

Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts
from
Rabbi Elimelech
Biderman
Shlita*

Ki Seitzei



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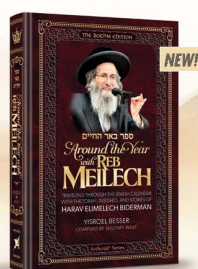
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Experience
Reb Meilech
all year long...

BY YISROEL BESSER
compiled by Shloimy Wolf

Torah Wellsprings - Ki Seitzei

Teshuvah, Tefillah, and Tzedakah

At the beginning of the Parasha, the pasuk says, (21:10) *כי תצא למלחמה על אויבך*, "When you go out to war against your enemies." The Imrei Elimelech of Gradzisk zt'l says this refers to the war of Rosh Hashanah.¹

But notice that it states *כי תצא למלחמה*, "When you go out to war." On Rosh Hashanah, no one is going out to war; we are already on the battlefield. The Imrei Elimelech explains that the pasuk refers to the month of Elul. That is when we go out to the war before it begins.

He writes, "This pasuk refers to Rosh Hashanah, the day of judgment when people stand before Hashem in judgment. But certainly, on Rosh Hashanah, the day of war, one can't say *כי תצא*, that he goes out to the war because he is already in the midst of the battle. Rather, the pasuk refers to going out to war *before* the day of judgment, when we prepare for the war with teshuvah, tefillah, and tzedakah. If we prepare, we will win and be found worthy in the judgment. The Torah promises us [that if we prepare for the war in Elul] *ונתנו ה' אלקיך בידך*, that Hashem will give us success on the day of judgment."

The Imrei Elimelech tells us that we prepare for Rosh Hashanah in three ways: Teshuvah, Tefillah, and Tzedakah, as these three factors are mentioned in the Unesaneh Tokef. We save ourselves on the days of judgment with teshuvah, tefillah, and tzedakah. Let us discuss these three factors, which are required this time of year.

Teshuvah

It is easier to do teshuvah in Elul than the entire year. It is a time mesugal for improving our ways.

In the year ת"ש, at the outbreak of the War, many cities in Romania came under Hungarian rule. The city of Satmar is an example of this. It used to be a Romanian city, and during the war, it became part of Hungary. Moshe Friedman, a bachur from Earmanshtat, Romania, studied in Satmar. He was orphaned from his father. His mother rushed to the yeshiva to take her son home with her. She explained that she was afraid that the borders may close, and then her son won't be able to return to Romania. However, her son didn't want to leave Satmar. He said, "It is better for Yidden in Hungary than in Romania, and besides, my Rebbe is here."

They went to the Satmar Rebbe zt'l and asked him for his opinion. He agreed with the mother that the bachur should return home to Romania, and he said, "If I could do it, I would also return to Romania."

During Shalosh seudos, the Rebbe said in his divrei Torah the pasuk (Devarim 32:8) *יציב גבולות עמים*, "He sets the boundaries of nations." He explained that Hashem changes the borders of countries, *למספר בני ישראל*, and it is all for the Jewish nation.

The Satmar Rebbe advised the bachur to escape when it was still possible. Had he waited, by year תש"ד, he wouldn't be able to escape.

This is a mashal for the month of Elul. Hakodosh Baruch Hu tells us that the days of judgment are coming, but now you can escape from your enemy, the yetzer hara. You can run and improve your ways with teshuvah.

1. Probably, this means that there is a battle between us and the Satan, who wants to persecute us.

It states (Shmos 21:13) והאלקים אנה לידו ושמתי לך מקום אשר ינוס שמה "...I will make a place for you to which he shall flee." Seforim Hakedoshim write that the roshei teivos of אנה לידו ושמתי לך spell out the word אלו. These are the days that we can escape from the yetzer hara and our bad ways and begin on a new path.

In Shu't Divrei Chaim (Yorah Deiah vol.1 33), Reb Chaim of Sanz responds in length to someone's halachic *shailah*, but the person who sent him the question also wrote to him a pilpul, a *lomdishe* thesis, not related to halachah. The Divrei Chaim refused to comment on that part of the letter. He wrote,

ולפלפולא בעלמא אין הזמן גורם כי צריך לבדוק חדרי משכיות לבב בימים נוראים הללו אלול תרי"ז "Just to discuss pilpul, this isn't the best time, because we have to check the corners of our hearts in these awesome days of Elul, 5617."

Beautiful words, which carry an important lesson. What could be better than discussing divrei Torah? The Divrei Chaim certainly did discuss divrei Torah all day long, also in Elul, as he was busy with the teshuvos and his regular learning schedule. Nevertheless, he didn't have extra time for pilpul because he needed time for self-reflection, to think about his deeds, and to see what he could do to improve his ways.²

2. The Divrei Chaim zt'l once told the following story at Shalosh Shudes in Elul. It is a mashal for teshuvah:

Someone was lost in the forest, and he was delighted to meet a human being. He rushed over to him and asked, "What is the way out of the forest?"

The man replied, "I am also lost. I also don't know the way out of the forest. But I can tell you the paths that you shouldn't take. I tried them already, and I know that they are futile." When he said these words, everyone cried.

The Divrei Chaim was humbly saying that he doesn't know the path of teshuvah, but he can tell us which directions we shouldn't take, which deeds we shouldn't do, and which attitudes we shouldn't have.

The Noem Eliezer of Skulen zt'l compared teshuvah to a person sinking in quicksand. He throws his hands about, hoping to find something to grab onto. He throws his hands to the right, then to the left, and to all directions, and finally, someone grabs his hand and pulls him out of the quagmire. This is a mashal of teshuvah. We often don't know exactly what we must do to improve our ways. We know there is much to do, but where do we begin, how, and with what techniques? We try this sefer, we go to that drashah, we make one kabbalah, and then we try another kabbalah tova. We say Tehillim. We seek the path that will pull us out of the quicksand of our destructive ways. We try, but we don't seem to find the path. But when we keep trying, Hashem will stretch out His right hand and pull us up to Him. This is alluded to in the words, כי ימינך פשוטה לקבל פושעים, Hashem's right hand stretches out to receive the sinners.

