

## Rosh Hashanah All Year Round Part 1

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbitzin Leah Kohn

How do we hold on to the clarity, enthusiasm and commitment of the chagim and how can we grow from it all year round? The days from Elul to *Simchat Torah* are very intense. If we don't take the initiative to hold on to what we've attained, we can easily lose it. What are some steps we can take? The first factor is tuning in to the energy of the time period. When *Elul* comes, something moves inside of us. The High Holy Days bring us into a mode of thinking which in itself has the power to affect us. Rav Hirsh explains that what life is about is connection to Hashem, spiritual growth, fulfilling the purpose we were created for. Hashem gave us myriad ways to help us achieve these goals and one of them is tapping into the powerful holiday periods around the year which elevate us and enable us to connect to our spiritual core. Time doesn't wait for us. *Elul* and *Rosh Hashana* will arrive whether we are ready or not and this compels us to get into the mode of the yom tov. A major factor that motivates us is knowing that our year will depend on what we will invest now and we need Hashem's help every step of the way. Being so focused helps us get to our goal.

The second factor, *aimat hadin*, the fear of judgement that begins in *Elul*, forces us to prepare. The fact that so much is at stake

causes us to stop and introspect and gain clarity. There are the *chagim* and the in-between days - *Chodesh Elul*, the 10 days between *Rosh Hashana* and *Yom Kippur* and the four days between *Yom Kippur* and Sukkot. Although these in between days are weekdays, they have a special quality as their purpose is to help us prepare for *yom tov*. The idea of preparation is essential. In fact, we are told that the difference between regular people and *tzadikim* is not so much what they do, but the level of attachment that they have while they are doing the *mitzvot*. This is achieved by preparation. If we want to maintain the connection, we have to keep this in mind.

There are many special customs in *Elul*, such as blowing the *shofar* daily, reciting *L'David Hashem* and visiting the graves of *tzadikim*. The subsequent chagim are chock full of special *mitzvot* that affect who we are and inspire enthusiasm, connection and clarity. There's a lot of emphasis on *tefilah*, inspiring *nigunim* and special *piyyutim*. Just concentrating on the meaning of these special prayers elevate us, and helps us capture the essence of these holy days.

Other aspects that add to the intensity of this period of time are dedicating more time to learning *Torah*, studying *mussar* and *tikun*

*hamiddot* and the fact that its all of us doing it together. There's a special aura in the air when so many people are involved in the same *mitzvot* at the same time. We have to add the aspect of what Hashem grants us in these days, and that is that every holiday is connected to what happened in the past. Whatever energy was implanted at the time the event took place, is still there and we have to tap into that potential.

We know that during *Elul* Hashem makes himself available to us. He's the king in the field in contrast to all year round when He's in the palace and harder to reach. If we can maintain the clarity and enthusiasm we attained in *Elul* throughout the year we can come to the next year on a different level. Previously we noted that the key motif that runs through these days and causes us to awaken, is fear of judgement. It is much like shock therapy. All year round, although we know we need to connect to Hashem, we're busy. For a significant change to happen we need to be shaken up. The *yomim nora'im* are our wakeup call that compel us to work towards clarity, enthusiasm and commitment for the rest of the year. If we let it go, we've missed the goal.

## Forgiveness and Atonement -Which is Divine: Psalm 130

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Dr. Esther Shkop

Alexander Pope is attributed to the famous saying – "To err is human, to forgive is divine." What is forgiveness? In English, we use words like pardon or exoneration which means being proven innocent after being falsely accused. It's not about forgetting or condoning offenses. Typically, psychologists define it as a conscious and deliberate decision to release feelings of resentment or vengeance against those who have hurt you. They recommend forgiveness not for the benefit of the offender, but rather the victim, as a way to relieve a person of the anguish and the corrosive effects of anger and resentment.

The *Torah* commands us, "You shall not take vengeance or hold a grudge." There is no commandment to forgive. According to the *Torah*, there is no such thing as sin without punishment, because according to natural law they are inextricably linked. Every act has a consequence which may not be seen immediately. The consequence can be external or internal, but there is no such thing as otherwise. That which was done cannot be undone. Beyond that, justice and our sense of fairness demands accountability. It's not nearly as important for us that someone suffer as it is that someone redress the wrongdoing and since some wrongdoing can't be undone, we

demand punishment and usually measure for measure. More importantly, should we choose to forgive or forgo any punishment or retribution, the assumption is that the wrongdoing will now be swept away and treated with impunity and will reoccur again and again. We believe in the notion that unless somehow stopped, people who do wrong will continue to do so as long as they can get away with it.

