

## Shcharansky Prayer

By Robert E. Segal

Press and pulpit, seeking to underscore the meaning and value of the Days of Remembrance, Judgement and Atonement here before us, have a new beacon for inspiration and guidance this year. As Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur approach, they are impelled to turn again to the memorable words uttered by Anatoly B. Shcharansky, standing in the dock at Moscow:

"For more than 2000 years, the Jewish people, my people, have been dispersed. But wherever they are, wherever Jews are found every year they have repeated, 'Next year in Jerusalem.' Now when I am further than ever from my people, from Avital, facing many arduous years of imprisonment, I say, turning to my people, my Avital: 'Next year in Jerusalem'."

Having with insuperable courage and dignity spoken thus in the courtroom hostile to justice, Anatoly Shcharansky looked directly to his prosecuting - persecutors and concluded: "Now I turn to you, the court, who were required to confirm a predetermined sentence: to you I have nothing to say."

In these days of awe, we all seek reconciliation with God and with our fellow men. Anatoly Shcharansky has been denied access to reconciliation with those who found him guilty before he entered the Russian courtroom. But among those who stood in false judgment, there must be one or more who would grant that the man with whom they dealt so unfairly did find reconciliation with his maker. Such renewal, such refreshment for a troubled soul is of greater significance than all that took place in a rigged court; the nobility of that reunion illuminated the darkened recesses of an evil courtroom, dramatizing the sharp contrast between right and wrong, bravery and cowardice, caring and contempt.

The prison camps to which Anatoly Shcharansky and Alexandr Ginzburg and other valiant Russian dissidents are now confined constitute, in a sense, a new Babylon. Our prayers in this holy season will be for the prisoners in that Babylon -- far from the yearned - for reflection on the course of honor pursued by exiles wanting only to breathe the free air of the Israel, the Jerusalem, so cruelly denied them.

It has been told us that Jewish identity and

spiritual distinctiveness were miraculously preserved by our forebears when driven into Babylonian captivity. There the coals of a passionate dedication to the Creator continued to burn; there vows rose to heaven bearing assurance that Jerusalem would be lovingly remembered.

When Cyrus came to the Persian throne, he saw a sacred privilege in finding himself in position to assure the return of dispersed Jews to Jerusalem. His decree that reunion is marked by eloquence comparable with that characterizing Anatoly Shcharansky's remarkable Moscow utterance:

"Thus says Cyrus, king of the Persians: 'The Lord God of heaven, who has made me a king of the whole world, has charged me to build him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Therefore, whomever among his people so desire, let him go up to Jerusalem, and rebuild the home of the Lord God of Israel. And whoever remains where he now sojourns, let him help with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, besides the freewill offerings for the house of God in Jerusalem'."

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