

R' Moshe Yehoshua Hager z"l (1916-2012; Vizhnitzer Rebbe) writes regarding the upcoming month of *Elul*: It is well-known that R' Shalom of Belz z"l (1771-1855; R' Shalom Rokeach, first *Belzer Rebbe*) interprets "*Elul*" as being related to the Aramaic root "*Aleph-lamed-lamed*," which means "to reconnoiter" (see *Onkelos to Bemidbar* 13:2). That is the foundation of the coming month, leading-up to the upcoming Days of Awe. One must "reconnoiter" the recesses of his soul. "The heart knows its own bitterness," in the words of *Mishlei* (14:10). [In other words, every person can discover what he or she needs to correct, and he or she is better-suited than anyone else to do so.]

The *Vizhnitzer Rebbe* continues: The accounting that a person must do relates to more than the sins he committed. One also should examine whether his enjoyment of worldly matters is being done to fulfill his pleasures, or for the sake of Heaven. The *Mitzvah* of *Shofar*, which awakens us, calls upon us to analyze whether we sleep for the sake of Heaven. And, the *Mitzvah* to refrain from eating and drinking on *Yom Kippur* calls upon us to analyze whether we eat and drink for the sake of Heaven. However, *Elul* is the time to prepare for those accountings.

He adds: We read in our *Parashah* (12:8), "You shall not do everything that we do here today, every man what is proper in his eyes." The *Gematria* of the Hebrew words for "You shall not do" equals the *Gematria* of "*Sha'ah Talmud*" / "an hour of Torah study" (adding 2 to the latter, for the number of words). The *Gematria* of the Hebrew word for "everything" equals the *Gematria* of "*Chessed*" / acts of kindness (adding 3 to the former, for the number of letters, and 1 to the latter, representing the 1 word). "Today," says the *Zohar*, refers to *Rosh Hashanah*. The preparations for that big day, our verse teaches, are Torah study and acts of kindness. (*Yeshuot Moshe*)

Teshuvah

Rabbeinu Yonah Gerondiz"l (1210-1263; Spain) writes: Know and understand, for this is a great principle--It is true that the righteous sometimes sin, as it is written (*Kohelet* 7:20), "For there is no person on earth so wholly righteous that he [always] does good and never sins." However, the righteous subdue their *Yetzer Ha'ra* / evil inclination a hundred times, and if they succumb to sin once, they do not repeat that sin because they become despicable in their own eyes and repent. But if one does not take care to avoid a known sin and does not take it upon himself to protect himself from it, then, although it may be one of the lesser transgressions, and although he may take care to avoid all other transgressions of the Torah, the Sages refer to him (*Chullin* 4b) as an "apostate in respect to one thing." It is as if a servant would say, "Master, I will do all that you tell me except one thing." Concerning this it is said (*Devarim* 27:26), "Cursed is he who does not to uphold the words of the Torah to do them," *i.e.*, he does not take upon himself the fulfillment of all the words of the Torah from beginning to end.

Rabbeinu Yonah continues: Know also, that if one repeats a sin ten times, though he is careful in relation to all other transgressions, he is regarded as having committed distinct transgressions. If it is a sin that carries the punishment of lashes, he would receive lashes for each instance of the sin as if he had eaten multiple types of non-kosher things. We see in our generation, Rabbeinu Yonah writes, that there are those who are not careful with a particular transgression because it has become permissible to them--for example, taking oaths in vain, cursing one's neighbor or oneself with the Name of G-d, taking G-d's Name in vain, saying G-d's Name in an unclean place or when one's hands are unclean, ignoring the poor, *Lashon Ha'ra*, baseless hatred, haughtiness, gazing at improper sights, and, above all, neglect of Torah study. (*Sha'arei Teshuvah* 1:6-8)

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Moshe Yosef ben Meir Hakohen a"h (26 Av)

“However, there shall be no destitute among you; rather Hashem, will surely bless you in the Land that Hashem, your Elokim, will give you as an inheritance, to possess it.” (15:4)

The *Gemara* (*Shabbat* 104a) relates that some small children came to the *Yeshiva* and expounded on the significance of the letters of the *Aleph-Bet* in a way that “even in the days of Yehoshua bin Nun--*i.e.*, the successor to Moshe Rabbeinu--such things were not said.” [Until here from the *Gemara*]

Why is Yehoshua singled out in this *Gemara*? R’ Meir Margulies *z”l* (1707-1790; rabbi of Ostrog, Ukraine; one of the earliest disciples of the *Ba’al Shem Tov*) explains: One of the expositions that these children made was that the letters *Gimel* and *Dalet* (ד ג) together represent a “*Gomel Dalim*” / “one who gives to the poor.” (Not only do these two words begin with the letters *Gimel* and *Dalet*, respectively, they are phonetically similar to the names of those letters.) The children said, “Why does the letter *Gimel* (ג) look like a person running after the *Dalet*? Because the *Gomel* / giver should run after the *Dal* / pauper. Why does the letter *Dalet* (ד) have its back turned toward the letter *Gimel*? Because the giver should respect the privacy and dignity of the recipient.”

