1. Questions.
2. We refer to Hashem every day in two distinct ways – השיבנו **אבינו** לתורתיך, וקרבנו **מלכנו** לעבודתך. Why do we refer to Hashem as a father when it comes to Torah, but as a king when it comes to עבודה? What is the connection between Hashem as father and our תורה?
3. As we approach ראש השנה this week we will say the phrase היום הרת עולם... אם כבנים רחמנו כרחם אב על בנים, ואם כעבדים עינינו לך תלויות עד שתחננו ותוציא כאור משפטינו איום קדוש – why is it that עינינו לך תלויות is only if we are like עבדים? Doesn’t a small child look up to his father with a sense of dependence and comfort in the father’s presence? One would hope that both בנים and עבדים should say עינינו לך תלויות!
4. There is a fairly popular practice for people to give צדקה in the זכות of ר' מאיר בעל הנס – the holy תנא ר' מאיר. Of all the Torah giants in Jewish history why would we specifically associate ר' מאיר with צדקה?
5. Three Ideas. In order to answer these questions it is important to know three separate ideas:
6. First, there is a מחלוקת ר"מ ור"י in the גמרא קידושין דף לו whether the Jewish people are always considered בנים to ה' as ר' מאיר maintains, or the status of בנים is reserved for those times that we follow Hashem’s will, as ר' יהודה maintains. In ר' יהודה’s view Hashem views a כלל ישראל that is not living up to the standards of תורה as עבדים, and not בנים.
7. Second, there is a הלכה in שולחן ערוך חושן משפט סימן קעה that when one sells a property the first right of purchase has to be given to the neighbor. The only exception is if children are selling the property of their father. Another child takes precedence over a neighbor no matter how close to the property he lives.
8. Rav Moshe Bick explains that when Hashem wanted to give us the Torah, the מלאכים came with a claim of דינא דבר מצרא – “we are closer to the Torah up in שמים than the Jewish people are”. The response is that the Jewish people aren’t just some other buyer, but are children of Hashem and therefore take precedence over any neighbors. Rav Bick explains that this is what the משנה אבות פרק ג' teaches us when it says חביבין ישראל שנקראו בנים למקום חביבין ישראל שניתן להם כלי חמדה – the Jewish people are beloved in that we are called children of Hashem and in that Hashem gave us the Torah. The fact that we are בנים is the very reason that Hashem gave us the תורה! It is our true claim to תורה!
9. Third, and finally, there is a גמרא in מסכת בבא בתרא דף י that records a discussion between טורנוסרופוס הרשע and ר' עקיבא: שאל טורנוסרופוס הרשע את רבי עקיבא אם אלקיכם אוהב עניים הוא מפני מה אינו מפרנסם, אמר לו כדי שניצול אנו בהן מדינה של גיהנם, אמר לו אדרבה זו שמחייבתן לגיהנם אמשול לך משל למה הדבר דומה למלך בשר ודם שכעס על עבדו וחבשו בבית האסורין וצוה עליו שלא להאכילו ושלא להשקותו והלך אדם אחד והאכילו והשקהו כששמע המלך לא כועס עליו ואתם קרוין עבדים שנאמר כי לי בני ישראל עבדים, אמר לו ר"ע אמשול לך משל למה הדבר דומה למלך בשר ודם שכעס על בנו וחבשו בבית האסורין וצוה עליו שלא להאכילו ושלא להשקותו והלך אדם אחד והאכילו והשקהו כששמע המלך לא דורון משגר לו! ואנן קרוין בנים דכתיב בנים אתם לה' אלקיכם. Apparently the מצוה of צדקה only makes sense if we are considered בנים למקום, but not if we are considered עבדים.
10. Answering the Questions: When we put all three sources together the answers to our questions become clear:
11. We specifically say השבינו אבינו לתורתך, relating to Hashem as a father when relating to Him through Torah, because it is only the father son relationship that enabled us to receive the תורה in the first place.
12. The Satmar Rebbe explains that the גמרא עירובין דף יג says that we pasken like ר' יהודה against ר' מאיר because "גלוי וידוע לפני מי שאמר והיה העולם שאין בדורו של ר"מ כמותו ומפני מה לא קבעו הלכה כמותו מפני שלא יכלו חביריו לעמוד על סוף דעה. It would stand to reason that in שמים where Hashem is more than capable of understanding ר' מאיר’s opinion, the הלכה would follow ר' מאיר. The Rebbe explains that this is the meaning of the תפילה we say on ראש השנה – אם כבנים רחמנו כרחם אב על הבנים – if we are sons then we ask Hashem to treat us as such. And if Hashem is viewing us as עבדים we remind Him that לך עינינו תלויות – we are looking at how Hashem would view the מחלוקת ר"מ ור"י, where we can pasken like ר' מאיר that the Jewish people are *always* בנים whether we behave like it or not.
13. In light of the גמרא בבא בתרא that the מצוה of צדקה only makes sense if we are בנים למקום, it is reasonable that the צדקה we give should be associated with ר' מאיר who reminds us that we are always בנים.
14. As we approach ה' on ראש השנה when we will be ממליך the רבונו של עולם, it is important that we remember that we are not only עבדים of a מלך, but also בנים of an אב. Hashem is our father and a child can demand a father’s רחמנות.
15. My good friend Rabbi Yechiel Weberman told me this week that last summer when he was working in Camp Dora Golding there was a torah incentive program for the campers. Those who collected the most “dollars” by doing a variety of מצוות were able to redeem the “dollar” coupons for prizes. The child of one of the camp directors had spent the entire summer collecting “dollars” and had put all of them in his pants pocket. He then put his pants in the wash and all of the dollar coupons were destroyed. The young boy was hysterical. After all that work he lost all those coupons. He was crying to his older sister who had been looking for a shidduch for some time. She was struggling with the whole שידוך scene and was starting to get depressed by the entire process. As her brother was crying to her she looked at him and reminded him “your father runs the entire program – I am sure he can fix this problem”. Hearing herself say these words “your father runs the entire program” provided her with a moment of sudden comfort. After all the struggle with dating, and whatever else adults genuinely struggle with, we just have to remember that “our father runs the entire program”. That should provide us with a deep sense of comfort and confidence.