Foundations of Truth

On

Chodesh Elul

Torah Thoughts From

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Torah nuggets harvested from Rav Weinberg's thought-provoking classes given at Yeshivas Ner Yisroel and Aish HaTorah, Jerusalem, that uniquely reveal essential foundations of Torah and Jewish thought. While these essays include some edits for readability, they largely preserve the Rosh HaYeshiva's unique style and original messages.

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Ani L'Dodi V'Dodi Li:
Building A Meaningful Relationship With Hashem
Rav Yaakov Weinberg zt"l (Elul 1987)

Days of Awe

When we face the fact that *Elul* is upon us, the first consideration is of course, the fact that we'll be facing a *Din*, a judgment, very shortly. This must inevitably have an effect on anybody who is at all awake and aware in life - the awareness that we're going to be subject to a *Din*. Where Hashem, the Source of all truth, will see all of our actions as they really are, in their actuality. Having an awareness that our actions might not have been as well as we might have liked them to be. It's impossible not to feel to a greater or lesser degree, but to some extent, a sense of trepidation. A *pachad* – a sense of fear and awe.

And if we don't feel it in our emotions, in our *hergeshim*, but at least we're aware of it intellectually, with our mind. At least we know that this is something we should be very much afraid of. So inevitably, of course, we're going to spend time doing teshuva. And it doesn't only have to be in *Chodesh Elul*. If we're wise, who isn't going to recognize it back in *Av* and maybe even in *Tamuz* - and as the time gets closer and closer, the fear will get deeper and deeper. The desire to repair ourselves will grow stronger and stronger - of course we're going to be involved in *Teshuva*. Not because the *zman* is a time that is specially infused with a *segula* for *Teshuva*, but because the very event that we're going to face, demands and requires that we have enough sense to try and work on ourselves to the absolute best of our abilities.

An Awareness - Being Judged

Obviously, any thinking person is going to work to do as much *Teshuva* as he can possibly bring himself to do. The very awareness of what's in store, that in a very short time, we're going to stand in front of the King of Kings, *kaviyochol*, to be judged - has to bring about a sense of *Koved Rosh*, a weightiness. It has to bring about a sense of tremendous tension, of tremendous seriousness. **One who's going to stand trial in front of a human judge for his very life, is obviously not going to come with a *leitzunus* and a levity; there's going to be a very strong sense of *Koved Rosh*.** He's facing very grave possibilities, and they must stir in in him an awareness that his actions can't be the same as they are the rest of the year.

As we get closer and closer to the *Yom HaDin*, the awareness gets heavier and heavier; that we must act more appropriately, for someone who's about to come for a judgement. This mindset is not a part of what Hashem established in the essence of what the month of *Elul* is, but these are the inevitable results of the fact that we're aware that we're going to stand in front of the *Shofet Elyon* for judgment shortly. **This knowledge has to have an effect on us if we have any sense of reality**. It has to have an effect on what we do, how we think, and how we act. We've got to be different.

We've got to be worried. We've got to be sensitive to what we do and the way we hold ourselves. The way we talk and relate to others has to show the awareness, that we know that we're about to be stand in *Din*. **It would be the height of irresponsibility, *hefkerus*, to go about our daily lives as though nothing is about to take place!**

The Essence of Elul

But this isn't *Chodesh Elul* and it's particular *kochos hanefesh*, it's spiritual potential that the *Ribono Shel Olam* gave it. This is the rational fact that we're approaching closer and closer to the moment

when we'll stand in judgement. And because of this fact, we're going to do *Teshuva*, we're going to act with seriousness, we're going to treat our daily life very differently than when the *Yom HaDin* is further away.

However, the month of *Elul* is itself a *mesugal*, it does have its own intrinsic capabilities and potentials. We have to find out what is the particular *segula* that it possesses and what this tells us about how to deal with the *Yom HaDin*. Because, that which the *hashagcha* put into the *zman* of *Elul* will certainly relate to us how we ought to properly prepare for standing in *Din*. So, although personally we'll work to merit a favorable judgement, this is not the underlying special *koach hanefesh* that the entire month of *Elul* is preparing us for. **What then is it, that *Elul* gives us and how does it explain how we are to use the *Days of Judgment*?**

Our Beloved

As we know, Elul stands for *Ani L'Dodi V'Dodi Li - I am to my Beloved and my Beloved is to me (Shir HaShirim 6:3)*. That means, that the specific *segula*, the specific characteristic which the month of *Elul* engenders, is the awareness and establishing the relationship between us and Hashem *k'viyochol*, in its most intimate and closest way. The relationship of *Dod*, of loving and caring - *Ani L'Dodi V'Dodi Li*.

