



Ellul - 002 Allowing Hashem To Enter Your Heart

My Beloved Friend and My Father

It is well-known from our earlier Rabbinic sources that Elul stands for *Ani L'Dodi V'Dodi Li*, "I am to my Beloved, and my Beloved is to me." In these days of Elul, Hashem is called *Dodi*, our Beloved. When it comes Rosh HaShanah, we don't call Hashem "*Dodi*" and we elevate the title instead to "*Avinu Malkeinu*", "Our Father Our King." On Rosh HaShanah, we view ourselves as sons to a father, or as servants to a master.

There is an obvious question. Why is Hashem only called *Dodi* during Elul? Why not on Rosh HaShanah too?

The explanation, though, is as follows. There are two kinds of relationships we have with Hashem - to relate to Him as a "Beloved Friend," or to relate to Him as our "Father, our King."

A friend is someone who visits sometimes, but we don't spend all our time with a friend. But if we are a servant to a king, we are always in the palace, and if we are a prince, we are certainly always near the king in the palace.

In Elul, before it's Rosh HaShanah, our relationship to Hashem is that of "*Dodi*", our Beloved Friend. It is a closer relationship than during the rest of the year, but it's still not the closest kind of relationship with Him. On Rosh HaShanah and then in the Ten Days of Repentance, though, we get closer. "*Seek Hashem where He is found, call out to Him where He is close*" is a possuk referring to the Ten Days of Teshuvah, where there is more closeness with Hashem - then we relate to Him as a Father, as a King.

Elul is the time to prepare for the Day of Judgment (Rosh HaShanah), and it is the time to begin the first level of closeness with Hashem - to relate to Him as a Beloved Friend, and to hopefully arrive at the level of "Our Father Our King." If a person is still relating to Hashem as a Beloved Friend by the time it comes Rosh HaShanah and he doesn't relate with Hashem as a Father or as a King, he is still at the lower stage, and he will be behind on Rosh HaShanah in his relationship with Hashem. The avodah of Elul is to begin with relating to Hashem as a Beloved Friend, but by the time it comes Rosh HaShanah, we have to have arrived as the level of Our Father Our King.

But how do we do it? How do we feel towards Hashem as *Ani L'Dodi V'Dodi Li*, and how do we progress after that to the level of *Avinu Malkeinu*?

Opening Your Heart So That Hashem Can Enter

It is written, "*The voice of my Beloved knocks*".^[1] Hashem is called the Beloved, Who knocks on the "door" of our heart.

When there is knocking on the door, does the door always get opened? Not always. Sometimes the person isn't home, and even if he is home, sometimes he's sleeping, so he doesn't hear anyone knocking.

Hashem is knocking on the door in each person's heart during Elul! The question is if a person hears that knocking.

If a person really wants to feel that Hashem is his *Dodi*, a Beloved Friend, then he has to make sure to open the door when he hears the voice of the Beloved Friend knocking. He needs to open up the closed doors of his heart, and then, so to speak, Hashem is enabled to enter there. It is written concerning the future, "*And I will tear their closed hearts.*" The heart of a person is usually closed, it's sort of locked. A person's avodah is to open his heart, to greet the voice of his Beloved Friend who is knocking on his inner doors.

How indeed do we open the doors of our heart so that Hashem can enter?

Compare this to the following illustration. If a big person has to get through the door, we need to make a large opening that will fit his size, so that he can get through the door. How big of an opening do we need to make in the entranceway so that *Hashem* can enter?

Hashem says: "My child, make me for a small opening of *teshuvah* (repentance), like the size of a needlepoint, and I will then open for you openings the size of wagons" (*Shir HaShirim Rabbah 5:2*). The opening we need to make for Hashem to enter our heart, so to speak, is only the size of a mere needle!

The Kotzker Rebbe zt"l explained: "But make sure that it's a real opening. It can't be an opening that you quickly close up after you make the opening, like when a collector comes to your door and you open the door just a little so that you can hand him some money and then you immediately close the door. In order to make an opening so that Hashem can enter the heart, it has to be a kind of opening which stays open and you don't close it afterwards.

There is a kind of person who opens up his door to Hashem three times each day - by the three tefillos of Shacharis, Mincha and Maariv, but when it comes Aleinu, he's already out the door of the shul. He opened up a door for Hashem to enter, but he immediately ran away and basically closed the door on Hashem!

In order for a person to be eligible that Hashem enter him, he needs to make a true opening in his heart. It can be a very small opening - the size of a needle - but it must be a true opening, which never closes after it is opened.

A person is inspired in Elul, and he wants to really become close to Hashem. But after Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, what does he look like? Does he remain opened towards Hashem, or did he already close the door now that Elul is over? Was he just inspired temporarily, and now he's waiting for next year's Elul? Or does he allow his opening for Hashem to remain open during the rest of the year as well when it's not Elul?

If it's a real opening, Hashem enters. If it's only a temporary opening for Him, and a person plans on closing the door on Hashem after Elul ends, then such an opening was never really an opening.

Compare the difference between a guest and a family member who lives in your house. When a guest comes to your house, you clean a room for him, you make his bed, you think about his needs. But after a week he's out of here, at most, a month or two months, but eventually, he leaves the house. A family member though has his permanent room in the house. We don't plan on him leaving the house, so we give him a permanent room to stay in. He lives in the house; he's not just staying there.

When we open an opening in our heart for Hashem to enter there, do we treat Hashem like a guest in us, or like a permanent family member? If we view Hashem as a mere guest for Elul, Hashem is not

looking to come into such a place. Hashem wants to dwell in our hearts, *"I will dwell amongst You"* - in each person's heart - that each person's heart should be a permanent dwelling for His Name to settle upon.

