

Rosh Hashanah All Year Round Part III

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbitzin Leah Kohn

The *Nesivos Shalom* brings a parable of a king who stood atop a very steep mountain. He promised great treasures to all who would climb the mountain and come to him. People started to climb, some fell and turned back, but some reached the top after a lot of strenuous effort.

At the bottom of the mountain sat a person in a wheelchair. There was no way for him to climb up but he wanted so much to be with the king that he cried out to him for help to get to the top. And the king heard his cries and brought him up. That is the power of tefilah. A profound prayer from the heart can elevate us beyond our capabilities. Hashem listens and makes things happen for us. A critical factor in succeeding in any undertaking is asking Hashem for help. *Chazal* say, without Hashem's assistance a person would never

be able to conquer the *yetzer hara*. If we pray for help as we strive for growth we will achieve great things. Prayer elevates us to the recognition that I can't do it myself. The fact that I know that Hashem is the only one that can help me, compels me to reach out to Him and helps me recognize that He is the source of everything.

It's always helpful to connect what we really want to a specific tefilah that we say every day. This creates consistency which is a critical factor in spiritual growth. Learning *Torah* affects us in a very profound way. If we set up a designated time to learn every day and it does not need to be lengthy, just a short piece that is food for thought, something to contemplate about during the day or a small story about a gadol, it can change us in a profound way.

An individual can't alter what was decreed on *Rosh Hashana* but if we come together and do *teshuva* as a *tzibur* we can change what was decided then. Rav Tzadok Hakohen says, many *mitzvot* including the *chagim* are connected to *Yetziat Mitzrayim* and we have an obligation to remember the Exodus every day. *Yetziat Mitzrayim* signifies the power to grow. In *Galut Mitzrayim* we sank to the 49th depths of impurity. We were at a very low spiritual point and in a very short period of time Hashem took us out and raised us to a great level to the point we were stood at *Har Sinai* and heard the word of Hashem. By remembering *Yetziat Mitzrayim* we can tap into that potential today. The spiritual essence is there. In *Elul*, Hashem is here with us in the field, we can reach out to Him. He wants us to succeed, and we can if we just make the effort to take the first step.

Tehillim 86: Begging for Forgiveness

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

"Incline Hashem your ear, answer me... guard my soul for devout (*chasid*) am I." The root word of *chasid* is *chesed* which is serving Hashem beyond what is required, out of love. Why would he need to beg for mercy if he is a *chasid*? *Rabbi Avraham Shalem* writes that in fact in this context *chasid* means ashamed. He brings an interesting source, quoting a verse in *Vaykira* which speaks about acts of incest. There the *Torah* says this is an act of *chesed*- a shameful thing because the word *chesed* like many other Hebrew words can be either a synonym or an antonym. Sometimes when we want to exaggerate, we will say something exactly the opposite. When one doesn't behave according to the law one can be either a criminal or a person that is so careful that he puts restrictions on himself far beyond the letter of the law. If that's the case, *chesed* in itself, means out of the norm. *David Hamelech* is wracked with guilt and when he writes this, he feels Hashem has turned a deaf ear to him because he's done something shameful.

"Gladden the soul of your servant for to you O' Hashem my soul I lift up. Depression is anger turned towards oneself in which one punishes oneself for having harmed oneself. Rav Hirsh says even amidst terrible tragedy, one can experience joy if one accepts what Hashem has decreed with dignity and trust. "There is no one like you among the powers Hashem..." All the forces of nature are unified by the Creator. They are no more than different fingers on one hand. "Unite my heart to fear your name." Rashi explains that this refers to the two inclinations that battle within us. We can be hypocritical sometimes and delude ourselves into thinking that what is wrong is not so bad or even a *mitzvah*.

We ask Hashem every day, yached livavenu-unite our heart. Let me serve you with my desires and with all that I do, in my physical as well as spiritual life. I want to be a person of integrity and I commit myself to honor Your name, the name that signifies Hashem's unity.

When we say *Shema*, we acknowledge this unity, that Hashem is the uniting force that controls the disparate forces of this world. I will honor your name by unifying myself, by making what I say, feel and do- one.

David Hamelech repeats here the 13 attributes of mercy. After *cheit haegel*, Moshe begged Hashem for forgiveness and he asked Hashem to teach him His ways. Hashem passed over and called out the 13 attributes, among them, "He is slow to anger and increases kindness and truth." How do we reconcile forgiveness with truth? Hashem can unify these disparate concepts. *David Hamelech* begs Hashem- "Turn to me and show me favor..." Pardon me not because I deserve it ...and save the son of your handmaiden." David invokes the name of his mother much as someone who is ill and needs prayers because when we daven for healing, we arouse Hashem's mercy in that way. "...For you Hashem will have helped me and consoled me."



