Chizuk for Elul and the Yamim Noraim

Inspirational ideas, stories and quotes

Chizuk for Elul and the Yamim Noraim

inspiring ideas, stories and quotes

Compiled by Daniel Shasha for feedback, to receive more copies or the PDF version, please contact:

Phone: 055-679-2930

Email: livingappreciation@gmail.com

*You can also email **livingappreciation@gmail.com** to receive our inspiring weekly newsletter directly to your inbox.*

*Dedicated for a refuah shleimah for **Shoshana Emuna Bas Penina Devora** amongst all the other cholim and for yeshuus for all of Klal Yisrael.*

Contents

Chapter One: Elul, A Month of Mercy 3

Chapter Two: Elul, An Extraordinary Opportunity 8

Chapter Three: Making the Most of Elul 11

Chapter Four: The Gift of Teshuvah 16

Chapter Five: Rung by Rung 23

Chapter Six: Together As One 30

Chapter Seven: Rosh Hashanah: Why We Rejoice 37

Chapter Eight: Crowning the King 44

Chapter Nine: Yom Kippur: The Happiest Day 51

Chapter Ten: Yom Kippur, A Day Like No Other 55

Chapter Eleven: Inspiring Quotes 63

Kollel Toras Chaim

Michtav Berachah

My dear friend Rav Daniel Shasha is performing an invaluable service for the Jewish people. Every week he finds gems on the topic of *hakaras hatov* connected to the parsha, making us all more and more aware of this critical *midah*.

Now he has taken his work one step further and extended his efforts to the *Moedim* as well. He is to be commended for his great work for the Jewish people, and I am sure that anyone who regularly reads his articles and books will see a complete transformation in his relationships with both man and G-d.

Bahavah Gedolah

Rabbi Daniel Yaakov Travis

<u>*Michtav Berachah* from Rav Aharon David *shlita.*</u>

The more you know what Elul and the Yamim Noraim is, the more you can make the most of it. This *kuntras* is very well researched based on the teachings of the *sefarim hakedoshim* to help us make us the most of this holy time. Hashem should help everyone use this *kuntras* well and have ברכה, חצלחה and all the ישועות.

לכבוד עמלי התורה

Aharon David

Chapter One

Elul, A Month of Mercy

From the very moment Hashem created the world, He gave the month of Elul a unique and extraordinary quality. When Hashem created the months of the year, each one was created with a combination of two qualities: *rachamim* and *din*—mercy and judgment. Elul, however, was different. It is the only month that was created solely with the quality of *rachamim*.[1]

This means that *rachamim* is not simply one of the special qualities of *Elul*. It is at the very heart of what this month is. From the very beginning of creation, Elul was set apart as a time filled entirely with Divine mercy. The *mazal* of Elul conveys a similar message. Its *mazal* is that of a *besulah*, a maiden, symbolizing love and renewal. *Elul* is therefore a particularly auspicious time to renew our relationship with Hashem. [2]

It was on Rosh Chodesh Elul that Moshe ascended to Har Sinai, in order to implore for mercy that we would be forgiven for the grave sin of the Golden Calf. He stood relentlessly for forty days, beseeching for forgiveness, until on the fortieth day we were granted complete atonement, on Yom Kippur.[3]

---

[1] *Gra, Sefer Yetzira*

[2] *Ramban,* cited by the *Alter of Kelm, Hochmah U Mussar* 1:85

[3] *Pirkei DeRebbi Eliezer* 46.

Many years later, when Klal Yisrael were at the doorstep of Eretz Yisrael, they were attacked by the powerful armies of *Sichon* and they were miraculously defeated and we conquered their territory. This too, occurred in Elul.[4] Also, it was during Elul when the wicked Bilaam tried to curse us, and Hashem transformed these curses into *berachos,* thwarting his evil plans.[5]

We see how Elul is a month that is infused with such great Divine mercy and is a time when in the past we experienced many salvations. So, each year when Elul comes around, great mercy is aroused and poured into the world.[6] In fact, during Elul there is a unique revelation of the thirteen attributes of mercy, something we experience during no other time.[7]

Hashem is exceedingly close to us during Elul, as the verse states, "דרשו ה' בהמצאו קראהו בהיותו קרוב"—Seek Hashem when He can be found; call out to Him when He is near."[8] "Seek Hashem when He can be found" refers to the *Aseres Yemei Hateshuvah*.[9] The rest of the verse, "Call out to Him when He is close," refers to Elul.[10]

The Ba'al HaTanya brings the following parable to help us understand this unique closeness.

A powerful king, when residing in his palace, is inaccessible to the masses. Of course, no one can just walk in and have an audience with the king. After all, his palace is surrounded by a moat and well-armed guards and security

---

[4] This is according to one opinion in *Bamidbar Rabbah* 19:32
[5] *Imrei Emes, Shabbos Shuvah 666* based on the *Midrash*
[6] *Rav Yerucham Levovitz, Da'as Hochmah Umussar* 2:7
[7] *Rav Chaim Vital, Shaar HaYechudim ch.10*
[8] *Yishayah* 55:6
[9] *Rosh Hashanah* 18a
[10] *Haflaah, Panim Yafos Vayikra* 16:30.

personnel. Yet, occasionally the king will travel through his kingdom and pass through the countryside, giving all the simple peasants a chance to observe the king. For sure, the king is now much more accessible, as he is just riding in his chariot with a few guards, than within the confines of the palace walls. Elul is a time when Hashem, our King, is so to speak, in the field and accessible to all.

It is well known that Elul is an acronym for the verse in *Shir HaShirim*[11], *"Ani Ledodi VeDodi Li-* I am for my beloved and my beloved is for me." This reflects how Elul is a time when we focus on Hashem's closeness and love.

Rav Moshe Feinstein notes that when we do our part and focus on our love for Hashem, He will reciprocate. As the verse begins "*Ani LeDodi*—I am for my beloved" referring to how we need to do our part. Then, as the verse continues "*Dodi li*—My beloved is for Me" Hashem will respond likewise. He will shower us with abundant love and blessings, regardless of our spiritual level. As Chazal[12] teach "אהבה מקלקלת את השורה"—"love interrupts the scheme of things." So, when we focus on our love for Hashem, He will reciprocate this love and not be exacting with how deserving of a good judgment we really are.[13]

We see that Elul is a time when there is such a tremendous outpouring of love. After all, we are Hashem's children and He loves us more than we can possibly imagine. A fundamental *avodah* during Elul is to focus on this, appreciating the priceless gift that we are chosen to be children of Hashem, who loves us more than we can possibly

[11] 6:3
[12] *Bereishis Rabbah* 55:8
[13] *Derash Moshe* Vol.2 p.94

imagine. He is waiting with open arms for us to draw close to Him, and to maximize these golden days.

A key ploy of the *yetzer hara* in tempting us to sin is to try and make us forget about our exalted status. When we are aware that we are Hashem's children and this improper behavior isn't fitting for us, we won't listen to these temptations of the *yetzer hara.* So, Elul is a unique time to internalize that we are Hashem's beloved children. Then, we will act in a way befitting of our elevated status.[14]

The Ponevezher Rav, Rav Yosef Kahaneman, was in the airport, waiting to board his flight in Rome. An Israeli professor, who recognized the Rav from newspaper pictures, approached him and told him "Shalom Aleichem."

The Rav responded by hugging the professor. Surprised by this reaction, the professor remarked, "If you knew what kind of sinner I am, you wouldn't hug and kiss me." The Ponevezher Rav then hugged him again! "If only you knew how much Hashem loves you despite your sins, you wouldn't continue sinning," he responded warmly. This incident made a strong impression on the professor who began improving his ways.[15]

Since Elul is a great time of love and closeness, we should strive to be in a state of happiness.[16] There might be a tendency during this time for some to become overly anxious, due to their trepidation of the upcoming judgment. Of course, it is appropriate to feel fear, after all we are being judged by the King of Kings. However, this is no contradiction for us being in a state of *simchah*. As the verse states[17] "וגילו ברעדה—One should rejoice with fear."

---

[14] *Rav Nosson Wachtfogel, Lekes Reshimos Inyanai Elul VeYamim Noraim p.7*

[15] Cited in 'Sparks of Majesty' by Mrs. Genendal Krohn.

[16] *The Alter of Kelm* cited in *Leavdecha Baemes* p.8

[17] *Tehillim,* 2:11

With a king of flesh and blood, it is impossible to maintain both these feelings. One will be gripped with great trepidation when in the presence of such a powerful figure, there will be no room to feel any happiness. Yet when we contemplate the greatness of Hashem and how much we should fear Him, we will be overflowing with great joy.

After all, we cannot describe what a privilege it is to serve Hashem, the King of all Kings, and fulfill His *mitzvos*, being rewarded ever so greatly.[18] So, during Elul, it is appropriate to feel fear due to our upcoming judgment, yet we know that Hashem loves us and how much He cherishes our *mitzvos* and *teshuvah.* Therefore, we need to blend these feelings of fear with *simchah.*

One time, a group of bachurim visited the Chazon Ish during the Aseres Yemei Teshuvah to receive a berachah. The Chazon Ish right away discerned that one of the boys appeared to be overly anxious. He affectionately turned to him and asked, "Do you know why we don't normally say Tashlich when Rosh Hashanah is on Shabbos? There are a few reasons, yet one reason is that it is in order that confessing our sins won't dampen our spirits. Even during these days we need to feel simchah, even though they are days when we are being judged. We need to be besimchah for the fact that we can cleanse ourselves from our sins."[19]

[18] *Rabbeinu Yonah, Berachos* 21a

[19] Cited in *Tiv Hamoadim Yamim Noraim* p.499

Chapter Two

Elul, An Extraordinary Opportunity

Elul is a goldmine of opportunity. In fact, the *Hafla'ah*[20] teaches that Elul is full of so much spiritual potential that one hour is worth like a day during the rest of the year! The *Ba'al HaTanya*[21] writes that these days are full of such mercy and holiness, it is surprising that Chazal didn't give them the status of a Moed! During Elul there is a special *he'aras panim*, Divine countenance that we experience during no other time. Rav Yerucham Levovitz writes that we need to make the most of each second of Elul due to this special *he'aras panim* that illuminates these days.[22]

Also, the *eis ratzon* of the days of Elul is so strong that it extends to teshuvah that isn't wholehearted or complete. During the year this isn't sufficient to be accepted, but in Elul it is accepted.[23] Since this is the last month of the year, it has the potential to help rectify our shortcomings of the previous year, helping us enter Rosh Hashanah free of our sins.[24] Elul is really a tremendous gift from Hashem and we need to try and utilize it to the maximum, relishing these holy days.

---

[20] *Panim Yafos* 16:30
[21] *Likutei Torah, Elul*
[22] *Da'as Hochmah U Mussar 2:73*
[23] *Rav Dov Yafeh, Le'avdechah Baemes*, p.19
[24] *Shlah, Rosh Hashanah Ner Mitzvah*

One Rosh Chodesh Elul, the renowned tzadik, Rav Yitzchak Blazar, walked into the Beis Medrash and approached the Aron HaKodesh. He stood there for a few moments, and then, with tears pouring from his eyes, he cried out with deep emotion: "Thank You Hashem, Master of the World, for giving us the month of Elul!" The words were simple, but the feeling behind them was overwhelming. Elul had just begun, and already he felt the greatness of the gift — a time when Hashem is so close, when every Jew can return, when every small step matters so much. [25]

During the last week of Elul in particular, we should make the extra effort to strengthen our *Avodas Hashem*. Our Rabbis teach that these days are so powerful that they have the potential to rectify what we did during the entire year. For example, if we make an extra effort on Sunday to be on time for *davening*, learn diligently, *daven* and say *berachos* with intent, be on guard not to say or listen to *lashon hara* etc. we can rectify any time that we stumbled in these areas during the entire year![26]

Hashem yearns ever so much for us to have a relationship with Him and in His abundant mercy, gives us the opportunity to move on from our previous ways and start afresh. It is imperative that we try and appreciate this special gift of Elul, making the most of the vast spiritual potential laden in these days. We must remember that we are Hashem's children and He loves us more than we can imagine, waiting with open arms for us to repent.

