



The Fascinating Connection between the Month of Elul and Eliyahu HaNavi

This coming Shabbas Kodesh, on which we will read parshas Re'eh, is Rosh Chodesh Elul. It behooves us to consider the incredible chesed HKB"H performs annually on behalf of his beloved children, the people of Yisrael, by designating a special month for the performance of teshuvah. It allows us to make amends for all of our sins and iniquities of the past year in preparation for the High Holidays in Tishrei. At that time, all living creatures pass before HKB"H in judgment and are held accountable for their deeds of the past year. The High Holidays culminate with the holiest day of the year, Yom Kippur. If we perform proper, sincere teshuvah, it is a day of forgiveness and atonement.

We find no depiction more moving or more awe-inspiring than that of the divine poet Rabbi Amnon of Mainz, ztz"l. In his poetic prayer **U'Netaneh Tokef**, which he formulated on his deathbed, he depicts the harsh judgment we must all endure during these holy days:

"בראש השנה יכתבון וביום צום כיפור יחתמוון, כמה יעברון וכמה יבראון, מי יחיה ומי ימות, מי בקצו ומי לא בקצו, מי במים ומי באש, מי בחרב ומי בחיה, מי ברעב ומי בצמא, מי ברעש ומי במגפה, מי בחניקה ומי בסקילה, מי ינוח ומי ינוע, מי ישקט ומי יטרף, מי ישלח ומי יתסר, מי יעני ומי יעשר, מי ישפל ומי ירום."

On Rosh HaShanah you will be inscribed and on Yom Kippur you will be sealed; how many will pass from the earth and how many will be born; who will live and who will die; who will die at his predestined time and who will die before that time; who by water and who by fire; who by sword and who by beast; who by famine and who by thirst; who by storm and who by plague; who by

suffocation and who by stoning; who will rest and who will wander; who will live in harmony and who will be harried; who will enjoy tranquility and who will suffer; who will be impoverished and who will become wealthy; who will be degraded and who will be uplifted.

When we consider all of the tragic events of the past year, knowing and believing sincerely that they were all predetermined at the start of the year, whose heart will not shudder at this time. This applies even to the consummate tzaddik. For, in the words of the wisest of all men (Koheles 7, 20): "כי אדם אין צדיק בארץ אשר יעשה טוב ולא יחטא"—**for there is no man so wholly righteous on earth that he always does good and never sins.** All the more so, should simple people like us tremble with fear in anticipation of the Day of Judgment.

Therefore, in His infinite mercy and kindness, HKB"H gives us the month of Elul, at the end of the year, to focus on teshuvah. With this month of preparation, we can reach and complete the lofty level of teshuvah required of us during the ten days of teshuvah—Aseres Yimei Teshuvah—extending from Rosh HaShanah to Yom Kippur. In this merit, we will be inscribed and sealed for good for the year to come.

The Name Gad Alludes to the Month of Elul

In this essay, we wish to focus on the choice of the Almighty to specifically designate the month of Elul as the month of teshuvah. Clearly, it makes perfect sense, since it is at the end of the year and precedes the days of judgment of Tishrei. Nevertheless, it is not mere circumstance; HKB"H assigned

each month a unique purpose and character. For instance, the month of Nissan is the optimal, designated time for geulah. In the words of the Gemara (R.H. 11a): **”בניסן נגאלו ובניסן עתידין”**—**in Nissan they were redeemed and in Nissan they are destined to be redeemed again.** Thus, it behooves us to explore the deeper connection between the month of Elul and the mitzvah of teshuvah.

We will begin to shed some light on the subject by referring to the teachings of the Bnei Yissaschar (Elul 1, 8). He writes that the month of Elul aligns with the tribe of Gad. This is consistent with the assertion of the Sha’arei Orah (5) that the twelve months of the calendar year—beginning with Nissan and ending with Adar—align with the arrangement of the banners and encampments of the twelve tribes in the midbar. The first three months of the year—Nissan, Iyar, Sivan—align with the first banner representing the tribes of Yehudah, Yissaschar, and Zevulun. The next three months—Tamuz, Av, and Elul—align with the second banner representing the tribes of Reuven, Shimon, and Gad. The next three months—Nissan, Cheshvan, and Kislev—align with the third banner representing the tribes of Ephraim, Menashe, and Binyamin. The last three months—Teves, Shevat, and Adar—align with the fourth banner representing the tribes of Dan, Asher, and Naftali.

