



Rosh Chodesh Mazal - 009 Elul | Virgin

Elul - The Mazal of Besulah\Virgin

The month of Elul, as is well-known, contains the *mazal* of *besulah*, virgin.^[1] [1]

The verse “*Ani L’Dodi, V’Dodi Li*” (“I am to my Beloved, and my Beloved is to me”)^[2] [2] refers to the month of Elul. Thus [since the *mazal* of Elul is *besulah\virgin*], the term “*ani*” is referring to the aspect of *besulah\virgin*. The relationship between the Jewish people and Hashem are compared to a *chosson* and *kallah* (a groom and bride), with Hashem depicted as the *chosson* and the Jewish People as His *kallah*.

There are different relationships that a *kallah* (bride) may later have towards her husband. She may [*chas v’shalom*] become widowed or divorced from him. Or, she may retain her original status of being a “virgin” towards him.

Let us see what the concept of *besulah\virgin* is, which each Jew needs to have [in his relationship towards Hashem], in the month of Elul, the month where the concept of the *besulah\virgin* takes hold.

The virgin girl has a pure status, since she has not yet had relations with any man, but this also means that she has not yet become exclusively designated to the man who betroths her in marriage.

The first and only person whom the Torah calls a *besulah* is Rivkah Imeinu. The Torah says that she was a beautiful maiden, and a virgin, whom no man had relations with. From here we learn what the concept of a *besulah* is all about.

Of Rivkah, the Torah also says that she had a painful pregnancy, when her future sons, Yaakov and Esav, were clashing within her. She went to seek out the word of Hashem concerning this matter. She passed by the house of idols and she felt intense movement, and when she passed by the Beis Midrash she also felt intense movement. She didn’t know what kind of baby she was having, an idol worshipper or a Torah scholar, and she was confused.

The depth of this was that she was like a *beinoni*, a person who is “in between” different states, whose status is *teluyah*, pending – one who is not here neither there. That is the very concept of a *besulah*: she has not had relations with any man, but she is not yet designated to her husband, because her status is *teluyah*, pending, resembling the *beinoni*, whose fate lies in the balance.

The Connection Between Mazal Besulah\Virgin and Seeking Hashem In Elul

In Elul, our *avodah* is to seek out Hashem, as it is written, “*Seek Hashem, where He is found*”^[3] [3], which refers to the month of Elul. But this “seeking out” of Hashem must come from the same purity of the *besulah*, just as the pure, holy *besulah* Rivkah Imeinu sought the word of Hashem, as the Torah says, “*And she went to seek Hashem.*”^[4] [4]

That is why the *mazal* of Elul is *besulah*, the virgin - it is because we must seek out Hashem like the

original *besulah*\virgin, Rivkah, who sought Hashem. This is an additional insight into the verse “Seek Hashem where He is found” – it means that **we must “seek Hashem”, from our “besulah” aspect.**

In the 40 days which span Elul through the Ten Days of Repentance, the climax is the holy day of *Yom Kippur*, where there was an *avodah* of the *Kohen Gadol* in the *Kodesh Kodashim*. The *Kohen Gadol* is the only one of whom it is said (in the Torah) that he is required to marry a *besulah*\virgin. A regular *Kohen* can marry a divorcee, but the *Kohen Gadol* can only marry a *besulah*. Thus, at the end of this 40 day period, which is on *Yom Kippur*, is the *avodah* of the *Kohen Gadol* - who is the full revelation of the concept of *besulah*. In the general sense, all of the Jewish people have the *mazal* of *besulah* in Elul, but it is the *Kohen Gadol* specifically where the concept of *besulah* is manifest in the actual, *halachic* sense, for he is only permitted to marry a *besulah*.

The Concept of “Besulah” In Halachah, and In The Soul

Returning to our original question: What exactly is our “*Ani L’Dodi*” (I am to my Beloved) aspect in Elul, and how does it relate specifically to the *mazal besulah* of Elul?

Moshe ascended the mountain of Sinai in Elul, and he remained there for 40 days, and it is our own *avodah* during these days to resemble this 40-day ascent of Moshe on the mountain. When Moshe ascended the mountain, he wasn’t here on this world, because he was in Heaven. This 40-day period is therefore not just a period of seeking forgiveness and atonement, in the simple sense; it is a period when Moshe wasn’t on this world. That represents the inner dimension of our *avodah* during these 40 days from Elul through *Yom Kippur*. To resemble Moshe’s ascent to Heaven, when he wasn’t on this world at all, one needs to become closed off from the rest of the world, to become separate and disconnected from This World, so that he can avoid any negative influences from anyone.