The Divrei Chaim told a parable to describe what occurs when people want to do teshuvah.

A poor widow found an egg and showed it to her children. The children were happy that they would have something nourishing to eat. But the mother said, "We aren't going to eat this egg. We will place it under the neighbor's chicken, and it will hatch, and then we will have a chicken. The chicken will have even more eggs, and they will hatch. When we have many eggs and many chickens, we will sell them and buy a cow. We will sell the milk... When we have many cows, we will buy fields..."

She waves her arms about with excitement as she discussed the wealth that will soon be theirs. The egg fell from her hands, and all of her dreams crashed and cracked together with the egg. The Divrei Chaim said this is how it is with people and their kabalos for the new year. They make kabalos and have grand plans, but they end up being the same each year. All their grand plans crash to the ground.

How do police know if someone is speeding on a highway? This is one of the older techniques: A cop parks his car near the highway and marks when a car passes by. There's another police car parked ten minutes down the highway. If the driver is riding within the speed limit, he should arrive in ten minutes. If he reaches the other policeman in five minutes, that's a sign that he was speeding.

Tefillah

The Torah hints to Elul in this week's parashah with the words (21:13) וּבְכֹתֶהּ אֶת אָבִיהָ וְאֶת אִמָּהּ יָרָה יָמִים, "[She shall] weep for her father and her mother for a full month." The Zohar (Zohar Chadash 72.) states, "This pasuk refers to the month of Elul." The crying can allude to the teshuvah, prayers, and pleading before Hashem that we do in Elul.

Reb Chaim vital (Eitz HaDaas, או ירמיו) writes, "The primary teshuvah is in Elul, called יָרָה יָמִים because that is when your tefillos are answered."

The Chasam Sofer (Sefer Zikaron, Drashos Chasam Sofer Erev Yom Kippur) says it is also an excellent time to daven for Moshiach. The Chasam Sofer says, "Elul is called יָרָה יָמִים, which is the same gematriya as שִׁי"ח, prayer, hinting that, this month, one should pour out his heart in prayers before Hashem, and Hashem will accept him. There are forty days from rosh chodesh Elul until Yom Kippur. [Forty is gematriya מ"ו.] If you add the מ"ו to שִׁי"ח, it becomes מְשִׁיחַ, because this brings the redemption near."

It states (Devarim 3:23) וְאַתְּחֵן אֶל ד' בַּעַת הַהוּא "I prayed to Hashem at that time, saying." The Bnei Yissaschar (Elul 1:9) asks: When was that particular time? When was the בַּעַת הַהוּא?

Rashi writes, לאחר שכבשתי ארץ סיחון ועוג, "after I conquered the lands of Sichon and Og...", and the Midrash (Bamidbar Raba 19:32) teaches that the wars of Sichon and Og were in Elul. So בַּעַת הַהוּא is in Elul. That is when Moshe davened. It is an *eis ratzon* for tefillah.

We've seen that Elul is called עֵת. The months of Tamuz and Av are called רֶשֶׁל דֵּל,

which both mean poor. These are poor, unfortunate months because these months fell into the portion of *Eisav HaRasha*. Afterward comes Elul, which is represented by the word עֵת. The Bnei Yissaschar says that if you bring the letters עֵת into רֶשֶׁל דֵּל, you receive שְׁעָר וּדְלָת, which represents an opening. They allude to the gates of heaven that open in Elul for teshuvah and to tefillah. It states הפותח שער לדופקי בתשובה, Hashem opens the gates for those who knock on it to do teshuvah. The דלת פתוחה, the door is open for all those who want to do teshuvah, and Hashem accepts them with a happy countenance.

Furthermore, דלת ושער hints to us that the gates of heaven are opened this month to receive our tefillos. It states (Eichah 3:44) סָכַתָּה בַּעֲנָן לֹךְ מֵעֲבוּר תַּפְלָה, "You have enveloped Yourself in a cloud so that no prayer can pass through." But in Elul, the gates of heaven are open. The Bnei Yissaschar writes, "In Elul, the gates of heaven are opened to accept tefillah and teshuvah. Moshe Rabbeinu accomplished this for all generations. Moshe davened a lot בַּעַת הַהוּא, in this month. לֵאמֹר, this means we should tell all future generations that at this time, the heavens are opened to receive with compassion the tefillos of Yisrael."

It states in parashas Eikev (9:25) וַאֲתַנַּפַּל לִפְנֵי ה' אַרְבַּעִים יוֹם, "I fell before Hashem for forty days." These were the days between rosh chodesh Elul until Yom Kippur (see Rashi Devarim 33:18). The Gr'a (Aderes Eliyahu, Ki Sisa 33:7) explains that during these forty days, Moshe didn't do anything, he only fell before Hashem [and prayed for Bnei Yisrael]. Therefore, these forty days were established as days of prayer, and on Yom Kippur, נִתְרַצָּה,

So, what do wise drivers do when they see a police car? They slow down.

This can be a lesson for Elul. The entire year we are rushing, and we don't check to see whether we are going in the right direction. When Elul arrives, we slow down. It is time to think and improve our ways.

I once saw a sign in a hallway of a beis medresh, "Don't be upset if you made a mess. You aren't a malach. But if you don't clean up, then you aren't even a mentch." This is our avodah in Elul. To clean up the mess we created with our aveiros.

השי"ת להם, Hashem accepts their tefillos and their teshuvah.

Chazal (Brachos 60.) say that during the first forty days of pregnancy, parents can daven that the child should be a boy or girl. After forty days, there is no reason for such a tefilla because the child has already been formed, and the gender won't change. The Shaar HaMelech (1:5) says this hints at the forty days from rosh chodesh Elul until Yom Kippur. During these forty days, with our tefillos, we can change what will be in the upcoming year. One can daven that if the year is destined to be נוקבא, female, representing din, it should become דוכרא, male, representing chessed.

