



Ellul - 024 Believing In Renewal

The *mazal* of the month of Elul is *besulah* (virgin), as is well-known. A *besulah* refers to anything that is new; in the Talmud, there is a concept of “*besulah*” in land (*besulah karka*, “new land”), and a woman who has never had relations is called a *besulah*. Hence, the term *besulah* connotes something new.

If a person reflects into the Creation, he sees a creation that is thousands of years old; if one thinks about his own life, he thinks simply that he is found here on this world and that he has been here for a certain amount of years, etc. That is the simple perspective. But through the spiritual light of Elul, a new perspective can be revealed. The Sages state that the world was created on the 25th of Elul, but Elul is not just the creation of the world – it is a month which contains a spiritual illumination that enables a person to begin anew.

The physical eyes only see what is in front of them and what happened until now. But the light contained in Elul reveals a deep power: that it is possible to begin again anew.

This is really the idea of *teshuvah* (repentance). When a person sins, G-d forbid, he must do *teshuvah*. The simple understanding of *teshuvah* is, as the Rishonim explain, that one must return to the situation he was in before the sin. But the inner understanding of *teshuvah* is for one to believe that it possible to begin again anew. *Teshuvah* is therefore based upon a certain emunah (belief) that must precede it, as described above.

One of the deep reasons of why most people do *teshuvah* and don't change is because although they had earnest intentions as they did *teshuvah*, they were far from the word of the Rambam about *teshuvah*: “One must repent until the One Who knows all secrets can testify on him that he will never return to this sin, forever.” Complete *teshuvah* is based on something that must come before it, and when that something is missing, the *teshuvah* will be like a tower floating in the air, which has nothing to hold it up and support it.

Teshuvah is therefore based on the emunah that a person believes that Hashem renews Creation, and just as He renews the creation every day, so did He give this power of renewal to each person. It is a power to believe in renewal, and upon this belief, *teshuvah* can happen.

There are actually two times of renewal in the year. One renewal takes place in the month of Sivan, and the other time of renewal takes place in the months of Elul and Tishrei.

Regarding the month of Sivan, where we received the Torah, *Chazal* say that “the words of Torah should be upon you like new, as if it was given today”. This was the beginning of all renewal, and it is because Hashem looked into the Torah to create the world. This power of renewal in Torah was given to us during that time.

But the power of renewal in the month of Elul, which continues into the Ten Days of Repentance, is a renewal that is based upon destruction, ruination, and breaking. It is a renewal after sin. This a new kind of renewal, a more novel kind of renewal than Sivan's renewal, and it is the renewal that is used

for *teshuvah*.

The Rambam says that a baal *teshuvah* changes his name, meaning, that he is no longer the same person who committed those sins; he is no longer the man who committed those certain deeds. The simple understanding of these words of the Rambam is that if a person has changed his deeds, he is no longer the same person anymore, just as there is a concept that a person who steals can acquire the time by changing its appearance. In the same way, a person changes himself, by having a change in action.

But the deeper understanding of it is because *teshuvah* is based on believing in the power of renewal. The original renewal took place in Sivan, and a new kind of renewal comes in the month Elul, which takes place after destruction [Av], and it continues into the Ten Days of Repentance. When something is destroyed and is ruined, it needs *teshuvah* in order to make it new again like it was in the beginning. In order for the *teshuvah* to last, in the depths of the soul, and to be actualized from its potential state, one needs to precede it with personal *avodah* – to believe in the power of renewal.

Teshuvah, as our Sages explain, is to uproot the sin retroactively. The Mesillas Yesharim explains that, and the root of this is the concept of a *neder* (vow), which is annulled retroactively. That shows us that there is a power which can cause a retroactive change (as opposed to a change that is merely from now and onward). *Teshuvah* reveals that even though there was previously destruction, there can be a retroactive change, and therefore, it is possible to begin again from the start; to be renewed.

The more a person is clear about the power of renewal, the more effective his *teshuvah* will be; it will have something to stand upon. In turn, the less a person is aware about this belief in the power of renewal, or if he doesn't think about it enough and he is almost entirely unaware of it, even if he will do *teshuvah* on a "Halachic" level, usually such *teshuvah* will not last into the rest of the year.

We should understand deeply that each and every one of us has gone through decades on this world already, where we did many mitzvos, as well as sins, G-d forbid. A person has learned a lot of Torah, but there were also many times of wasting time from Torah study. The pressures of life weigh heavily upon each individual, with a millstone around the neck. There is a tremendous burden upon every soul, and all of these burdens have gathered on top of each other, over the years of a person's life. A great deal of sins and improper actions have accumulated, in addition to the various stresses of life. When a person tries to unload this huge burden from his shoulders, he finds it nearly impossible. It seems to a person that it is impossible for him to leave this situation behind.

