

This week's *Parashah* includes the *Mitzvah* of appointing a king. We read (17:15), "You shall surely set over yourself a king whom *Hashem*, your *Elokim*, shall choose. From among your brethren shall you set a king over yourself; you cannot place over yourself a stranger, who is not your brother." R' Shlomo Hakohen Rabinowitz z"l (rabbi and *Chassidic Rebbe* of Radomsko, Poland; died 1866) asks: Would we have thought to appoint a stranger, a foreigner, as king? He explains: We read (*Shmot* 28:30), "Aharon shall bear the judgment of *Bnei Yisrael* on his heart constantly before *Hashem*." Someone who is considered the *Tzaddik* of a generation must have this quality of Aharon's--that he carries the burdens of his brethren on his heart and sacrifices himself for their good. This, too, is the meaning of our verse--the king must be someone who sees each Jew as his brother and is willing to sacrifice himself accordingly--not someone who behaves as a foreigner. (*Tiferet Shlomo*)

R' Yitzchak Menachem Weinberg *shlita* (*Tolner Rebbe* in Yerushalayim) adds: The explanation offered by the *Tiferet Shlomo* is the foundation of all leadership. And, every person should realize that he or she is in a leadership position. Every parent is a leader to his or her children. Every older sibling is a leader to his or her younger siblings, even if the "older" sibling has just barely reached *Bar* or *Bat Mitzvah* age. Every person must act towards the people under his influence as a "brother" who is willing to sacrifice for the other, not as a foreigner or stranger. (*Chamin B'Motzai Shabbat*)

Elul

R' Yaakov ben Asher z"l (the "*Ba'al Ha'turim*"; Germany and Spain; 1269-1343) quotes *Midrash Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer*: On *Rosh Chodesh Elul*, *Hashem* told Moshe, "Ascend to Me on the mountain," and Moshe then ascended to receive the Second *Luchot*. *Bnei Yisrael* blew a *Shofar* in the camp so that no one should make the same mistake that they made before, when they worshiped idolatry (the Golden Calf). *Hashem* was "elevated" by that *Shofar*-blowing, as we read (*Tehilim* 47:6), "*Elokim* ascended with the *Teru'ah* blast; *Hashem* with the sound of the *Shofar*." Therefore, continues the *Ba'al Ha'Turim*, our Sages established that the *Shofar* be blown annually on *Rosh Chodesh Elul*, to alert people to repent, as it is written (*Amos* 3:6), "Can the *Shofar* be sounded in the city and the people not tremble?!"

(*Tur O.C.* 581)

R' Yisrael Meir Kagan z"l (the *Chafetz Chaim*; died 1933) writes: The *Shofar* should be blown every morning in *Elul* after *Shacharit*.

(*Mishnah Berurah* 581:3)

R' Yisroel Dovid Schlesinger *shlita* writes: We customarily recite the verse, "*Elokim* ascended with the *Teru'ah* blast . . .," with great emotion before blowing the *Shofar* on *Rosh Hashanah*. However, we learn from the above passage in the *Tur* that the *Shofar*-blowing referred to in that verse actually is the one that took place on *Rosh Chodesh Elul*. On *Rosh Chodesh Elul* every year, *Hashem* gives us the same opportunity that he gave *Bnei Yisrael* on that *Rosh Chodesh*: the chance to renew ourselves just as they received the *Luchot* anew. Just as *Hashem* was "elevated" by the *Shofar* that *Bnei Yisrael* blew when they renewed themselves, so He is "elevated" when we allow the sound of the *Shofar* to awaken us to renew ourselves.

(*Sha'arei Teshuvah* II 15: *Si'ach Elul*)

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Shlomo ben Yaakov Shulim Spalter a"h (4 Elul)
and Avraham Eber ben Yaakov Shulim Spalter a"h (5 Elul)

“When you besiege a city for many days to wage war against it to seize it, do not destroy its trees by swinging an axe against them, for from it you will eat, and you shall not cut it down . . .” (19:20)

Rabbeinu Yonah Gerondi z”l (1210-1263; Spain) writes: This verse cautions us not to cut down any fruit tree, even to build siege-works, so long as there are enough non-fruit trees available. We likewise are cautioned not to waste any money, not even a *Perutah* / small coin. Our Sages say (*Bava Kamma* 91b), “If one tears his garments too much over a deceased relative, he incurs the penalty of lashes.”