Tehillim

The Rashab of Lubavitz zt'l once said, "Elul is the season for saying Tehillim." (He said this when he sent his gabbai to buy him a Tehillim in Elul.)

Shaar HaMelech (1:2) encourages saying Tehillim every day in Elul after Shacharis. He writes, "I saw a good custom in many communities, and my parents also told me about this good custom. From rosh chodesh Elul until Yom Kippur, immediately after Shacharis, these communities say Tehillim with a crying and sweet voice. I decided to bring this good custom to our city. Tehillim

is needed because our primary goal this month is to remove the mastinim (mekatrigim who speak against us)... and nothing stops them as well as when we say Tehillim. Tehillim is called *mizmorim*, which also means to shear, because the Tehillim shear away all thorns [of the mekatrigim]..."³

The Nesivos Shalom zt'l (Slonim) was very ill at the end of Av, and the doctors determined he needed emergency surgery. The Nesivos Shalom said he wanted to postpone the operation until after the yomim noraim. He explained that we believe that Rosh Hashanah is when decrees are passed, and we can daven and merit a good year.

The family realized that the Nesivos Shalom was firm with his resolve and asked the doctor to come to him. The doctor told him how to take care of himself throughout this waiting time. He told him what he could eat, how much he needed to sleep, etc.

The day after Yom Kippur, he was brought in for surgery. The doctors checked him and saw that he no longer needed an operation. One doctor said, "Time was good for you." The Nesivos Shalom replied that it was indeed "Time" that helped him. The days of Elul and the yomim noraim were good for him because he changed his destiny with his tefillos during this time.⁴

3. The Shaar HaMelech concludes:

"So, say Tehillim with kavanah and tears, and say the tefillah after each sefer of Tehillim. There should be ten people saying Tehillim, and they should also say the thirteen attributes of mercy until the end of the prayer. If you know of a place or city that doesn't know of this good custom, you should tell them about it so that every day of Elul we will be with the Tehillim. The Tehillim will be precious to Hashem as if we had studied the laws of negaim and ohalos, and the merit of Dovid HaMelech a'h will protect us, to receive a good judgment, for life and peace."

4. (Amos 3:6-8) אריה שאג מי לא יראה, "A lion has roared; who will not fear?" This pasuk alludes to Elul and the days of judgment because אריה is roshei teivos for הושענא רבא, יום כיפור, אלול ראש השנה, days of teshuvah, representing the fear that we have in these days.

Someone asked Reb Chaim Kanievsky zt'l that if the pasuk is alluding to Elul and the days of judgment, it should be in the present tense because the immense fear comes each year anew. Why does it state אריה שאג, "A lion roared," in the past tense?

Reb Chaim zt'l replied that the pasuk is saying, "Think about what happened this year. You saw what

Tzedakah

The King of Spain held Reb Yitzchak Abarbanel in high esteem and appointed him to be the treasurer of Spain. But some people were jealous of Abarbanel's success and close friendship with the king. In particular, the foreign minister of Spain, a great *rasha*, was very jealous of Abarbanel's status. He tried to destroy the king's affection for Reb Yitzchok Abarbanel with all his might. He told the king that Reb Yitzchak Abarbanel was stealing money from the treasury. "Did you ever wonder why Abarbanel is so wealthy and has a beautiful home and expensive assets? It is because he steals money from the treasury! Ask him how much money he has, and you will see that he will hem and haw and attempt to get out of giving you a straight answer."

The king summoned Reb Yitzchak Abarbanel and said, "I want to know how much you own. I'll give you three days to appraise your assets, and then come back and tell me."

After three days, the Abarbanel came to the king and said, "I own 700,000 gold coins."

The foreign minister and his friends laughed and said to the king, "His home alone is worth more than a million gold coins. He is lying. He doesn't want to admit that he is stealing from you."

The foreign minister devised another plan to increase the king's wrath on Reb Yitzchak Abarbanel. The Abarbanel knew the kingdom's secrets, which the king shared with him. He wasn't permitted to tell anyone

the secrets other than a particular high-ranking official.

The foreign minister bribed this high-ranking official to reveal the sensitive information to him, and then the foreign minister spoke to the king about these secrets.

"How do you know about these things?" the king asked. "Who told you?"

The foreign minister lied, "Don Yitzchak Abarbanel told me."

The king was angry with Reb Yitzchak Abarbanel and decided to kill him. But he couldn't kill him in Spain since the Abarbanel was very beloved by the public,⁵ and it would create a tumult and uproar. So, he handed the Abarbanel a sealed letter and told him to deliver it to the owner of a brick factory outside Spain. A fire burned in the factory's furnace all day long. The letter said, "Throw the bearer of this letter into the furnace immediately, without further ado."

Don Yitzchak Abarbanel, not knowing what was in the letter, took it from the king and set out with the high-ranking official to deliver it. En route, a Yid rushed to the Abarbanel and said, "I have an eight-day-old son, and the *mohel* didn't show up. Can you please come?"

Reb Yitzchok Abarbanel didn't have to think long to decide. He was on a mission for the king of Spain, and now he had the opportunity to serve the King of all Kings, Hakadosh Baruch Hu. He agreed to go and perform the bris. Reb Yitzchok Abarbanel

occurred: the tragedies, the problems. The lion has roared, r'l. This inspires us to be afraid now and to invest in tefillos. A new year is approaching, and we don't know what is in store for us.

Reb Yechezkel Levinstein zt'l became ill with the disease r'l, and he said that if he had ripped open the heaven with tefillos in Elul, he wouldn't have become sick.

Imagine the Elul before the Holocaust began. If people knew what to expect, they would have invested in Elul with all their hearts and souls. We never know what is approaching, but there are years of *אריה שאג*, great devastations, and we can save ourselves and avoid them with sincere tefillos in Elul.

