

The Weekly *Farbrengens*

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ELUL (II)

MAKING THE BEST OF THIS TIME

When the Mittlerer Rebbe was five years old, he studied under Reb Ber the *melamed*, in the home of Reb Avraham the doctor. Once he overheard Reb Avraham bemoaning, "We are already far into Elul, but I haven't yet prepared the leeches!" Leeches were used for healing purposes and were only out during the warm summer months.

When the Mittlerer Rebbe came home after *cheder*, he used to spend time in the company of the chassidim who were in the room next to the Alter Rebbe's room. One day he saw them sitting around and talking, when they suddenly began to laugh. Hearing them, the young boy reprimanded them, "We are deep into Elul, you haven't yet prepared the leeches, yet you sit here laughing?!"

And he left the room.

They immediately assumed that this was a *vort* he had heard from his father, the Alter Rebbe, and began to think deeply into its meaning. They concluded that just as leeches are used to draw out a patient's diseased or overheated blood, during the month of Elul one should do away with one's negative desires in preparation for Rosh HaShana.

When word of their discussion reached the Alter Rebbe, he said, "Such is the way of the Baal Shem Tov – to learn a lesson in *avodas HaShem* from every physical thing that one sees or hears. Whoever follows this path and uses all physical things for *avodas HaShem*, will instill in himself and in his descendants a spark of inspiration in *avodas HaShem*."

Chassidim recall: That Rosh HaShana, the floor was wet with tears from the impact of the Mittlerer Rebbe's *vort*, and on Simchas Torah, the shoes of the chassidim were worn out and torn by the exuberant dancing inspired by the Alter Rebbe's promise.

(סה"ש תרצ"ו ע' 5, תר"מ חלה"ה ע' 126)

The chossid Reb Foleh Kahn related:

Once, as I was sitting alone, I heard the Rebbe Rashab muttering to himself, "It's Elul in the world and time is just flying away." Hearing these words, a shiver went down my spine.

When I later shared this experience with my fellow chassidim, they all told me, "Don't you understand? The Rebbe was speaking to you."

(שמועות וסיפורים ח"א ע' 145)

During the month of Elul, the Rebbeim would be preoccupied with their personal *avoda*, leaving less time than usual for correspondence. Chassidim would therefore keep their correspondence to a minimum, to allow the Rebbe to prepare for Rosh HaShana.

(אוצר מנהגי חב"ד ע' יא)

CONSIDER

Why would the Rebbeim spend more time on personal *avoda* during the month of Elul? Is caring for the needs of *klal Yisroel* not enough of a holy endeavor?

What constitutes the primary *avodah* during Elul: inner *teshuvah* and *cheshbon hanefesh* or checking *mezuzos* and other *mitzvos*?

PREPARING ONESELF

The month of Elul is called the month of *teshuva*. It is a most auspicious time to make a *cheshbon* and to correct whatever needs to be corrected. For this reason, we sound the *shofar* to awaken us to do *teshuva*.

Though we are assured that during this month HaShem greets us lovingly, nevertheless it is incumbent upon us to reveal those thirteen *midos harachamim* through *davening*, learning and *teshuvah*.

(טור או"ח סי' תקפ"א, שיחור"ק תשל"ח ח"ג ע' 333)

In the year תרצ"ז (1937), at the request of the Pupa Rebbe, the Frierdiker Rebbe wrote a letter addressed to all *talmidei yeshiva*, arousing them to prepare fittingly for Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur:

"The month of Elul is a time for accounting of the past year, when one regrets whatever was negative, and commits to fulfill *mitzvos behiddur*, to be diligent in one's Torah and *davening*, and to cultivate *middos*

toivos. The Baal Shem Tov taught that the *avoda* of Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur depends on one's *avoda* during the month of Elul and the week of *Selichos*. One's emphasis should be on learning *Chassidus* and other *seforim* that will heighten his *yiras Shamayim*."

As to the *talmidim* of Tomchei Temimim, the Frierdiker Rebbe required that they increase their learning of *Chassidus* and *daven* deliberately. "What matters most is not the study, but the *cheshbon hanefesh* at night and in the morning. Every individual should arouse his friend concerning *middos toivos* and commitment to proper conduct."

