

Elul ~ אלול

S. Smiles
Elul 5757

Shir Hashkhan 6:3 1

3 I am my be-
loved's,
and my beloved is
mine,
who pastures
among the roses.

ג. אני לדודי
ודודי לי
הרוצה בשושנים:

Sefat Emet-Elul 2

1 **אני מריר זיל פי על חודש אלול קהם לו ולא**
* **אחמו קרי וכתיב צוממור לתודם. ופי הדבר**
סכל אי שכפי מה שלא אחמו כן לו אחמו. כי צנסות

5 **זין חמי והוא יבולץ לרור. לזן מרעיתו כי הוא ריה**
למעשר בהמה כרי עייש צמיאל. ונפשימות עיי הציעול
שכעשין כל הדברים לא והצל וריק צעירי האדם. וכל
הרלן והשוקה להשי"ת. עמילא כמים הפכים כרי
ומחקרב עייז אליו ית'. חיש ריש למעשר בהמה.
10 **שים צכל כפס ישראל גייכ כפס הצמיות כמי"ש**
צמפריס. ולריך כל אדם להצני גם כפס צ להשי"ת.
הוא עיי ציעול וקעוסה היפוך החלות. עייז מנזיי
גם זה. כענין כרי צמי יריך כרי. חו גייכ קופעריס
וקופעריס. קופעריס צמיי סכל וגיעה צמרה. וקופעריס
להכריע הגוף:

3 (קוין-ת"ג)
מזמור לתודה הדישו ליהוה כל הארץ: עבדו אתיהוה: ק
בשמחה בא לפנו ברננה: דעו פרייהוה הוא אלהים הוא:
עשט (רא) אנתו עמו וזאן מרעיתו: בא שעריו בתודה:
חציו בתהילה הודו לו ברכו שמו: פריטוב יהוה לעולם:
חסיו ועדוד יוד אמנות:

4 **מזמור לתודה** A psalm of thanksgiving,* call out to HASHEM, everyone on earth. Serve HASHEM with gladness,* come before Him with joyous song. Know that HASHEM, He is God, it is He Who made us and we are His. His people and the sheep of His pasture. Enter His gates with thanksgiving, His courts with praise, give thanks to Him, bless His Name. Chazan— For HASHEM is good, His kindness endures forever, and from generation to generation is His faithfulness.

5 As we have begun to see, the ordeal was one of ego, of the desire for freedom and independence. Adam was torn between obedience and what seemed like freedom. Obedience meant performing the Creator's will, and in so doing, bonding with Him. But it also seemed to require a yielding of human independence. And this is the deepest battle: if this was the primal ordeal, it must be the source of all spiritual ordeal and it must hold the key to all human growth. This is where it began and this is where the battle is pitched. Let us understand.

Worldmark - R. Tatz
[5712, 14]

6 Adam was commanded not to eat of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. Obedience to that command was all that was required. And if he held strong and obeyed, all would be well; the world would reach its perfection in a few short hours and be forever perfect. But Adam felt that such an arrangement lacked a significant enough part for him: what would his contribution be to that perfection? Only the passive non-action of resisting one solitary transgression? Surely he was capable of much more than that? Surely he was capable of building worlds on his own? Surely he could be tested much more severely and prove his love of his Creator much more powerfully?
7 Adam reasoned that if he were to eat that fruit and bring himself and the world down from their rarefied and almost perfect spirituality into heavy physicality with all the temptations and possibilities of failure which would result, and then hold strong, within that lower state remain true to his Creator, that would be a far greater act of service than merely desisting from one simple action of disobedience. Essentially, he wished to amplify the scope of his free will so that there would be more work to be done, and therefore more opportunity to draw close to Hashem of his own doing.

8 He sensed that there was far more scope and potential for expression of his independent free will than his given situation allowed. And he was right. And he was wrong. He was right because in truth he had enormous potential; he was close to Divine in his greatness and virtually unlimited in power. But he was wrong because in going against the Divine command he would be moving out of reality.
* And this is the point to understand: in every action of human free choice which is in contradiction to the Divine command there is a powerful illusion of independence - "No-one tells me what to do"; there is an assertion of self which is heady in its potency. But in every action which is in contradiction to the Divine command there is a death; if Hashem is the definition of existence, then any action against Him, no matter how powerful its sense of reality, is an action out of existence.
➔ The nature of human emotion is such that there is a resistance to doing that which is commanded from outside the self; in such obedience lies a negation of self, a negation of desire and of that deepest level of the personality which is the seat of free choice. And in such obedience there is a sense of death too - a deep level of self is being annulled, negated, slain.