According to this scheme, the month of Elul aligns with the tribe of Gad—the third shevet on the second banner. In a similar vein, Rabbi Tzadok HaKohen, zy”a, writes in Pri Tzaddik (Rosh Chodesh Elul 3): **The holy Ari, who viewed the twelve months as corresponding to the twelve shevatim, considered the month of Elul to correspond to Shevet Gad.**

To reinforce this connection, we can suggest that this alluded to very nicely in the passuk related to the birth of Gad (Bereishis 30, 9): **”ותרא לאה כי עמדה מלדת ותקח את זלפה שפחתה ותתן: אותה ליעקב לאשה, ותלד זלפה שפחת לאה ליעקב בן, ותאמר לאה בא גד ותקרא: את שמו גד.”** **When Leah saw that she stopped giving birth, she took Zilpah her maidservant and gave her to Yaakov as a wife. Zilpah, Leah’s maidservant, bore Yaakov a son. Leah said, “Good fortune has come!” and she named him Gad.** Now, according to tradition, the word **”בְּגֵד”** is written as a single word, but it is read as two words--**”בָּא גֵד”**.

Rashi comments: **”בָּא גֵד”**—**this means that a good sign has come . . . According to an aggadic Midrash, these words**

imply that he was born circumcised . . . but I do not know why it is written as one word. Alternatively, why is it read as one word? Because it can be interpreted to mean “you betrayed me by lying with my maidservant” . . . The commentaries are baffled by this latter comment. It seems inconceivable that Leah Imeinu would have blamed Yaakov for betraying her; after all, it was her suggestion that Yaakov try to conceive a child with Zilpah. As it is written: **”She took Zilpah her maidservant and gave her to Yaakov as a wife.”**

ג”ד Is an Acronym for ג'ומל ד'לים Signifying that HKB”H Accepts the Teshuvah of a Sinner

It appears that we can provide a reasonable explanation by introducing what Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Vizhnitz, ztz”l, writes in Tzemach Tzaddik (Elul). He also points out that the month of Elul aligns with the shevet of Gad according to the order and arrangement of the banners. This is because it is the time designated for teshuvah, to make amends for all of the wrongdoings one committed during the entire past year. Despite these wrongdoings, HKB”H, in his infinite mercy and kindness, accepts a person’s teshuvah. This is alluded to by the name **ג”ד** which is an acronym for **ג'ומל ד'לים** (loosely translated: assisting or rehabilitating the lowly and downtrodden). In other words, HKB”H treats the lowly sinners with undue kindness. We acknowledge this in our Selichot prayers: **”כדלים וכרשמים דפקנו דלתיך”**—**as paupers and beggars do we knock at Your doors.**

In this light, we can comprehend the pronouncement of Leah Imeinu. She foresaw via “ruach hakodesh” that Yisrael would be provided a month of teshuvah in the merit of Shevet Gad. Hence, she hinted to this by saying **”בגד”**, which has two meanings. As it is written--**”בְּגֵד”**—it connotes betrayal, alluding to Jews, chas v’shalom, who have sinned against Hashem. As it is read--**”בָּא גֵד”**—it alludes to the arrival of the month of Elul, a month of good fortune. As explained, Elul aligns with the tribe of Gad, the month in which HKB”H is **ג'ומל ד'לים**—in which He treats penitents—those who perform sincere teshuvah—with divine mercy and leniency.

With this understanding, we can clarify Rashi’s comment very nicely: **”בָּא גֵד”**—**this means that a good sign has come.** Gad has a greater association with “mazal tov” than any of the other tribes. In his writings, the Bnei Yissaschar (Elul 1, 3)

interprets the passuk (Mishlei 18, 22): **"מצא אשה מצא טוב ויפק: "מצא אשה מצא טוב ויפק—one who has found a wife, has found goodness, and has brought forth favor from Hashem.** He writes that this passuk alludes to the month of Elul, whose zodiac sign—"mazal"—is Virgo, a woman. So, the passuk is saying that when a Jew reaches the month of Elul, represented by a virtuous woman, he can begin to discern how to behave properly and what wrongdoings require making amends via teshuvah. By doing so, he will bring **forth favor from Hashem**, Who desires the teshuvah of Yisrael in Elul.