---

[25] *Ohr Yehezkel* vol.2 p.297

[26] *Rav Elya Lopian* in the name of the *Kadmonim.* This also applies to the *aseres yemei teshuvah, Yaaros Dvash (1:1)*

One night during Elul, Berel's inn was bustling. Many of the town's simple Jews had gathered there, drinking and talking, trying to forget for a while about their financial struggles and other hardships. The Ba'al Shem Tov entered and joined their lively conversation, which happened to be about horses. "Tell me," he asked, "what is the difference between a fast, well-trained horse and a slow, lazy one?" The men laughed. "Don't you know? The difference is like night and day! A fast horse that can gallop at tremendous speed is worth far more than a slow, lazy horse." "If that is so," the Ba'al Shem Tov continued, "which horse is more likely to stray farther if it leaves the path—the fast horse or the slow one?" "The fast horse, of course," they replied. "It could run a great distance before anyone could catch it." The Ba'al Shem Tov nodded. "Then perhaps the slow horse is better after all." The men fell silent, waiting to hear what he meant.

"No," the Ba'al Shem Tov continued, "the fast horse is still far more valuable. Even if it strays from the path, once it is turned around, it can return much more quickly." He then turned to the men and said warmly, "My dear holy brothers, each of you is a child of Avraham, Yitzhak, and Yaakov. You have an incredible lineage and such holy neshamos. Please never despair because you have strayed from the path. You possess tremendous spiritual strength. If you turn around and begin making your way back, you can travel that distance far more quickly than you imagine. Hashem is waiting for you with open arms."[27]

[27] *Sipurai Shel Chag, Rosh Hashanah p.4*

Chapter Three

Making the Most of Elul

The month of Elul serves as a gateway to the *Yamim Noraim*. We cannot simply walk into the lofty day of Rosh Hashanah. We need to make the most of Elul and use these precious weeks to prepare ourselves. Our *Rabbanim* instituted various practices and customs that can help us prepare for the *Yamim Noraim* and enter these holy days in the optimum way. These practices are precious opportunities to awaken our hearts, focus our minds, and remind ourselves that the Day of Judgment is approaching.

One example is the custom to blow the shofar during the month of Elul. This is in fact an ancient practice rooted in the teachings of Chazal. The reason is that Moshe ascended to Har Sinai on Rosh Chodesh Elul to receive the second *Luchos* and the sound of the Shofar blasted throughout the camp. Therefore, each year during Elul the Shofar is sounded to arouse us to do *teshuvah*.[28] The sound of the *Shofar* serves as a powerful reminder, calling us to pause, reflect, and begin the process of returning to Hashem.[29]

Another practice that can help us prepare for the Yamim Noraim is the widespread custom to recite the *perek* of Tehillim, *LeDavid Hashem*

[28] *Pirkei DeRebbi Eliezer* 47
[29] *Shlah, Rosh Hashanah* 53

Ori VeYishi after *davening* during Elul.[30] This practice is based on a teaching of Chazal[31], who teach that the words "*Hashem Ori*"—"Hashem is my light"—refer to Rosh Hashanah, while "*VeYishi*"—"He is my salvation"—refers to Yom Kippur.

The *Hafla'ah* explains that Rosh Hashanah is referred to as "light" due to the tremendous mercy that shines forth on this day. Rosh Hashanah falls at the beginning of the month, when the moon is barely visible, symbolizing darkness. Yet, despite the darkness, Hashem's great mercy shines upon us. "*VeYishi*," referring to Yom Kippur, represents the tremendous salvations that we can merit through teshuvah and the opportunity to receive a favorable judgment.

There is also a remarkable connection between this *perek* and the month of Elul. Hashem's Name appears thirteen times, corresponding to the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy that are especially revealed during this time of year.[32]

Rav Shabsai MiRashkov, a noted Kabbalist, records in his *Siddur* based on the teachings of the Arizal, "Whoever recites *LeDavid Hashem Ori VeYishi*, from Rosh Chodesh Elul until after Simchas Torah, morning and evening, day after day, is assured that he will have a good year and that even a harsh decree written against a person can be nullified."[33]

---

[30] *Mishnah Berurah* 581:2
[31] *Midrash Tehillim,* 27
[32] *Panim Yafos, Vayikra* 16:30
[33] *Siddur HaAri, Rav Shabtai,* p. 44

So, by reciting this *perek* each day we are reminding ourselves throughout Elul that Hashem's mercy is available to us and we can merit salvations through doing *teshuvah.*

Elul is also an especially appropriate time to strengthen our learning of *Mussar*. It is customary to learn *Shaarei Teshuvah*, but any *sefer* that inspires us to strengthen our Avodas Hashem can be valuable. The important thing is not merely to learn more *Mussar*, but to allow what we learn to enter our hearts and influence the way we live. We should try to set aside some time during Elul for honest self-reflection and contemplate what areas we would like to improve.

Rav Yitzchak Blazer, one of the great *Baalei Mussar*, placed particular emphasis on gratitude during Elul. When he was asked why this is such an important focus at this time of year, he explained that recognizing Hashem's kindness awakens within us a love for Him. This love allows us to reach a deeper level of teshuvah. When we recognize how much Hashem has given us and how much kindness He showers upon us every day, we naturally develop a greater desire to come closer to Him and improve our relationship with Him.[34]

Gratitude is, in fact, an integral part of our path towards *teshuvah*. As Rabbeinu Yonah teaches, when we recognize that Hashem created us, cares for us, and sustains us every moment, we cannot help but ask ourselves: How could we have sinned against the One who has shown us such constant kindness?[35] Consequently, we would be aroused to repent.

---

[34] *Leket Sichos Mussar*, p. 16

[35] *Shaarei Teshuvah* 1:12

This makes Elul a wonderful time to strengthen our practice of gratitude. We can try to set aside a few minutes each day to think about the kindnesses Hashem has done for us, perhaps even writing down a few things for which we are grateful. We can think about our family, our health, our home, our ability to learn Torah, or even the simple things we often overlook. The more we recognize Hashem's kindness, the more our love for Him grows, and the more naturally we want to come closer to Him.

Another important aspect of Rosh Hashanah is accepting Hashem as our King. Every day we have an opportunity to accept *Ol Malchus Shamayim* when we recite *Krias Shema*. Rav Shlomo Wolbe therefore notes that Elul is an appropriate time to strengthen our concentration during Shema. We can try to slow down for a moment, pay a little more attention to the words, and truly internalize that Hashem is our King and that we are accepting His Kingship upon ourselves. Even a small increase in our concentration can make this daily mitzvah much more meaningful.[36]

Elul is also an especially auspicious time for tefillah. It was during this month, when Moshe's entreaties were accepted and we were forgiven for the sin of the Golden Calf. Therefore, this time was infused with a unique power for us to call out to Hashem and plead for mercy.[37]

These are days when Hashem's mercy is revealed to us, and we have a special opportunity to turn to Him and ask for His help and blessing for the coming year. We should try to take advantage of this special

[36] *Alei Shur*, Vol. 2, p. 429
[37] *Rosh, Rosh Hashanah 4:14*

time by investing a little more thought into our *tefilos* and speaking to Hashem from our heart.

The Nesivos Shalom fell very ill at the end of Av, and the doctors immediately wanted to perform a very important surgery. However, he requested to postpone the surgery until after the Yamim Noraim. He explained that this time is especially powerful for tefillah, and he wanted to use these golden days to pray that he would have a recovery. The doctor agreed, giving him strict instructions on how to take care of himself.

The day after Yom Kippur, he went for another evaluation. Miraculously, everything was clear, and he wasn't in need of the surgery that the doctors were convinced was necessary just over one month before. "Time was good for you," the doctor remarked. The Nesivos Shalom replied that "time" indeed helped him. The auspicious days of Elul and the Yamim Noraim were very good for him.[38]

[38] *Torah Wellsprings, Ki Setzai 5784*

Chapter Four

The Gift of Teshuvah

"For this commandment that I command you today, is not hidden from you and is not far…it is very near to you…".[39] The Ramban teaches that "This commandment" refers to *teshuvah*. Surely, this is very puzzling. We associate *teshuvah* with being something daunting and difficult, how can it be described as something that is close to us?

Really, the Torah is telling us that it is less daunting and more attainable than we think. We tend to understand that *teshuvah* means making a complete turnabout and never returning to our sins again and if we did sin again, our *teshuvah* wasn't successful. However, this isn't so and just thoughts of repentance can accomplish a tremendous amount, even if we don't change our ways.

For example, Chazal[40] teach that the betrothal of an evildoer to a woman on condition that he is completely righteous might be valid, since maybe he had thoughts of repentance. This is without him even changing anything yet!

Although there are four stages of *teshuvah* which are required (regret, leaving the sin, confession, and resolving not to repeat the action), it is not all or nothing and just the will to change can accomplish a tremendous amount. Furthermore, one might ask "How can my *teshuvah* be accepted if I am bound to stumble again? Maybe that

[39] *Devarim 30:11-14*
[40] *Kiddushin 49b*

canceled out my *teshuvah?"* However, this is not so: *teshuvah* wipes the slate clean and whether one stumbles again or not is irrelevant.[41]

The Chazon Ish was once approached by a well-meaning man, who lamented, "each year I try to do teshuvah, but I keep reverting back to my old ways, what is it all worth?" The Chazon Ish gently reassured him that really his teshuvah has so much value and just his thoughts of teshuvah alone are very significant despite how he acts in the future.[42]

The ability to do *teshuvah* really surpasses all logic. If someone was speeding dangerously down the highway and after being pulled over, he cries out, "Officer I am really sorry, I didn't mean to speed and won't do it again," he will still receive a ticket. Yet, *lehavdil* when we tell Hashem, the King of all Kings that we are sorry for our sins, He is willing to completely forgive us and wipe the slate clean! Rabbeinu Yonah begins his monumental work, *Shaarei Teshuvah* by writing that *teshuvah* is a gift. He brings elsewhere[43] that when we repent, we need to contemplate the great kindness of Hashem Who gave us this priceless opportunity.

Another area of *teshuvah* which is a precious gift is the special *Siyata DiShmaya* that we receive. Our Rabbis teach that "One who wishes to be purified will receive Divine assistance."[44] Elaborating on this, Rabbeinu Yonah teaches that the assistance we receive is beyond natural: Hashem gives us a very powerful *Siyata DiShmaya* to help us overcome our *yetzer hara*.[45] Our *yetzer hara* can be very cunning and quite difficult to overcome. However, when we take the initiative to

---

[41] *Rav Saadiah Gaon,* cited in *Leket Reshimos Inyanai Elul Veyamim Noraim p.106*
[42] *Yesharim Darkai Hashem, Teshuvah*
[43] *Shaarei Teshuvah 3:2*
[44] *Shabbos 104a*
[45] *Shaarei Teshuvah 1:1*

do *teshuvah,* we have a guarantee that Hashem will be with us all the way, holding our hand no matter what. There is no limit to Hashem's willingness to accept *teshuvah*.

The biggest *reshaim* who ever lived were given the opportunity to do teshuvah. Let's take the example of King Menasheh. He was one of the most wicked kings in Jewish history, who worshipped multiple types of *avodah zarah*, placed an idol in the *Beis HaMikdash*, and led the Jews astray. He was captured by an enemy army and in his great distress he cried out to Hashem in repentance and was forgiven!