5. One of the reasons Abarbanel was so beloved in Spain is because he lowered the taxes.

was an expert *mohel* and never missed an opportunity to perform this great mitzvah. So, he said to the high-ranking official, "Deliver this letter to the brick factory, and I will meet you there later tonight."

The high-ranking official didn't know what was written inside the letter, and when he delivered it, he was promptly thrown into the fire. Before his death, the official said, "I deserve this because I revealed the king's secrets."

Later that night, when the Abarbanel arrived at the brick factory, they showed him the letter and told him the official's final words. Don Yitzchak Abarbanel thanked Hashem for saving him in the merit of the mitzvah of *milah*. From the high-ranking official's final words, he understood that the king suspected he had revealed the secrets.

Don Yitzchok Abarbanel returned to the king and told the king everything that occurred. The king said, "I see that your G-d helps you. But there remains one issue that still bothers me. Why did you say you have 700,000 coins when we know you have so much more?"

Don Yitzchok Abarbanel answered, "The 700,000 coins are the amount I gave to tzedakah. This is the amount I know for certain that I have because the merit of tzedakah will remain with me forever. As for the rest of my wealth, I can't say that it is mine. The king can take it all away at any moment. So when the king asked me how much I own, I told him the amount I gave to charity because that is what I truly own."

The king praised him for his wise answer.

Shofar

Once, on Rosh Hashanah, in a hospital in Eretz Yisrael, a baal chesed blew shofar for the bedridden patients. A non-religious Jew was present, and the shofar inspired him. He said, "I understand what the shofar is all about."

He told them, "I served in the Israeli Navy in a submarine. The means of communication underseas was Morse code, and I could quickly send and decipher messages."

"A couple of years after serving in the Navy, I saw an advertisement. The army was looking for a Morse code expert to be in charge of several submarines. To apply for the job, we had to be at a certain office between 10:00 and 12:00 in the morning. I arrived at 11:50. The room was packed with applicants, with soft music playing in the background. No one was being called in, and everyone was on edge. They had come for an interview; why weren't they being called in? But I didn't wait. I stood up and opened the door of the office. "I came for the interview."

"Many people are waiting in line ahead of you," the secretary said agitatedly. "And you just came. Wait your turn!"

"I ignored her, walked into the room, and went straight to the commander in charge. In a few moments, I was hired for the job."

When the people in the waiting room heard that this person had been chosen, they were angry. "This man came in last," they protested. "You make us wait for hours, and then you take someone who just arrived?!"

The interviewer told them, "Listen carefully to the music. Don't you get it? It's Morse code, saying, 'If you've come for the interview, just open the door and come inside.' This man heard the message. That's why he came in. But you didn't understand. So you're obviously not fluent enough in the code."

The irreligious man in the hospital said, "I understand that this is what the shofar is doing. It is telling a coded message. We just have to decipher it."

It is indeed true. The shofar is telling a message, but it isn't in code.

The Rambam (*Teshuvah* 3:4) writes, "The shofar is saying, עורו ישנים משנתכם – wake up, from your sleep... Examine your deeds. Repent. Remember your Creator, all you people who forget the truth..."

The Rambam refers to the shofar of Rosh Hashanah, but the shofar of Elul serves the same purpose. It is to arouse us to teshuvah. The Tur (581) writes, "Chazal established that every year, we should blow the shofar on rosh chodesh Elul and throughout the month, to arouse Yidden to do teshuvah, as it states (Amos 3:6) אִם יִתְקַע שׁוֹפָר בְּעִיר וְעַם לֹא יִחַרְדּוּ, 'Will a shofar be sounded in the city and the people not tremble?' Also, it is blown to confuse the Satan..

But we have to pay attention to the message.

Listen to what people say after they hear the shofar in Elul. People say, "He blows nicely. I like his *truah*." And another person will respond, "Last year, he blew nicer." These people listen to the sound, not the shofar's message.

But the wise listen to the message and are aroused to teshuvah.⁶

Kav Hayashar (ch.48) states, "The minhag of Yisrael is to begin blowing shofar from Rosh chodesh Elul, which is thirty days before Rosh Hashanah, like [the halachah] that someone who has a debt, beis din gives him thirty days to gather money to pay up his debts. Similarly, the beis din of heaven gives the person thirty days to do teshuvah so that he will come out *zakai* (innocent) in the court of heaven. This is when he does teshuvah, tefillah, and tzedakah, which removes the bad decree. The shofar is to arouse us... Therefore, when he hears the call of the shofar, a person who fears Hashem should be afraid and tremble out of fear of Hashem and before Hashem's greatness. שפרו מעשיכם שופר stands for שפרו מעשיכם, improve your ways and leave your bad ways...⁷ Therefore, everyone should be awakened by the sound of the shofar that is calling him to do teshuvah and he should call to Hashem with tears and prayer. This is the custom of אנשי מעשה, righteous Yidden, when they hear the shofar from Rosh chodesh Elul. They turn their face to the wall and call to Hashem with tears and with cries..."⁸

The shofar is a call without words, but there doesn't need to be any words because

6. When a cell phone rings and the tune is pleasant, most people aren't interested to know who is on the phone and what the person wants. They are more interested in the music. But one person is interested in the caller; the cell phone owner. The same is with the shofar. Some people pay attention to the music, but the wise pay attention to the shofar's message.

In Eretz Yisrael, some shuls have coin-operated air conditioners. When it is about to turn off, the machine beeps to remind people to add more money (if they want it to continue working). L'havdil, the call of the shofar is our reminder and arousal to put in more tefillos. It tells us that a new year is approaching, and we must do teshuvah.

7. שופר is *roshei teivos* (Tehillim 24:9) שאו שערים ראשיכם ושאו פתחי, and (Tehillim 126:2) שחוק פינו ולשנונו רנה, and (Devarim 29:17) שורש פורה ראש ולענה.