This is implied by Rashi's comment: **"בא גד"**—when the month aligning with Gad comes, **ג'זמל ד'לים**—HKB"H accepts the lowly sinners back into good standing via teshuvah. And he adds: **"בא מזל טוב"**—in the merit of Gad, whose "mazal" is Virgo, it is like finding a virtuous woman and understanding what it means to be good.

I would also like to propose an explanation for Rashi's explanation based on the aggadic Midrash that Gad was born circumcised. The implication is that Gad was the only one of the shevatim that was born circumcised, and this is what prompted Leah to name him Gad. Let us refer to the Ba'al HaTurim (Nitzavim). He finds an allusion to the month of Elul in the following passuk (Devarim 30, 6): **"וימל ה' אלקיך את לבבך: Hashem, ואת לבב זרעך לאהבה את ה' אלקיך בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך"—Hashem, your G-d, will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, to love Hashem, your G-d, with all your heart and with all your soul.** The first letters of the words **בב אלול**--alluding to the fact that HKB"H circumcises the hearts of Yisrael during the month of Elul to rid them of the negative influence of the yetzer hara, enabling them to perform teshuvah and serve Hashem with a pure heart. Accordingly, we can posit that HKB"H arranged for Gad to be born circumcised as a symbolic gesture to the fact that in the future, HKB"H would circumcise the hearts of Yisrael in the month of Elul aligned with Shevet Gad to arouse them to perform teshuvah.

"בא גד" Alludes to the Coming of Eliyahu HaNavi from Shevet Gad

Following this line of reasoning, we will proceed to explain why HKB"H chose the month aligned with Shevet Gad specifically to be the month of teshuvah. They expound

in the Midrash (B.R. 71, 9): **בא מי שעתיד לגדד: Leah's pronouncement indicates that she foresaw the coming of Eliyahu HaNavi, ומנו אליהו".** Leah's pronouncement indicates that she foresaw the coming of Eliyahu HaNavi, who descended from Shevet Gad, and that he was destined to uproot the foundations of the idolatrous nations of the world. The Midrash proves that Eliyahu was from Shevet Gad from the passuk (Melachim I 17, 1): **"ויאמר אליהו התשבי מתושבי גלעד: "Eliyahu the Tishbite, a resident of Gilad, said . . ." We know from another passuk in the Navi (Yehoshua 13, 25) that Gilad was located in the territory of Gad.**

This is somewhat problematic, however, since other references suggest that Eliyahu HaNavi was actually a kohen. For, as we know, he was Pinchas ben Elazar whom HKB"H promised an everlasting covenant of "shalom." Let us refer to the passuk (Bamidbar 25, 11): **"פינחס בן אלעזר בן אהרן הכהן השיב את: חמתי מעל בני ישראל, בקנאו את קנאתי בתוכם ולא כליתי את בני ישראל בקנאתי, Pinchas the son of Elazar, לכן אמור הנני נותן לו את בריתי שלום." the son of Aharon HaKohen, turned back My wrath from upon Bnei Yisrael, when he zealously avenged Me among them; so, I did not consume Bnei Yisrael in My vengeance. Therefore, say: Behold! I give him My covenant of peace.** The Targum YoNasan provides the following interpretation: **"את בריתי שלום, האנא גזר ליה ית קימי שלם, ואעבדיניה מלאך קיים ויחי לעלמא, I will establish My peace covenant with him by making him a living angel (messenger) who will live for all eternity; he will be the one to announce the geulah at the end of time.**

Similarly, we learn in the Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni Pinchas): **Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish said: Pinchas is Eliyahu! HKB"H said to him: You established peace between Yisrael and Me in Olam HaZeh; so, too, le'asid la'vo you will be the one to establish peace between Me and My children. As it says (Malachi 3, 23): "Behold, I send you Eliyahu HaNavi before the coming of the great and awesome day of Hashem. And he will turn back the hearts of fathers with their sons and the hearts of sons with their fathers."** This seems to contradict the contention of the Midrash above that Eliyahu HaNavi was from Shevet Gad.