Another example is Elazar Ben Dudaya. He was one of the most immoral people, who visited every single *zonah* in the world. One time he traveled a very large distance to visit a certain *zonah,* who told him that there was no hope for him. He cried copious tears of repentance until his soul departed from him, and a voice from Heaven proclaimed, "Rav Elazar Ben Dudaya has a place in Gan Eden." He went from being one of the most immoral people to receiving *semichah* from *Shamayim*![46]

Hashem is our loving caring Father and just like a father really desires his son to behave correctly and be close to him, so too when we return to Hashem it brings Him tremendous pleasure. He is also waiting for us to come close to Him, and gives us the opportunity to repent. Three times a day we express our appreciation for this. In the *berachah* of *Hashiveinu Avinu,* we conclude *Baruch Atah Hashem Harotzeh Bitshuvah.* We are expressing our gratitude to Hashem that not only does He give us this opportunity; He actually wants us to do *teshuvah,* and is eagerly waiting.[47]

---

[46] *Avodah Zara 17a*

[47] Rav Yitzhak Blazer, *Kochavai Ohr, Maamar 6.*

The Midrash[48] brings the following parable, helping us highlight how much we should make the most of the opportunity to do teshuvah.

There was once a group of thieves who were imprisoned in the king's jail. One of the thieves managed to dig a hole, and in the middle of the night, the entire group escaped. One thief, however, decided to remain behind. The next morning, the prison guard was furious when he saw that the man was still there. "You fool!" he berated him. "You had the opportunity to escape. Why didn't you take it?" So too, the Midrash teaches, in the future Hashem will rebuke those who failed to do teshuvah: "You had the opportunity to do teshuvah. Why didn't you take advantage of it?"

We might ask on this parable. Why was the guard so furious with the prisoner who remained behind? Surely, he should have been rewarded for being a loyal subject of the king, respecting his laws and not following in the path of his rebellious counterparts.

Rav Shimshon Pincus[49] explains that he was scolded for his tremendous affront to the king. The other prisoners showed that they valued the extent of the king's punishment and therefore sought a way out. Yet the man who remained behind, displayed to the king that he did not take his punishment seriously.

Therefore, there was no greater affront to the king than this and that is why the guard was so infuriated. So too, we must try our best by taking advantage of the opportunity to do *teshuvah*, showing that we understand the magnitude of the sins we committed and are eager at the chance to erase them.

---

[48] *Koheles Rabbah* 7:1

[49] *Sichos HaRav Pincus, Elul VeYamim Noraim* p.14

We might think to ourselves, of course we are supposed to do *teshuvah* yet it is not a realistic expectation that we will never fall again. The *yetzer hara* is very cunning and it can be very difficult to overcome. Especially for something that we have been accustomed to for our entire lives. How do we do *teshuvah* for something we struggle with and is difficult for us to overcome? Can we really honestly say we will never commit it again? Rav Yisrael Salanter[50] reassures us that one can still resolve never to do it again at the times where it is easy for us to be more careful.

For example, let's say Reuven has a difficult time being on time for Shul and often enters in the middle of *davening.* Reuven should determine when it will be easier for him to be on time and when it will be harder. So, if *Shacharis* is always very difficult for him, yet *Minchah* is normally much easier, he should make a firm commitment to be on time for *Minchah,* since that is much less challenging than *Shacharis*.[51]

This idea is reflected in the following teaching of Chazal[52] regarding wearing *Tzitzis*. One who doesn't wear white *Tzitzis* is held more accountable than one who doesn't wear *techeiles*. This is because *techeiles* was a rare dye and was hard to come by and was very expensive. On the other hand, white strings were much easier to obtain. Chazal are telling us that the more difficult something is, the less accountable we will be.

When we follow this method, we will realize that no matter how much we struggle, there are always times we struggle less and we can be more careful during those times, performing a complete *teshuvah.*

---

[50] *Ohr Yisrael,* 16

[51] *Rav Yisrael Salanter, Ohr Yisrael 6*

[52] *Menachos* 43b

Gradually, it will help strengthen us and we will be able to resist the urge to stumble even in the times where it is harder for us. As our Rabbis teach, one mitzvah leads to another.[53] This means that when we perform a *mitzvah* that is easier for us, we will be given a special *Siyata DiShmaya* to fulfill the ones that we find hard.[54] Furthermore, even when a sin we once struggled with becomes easier to resist, we still receive the reward as if it were as difficult as before.[55]

We mustn't underestimate the power of teshuvah even in one small area. As Rav Pincus teaches, "Repentance in one area carries all the awesome greatness of teshuvah. It enables a person to reach all the way to the *Kiseh Hakavod*."[56]

We see the tremendous impact of even a brief spiritual awakening in the incident of the *Meraglim*. When these spies returned with their negative report about Eretz Yisrael, Kalev stood up and declared, "We shall surely ascend and conquer it, for we can surely do it."[57] For a few moments, these encouraging words impacted the people and aroused feelings of repentance. However, this was short lived and they went on to accept the slander resulting in a national hysteria. Regardless of this, that brief awakening had tremendous value. Therefore, Kalev and his descendants received a great reward, they inherited the city of Chevron.[58]

One night, a bachur from the Gerer Yeshiva was standing at the Kosel when the Beis Yisrael, the Gerer Rebbe at the time, arrived. The Rebbe approached

---

[53] *Avos* 4:2
[54] *Maharal, Derech HaChayim* 4:2.
[55] *Rav Yisrael Salanter, Ohr Yisrael* 6
[56] *Sichos HaRav Pincus Elul Veyamim Noraim* Ch. 13
[57] *Bamidbar* 13:30
[58] Rav Moshe Feinstein, *Derash Moshe,* Part 1 p.118

him and asked, "What is the greatest praise that can be said about Hashem?" Before the bachur could answer, the Rebbe replied, "The greatest praise is that Hashem does not laugh," and continued on his way. Deeply intrigued, the bachur returned to the yeshiva and asked the Rebbe's brother, the Pnei Menachem, the Rosh Yeshiva at the time, what these cryptic words meant.

The Pnei Menachem explained: "When a person comes before Hashem and says he wants to improve, Hashem believes him. He does not laugh and say, 'You have told Me this many times before, and you still have not changed. Why should I believe you now?' Hashem sees the sincerity in a person's heart and accepts his desire to grow. A person may hear the same promise many times and eventually stop believing it. Hashem is different. Every day—even many times a day—we can turn to Him and say, 'Hashem, I want to improve. I want to become better.' He never responds, 'I have heard this before.' He believes us every time and gives us the opportunity to begin again. That is the greatness of Hashem. He never gives up on us and always believes in the sincerity of our desire to come closer to Him.[59]

[59] Recounted by Rav Elimelech Biderman

Chapter Five

Rung By Rung

The *Chafetz Chaim*[60] notes that it is one of the ploys of the *yetzer hara* to persuade a person to accept upon themselves commitments that are not within their ability. Consequently, these lofty aspirations will cause a person to feel despondent when he falls short of them, resulting in him giving up, thinking that he is unable to change.

Serious change doesn't happen overnight. As our Rabbis teach "תפסת מרובה לא תפסת — If you grasp too much you grasp nothing."[61] True change must be made slowly and consistently. If we try to jump up the rungs of a ladder, we are likely to fall. We can only climb successfully, rung by rung.[62] So, as we climb the rungs to true greatness we have to remember to ascend one rung at a time.

The *Chasam Sofer* explains that we can actually learn this strategy from the *yetzer hara.* When the *yetzer hara* entices us to stumble, he does so gradually. As Chazal[63] teach, "Today he will tell you to do such and such and tomorrow such and such, until he will tell you to worship idols." So, we need to defeat the *yetzer hara* with exactly the same tactic, by improving gradually one small step at a time.[64]

---

[60] *Davar Baito Ch.12*
[61] *Yuma* 80a
[62] *Gra*, Mishlai 19:3
[63] *Shabbos* 105b
[64] *Toras Moshe Devarim* 21:10

Rav Yerucham Levovitz notes that really the foundation of Torah lies in the small actions that we do. He explains that an important piece of advice for us to enter the *Yamim Noraim* is to focus on the "small things" that we do. Rav Yerucham notes that really the term, "small things" is inaccurate. The purpose of everything is to reach the realization of e*in od milvado,* there is nothing besides Hashem. So, if something, no matter how trivial, is a step towards this goal, it is indeed very great.[65]

It is interesting to note that this realization inspired Rebbi Akiva to pursue a life of Torah, eventually becoming a leading authority who taught thousands. Until the age of forty, he was an unlearned shepherd with little knowledge of Torah. One day, while standing by a well, he noticed a large hole in one of the surrounding rocks. "Who made this hole?" he asked. He was told that the constant flow of water had gradually worn away the rock. Inspired by what he saw, Rebbi Akiva began to learn, eventually becoming a world-renowned Torah scholar.[66]

What caused Rebbi Akiva to have this complete turnaround was by observing the far-reaching effects of something so small yet consistent. The splash of the water, day after day, year after year, was strong enough to penetrate the hard rock. The change was so gradual that it wasn't even visible yet still made an impact and after many years it accomplished something that we would think to be impossible.

So too, he realized, each mitzvah that he performed and each piece of Torah he learned can have an enormous effect. We might not see it

---

[65] *Da'as Hochmah uMussar* vol. 1, p. 258

[66] *Avos D'Rebbi Nassan Ch.6*

now, but it is part of a gradual process that will reap tremendous results. This realization that seemingly minor acts repeated consistently lead to significant spiritual growth over time is what caused him to become the Torah giant whom he became.[67]

The following powerful story illuminates the far-reaching effect of such 'minor' actions.

Rav Binyamin Finkel, the Mashgiach of Mir, was having a conversation with a man who excitedly told him that he had just commissioned the writing of a Sefer Torah and donated it to a shul. The Mashgiach was curious how he had managed such a great feat. The man did not seem particularly put together and certainly did not appear to be a man of means. To his surprise, the man explained that he had accomplished it by collecting empty soda bottles for many years!

It had been his lifelong dream to donate a Sefer Torah, so he began collecting used bottles, each worth a 30-agorot refund. It was a tiny sum, yet he persistently gathered a few bottles each day, and slowly the money accumulated. After many years and hundreds of thousands of bottles, he finally had enough to have a Sefer Torah written. A joyous Hachnasas Sefer Torah was held. The Mashgiach was mesmerized by the story and by how far seemingly insignificant actions can go.

Our Rabbis encourage that we accept upon ourselves a *kabbalah*, a resolution for the upcoming year. We need to ensure that this is realistic and within our reach. Of course, we all have high aspirations yet people don't become perfect overnight and change has to be consistent and gradual. So, when deciding on a *kabbalah* we need to ensure that it is something realistic and within our reach.

[67] Explained by the Alter of Slobadka, *Ohr Hatzafon* Vol. 2 p.131

During Elul, the renowned Tzadik Rav Yehudah Leib Chasman was telling his talmidim the importance of accepting upon themselves a kabbalah for the upcoming year. He encouraged that all the students think of an appropriate and realistic kabalah suited to them. So, they spent a few minutes until they all thought of a kabbalah. To their surprise, Rav Chasman announced, "I would now like you to take your kabbalah and halve it."[68]

When making plans to change, it is essential that we also focus on how far we have improved until now. As Chazal[69] teach, "Who is rich, one who is happy with his lot." The *Gra* explains that this not only applies to physical possessions but also to spiritual accomplishments.[70] One needs to appreciate the value that his *Avodas Hashem* has.

This is by no means a contradiction to the importance of always striving for more. This can be likened to driving a car. We can look at the rearview mirror and see how far we have driven, even if there is a long distance to go. So too, as we are driving down life's highway, we need to try our best to appreciate how much we have accomplished.

If we will try, let's say, on an average day, to record all the mitzvos we do, we will run out of time! We wear *Tzitzis*, something that is equal to all the mitzvos![71] We also wear Tefillin, something that is even holier than the *Tzitz* of the Kohen Gadol since it has more names of Hashem![72] Furthermore, we are privileged to daven three times a day, to have an audience with Hashem Yisbarach, King of Kings. Not to

---

[68] This was recounted in a *shiur* by Rav Shlomo Shwradron.
[69] *Avos* 4:1
[70] Cited in *Menuhah Ukedushah, Hakdamah*
[71] *Menachos* 43b
[72] *Yumah* 8a

mention the incredible reward and value that Torah study has. Each time we learn Torah we uphold the world[73] and each word is equivalent to 613 mitzvos![74] These are only some examples of the incredible spiritual accomplishments we amass on just one day alone. It is essential that we appreciate and value this.