9

And that was confusing. He was certain that he had been created to express his freedom, not suppress it. Obedience to one simple command was surely not a full expression of his freedom to choose? Where would all his freedom be if he merely obeyed and watched the world perfect itself without his own massive and heroic effort? Surely Hashem must mean something else in His command - perhaps He means only that eating will be so dangerous that He does not require me to do it; perhaps His command is in fact only a warning; let me show Him that I am ready for that danger, I am ready to take on all of life, and death too, to show who I am in reality.

* The positive side: readiness to serve, readiness to sacrifice, readiness to enter danger, even to die - after all, Hashem had told him that he would die if he ate. And the justification: what is my free will for if not to be used, asserted?

11 So what is the true purpose of the free will we are given? The answer is that its highest use is to give it up, to yield it to Hashem. But here lies the secret: the act of yielding the freedom to choose is the greatest act of free choice possible. That act is not a sacrifice of will; in depth it is the highest assertion of will. That is the challenge Adam was given: use your will to want what I want; kill not your freedom to choose but that part of it that seeks to make you separate from Me. Use your will; use it to give it to Me; in that way we shall become One.

Do not seek heroics; do not seek to prove what you can do. Simply obey; anything else is no more than assertion of ego. Such assertion of self feels good while it lasts, deeply good because it is an expression of human essence; but in truth it is illusion. Do not choose to be free; choose instead to be obliged - bondage to Me in true obligation is the real freedom.

14 The Act of Jewish Prayer - R. Kirzner

The Hebrew word for thanksgiving is *hoda'ah*. This word also means "to admit" or "to acknowledge." Rabbi Hutner said that every expression of thanks that one person gives to another is really a form of admitting.¹¹ People sometimes have difficulty saying "thank you" to another person because it implies that the first person needed the second. People who are very arrogant don't want to admit that they need something from someone else. Thus, thanking someone is related to the idea of admitting something. In the Modim prayer, we admit that we need God and that we appreciate everything He gives us. It

15

The concept of thanking God, and bowing to Him, is related to distinguishing between what is right and what is wrong. Adam introduced the negative force into himself because he wanted to be like God. His arrogance made him not want to accept that God's command was for his ultimate benefit. He thereby created a perception of reality in which good and bad became mixed. God told Adam to listen to Him, whereas Adam "stood up" to God and decided to listen to himself.

* When we bow, we show that we subjugate our will to God and acknowledge His will as being supreme. We demonstrate that God has ultimate wisdom and goodness and is the ultimate Director of our lives. Every time we bow, we break our resistance to allowing ourselves to be dominated by God's will. We demonstrate physically that we want to break our "stiff-necked" approach that denies that what God commands is good for us.

10

But the negative side: I must be independent; I must act; I must be the builder of my own life; I must not sacrifice my independent sense of self in a melting into something greater than myself. I will do anything to remain myself; I shall not yield my will.

* And here is the paradox. While man asserts his independence, he is nothing, merely a small bundle of protoplasm asserting the scope of his smallness. But when he annuls his independence, negates his ego, he melts into the reality of a greater Existence and thereby achieves real existence. And not merely existence as an unidentifiable part of a greater whole: no, existence as a great human being. Moshe was perhaps the greatest human who ever lived, and the Torah clearly indicates the reason: he was the humblest who ever lived. He was able to completely annul his independence and become totally attached to the Creator; and the result was not that he disappeared, but that he became the most famous individual who ever lived.

12

A true servant is not an empty shell of a human from whom all content has been drained, a mechanical and bland being who lacks all will and interest. Exactly the opposite: a true and valuable servant is one who burns with motivation, whose will is powerful and unshakable, but whose will is poised constantly to carry out the wishes of the master, not the personal vested interests of the servant. He has made his master's will his will, he acts as passionately for his master as he possibly could for himself because there is no difference between his master's desires and his own.

13

אתה נספרים על חודש אלול אני לרדוי דודי לי
כי. כי עיקר התשובה לריד להיות ע"ז לזובה
כי נשחלחנו צוה"ל לעשות רלווי ית"ש בלנד. ונה
שטרודין צה"ל עולם וסוכחן העיקר. ע"ז לריד להיות
עיקר התשובה לחזור לקבל עול העצדות להיות נוכח
דק נעשות רלווי ית. ועמד לא חפלהי צה"ל. ואם
מקבלין זה העול בשלימות אני לרדוי. ממילא דודוי
לך וזה נחקיים בשיק שזה ערום השגח לשגח וכל

16

→ When we bow, energy is allowed to flow through our spines that otherwise cannot. It's almost as if there were a blockage, and breaking open the vertebrae of the spine allows our true life force to flow through us. This idea stands in contradistinction to the belief that the more independent we are, the more life energy we will be able to create and sustain. Some people believe that the more they subjugate themselves, the less life energy they will retain. When we stand up arrogantly in front of God, we create a *klipah*, a shell which surrounds our access to life. When we bow, we shatter the shell that confines us, and we allow our life energy to nourish us.