What happens, as a result of that realization? Usually a person will try even harder, trying to make things work. He will try to bear the yoke of Torah upon him, he will try to get some spiritual uplift, he will try to better his actions, and he will try to continue and move on. But the truth is that the giant "package" that has accumulated over the years upon his soul is too big for him to carry, and it is beyond his energies. It is a burden that he cannot carry.

Some people, when they come to that point, will give up completely. Others do not give up, and they continue to try harder, with the belief that that if they try harder, they will eventually get assistance from Heaven and then succeed, or through some other means. When the days of Elul arrive – the end of this year, and the beginning of the next year – every person feels a need to become spiritually elevated, to continue to strive higher, and to attempt to get there.

But the truth is, as mentioned above, that this is really too big of a burden for a person to carry. So what does Hashem ask of you? If the burden is too enormous to carry, what does Hashem want from us?

The simpler answer to this is that it's true, you really can't carry the burdens that are upon you, but if you try your hardest, you do your part, and Hashem will do the rest. That is a true perspective. However, there is a more inner perspective, which is a totally different attitude towards life.

Teshuvah offers a person renewal in the same way that a small child feels that first grade is completely new for him, and how a thirteen-year old boy views his bar mitzvah, and how entering high school feels new, and later, how entering Beis Midrash feels new. He sees it as new, and everything feels new to him, when entering these situations. The same is true of the feeling of renewal that is *teshuvah*.

Believing in renewal is the root of *teshuvah*. It shows a person that if he truly does *teshuvah*, he is not merely throwing away his sins. That is the basic part of *teshuvah* – getting rid of sin. But the depth of *teshuvah* is that all that has piled upon the person until now, can now be thrown off, and the person can begin anew. When one begins again anew, he will be able to “light like an eagle, bold as a leopard, swift as a deer, strong as a lion” to do the will of his Father in Heaven.”

If a person does not view *teshuvah* with this inner attitude, his life will feel too burdensome and heavy to bear, and it will only continue to feel more burdensome. There are some individuals who literally feel alive from their Torah learning and mitzvos that they do, which revitalizes them and elevates them, but they are still feeling very burdened from all that has gathered upon them; each person can write an entire book about his stresses and troubles that he's carrying on his shoulders.

Teshuvah accomplishes the same effect for the soul as a convert, who is considered born anew. It is with the person's belief that it is possible to become a new creation.

These words will seem far-fetched to some people, but if someone believes the idea we are explaining, a new window will be opened up to him, which will enable him to begin instantly from a new place.

The secret of *teshuvah* is a hidden matter, because it seems to many people that *teshuvah* means “repentance from sin.” But that is just the beginning of *teshuvah*. A person can do that part of *teshuvah* instantly, and he may succeed. But in order to do “complete” *teshuvah*, he will not get there just through repenting from sin alone. If he has accessed the power to believe in renewal, before the Ten Days of Repentance have arrived – then he will be able to do the complete level of *teshuvah*.

For this reason, Elul precedes the ten days of *Teshuvah*. Elul is about believing in the power of renewal. Upon believing in the power of renewal, a person can then come into the Ten Days of Repentance having done complete *teshuvah*. The days of Elul are given to us for this reason. Hashem has implanted these days into Creation to give us this power.

Elul has the *mazal* of *besulah* (virgin), because a *besulah* signifies something new, and it symbolizes the power to become renewed.

One should reflect deeply into this idea and firmly believe in this power of *emunah*, to activate it from its potential state. He should clearly believe that that a person has the power to become renewed, every day, at any moment. Although it doesn't seem that way at first, with the more we strengthen this *emunah* and reveal it in our souls, we enable ourselves to throw away the packages of sin that have accumulated upon us. As opposed to an elderly person writing on paper after erasing its ink, through renewal we can become like a child writing on a fresh new piece of paper.

Elderly Torah scholars become wiser the more they age. The simple understanding of this is because they get their life from Torah, therefore they have energy from it. That is true, but the more precise way to understand this is because they are connected to the power of renewal, and therefore

whatever they have gone through until now is like a nullified vow, which becomes annulled retroactively – enabling them to always begin again anew.

The words here, on one hand, will seem very far; but on the other hand, they are closely attainable to anyone who deepens this belief in the power of renewal, within himself.

One who merits revealing this power, with *siyata d'shmaya*, will be able to undergo a renewal even after going through a stressful, burdensome day, or after a long, stressful period of his life. There is always this power to rise above the past burdens and become renewed, as if nothing has happened until now, no matter how much a person has been through. Once this power to believe in renewal becomes revealed within the person, it will accompany him throughout the year, and for eternity.

Teshuvah is a secret. It is a secret based upon the belief in the power of renewal. The clearer one is about this belief, the result will be that he will merit with *siyata d'shmaya* to do complete *teshuvah*, as we say,

Return us, in complete repentance, before You החזירנו בתשובה שלימה לפניך

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