



Beit Hamidrash Hameir Laarets | Issue 68

Re'eh | Elul – The Key To The New Year



MESILLOT

Pathways to the Soul

illuminating teachings and insights on the weekly parasha
by **Rabbi Yoram Michael Abargel zt"l**

From the weekly lectures of his son,
Rabbi Israel Abargel shlita

...*~* PATHWAYS TO THE SOUL *~*...

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Beit Hamidrash Hameir Laarets

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Parashat Re'eh

Cats!

There was once a wise¹ rabbi who went out into the field outside the city to harvest wheat. One of the kingdom's ministers who passed by on his horse saw the rabbi and called him over, "I've been called for judgment and must appear before the king tomorrow. I want you to write me an amulet for success."

The rabbi understood that if the minister asked him for an amulet, it was a sign that he had something to fear and decided to tell him that he didn't know how to make amulets. The minister drew his sword and declared that if he didn't receive the amulet immediately, he would kill him, and also, if it didn't work, he wouldn't rest until he took revenge.

The rabbi, who was out of options, took out a piece of paper

from his pocket, scribbled a few letters on it, and said to the minister, "If you hang this amulet around your neck during the interrogation, nothing bad will happen to you. However, this is only on condition that you don't think about cats while wearing it."

"Not think about what?!" yelled the minister.

"Cats!" replied the rabbi. "Do not think about cats during the interrogation, for if you do, the power of the amulet will be terminated."

"I will obviously not think about cats!" said the minister mockingly. "What a strange condition! Who thinks about cats?!"

The next day, the minister took the amulet, hung it around his neck, and proceeded

Parashat Re'eh - The Secret of the Attic

confidently towards the king's palace, reminding himself that nothing bad would happen, so long that he doesn't think about... wait, no, he mustn't think of... It's forbidden to think of... Why is it forbidden to think about... about cats... Cats, how weird... Wait... No, no ! It's forbidden to think of them.

Thoughts of cats filled his head the entire duration of the

interrogation... Of course, the amulet didn't work, and he was severely punished and dismissed from his position...²

The minister received a gift and was confident in its power but didn't succeed in holding on to it and ultimately lost the gift...

Let's try to learn a lesson from him and not lose out on our gifts...



The Secret of the Attic

News of the imminent arrival³ of the renowned tzaddik Rebbe Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk crept into the attic of the home of Yehuda Leib Segal, the father-in-law of two outstanding *avrechim*, Shneur Zalman and Israel Gutman, where they temporarily lived.

When the day came, many of the townspeople gathered eagerly awaiting the important Rebbe. After a while, Rebbe Menachem Mendel appeared, and the audience greeted him with an enthusiastic "*Shalom Aleichem!*" At the end

of the official reception, the Rebbe headed towards the central Beit Midrash of the city. Rapidly, the Beit Midrash filled its capacity. Many were even left outside, peering through the open doors and windows.

The appearance of Rebbe Menachem Mendel made a strong impression on all those present. He gave over a captivating Torah lecture suitable for both great Torah scholars and common people alike. After the lecture, the congregation lined up

—  *Wellspring of Wisdom*  —

2. Sippurei Mofet – Baal HaTanya (p. 33).

3. Zohar Chadash – Rut; See Matok M'Dvash (Vol. 3, p. 446).

to receive a warm handshake and blessing from the Rebbe.

Shneur Zalman and Israel Gutman remained standing in the corner, pondering with admiration at the words of Torah they had just heard. It was actually Rebbe Menachem Mendel who noticed them and held out his hand to call them over.

He shook their hands warmly and said, "I see upon you two greatness in Torah!"

Shneur Zalman and Israel Gutman were embarrassed by the esteem that they received from the Rebbe's remarks... Rebbe Menachem Mendel continued to stare at them with a penetrating look and said, "I can teach you a very special way of serving of Hashem, that if you learn to walk in it, you will achieve very lofty heights."

"We're willing to do whatever the Rebbe commands of us," they replied together.

"If so," the Rebbe declared, "take upon yourselves a week's fast, starting *Motzei Shabbat* until the start of the following

Shabbat. Only in the evenings shall you drink water as needed. Other than that, increase your time in Torah study and do not reveal your secret to anyone."

The two bowed their heads in agreement, and the Rebbe continued to bless the people warmly.

Motzei Shabbat arrived, and the two *avrechim* began their fasts. The entire week, they reduced their sleep, increased their Torah study, and hid whatever food was brought to them so as not to reveal their secret to anyone in the house.

On Friday afternoon, the end of a grueling week of fasting and intense Torah study, the two finally left the attic. With weakened bodies, they went together to the mikvah in honor of Shabbat, which would soon end their fast.

When they returned to their home, their father-in-law immediately noticed their poor physical conditions and said to them, "Although the Torah drains one's strength, it seems that you two have toiled in your studies more than usual in the

Parashat Re'eh - The Secret of the Attic

past week. Go to the kitchen and taste the dishes prepared for Shabbat and strengthen yourselves for the continuation of *avodat Hashem!*"

Shneur Zalman didn't reply. Rather he hurried up to the attic to complete the last hour of the fast. Israel, on the other hand, accepted his father-in-law's invitation. He felt he was no longer able to continue fasting... "One hour won't make a difference."

Shabbat entered, and Shneur Zalman finally broke his fast. The next morning, when the two sat opposite each other to continue their studies, Israel immediately felt that things were no longer the same as yesterday. While Shneur Zalman began to clarify the issues of the Gemara sharply and fluently, Israel looked at the lines of the Gemara in front of him and couldn't seem to understand. All his efforts to understand the words of his study partner were in vain. The same thing happened in the following days...

Three miserable days passed over the two close friends. Time and time again, they tried to

continue as in the past, but their common language had disappeared.

At the end of the third day, Israel realized that he was no longer at par with his friend Shneur Zalman, and with deep sorrow, the two were forced to separate.

