

*Paris, the year 1427. A tremor sweeps through the courthouse as the all-powerful judge makes his entrance. As the proceedings that will decide his fate—for life or death—begin, a tremor runs through Jacob’s body. The prosecution presents its case against him and, though their proofs are weak, the judge seems inclined to believe them. Jacob is then given a chance to defend himself, however, with the assumption of guilt until proven innocent that prevails, he doesn’t really stand a chance. It looks like his life will soon be over as the judge seems to accept the words of the prosecution. He has only one last chance to save himself. The law allows the defendant to see the judge in his private chambers before he makes his final ruling. If the judge, for whatever reason, is willing to spare his life, he will be free. With trepidation he enters the judge’s inner chamber and falls before his feet. With tears streaming down his face he explains his innocence, and how it was merely his low position in society that made him free fodder for anyone who wished to use him as cover for their own crimes. As he recounts the story of his sorry childhood, when he had been kidnapped and gone through terrible pain, the judge’s demeanor softens. The judge himself had a son who had been kidnapped from him while still a small child and a day has never passed without his heart yearning for him. As Jacob recounts further details regarding himself, the judge begins to tremble. The details are consistent with his own son’s. Could it be? Could the sorrow that has engulfed his life for the past thirty years be coming to a close? Could his dear son, whom he yearns for so longingly, really be the man standing before him pleading for his life? He has one way to find out for certain. His own child had a very distinctive birth mark on his left middle toe. He asks Jacob to remove his left shoe and sock. Though bewildered by the request, Jacob immediately complies revealing that very same distinctive birth mark the judge had remembered. With tears streaming down his face the judge jumps up to hug his bewildered son, crying, “Jacob! My dear little Jacob! It truly is you! I can’t believe I lived to see this day!” Whereupon he explains to Jacob the enormity of his revelation. Jacob’s tears then mingle with his fathers’ as they both hold on to each other refusing to let go. Not only has his life been saved, but he has finally found his dear lost father!*

Everything that will occur in our lives is decided by He Who judges the entire world on Rosh Hashanah, a decision we may improve upon by acquiring additional merits throughout the year. However, our judge also has a private chamber, it’s called *Shemone Esrei!* Three times each day we meet the all-powerful judge in whose hands lies our fate, in his private chambers. It is there that we can plead with him regarding all of our affairs and it is entirely up to Him to determine our fate. How comforting it is to know that this judge happens to be our dear Father, who yearns and is overflowing with love for us so much more than even the father in our story?

Let us review this story in our mind until we truly feel it in our hearts, the next time it takes place—our next *Shemone Esrei!*

*Established By:*