Elul: Entering and Exiting

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles
Summary by Channie Koplowitz-Stein

As we approach the Days of Awe, we struggle with the paradox our Sages struggled throughout the ages: Every year we regret our past sins and resolve to do better. Yet, here we are again, not having met our past aspirations. How can we not feel despair and what can we do to be more successful in the coming year?

During the month of *Elul*, we listen to the sound of the shofar daily. Yet, why on *Erev Rosh Hashanah*, do we not blow the shofar? King David asks in *Tehilim 27*, "...That I dwell in the house of Hashem all the days of my life; to behold the sweetness of Hashem and to visit in His Sanctuary." Although he says he is asking one thing, he seems to be making two requests. In addition, if I am already sitting in Hashem's house why do I also ask to visit His Sanctuary?

To understand our goal in *Elul*, it's important to understand its historical perspective. Moshe ascended *Har Sinai* three times. First, on *Shavuot* brought down the first *luchot*, but smashed them when *Bnei Yisroel* sinned with the golden calf. He ascended for a second forty -day period, descending on *Rosh Chodesh Elul*, and bringing down the second *luchot*. But the relationship between Hashem and *Bnei Yisroel* had not yet been fully repaired. Moshe ascended a third time, on *Rosh Chodesh Elul* and descended on *Yom Kippur* with Hashem's promise of "I have forgiven as you/Moshe have said." It is within this context that we interpret *ELUL* as an acronym for (E)Ani Ledodi (U)Vedodi Li/I am to my Beloved (Hashem) and my Beloved is to me. *Elul* is also an acronym for-"Ve-haElokhim Ena Leyodo (U)Vesamti Lach.../And Hashem 'forced his hand' and I [Hashem] have placed for him [a place of

refuge]." On *Rosh Hashanah*, we don't recite *Hallel* for we are filled with awe at our imminent encounter with *Hashem*. But He has prepared this safe place in time so that we can less fearfully approach Him on *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*, in spite of our sins.

What is the connection between *Elul* and the atonement on *Yom Kippur*? While Hashem gifted us with the first *luchot*, formed by His hand, these could not survive in a flawed, human society. The second set of *luchot* chiseled by Moshe's human hand, represented an "arousal from below," the stirring of humanity toward the relationship with Heaven. Humanity has to prepare for itself the "Tablets" to receive the writing of *Hashem*. That connection would be permanent, culminating in the forgiveness on *Yom Kippur* and the repair of the relationship. Our task during *Elul* is to prepare our personal *luchot* so that Hashem's presence can come down into this world, and within us.

When we first accepted the *Torah*, we were on the level of total perfection of Adam before the sin, fully ready to accept Hashem's presence. While we no longer have the *luchot*, they are symbolically contained in our hearts, writes Rabbi Wolbe. But those original tablets were broken, and we must prepare to imprint them again on our hearts. While Moshe was preparing the physical stones for Hashem's writing, *Bnei Yisroel* were also doing *teshuvah* to prepare to receive Hashem's word anew. Hearing the sound of the shofar helps us prepare down below to receive Hashem's Sovereignty from Above.

Our *teshuvah* did not end on *Rosh Hashanah*, when Hashem again revealed Himself to us, but on *Yom Kippur*, when we received the second *luchot*. Both revelation and receiving

the *Torah* were one combined experience on *Shavuot*, but the experience of the second *luchot* was divided into two stages, Revelation of God's Sovereignty on *Rosh Hashanah* followed by a recommitment to *Torah* on *Yom Kippur*. Rabbi G. Rabinowitz explains that *David Hamelech* was not asking for two separate things in *Tehilim 27* but making one request with a necessary corollary. As king, he was involved with many issues of state and could not study *Torah*, day and night. So, he requested that no matter where he was, he would always feel Hashem's Presence beside him and keep building the relationship.

Begin with resolving to not speak *loshon horo* for only five minutes. This can be the hole Hashem enlarges to a wide-open gate to help you overcome this negative tendency further. We do not return to the same point of the *teshuvah* process each year, writes the *Tallelei Chaim*. The process is a spiral from year to year. We may return to the same shortcoming, but we can see some improvement from year to year. We don't sound the shofar right before *Rosh Hashanah* because this month has been dedicated to following through from last year's *Rosh Hashanah*. Hence, the shofar of *Elul* is a reminder of the commitments we made last *Rosh Hashanah* when we heard the shofar, and we break for a day, before we encounter the shofar of this year's *Rosh Hashanah*.

Elul gives us the opportunity to save face, to exit the year on a regained high. We can now focus on the second half of our initial verse, not only to dwell in Hashem's house, but also to visit. It is difficult to maintain a constant momentum, but at least let me visit to reignite the relationship with Hashem once more.