After a short while, Rebbe Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk called for Shneur Zalman and said to him, "Go to the holy Maggid of Mezritch, for there you will find yourself."

Shneur Zalman did as Rebbe Menachem Mendel said and went to Mezritch. There he *did* find himself and began to flourish to new heights.

Later on, when Rebbe Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the Baal HaTanya, became the teacher and Rebbe of tens of thousands of followers, Rabbi Israel Gutman would also, like all the others, stand before his old friend and listen to his holy words of Torah and Chassidut.

Rabbi Israel Gutman unfolded this chain of events himself while lying on his deathbed. When he told this story, he cried uncontrollably. "Because of one

Parashat Re'eh - An Ongoing War

hour of weakness, I lost my chance to reach the same attainment of Torah, which my friend and

teacher, Rebbe Shneur Zalman, merited!" With that statement, he closed his eyes and passed away...

An Ongoing War

Shlomo HaMelech, in his book Kohelet, describes a certain war and its results as follows...⁴

"A small city, with few residents. A mighty king came upon it and surrounded it and

~ Wellspring of Wisdom ~

4. Rabbi Yechezkel Abramsky zt"l once told me that when he was appointed Head of the Rabbinical Court in London, he began working with *kiruv* (bringing people closer to their Jewish roots). He started teaching a class in Gemara to Jewish students, which truly captured the hearts of the listeners and brought them closer to Torah and mitzvot...

of them knew that man would have difficulty completing it, and therefore in advance, He permitted it. If so, it's proven that in all the other commandments, Hashem knew that man is capable of standing before his *yetzer hara*."

That was until they reached the issue of *Eshet Yefat To'ar* (a beautiful woman captive).

In this matter, someone once asked me, "Why do you guys not adapt the Torah to the time?"

The Gemara explains that what the Torah meant when it allowed taking a woman captive as a wife was only in the case of someone who couldn't stand against their *yetzer hara*.

Good question.

What an uproar this evoked! If the Torah allows prohibitions because of provocations from the *yetzer hara*, there won't be an end to it... For one, it's unkosher food. For another, Shabbat...

I said to him, "Let's agree on one thing. As a child grows and their shoes don't fit anymore, there are two options. Either expand the shoe, in my days, they would cut an opening in the front for the big toe, or buy new shoes.

Rabbi Abramsky answered cleverly, "This is a question I was prepared to hear from common people, not from highly intellectual academics... Understand, if Hashem gave us 613 mitzvot and in one

Honestly, there are two more options, either go barefoot or just endure the pain.

Why not think of a fifth option... to cut off your toes?

The choice is simple, and that's because the foot is first and foremost, and the shoe only comes to serve it.

Do we agree?

Parashat Re'eh - An Ongoing War

built great fortresses. A poor yet wise man was found in the city, and he saved the city with his wisdom, yet no one remembered the poor man.” (Kohelet 9:14-15).

This was the first war that ever took place in the world...

The creation of our reality and existence took place in stages. First, the spiritual reality was created, and then, in the end, the physical reality which we know today was created.

Hashem's first creation was the Torah, which He later used to create our world.

Shlomo HaMelech describes the Torah with the words, “A small city, with few residents,”

because very few people learn it, so it looks small.

The evil inclination was very bothered by the few who learned Torah, so he decided to wage war against them, “A mighty king came upon it.”

Shlomo HaMelech continues to describe the war, “and surrounded it and built great fortresses.” The evil inclination set up its own “learners,” heretics who disparage the Torah, thus preventing good Jews from drawing close to it.

Hashem created two souls to fight against those heretics, David HaMelech and his son Shlomo HaMelech. “A poor yet

— *~* **Wellspring of Wisdom** *~* —

Good...

Now understand, we disagree about which is the shoe and which is the foot.

We know that the Torah preceded the world, and Hashem looked in the Torah and created the world according to it, and one of the foundations in Judaism is that the Torah won't be replaced. Therefore, there's no thought ever to change, heaven forbid, the Torah. *We* must adapt to it. And we *are* adapted to it because we were created according to it.

For you, man is foremost, and the Torah is like a shoe. If it puts pressure, you replace it...”

“By no means!” the man protested. “Just a few leniencies here and there...”

I said to him, “It's possible that there can be, but I'm not the giver of the Torah, and neither are you. If you give me your name and your mother's name, I'll tell Hashem that you want to offer Him some advice...”

wise man was found in the city...” “Poor” describes David HaMelech, who said, “For I am poor and needy” (Tehillim 109:22), and “wise” describes Shlomo HaMelech, “For he was wiser than all men” (Melachim I 5:11). And, through them, “he saved the city with his wisdom.”

When the Torah was given, it was like a large boiling pot on the fire. However, although what was cooking inside the pot smelled very appetizing, it was impossible to eat from it, for the pot had no handles to take it off the fire. Therefore, anyone who tried to touch it was burned...

The Torah was inconceivable to the mind, and even though they studied it, they didn't know how to translate it into simple ideas, so when the heretics asked questions, they didn't know how to deal with them...

Then, David HaMelech's soul came down to the world and brought the ideas of the Torah down into everyday concepts understandable to all.

David HaMelech passed away, leaving behind a purer, holier world. His son, Shlomo HaMelech, continued his father's work and succeeded with his great wisdom in translating the spiritual words of the Torah into words that even the simplest minds would understand.⁵

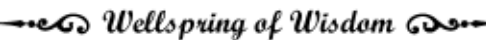
From that moment on, the heretics lost the upper hand, and the wisdom of the Torah spread, uniting the hearts of Am Israel with it...

Shlomo HaMelech concludes, “yet no one remembered the poor man.” In order to understand his words, let's take a look at what the Zohar writes in parashat Bereshit...

Adam HaRishon

The Zohar says⁶ that after Adam HaRishon was created,

Hashem gave him a book detailing the souls of every generation.