We're devoted, committed, and tied, each to the other. As a result, this tells us that during the month of *Elul*, we work on absorbing and feeling this *shaychus*, this relationship between us and our Creator. It tells us that the Days of Judgement require that we have this closeness and feeling of commitment; this *Dod* relationship with the *Ribono Shel Olam*. **But how does this mindset of love, *Ani L'Dodi V'Dodi Li*, make us aware of what we're supposed to get from the *Yemei HaDin* and how we're supposed to act in this period? How does it prepare us for *Din*?**

An Expression of His Love

One thing that it must do without a doubt: If Elul is supposed to sharpen the feeling of our love for the *Ribono Shel Olam* and His love for us, then necessarily we have to understand that *Din* is the expression of His *Ahava, His* love for us! **That we are to see *Din*, not as punishment or reward, but as the source and climax of our entire relationship with the *Ribono Shel Olam*.**

If in order to enter into *Din*, we must come through the closeness, from the affection and commitment that's involved in *Ani L'Dodi V'Dodi Li*, what does it tell us? **The month of *Elul* is a time which the *Ribono Shel Olam* gave us to be *makir* and *margish*, to understand and feel, this closeness - this relationship between us and Him and Him and us.** That the "us" is Klal Yisroel and the "Him" is not just the Creator of all of existence, but also specifically the G-d of Klal Yisroel, our *Dod* and lover, to us and to us alone.

This is what we can gain through *Chodesh Elul*. The special potential to be *margish*, to feel and respond to this reality, that He is *Kulo* Ahava, pure love to us. Therefore, when He sits in *Din*, it isn't a stern judge who's there to punish. Rather He's an *Ohev*, the *Dod*, our Lover who, because of His love and connection with us, He judges us. He doesn't judge us to make us pay! He judges us because He's our Beloved, and intimately bound to us.

Transforming Our Judgment

As a result, the whole understanding of *Din* has transformed - it's a different concept altogether. The *geder* of *yirah*, the fear that the judgement engenders is also transformed.

We start off with a *pachad* that we'll die. That fear has to motivate us and make us recognize that we've got to be *zocheh*, that we have to do *Teshuva* and brings about a seriousness and a *koved rosh*. **But that *pachad* of *Rosh Chodesh Elul* has to become: not what will happen to us, but how will we relate to Him.** Will we get close to Him, or *chas v'shalom,* will we be far from Him.

The *yirah* is not just a fear of will we die, the *yirah* is a fear that we won't have achieved a *d'vekus b'Hashem*, a striving to achieve perfection, which is what He ultimately wants for us. The fear of the *Yamim Noraim* transforms from a *Yiras Ha'Onesh*, will we be punished, to a *Yiras HaRomimus*. This period of time is specifically the *zman* to be *koneh*, to acquire, the *midah* of *Yirah*.

<u>Reward and Punishment</u>

Our fear is not simply: will we have *parnasa* this year or won't we have *parnasa* this year. Rather, will we be in a situation where we'll be able to grow and achieve perfection or *chas v'shalom* will the growth be more difficult to achieve. **Remember, these judgments of *Olam HaZeh*, in this world, are not judgments of *schar v'onesh*, reward and punishment.** Whether we'll have *parnasa* or won't have *parnasa,* whether we'll be healthy or *chas v'shalom* we won't be healthy. These are not are not rewards or punishments, as *Chazal* tell us "*schar bhai alma leika"* - "there's no reward in this world". When the *Ribono Shel Olam* tells us in the *Torah* that if we do His *mitzvos* we'll have *parnasa*, that our property will be protected, and our family will be well, it's clear that this is not *schar,* a reward. The *Rishonim* explain instead that it means that He'll send us a world with less and less distractions so that we'll be able to dedicate ourselves more and more to doing mitzvos and achieving a closeness and *d'vekus* in Him. To growing and achieving *shleimus* which will allow us to know him more and more.

This is what the judgement of the *Yamim Noraim* is all about, not about *schar v'onesh*. **It's in terms of whether we'll have a situation which will make it more likely for more growth and closeness to Him** or, heaven forbid, *Rachmana L'tzlan*, we'll have a *Din* which will make it more difficult to achieve the *shleimus*, learning Torah, and doing mitzvos which is what life is all about.

So, the fear in judgment is not a *pachad* of will we, *chas v'shalom* break a leg. Rather it's a *pachad* of will we be distracted by a world of *Tumah* or will we be able to remove ourselves from that world and deepen ourselves in the *koslei beis hamedrash* so that our minds will be relieved from that which would take us away from the *Ribono Shel Olam.* Will we be open to the *Kedusha* and holiness which will bring us closer to *Hashem*. This is the *Din* that we have to be even more frightened of.