8. The Kav HaYashar concludes that one should also arouse his fellow man to do teshuvah. (Obviously, this must be done with extreme care, and often it can't be done altogether, but they are the Kav HaYashar's holy words, so we quote them here.) The Kav HaYashar writes:

"He should also arouse his friend to do teshuvah. Certainly, if he sees that his friend did something disgusting, he should arouse him with kind words, 'My dear friend, it is now the time to correct our paths. Listen to what I tell you and go away from this way that you are doing. These deeds aren't proper. I have to warn you about this, and if you see something improper with my behavior, you should also tell me and say, 'You did this and that,' because we are brothers, our neshamos come from the same place, from under Hashem's throne."

the message is understood. The shofar in Elul is shouting, "Yiddelach, it's time to get rid of your aveiros and bad deeds."

Reb Yechezkel Leinstein zt'l reminisced about how it was in Europe when government officials came to a city to check whether people were properly disposing of their trash or were polluting the city. Whoever left his garbage in front of his home was fined. To avoid this penalty, when someone saw the government inspectors approaching, he would shout, "Yiddelach! Yiddelach!" He didn't say more. He didn't have to. Everyone understood that they should quickly dispose of their garbage. The shofar also calls us without words, and we understand the message.

The Or HaMeir (Devarim, Rosh Hashanah) writes, "A mashal of a city who appointed someone to be in a tall tower to guard the city. When the guard sees the enemy approaching, he must shout to arouse people to go out to war. When the townspeople hear the guard's call, the wealthy people are afraid because they have a lot of money, their homes are filled with gold and silver and beautiful clothing, and they are worried that the enemy will take away everything that belongs to them, and they will be left penniless. But this fear is solely for the wealthy, not the poor whose homes are bare. They aren't afraid of thieves because nothing can be taken away from them.

"However, when the guard shouts from the tower, in panic, 'Oy vay,' and doesn't say any words, then everyone in the city is afraid, the poor and the wealthy alike because when no words are spoken, it means that the enemy came to kill, chas v'shalom... and everyone is afraid."

The Or HaMeir explains, "This is why the *kadmonim* established that we should blow shofar from rosh chodesh Elul. It is a straight call, and it is for all Yisrael, the

wealthy and the poor. This is because a straight call means that people's lives are at stake, and it arouses each person in his own way."

If the shofar produced words, or if a Rav would give a mussar drashah, some people will say that the topic doesn't apply to them because, indeed, everyone needs to hear something else. Mussar which is fitting for some is superfluous for those who have already attained perfection in those areas. Therefore, we are aroused by the straight sound of the shofar. This prompts everyone to do teshuvah, each person in their own way.

The Greatness of Elul

Rebbe Shmelke of Nickelsberg zt'l said he doesn't want to go to heaven because there is no Elul in heaven.

Reb Chaim Vital zt'l writes, "In Elul, HaKodosh Baruch Hu becomes a ידיד ואהוב, a friend and beloved to the person who does teshuvah."

The Alter of Kelm zt'l writes in a letter that Elul is beloved in heaven. He quotes the Ramban that says that Elul is the mazal of a besulah- virgin because it represents Hashem's love for Bnei Yisrael. "Hashem chose this month to prepare their hearts for their Father in heaven, and he loves them even more than before they return to Him."

The Beis Aharon says that the name of last week's parashah, ראה, is the roshei teivos for ראה אלול הולך, "Take note that Elul is leaving."

One can ask, why do we say at the beginning of Elul that Elul is leaving? We should say that Elul has arrived! But the answer is that when Elul arrives, we are happy and simultaneously disappointed because we know that in thirty days, Elul will pass.⁹

9. A similar question is asked on the Gemara (Beitzah 16.) from the pasuk (Shemos 31:17) כי ששת ימים עשה ה' את

השמים ואת הארץ וביום השביעי שבת וינפש, "in six days Hashem created the heaven and the earth, and on the seventh day He ceased and rested," and Chazal say that we should read it שבת וינפש, "When Shabbos passes, woe! The nefesh yeseirah left us."

But this is difficult to understand. The pasuk refers to the arrival of Shabbos, so why do Chazal translate it as though it refers to the leaving of Shabbos?

The Baal Shem Tov *zt'l* answers that when Shabbos arrives, we are happy with Shabbos, and we are simultaneously disappointed because we know that in twenty-four hours, Shabbos will pass.

There was a businessman who would often seek business counsel from the Sfas Emes. Once, the Sfas Emes told him, "Now it's Elul. The wisest investment, which earns the greatest dividends, is to invest in this month."

Rebbe Mordechai of Lechovitz *zy'a* arrived at an inn with his chassidim, and they overheard the innkeeper say to his staff, "This month is the peak season for our business. There is more work now than the entire year. Whoever will work hard this month will earn enough money to last him the entire year. Therefore, my dear workers, I recommend you work extra hours this month and be devoted to your chores. Later on, you will be glad you did so."

Rebbe Mordechai of Lechovitz turned to his chassidim, "We heard enough. Now we can return home." They heard the lesson of Elul.

The Or HaMeir's sister was making a chasunah, and she told her brother, the Or HaMeir, that it would mean a lot to her if he could be by the chasunah. The problem was that the chasunah was in Elul, and the Or HaMeir generally didn't travel in Elul.

He decided that he would set out on the journey, and if Hashem didn't want him to go, Hashem would send him a hint that he should return home.

At the beginning of his journey, he saw a young goy beating an old man. Startled, the Or HaMeir asked the young goy why he was hitting the old person.

The goy replied, "This old man is my father. We agreed that he must care for my children, so I can work and plant in the fields. But he sleeps all day, and I have to take care of my children. But if I don't plant this month, we will lose the entire year's crops."

The Or HaMeir understood that Hashem was sending him a message: If you miss this month, the results will be felt the entire year, and he returned home.

Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk *zy'a* didn't see visitors during Elul because he was so involved in the avodah of Elul. Once, however, a wealthy person decided to go to Rebbe Elimelech, even if it was Elul. His son had become insane, *r'l*, and he needed an immediate yeshuah. He figured that because of his wealth, an exception would be made, and he would be able to get an appointment with the Rebbe.