5. Zohar - Bereshit 55a

6. The verse in Hebrew is... "וְאָדָם לֹא זָכַר אֶת הָאִישׁ הַמְסֻבֵּן הַהוּא"

When he reached the generation of David HaMelech, he saw that it was decreed on the soul of David HaMelech to descend into this world and immediately die after birth! Adam HaRishon turned to Hashem and said, “Master of the world! You have given me 1,000 years to live. I would like to give David HaMelech 70 years of my life!”

“**Yet** no person remembered the poor man” (Kohelet 9:15).⁷ “Person” represents Adam HaRishon (see footnote 7). While giving from his years to David HaMelech, Adam HaRishon didn’t know how much good he was doing for the world. If he had known, he would have given him more years, allowing David Hamelech to do even more good for the world, eventually completing our *Tikkun* (correction of the world) and saving the Beit HaMikdash from being destroyed...

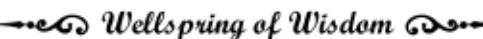
Every year, as Jews, we’re privileged to advance spiritually, and every step that we take forward brings great benefit to

the entire world, whether we know it or not.

If David HaMelech had lived only 100 years, he would have achieved correcting the entire world. Nevertheless, he lived only 70 years and therefore wasn’t able to bring about the complete *Tikkun*. Instead, the way was paved for his son Shlomo...

Shlomo HaMelech succeeded in explaining the secrets of the Torah in material words. Our Sages defined only one book as *Kodesh HaKodeshim* (The Holy of Holies), Shlomo HaMelech’s book, Shir HaShirim. In it, he describes the burning love of Am Israel to Hashem and the even greater love that Hashem has for Am Israel. This can be summed up by one verse, “I am for my Beloved, and my Beloved is for me” (Shir HaShirim 6:3).

This verse, which we’ll explain, shows the magnitude of the love between Hashem and Am Israel, which of all the months shines the brightest in the month of *Elul*...



7. **Adam** (אָדָם) means person and also alludes to Adam HaRishon, which is his name.

The Gift of Elul

We are at the threshold of the wonderful month of mercy and forgiveness - the month of Elul. A month in which Hashem draws close and opens before us the gates of *teshuva*.

Rebbe Shneur Zalman of Liadi zt"l illustrated this as follows...⁸

There was once a large kingdom headed by a wise and mighty king. Naturally, it wasn't easy to meet or talk to the king.

One day, the king left his palace for a long journey. On his return, he decided to travel through all the cities of his kingdom. The people, who until now had only heard about their beloved king, went out to try to meet him, and indeed most of them succeeded. The king listened to each person who approached him and greeted everyone with a warm and loving welcome...

So too, in the month of Elul, Hashem is like the king who travels through the cities of His kingdom, and we can all easily

approach Him. These days are a great *Et Ratzon* (time of heavenly mercy) to merit real *teshuva* and draw near to Hashem.

Indeed, this *Et Ratzon* doesn't last only for the month of Elul but also during the Ten Days of Repentance, a total of 40 days of *Et Ratzon*. Throughout these days, every Jew, if they desire, is helped with doing *teshuva* and drawing nearer to Hashem!

There are those who think to themselves, "I've sinned so much, even if I want to do *teshuva*, who's even looking at me, who cares about me?!" However, they're very wrong... Hashem waits for them and cries out, "My beloved child, in the month of Elul, I have mercy on every Jew and help them come close to me! Just do *teshuva*, and all your sins will be completely erased and forgotten!"

Hashem created in His world a creation called the *yetzer hara*. Its job is simple... to take

Parashat Re'eh - The Gift of Elul

good and righteous Jews and make them sin and distance themselves from Hashem until they despair of themselves and

come to terms with their failure...⁹ When this happens, the *yetzer hara* celebrates, “Yes! Another Jew has been taken captive!”¹⁰

—*~* **Wellspring of Wisdom** *~*—

9. Knowing this, we shouldn't let any moment of “failure” bring us down completely. Everyone has moments of weakness... Our job is to bounce back from those moments of weakness even stronger and not allow the *yetzer hara* to push us down again. The *yetzer hara*'s greatest weapon is our sadness. However, with this knowledge, there's no reason to be sad or become depressed after any incident. Instead, we must immediately remind ourselves that the *yetzer hara* is trying to bring us down and that if we stand up and fight back, it won't have any control over us!

10. Once a man passed by the king's palace and noticed that the entire palace was illuminated and decorated in all sorts of lights and colors, something which was not normally seen there.

He asked the people standing outside, “What are all of the decorations for?” They answered, “Today is the king's birthday, and in honor of his birthday, the king opened the palace and gave every citizen the opportunity to come in and greet him.”

Excitedly, he hurried to enter...

When he entered, he noticed the king sitting on his throne and all his ministers and servants standing around him.

Suddenly, one of his servants walked up before the king and bowed in his honor. Everyone stared at the servant.

Then, the servant began to walk slowly, took a large golden urn from the palace, and walked with it towards the palace entrance. Everyone looked at him with enthusiasm, looking forward to see what would happen to him.

The man that entered the palace stood and wondered, “Why are they all excited? What are they expecting?”

He decided to follow the servant... The servant entered the palace courtyard and slowly filled the jug with water from a well. Then, slowly, he returned to the palace, all while the man followed, staring at his every action.

The servant entered the palace, walked toward the king, bowed before him, and carefully presented the jug of water to the king. Cheers and hurrahs filled the palace...

The king smiled, took out a sparkling diamond ring, and placed it, himself, on the minister's finger!

The man rubbed his eyes, “What's going on here? Surely, the king went crazy! For such a simple act, he receives such attention and a diamond ring?! Well, let it be. But

Parashat Re'eh - The Gift of Elul

I'm not going to be a fool ! I'll do the same and receive a diamond ring as well...

The man walked up before the king, bowed in his honor, took a golden urn from the palace, went out into the courtyard, drew water from the well, then reentered the palace, bowed, and presented the jug of water before the king, just as a minister did...

