



Parshat Ki Tavo: Parsha Journeys

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hanoch Teller

Parshat Ki Tavo discusses the blessings that were given on Har Grizim and the curses that were given on Har Avel. While both mountains were situated near each other and enjoyed the exact same climatic conditions, Har Grizim was lush and verdant while Har Avel remained barren. Rav Hirsch explains that this is a timeless lesson in free will. Two people can be given identical capabilities, yet one will go in one direction while the other may go the opposite way. You can choose to be the mountain of blessing or the hill of curses. It's all up to you.

The essence of life is choice. As our choices diminish, our lives become less meaningful. Human nature is to avoid difficult decisions, but if we don't proactively choose life we inevitably choose death. The legendary Sara Schenirer would say, one should live a life of *chayim sheb'chayim*, every minute should be thought out, not lived perfunctorily. Choosing life means seriously considering how to raise our children, treat our spouse, and fill our days. What stands

high on our priority list? Is it career advancement, shopping, fitting in, or *tikkun hamiddot* and spending more time with our family? A meaningful life is a collection of meaningful moments. People who don't view life as a choice never change or grow. In the *tochacha* the Torah states, "You will bear sons and daughters but they will not be yours, because they will go into captivity." The Chazon Ish explains that this refers to our generation. Millions of our brethren who have grown up entirely ignorant of Judaism are the *tinokot shenishbu* referred to in the Torah. Why have we suffered these great losses? The parsha continues, "*Tachat asher lo avadata et Hashem Elokecha b'simcha*. Because you did not serve Hashem with joy." If we fail to show our children that living a Torah lifestyle is a wondrous, delightful experience, we will lose them. Indeed, Rav Moshe Feinstein noted that even those who sacrificed their livelihood to keep Shabbat in early 20th century America, lost their children to assimilation because they would so frequently sigh, "*Oy siz shver tzu zein a yid*. It's difficult to be a Jew." Each of us in

our own way can reach out and bring our brethren closer to Torah.

We find many *mitzvot* in the Torah that command us to bring our "firsts" to Hashem. This includes the first of the shearing, dough, children, and animals. Why did Hashem ask for these "firsts" rather than the best? We find the answer in Kohelet. "*Tov achrit davor mereishito*. A good end emanates from the beginning." The "first" is the root and foundation of all that follows. Just as a hairline crack on a building's foundation can endanger the entire structure, an imperfection in the root of holiness will manifest all that follows. That is why we immediately dedicate our first gleanings to Hashem. Similarly, Elul and the High Holy Days are an opportune time to grab the moment and repent, because whatever we become on the first day of the year will very critically affect our entire year.

Elul- Recognizing The Relationship

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

There is a spirit of love between Hashem and the Jewish people that permeates the months of Elul and Tishrei. Hashem is especially close to us during these days and accepts our *teshuva* readily. In turn, we increase our Torah learning, add extra *selichot* prayers, and are careful in our *mitzva* observance. The Taz notes that one who normally eats *pat palter* or *chalav stam* should refrain from doing so during the Ten Days of Repentance. Taking on temporary strictures seems like a charade. Can we fool Hashem? In addition, although this time period abounds with Hashem's love, there is an undercurrent of fear and awe. How should we view these holy days?

Rabbi Tatz writes that time is not passive, but rather the energy source for our actions. Each day of our lives demands a certain sensitivity and growth. Our challenge is to learn how to respond appropriately to each time period. In Elul and Tishrei, we feel

Hashem's closeness more acutely. Therefore, our accountability is greater. Our responsibility is to tap into that energy. We are not being two-faced by adopting extra stringencies, we are responding to the matrix of time.

The Imrei Chaim compares the High Holy Days to a woman expecting her first child. There's the apprehension of the upcoming birth and the joy of becoming a mother. Similarly, on Rosh Hashana, there's the trepidation of coming under the scrutiny of the King and the joy of basking in His presence. Our challenge is to tap into Hashem's love and closeness. If we cannot feel emotionally that Hashem is with us, we cannot go through the process of introspection and *teshuva*. The true depth of *teshuva* is recognizing Hashem's presence. Talking to Him on a constant basis and bringing Him into our daily life in Elul cultivates a relationship that grows into something bigger on

Rosh Hashana. Consequentially, when the chazzan intones "*Hamelech*," the connotation is far greater.

