

The Weekly Farbrenge


**MERKAZ
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 מרכז אנאש
 685 • לחמן ישמעו • ראה תשפ"ב
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ELUL (I)

A UNIQUE TIME

On Rosh Chodesh Elul, Moshe Rabbeinu ascended Har Sinai for the final forty days to receive the second set of *luchos*. At the conclusion of those days, on Yom Kippur, HaShem forgave the Yidden completely and that day was designated as a day of forgiveness. For this reason, those forty days are auspicious for *teshuvah*.

(פרקי דר"א פמ"ו, וראה דברי נחמ"י השלמה לסי' תקפ"א)

Though the month of Elul is an earnest time of *teshuvah*, it is during this very time that we experience a particular closeness to HaShem.

In a classic *maamar*, the Alter Rebbe explains this by the *marshal* of a king who, on the way to his palace, walks through the fields. There, everyone can approach him and he greets them all with a smiling countenance, until he enters his palace with only his chosen courtiers.

So, too, during the month of Elul, as HaShem prepares to enter His throne room on Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur, He passes through the mundane world. Thus, we are able to connect to Him more easily than usual. At that time in particular, He inspires us and empowers us to do *teshuvah* and return to Him.

(לקוטי תורה דברים לבא)

In Lubavitch, even though *Shabbos Mevarchim* Elul would still be a clear and sunny day, the air felt different. There was a smell of Elul in the air; you could feel the first stirrings of a *teshuvah-breeze*. Every person there was beginning to grow a little more deliberate, a little more thoughtful, and allowing his weekday affairs to fade from his memory.

From *Shabbos Nachamu* onwards, people would already begin to learn in groups after *Maariv*, in order to "cry out in the night." By the time *Shabbos Mevarchim* Elul came around one could sense the atmosphere of Elul. Anxiously, people now awaited the time when they could say "*LeDovid: HaShem ori*"; eagerly, they awaited the first blast of the *shofar* that would announce that the gates of *chodesh harachamim* had been thrown open. The *maamarei Chassidus* of *Shabbos Mevarchim* Elul, opening with the familiar words *Ani LeDodi*, were permeated with

the spirit of Elul.

Every day of Elul was quite unlike every other day of the year. Lying in bed at six o'clock in the morning, you could hear that the *vasikin-minyan* in the *beis midrash* had already finished *Shacharis*. You could already hear the *shofar*. It woke you up to the fact that the world was now filled with Elul. You dress hastily, a trifle dissatisfied with yourself for having somehow slept in so late. You recall that this was the time that Moshe Rabbeinu spent on the mountain. These are propitious days, days in which you can accomplish more than usual. You tell yourself that you really should become a *mensch*: you cannot let these hours be lost on sleep.

By the time you arrive at the *beis midrash* you find quite a crowd already there. Some are saying *Tehillim*, some are learning *Chassidus*, some are reading *Tikkunei Zohar*, while others, whether standing or sitting, are davening.

(לקו"ד ח"א ע' 230)

CONSIDER

How does the joy of HaShem's presence not detract from the seriousness of the time?

How is it possible to feel the "Elul air" today if one's surroundings may not reflect the specialty of this time?

At one *farbrenge* the Rebbe emphasized that the Frierdiker Rebbe told this narrative long after he had left Lubavitch, in order to inspire others to follow this lifestyle. Even today, every Yid is capable of feeling the "Elul air."

(התועודיות תשמ"ה ח"ה ע' 2668)

ELEVATED AVODA

The month of Elul is a month of reckoning. Just as

a businessman must take stock every so often and correct any problems to ensure the business is profitable, the same applies in *ruchniyus* matters. After having served HaShem, and been occupied with Torah and *mitzvos* throughout the year, we have a month to make an accurate account of the past year, fix that which needs correcting and strengthen our positive traits. Through this excellent preparation, we merit a good and sweet year, *b'gashmiyus* and *b'ruchniyus*.

(היום יום כ"ז מנחם אב)

In the year תשי"ג (1953), the Rebbe gave instructions to the administration of the Yeshiva on how to inspire the *talmidim* with *yiras Shamayim* during the month of Elul: Firstly, they were to impress upon them the seriousness of the month by relating how *chassidim* in Lubavitch conducted themselves throughout Elul. Secondly, for fifteen minutes after *Maariv*, the *talmidim* were to learn *avodah'dike maamorim* relevant to this time of year.

(מיומנו של הר"ד משה לברטוב, וראה סה"מ תש"א ע' 207)

The month of Elul is compared to an *ir miklat*, to which one can escape from the *yetzer hara* who attempts to take revenge on a person.

At a *farbrenge* in תשי"א (1951), the Rebbe delivered the following message which he asked to be publicized in all possible ways:

"HaShem tells the Yidden: 'I am giving you 30 days during which you can escape your old negative habits and follow the Elul lifestyle, thereby correcting the past, and you will be spared from the *kitrugim* of the *yetzer hara*. Through *teshuvah* you will be written and sealed for a good sweet year.'

(לקו"ת להאריז"ל פ' משפטים, לקו"ש ח"ב ע' 623)

During one *farbrenge*, the Rebbe spoke of the joyful attitude to be had during Elul. Though one should be bothered by any wrongdoings they may have done throughout the year, yet thinking of their closeness to HaShem during this month should bring one to tremendous joy. As discussed in *Tanya*, distress over ones wrongdoings should not detract from the joy of the *neschama*.

(שיח"ק תשל"ד ח"ב ע' 467)

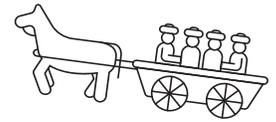
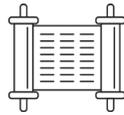

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WASHING HANDS IN A RESTROOM

May one wash after using the restroom in the restroom itself?