Roars of laughter shook the palace... But the man wasn't deterred and continued to stand innocently before the king in anticipation of receiving his gift...

The only one who didn't laugh or smile was the king. He turned to the man and said to him, "Sit here next to me." He then called one of his servants and ordered them to serve the man a glass of wine. After finishing the glass, the servant poured him another one. He finished that glass too. The servant then poured him another glass, and he finished that one as well.

After the third glass, the man's head began to spin, and his body swayed from side to side... The king then said to him, "Now go and get me water from the well..."

The man got up, grabbed the urn, and began to walk towards the entrance. He didn't get very far though... He stumbled with the urn, and the laughter of those present roared once more...

The servants ran up to him, washed his face, and awakened him. When his drunkenness faded, and he had returned to himself, the king called him over and explained to him, "Understand, the minister who brought me a jug full of water and received an expensive diamond ring was

much drunker than you. He drank a lot more than three glasses of wine... But despite his great intoxication, he managed to fill the jug with water and bring it to me, and it wasn't a simple task. That's why he did everything slowly and carefully, and after overcoming his drunkenness and doing my will, I gave him a diamond ring. But, for what you did, drawing water effortlessly and without any battle has no value and isn't worth any attention! Certainly, it's not worth receiving a ring from the king!"

Let's apply this to our lives...

In the story, we called him a servant, but in reality, it's called a *Ba'alei Teshuva*.

Ba'alei Teshuva, in the past, were engrossed in their desires and were "drunk" and confused. The *yetzer hara* controlled them...

In spite of all this, they overcame their "drunkenness" and left everything and came to fulfill the will of the King, and fought hard battles for His cause.

Even now, they still fight daily battles. At every moment, the *yetzer hara* fights with them harder, knowing that they've tasted sin and that there's a possibility that they'll be enticed to return to their previous ways, G-d forbid.

For this reason, the virtue of a *Ba'alei Teshuva* is very great, to the extent that it's said, "In the place where *Ba'alei Teshuva* stand, even complete tzaddikim cannot stand," because they fight battles that tzaddikim didn't. They overcome and coerce the *yetzer hara* for the sake of the King, and this is an immense virtue.

Parashat Re'eh - The End... Or Just the Beginning

When the month of Elul arrives, Hashem throws all of us a lifeline! "I'm here by your side, just want, just ask, and I'll rescue you from captivity!"

Every Jew who strengthens themselves in the month of

Elul and yearns to draw closer to Hashem, Hashem helps and guides them step by step until they merit standing side by side and hand in hand with Hashem. And Hashem never let's go...

The End... Or Just the Beginning...

Am Israel left Egypt, and fifty days later, they heard the Ten Commandments. The day after, the sixth of Sivan, Moshe went up Mount Sinai for forty days to receive the tablets. Before ascending the mountain, Moshe Rabbeinu explicitly informed Am Israel that he would return in forty days. Or, more precisely, at midnight on the fortieth day.

Am Israel counted forty days and waited for Moshe Rabbeinu to return... Unfortunately, they made a mistake in their counting...

Moshe Rabbeinu's intention was for Am Israel to count

forty days, not including the day he ascended Mount Sinai. However, Am Israel also counted the day of his ascent... When they saw that midnight of the fortieth day had come and Moshe had not yet come down from the mountain, they were sure that he had died...

Therefore, they decided to make a golden calf to serve them as a god who would go before them in place of Moshe Rabbeinu.

The calf was finished, and Am Israel began to gather around it and rejoice.

...*~* **Wellspring of Wisdom** *~*...

Every *Ba'al Teshuva* should understand just how great of a step they've taken and how much delight Hashem takes in them. Likewise, every *Ba'al Teshuva* should rejoice in what they have earned,

both in this world and in the next. From here on out, they should gather strength and continue to fight until their last day, for it's a never-ending war, but it's for sure one that's worth it...

Parashat Re'eh - The Giving of the Second Tablets

Hashem turned to Moshe Rabbeinu and ordered him to descend immediately!

“Know this,” Hashem continued and said to Moshe, “For me, the story is over. They’re no longer my nation. I want nothing to do with them.”

Moshe Rabbeinu heard this, and his body began to tremble... Without delay, he began to pray before Hashem...

When Moshe saw that his prayers weren’t working, he said to Hashem, “If you cancel the

decree, everything will continue as usual. But if you decide not to forgive them, erase my name from your Torah, from this world, and the next!”

Then, Moshe Rabbeinu continued to pray...

From the 18th of Tammuz to the 29th of Av, forty consecutive days, Moshe continued to pray and defend Am Israel!

Then, on the last day of the forty days, on the 29th of Av, Hashem decided to forgive Am Israel...

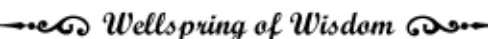
The Giving of the Second Tablets

The next day, on the first of Elul, Moshe Rabbeinu again ascended the mountain to receive the second tablets.

On the day that Moshe Rabbeinu ascended to heaven, all of Am Israel announced his departure and began to count forty days...¹¹ Hopefully, this time without any mistakes!

Forty days later, on the tenth of Tishrei, Moshe Rabbeinu returned, holding the second tablets.

Generations passed, and Rabbi Itzchak Ibn Gi’at (who lived about a thousand years ago) wrote in his book, “I heard that in some cities in Iran it;s customary to start saying *Slichot* on the first of Elul, and the reason being that



11. Pirkei D’Rabbi Eliezer (Ch. 46).

Parashat Re'eh - The Arizal's Arrival

since on these days Moshe Rabbeinu went up Mount Sinai, it's fitting to ask for mercy... Thus, so have I began to act."¹²

And so did Rabbi Yosef Karo rule in his *Shulchan Aruch*,¹³ "Our custom is to wake up before sunrise and say *Slichot* from the first of Elul until Yom Kippur."