During the week of Parashas Korach, after Rav Yehezkel Abramsky gave his daily shiur, he delivered a stirring speech. "You should know that you, my dear students, who are immersed in Torah study, are upholding the world! What you do is a great merit for Klal Yisrael. You are truly on the highest level! This is what Moshe Rabbeinu meant when he told Korach's followers, 'You have so much, Bnei Levi.' Moshe was admonishing them for failing to appreciate their tremendous role and instead becoming jealous of others. The Levi'im were immersed in Torah study, and our Rabbis teach that this is even greater than the Kehunah. They were therefore greater than those they envied! Please, my dear students, never forget how important you are!![75]

In addition to appreciating how far we have come, it is essential that we not be discouraged by setbacks. A sincere student of Rav Yitzhak Hutner wrote a letter to his Rebbi, bemoaning how he kept on resolving to improve yet he keeps on succumbing to his *yetzer hara*. Rav Hutner replied that he might lose a battle but he will win the war. He explained that it is normal to stumble. We just mustn't despair if we do and instead be strong and know that with perseverance, ultimately, we will be successful.

As Shlomo Hamelech, the wisest of all men, taught, "A *Tzadik* falls seven times and gets up." Rav Hutner explains that the correct

---

[73] Zohar Vol 2, 200a

[74] *Yerushalmi Peah* 1:1 explained by the *Gra, Shenos Eliyahu*

[75] Adapted from *Peninai Rabbeinu Yehezkel* p.83

meaning of the verse is that the *Tzadikim* arise because they stumble. Setbacks are inevitable yet the *Tzadikim* use these as opportunities to improve and these struggles are what made them who they are.[76]

Another important point to appreciate is that simply being on the right track is itself something incredibly powerful. We sometimes look at how far we still have to go and become discouraged by everything we have not yet accomplished. Yet, Hashem does not only look at where we are. He sees the direction in which we are heading.

Rabbeinu Yonah teaches that when a person commits himself to learning Torah and striving to keep *halachah*, even though he may not yet know or fulfill everything perfectly, Hashem considers his sincere effort as though he has kept everything! The fact that he is trying, learning, and working to become better is extremely precious in the eyes of Hashem.[77] How encouraging!

Chazal[78] teach, "One who comes to purify himself is assisted." When a person sincerely wants to grow and begins moving in the right direction, he receives a special *Siyata Dishmaya*. He does not have to have reached the destination yet. He simply has to begin travelling toward it.

One time, Rav Elchanan Wasserman met an old childhood acquaintance at a train station. They greeted each other warmly and began catching up after many years. The man asked Rav Elchanan what he had been doing with his life. "I became a Rav," Rav Elchanan replied, "and I teach Torah." Rav

[76] *Igeres Pachad Yitzhak*128
[77] *Rabbeinu Yonah* on *Pirkei Avos* 3:9
[78] *Yumah* 38b

Elchanan then asked his friend what he had chosen to do. With pride, the man described his great success in business and the wealth he had accumulated. "Rebbe," he said, "you are far more talented and capable than I am. If you had gone into business instead of becoming a Rav, you could have achieved even greater success. You could have amassed a fortune and lived a life of tremendous comfort."

Rav Elchanan listened quietly. A short while later, two trains arrived. One was modern, spacious, and luxurious; the other was old and worn. The wealthy man set out to board the older train. Rav Elchanan turned to him and said, "I don't understand. Look at that train. It is so much newer and more comfortable. Why don't you take that one?" "Rebbe," the man replied, "that train is going in the opposite direction! It may be much more comfortable, but it will not bring me where I need to go." Rav Elchanan smiled. "Exactly, when you know where you need to go, you will take the path that will bring you there, even if it is uncomfortable."

There will be times when we look around and wonder why our journey seems so slow, while others appear to be racing ahead. We may wish we were further along, more accomplished, or more consistent. Yet, if we are heading in the right direction, we should not be discouraged by the pace. The destination matters far more than how quickly we get there.

Chapter Six

Together As One

One of the most important realizations as we prepare for the *Yamim Noraim* is that we do not stand before Hashem alone. It is natural to enter *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur* thinking about ourselves — our mistakes, our *teshuvah*, our hopes, and the kind of year we are asking Hashem to give us. Yet, there is a much bigger picture to consider.

We are not isolated individuals standing on our own. We are part of something far greater: *Klal Yisrael*. What happens to one Jew can affect another, and the choices we make can reach far beyond our own lives. Our *teshuvah* is therefore not only an opportunity to change ourselves; it is an opportunity to impact all of *Klal Yisrael*.

As Chazal teach, "Great is teshuvah, because when one individual repents, the entire world is forgiven.[79] The *Hafla'ah*[80] explains that this is because each Jew is connected to each other. Therefore, when one person sins, the damage is not limited to him. There is a blemish in the relationship between Klal Yisrael and Hashem. When he does *teshuvah* and his sin is forgiven, that blemish is removed, bringing forgiveness to all of Klal Yisrael.

[79] *Yumah* 86b
[80] *Panim Yafos, Vayikra* 1:2

Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai[81] illustrates this with a powerful *mashal*. There was once a group of passengers traveling together in a boat. One person began digging a hole beneath his seat. When the other passengers protested, he responded, "What does it matter to you? I am only making a hole beneath myself." They answered, "The water will rise and flood the entire boat."

The boat may have been divided into separate seats, but beneath the surface, everyone was sharing the same vessel. What affected one person could ultimately affect them all. Klal Yisrael is the same. When one Jew makes a breach, the entire Klal can feel its effects. The reverse is true as well. Just as our actions can weaken the Klal, our Torah, *mitzvos*, and teshuvah can strengthen the entire Klal too.

There was a man from France who once traveled to the great Yeshiva of Volozhin. He saw the renowned Brisker Rav sitting with his students, deeply immersed in a difficult passage of the Rambam. After watching for a while, the visitor gently remarked, "Rebbe, it is wonderful that you are learning here, but perhaps your strength could be used more effectively elsewhere. Here in Volozhin, the students will learn Torah whether the Rambam is understood this way or that way. However, if you were in Paris, perhaps you could save many Jewish souls from being lost."

Rav Chaim listened and then gave an answer that the visitor never forgot: "By learning here in Volozhin, I am preventing Jews in Paris from being lost." Rav Chaim was expressing this very principle. A Jew does not live in isolation. What happens in one corner of Klal Yisrael can affect Jews thousands of miles away. A person sitting over a Gemara in a quiet beis

[81] *Vayikra Rabbah* 4:6

midrash may have no idea that his Torah is strengthening another Jew somewhere in the world.[82]

Rav Yisrael Salanter expressed a similar idea. He used to say that when someone strengthens himself in his learning, his strength can reach even Jews far away. It can inspire a businessman in Warsaw to close his store a little earlier before Shabbos, or a young Jew in Paris to seek out a kosher meal.[83]

This deep connection between one Jew and another is captured in the famous words of Chazal,*"kol Yisrael areivim zeh bazeh* — every Jew is responsible for one another."[84] We are not simply a collection of individuals who happen to belong to the same nation. We are bound together, and what one Jew does can have an effect on another.

The *Noam Elimelech* reveals a beautiful dimension to these words. The word *areivim*, meaning "responsible for one another," is connected to the word *arev*, meaning "sweet." He explains that when we daven for another Jew, we can sweeten the judgment upon him. Our *tefilah* for another person can bring *rachamim* upon him and help bring about his salvation. Our connection to one another is therefore not merely a responsibility; it is also a source of *chesed*. We have the ability to help one another through our *tefilos* and our concern for each other.[85]

This idea is woven throughout the *Yamim Noraim tefilos*. In the special *Shemoneh Esrei* of these days, we say, " ויעשו כולם אגודה אחת לעשות רצונך

[82] *Teshuvos VeHanhagos* p.728
[83] *Ibid*
[84] *Shavuos* 39a
[85] *Noam Elimelech, Likutai Shoshanim*

בלבב שלם" — "May they all become one *agudah* in order to carry out Your will wholeheartedly." We are not simply asking that each individual recognize Hashem and serve Him. We ask that we become one *agudah*, a united whole, and only then do we say, "*la'asos Retzonecha b'levav shalem*." Our unity is not merely a means of serving Hashem; it is itself an essential part of fulfilling His will.

Furthermore, it plays a crucial role in crowning Hashem as our King. In the section of *Malkiyos* in the *Mussaf* of Rosh Hashanah we recite the verse[86]: ויהי בישורון מלך בהתאסף ראשי עם יחד שבטי ישראל — "He became King over Yeshurun when the leaders of the nation gathered together, the tribes of Israel united." This verse demonstrates the strong connection between our unity and Hashem's Kingship.

The fact that we are being judged as one unit helps us understand the many plural expressions found throughout the *Yamim Noraim tefilos*. For example, we say זכרנו and כתבנו. Even while an individual is standing before Hashem, he speaks as part of the community. The language of the *tefilah* itself constantly reminds us that we are all one unit and are interconnected in fulfilling our purpose in this world.

Every Rosh Chodesh Elul, in the Yeshiva of Kelm, the bachurim would see something familiar appear once again in the Beis Midrash. A yellow sign, which had been stored away in the attic during the rest of the year, was brought down and hung prominently in the Beis Midrash. It had been written by the Alter of Kelm himself, and its message was simple but powerful: love one another.

[86] *Devarim* 33:5

The sign was not simply a reminder to be nice to others. It was the Alter's way of reminding the bachurim that this was one of the great avodos of Elul. As Rosh Hashanah approached, when we would stand before Hashem and ask Him to become our King, we needed to prepare ourselves by strengthening our love for every Jew around us.[87]

One of the most powerful ways to strengthen that bond is through the way we choose to see another person. We can easily notice someone's mistakes or shortcomings, but Elul gives us an opportunity to train ourselves to look deeper to search for the good in our fellow Jew.

Chazal teach us, "הדן את חבירו לכף זכות, דנין אותו לכף זכות" — "One who judges his fellow favorably is judged favorably." This is a powerful reminder that the way we look at others can have a profound effect not only on them, but also on ourselves and on the way we are judged by Hashem.

The *Kedushas Levi*[88] explains this idea beautifully. He writes that when we conduct ourselves with *chesed* and make an effort to judge every Jew favorably, we awaken that same quality in *Shamayim*. Hashem, so to speak, responds in kind, bringing *chesed* and favorable judgment upon us and upon all of *Klal Yisrael*. By judging others favorably, we open the "upper gates" of *chesed*, allowing blessings to flow upon the entire Jewish people.

[87] *Mechanech Ladoros* p.149
[88] *Shoftim*

So, every time we choose to see another person positively, we are not simply being kind to them. We are creating an atmosphere of *chesed* that can bring *chesed* upon ourselves and upon all of *Klal Yisrael*.

However, *chesed* is not expressed only in the way we judge others. It is also expressed in the way we notice them. Elul is a time when we become especially sensitive to the needs and feelings of those around us. It is a time to step outside ourselves and notice someone else: to ask how they are doing, to offer encouragement, to be patient, or simply to make another person feel valued. Through these small acts, we learn to look beyond ourselves and become more sensitive to the people Hashem has placed around us.

A powerful story about Rav Elya Lopian shows us just how deeply this sensitivity to others can become part of a person's *avodah*.

One Erev Yom Kippur, a talmid of Rav Elya Lopian was curious how his Rebbi would spend the precious hours before the lofty day of Yom Kippur. He wondered what his Rebbi would do in order to prepare himself for this holy day, and therefore decided to follow him after the seudah hamafsekes. To his surprise, Rav Elya did not walk to the Beis Medrash, but instead made his way to the yeshivah dormitory. The talmid watched as his Rebbi began inspecting the tissue dispensers in the bathrooms. The bachur quickly realized what was happening. This was normally the responsibility of the cleaners, but since they were not working that day, Rav Elya had taken it upon himself to ensure that everything was prepared properly for the bachurim. Whenever he noticed that a dispenser was running low, he would personally cut more tissues and make sure there would be enough.