When we bow, we should focus on breaking our stubbornness and unwillingness to listen to God, who is the One who knows what is ultimately good for us. We are then supposed to straighten up gradually and be standing totally upright when we say God's name in the blessing that follows. This is done because bowing breaks our "shells" and allows our life energies to come through. As we straighten up, we then have the ability to face God. This process is known as "the revelation of the energy of the One who is the Source of all life."⁸

elaborated by R. Dessler.⁹ He explains in detail the full grandeur of Abraham's sacrifice. It was an utter self-effacement before the will of God, a sacrifice on all planes of Abraham's life. Firstly, on the natural, human level, there was the love of the father to the son that had to be sacrificed—towards the only son he could ever have from Sarah, as God reminds him: 'You have not withheld your only son from me.'¹⁰ Then, there was another aspect to this sacrifice: it would nullify all the labour of Abraham's hundred and thirty-six years. All his life, he had gone through the world proclaiming the divinity of God, bringing men close to Him, severing them from idol-worship and the abominations that went with it—human sacrifice, child-immolation. Now, by his own action, he would cancel out all the good he had done, he would deny the moral horror of such an action, by offering his own son as a sacrifice to his God. But, most of all, it was just the moral outrage that was the hardest for him to withstand. Such an action against all his concepts of the justice and mercy of God, against his very nature, his very soul. It could not be right: his heart did not go with the deed. Yet when God commanded him, he stifled utterly all the voices that cried out within him, and fulfilled the command unquestioningly.

18 save his son, at all costs. His egoistic will must play no part in this issue: he must perform the will of God, achieve the utter self-effacement necessary for the sacrifice, and then, only then, ask the moral questions that burned in his heart.

→ This power of self-effacement, the withdrawal of the self before the will of God is Abraham's heritage to his descendants. Acquired at such great cost, it remained as a kind of spiritual power-house, a source of energy for the people of Israel throughout the centuries. It is a national characteristic, and it is this, as R. Dessler explains, that gives us the right, even the possibility of praying to God.

Sefat Emet

21 וְדַבְרָה מִלִּל חֲלוּל בְּחֻלָּה. הֵיכֵן שֵׁשׁ נְקוּדָה פְּנִימִית
 בְּנֶפֶשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁאֵין שׁוֹלֵט שָׁם מִגַּע כֹּכָבִי.
 גֵּן כְּעוֹלָם. מַעֲיִין חֲסוּם. וְכִי בְּחֻלָּה וְעִיִּין הַנְּקוּדָה
 כְּאִמֵּר אֵיךְ לְדוּדֵי שְׁלֵעוֹלָם לֹא כִתְרַחֵק זֶה הַנְּקוּדָה
 מִדְּבִיקוֹת בְּשׂוֹרֶשָׁה. וְשׂוֹרֶשָׁה לְשׂוֹמֵר יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא כֻלָּל *
 עִם יְכוּלֵי לְמַלְאָךְ זֶה הַנְּקוּדָה. וְעַתָּה הַזְּמַן גּוֹרֵם שֶׁכִּתְּשׂוּרָו
 בְּכִי בְּשׂוֹרֶשָׁה. וְכִתְּרַצְוּ כִּפְשׁוֹת בְּכִי אֵלָיו יִשְׂרָאֵל. וְכִמוֹ
 כִּן דוּדֵי לִי הוּא גִי'כ שֵׁשׁ לְעוֹלָם מִדוֹת מִיּוֹחֲדִים רַק

22 Sanctified in Time - Ed. R. Carnel

However low a person may have sunk, he never loses that inner spark of spirituality hidden in the heart of Israel. This is the deeper meaning of God's promise never to reject the Jewish people or allow them to become extinct.³ But through sins and involvement with impurity an iron wall may be erected between the holy spark and the ego. As a result the holy spark, in a sense, "falls into impurity" and can no longer illuminate the person's soul. Then "the Shechinah is in exile." The inner point of truth no longer shines forth in the open, but is obscured and dark.