Our master, the Arizal, addresses this apparent contradiction in Sha'ar HaGilgulim (Intro. 32). In his own sacred, prophetic way, he reveals that both claims are correct, because Eliyahu HaNavi possessed two neshamos. His original

neshamah was that of Pinchas ben Elazar, who was a kohen. Subsequently, a new, additional neshamah was given to him, a neshamah stemming from Gad. Hence, he is also described as **“Eliyahu HaTishbi, a resident of Gilad.”**

Eliyahu HaNavi Offers the Daily Korban Tamid in the Beis HaMikdash Even Today

In this manner, we will establish an intriguing connection between the month of Elul and Eliyahu HaNavi, a descendant of Shevet Gad. Let us introduce a fascinating passage from the Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni Pinchas) related to the passuk (Bamidbar 25, 13): **“ויכפר על בני ישראל, וכיפר על בני ישראל לא נאמר, אלא: ”**The passuk does not state that he atoned for Bnei Yisrael in the past but implies that he continues to do so until this very day. In fact, he will continue to do so until the resurrection of the dead.

To make sense of this Midrash, we will present a fantastic chiddush from the divine kabbalist, the Rama of Pano, in Asarah Ma’amaros. He claims that even today, after the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash, Eliyahu HaNavi, who is a kohen, stands in the Beis HaMikdash and sacrifices the daily Tamid offerings as prescribed—one lamb in the morning and a second lamb in the evening. This coincides with the teaching in the Mishnah (Megillah 28a) based on the passuk (Vayikra 26, 31): **“והשימותי ”**—**“and I shall make your sanctuaries desolate,” implies that they** (sanctuaries and synagogues) **retain their kedushah even when they are desolate** (in ruins). Elsewhere, we are taught (ibid. 10a): **“אמר ”** רבי יהושע, שמעתי שמקריבין אף על פי שאין בית... מפני שקדושה ראשונה. **And Rabbi Yehoshua said: I heard** (from my teachers) **that we may offer korbanos** (at the site of the Mikdash) **even though there is no sanctuary building standing . . . because the initial kedushah** (of Yerushalayim and the Mikdash) **sanctified for its time and for all future time to come.** Hence, it stands to reason that even at the present time, in the aftermath of the churban, Eliyahu HaNavi still stands at the site of the Beis HaMikdash and offers the korban Tamids.

Regarding this phenomenon, we find an extraordinary story in the Yitav Lev (Emor). After presenting the assertion of the Asarah Ma’amaros—that even after the churban,

Eliyahu HaNavi, who is Pinchas, a descendant of Aharon HaKohen, continues to offer the daily korban Tamid—he writes the following: I heard from my teacher of blessed memory, the author of the Yismach Moshe, that once, after he finished davening Shemoneh Esreh, he decided to pray to actually witness this phenomenon described in the Asarah Ma’amaros. Immediately afterwards, he prayed for this to happen, and Hashem granted his request. He witnessed firsthand Eliyahu dressed in the priestly garments offering the korban Tamid.

Clearly, this illuminates for us the meaning of the Midrash that Pinchas, who is Eliyahu, continues to provide atonement for Yisrael even today and will continue to do so until the resurrection of the dead. It is referring to the daily korban Tamid offerings that Eliyahu sacrifices at the site of the Beis HaMikdash even after the churban. This is the atonement he continues to provide. This interpretation can be substantiated by the following Midrash Tanchuma (Pinchas 13): **“מעולם לא לן ”** אדם בירושלים ובידו עוון, כיצד, תמיד של שחר מכפר על עוונות שנעשו בלילה, **A person never stayed overnight in Yerushalayim with an outstanding transgression. How so? The morning “tamid” atoned for the transgressions committed during the night; while the evening “tamid” atoned for the transgressions committed during the day.** Evidently, sacrificing the korban Tamid provides atonement for Yisrael.