The Arizal's Arrival

In the year 5330, since the creation of the world,¹⁴ the holy Rabbi Itzchak Luria Ashkenazi, the Arizal, first appeared in the city of Tzfat.

The Arizal was then given permission from heaven to reveal profound hidden secrets of the Torah, which until those very days, had not been revealed by anyone.

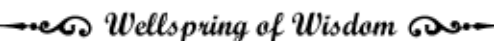
One of the secrets he revealed was the loftiness of the month of Elul. On Rosh Chodesh Elul (the first of Elul), the Arizal turned to his holy disciple Rabbi Chaim Vital and said to him, "Rabbi Chaim! On the first of Elul, the thirteen sources of mercy open

and illuminate down into our world!

Receive a fast upon yourself tomorrow and the day after (two consecutive days), on the second and third of Elul, and thanks to this, you will merit holy attainments."¹⁵

Although until now, it was understood that the days of Elul are days of mercy because Moshe Rabbeinu ascended to heaven. However, from this, it's understood that the days of Elul are holy in themselves, for the world was created by the light that illuminated in this month.

The reason for this is that in the month of Elul, Hashem decided to



12. Me'ah She'arim (Halachot Teshuva).

13. Shulchan Aruch - Orach Chaim 581:1.

14. The year 1570 according to the Gregorian calendar.

15. Shaar Ruach HaKodesh (Yichud 16).

Parashat Re'eh - Elul - The Month of Teshuva

create the world, and on the 25th of Elul, the verse, “In the beginning

G-d created the heavens and the earth” (Bereshit 1:1) was said.

Elul - The Month of Teshuva

Moshe Rabbeinu turns to Am Israel and says to them, “These are my last days in this world, and I want to reveal to you a great secret...

You already know that one of the countless gifts that Hashem gave us is the gift of teshuva (Repentance)!

Know that in the month of Elul, Hashem immediately receives all of our teshuva with mercy, and this is the reason for the sanctity of the month of Elul.”

This is implied in the verse, ”אָנִי לְדוֹדִי וְדוֹדִי לִּי”,¹⁶ which is an acronym for אלול - Elul. The meaning of this is that although in

the month of Elul Hashem comes close to every person and opens before them the gates of teshuva and helps them return to him, He only does so in accordance with what the person, in turn, tries to improve their actions and come close to Hashem. To the same extent that “I am for my beloved,” and so is “my beloved for me.”

Hence, every one of us is obliged to take advantage of the sanctity of these days and wake up and draw near to Hashem. As the Midrash said,¹⁷ “I am asleep, but my heart is awake” – “I am asleep,” all year long, “but my heart is awake,” in the month of Elul...

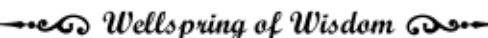
The Lesson From The Horse

The month of Elul.

Dozens of Jews filled Berel’s bar. Night had already fallen on the city, but inside the bar, the day had just begun. Everyone

was there. Horse dealers, cattle herders, butchers, and basically, who wasn’t there?!

The annual fair was in full swing, and people gathered



16. “I am for my beloved and my beloved is for me” (Shir HaShirim 6:3).

17. Shir HaShirim Rabbah 5:3.

from all ends of the country to buy and sell merchandise. Many of the merchants made enough profit during the few days of the fair for the entire year. Throughout the day, everyone was busy at the fair, whether buying, selling, or just interacting, but in the evening, everyone found themselves at Berel's bar.

Laughter filled the air. One by one, bottles were poured, and just as quickly, they were emptied. The room was shrouded in alcohol vapor mixed with the thick smoke of pipes. None of them thought that these days were also the days of Elul, a month of repentance and mercy.

Unexpectedly, Rebbe Israel Baal Shem Tov entered the bar. He saw the stumbling Jews, their heads sunk in bottles of vodka, trying to forget the burden of their livelihoods. Immediately the Baal Shem Tov took pity on them and entered into conversation with them on the matter in which they were engaged...

"I have a question. Can you explain to me what the difference is between a good and fast horse and a bad and lazy horse?"

Pinchas, the wagon driver, looked at the Baal Shem Tov dumbfoundedly.

"What, you don't know?!" he asked in amazement as his friends all laughed. "The difference is immense! You can get a hundred or more rubles on the market for a good horse trained in riding and galloping, while a thin, village horse worthy of a poor peasant's carriage won't receive even ten rubles on the market."

One by one, the horse "experts" added mocking remarks about the dimwittedness of the passerby that interfered with their conversation.

"I have another question," continued the Baal Shem Tov. "What's the use of the expensive horse running at such great speeds? If the horse goes astray from the path, won't it stray to a greater extent than the cheap horse will?"

The fair's "experts" in horse affairs fell silent..."

"Hear me out, my fellow Jews. While it's true that it's not good if the galloping horse strays in the wrong direction, the

Parashat Re'eh - You Are Children of Hashem

advantage is still on its side. Even after it strays, when the good and trained horse returns to the right path, it returns and corrects the mistake very quickly.”

“**True!**” exclaimed everyone together.

“**Now**, you’ll understand the parable for yourselves!” The Baal Shem Tov raised his voice with exhibited love, “Dear and kind Jews. You are all children of Avraham, Itzchak, and Yaakov. Your lineage is distinguished, and your merit is great. Don’t despair.

Even if you strayed from the straight path, let your hearts not be faint. Even if you’ve already strayed and neglected the Torah it’s mitzvot, sparks of holiness are buried deep within you. If you just turn back to the straight road and better your ways, you can hastily achieve everything! “Turn back, rebellious children” (Yermiyah 3:14). Even when you are rebellious, you are still the children of Hashem. Return, Jews. Return in repentance, for the path to teshuva opens wide in the month of Elul!”¹⁸

You Are Children of Hashem

“**You** are children of Hashem, your G-d” (Devarim 14:1).