When the Jewish people accepted the Torah, they said "Na'aseh v'nishma - We shall do, and we shall hear." They committed themselves to obey before they knew what that obligation would mean. Many depths are contained here, but relevant to our discussion is this: Torah is all obligation, as we have seen. The Jewish people knew that. And they knew that Torah must be received and fulfilled as obligation. They obligated themselves to Hashem without knowing the details because that is the true nature of such obligation - it is my commitment to You that matters, not my judgement of whether or not I can fulfill this or that detail. And so they

Beis Hadevi

This is what the Israelites had in mind. When they saw that Moshe had to mediate between themselves and Hashem, they wanted to create a place where Hashem could dwell among them, as in fact was the case after the mishkan was built. Through their esoteric knowledge, they sought to determine what such a place would entail. But rather than relying upon their own knowledge, they consulted Aharon, whom they considered their superior. "Make us a god" (Shemos 32:1), they said, a resting place for the Shechinah.

The Israelites thus had good intentions. But they made one error. Man's actions enhance the structure of the cosmos only when they are commanded by the Torah. The actions involved in building the mishkan caused a revelation of the Shechinah, but only because they expressed the Divine will. Otherwise, not only did they not bring about the desired result, they constituted a grave sin: the sin of the golden calf.

23 Sichor Mussar - R. Shmelwitz

The answer is that the primary impediment to self-improvement and growth is the lethargy of routine and inertia. Not only does it hamper a person's spiritual growth but it renders him totally insensitive, as well. This finds expression in Yeshayahu's rebuke:

יֵצֵן כִּי נִגַּשׁ הָעָם הַזֶּה, בְּפִי וּבִשְׂפָתָיו בְּדַוְיָו וְלִבּוֹ רַחֵק מִמֶּנִּי.
 וְהָיָה יִרְאָתָם אֹתִי מִצָּוֹת אֲנָשִׁים מִלְּמִדָּה (ישעיהו כט:יג).
 Because this nation has approached Me, honoring Me with their mouths and lips, but their heart was far from Me, and their fear of Me was only by force of habit (Yeshayahu 29:13).

Once Israel's worship of God was 'by force of habit,' their hearts were automatically 'far from Me'. All that they did became but lip service. All, even their fear of God, was an external performance divorced from and devoid of any heartfelt inspiration. The passion and fire were gone, extinguished by the 'force of habit.'

וְזוֹ עֵינֵי עֲבוּרָה וְהוּא לְחַדֵּשׁ אֶת הָרְגִישׁוֹת מִדֵּי שֵׁטָה, וְלִשְׁמֹר עַל הַלֵּב לִכְלֹל יִצְטַנֵּן בְּעֲבוּרָה.
 , וְלֹא תְהִי יִרְאָתוֹ "מִצְוֹת אֲנָשִׁים מִלּוּמַדָּה". (עֵינֵי עוֹד בְּמַאֲזַר כְּבוֹדָה שֶׁל הוֹרָה).

25 Songs 9 Songs - ch. 5

abundantly, beloved ones. 2. I sleep, but my heart is awake. Hark! My beloved is knocking: "Open for me, my sister, my

beloved, my dove, my perfect one, for my head is full of dew, my locks with the drops of the night." 3. "I have taken off my chemise; how can I put it on? I have bathed my feet; how can I soil them?" 4. My beloved stretched forth his hand from the hole, and my insides stirred because of him. 5. I arose to open for my beloved, and my hands dripped with myrrh, and my fingers with flowing myrrh, upon the handles of the lock. 6. I opened for my beloved, but my beloved had hidden and was gone; my soul went out when he spoke; I sought him, but found him not; I called him, but he did not answer me. 7. The watchmen who patrol the city found me, they smote me and wounded me; the watchmen of the walls took my veil off me. 8. "I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, what will you tell him? That I am lovesick." 9. "What is your beloved more than another beloved, O fairest of women?"

וכתב הרמב"ם (הלי תשובה פ"ב, ה"ד) וז"ל: "מדרכי התשובה להיות השב... מתרחק הרבה מן הדבר שחטא בו... ומשנה מעשיו כולן לטובה ולדרך ישרה". ויש להבין מה הוסיף הרמב"ם במש"כ "ומשנה מעשיו... לטובה" הרי כבר כתב "מתרחק הרבה מן הדבר שחטא בו" ועוד, מה ההדגשה "ומשנה מעשיו כולן לטובה"? ונראה שכוונת הרמב"ם היא כאמור לעיל, בראשונה כתב שהשב צריך להתרחק הרבה ממה שחטא ואח"כ הוסיף שאף בדברים שלא חטא ובמעשים טובים מעשה לפני התשובה, משפר אותם ומשנה את הרגליו הקודמים, והיינו - "משנה מעשיו כולן לטובה". דרך זו גם היא "מדרכי התשובה" כי שינוי ההרגלים - שעל ידם יוצא ממצבו הקודם שהורגל בו וממילא מהשעבוד להרגל - מחזק את התשובה.⁵