Eliyahu HaNavi Instills Thoughts of Teshuvah in Every Jew Even in Galus

Let us embellish this idea that Eliyahu continues to provide atonement for Yisrael even in galus until the resurrection of the dead. Regarding the future geulah, Malachi prophesies: **“Behold, I send you Eliyahu HaNavi before the coming of the great and awesome day of Hashem. And he will turn back the hearts of fathers with their sons and the hearts of sons with their fathers.”** Rashi comments: **He will return the hearts of the fathers to HKB”H by means of the sons. He will persuade the sons lovingly to encourage their fathers to embrace the ways of Hashem. Similarly, he will persuade the fathers to influence the sons** (to return to HKB”H). In other words, Eliyahu’s task is to ensure that all of Yisrael perform absolute

teshuvah, returning to their Father in Heaven in preparation for the complete geulah. As we learn in the Gemara (Yoma 86b): "גדולה תשובה שמביאה את הגאולה"—**the merit of teshuvah is so great that it brings about the geulah.**

We find a tremendous chiddush pertaining to this subject in the sacred teachings of the Ma'or Einayim (Pinchas). He asserts that Eliyahu HaNavi influences us to awaken and perform teshuvah while we are still in galus. Accordingly, he interprets HKB"H's declaration as follows: "הנה אנכי שולח"—He does not say "I will send them," in the future tense, but rather "I am sending them," in the present tense. This implies that HKB"H sends us Eliyahu HaNavi on a continual basis while we are yet in galus to arouse us to perform teshuvah. Hence, He emphasizes: "לפני בוא יום ה'—הגדול והנורא"—that this is occurring even prior to the geulah. Then, the Ma'or Einayim adds a wonderful insight: **In truth, the yearning of Yisrael, the worshippers of Hashem, to their Father in Heaven is exclusively due to the influence of Eliyahu, who is the herald for all things.**

We have now achieved a deeper appreciation of the Midrash: "ויכפר על בני ישראל, וכיפר על בני ישראל לא נאמר, אלא ויכפר." (The passuk does not state that he atoned for Bnei Yisrael in the past but implies that he continues to do so until this very day. In fact, he will continue to do so until the resurrection of the dead.) According to the Ma'or Einayim, HKB"H sends Eliyahu HaNavi even in galus to stimulate Yisrael to perform teshuvah. According to the Rama of Pano, Eliyahu HaNavi continues to sacrifice the daily korban Tamid. Combining these two insights, we can say that the korbanos offered by Eliyahu are Yisrael's stimulus to perform complete teshuvah.

For, as we have learned, a person never stayed overnight in Yerushalayim with an outstanding sin, since the morning and afternoon Tamids provided atonement.

We have now been enlightened and have cause to rejoice! We inquired why HKB"H specifically chose the month of Elul aligning with the tribe of Gad as the month of teshuvah. We explained that Eliyahu HaNavi is a descendant of Shevet Gad, and he is the agent HKB"H assigned to bring Yisrael back to their Father in Heaven in the future by stimulating them to perform teshuvah. According to the Ma'or Einayim, Eliyahu will not only fulfill this task in the future but does so even now in galus. Therefore, in the month of Elul, in the month that aligns with the shevet of Eliyah HaNavi, it is fitting that Eliyahu HaNavi stimulates us to perform complete teshuvah.

We now have an amazing interpretation of the pronouncement of Leah Imeinu. She foresaw via her "ruach hakodesh" that in the merit of Shevet Gad, from whom Eliyahu HaNavi would descend, Yisrael would be given the month of Elul as a month of teshuvah. She alluded to this magnificently with the word "בגוד". As it is written, it connotes betrayal, alluding to a Jew who betrays Hashem, chas v'shalom, by sinning. The way it is read, however—"בָּא גֹד"—alludes to the coming of Eliyahu HaNavi. For, they expounded on this passuk in the Midrash: **"The one has come who is destined to uproot the foundations of the idolaters—namely, Eliyahu."** She was telling us that he would arouse Yisrael in the future to perform teshuvah in the month that aligns with Gad, the month of Elul. In this manner, Yisrael would make amends for betraying Hashem by performing complete, sincere teshuvah which would hasten the arrival of the geulah—swiftly, in our times! Amen.



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