The talmid was amazed. While many people would spend the final moments before Yom Kippur focused only on their own spiritual preparation, Rav Elya was concerned about the comfort and needs of others. This was the greatness of Rav Elya Lopian — even on the holiest day of the year, his thoughts were filled with consideration and care for other people.[89]

[89] *Rav Elya,* p. 208

Chapter Seven

Rosh Hashanah: Why we rejoice?

Chazal[90] note that if someone were to be judged in court, he would wear black clothes and appear unkempt and anxious. Yet *lehavdil*, on Rosh Hashanah, when Hashem judges us we act differently. We cut our hair and nails, wear white clothes and eat festive meals. Why is this different? After all, we are being judged and there is so much at stake: our livelihood, health and so much more are all being decreed on this day. Chazal explain that *Klal Yisrael* are so confident that Hashem will perform miracles for us and tear up harsh decrees, that even now we celebrate!

Our confidence comes from knowing Who is judging us: our loving and caring Father, who wants what is best for us. The Torah testifies how each Jew is a child of Hashem: "You are children to Hashem your G-D."[91] Just as a parent only wants the best for their child, so too Hashem has our best interests at heart. When He judges us, we are so confident that everything will be good, so even now we rejoice.

We also see how the nature of Rosh Hashanah is a happy day in *Sefer Nechemiah.*[92] *Klal Yisrael* were very dejected when Rosh Hashanah arrived, feeling great remorse for their sins and were weeping copious

[90] *Yerushalmi Rosh Hashanah 1:3*
[91] *Devarim 14:1*
[92] *Ch.8*

tears. However, *Nechemiah* told them not to be sad and rather to eat a festive meal and rejoice since the nature of Rosh Hashanah is that it is a day of *simchah.*

The *Sefer HaChinuch*[93] brings an additional reason why Rosh Hashanah is a happy day since we are so full of gratitude to Hashem for giving us this opportunity to start afresh. Once a year we have the ability to receive an entirely new decree: whatever has been decided last year is a thing of the past. He then writes something remarkable, that if not for this day the world won't be able to continue! Only due to Hashem's great kindness that He gives us an opportunity to start afresh and to receive new decrees can the world continue to exist! No matter how challenging the previous year was, on Rosh Hashanah everything is wiped clean and we are judged anew. For sure this is a great reason for us to rejoice!

This idea actually has *halachic* ramifications. The *Shulchan Aruch*[94] rules that when one sees a friend whom they have not seen for an entire year, they recite the *berachah* of *Baruch Mechayeh HaMeisim*. Why specifically a year?

The *Maharsha*[95] explains that this is because, over the course of a year, Rosh Hashanah has passed. On Rosh Hashanah, every person is judged as to whether they will live or, *chas v'shalom*, not live for the coming year. Therefore, when we see someone again after a full year has passed, we can rejoice that they have been granted another year of life and say, *Baruch Mechayeh HaMeisim*—"Blessed is Hashem Who revives the dead."

---

[93] *Mitzvah* 311
[94] 225:1
[95] *Berachos* 58b

There is a beautiful lesson here. Every Rosh Hashanah, we are given the opportunity to begin again. We stand before Hashem with hope and *bitachon*, asking Him to grant us another year of life, health, blessing, and *siyata diShmaya*. We are not simply looking back at the past year; we are looking forward to a new year that Hashem, in His kindness, may grant us.

We also see this idea in the *Kerias HaTorah* of the first day of Rosh Hashanah when we read about how Sarah was miraculously blessed with a child, despite being barren and her advanced age. This miracle occurred on Rosh Hashanah.[96] The *Chafetz Chaim*[97] teaches that there is a very powerful lesson that we can learn from this Torah reading; that there is always hope.

No matter how bleak things were previously, we now have a new year and a new judgment ahead. Avraham and Sarah were blessed with a son in their advanced age, something that many disbelieved. Yet, Hashem can do anything and a tremendous miracle happened. So too, no matter how hard our previous year was, on Rosh Hashanah everything can be changed. This is a very inspirational message that we learn from this Torah reading that is very appropriate for this day.

This idea is also the reason behind the ancient *minhag* of having *simanim* on Rosh Hashanah.[98] The *Chochmas Shlomo*[99] writes that on Rosh Hashanah we need to be happy and speak positively, stating how everything Hashem does is for the best. By saying this, everything will be turned for the best! He writes specifically that after shul, we should say, "*Kol mah deavid Rachmanah letav avid*—everything

[96] *Yevamos* 64b
[97] *Chafetz Chaim al HaTorah, Vayeirah*
[98] See *Kerisus* 6a
[99] *OC 683*

Hashem does is for the best." Our Rabbis[100] teach that when we say these words, we will actually see how things will turn out for the best. Therefore, saying these words can be very impactful in terms of our judgment for the upcoming year.

We also rejoice on this day since we are happy that Hashem has given us the most incredible gift of life until now and He continues to give it to us. Each second, we are able to breathe and enjoy another moment of the phenomenal world that Hashem made for us. Rav Shraga Mendalovitz used to say, "The greatest gift of life is life itself!" Each day of life has endless potential. We can learn Torah and perform *mitzvos,* helping us acquire eternal life and enjoy all the amazing pleasures that this world has to offer.

Our Rabbis teach that really, we should thank Hashem for each breath. This is because each second Hashem gives us another lease of life.[101] He allows our heart to beat, our lungs to help us breathe and all the numerous processes that help keep us alive. This is regardless how deserving we are. Hashem believes in us and is confident we will use the gift of life correctly no matter what happened previously.

We reference this each morning during *Modeh Ani* when we say רבה אמונתך "How great is Your faithfulness." We are thanking Hashem that He believes in us![102] No matter what happened the day before, Hashem returns our precious *neshamah* since He trusts us ever so much that we will use it correctly.

So, Rosh Hashanah is a great opportunity for us to express our gratitude for this priceless gift of life and how much Hashem believes

---

[100] *Ben Yehoyada, Berachos 60b, Maharal Nesivos Olam, (Nesivos Ahavas Hashem) Ch.1.*

[101] *Avodas Yisrael, Avos 4:4*

[102] *Chasam Sofer, Toras Moshe Devarim* 21:8.

in us. Really, before *davening* for a new year of life, it is important that we thank Hashem for the wonderful gift of life that we have experienced until now. As our Rabbis teach, "We should thank Hashem for the past and cry out in prayer for the future."[103] So before we ask for more, we need to appreciate what we have had already.

Rav Avigdor Miller was extremely particular not to take the gift of life for granted. When he recited the words, "And for our souls that are deposited with You," in the Modim prayer, those near him heard him pause and take a full breath; relishing the gift of life. One time, on the second night of Rosh Hashanah, he delivered a shiur in his shul. He began by telling his kehillah that "first of all we need to thank Hashem for the gift of a day in the new year." When he observed someone giggle, he remarked "I am being serious, all of us right now must say thank You Hashem for the gift of a day in this new year!"[104]

Another reason why we rejoice on this day is because it is the day that we coronate Hashem, the King of all Kings. There is no greater happiness than the fact that we are the subjects of the King of Kings and we crown Him over us, expressing His dominion over the world. As the verse in *Tehillim* states "בני ציון יגילו במלכם —The children of Tzion will rejoice in their King."[105]

Proclaiming Hashem as our King is such a great form of happiness. After all, Hashem is a loving and Merciful King Who is always bestowing us with kindnesses.[106] One reason why we blow the Shofar, is that it is a way of coronating Hashem as our King.[107] According to

---

[103] *Mishnah Berachos* 9:4
[104] *Rabbi Avigdor Miller, His Life and Revolution* p.26
[105] *Tehillim* 149:2
[106] *Seforno, Vayikra 23:24*
[107] *Ibid.*

what we have explained, blowing the Shofar should be an extremely happy time, since we are proclaiming Hashem's Kingship. In fact, it was reported that the Vilna Gaon was overflowing with joy when the Shofar was blown.[108]

When we coronate Hashem as our King, we are acknowledging that He is in control of every aspect of our lives. How each detail is carefully planned and that He is constantly running the world, orchestrating events. Contemplating this is also something that should fill us with tremendous happiness, as we see by Yaakov's emotional encounter with his son Yosef.

After they had been separated for many years, Yaakov experienced a moment beyond his wildest dreams: being reunited with his beloved son. Yosef fell on his father's neck and cried excessively. However, Yaakov didn't cry since he was reciting *Kerias Shema.* The *Maharal*[109] explains that Yaakov was just so overjoyed and was overflowing with love and gratitude to Hashem for fulfilling his lifelong dream of reuniting with Yosef.

After many years of separation, his son was still alive, and the second most powerful person in the entire Egypt. He had such a clarity of how Hashem is the true King and is in charge of each detail that occurs, that he spontaneously recited *Shema,* accepting His Kingship, *Ol Malchus Shamayim.* So, we see how being aware of Hashem's involvement in our lives and His Kingship should bring us such tremendous happiness and joy.

The Alter of Slobadka once described the coronation of Tzar Nicholai, the last Tsar of Russia. An enormous platform was erected that could be seen at a

[108] *Tosefes Maaseh Rav, 58*
[109] *Gur Aryeh Bereishis* 46:29

distance of many kilometers from the palace. The most distinguished dignitaries and nobles were in attendance and were privileged to stand close to the platform. At a certain point, large fences were erected to separate the common folk. Yet these citizens were yearning to have a glimpse at this spectacular occasion. Throngs of people pushed forward and tried to scale the fence, risking their lives just to catch a glance of the king being coronated. So, the Alter of Slobodka said, how much more should our yearning be for the privilege of coronating the King of Kings?" Our happiness should be immense and for sure we should dress in our finest clothes, and not appear unkempt.[110]

[110] Recounted by Rav Meir Chadash, Cited in *Shaar Hazmanim Rosh Hashanah* p.78

Chapter Eight

Crowning the King.

If we would be asked to sum up the entire *avodah* of Rosh Hashanah in one word, what would that be? The answer is: *Malkus,* Kingship! As Chazal[111] teach, on these days Hashem says, "Recite before Me (the verses of) *Malchiyus* in order that you would crown Me as King." This is a reference to the verses that Chazal enacted that we recite during *Mussaf*, proclaiming Hashem's Kingship. Yet how does reciting these verses proclaim Him as King?

Really, the purpose of reciting these verses is to arouse us to crown Hashem over ourselves. They are supposed to help us internalize how we cannot live unrestricted lives. Rather, we are subjects of Hashem, King of the Universe and need to faithfully obey His commandments. This awareness will help us prevail over our *yetzer hara* and will lead us to true repentance.[112]

This helps us understand a paradox that we see by Rosh Hashanah. The focus of this day is to crown Hashem, not a day of *teshuvah.* We don't recite *viduy* or *selichos* as opposed to Yom Kippur. However, Rosh Hashanah is considered to be part of the *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah.* If it is a day when we don't explicitly do *teshuvah* it is very puzzling why it would count as part of these ten days?

---

[111] *Rosh Hashanah* 16a

[112] Based on *Har Ye'areh Maamrei Mussar* p.184 by Rav Aryeh Finkel

Really, acknowledging Hashem's direct involvement in our lives is the first step towards *teshuvah.* The word *teshuvah* literally means to return. When someone needs to drive home, he has a destination where he is going. So too, we can only return to Hashem with a clear "destination," — the awareness of Whom we are returning to. Therefore, the day when we crown Hashem is one of the *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah* since it is an integral part of our repentance.

This also helps us understand why Rosh Hashanah precedes Yom Kippur. One might think that Yom Kippur should come first in order that we could enter the new year free of sin. However, crowning Hashem is an essential stage in enabling us to do complete *teshuvah*.[113]

We might ask, Hashem is always our King, why would it make a difference if we proclaim Him as King? The saying goes "*Ain Melech be'lo am*– There is no king without a people." Hashem is always King, yet we need to proclaim Him as King over ourselves. The *Gra*[114] explains that the very definition of a *melech,* is one whose subjects express their allegiance to him. If they reign against the will of their subjects, they are termed as a *moshel,* a ruler.