(אג"ק מהר"י"צ ח"ד ע' קלא, אוצר מנהגי חב"ד ע' ג-ד)

During the month of Elul one should designate more time for *davening* than usual. The Rebbe writes that similarly in the realm of Torah learning, one should learn those areas of Torah which focus on *avodas Hashem*, and those *maamorim* of *Chassidus* which arouse one to do *teshuvah*.

(מט"א סי' תקפ"א סי"א באל"מ, אג"ק ח"ט ע' תלב)

SPECIAL PRACTICES

The chossid Reb Avrohom Pariz was in charge of the *pidyon shvuyim* fund in Lubavitch. One day in Elul, the Rebbe Rashab sent him on a mission to Vitebsk, and requested that while there he should buy a *Tehillim* for him. The Rebbe then added with a smile, "Now is the season for it."

We have a tradition from the Baal Shem Tov, who heard it from his Rebbe, Achiya HaShiloni, that each day of Elul and *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah* we should recite three *kapitlach* of *Tehillim*, concluding the *sefer* on Yom Kippur.

(שמועות וסיפורים ח"א ע' 145, היום יום א' אלול)

During this month, it is the custom of *anshei mayseh* to check their *tefillin* and *mezuzos* and any other *mitzva* that needs attention. The Rebbe urged that this directive be widely publicized.

(מט"א סי' תקפ"א, שה"ש תשמ"ח ח"ב ע' 610)

During the month of Elul and *Aseres Yemei Teshuva* we *bentch* one another with *berachos* for a *kesiva vachasima tova* and *leshana tova umesuka*. This exchange of *berachos*, which should be done both in speech and in writing, increases the *berachos* that HaShem bestows upon Yidden.

(אוצר מנהגי חב"ד ע' ט)



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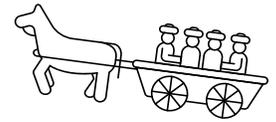
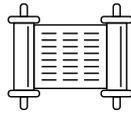
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CUTTING FRUIT TREES

The apple tree in my backyard is old and expensive to maintain. May I cut it down?

From the posuk "You shall not destroy its trees," Chazal derive a biblical prohibition against destroying a fruit tree. Not only may one not cut the tree down, it is even forbidden to cause it to die by destroying its source of water or the like. Trees that don't bear fruit do not fall under this prohibition.

If there is a legitimate purpose for cutting down the tree, it is halachically permitted, since the Torah's prohibition applies specifically to "destroying" the tree and not when it is done for a purpose. Some examples of legitimate purposes include: The tree is hurting other trees, it is damaging another field; and, according to some, if the tree attracts birds that dirty the garden below.

Cutting the tree isn't destructive when the tree is worth more in wood than in fruit, or if the tree is producing so few fruits that it isn't worth maintaining it. Many poskim hold it is likewise permitted for mitzva purposes (e.g. schach, or to make room for a shul).

To hire a gentile to cut down a fruit-bearing tree—in cases that lack legitimate purpose—is prohibited by many poskim, since he is acting on the Jew's behalf. Some argue that if the gentile is hired as a contractor (kablan), he's considered to be acting for his own benefit (pay). In practice, this is not relied upon. Still, some contemporary poskim write that in case of need, one should sell the tree to a gentile with payment of money and a contract, and then the gentile may cut down his tree.

Rabbeinu Yehuda HaChossid writes in his testament (tzavaa) that a fruit-bearing tree should not be cut down in any case, even with a legitimate purpose. While some say that the instructions contained in the tzavaa were intended only for his descendants, some poskim write that since he implies that it's dangerous, everyone must be cautious. Others hold that one needn't be concerned, and one who wishes should be stringent for himself. In practice, one can rely when needed on the suggestion of poskim that to be cautious, one should hire a gentile and let him cut it down. Of course, this is all provided that it is halachically permissible due to the circumstance.