Shulchan Aruch rules that "one who leaves the restroom" is obligated to wash their hands. Poskim explain that this applies even if one merely entered restroom without using it, due to the ruach raah (impure spirit) that rests there.

Halacha discusses "Persian bathrooms" that were designed for the excrement and urine to immediately roll into a cavity at a distance to avoid a foul odor. Halacha rules that as long as there is no foul odor present, Shema may even be recited in the room.

Based on this, some contemporary poskim posit that clean modern-day restrooms have a similar status. Yet often there is some dirt that remains in the toilet and there is a residual foul odor. In times of need, one may wash inside but recite the bracha outside.

If the bathroom has other uses — e.g. shower, laundry, storage closet — some poskim say that it may not have a ruach raah and are lenient not to require hand washing for merely entering.

What about to take water from the bathroom sink and use it to wash outside?

Some poskim permit using such water if needed to wash outside after using restroom, and even to wash for bread. They hold that the impure spirit of a bathroom is less intense and doesn't prevent one from reciting Hashem's name in brachos. It also doesn't transmit impurity to the food that one touches (like the impurity that rests upon one's hands after sleeping).

In his home, the Rebbe was particular not to wash or even take water from the bathroom for negel vasser, unless the sink was separated by a curtain or a doorway.

- 1. שו"ע אורח סי' ד' סי"ח. שו"ע ר' שם סי"ח. וראה מ"ב שם סק"מ.
2. ברכות כ"ו ע"א. וראה שו"ע ר' סי' פ"ג סי"ד.
3. ראה חזו"א אורח סי' י"ז סק"ד וסק"א (סיים נכון להחמיר). וראה שו"ת מנח"י ח"א סי' ס' וח"ד סי' ס"ו.
4. ראה בי"ע אומר ח"ג סי' א'.
5. ס' הליכת שלמה פ"כ אות כ"ד, פסק"ת סי' ד' אות י"ט.
6. שו"ת חלק לוי אורח סי' ג'. וראה גם שו"ת ויען יוסף אורח סי' ב'.
7. בס' בחודש חזיתך ע' 24. ושם שבח"דר רבינו יהודה וילון תלוייה בתוך חדר הכבוד.

לע"נ מרת ציפא אסתר בת ר' שלום דובער ע"ה

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R. MENDEL LEIB ABRAMSON

Originally a chossid of the Magen Avos of Kopust, after his passing R. Mendel Leib Abramson became a chossid of the Rebbe Rashab and Friediker Rebbe. He was deeply involved in the mesiras nefesh work in Soviet Russia directed by the Friediker Rebbe, and was killed by the communists al kidush Hashem in 5697.

As a youth, R. Mendel Leib was a genius, and coupled with exceptional hasmada, he reached great heights. Local maskilim would taunt him for his "wasted talents" spent in Torah. His parents were concerned that he would be ensnared, so they sent him off to be a yoishev in Kopust.

In addition to his own learning, R. Mendel Leib would deliver a daily Gemara Shiur, over the course of which he completed Shas several times. His knowledge of Chassidus was also exceptional, and he could repeat the Likutei Torah word for word.

R. Zalman Leib Astulin recalled a Purim spent in the company of R. Mendel Leib:

When I entered, he invited me to say l'chaim with him, quoting Shulchan Aruch that the drinking on Purim need not take place during the meal. After drinking several cups, he wished to start the meal early, since the Rema writes that most of the Purim meal should take place during the daytime.

On his way to the sink, he remembered what the Rema writes to learn a bit before the meal. He immediately pulled out a Bava Basra from the shelf and spent some time analyzing a sugya and even shared an original comment on a Rashbam. He then closed the sefer and proceeded to wash.

We then sat down for the seuda, and R. Mendel said many more l'chaims, though he maintained fully lucid. Whenever he drank, words of Torah and chassidische stories flowed from him, and he never lost his composure.

(גאון וחסיד ע' 41 ואילך)

During the time when the Friediker Rebbe was in Moscow, R. Mendel Leib's financial situation was so poor that he could not afford the few kopecks for the trolley to visit the Rebbe. Instead, he would make the long trek by foot.

Arriving at yechidus, he presented the Rebbe with a 3-page pan. After the Rebbe answered all the questions, R. Mendel Leib began to exit, but the Rebbe called him back, "This is all about ruchniyus; what about gashmiyus?"

"I don't care about gashmiyus," he said. The Rebbe smiled and said to him, "You don't care, but it's very important to me." After that, his situation improved somewhat.

(גאון וחסיד ע' 224)

A Moment with The Rebbe



LEARN FROM SUCCESS

When someone wrote to the Rebbe that he was involved in publishing a sefer on tznius, the Rebbe wrote "certainly with the appropriate zerizus."

The Rebbe once told Reb Uriel Tzimmer in a yechidus (in 5716 or 5717 – 1956/1957) regarding the tznius in Kfar Chabad:

"You could be confident that with time it will improve. One just needs patience with people who grew up in Russia, who because of the conditions there, didn't see it in their youth."

In another instance the Rebbe expressed regarding a tznius issue: "Haklipa dimedinaseinu milefanim – the kelipa of our previous country [Russia]."

A chossid once asked the Rebbe from what age one should begin educating a girl in tznius matters.

The Rebbe responded, "Take advice from so-and-so," saying the name of a certain chossid. "He has been successful with his daughters' chinuch."

(Hiskashrus Issue 1169; Madrich Le'imahot U'Banot p. 86)