

THE AVODAH OF ELUL

The meaning of *yeshuah* (salvation) is essentially when Hashem reveals His light, *he'aras panim*, to a person. By contrast, the opposite of *yeshuah* or *he'aras panim* is when there is *hester panim*, when Hashem hides His light from the person, and the person feels like he is in trouble. When Hashem removes His *hester panim*, and that is the meaning of getting a *yeshuah*.

A person who has troubles might view his situation as *hester panim*, while a person with good health, livelihood, and children seems to be enjoying *he'aras panim*. That is the way we simply understand the difference between *hester panim* and *he'aras panim*. But the deeper understanding is that ***hester panim* is whenever a person doesn't live with Hashem in his life, while *he'aras panim* is when a person lives with Hashem in his life.** The true *hester panim* of Creation is when people don't feel Hashem's *he'aras panim*, meaning that they don't live with Hashem in their life. And by the same terms, *hester panim* is essentially when people don't feel Hashem enough in their life.

Moshe spoke with Hashem *panim b'panim*, "face to face". Only Moshe spoke to Hashem "face-to-face", but we can also have a "face-to-face relationship" with Hashem, a relationship of *panim b'panim* with Hashem. This is more than just feeling *he'aras panim* of Hashem every here and there in our life. It is when we feel a yearning for Hashem all the time in our life.

A person can feel that Hashem takes care of him in all areas of his life. Whenever he feels like he needs Hashem, he asks Hashem to save him. He feels the *he'aras panim* of Hashem.

This is wonderful, but he is still missing something. There is a higher kind of relationship we can have with Hashem: *panim b'panim* (face to face). This is like a person who receives good from his friend - not only does he receive what he wants, but he is given a smile along with it. A person who only feels *he'aras panim* but not *panim b'panim* will be aware that Hashem provides all his needs, but he only turns to Hashem when he needs something. A person who has the higher relationship with Hashem, *panim b'panim*, feels Hashem all the time in his life – not just when he receives things from Him.

People can learn *sefarim* about *emunah* and *hashgachah pratis* (Divine Providence), which is wonderful, but they are still unaware that they can have a deeper feeling of Hashem in their life: *panim b'panim*. When people have troubles and they ask Hashem to take them out of their troubles, because they believe that Hashem can help, do they feel close to Hashem? They might view Hashem as the one to turn to in their time of need, and that is how they relate to Him. He views Hashem as just an *eizer k'negdo* (helpmate opposite him) to help him, and not more than that.

Although we always need to *daven* to Hashem our needs, there is a lot more to that in our relationship with Hashem. The *sefarim hakedoshim* say that in Elul, we are entering the Palace of the King, where we are surrounded by Hashem's light. We cannot see Hashem face-to-face, but we can definitely feel, in our mind and our heart, a relationship with Hashem that is face-to-face.

The main trouble in a person's life, from all his troubles, is when he doesn't feel Hashem in his life! What is the

worst thing that a person went through this year? Everyone will have a different answer, but the true, inner trouble that we have is that we didn't feel Hashem enough in our life. That is the true *tzarah* (painful situation) from all of the *tzaros* in a person's life.

In *Avinu Malkeinu*, we ask Hashem for mercy, because we are undeserving. Are we asking Hashem that we should be *zocheh* to see and feel Him in our life? Are we just asking Hashem for what we want, for a good year, or do we want to see and feel that we have a Father? Do we have a will for **רצוננו מלכינו לראות את**, we want to see our King? Imagine a father who gives his children all of their needs, and all his children ever do is ask him for things, but they never want to see him and have a relationship with him.

During Elul we certainly need to make a *cheshbon hanefesh* (self-accounting) as part of doing *teshuvah*, but that is all an introduction to something greater: To be able to enter the Chamber of the King, which will be on *Rosh HaShanah*. The goal of all our *teshuvah* during Elul is to want to see our King, wishing to see Him, to feel Him more in our life. It is not enough for us to feel how Hashem is good to us - we need an actual relationship with Him, *panim b'panim*, to feel Him on a more regular basis, not just when we turn to Him in our troubles. We must uncover our *neshamah's* yearning for Hashem, **רצוננו לראות את מלכינו**, our desire to see our King, to yearn to feel Hashem in our life. And this is also what we should cry for during Elul. May we all be *zocheh* to a good year, to be written in the book of *tzaddikim*. Translated from the original Hebrew shiur מושיע_029_תפילה