As the father traveled with his son toward Lizhensk, they met a poor person asking for tzedakah. The son told his father, "Give this man a generous donation."

This was the first intelligent sentence that the boy had said in a long time. The father was astounded. Since he was so pleased with his son's improvement, he gave a half-gold coin to the poor man.

The poor man asked, "Where are you traveling?"

The wealthy man told him they were going to Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk because his son had become insane.

The poor man replied, "But don't you see that your son is healed! Why should you bother the tzaddik? The Rebbe doesn't see visitors in Elul."

But the wealthy man decided that since he had traveled so far, he would continue.

When he came to Lizhensk, he gave the Rebbe twelve gold coins. The Rebbe said, "You gave Eliyahu HaNavi a half-gold coin, and you give me twelve gold coins?"

That's when the father understood that the poor man he met was Eliyahu Hanavi.

The Shaar HaMelech (1:3) quotes the Yerushalmi (Rosh Hashanah 1:3), which tells us that Hakadosh Baruch Hu keeps the entire Torah. This means that Hakadosh Baruch Hu also keeps the mitzvah of pidyon haben. Hashem's firstborn is the Jewish nation, as it states (Shemos 4:22) בני בכורי ישראל, "My firstborn son is Yisrael." When we say Hashem does pidyon haben, this means that Hashem redeems us from all tzaros. He redeems us and saves us on the day of judgment.

But when a child is born, he doesn't do pidyon haben immediately. He must wait a month, as it states (Bamidbar 18:16) ופדיוו מכן חדש, "Its redemption [pidyon, shall be performed] from the age of a month."

The Shaar HaMelech writes that Hashem does the same. "After the month of Elul, the month we do teshuvah, and we become like a newborn child, that is when Hashem redeems us on the day of judgment."

The Panim Yafos (Hafla'ah) zt'l said about Elul, "Every hour is like a day."

The Ben Ish Chai writes in a letter, "I wrote to you this in Elul, which in my eyes

each minute is like a month in the rest of the year."

The Fear of Elul

Someone asked Reb Yisrael Salanter zt'l, "Why do you make Elul into a bear?"

He replied, "You're right; Elul isn't a bear. Elul is more frightening than a bear. Dovid wasn't afraid of a bear, as it states (Shmuel 1, 17:36) גם את הארי גם הדוב הכה עבדך, "Your slave has slain even the lion and the bear..."¹⁰ He wasn't afraid of a bear, but he was afraid of the days of judgment. He said (Tehillim 119:120) סמר מפחדך בשרי וממשפטך יראתי, "My flesh bristles from fear of You, and I fear Your judgments." So, Elul isn't a bear. It is far more frightening.

The gematriya of סמר מפחדך בשרי וממשפטך יראתי (2090) is the exact same gematriya as אלול, ראש השנה, יום כפור, נעילה, הושענא רבא (2090).

It states (Amos 3:6-8) אם יתקע שופר בעיר ועם לא יחרדו... אריה שאג מי לא יראה, "Will a shofar be sounded in the city and the people not tremble? ... A lion has roared; who will not fear?" אלול ראש השנה, יום כפור, הושענא רבא, days of teshuvah, representing the fear that we have in these days.¹¹

Reb Yisrael Avraham Tchernostrau zt'l (the son of Rebbe Zusha of Honipoli zt'l) told this story and added, "Notice how precious Rebbe Elimelech's Elul was to Hashem. Eliyahu Hanavi was sent to heal the wealthy man's son to prevent them from disturbing Rebbe Elimelech's Elul."

10. When Dovid volunteered to battle Golyas, Shaul HaMelech told him (Shmuel 1, 17:33), "You cannot fight this Plishti. You are a lad, while he is a warrior since his youth!"

Dovid replied. "Your servant was a shepherd for his father among the flocks; the lion or the bear would come and carry off a sheep from the flock, and I would go after it, strike it down, and rescue the sheep from its mouth. If it attacked me, I would grab onto its beard, strike it, and kill it. Your slave has slain even the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Plishti will be like one of them..." He wasn't afraid of a bear, but he was fearful of Elul and the days of judgment.

11. Parents took their son on a safari to show him the wild animals. Their son stared out of the window, amazed at the sights he saw. When they got to the lions, he opened the car door to run to the lions. "What are you doing?" the parents shouted in shock. "Lions are dangerous!"

"No, they aren't," the son said. "Lions are my friends. I know them from my crib." Because when he was an infant, his parents decorated his crib with pictures of lions.

The mother explained, "The lions in your crib were just pictures, but these are real lions!" This is the meaning of אריה שאג, the lion roars, and now it is real.

The question אם יראה שאג מי לא יראה can only be answered with the Mesilas Yesharim.

Tzaddikim have said, "Even fish in the sea tremble on *Shabbos Mevorchim Elul*."

Rebbe Yissacher Dov of Belz *zy'a* would cover himself with blankets from the fifteenth of Av. He explained, "It states in *sefarim* that even fish tremble at this time of year. Fish don't know what Elul is all about. Those who learn *sefarim* and understand what Elul is all about should certainly be afraid."

It is repeated that every year, in Yerushalayim, when the chazan would *bench rosh chodesh Elul*, women in the *ezres nashim* would faint from fright. People would shout, "Water! Water!"

In the Rebbe Dovid Biderman *zt'l* court, the atmosphere of *erev Shabbos Mevorchim Elul* resembled *Erev Yom Kippur*. The *gaba'im* would ask each other for *mechilah*, just like on *Erev Yom Kippur*.

The Magen Avraham (end of siman תקצ"א) writes, "The Sefer Chasidim (תשס"ג) asks, every day Hakadosh Baruch Hu judges the world, so what is the difference between Rosh Hashanah and the rest of the year? It is because on Rosh Hashanah, the judgment is for what will be in many years, like the seven years of the famine."