R’ Margulies continues: We read about the days of Yehoshua bin Nun (*Yehoshua* 21:43), “Nothing of all the good things that *Hashem* had spoken to the House of *Yisrael* was lacking; everything came to pass.” This, writes R’ Margulies, presumably includes our verse: “There shall be no destitute among you.” It follows that in the days of Yehoshua bin Nun there were no paupers, so there was no need for a “*Gomel Dalim*,” which is why the exposition made by these children could not have been made in the days of Yehoshua bin Nun. (*Yachin U’Bo’az* ch.3)

“Three times a year all your males should appear before Hashem, your Elokim, in the place that He will choose--on the Festival of Matzot, the Festival of Shavuot, and the Festival of Sukkot; and one shall not appear before Hashem empty-handed.” (16:16)

The *Gemara* (*Pesachim* 3b) relates a story from which it is clear that the sage Rabbi Yehuda ben Beteirah did not ascend to Yerushalayim for *Pesach*. The *Tosafot* ask why he did not do so, and they offer several possible answers. One of those answers is that Rabbi Yehuda ben Beteirah did not own land and therefore was exempt from this *Mitzvah*. The *Gemara* (*Pesachim* 8b) derives that one who does not own land is exempt from ascending to Yerushalayim for the festivals from the verse (*Shmot* 34:24), “No man will covet your land when you go up to appear before *Hashem*, your *Elokim*, three times a year”--implying that only someone who could have a fear that someone will covet his land is obligated to ascend.

R’ Aharon Lewin *z”l* *Hy”d* (the *Reisher Rav*; killed in the Holocaust) cites R’ Eliyahu *z”l* (1720-1797; the *Vilna Gaon*) as noting that Rabbi Yehuda ben Beteirah described himself (*Sanhedrin* 92b) as being a descendant of the dead that Yechezkel resurrected, the so-called “Dry Bones.” According to our Sages, the Dry Bones belonged to members of the tribe of Ephraim who had left Egypt before the Exodus and were killed in the desert. It follows that Rabbi Yehuda ben Beteirah would have no share in the Land, for his ancestors did not experience the Exodus and were not present when the Land was divided. (*Ha’drash Ve’ha’iyun*)

“You are children to Hashem, your Elokim . . .” (14:1)

R’ David Chai Abuchatzzeira *shlita* (former Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Nahariyah, Israel; now a *Chassidic rebbe* in that city) writes: R’ Elimelech of Lizhensk *z”l* (1717-1787; early *Chassidic Rebbe*) relates a parable about a father and son who were traveling a long distance through a forest. Many exotic fruits and berries were growing on the trees and shrubs to the sides of the path, and the father was afraid that his son would become so distracted by them that he would wander off and become lost. Therefore, the father told his son, “Every few minutes, you should call out to me so that I can save you from wandering too far.”

This, says R’ Elimelech, is the purpose of prayer. *Rashi z”l* writes (in his commentary to *Bereishit* 30:8) that the name of Yaakov’s son Naftali comes from the root that means “connection.” *Targum Onkelos* says that that name comes from the same root as “*Tefilah*.” Putting these together, it appears that the purpose of *Tefilah* / prayer is connection--*i.e.*, we call out to *Hashem* several times a day so that we will not become too distracted by the pleasures of this world and become lost. (*Sha’arei Tefilah* p.1)

“And you shall eat before Hashem, your Elokim, in the place that He will choose to rest His Name--the tithe of your grain, your wine, and your oil, and the firstborn of your cattle and your flocks, so that you will learn to revere Hashem, your Elokim, all the days.” (14:23)

R’ Chaim Friedlander *z”l* (1923-1986; *Mashgiach Ruchani* of the Ponovezh *Yeshiva*) writes: The *Bet Hamikdash* was the place where one could seek and find *Yir’at Shamayim* / reverence for Heaven (*i.e.*, *Hashem*). There, one could literally sense the presence of the *Shechinah*, thanks to the ten miracles that occurred there on a regular basis (see *Avot* ch.5). This is why the Torah decreed that a person should take a (second) tenth of his produce, known as *Ma’aser Sheni* / the second tithe, and eat it in Yerushalayim, so that while he was there he could observe the immense holiness and see the service performed by the *Kohanim* and be inspired thereby to revere *Hashem*.

R’ Friedlander notes further: The possibility for inspiration was not limited to the *Bet Hamikdash*; it was present in all of Yerushalayim. After all, *Ma’aser Sheni*, of which our verse speaks, was not eaten in the Temple; it could be eaten anywhere within the walls of Yerushalayim. The key, says our verse, is that one’s intention be to “eat before *Hashem*,” not merely to fill one’s stomach.

(*Siftei Chaim, Mo’adam* III p.320, 344)

A related thought:

R’ Avraham Shalom Lipschitz-Halberstam *shlita* (*Stropkover Rebbe* in Yerushalayim) observed: The idea of *Kohanim* standing around in the Temple courtyard eating meat from the *Korbanot* sounds, at first, to be very uncouth. However, when done for the sake of Heaven, it elevates the eater to a very high level, as reflected in the fact that the Hebrew words “מאכל” (food) and “מלאך” (angel) have the same letters. (Heard from the *Stropkover Rebbe*)