We need to ask ourselves, What is my purpose on this world? Am I satisfied with the bit of *Yiddishkeit* I have or do I want a deeper relationship with Hashem? Are my actions meeting up with my goals? What defines me? Elul is about working through these questions. How many of us drive through life not knowing why or where we are actually going. Hashem doesn't demand from us more than we can achieve. We do however need to actualize the potential latent within us. Elul is about recognizing that our core being wants to live correctly. The more we work on ourselves, the more we uncover our essence. And when we allow the intrinsic light within us to shine forth, we begin traversing the road towards true repentance.



Elul, Rosh Hashana, and Yom Kippur For Children

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

Very young children should not be taken to shul because if they are forced to sit quietly for long periods of time they may come to despise going to shul. Letting them run wild in shul is anti-chinuch. If feasible, take them for shofar blowing and some of the serious parts of the davening such as *U'nesane Tokef* to increase their *yirat shamayim*.

During *Aseret Yemei Teshuva*, encourage children to do more mitzvot. Give them extra coins to give to *tzedakah* and have them recite short chapters in tehilim

Introducing the highlights of the *Yomim Noraim* to older children from the age of ten to early adolescence can be a bit more complex. Take time to speak with them during Elul. Ask them what they would desire more, a fancy camera or to be married to someone they respect. They will probably answer the latter. Explain to them that the pleasure we derive from people stems from seeing their *ruchniyut*. This is something of

the yearning we have for closeness to Hashem. Get them to identify all the gifts and talents Hashem has given them. Tell them that Hashem gives us these things out of *chesed* and that he expects us to use it well. Let them see your Elul, how you are trying harder and working on yourself. Explain to them that Elul is the time to redefine ourselves, a period of great *chesed*, where we can once again resolve to make things work. Tell them stories of people who completely changed themselves. Ask them for *mechila* and encourage them when they express any signs of regret for past misdeeds. The real message of Elul should come through clearly—make your own transformational moments or ask Hashem to send them to you, decide what you want to be, and be it.

Rosh Hashana is a time when we renew our relationship with Hashem by recognizing Hashem's *malchut*. This should awaken a certain desire to do and be more. Children can

get very distracted by the externals of the day such as new clothing and the *simanim*. Stories are a good medium to explain “of *malchut shamayim*.” Tell your kids to aim for absolute acceptance of Hashem's kingship. They should understand that our only desire is to do Hashem's will. In a sense we are telling Him, “Wherever you take me, this is where I want to go.”

Older teens don't like being told what to do. Share some inspiring ideas or stories you have read. The more indirectly you talk, the more directly they'll hear it. The only condition though is, you have to “walk your talk”. Ask yourself honestly if you are at the level you want your children to be.

Think ahead and plan things out carefully. Ask Hashem to give you the right words, clarity of mind, *siyata deshmaya*, and credibility, to guide your children on the true and straight path

Rebbetzin's Perspective II: Class #10

Excerpted from Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller's Question and Answer series on Naaleh.com

Question:

In your shiur on Sarah (In The Merit Of Righteous Woman series), you mentioned that when we come up to the next world we will be asked our name and age. Our age will not be measured on the amount of time we actually lived. Can you clarify what this really means?

Answer:

At a minimal level, age will be calculated based on days that were actually filled with purposeful activity. For example, the man

who spent most of his life earning more money than he possibly could spend in his lifetime will have accrued years of wasted hours. There are many things we do that are purposeless. The half hour phone calls that border or even go over the edge of *lashon hara*, the “yenta stuff” that could take two hours in some circles, men's endless discussion of politics, are all a huge waste of precious time.

You have to ask yourself, “Am I really doing something meaningful right now?” It doesn't

have to be “*Tafkid*” with a capital “T”, it can be “*takfid*” with a small “t”, like doing the laundry so your kids have clean clothes the next day or preparing supper for your husband, or rejoicing with a bride at a wedding, or lending a listening ear to a friend in need.

Doing small acts of kindness, snatching a quiet moment to pray, listening to an inspiring Torah shiur, are the puzzle pieces that make up a meaningful life.