Pharaoh dreamt on Rosh Hashanah that there would be a famine for seven years. That Rosh Hashanah was a decree for seven years. This aspect of Rosh Hashanah increases our fear because the decrees that will be determined on Rosh Hashanah can affect our lives for many years afterward.

The Beis Aharon traveled someplace before Rosh Hashanah. He told his gabbai, "Prepare the horses [to travel back]. My hair burns from the *pachad* of Rosh Hashanah."

The Ben Ish Chai (Vayikra) *zt'l* tells over that a person once came to a city and told everyone that he was "The *Mochiach* of

Prague." Everyone understood that he was hired in Prague to give mussar drashos and to arouse people to teshuvah, so they invited him to speak in their *beis medresh*.

As he stood before the community, he told them he wasn't a baal mussar and didn't have experience giving drashos in public. When he said that he is the *mochiach* of Prague, he meant that his life is *mochiach*, proves¹² that Hashem runs the world. He said, "I was from the wealthiest people in Prague, but I lost all my money. Now I'm a bitter and poor man. I also have many problems. My life is proof that wealth is in Hashem's hands. Hashem gives, and Hashem takes, and everything is in His hands."

We tell this story now to remind us that things can change in either direction. The wealthy can become poor, and the poor can become rich. We don't know the future that will be determined on Rosh Hashanah.

A shofar is narrow on one side and wide at the other end. This hints that there are tight, narrow, difficult moments in life, represented by the narrow end of the shofar (מן המצר), and there are good, happy moments in life, represented by the wide end of the shofar (עני במרחב). Things can change, and we don't know the future. This is part of our fear on these days of judgment.

אריה (which represents Elul and the days of judgment) has the letters that spell ראייה, "to see." We see what happens to people over the year, and this fills our hearts with fear.

Hashem gave us Elul to help sweeten the judgment that everything should be good for us in the coming year. And together with our fear is immense joy. As Reb Mordechai Slonimer *zt'l* said, "It isn't a band of robbers who will be judging us on Rosh Hashanah. It is our Father in heaven!" We trust that

12. Mochiach can be translated as someone who rebukes others, and it can be translated as "proof." He explained to them that he meant that his life is proof that everything is from Hashem."

Hashem will grant us a good year, and we combine our fear with our trust in Hashem.¹³

The Danger of Speaking During Davening

Chazal (*Bava Kama* 60:) say, "If there is a plague (*dever*) in a city, one shouldn't be alone in a *beis kneses*, because the *malach hamaves* stores his tools there." *Derech Moshe* (on *Sefer HaGan*) asks why the *malach hamaves* store his tools precisely in the *beis medresh*. It's because the *malach hamaves* gets his strength to harm people from those who speak in the *beis medresh*."

Shulchan Aruch (124:7) states, "Don't speak idle talk during *chazaras hashatz*. If one speaks, he is sinning and גדול עונו מנשוא, the sin is too great to be forgiven,' וגוערין בו, and you should shout at him.'"

These harsh terms, 'the sin is too great to be forgiven' were originally said by Kayin after he killed Hevel. This expression describes the severity of speaking during davening, and *Shulchan Aruch* doesn't use this expression for any other aveirah. Is there an association between Kayin's murder and speaking during *tefillah* that they are both called גדול עונו מנשוא? The answer is, speaking during davening can also cause deaths, r'l, since the *malach hamaves* receives his powers to cause plagues and epidemics because of the people who talk during *tefillah*.

Shulchan Aruch states וגוערין בו, "People should shout at him." People asked Reb Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt'l whether one should do so literally. He replied, "If you

saw someone killing his fellow man, wouldn't you shout at him?"

Some say that refraining from speaking during *tefillah* is a רוב הציבור יכולין לעמוד בו, a law that most people are unable to maintain. We ask them, are the *tzaros* that come from speaking during davening something the public can sustain? These *tzaros* are also אין הציבור יכולין לעמוד בו, something people simply cannot endure. If we stop talking during davening, we will be freed from all these *tzaros*, and our lives will be much better.¹⁴

The *Derech Moshe* writes, שיבה, old age, is *roshei teivos* בשעת התפילה, "Silence is good during *tefillah*." This means those who are silent during the *tefillah* will merit to live long.

The Debreciner Rav zt'l (*Be'er Moshe* 7:108) writes, "I will tell an awesome story. I saw it myself. My feet still tremble when I think about it. One Shabbos, my father zt'l hy'd delivered a *drashah* on the importance of answering amen and *amen yehei shmei rabba*. He repeated the Remak that שיבה is *roshei teivos* for בשעת התפילה, that in the merit of being silent by the *tefillah*, one will live long. My father added, 'The opposite is self-understood (that if people speak by the davening, they won't live long. He didn't explicitly say those words, but the implication was understood.)

"The next day, there was a commotion in the *beis medresh* because one of the people who heard my father's *drashah* said that in his dream, he saw himself standing before the Heavenly tribunal, and the court ruled

13. It states (*Devarim* 7:12) והיה עקב תשמעון. Chazal say that והיה is an expression of happiness. When is there happiness? עקב, when we come to the end of the year, תשמעון, because that is when we listen to the Torah and change our ways.

There is great joy in these days, days of joy mixed with fear.

14. During the massacres of (1647-1648) ת"ח ת"ט, the Tosfos Yom Tov perceived that these tragedies were caused because people were speaking during davening. He, therefore, composed a *tefillah* — said in many congregations on Shabbos right after *kriyas HaTorah* — כל מי ששומר פיו ולשונו שלא לדבר בעת התפילה... ויזכה לראות בנים — חיים וקיימים ויגדלם לתורה ולחופה ולמעשים טובים ויעבוד את ה' אלקינו תמיד באמת ובתמים "Whoever guards his mouth from speaking during the *tefillah*...he will merit healthy children, and to raise them to Torah, chuppah, and good deeds..."

that he was guilty (חייב). He was still asleep but understood that he wouldn't wake up in the morning. He pleaded before the court that he hadn't yet reached שיעה. Why should he be punished? Heaven replied that it's because he spoke *devarim beteilim* during the *tefillah* and didn't answer amen and *amen yehei shmei rabba*. He replied, 'I didn't know the matter was so grave.'