9. שו"ת יבי"א י"ד ח"א סי' ט.
10. צוואת ר' יהודה החסיד צוואה ג.
11. ראה חיד"א שו"ת חיים שאל סי' כ"ג, וראה שו"ת חיים ביד מהרב חיים פלגי סי' כ"ד שאפילו ע"י גוי אין להתיר. וראה אג"ק חו"י ע' רסד שלאדם פורטי שאיריע לו מעשה הורה לא להקל בזה.
12. ראה שו"ת שם אריה חיד"ד סי' כ"ז, ובשו"ת מהר"ם מינץ סימון ע"ט, אג"מ יו"ד ח"ג סי' קל"ג.
13. ראה שו"ת חיים שאל סי' כ"ד, וראה שו"ת בית שלמה סי' י"ד סי' קצ"א לרווחא דמילתא, וראה שו"ת יחוד"ד ח"ה סי' מ"ו.

REB YEHUDA EBER

Reb Yuda Eber was born on Isru Chag Pesach 5661 (1901) to Reb Avrohom Yaakov, a melamed in Krasniluky. He learned in Lubavitch, Schedrin and Rostov. In Kislev 5686 (1925) he married Freida, the daughter of Reb Mendel Schneerson, a great-grandson of the Tzemach Tzedek. He taught in several branches of Tomchei Tmimim in Russia. In 5690 (1930) he managed to escape to Riga, Latvia where the Frierdiker Rebbe was then living. Shortly after, he was appointed as rosh yeshivah of Tomchei Tmimim in Warsaw (which later on moved to Otvotzk). Eventually he was also put in charge of raising funds for the central yeshivah and all its branches. He was a great gaon, and his deep shiurim were exceptionally clear; several of them were printed by his talmidim in the sefer Sharei Yehuda at the Rebbe's request. Being a talented baal menagen, he taught many nigunim to the bochurim in a very orderly fashion. Some nigunim he composed himself. He was killed by the Nazis together with his wife and two children in Kislev 5702 (1941), HY"D.

him. They didn't accept the excuse and he was arrested. His punishment was to clean the streets of the city. He would do so wearing his Shabbos clothes, demonstrating that one should be proud to be punished for teaching Torah. Although he cleaned the streets by day, he continued to give the shiur by night. A non-Jewish woman saw him sweeping and took away the broom, asserting that a rabbi should not do such a task. She did so several times until the officer watching him told him that he was thereby exempt.

(תשורה אקונוב טבת תשס"ט ע' 5)

Reb Nissan Nemenov related:

At a certain point Reb Yuda served as the mashgiach in one of the branches of Tomchei Temimim. He requested from the Frierdiker Rebbe to excuse him from this post, explaining: "If I see a learned bochur coming five minutes late, although the five minutes will not really affect his learning, I have to rebuke and sometimes penalize him. However, if I see a less learned bochur coming on time, I have to pat him on the back!"

Once in one of the branches of the underground yeshivah in Russia, two police officers walked in on Reb Yuda giving a shiur, catching him red-handed. Reb Yuda immediately stopped the shiur. The officers asked why he did not continue, to which he replied that he was not their teacher, rather he had just answered a question they asked

The Rebbe responded, "Explain to the talented bochur that by coming late he is like a person that comes to the train station with all of his baggage but misses the train. On the other hand, somebody else might not have all his belongings with him but he at least makes the train. The talented bochur will be successful in his learning, but he will not merit being on my train!"

(אוצר החסידים ברחבי תבל ע' 300)

A Moment with The Rebbe



SAVED AT THE LAST MINUTE

Shortly after Reb Zalman Kazen arrived on shlichus to Cleveland, Ohio, he turned to a local rov for direction on chalav Yisroel and pas Yisroel products. This rov told him that it is accepted to use plain pumpernickel bread and "Silts and Hilts" milk.

Mrs. Kazen, quite shaken from the open ruach hakodesh, said they were following a local rov, as the Rebbe had instructed them prior to their departure. HaRav Chodakov wasn't satisfied.

Rebbetzin Kazen arrived home with her shopping bags, and as she poured herself a cup of milk, the phone rang. It was HaRav Chodakov with an important message from the Rebbe, "Do you know what bread and milk you are bringing into the house?"

"America is not like Russia," he said. "In Russia the bread is baked like matza, with flour and water. Here they add fats, sometimes from treife animals."

The story became the talk of town, how the Rebbe had saved Mrs. Kazen at the last minute from chalav akum.

(Kotlarsky Teshurah, Cheshvan 5774)