As the verse states, *'Ki LaHashem hamluchah umoshel bagoyim*—for Hashem there is Kingship and a ruler amongst the nations."[115] A reference to the fact that not all the nations of the world have accepted Hashem's sovereignty. This will only fully occur with the Mashiach, as the verse states, "And Hashem shall be King over all the earth; on that day shall Hashem be One, and His Name One."[116]

---

[113] Based on *Teshuvos VeHanagos Moadim: Rav Moshe Shternbuch* p.357.
[114] *Mishlai* 27:27
[115] *Tehillim* 22:9
[116] *Zechariah* 14:9

This idea is reflected in the *Shir Shel Yom*, the daily song, that was sung in the Beis HaMikdash each Friday. Chazal incorporated this in *Shacharis* and we also recite this each Friday: "*Hashem malach geus lavash*- Hashem is King; He is clothed in majesty. [117] " On the sixth day man was created and only then, we could proclaim Hashem as King.[118] So, only mankind has this unique privilege to crown Hashem.

On Rosh Hashanah, it is incumbent upon ourselves to try as much as we can to subjugate ourselves to Hashem, expressing our allegiance to Him as His loyal subjects. Only then He can be considered to be our King. Consequently, we will be driven to faithfully follow His commandments and will repent for our wrongdoings.

Rav Yitzhak Blazar loved to tell the following parable at Rosh Hashanah time. There once was a king who was curious about what his subjects thought about him. So, he decided to disguise himself as a peasant and went to the marketplace, mingling amongst the common folk. He found himself amongst a gang of thugs, including thieves and murderers, who looked at this stranger sinisterly. Suddenly, a few of these hooligans began to viciously attack him, with the intent to kill him. One member of the gang had mercy on him and pushed the others away, saving the king's life.

When the king returned to his palace, he hosted a lavish banquet as an expression of gratitude for the miracle that his life was saved. In attendance were the most dignified nobles and governors from his kingdom. Yet one of the guests, whom the king sent a personal invite to and ensured that he attended, was a member of the gang who saved his life. When he walked in, the dignitaries looked at him with great discontent, "What is this lowly peasant doing among us, nobles" they wondered. Yet when the king saw him,

---

[117] *Tehillim* 93:1

[118] Rav Shlomo Wolbe Alai Shur Vol.2 p. 225

he greeted him warmly, "Please sit right next to me" he said to everyone's surprise.

This thug was held in such high regard by the king since he resisted the influence of his counterparts and acted correctly by saving his life. In fact, the king viewed it as an expression of submission and allegiance to him as king, even though his identity was unknown. Our Rabbis[119] *teach that, a place where those who do teshuvah stand, even Tzadikim gemurim, cannot stand. Those who strive to improve, resisting the temptations of the yetzer hara are acknowledging that Hashem is the true King and are showing their allegiance to Him as loyal subjects. This is so cherished and beloved that they are considered to be greater than the Tzadikim.*[120]

Another important aspect of crowning Hashem, is proclaiming how He is in control of each single aspect in the creation. There are over seven billion people in the world in addition to billions of other species. Hashem's world was ingeniously designed and is ever so complex with countless intricate details. On Rosh Hashanah, we pronounce Hashem as King over each facet of Hashem's creation. We are testifying how He is intimately involved in the running of the world, controlling each single aspect and has dominion over the entire universe.

Really, we refer to this each time we recite a *berachah.* Chazal teach that *shem* and *Malkus,* mention Hashem's name and His Kingship, are key components to a *berachah.* Therefore, in addition to mentioning Hashem's name, each *berachah* contains the phrase, *Melech haolam,* King of the world. Before we eat, we are acknowledging how Hashem is the sole cause behind the many factors and processes that are

[119] *Berachos* 34b

[120] Cited in *Har Year'eh Maamrei Mussar* p.184 by Rav Aryeh Finkel

involved in our food reaching our table. Each apple we eat, so to speak, has a personal stamp by Hashem and He orchestrated countless processes for us to enjoy it.[121]

A man in Yerushalayim attended a Mussar group that were working on appreciating Hashem's intimate involvement in their lives. During one class, each member was given an assignment to sit down for a few minutes focusing on just one thing that they appreciated. This man chose to focus on the cup of coffee he enjoyed each morning. So, he sat down with a pen and paper and began writing about the many details that had to happen for him to enjoy this coffee. Firstly, the coffee beans were harvested from the plantations, an operation that requires many skilled workers and machinery. These beans were then processed in specialized ovens, also requiring many skilled laborers.

Not to mention the people who made these ovens, this by itself was a great operation. These coffee beans were then packaged and shipped to the port in Haifa. Hundreds of people had to be involved in the packaging and delivering the beans to the port in addition to managing the ship. These beans were subsequently delivered to the wholesaler, until it reached his local makolet in Yerushalayim. The man looked at his watch and realized that 35 minutes had passed!

This was before he even began to focus on many of the other factors involved such as the processes involved in creating the mug and spoon. This gave him a new awareness of the countless details that Hashem employs to enjoy the many benefits He gives us. It was a glimpse in what it means that Hashem is our King.[122]

---

[121] Rav Matisyahu Solomon, Cited in the *Halachos of Berachos* Rav Pinchas Bodner p.3

[122] *Adapted from Gateway to Happiness*

Another facet of crowning Hashem is not only acknowledging Hashem's complete dominion over each aspect of the creation but how He recreates the world on a constant basis.[123] Each morning, in the *berachah* of *Yotzer Ohr,* we exclaim, "He renews in His goodness the creation of the world each day." This is because the creation of the world wasn't a one-time event and in fact each second Hashem is renewing the world. If He would cease, even for one moment, the world would cease to exist.

This explains why the *berachos* we recite are in the present tense, such as "*Boreh peri haetz*—Who creates the fruit of the ground." The reason is because Hashem is constantly active every moment. Unlike a human craftsman who completes his work and then steps away, Hashem never ceases His actions and involvement.[124]

There is something unique about Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. These are the only two Yamim Tovim from the Torah that there was no *mitzvah* of *Aliyah laregel*, to visit the Beis HaMikdash. During the *shalosh reglaim,* throngs of Jews flocked from far and wide to stand in the holiest place in the world, where there is the strongest manifestation of the *Shechinah*, in order to draw close to Hashem. On Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, we crown Hashem as King and His Kingship is revealed through the entire world. Therefore, it isn't necessary to enter the Beis HaMikdash. So, during these days, we are actually standing in the Beis HaMikdash![125]

Let's conclude with the inspiring words of Rav Pincus.[126] "When a person accepts upon themselves Hashem's Kingship it is like they

---

[123] Rav Moshe Shternbuch *Teshuvos VeHanagos Moadim* p.324
[124] *Aruch Hashulchan* OC 46:3
[125] *Teshuvos VeHanhagos* p.354
[126] *Sichos HaRav Pincus* ch.22 p.265

enter Shabbos (the day of Hashem's Kingship) and the Beis HaMikdash. Then Hashem won't refrain from giving him any blessing and success. So, the avodah of Rosh Hashanah is to change the form of our life, ensuring it is one where we accept Hashem's Kingship."

Chapter Nine

Yom Kippur: The Happiest Day

Why is it a *mitzvah* to eat a festive meal on erev Yom Kippur? It seems rather interesting since on Yom Kippur itself we fast and afflict ourselves yet just a few hours before it is a mitzvah *Deoraisah* to eat? Moreover, not only is it a mitzvah, Chazal[127] teach that when we eat on erev Yom Kippur it is like we have fasted for two days straight! What is the meaning behind this?

Rabbeinu Yonah[128] explains that Klal Yisrael are so full of *simchah* that we have this golden opportunity of Yom Kippur, a day when we can erase all our *aveiros*, that we celebrate with a festive meal! We can't eat on Yom Kippur so we eat before, to thank Hashem for this golden opportunity. This is so precious to Hashem that it is considered as though we have fasted for two days!

We really need to be full of appreciation for the priceless gift of Yom Kippur. In just one day we can remove all our sins and start afresh! The gates of *teshuvah* are open to all and Hashem is eagerly waiting for us to enter and come close to Him. After all, Hashem loves us so much, and only wants to bestow us with goodness. Each second, we are being showered with *berachos:* we can breathe, see, walk, etc. Due to His great love for us, He really wants us to be close to Him and

[127] *Yumah 88a*
[128] *Shaarei Teshuvah* 4:9

provides us with the most amazing gift of Yom Kippur, to erase all our *aveiros*!

This is why we eat a festive meal before Yom Kippur, we are so full of joy and gratitude for this tremendous opportunity. What's more, Chazal[129] teach that Yom Kippur is one of the happiest days in the calendar due to our great joy that we have this golden opportunity.

Rav Yerucham Levovitz teaches that it is the *minhag* of the Tzadikim to dance on *Motzai Yom Kippur* due to their great happiness that their sins have been forgiven. This is also the reason why we celebrate Sukkos after Yom Kippur, a time known as *Zman Simhasainu* when there is a unique obligation to rejoice. We celebrate for over a week, eating delicious foods, drinking wine, singing and dancing etc. expressing our happiness that we were just forgiven for our sins.[130]

Spending the entire day in Shul on Yom Kippur can be challenging. The davening is long and sometimes it is hard to relate to and we don't always understand the meaning. It is important to note that one of the most important things is for us to be sincere. Even if we cannot fully comprehend everything we say, when we sincerely want to become close to Hashem and erase our sins, it is ever so cherished by Hashem, as we see in the following story.

One Yom Kippur, a simple shepherd boy went to shul. He was uneducated and didn't even know Aleph Beis, yet he was so moved by the fervent tefillos of those around him. There is nothing he wished more than to daven to Hashem as well, but he didn't understand any of the tefillos. Innocently, he decided to whistle a tune to Hashem as that is what he knew how to do. Everyone was taken aback by what they saw as a lack of respect. However,

[129] *Taanis 30b*

[130] *Rav Yerucham Levovitz, Da'as Torah, Vezos Habrachah Maamar 63*

the renowned Tzadik, the Ba'al Shem Tov who was present, silenced them. "Until now I sensed that there was something blocking our tefillos," he said. "Yet, when this shepherd boy started whistling, all the barriers were broken and our tefillos ascended straight to Shamayim! His love for Hashem was just so sincere and pure that it made a great stir causing all our tefillos to ascend straight to Shamayim!"

What could also be challenging is the thought that now I feel so inspired, yet Yom Kippur will soon be over. If I lose the inspiration, what did I really accomplish? Rav Chatzkel Levenstein encourages us about what our correct approach should be, as we see in the following story.

When the Mir Yeshiva fled to Shanghai during World War II, Yom Kippur was very challenging. It was scorching hot and humid—the conditions were difficult enough on any regular day, let alone on a day when they could not eat or drink. The students were perspiring profusely and felt weak and exhausted. Yet the Mashgiach, Rav Chatzkel Levenstein, seemed oblivious to all this. He stood in the corner, praying with great intensity and devotion. Inspired by the sight of this Tzaddik, the students decided that after the fast they would eat and drink quickly and then return straight to the Beis HaMidrash to learn. They knew it would give their Mashgiach great pleasure to see them immersed in Torah as soon as he finished davening.

When they returned, Rav Chatzkel was still deeply engrossed in prayer. Finally, when he took three steps back, he looked up and saw all his students learning diligently. Smiling with delight, he went to the front of the Beis HaMidrash and addressed them:

"My precious children, I felt that this year the prayers of the yeshiva were more sincere and pure than ever. You might be thinking that soon the

incredible inspiration you felt today will pass, and then—what did we accomplish?

Well, once there was a man who spent years and invested a fortune in building the most extravagant mansion. Finally, when it was completed, he proudly climbed to the top to place an exquisite ornament on the pinnacle of the roof. Suddenly, a strong gust of wind blew it down, and it shattered to pieces. 'Oh no, my mansion!' he cried. 'This took so long to build!' However, those present reassured him that his mansion was still standing—it was only the ornament that had broken.