R’ Yonah continues: How much more so is this true if one breaks property in anger, for he commits two wrongs: (1) he wastes money, and (2) he allows his anger to control him and to cause him to transgress the Torah. Once a person has begun to lose the battle with anger, that evil inclination can literally lead him to apostatize, as we read (*Mishlei* 29:22), “A man of wrath is full of sin.” The *Gemara* (*Shabbat* 105b) teaches: If you see a person breaking things in anger, view him as an idolator, for such is the *modus operandi* of the *Yetzer Ha’ra*--today he tells you to commit this [small] transgression, and tomorrow he tells you to worship idols.

R’ Yonah returns to the subject of not being wasteful: Our Sages of blessed memory say (*Yevamot* 44a), “Do not pour out the water in your cistern if others need it.”

He adds: We are cautioned not to destroy the body by engaging in dangerous activities, and not to torment the body unnecessarily by fasting out of sorrow or anger or to mourn one’s deceased relatives. Nevertheless, if one fasts and mourns over his sins, it is said about him (*Yeshayah* 57:18), “When I see his [contrite] ways, I will heal him; I will guide him and recompense him and his mourners with consolations.”

(*Sha’arei Teshuvah* III 82)

R’ Gershon Edelstein z”l (1923-2023; Rosh Yeshiva of the Ponovezh Yeshiva) elaborates on the connection between anger and idolatry: Just as idolatry indicates a lack of *Emunah* / belief in *Hashem*, so anger indicates a lack of *Emunah*. Every aggression that a person suffers at the hands of another person is first decreed by Heaven, and the supposed “aggressor” is merely the agent who implements the Divine decree. That Divine decree would be implemented one way or another, whether or not this particular agent offered himself for this purpose. As such, one who gets angry at the agent is missing the point. If he had proper *Emunah* he would be asking himself why Heaven decreed that he should suffer this aggression. (The foregoing does not absolve from guilt the person who chooses to be the agent of harm. R’ Edelstein is merely discussing the attitude that the victim should have.)

(*Peninei Chizuk*)

“It will be told to you and you will hear; *V’darashata* / and you shall investigate well, and behold! it is true, the testimony is correct--this abomination was done in *Yisrael*.” (17:4)

Literally, this verse is referring to the judicial process. However, R’ Shalom Rokeach z”l (1803-1855; the first *Belzer Rebbe*) offers another interpretation:

If you will be told a *Dvar Torah* and you will hear it; then you will repeat it in a *Derashah* as if it was your own novel thought--even if it is a true Torah thought, the fact that you stole it and said it in your own name is an abomination that should not be committed among the people of *Yisrael*.

(Quoted in *Lekket Imrei Kodesh*)



“You shall be *Tamim* / wholehearted with *Hashem*, your *Elokim*.” (18:13)

Rashi z”l explains: Walk before Him wholeheartedly, put your hope in Him, and do not attempt to investigate the future. Rather, whatever comes upon you accept wholeheartedly, and then you will be with Him and become His portion. [Until here from *Rashi*]

R’ Reuven Sasson *shlita* (rabbi and *Rosh Yeshiva* in Ramat Ha’sharon, Israel) writes: *Midrash Sifri* comments, “When you are *Tamim*, your portion will be with *Hashem*.” The *Midrash* is teaching that there are two parts to this verse: When you are whole--satisfied with yourself, connected to the real you and to your *Neshamah* / soul--then you will be “with *Hashem*, your *Elokim*.” The reason is that the *Shefa Eloki* / flow of goodness from G-d comes via the *Neshamah*, so a person who is disconnected from his *Neshamah* cannot receive that flow, just as a faucet cannot provide water if it is not connected to the water pipe.

R’ Sasson writes further: A person’s life-force comes from the mission that *Hashem* assigned him, for which *Hashem* gives him all the physical and spiritual tools, abilities, and circumstances that he will need. Along these lines, R’ Yehuda Loewe z”l (*Maharal* of Prague; died 1609) explains that the essence of Adam Ha’rishon’s sin was seeking something that was not part of his mission. Therefore, Adam Ha’rishon was sentenced to eventually die--“*Met*” (מת) / “dead” being the reverse of “*Tam*” (תם). *Temimut* (the state of being *Tamim*) means that a person connects with the tools, abilities, and circumstances that *Hashem* gave him and does not seek something that *Hashem* did not given him. This is the message of *Mishlei* (11:3), “The wholeheartedness of the just will guide them, but the corruption of traitors will despoil them”--the opposite of a wholehearted person is a traitor--in particular, a traitor to whom one is meant to be.

(*B’ohr Panecha: Shmot* p.53)