That is the implication of the *mazal* of *besulah*\virgin in Elul – one must be like a *besulah*, a “virgin”, in the sense that he\she is closed off from any strange, unwanted influences that come from the people of this world.

How can one attain such a level of purity on this world, though, especially if we are influenced by the surroundings, (as the Rambam famously said, that a person is mainly influenced by the opinions of his surroundings[5] [5])? How can we remain like a *besulah*?

The *avodah* that we have during these days tells us the answer. Our *avodah* in Elul is to be like Moshe when he ascended the mountain for 40 days, when he wasn’t on this world at all. That is how we can be like a *besulah* towards Hashem – by being disconnected from This World, during this time of the year.

This is a very clear definition of the depth of our *avodah* during these days. It is to have 40 days when we are not in this world! In Heaven, Moshe didn’t eat and didn’t sleep - and that is the depth of the *avodah* we have during these days of Elul, through *Yom Kippur*.

This *avodah* ends with *Yom Kippur*, when we resemble angels. That is when we actually do not eat and we wear white to resemble a Heavenly state, like the *Kohen Gadol* in the *Kodesh Kodashim* on *Yom Kippur*, who must be married to a pure *besulah*. But this period of purity begins with Elul, with entering into the innermost chambers with Hashem, which we must be trying to reach for all these 40 days of Elul.

The full revelation of this is on *Yom Kippur*, but these 40 days of Moshe Rabbeinu ascending to the mountain represents the idea of disconnecting from the world, during this time. For this reason, some had the custom to fast for 40 days before *Yom Kippur*, to reflect how Moshe didn’t eat in Heaven for

40 days, because he wasn't part of this world then.

The verse “*Ani L'Dodi V'Dodi Li*” (“I am to my Beloved, and my Beloved is to me”) depicts the month of Elul. **The implication of “*ani*” (I) is that one’s “I” should be like the *besulah*. To the degree that one makes himself like a *besulah* in Elul, there will be “*Ani L'Dodi*” (I am to my Beloved), and accordingly, that is how much of a revelation there will be of “*Dodi Li*” (My Beloved is to me).**^[6] ^[6] Then there will be a special love (*chibah yesairah*) that the “Groom” (Hashem) will show towards His *kallah besulah*, His virgin bride.

Disconnecting From The World – Through Bittul (Self-Nullification) To Hashem

We need to understand the *pnimiyus*, the inner depth, of these days. Our *avodah* during these days is that we should not be found here on this world, just as Moshe wasn't on this world, when he ascended the mountain for 40 days.

In order for one to become separate from the world, he needs to have *bittul* (self-nullification). One needs to be *batel* (בטל\nullified), which has the letters ל, ט, ב (*beis, tes, and lamed*), similar to the root letters of the word *besulah*, which contains the letter ל, ת, ב. The power of *besulah* in Elul is the power to bring a person from the level of *besulah* spelled with a letter ת\tav, to *bittul*, which is spelled with the letter ט\tes.

the *avodah* of being like a *besulah* [in Elul] reveals two aspects [disconnection from the outside, and self-nullification].

As explained, one aspect of *besulah* is to be safeguarded from the rest of the world, so that no one else can enter. On a practical level, this means that one needs to disconnect from the world, similar to how Moshe Rabbeinu ascended the mountain for 40 days, when he was not part of this world. This is what enables the *besulah* to become designated to Hashem – it is through *bittul*, self-nullification.

The verse of “*Ani L'Dodi V'Dodi Li*” implies that if I am designated to my Beloved alone, “*Ani L'Dodi*”, and to no one else - only then can there be “*Dodi Li*”, that “my Beloved is to me”. That is the implication of *besulah* – to be designated to Hashem alone. There is only *Ani L'Dodi* if I am *batel* (nullified) to Him, and only then there can be “*Dodi Li*”.

In clearer terms to help us understand the concept, the Rambam in *Hilchos Teshuvah* says that only when one regrets, confesses, and resolves not to sin again, can “The Knower of all hidden secrets can testify, that the person will not revert back to sin”.^[7] ^[7] The commentators wonder what the source for these words of the Rambam is. But along the lines of our discussion, the explanation of the Rambam's words is because a *besulah* guards her opening, and if the Creator knows that the person is still apt to return to sinning, it is as if the opening isn't closed anymore.

