

SEASONS OF THE MOON

The Month of Elul

Elul / 5756 August 16 - September 13, 1996

THIS MONTH'S SIGN VIRGO / MAIDEN

The month of Elul is the time of return. A time where we try to sensitize ourselves to our mistakes and work on rectifying them. Elul is a time of preparation. Preparing for the day on which the whole world is to be judged — Rosh Hashana.

A person cannot return to the path from which he has strayed, unless he is prepared to search. That search has to start with an analysis of his own actions. This 'soul searching' is reflected in the name of the month itself, for **Elul** means 'searching' in Aramaic.

The sign of the month of Elul is the maiden, which symbolizes modesty and purity, essential traits for a true return. The faculties of understanding and insight which have an astrological connection to Elul are, according to mysticism, feminine attributes.

A person born under the influence of the sign of Virgo (*Betula* in Hebrew) has a natural inclination to analyze in great detail, and a propensity to be a perfectionist. When used positively, these attributes are essential tools in returning to the spiritual path. For we must analyze in great detail where we have gone wrong if we are to have any chance of perfecting ourselves.

Similarly, without the aspiration to perfect ourselves, we will never be motivated to change even the smallest fault that we possess.

A LITTLE YOM KIPPUR

Yom Kippur is a day when our sins are forgiven. However, there are other days in the year which also contain a reflection of this power of cleansing and forgiveness.

Question: Which are these days? Answer: The days of Rosh Chodesh — the beginning of each month. As we say in our prayers "You have given *Roshei Chodashim* to Your people, a time of atonement throughout all their generations."

Although on Rosh Chodesh the sins of the preceding month are forgiven, we don't expect forgiveness

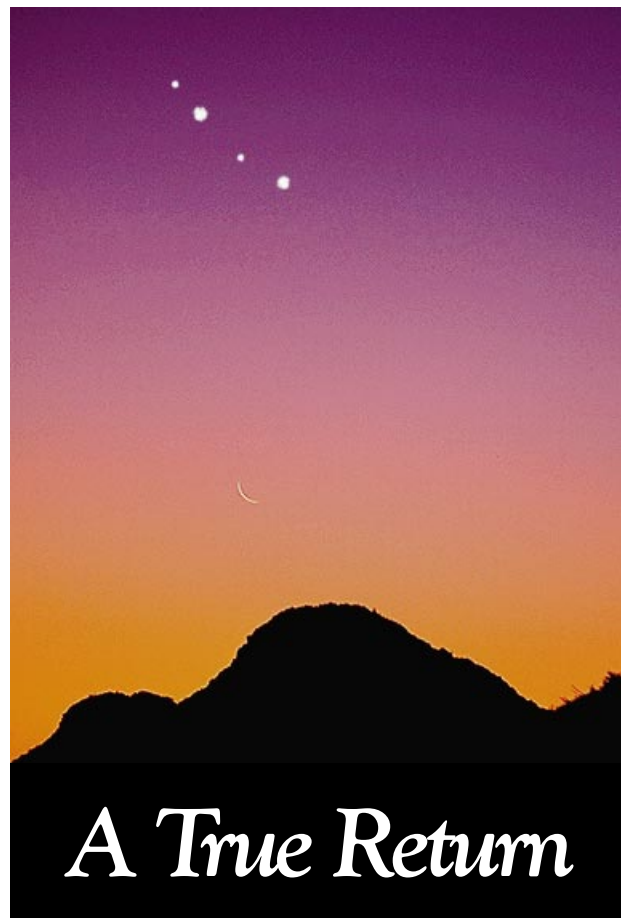
unless we forsake our ways and return to Hashem. Thus, some people fast as an act of self-examination and remorse.

However, fasting is prohibited on Rosh Chodesh, and so the fast is observed on the preceding day. And thus its name — *Yom Kippur Katan* — a Little Yom Kippur.

Yom Kippur Katan also resembles Yom Kippur in the recital of special penitential prayers and *vidui* (confession).

And if there is a *minyán* of people fasting in the synagogue,

Continued over



A True Return

“I’M SORRY I DIDN’T RECOGNIZE YOU!”

A STORY FOR ELUL

There once was a Hollywood star who had fallen on hard times and hadn’t played in a leading movie for many years. He was riding in the back seat of a cab down Sunset Boulevard when the cabby started to eye him in the rear-view mirror.

Finally the cabby couldn’t contain his curiosity any longer. He looked at the ex-star in the mirror and said to him “*Didn’t you used to be whatsisname?*”

There is a story about the great Sage, Rav Saadia Gaon, who lived some 1100 ago. Once, his students came to see him at night unexpectedly. They found their rebbe rolling in the snow! Dumbfounded and trembling, they asked “Rebbe, can it be that *you*, Heaven forbid, are in need of such suffering and affliction as this?”

Rav Saadia replied “I have done no sin that requires such stringent measures, but I learned something from someone with whom I lodged and I am following his example.”

The students were puzzled and silent as Rav Saadia continued: “Recently I stayed at the house of someone in a town far from here. The owner did not recognize me, but he paid me every customary

courtesy and honor. Somewhat later, the word got around that I was in town and everyone came to greet me and give me honor. When my host realized who I was he also started to accord me great honor, to the utmost of his ability.

A few days later, just as I was leaving, my host fell to the ground in front of me. In floods of tears, he begged my forgiveness. I asked him why he needed forgiveness from me, since he had treated me with the greatest honor and respect.

‘When you first arrived’ he said ‘I didn’t realize who you were. I failed to treat the master with the honor that is becoming to him. Please forgive me!’

If this man wept at my feet until I forgave him and lifted him up — and I am no more that flesh and blood — how much more so should I humble and afflict myself before the King of Kings, the Holy One, Blessed be He! For each day I recognize and worship and fear and love Him more and more. And so with each passing day I realize how totally inadequate has been my behavior toward Him in days gone by!”

SOUL MUSIC

*Beneath the articulate
There is a sound
of the heart crying
Like a baby
The primal wailing of the soul
longing for its home.
When all the words have failed us
When there is nothing left to say
Will You listen to the message of
our hearts?
sounding
sounding —
Tekiah Teruah Shevarim...*

A LITTLE YOM KIPPUR...

the special Torah reading and the Haftarah for public fast days are also recited.

Although it is only rare individuals who fast, the whole of Israel receives the merit of their fasting. For, since the fast is not obligatory, those who do fast, fast on behalf of all the Jewish People.

Perhaps this is the reason we say in our prayers of blessing for the month “All of Israel are friends.” When a person accepts upon himself to do something he is not obliged to do, he does it in the merit of all the Jewish People — “All of Israel are friends.”

SOURCES: THIS MONTH’S SIGN - Rabbi M. Glazerson;
A LITTLE YOM KIPPUR, I’M SORRY I DIDN’T RECOGNIZE YOU - Rabbi Eliyahu Kitov in *The Book of Our Heritage* Translated by Rabbi Nachman Bulman

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