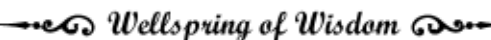
This wonderful verse expresses the greatness of Am Israel and the special connection they have with Hashem over the rest of the nations of the world. As *chazal* have said,¹⁹ “Beloved are Israel, for they are called children of Hashem. It’s a sign of even greater love that it’s been made

known to them that they’re called children of Hashem, as it’s stated, “You are children of Hashem your G-d” (Devarim 14:1).”

Let’s explain this with an analogy...

A father of ten children also has a couple of pets at home.

Although these pets are very precious to him, he may even have



18. Sippur Shel Chag – Rosh Hashanah (p. 41).

19. Pirkei Avot (3:14).

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some sort of love towards them, yet nothing in the world can compare to the love he loves his children with.

Even saying that this father loves his children more than he loves his pets is a mistake. A father's love for his children isn't only greater than his love for his pets, but an entirely different kind of love, and there's no way to even compare between them. Children are the entire life of a father. If needed, he's even willing to give his life for them, which is definitely not the case for pets.

Likewise, is the difference between Hashem's love for Am Israel and his love for the other nations, who are also his creations. There's only one unique and special nation, in which Hashem chose to be His nation, and called them His beloved children... and his love for them is above all logic, like the love of a father to his beloved son.

Our Purpose In This World

In the Tanya, it's written that the purpose of the creation of all the worlds is for our world.

For *this*, we're obligated to thank Hashem every day.

When someone becomes sad or depressed that they lack a better income or anything else in this world, that's a sign that they forgot for a moment that they're a Jew and that they're a child of Hashem.

If you were to hear about someone who has several million dollars in their bank account yet loses sleep at night because someone owes them thirty dollars and still hasn't returned them, you would probably say that they've lost their mind...

But the truth is that we too often act the same way... The very fact that we've been privileged to be born Jews means that we're some of the wealthiest people in the world. If so, how can we be sad and troubled by all sorts of trivial things?

All the upper worlds exist, and all the heavens stand, only because of this world, which, within it, reside Am Israel! The

entire creation depends solely on Am Israel!

This is the reason that Am Israel cannot be destroyed in any way. Even if someone were to try to do so, the world would rise up against them and prevent it from happening, for even they know that if anything were to happen to the Jewish people, the whole world would turn upside down and, even worse, be destroyed.

When we break our natural instincts by defeating our bad desires, we're able to subdue the *yetzer hara* and bring happiness to Hashem. Every time another place of Torah is opened in the world, another *Beit Midrash*, another *Talmud Torah*, more and more bad is removed from the world, and the *yetzer hara* surrenders.

Precisely because there's so much bad and immorality in the world, every good action brings Hashem a lot of gratification. In the upper worlds, everything is clean, everything is pure, there are no desires. Only in this world do we have the opportunity to

defeat the *yetzer hara* and bring pleasure to Hashem.

Whenever someone breaks their natural instincts and fixes their bad character traits - they have a tendency to lie, and they try to tell only the truth. They have a tendency to be arrogant, and they try to act humbly. They have a tendency to get angry, and they try to remain calm. They bring an end to the *yetzer hara* and cause *Kiddush Hashem* (sanctifying the name of Hashem).

One of the advantages of this world is that it's full of darkness, and this immense darkness, a Jew can turn to light by studying Torah, keeping mitzvot, doing charitable work, and so on.

Every time a Jew comes to pray, they cause *Kiddush Hashem*. Every Jew that makes a blessing or answers "amen" causes *Kiddush Hashem*. Every Jew who dedicates a part of their salary (maser) and gives it to the charity of *talmidei chachamim* does *Kiddush Hashem*. The world exists thanks to these good deeds.

Parashat Re'eh - Our Purpose In This World

Only in this world can you do good deeds, acts of kindness, give

charity, become a better person,²⁰ and strive to make as many Jews as

~ Wellspring of Wisdom *~*

20. The panoramic landscapes of the far east are known for attracting many young secular Israeli travelers, who, after finishing their mandatory army service, often go there to backpack through the terrain and explore the new and unknown.

Two such backpackers were a brother and sister who finished their army service together and then decided to visit India, a land known for its “spirituality.”

As the novelty of travel and the thrill and excitement of adventure and touring the vast landscapes and foreign cultures wore off, they began searching for meaning in life and what their purpose in this world was... Soul searching...

However, here, they took two different paths...

The brother quickly began to connect with his religion, Judaism, and almost instantly came across a Jewish family nestled in India who helped him learn more about his well-defined and Jewish spiritual roots.

Ironically, of all places, it was in far-flung India where this young Israeli learned about his Jewish heritage...

He began attending classes there, lecture after lecture, absorbing the tranquility of Shabbat, the sanctity of wearing *tefillin*, and the joy of studying Torah. He became a real *Baal Teshuva*, a fully observant Jew.

His sister, though, was not as fortunate. She became mesmerized by a charismatic monk who preached about harnessing cosmic energy and invisible powers and connecting to them. She was caught in his words of “universal and interstellar galactic energies” and became an active follower of his monastery.

When her brother became aware of her newly found idolatrous ideologies, he attempted to change her mind about them, but his efforts fell on deaf ears. She wasn't willing to hear anything. “Continue with your Judaism, and I'll continue with mine...”

He didn't give up, though, and in the end, just to get him off her back, she agreed to travel back home with him in order to visit her parents back in Israel and attend one Torah class, but nothing more than that. She also brought up one more condition. She would be willing to do all that but only on the condition that after they finished the class, he would never, ever, bring up the topic of Judaism with her again.

Her brother then began his research to find which class would be the most suitable to accomplish his goal of helping her ignite the spark within her soul that was drifting so far away...

After arriving back in Israel, they went to visit their parents in Haifa, and after a couple of days of rest, they arrived at a

Parashat Re'eh - Our Purpose In This World

large lecture hall one evening at the appointed time of the lecture. The sister was eager to be the lecture over with already and was annoyed that her brother dragged her to something that was going to waste an hour and a half of her night. Though, it was worth it to finally get her annoying brother off her back.