27 Sanctifier in Time - Ed. R. Carmel

The answer is: action. We can adopt a program of positive action — "good deeds" — which will prepare us to meet the challenge of *behirah* when it comes. One of the four things that reverse an evil decree is *shinnui ma'aseh*: a change in our actions (*Rosh Hashanah* 17a). Once we have made a radical change in our attitude, we can set about increasing the number of positive acts that we do each day. They need not be "big" acts. On the contrary, many small acts are more effective than one "big" one.² They can be improvements in punctuality, in politeness, in conscientiousness, in application to one's task. If done with vigor and enthusiasm they can become a habit. This will help *mussar* penetrate our subconscious mind and will eventually transform the external habit into inner involvement.

→ Our service during the month of Elul must be to throw ourselves into a program of vibrant acts of positive content, to take us from the extreme of moral and spiritual slackness to the other extreme of moral strength and enthusiastic endeavor.

The *Shulchan Aruch*³ recommends that in the Ten Days of Penitence we should adopt special stringencies in mitzvot, even if we do not demand this from ourselves during the rest of the year. On the face of it this seems most puzzling. What is the point of this extra care if we do not intend to keep it up? I believe our Rabbis are hinting at this very method that we have been discussing. The way to success lies in throwing ourselves enthusiastically into a varied program of good deeds and taking extra care in the performance of all mitzvot, even if this does not really correspond to our present *madregah*. A radical change in behavior will pave the way for a real change of heart and open up opportunities for sincere and thorough repentance.

28

יתירה מזו, כאשר אדם מצליח לשנות הרגל כלשהו, נותן לו הדבר עידוד שאכן אפשר להשתנות וע"ז מתעורר להתקרב אל ה' בתשובה שלימה. נמצא שמחד גיסא, בימי האלול הקב"ה מתקרב אלינו, ומסייע בידינו להתקרב אליו. אך מאידך גיסא, טומאת החטא המטממת את הלב, ההרגל והשגרה, וקשיחות העורף, חוסמים ח"ו את הסייעתא דשמיא. התפקיד המוטל עלינו הוא ליצור בנו כלי קיבול לס"ד המיוחדת הקיימת בימים אלו, דהיינו אנו צריכים ליצור את האלול וזאת עלידי שינוי הרגלים ושיפור המעשים בכל התחומים. בראש וראשונה התחוקות והתחדשות בלימוד התורה - השקולה כנגד כל המצוות - עלידי גיעה ועמל במידה רבה יותר.

29 Tekilla Treasury R. Fefer

כי הוא אֱלֹהֵינו וְנִאֲחָזְנוּ עִם מְרִעֵיתוּ וְצִאן יְדוּ הַיּוֹם אִם בְּקוֹל תִּשְׁמָעוּ.
For He is our God, and we are the flock He pastures and the sheep in His charge — today! If we but heed His call. (Psalms 95:7)

Rabbi Nachman of Breslav taught that one of the fundamental tools we need in serving God is to think *only* of today, and to pay no attention to yesterday or tomorrow. This certainly applies to our efforts to earn a living. We should only be concerned with what we need today and what we can earn today (see *Sotah* 48b).

The same idea applies to our service of God: We should think *only* of today, the present hour. When a person begins to concentrate on serving God, it appears to be a heavy burden which he will never be able to bear. But if he tells him that he has to shoulder this weight for only one day, *today*, then it will not seem like such a heavy burden at all.

Therefore, one should not put off important things until tomorrow, saying: "I will definitely start to improve — tomorrow! Tomorrow I will surely begin to pray with intense devotion! Tomorrow I will begin my Torah study program!" Man's world consists of nothing more than the day and the hour that he stands in *now*. Tomorrow is an entirely different world.

Therefore David exhorts us: הַיּוֹם אִם בְּקוֹל תִּשְׁמָעוּ, Today! If we but heed His call! (Likutei Eitzos §272).

30 Living Inspired - R. Tatz

There is no negativity in the moment of new creation. While the energy of creativity is flowing, depression and despair are impossible. The spiritual root of depression is lack of growth in the personality. When time ticks away and nothing new is being built, when all is static, the *neschama* feels the cold hand of death.