"One of the judges became angry with him and said, 'Why do you say that? On Shabbos, your Rav taught you about the importance of these matters. He said in the

name of the Remak that those who are silent in beis medresh and they answer amen and *amen yehei shmei rabba* will merit שיעה, and he said that the opposite is self-understood... You were present at this *drashah*... How can you say you didn't know the severity of this sin? The man declared to the *beis din* that he would tell the entire community what happened to him in the Heavenly Court, and from now on, he will warn them to be silent in beis medresh and to answer Kaddish, amen, and *amen yehei shmei rabba*. Upon that, the *beis din* permitted him to live. Everyone who heard the story was afraid."¹⁵

15. The Derech Moshe writes, "*Teshuvah* is very great, and by doing *teshuvah* [when one stops speaking during davening], it benefits others [for they will learn from him also to be cautious]. The sins will become merits... you and your children will merit a good, pleasant life."

The Gemara (*Shabbos* 119:) says, "Whoever answers *amen yehei shmei rabba* with all his might, his decree is ripped up... Even if he has the disgraceful sin of *avodah zarah*, he is forgiven." Why does *amen yehei shmei rabba* grant people life and annul heavenly decrees?

The following *mashal* will help us understand:

A king announced that he would be visiting a certain distant city on a specific date. The residents of that city prepared for the king's visit. With each passing day, the preparations and the excitement mounted.

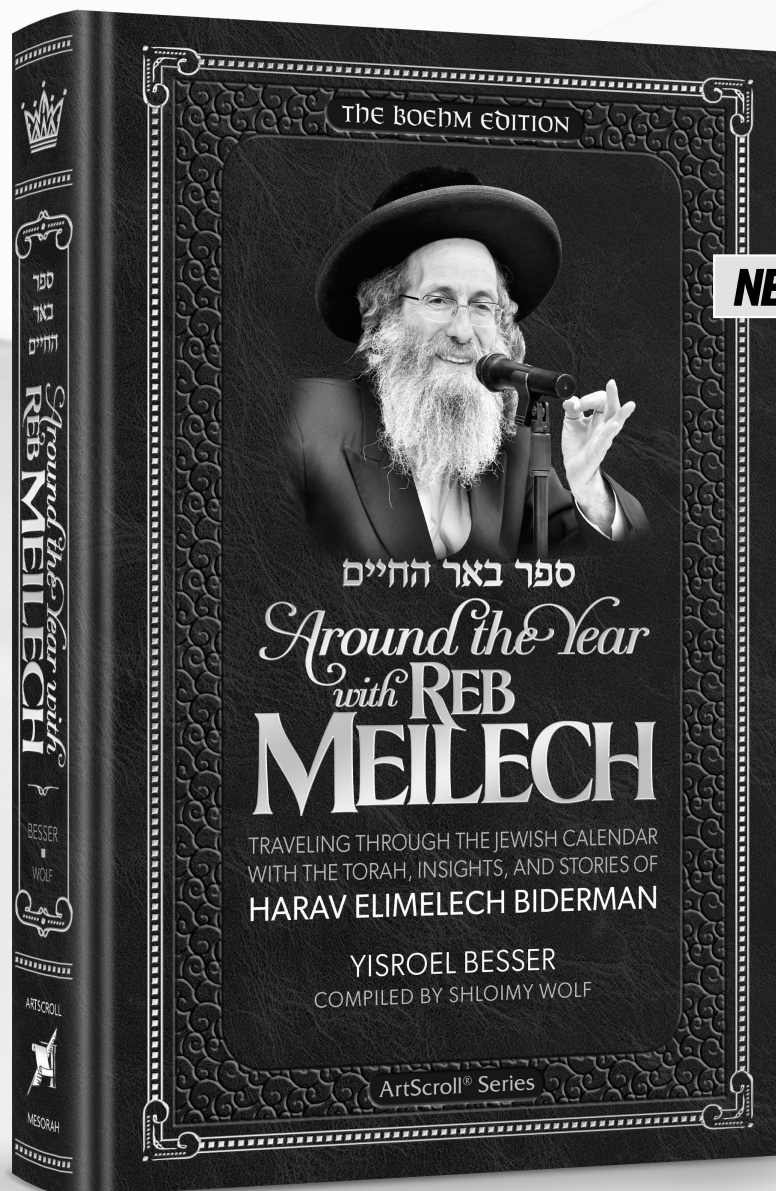
When the day finally arrived, everyone came to the city limits to greet the king, shouting loudly and joyously, '*yechi hamelech* — long live the king!' They shouted this several times with all their hearts and soul. But suddenly, a barrage of stones hit the king! Everyone was stunned into silence. The police quickly sought out the culprits who threw the rocks. It was two youths who were immediately arrested and jailed. A date was set for their trial.

At court, the prosecuting attorney spoke about the severity of what these youths perpetrated, that they rebelled against the king.

The defense attorney, however, said, "This wasn't a rebellion. I'd call it childishness. When everyone shouted *yechi hamelech*, I was standing near these boys and they were shouting *yechi hamelech* loudly and enthusiastically together with everyone. This proves that they are loyal to the king. That they threw stones is certainly childish behavior and shouldn't be considered a rebellion."

The *nimshal* is that sometimes people err and sin. The prosecuting *malachim* claim that our deeds are *morred bemalchus*, a rebellion against Hashem, *chalilah*. But if we will shout together with the congregation אמן יהא שמייה רבא it shows that we truly want to increase Hashem's honor and that our sins are accidental, influenced by the *yetzer hara*. This is why saying *amen yehei shmei rabba* annuls harsh decrees and atones for all sins, even *avodah zarah*.

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