My dear children, this Yom Kippur we all built a beautiful mansion. The inspiration might wear off, but the many rooms we built are still standing, and they will exist forever."[131]

[131] Related by Rav Matisyahu Solomon

Chapter Ten

Yom Kippur, A Day Like No Other

There is something almost beyond our understanding about Yom Kippur. It is not simply another day on the Jewish calendar, nor is it merely a day designated for fasting, prayer, and repentance. It is far more than that. Yom Kippur is a day that belongs to a different world—a day in which we are given the opportunity to step beyond the limitations of our ordinary lives and experience a glimpse of something far greater.

The *Kli Yakar* brings a fascinating allusion from the Torah to this. The verse[132] states, "ואל יבא בכל עת אל הקודש"—"The (Kohen Gadol) should not come at all times into the *Kodesh HaKedashim*." However, the *Kohen Gadol* is permitted to enter the *Kodesh HaKedoshim* once a year on Yom Kippur. So, how could the Torah say that he could never enter? The *Kli Yakar* explains that the words "בכל עת" mean that the *Kohen Gadol* may not enter on a day connected to ordinary time. He may enter only on Yom Kippur, a day that is above time and when we are not considered like ordinary people.

[132] *Vayikra* 16:2

There are in fact many symbolisms in the practices of Yom Kippur that demonstrate how on this day we are considered to be like *malachim*. *Malachim* are pure from all transgressions, as is the Jewish nation on Yom Kippur. Amongst the *malachim*, there is peace, and likewise, there is peace among the Jewish nation, as we seek forgiveness from one another before this day. Also, we don't eat and drink, just like the *malachaim*.[133]

Another way Yom Kippur allows us to experience our resemblance to the *malachim* is through the recitation of *Shema*. Throughout the year, we recite the words "ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד" quietly. On Yom Kippur, however, we say them aloud. Why?

Chazal teach that when Moshe ascended to *Shamayim*, he heard the *malachim* praising Hashem with these words and brought this praise down to *Klal Yisrael*. Since it is the *malachim's* praise, we normally recite it quietly, as though we are using something that does not fully belong to us. The Midrash compares this to someone who takes a precious piece of jewelry from the king's palace and gives it to his wife, warning her not to wear it publicly because it belongs to the king.

On Yom Kippur, however, we are compared to the *malachim*. We are cleansed from sin, refrain from physical pleasures, and devote ourselves entirely to serving Hashem. On this one day, we can openly recite the *malachim's* praise, saying "ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד" aloud.[134]

---

[133] *Pirkei DeRebbi Eliezer* 46

[134] *Devarim Rabbah* 2:3

Not only do we become transformed into a new spiritual existence, but the earth does as well. One of the prohibitions of Yom Kippur is to wear shoes. Wearing shoes is a basic human need. In fact, Chazal[135] teach, "A person should even sell everything he owns in order to purchase shoes for his feet."

The *Bnei Yissaschar* explains that shoes serve as a separation between a person and the ground. When Adam HaRishon sinned, the ground was cursed. Wearing shoes therefore protects us from the curse associated with the ground. This is why we recite the *berachah*, "*She'asah li kol tzorki*" — "Who has provided me with all my needs" — when putting on our shoes. In addition to the important function that shoes serve in protecting our feet, they offer us a spiritual protection, helping us separate from the land that was cursed.

On Yom Kippur, however the world enters a new kind of existence. As a result of the immense holiness of this day, the ground becomes elevated from being cursed to being blessed. Therefore, it is no longer necessary to have a separation.[136]

So, Yom Kippur transforms our relationship with both ourselves and the world around us. We temporarily leave behind the physical trappings of everyday life and seek to experience what it means to exist on a higher, more spiritual plane. Even the ground beneath our feet becomes part of that transformation.

Yom Kippur is a day when we can reach extraordinary heights. It is a day when Hashem's *midas harachamim* shines so powerfully, making

[135] *Shabbos* 129a
[136] *Igrah DeParkah* 304

it easier for us to sincerely repent and return to Him. There is something about the holiness of this day that awakens within us a deep desire to come closer to Hashem and return to Him. This is beautifully illustrated in the following story.

Rav Chaim Berlin, son of the Netziv, served as a Rav in Moscow during the nineteenth century. One year, shortly before Yom Kippur, an urgent matter required him to leave town, and he found himself spending Yom Kippur in a small village with only one shul. When he entered on Kol Nidrei night, he was surprised to find it completely empty. He waited, but as Kol Nidrei approached, no one came. Realizing he would not have a minyan, Rav Chaim began davening alone. He hoped the next day would be different, yet the shul remained empty throughout the morning.

Hours later, in the afternoon, the doors opened and several men entered. Their appearance was striking. Their clothes were disheveled, and they were covered in dirt and mud. It was difficult to imagine where they had come from. Then they began to daven. Rav Chaim witnessed a tefillah filled with such sincerity and heartfelt emotion that he had rarely seen before. These simple villagers poured out their hearts to Hashem, crying and pleading with a devotion that left a lifelong impression on him.

Afterward, Rav Chaim asked what had happened. With tears in their eyes, they explained that the previous afternoon, as they prepared for Yom Tov, Russian soldiers had arrived and forced them from their homes to work in the fields. They begged to be allowed to prepare for Yom Kippur, but their pleas were ignored. Only when the soldiers finally released them did they return as quickly as possible. They came straight to shul, because there was nowhere else they wanted to be.

Overwhelmed, Rav Chaim asked permission to address the congregation. He began, "There was once a dispute between two people over the ownership of a chicken. They went to Beis Din, who told them to untie its legs and see where it naturally walked. The chicken went toward one person's home, and Beis Din ruled that this revealed its true owner. "Ribono Shel Olam," Rav Chaim cried, "look at the incredible children You have! These people's feet were tied, and they had no choice but to work in the fields. Yet the moment they were free, where did they go? Not home to rest, not looking for entertainment, but straight to shul, because their souls were drawn to You."

Rav Chaim then turned to the congregation. "Think of those who have strayed from the path of Torah. They may arrive covered in the 'mud' of life, carrying the weight of their mistakes, yet when something awakens within them, they come back. Hashem, please do not let go of them. We cannot let go of them. We must hold on to every Jewish soul and show them the love and warmth that will help them return home."[137]

As Yom Kippur draws to a close, we are given one final opportunity to merit a favorable decree: *Neilah.* The *Mishnah Berurah*[138] writes that we should be especially diligent with *Neilah* because the goal of the *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah* is Yom Kippur, and the goal of Yom Kippur is *Neilah*, "הכל הולך אחר החיתום"—everything depends on the final seal. So, *Neilah* is the climax of everything we have experienced throughout the *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah* and Yom Kippur.

The *Mishnah Berurah* urges us to make a special effort during this final prayer. "If not now, when?" he asks. *Ne'ilah* is the culmination of the

[137] Rav Yechiel Spero, *Touched by the Seder* p. 96
[138] 623:3

Aseres Yemei Teshuvah and the climax of Yom Kippur. What we do at this moment carries great significance, for everything follows the final seal. Therefore, even when weakened by the fast, we should "gird our loins like a mighty warrior" and pray with a clear mind, sincerely resolving to accept the commitments of *teshuvah*. "One who comes to purify himself is assisted" from Above, and through this effort, one can merit to be sealed in the Book of Good Life.[139]

It is hard to describe how much we could actually accomplish at this time. In fact, the *Ramchal*[140] teaches that during this time, a person can attain the level of Adam HaRishon before his sin. It is a time when we can become completely pure before Hashem. All sins can be removed. It is a time of immense compassion, and Hashem will forgive us even for the most severe sins. One example is the grave sin of Chilul Hashem, desecrating Hashem's name. This *aveirah* is so serious that Chazal[141] teach that we cannot achieve atonement. Yet *Neilah* is different and we can cleanse ourselves from even this. Why is this so?

When Hashem judges a person, He doesn't do so alone.[142] The *malachim* normally stand before Him as part of the Heavenly court and can help advocate for us. However, if a person desecrated the Name of Hashem, which *malach* would be so brazen as to claim that the offense was not serious? Therefore, when a charge of *chillul Hashem* is brought before the Heavenly court, the *malachim* remain silent.

---

[139] *Mishnah Berurah* 623:3
[140] *Kitzur Kavanos* p.158
[141] *Yomah* 86b
[142] *Yerushalmi Sanhedrin* 1:1

During Neilah however, the *malachim* are not part of the judgment process. Hashem Himself alone judges us. When we stand before Him and plead for forgiveness, we can achieve atonement for the most serious sins such as *chilul Hashem*.[143]

We see that during Neilah there is such a unique manifestation of Hashem's presence more than any time. He judges us alone and is waiting with open arms for us to call out to Him and repent. This idea helps us understand the universal practice of reciting *Hashem Hu HaElokim* seven times at the conclusion of *Neilah*. The seven times we recite this correspond to the seven Heavenly *reki'im.* Each time we recite *Hashem Hu HaElokim* we are symbolically accompanying the *Shechinah* as it rises from earth, through the seven *reki'im*, all the way back to its place above. It is a way of saying farewell to the strong revelation of the *Shechinah* that we were so fortunate to experience during these sacred moments.[144]

At *Neilah*, we are standing at the very end of the day, but we are also standing at the beginning of something new. We do not have to leave Yom Kippur as the same person who entered it. Hashem gives us these final moments to become purified, to draw closer to Him, and to have a new beginning.

The following story provides us a glimpse of the power that the precious gift of *teshuvah* really has and how much we can gain from this precious time.

---

[143] *Meshech Hochmah, Haftaras Parashas Vayelech*

[144] *Levush* 623:5

Rav Leib Sarah's, a talmid of the Ba'al Shem Tov, was once in a Polish village for Yom Kippur where only nine men could make a minyan. "Are you sure there are no other Jews here?" he asked. "We are the only ones here who identify with our heritage," they replied. "What about someone who strayed from the path? The gates of teshuvah are open to everyone," he asked. "There is the village squire, but he has abandoned Torah and been engrossed in grave sins for over 40 years," they told him. "Let me speak to him," the Rav said determinedly. He explained their predicament to the squire, who surprisingly showed a newfound desire to reconnect with his Jewish roots and helped complete the minyan. He remained in Shul the entire Yom Kippur praying with sincerity. At the climax of Neilah, when everyone cried out "Hashem Hu HaElokim" for the seventh time, he suddenly passed away. The Tzadik proclaimed that he had earned a place in Olam Haba! [145]

[145] *A Treasury of Chasidic tales, Rabbi Zevin* p. 127

Chapter Eleven

Inspiring Quotes

Elul:

- *Due to Hashem's great love for His people, He is always bestowing good upon us and commanded us to repent whenever we sin. Even though it is always praiseworthy to do teshuvah, the month of Elul is particularly favorable for our teshuvah to be accepted, more than the rest of the year.* *(Chayei Adam, Rosh Hashanah 138:1)*

- *Elul is full of so much spiritual potential that one hour is valued like a day during the rest of the year!* *(The Hafla'ah, Panim Yafos Devarim 16:30)*

- *The days of Elul are full of such mercy and holiness that it is surprising that Chazal didn't give them the status of a Moed!* *(Ba'al HaTanya, Likutei Torah, Elul)*

- *The last week of Elul is so powerful that on each day we have the ability to rectify the sins we committed on that day during the entire year!* *(Rav Elyah Lopian in the name of the Kadmonim)*

- *It is well known from early Torah sources that Elul is an acronym for "Ani LeDodi vedodi li- I am for my beloved and my beloved is for me." Elul is a time of great closeness to Hashem. This is not a temporary relationship as this is not called 'beloved.' Rather, it is the purpose of this time to acquire a permanent relationship with Hashem.* *(Rav Shimshon Pincus, Sichos HaRav Pincus Elul VeYamim Noraim Ch.1)*