Q&A – ELUL

QUESTION There is so much *avodas Hashem* to be done in the coming weeks, starting from Elul, then Rosh HaShanah, Yom Kippur, Succos – so many different aspects of *avodah* to focus on. Is there a basic outline or summary of the entire *avodah* spanning Elul through Simchas Torah? **ANSWER** The following is a very brief outline. The *avodah* of Elul is all about “*Ani L’Dodi V’Dodi Li*”, “I am to my Beloved, and my Beloved is to me.” It is a time when we become beloved, like a *kallah* who finds grace by her *chossom*, in our relationship with Hashem. The days of *Selichos* (for the Ashkenazim who have this custom) is the time to feel pained for anything we have done that went against Hashem’s will, and to ask Hashem for forgiveness over the past and for the damages we have done. The *avodah* on Rosh HaShanah is to become close to Hashem - and thereby be deemed meritorious before Hashem. The *avodah* during *Aseres Y’mei Teshuvah* is a time to fix the past, do *teshuvah*, and make resolutions for the future. *Yom Kippur* is a time of spiritual cleanliness and purity, so that there are no barriers between oneself and Hashem. The days between Yom Kippur and Succos are a result of a pure bond with Hashem which we have hopefully attained from the purity that we reached on Yom Kippur, and extending this pure bond with Hashem into the rest of the year as well. The *avodah* on Succos is the time to live in the material world under “Hashem’s shade”, to dwell with Hashem’s Presence in all aspects of our life. The *avodah* on Hoshanah Rabbah is to fuse this entire process [from Elul until now] into one unit [to bring us to a state of oneness with Hashem through all of the above points]. The *avodah* on *Shemini Atzeres/Simchas Torah* is the joy that one can feel, in all of the above points fused together.

QUESTION Are there any sefarim I can learn which can give me a greater and deeper understanding of the *Yomim Noraim*. I am not looking for a *sefer* that merely gives words of *chizuk* (inspiration) or *mussar shmuessen* or nice ideas. I am looking for a deep *sefer* which analyzes *Yomim Noraim* and takes it apart like a *sugya*. I do not understand anything that touches *Kaballah*, though, so I would appreciate a list of *sefarim* that I can learn which explain about the depth of the *Yomim Noraim*. **ANSWER**

- *Sefer Pachad Yitzchok on Yomim Noraim* ספר פחד יצחק על ימים נוראים
- *Sefer Talilei Chaim* ספר טללי חיים על ימים נוראים
- *Sefer Beis Ginzai* ספר בית גני

However there are some sections in that *sefer* which deal with *Kaballah*, so you can skip those.

- The *sefarim* of Rav Shlomo Brevda *zt”l*
- *Sefer Bnei Yissocher* ספר בני יששכר
- *The shiurim* of R’ Moshe Shmuel Shapiro *zt”l* – for example “אפיקים”

QUESTION What should a person focus on during the days of doing *teshuvah*? What is the main *kaballah* (resolution) to make as opposed to all other *kaballos* to improve? **ANSWER** The main resolution which is needed is for a person to set aside daily time of having quiet time to be alone with Hashem, to bind one’s *nefesh* (soul) to Hashem, simply and earnestly, with *temimus* and *p’shitus*, and to speak to Him “as one talks to a friend” (as

the *Mesillas Yesharim* writes), and to beg Hashem to take pity on him that he be *zocheh* to become attached with Hashem. Without doing this, all of one’s *avodah* is just imaginary, and it is included in the category of one who takes a risky, dangerous path (as Rabbeinu Yonah writes in *Shaarei Teshuvah*) who will need to keep making *kaballos* to improve in order to place himself on the proper path. This is the fundamental and the basis, for the entire path of inner, true, *ruchniyus*: One needs to set aside time each day and bind his *nefesh*, to let his soul become attached, with the Creator [by thinking of Hashem and talking to Him], whether this is for a little bit of time a longer time. One should not ever miss this daily quota. If you are ready to take this further, you should go to a deserted place once a week where no one is around, and bind yourself to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, being alone with Him and thinking of Him and talking to Him, developing your relationship with Him and attaching yourself to Him - for a few hours straight. Then you will know what “*Ain Od Milvado*” (there is nothing besides Him) is, in the actual sense.

QUESTION How can a person succeed in changing an unwanted habit, whether in the practical side of life, or in areas of *ruchniyus*? **ANSWER** Generally speaking, there are two root ways of how we can do work on ourselves. One way is through taking the “all-inclusive” approach (*kelalus*), and it is also known as *mesirus nefesh* (self-sacrifice). The other way is through specifics, known as *peratus*, also known as *hadragah*, progressing step-by-step.

In the first way, *kelalus*, a person firmly makes a conviction, intellectually and also emotionally, that he is making an absolute decision to change. He makes up firmly in his mind that he will have the boldness and strength of character to change his behavior. Sometimes a person can employ the use of other external “anchors” which will make him feel somewhat forced to keep to his decision. For example, if a person wants to become serious about learning Torah, he may decide firmly that he will not eat or go to sleep that day unless he has fulfilled his quota of Torah learning. This approach is extreme, and “many tried to do it but did not succeed”, as it was said of those who tried to be like Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. The other approach, *peratus*, is where a person sets smaller goals to accomplish, which require only a bit of willpower and minimal exertion: Each day, the person examines if he has fulfilled this small accomplishment. This also entails making use of various external “anchors” that will make him feel personally obliged to fulfill his goals. Realistically speaking, he should use “anchors” that speak to his particular personality and his current level. Using this approach, one makes gradual progress, getting further and further – progressing slowly, but with consistency.

It should be emphasized, however, that if a person is trying to overcome an *aveirah* which he commits habitually, *chas v’shalom*, then “*There is no advice and no understanding against Hashem*” other than trying with all his might, and with sensibility, to overcome the sinful habits. From the archive Bilvavi Q & A