

SEASONS OF THE MOON

The Month of Elul

Elul 5758 / Aug. 23, 1998 - Sept. 20, 1998

The month of Elul is the time of return. A time when we try to sensitize ourselves to our mistakes and rectify 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 is an Aramaic term suggesting “searching.”

The sign of the month of Elul is The Maiden, symbolizing

THIS MONTH'S SIGN VIRGO / THE MAIDEN

modesty and purity, essential traits in a true return. The faculties of understanding and insight which are astrologically connected to Elul are feminine attributes. A person born under the influence of the sign *Betula* (The

Maiden) 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 find the motivation to change even our smallest fault.

I always thought that New Year's Eve was the loneliest night of the year. I could never work out why every New Year's Eve I used to feel so empty. Everyone jumping up and down imbibing vast amounts of alcohol in a frenzy of spontaneous merriment.

Jumping into fountains. Painted faces contorted in expressions of forced hysterical laughter. At twelve o'clock everyone joining hands and slurring their way through a Highland ballad with obscure lyrics. And then, the morning after.... Waking up feeling that your brow was overhanging your eyes by about two feet, and that shaking your head would cause severe brain damage. New Year's was always a bit of a mystery to me.

There was a great Jew who passed away from this world not so many years ago. In the month of Elul, before Rosh Hashana, his entire demeanor would change. He would sit at his meals surrounded by his *talmidim* in complete silence, preoccupied. Rosh

Hashana was coming. How could one speak when the books of Life and Death were about to be opened. On his

face was a palpable fear. The cosmic books of reckoning were being taken down off the shelves; they were being dusted off. In

just a few short weeks, the books would lie open and the future of the world would be in the balance.

How could one make light at such a time as this?

We live in a world where everything has to be “light.” The word “heavy” has become almost exclusively pejorative. And “light” (or as it is now spelled “lite”) is a synonym for all that is socially acceptable. “Light” is the buzzword that sells drinks and foods. “Light” is what people want from their bathroom scales. “Light” is what people want in relationships. We are so concerned with being “light” that we are in danger of taking off and floating away. Given this cultural focus, is it any wonder we have such difficulties relating to the

JOURNEY INTO LIGHT



LITE VERSUS LIGHT *continued*

preparation for the “heaviest” day in the year?

So how can we relate to Rosh Hashana and the time of preparation for it?

Leaving Home

There is nothing in this world from which we cannot learn something. Every experience, every feeling is an echo of a higher reality. Imagine that after living somewhere for many years, you have to go away. The day before you leave, you walk around looking at your surroundings differently. You think “This time tomorrow, I’ll be on the other side of the world. And all of this will still be going on.” Even though you’re still looking at familiar faces and places, you have the uncanny feeling you’ve already left. Everything seems distant and remote. The here-and-now becomes “there-and-then.”

When we enter this “24-hours before departure zone” we look at familiar sights through the eyes of a stranger. For the first time in maybe many years we see our surroundings and our lives objectively. Leaving home clears our eyes. We see where we are. We see where we have come from.

In a sense, *Elul is like a last day before a long journey.* On Rosh Hashana, G-d decides what will happen in the life of everyone in the world. Who knows what the new year may

bring? Some will wander; some will be at rest; some will find their lives in turmoil; some will find tranquillity; some will live; some will die.

Maybe that feeling of objectivity that we experience when just about to leave home is a metaphor for the month of Elul. In Elul, G-d allows us to come very close to Him. He gives us the chance to see ourselves and our lives with a sense of detachment.

Like the last day before a long journey, Elul is a time to reflect on our lives. Everyone must make this journey. Time is a compulsory ticket to the future. No-one is allowed to stay where he is. But in these precious moments before G-d writes the itinerary of another year, we have the chance to influence our ultimate destination. Every morning the shofar is sounded in the houses of prayer like a ship’s siren calling us, warning us that the boat is about to sail: “All aboard! You cannot stay where you are. All aboard for the New Year!”

To where will this year take us?

Grab that feeling that is the gift of Elul. Look at your life and realize that you can change it. Elul empowers us to return to the Source, to return to Reality. Elul empowers us to rid ourselves of the superficialities of the world and to connect once again to our real Jewish selves.

REFLECTIONS

He caught himself red-handed

In the mirror.

With an empty bottle in one hand

And an empty heart in the other.

He had gazed too much, too long, too far

And was lost in an endless feedback

Of reflections, howling round.

On a shore in distant world

Where all the broken images

Finally are washed up,

With loving hands,

she is silently

mending mirrors

and turning them into glass.

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