<u>An Opportunity To Connect</u>

If we understand that the judgment is not a *Din* to punish us for our transgressions, but that the *Din* is an opportunity to have a connection with the King of Kings and that he's sitting in *Din* because of His Ahava, His absolute love for us. That this *Din* is a direct outcome of the fact that He is our Dod - it's the expression of His love for us!

When we stand in judgement, it's not just the fear of what will happen to us physically, but that there's a feeling and a concern that this *Din* will establish our *asidus*. Not just this year, but our entire future, because it will open up tremendous opportunities for growth and *shleimus* or *Rachmana L'tzlan* closes up these opportunities. **It's not a question of this year's parnasa, it's a question of will we be able to grow higher and higher in the years to come. It affects everything of our existence forever!**

But it's also a *zman* of *chibur*. The very fact that we're standing in judgment, connects and ties us to the Master of the World with a love that grows deeper and deeper. The fear becomes a *yirah* that's a *shaychus*, that connects us with the *Ribono Shel Olam*. **It's a *yirah* that is a *hisbatlus* to him, where we**

feel our utter closeness and dependence on him. Where we truly feel, and accept the truth that He is the source of our existence and what our purpose is all about. This connection is the reality of a human existence, the existence of a Jew. It's what we derive from the *Yimei HaDin* and what we see from *Chodesh Elul*.

An Awareness of His Love

B'Chasdei Hashem, ***Elul* is a time to achieve an understanding and a connection with Him. To achieve this feeling of closeness, of being *margish*, as a fact, in reality His love for us.** So that when we come to the *Yom HaDin*, we're not thinking "Alright what can I do, I resent that I have to stand in front of the Judge, but what should I do, he's stronger than me".

We can come with the feeling of an unbelievable *hakaras hatov*, an incredible gratitude to this *Melech Malchei HaMelachim*, the King of Kings. Whose love for us is so deep and so far-reaching that *kaviyochol* He sits on His throne of judgment to bother with the creatures who have no reality compared to Him! What are we that He should care what we did and how we did? What are we that it matters to Him that we sat and learned or we didn't sit and learn – what do we have to give Him? Why is He bothering with what these simple flesh a bloods did or didn't do - what difference does it make?!

The only difference is His *ahava* – that He cares. It's that he's a *Dod* and because he's our *Beloved* He's bothering. Because of His *ahava* He's sitting in *Din*. **The judgment is the ultimate *chessesd*, the deepest of any kindness,** more than His creation of us or His maintaining of us. That He's giving us His attention and caring. **That he's telling us that we matter to Him and that what we do is important *kaviyochol* to Him. That's what sitting in *Din* says to us.**

Maximizing These Days

Therefore, to use the *Yemei HaDin* is to understand what it is that we really want to attain from that *Din*, not just that we want a prosperous and healthy year. We want a prosperous year so that we should be able to learn His *Torah* and do His *mitzvos* with less distractions. We want a healthy year so that we can fulfill His will with less *tirdos*. We want to merit a favorable judgment to be *zocheh* to a year of perfecting ourselves, of growth and becoming greater. **A year of understanding Him more deeply and more fully.**

This is the *Din* that we want, and this *Din* is more awesome and frightening than the *Din* of will we have a healthy leg or will it be *chas v'shalom* another way; it pales and loses all significance against the real understanding of *Yom HaDin*. Of course we want a *Shana Tova U'mesuka*, that we want a sweet year with good health. **We want *parnasa b'revach*, great sustenance, but not for its own sake.** Is this what we're going to use the *Aseres Yemei Teshuva* for? So that we can be healthy and wealthy?!

We do want it but only because these are means through which we can achieve a true existence. A *Din* of growth and attaining a complete connection with Him. The *Din* in which the *Darchei HaBechira* open up for us to the greatest possible extent. *Ani L'Dodi V'Dodi Li* changes our focus for Rosh Hashana. It intensifies and gives us a different recognition of what the *Din* is and what *Yirah* is all about. In our understanding of what *Chayim* and what *Schar v'Onesh* is all about. Through this, we can come into the *Yimei HaDin* with a focus. With an understanding of how to use it and how to grow through it. Not just getting through it so that the judgment will come out favorably! **Rather to enter with an awareness of Hashem's love for us and that a favorable *Din* will open doors for us.** That the whole year will be opened up to be used, to be used for *shleimus*, *avodah*, and growth. Growing in *Torah*, *Yiras Shamayim*, and making use of the opportunities that will help us achieve the very purpose of our existence.