There's a very famous *Yerushalmi* -They asked wisdom (rationality or natural law), "Is sin pursued by evil or is evil pursued by sin?" Evil as much as it means *rah*, is disintegration. It destroys the society and the fabric thereof. It

Continues on page 2

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Continued from page 1

destroys the victims of the sin and the sinner who loses his divine image. They asked prophecy the same question and it responded, "Hanefesh hachotat he tamut -The soul of sin, she will die." Sin destroys the soul, the divine image within a person. The opposite of heaven or *olam habah* is not *gehinom*, but death, where nothing is left of the soul. They asked Hashem, "A sinner, what is his punishment?" He responded, "Let him repent and I will atone for him."

In the *yud gimmel middot*, Hashem defines one aspect of himself as *nosei avon* (He bears sin). *Nosei avon* comes from the root word *lase-* to lift up. The assumption is that every time you do a wrongdoing, you get a proverbial rock on your back. The more sins, the heavier the load you carry. And since

every sin is inextricably linked with punishment, there's all that burden on your back which demands justice, retribution and accountability. And Hashem lifts that off your back. What happens to the sins and the punishment?

When Moshe pleaded for forgiveness after *cheit ha'egel*, Hashem forgave. However, he didn't wipe the sin completely off the slate. The generation of the desert were sentenced to die slowly over 40 years in the desert. *Selicha* doesn't mean that the sin is wiped out. Rather it's nothing more than a delay of the carrying out of an inevitable sentence. Similarly, the word *noso avon* also signifies *chayiv onesh*- he must be punished. It can also signify forgiveness, but in a way that means to tolerate at least for a while. It follows that

*nesiat avon* is a willingness to forgo and give up that sense of resentment and desire for vengeance. But it can also mean a willingness to accept the punishment, the inevitable suffering that comes as a result of sin. The great *chesed* that Hashem gave us was the opportunity for atonement. Remorse is not enough. Some things can't be paid back. But you can change. And if you do, then the burden that comes with sin can be taken off your back by none other than Hashem for only He can forgive.

According to the *Torah*, there is no forgiveness without action. Hashem gives us a chance to repent, to change our ways and to commit to a brighter future. It's up to us to seize the opportunity and invest the effort.

## Owning Our Actions

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller-Gottlieb

"They will not despise a thief if he steals to sate his appetite, for he is hungry. And if he is found, he will pay sevenfold; he must give all he owns." A thief is in danger of losing his identity. He can give himself over totally to the desire for theft because of his great hunger and thereby lose everything real and enduring including his portion in the World to Come.

"One who commits adultery with a woman is devoid of sense; one who would destroy his soul-he will do it." If you give succumb to your desires, you end up escaping from yourself and are left with no direction or emotional capacity. When you adapt that which is foreign, you lose your heart and the way you define specific aspects of the soul.

The soul has five levels, *yechida*, *chaya*, *neshama*, *ruach* and *nefesh*. Hashem's image flows through us from a more vivid state to a state where we experience it only via our

bodies which is called *nefesh*. The *neshama* is always pure, but when it rests in the walls of the body it can end up in a state of lack of self-knowledge where you become almost unaware of your soul. The animal self is not evil. It could be adapted and elevated so that it is controlled by the spiritual self. Picture young children baking cookies for *Shabbat*. Although, they want the cookies, if they are listening to *Shabbat* music in the background and have in mind that it is *l'kevod Shabbat*, it's a whole different experience.

There's also the possibility of the *neshama* becoming *tameh*- blocked. However, Hashem didn't create us for failure. The *Baal Halashem* says that nobody remains permanently blocked. In this world you could open yourself to a redefinition of self. You could find yourself standing on burning coals and that could awaken you to ask yourself-Why am I here? This happened to Menashe Hamelech. He was a terrible sinner. But when he went through suffering, he began to pray and repent.

Atonement can happen through suffering in this world or *gehinom* in the next world, where the soul is purified. But in the end, everyone will have what the *Baal Halashem* calls *Chemdat Yisrael*.

The Gra explains that when Mishlei speaks about the destruction of the soul it refers to *gehinom* which destroys the aspect of self that is *tameh*. It's a painful loss, because you've identified with it for so long. *Gehinom* has a finite span, described as 12 months, which parallels the 12 *mazalot*. *Mazal* refers to the way Hashem pours down what will be a person's ultimate fate, the background of his life, who he could've been. You're accountable for all of that, and there in *gehinom* it will be an intense and difficult process through which the soul will lose the *tumah* inside itself, the attachments to *isha nachriyah* and all that is foreign. Then the soul will be free to be who it could've been all along and will merit the state of *Chemdat Yisrael*.