To the great agitation of the attendees, the lecturer still hadn't arrived, and forty minutes later, to the dismay of the brother, the organizers of the lecture announced that the featured lecturer was stuck in traffic and wouldn't be able to arrive to give over the lecture. Instead, and without any other choice, they called upon one of the attendees, a knowledgeable young man that learned in one of the nearby kollel's, asking if perhaps he could replace the featured lecturer and give a substitute class.

The young man stood up, stuttering, excusing himself for being unprepared, and with a nervous smile, spent the next hour and a half reviewing a topic that he studied that day in his kollel... The laws of *Hashavat Aveida*, the commandment to return lost objects.

The sister listened, yawned, and returned as fast as possible to her monk in India...

The brother, however, remained with his newly found appreciation for his Jewish heritage in Israel, understanding that he failed in his opportunity to save his sister.

We'll fast-forward a little...

One day, the brother was sitting in his home when suddenly, he heard his

doorbell ring. He gets up, opens the door, and is pleasantly surprised to see his sister standing before him. "I've returned home for good!" she declared.

"Who succeeded in freeing you from there?" he asked curiously and surprised.

"It was the monk himself," she replied.

He let her in, they sat down together at the kitchen table, and she began to open up and relate how it all happened...

She was walking with her religious teacher, the monk, in their holy city of Varanasi when he suddenly stopped, bent down, and picked up a lost wallet. The wallet contained a passport, airfare tickets, and \$20,000 cash.

The monk serenely placed the wallet in his pocket and continued on as if nothing had happened...

She then inquired and asked, "What do you plan on doing with that wallet? It's fully identifiable. It can easily be returned to its owner."

The monk, however, replied with a dissertation about the cosmic energy that he senses in the wallet and the good that the world will receive with his ownership of it...

She was shocked and horrorstruck. At that very moment, she realized that her "religious teacher's" integrity was being tested in real life at that pivotal moment, but his entire theology was nothing more than an excuse to justify his unethical actions.

The image of the young nervously smiling kollel student lecturing flashed before her

Parashat Re'eh - Our Purpose In This World

possible happy. The more you do good to another Jew, the more you connect with the Hashem. Never bother another Jew, no matter what. If you can do good, then do it, and if not, at least don't do bad. Even if someone really deserves a little "payback" for what they've done, at least don't be the messenger. Leave this "mitzvah" to someone else and look for better mitzvot for yourself. Hashem knows exactly what everyone deserves.

By doing exactly *this*, we fulfill the purpose of creation.

For these simple acts, and for acting, honestly, how we should be, we even receive reward, in this world and in the next. Reward that can't be fathomed or explained.

Even if the whole world were to be sold, the banks, cars, real estate, etc., and a check one hundred miles

long had to be written in order to hold all the zeros, it wouldn't be enough to pay a single Jew for even putting on tefillin one time... What about the reward for keeping Shabbat, giving charity, learning Torah, and other mitzvot...

Hashem pays attention to every single one of our actions, through every moment and moment of our day. Nothing is missed by Him...

We must take advantage of every moment of life in this world. We must appreciate our existence in this world, for only here do we have the opportunity to do more and more good, for which in the future we'll receive endless reward. Strive to live as much as possible because every day of life in this world is priceless. Every second that you live in this world, you can do *Kiddush Hashem...*²¹

...*~* **Wellspring of Wisdom** *~*...

eyes. She couldn't stop picturing that young avrech beaming over the minute details of the mitzvot of *Hashavat Aveida*.

"The contrast was blinding," she said. "I've come home for good. I've returned to Judaism!"

21. Betzur Yarum (Vol. 8, p. 53).

Judgment Day

Hashem gave us fifty-one days²² of mercy so that we may examine our deeds, correct what needs to be corrected, and return to Him with all our hearts and souls. This is what the entire month of Elul, which is called the month of mercy and forgiveness, is for.²³

Then, on Rosh Hashanah, everyone in the world passes before Hashem for judgment.

Each and every person has good deeds and bad deeds. Those whose good deeds outweigh their bad deeds are righteous. Those whose bad deeds outweigh their good deeds are wicked. Half and half, *benoni* (intermediate). So, with a state, country, and the whole world...²⁴



On Rosh Hashanah, the righteous are written and signed immediately for a good life, the wicked are written and signed immediately for death, and the intermediate hang around...²⁵ and until when do they hang around? Until Yom Kippur, and this is to allow them to return to Hashem and correct their deeds...

Elul is Hashem's gift to us.

Let's not miss out on our gift and return to Hashem sooner rather than later...

Thanks to the month of Elul, may we merit being written for a good, long, healthy, and blessed life of peace and happiness, and may we be privileged to welcome the Mashiach and reveal Hashem's Honor in the world.

Shabbat Shalom !

 *Wellspring of Wisdom* 

22. From the first of Elul until the twenty-first of Tishrei.

23. Chelev Haarets (Vol. 6, p. 247).

24. Rambam – Halachot Teshuva 3:1-2.

25. Rosh Hashanah 16b.

The Pathway...

1. We are at the threshold of the wonderful month of mercy and forgiveness - the month of Elul. A month in which Hashem draws close and opens before us the gates of teshuva. In the month of Elul, Hashem is like a king who travels through the cities of His kingdom, allowing all to easily approach Him. These days are a great *Et Ratzon* (time of heavenly mercy) to merit real teshuva and draw near to Hashem.

2. There are those who say, "I've sinned so much, even if I want to do teshuva, who's even looking at me, who cares about me?!" However, they're very wrong to think so... Hashem waits for them and cries out, "My beloved child, in the month of Elul, I have mercy on every Jew and help them come close to me! Just do *teshuva*, and all your sins will be completely erased and forgotten!"