- *The days of Elul are a great gift that Hashem grants us.* *(Chidushei HaRim, cited in Beer HaChayim p.24)*

- *Elul is a time when Hashem's great love for us is displayed.* *(The Alter of Kelm Chochmah U' Mussar vol.1, Maamar 16)*

- *One of the things that a Jew needs to believe is that the month of Elul is great and awesome.* *(Rav Shimshon Pincus, Sichos HaRav Pincus Elul VeYamim Noraim Ch.1)*

- *We are obligated to designate time in the month of Elul, for contemplation and connecting ourselves to our Creator.* *(Rav Gamliel Rabinovitch, Tiv Hamoadim, Yamim Noraim p.145)*

- *Elul is an acronym for Ani LeDodi vedodi li, since Hashem desires our love for Him and His hand is outstretched to accept our repentance.* *(Seder HaYom, Elul)*

- *The month of Elul is a time when we can elevate ourselves more than other times. We can draw closer to Hashem more, to draw close with great yearning… then our Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur will be a different league.* *(Rav Aharon Leib Shteinman, Yimilah Pi Tehilasecha, Yamim Noraim)*

- *Moshe ascended the mountain for the third time (on Rosh Chodesh Elul) and came down on Yom Kippur. Anyone who increases to ask for mercy during these days, will be a merit for him.* *(Rosh, Rosh Hashanah 4:12)*

- *Each person should arouse themselves when the Shofar is blown in the month of Elul.* *(Shlah, Rosh Hashanah Torah Ohr)*

- *The month of Elul is a time when the gates of Shamayim are open, for our prayers and praises to be accepted.* *(Bnei Yisaschar Elul, Maamar 1)*

- *These days, of Elul, are days when we can be freed from the control of the yetzer hara: a person can change his ways and be on the correct path….* *(Rav Nosson Wachtfogel, Leket Reshimos Inyanai Elul VeYamim Noraim p.8)*

- *These days are days of love, days when we can entrench in our heart that Hashem is our G-D and there is no one besides Him.* *(Rav Shimshon Pincus, Sichos HaRav, Pincus Elul VeYamim Noraim)*

- *The eis ratzon of the days of Elul extends to teshuvah that isn't wholehearted or complete, when during the year this isn't sufficient to be accepted, but in Elul it is easier to be accepted.* *(Rav Dov Yaffeh, Leavdecha Baemes p.19)*

- *Elul is an acronym for Ani LeDodi vedodi li. 'Ani LeDodi' I am for my beloved' refers to Elul, dodi li, 'My beloved is for me' refers to Tishrei. According to how much we arouse ourselves in Elul, we will merit in Tishrei.* *(Sfas Emes 5661)*

- *Someone who wisely utilizes these days can enter Rosh Hashanah free of any stain of sin and be fitting that his name be inscribed in the book of good life.* *(Rav Shimshon Pincus, Sichos HaRav Pincus ch. 10)*

- *During Elul, Hashem is always near, as it states* *(Yeshayah 55:6)* "בהמצאו' דרשו ה' קראהו בהיותו קרוב— *Seek Hashem when He can be found; call upon Him when He is near." "When He is near" is a reference to Elul.* *(Haflaah, Panim Yafos Vayikra 16:30)*

- *These days are very fitting for us to require a relationship with Hashem and be saved from an unfavorable judgment through embracing Hashem, by building a connection and a relationship with Him. This is the avodah of these days.* *(Rav Shimshon Pincus, Sichos HaRav Pincus Elul Veyamim Noraim p.17)*

- *Elul is a time of ratzon: these are unique days when there is a Shefa Eloki, a Divine bounty': that Hashem distributes.* *(Rav Chaim Freedlander, Sifsai Chayim Moadim vol.3 p.18)*

- *In addition to the feelings of fear that we need in Elul, we also need feelings of simchah.* *(The Alter of Kelm cited in Leavdecha Baemes p.18)*

- *The yetzer hara attempts to cause us to sin by trying to make us forget that we are Hashem's children; then we will fall and act in ways that are not befitting for the King's children.… This should be our avodah in Elul: to internalize the truth of "Ani LeDodi vedodi li" and to remember and feel that we are Hashem's children. Then, we will act differently.* *(Rav Nosson Wachtfogel, Leket Reshimos, Elul Veyamim Noraim p.7)*

- *During these days, when Klal Yisrael yearn to draw close to Hashem, the gates of teshuvah and rachamim are opened, since Hashem's hand is outstretched to accept those who repent.* *(Sfas Emes, Likutim)*

- *These are days of friendship and days of ratzon, for this month helps atone for the entire year.* *(The Arizal, cited in Panim Yafos Vayikra 16:30)*

- *Since the yetzer hara knows very well how elevated these days are, it does whatever is in its power to prevent us from accessing the potential. We need to be on guard not to waste even a moment.* *(Rav Dov Yaffeh, Leavdecha Baemes p.19)*

- *Let's stop and think, are the gates of mercy not open before us in this time? How great is our obligation to try with all our ability to make the most out of these days of mercy.* *(Rav Yerucham Levovtiz, Daas Hochmah Umussar vol2, Maaamar 73)*

- *We have before us, the most precious days in the world. Days of teshuvah and Yom Kippur, when we can merit a great bounty through returning to Hashem…* *(Rav Aharon Leib Shteinman, Yimilah Pi Tehilasecha, Yamim Noraim)*

- *How great is our obligation to make the most of each moment in Elul, to make the most of the he'aras panim (Hashem's shining countenance) that illuminates and shines forth during these days.* *(Rav Yerucham Levovtiz, Daas Hochmah Umussar 2:73)*

- *Elul is not like the rest of the year. On the contrary, the rest of the year is dependent on Elul.* *(Rav Nosson Wachtfogel, Leket Reshimos, Inyanai Elul Veyamim Noraim p.7)*

- *During Elul, we have the power to rectify our sins from the past year.* *(Shlah, Rosh Hashanah, Ner Mitzvah)*

- *The fundamental avodah of Elul, is to increase our Torah learning and kavanah and freshness of our davening.* *(Chafetz Chaim, cited in VeZos LiYehudah vol.2 p.6)*

Teshuvah:

- *How effective is teshuvah! Yesterday someone was distant from Hashem… and today he clings to the Shechinah!* *(Rambam, Hilchos Teshuvah 7:7)*

- *From the favors that Hashem Yisbarach bestowed His creations with, was that He prepared for them a way to ascend from the pit they have fallen in, due to their actions.* *(Rabbeinu Yonah, Shaarei Teshuvah 1:1)*

- *Included in (the above quoted) words is the essence of teshuvah. The purpose of teshuvah is to recognize the kindness of Hashem and to come close to Him.* *(Rav Nosson Wachtfogel, Leket Reshimos Inyanai Elul VeYamim Noraim p.117)*

- *Amongst the kindnesses that Hashem bestowed upon His creations is that teshuvah was created before the world.* *(Rabbeinu Bechaya, Kad Hakemach Rosh Hashanah)*

- *Rabbi Levi taught, great is teshuvah since it reaches all the way until the Kiseh Hakavod!* *(Yumah 86a)*

- *When we repent, we need to contemplate Hashem's great kindness for giving us atonement.* *(Rabbeinu Yonah, Shaarei Teshuvah 3:2)*

- *Rabbi Hamah taught, great is teshuvah since it brings cures to the world.* *(Yumah 86a)*
- *Rabbi Yochanan taught great is teshuvah since it tears up a person's decrees.* *(Rosh Hashanah 17b)*
- *Rabbi Shmuel Bar Nachmani said in the name of Rebbi Yochanan, great is teshuvah since it lengthens the years of a person's life.* *(Yumah 86b)*
- *Rabbi Avahu Bar Zeira said, great is teshuvah since it preceded the creation of the world.* *(Midrash Tehillim 90)*
- *Teshuvah is greater than tefillah….* *(Tanah Devi Eliyahu 24)*
- *Great is teshuvah since it is a shield against punishments.* *(Midrash Hagadol, Bamidbar 21:7)*
- *Rabbi Meir said, how great is teshuvah since if an individual repents, the entire world is forgiven!* *(Yumah 86b)*
- *If someone does teshuvah, they draw down chessed, light, and plenty from above for the entire world.* *(Bas Ayin, Reeh)*
- *Rabbi Yochanan said great is teshuvah since it hastens the geulah.* *(Yumah 86b)*
- *One who does teshuvah is shown a special Divine favor.* *(Midrash Tanchumah, Haazinu 4)*
- *The gates of tefillah are sometimes open and sometimes closed, yet the gates of teshuvah are always open.* *(Devarim Rabbah 2:12)*
- *Anyone who does teshuvah is considered to be a briah hadashah, a new being.* *(Abudraham, Seder Tefilas Rosh Hashanah)*
- *Teshuvah is considered equal to all the mitzvos.* *(Ba'al Haturim Nitzavim 30:10)*

- *In addition to the great kindness that Hashem created the gift of teshuvah… it is a great kindness that He wants us to do teshuvah... Hashem desires that even the reshaim do teshuvah… as we say each day Baruch atah Hashem Harotzeh Bitshuvah.* *(Rav Itzeleh Peterberger, Kochavai Ohr, Maamar 6)*

- *Rabbi Akiva said, fortunate are you Yisrael. Before Whom do you become pure? Before your Father in Shamayim.* *(Yumah 85b)*

- *When a person arouses himself with even some sliver of regret, even if it isn't wholehearted, then Hashem will assist him to accomplish a complete repentance.* *(Rav Shneur Kotler based on Yirmiyah 31:17 Noam Siach p.204)*

- *Even the biggest rashah, Hashem prepares the way for them, the way for forgiveness and atonement: is there anything sweeter for the palate than that?* *(The Alter of Kelm, Chochmah U'Mussar 1:195)*

- *Any attempt a person makes to improve has the power to elevate him.* *(Rav Shneur Kotler, Noam Siach p.206 based on Midrash Shocher Tov 1).*

- *Great is teshuvah since it brings one close to the Shechinah…* *(Rambam, Hilchos Teshuvah 7:6)*

- *If one does teshuvah and then stumbles, his teshuvah was still valid and will exist forever.* *(Rav Sadya Gaon, cited in Leket Reshimos Inyanai Elul VeYamim Noraim p.106)*

- *One who has done teshuvah shouldn't think that he is far from the levels of the Tzadikim because of the sins and iniquities that he performed. This is not so, rather he is beloved and desired before Hashem, as if he had never sinned….* *(Rambam, Hilchos Teshuvah 7:4)*

- *Teshuvah is greater than the korbanos.* *(Chafetz Chaim, Machaneh Yisrael 1:26)*

- *Even when one performs a complete repentance, it is still a great kindness from Hashem that this repentance is accepted.* *(Shlah Rosh Hashanah 57)*

- *When we commit an aveirah, Hashem eagerly awaits our teshuvah.* *(Tzlach, Derashos, 13)*

- *Rav Elazar said great is teshuvah since it draws those who are far close…* *(Midrash Hagadol, Devarim 30:1)*

- *Rabbi Avahu taught, a place where those who do teshuvah stand, even tzadikim gemurim, cannot stand.* *(Berachos 34b)*

- *When we do teshuvah out of love, our sins turn into mitzvos. So, each kezayis of forbidden food that one eats has the potential to be turned into eating keyaysim of the korban Pesach.* *(Chasam Sofer cited in Tiv Hamoadim,Yamim Noraim p.142)*

- *Chasidim and Anshai Ma'aseh were accustomed to dance on Motzai Yom Kippur due to their great happiness that they had erased their previous sins.* *(Rav Yerucham Levovitz, Daas Torah, Vezos Habrachah Maamar 63)*

- *Teshuvah and ma'asim tovim are a 'shield' against tribulations.* *(Avos 4:11)*

- *This is the main point of teshuvah, to establish a relationship with Hashem through His Torah. He is just waiting for us to do this.* *(Rav Shimshon Pincus, Sichos HaRav Pincus ch.14)*