The month of Elul contains the *mazal* of *besulah*, but it seems that we are no longer a “*besulah*\virgin” towards Hashem. For if a *besulah* has relations, whether in the usual fashion or in the unusual fashion, she is no longer a *besulah*, and so have we “cohabited” with other “men”, by committing sins. So how we can still be like a *besulah* towards Hashem? Haven't we lost our “*besulah*” status by now?

The answer to this is that we can only be a *besulah* if we are like the *ketanah*, a minor girl under the age of three, whose *besulim* return even after it has been broken. Without being like a *ketanah* under the age of three, we cannot be like a *besulah* in Elul, and even if we would do *teshuvah*, we would

only be like a widow or divorcee towards Hashem. Only from resembling the *ketanah* under the age of three can our *teshuvah* be genuine, lasting, and complete.

Resembling The Purity of The Besulah Ketanah (Virgin Minor Girl) – Through Bittul

This is the depth of the *mazal besulah* of Elul.

There are two kinds of *besulos*\virgins. There is a kind of *besulah* who has never cohabited at all, and there is also a *besulah* who loses her *besulim* but later her *besulim* return (which is only possible with a *ketanah*, a minor girl under the age of three). The month on Elul is not like the first kind of *besulah*, who has never cohabited\sinced. That is an altogether different level of purity. The month of Elul is rather like the *besulah* whose *besulim* returns to her even after it has been broken, which is only possible by a *ketanah* under the age of three.

Therefore, **in Elul, one needs to be like the *ketanah*, within his soul, by nullifying himself totally to the Authority**, and in this way, then even if the *besulim* have been broken, the *besulim* return. On a similar note, the *Raavad*^[8] ^[8] writes that the *mazal* of *besulah* in Elul implies “a woman, who has light *daas*”^[9] ^[9] [one should be pure-minded and ready to nullifying himself to the Creator, just as a woman nullifies herself to her husband].

The more *bittul* (self-nullification) that a person feels towards the Creator, the more that the ‘*besulim*’ [purity] can return. A *besulah* implies that she is designated only to her husband. According to the level that one makes himself like a *besulah* towards Hashem, that is how much he becomes betrothed and designated to Hashem.

Practically Speaking: Practicing Times of Disconnection From The World In Elul

Making this matter practical, each person must find during these days some time of the day where he is not of the people of the world. He needs time to silence his soul and be dedicated to Hashem, where there is only Hashem, where he transcends time and place. The *Beis Din* sanctifies the times, and this is because the Jewish people can be above time and be disconnected from the world. If a person acquires during these days a deep place in his soul where he is disconnected from everything, just for some time of the day, he acquires new “*besulim*” for himself.

If one only does *teshuvah* on an external level, he is only doing *teshuvah* from the outer, superficial layers of his existence, and he won't succeed. He needs a new place in himself, “the place where *baalei teshuvah* stand”^[10] ^[10] - a place which is not a place. This means a disconnection from the world and a place where one is completely dedicated to Hashem. If one reaches this place in his soul, he is connected to period of the 40 days when Moshe ascended the mountain. This is also the point where the “*besulim* return”. If we want to define what our actual, practical *avodah* is during these days, that is the definition.

In order for one to reach the *avodah* of these days, he must reach a place in his soul where he feels disconnected from the world. Then his soul will hear Hashem saying **סלחתי כדבריך**, “I have forgiven you, as you have spoken.”^[11] ^[11] These are days where any person can become disconnected from the world, similar to how Moshe ascended to Heaven, during this time.

May the Creator merit us to serve Him as we should during these days, and to merit forgiveness from Him, and that all of Creation should merit the complete revelation of Him. *Amen V'Amen*.

[\[1\]](#) ^[12] *Sefer Yetzira* 5:4

[\[2\]](#) ^[13] *Shir HaShirim* 6:3

[\[3\]](#) ^[14] *Yeshayahu* 55:6

[\[4\]](#) ^[15] *Beraishis* 25:25

[\[5\]](#) ^[16] *Rambam Hilchos De'os* 6:1

[\[6\]](#) ^[17] *Sfas Emes: L'Chodesh Elul*

[\[7\]](#) ^[18] *Rambam Hilchos Teshuvah* 2:2

[\[8\]](#) ^[19] *peirush HaRaavad: Sefer Yetzira* 5:4

[\[9\]](#) ^[20] *Shabbos* 33b

[\[10\]](#) ^[21] *Berachos* 34b

[\[11\]](#) ^[22] *Shemos* 14:20 (this verse is often recited in the Selichos prayers).

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