3. Hashem created in His world a creation called the *yetzer hara*. Its job is simple... to take good and righteous Jews and make them sin and distance themselves from Hashem until they despair of themselves and come to terms with their failure... When this happens, the *yetzer hara* celebrates, "Yes! Another Jew has been taken

captive! When the month of Elul arrives, Hashem throws all of us a lifeline! "I'm here by your side, just want, just ask, and I'll rescue you from captivity!" Every Jew who strengthens themselves in the month of Elul and yearns to draw closer to Hashem, Hashem helps and guides them step by step until they merit standing side by side and hand in hand with Hashem.

And Hashem never let's go...

4. Knowing this, we shouldn't let any moment of "failure" bring us down completely. Everyone has moments of weakness... Our job is to bounce back from those moments of weakness even stronger and not allow the *yetzer hara* to push us down again. The *yetzer hara's* greatest weapon is our sadness. However, with this knowledge, there's no reason to be sad or become depressed after any incident. Instead, we must immediately remind ourselves that the *yetzer hara* is trying to bring us down and that if we stand up and fight back, it won't have any control over us!

5. **One of the countless gifts that Hashem gave us is the gift of teshuva**

The Pathway...

(Repentance)! In the month of Elul, Hashem immediately receives all of our teshuva with mercy and comes close to every person and opens before them the gates of teshuva, and helps them return to him. However, He only does so in accordance with what the person, in turn, tries to improve their actions and come close to Him. Hence, every one of us is obliged to take advantage of the sanctity of these days and wake up and draw near to Hashem.

6. You are all children of Avraham, Itzchak, and Yaakov. Your lineage is distinguished, and your merit is great. Do not despair. Even if you strayed from the straight path, let your hearts not be faint. Even if you have already strayed and neglected the Torah and the mitzvot, sparks of holiness are buried deep within you. If you just turn back to the straight road and better your ways, you can hastily achieve everything!

7. There is only one unique and special nation, in which Hashem chose to be His nation, and called them His beloved children... and his love for them is above all logic, like the love of a father to his beloved son... Am Israel.

8. Hashem pays attention to every single one of our actions, through every moment and moment of our day. Nothing is missed by Him... We must take advantage of every moment of life in this world and appreciate our existence in this world, for only here do we have the opportunity to do more and more good, for which in the future we will receive endless reward.

9. Hashem gave us fifty-one days of mercy so that we may examine our deeds, correct what needs to be corrected, and return to Hashem with all our hearts and souls. This is what the entire month of Elul, which is called the month of mercy and forgiveness, is for. **Elul is Hashem's gift to us.** Let's not miss out on our gift and return to Hashem sooner rather than later...





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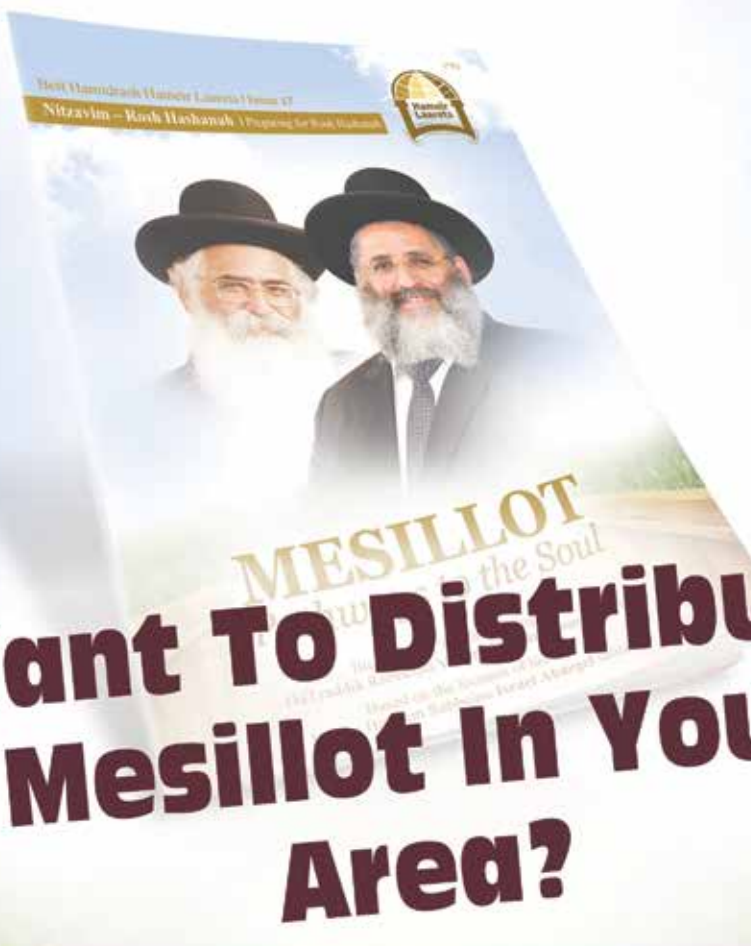
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30th of Av, 5782



City	Candle Lighting	Shabbat Ends	Rabbeinu Tam
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Miami	7:28 pm	8:21 pm	8:58 pm
Los Angeles	7:08 pm	8:04 pm	8:38 pm
Montreal	7:24 pm	8:28 pm	8:54 pm
Toronto	7:45 pm	8:47 pm	9:14 pm
London	7:45 pm	8:52 pm	9:10 pm
Jerusalem	6:55 pm	7:44 pm	8:33 pm
Tel Aviv	6:52 pm	7:41 pm	8:29 pm
Haifa	6:52 pm	7:41 pm	8:29 pm
Be'er Sheva	6:51 pm	7:40 pm	7:28 pm

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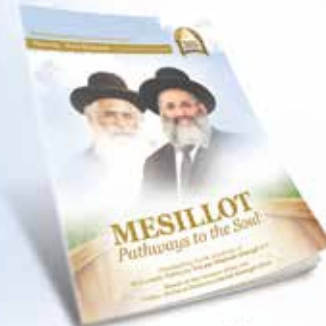
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