The Mishkan was temporary, while the Beis HaMikdash was planned as a permanent dwelling. We need to let our heart be a Beis HaMikdash for Hashem, not just a Mishkan; we need to build in ourselves a permanent dwelling for Hashem to settle in. The house we build for Hashem in our heart is really Hashem's house, because He is in charge of everything on this world; it's all His house. We can't really close the door on Him because He is the Owner.

But the question is - How do we do that and come to realize that, practically?

Cleaning Out The Heart From The Many Desires

In order for one to merit that Hashem enters the heart, he has to first clean out his heart so he can make room for Hashem. When a guest comes, we clean the house for him. If a person really wants Hashem to come enter his heart, he must clean out his heart from all that has piled up in it, so that there can be room for Hashem to enter there.

If a guest stays in our house for a few days, we find it tolerable, but we find it impossible to live with a permanent guest in the house. The only way to get out of this problem is to give him his own room, where he can stay there permanently, and then we stop viewing him as a guest. So too, if we want the Shechinah to dwell in our heart, if we want Hashem to enter our heart constantly, we must clean out a permanent space for Him. We have to give up ownership from the room, so to speak, and give it away to Hashem. Make your heart *hekdesh* (sacred property) for Him.

We have all *retzonos* (desires); we want all kinds of things. Some people want a new car, some want a bigger house, some want honor. If a person really wants Hashem to enter into him, directly, he needs to give Hashem one room in his heart to stay in, a room which is entirely designated for Hashem, where no other *retzonos* can come in.

Therefore, if a person really wants to reach closeness with Hashem during these days of Elul, he should give up something for Hashem. It is impossible to just go on with regular life as it is, pursuing all our desires, and to simultaneously desire that Hashem should be in our heart.

Giving Up One Desire

The heart of a person can either be a soft heart of flesh, a *lev basar*, or a heart of stone - a *lev even*. What do we do when we need to build a house on a rocky area? We bring a bulldozer that can smash open all the rocks. When the heart of a person has become hardened like a rock, it cannot be opened with a mere key. It needs to be shattered open, in order to clear space for Hashem to enter there.

When it comes Elul and a person wants to become closer to Hashem, he has to make a self-accounting with himself and write down what he is prepared to give up for Hashem. It will be very difficult to give up a desire, and it will be as hard as breaking into a mountain. In order to break a rock, you have to slice a path through it. So too, if we want to break open a stony heart, we need to dig into it and carve a path into it so that Hashem can enter it.

A person therefore needs to give up desires that are in his heart. What should he give up? Each person has free will in this. But one thing is clear: you have to give up at least one desire for Hashem, by the time the day of judgment is here. That will give a space in your heart for Hashem to enter.

It won't be enough to give up the desire for just *Aseres Ymei Teshuvah*, and even if you manage to

break that desire all the way until Hoshanah Rabbah and even Chanukah (which is the actual end to the judgment, according to the *sefarim hakedoshim*), it's still not enough! You have to give up the desire totally! Give it up, forever!

Imagine if a person gives a wedding present to his friend when his friend gets married, and two weeks later he shows up knocking on his newlywed friend's door and he says, "I apologize. I need back the present I gave you." People don't do that. Once you give it, that's it. You can't get ask for it back.

Are we really willing to give away something for Hashem, and never wish to get it back again? Or will we end up having regrets? If we make a resolution, will we regret it ten years later...?

If a person just gives up one desire totally, he has a space in his heart for Hashem to enter there, and he will merit the *Shechinah* settle inside himself.

From Friend To Father

That describes Elul, the time of *Ani L'Dodi, V'Dodi Li* - "I am to my Beloved, and my Beloved is to me". The step after that [which begins on Rosh HaShanah] is to progress to the level of *Avinu Malkeinu* - Our Father, Our King.

At first we need to make an opening for Hashem in ourselves, allowing Him to at least enter us and visit there. He is like a Beloved Friend during Elul. But as we know, a friend eventually takes leave from us, so too, in Elul, Hashem is like a friend who visits us, but after Elul, the visit ends. What will be after Elul, then? If a person remains toward Hashem as "*Dodi*" and he hasn't yet gotten to a relationship of *Avinu Malkeinu* with Hashem - which begins on Rosh HaShanah - then when winter comes, everything will go back to routine, and a person is back to where he started before Elul.

So a person has to prepare for the Day of Judgment [Rosh HaShanah]. We have the whole month of Elul, which is 29 days, to first allow Hashem to enter us, in which we relate to Him as a Beloved Friend who is visiting us. After Elul, though, we must let Hashem become a permanent dweller in our home! Elul is the time in which we need to realize that Hashem is our Beloved Friend, our *Dodi*, and after Elul, the *avodah* is to let Him permanently dwell in our heart.

Including Hashem In Your Problems

For this reason, there are many *tefillos* we *daven* for on Rosh HaShanah. There is great depth contained in this which is actually very simple.

Baruch Hashem, it's commendable if a person allows Hashem into his heart, but that's not enough. Imagine two people who live together in an apartment - are they quiet with each other or do they talk with each other? Of course they talk to each other!

When a guest comes to the house, do we talk to him, or do we act silent? We converse with the guest: "*Shalom Aleichem!* How are you? How do you feel? Where are you from?"

Therefore, in Elul there are many *tefillos* we *daven*, because when a person opens his heart to allow Hashem to enter him, then Hashem and the person are together, so to speak, and when two are together with each other, they speak with each other.

If one doesn't allow Hashem into his heart, he won't speak with Him either. But when one realizes that Hashem is the Friend who visits us in Elul, he can begin to talk to Him, just like we converse with a guest who is staying in the house. And when we realize that He is not just a guest, but a permanent dweller in our home, we tell Him more things, down to the tiniest detail.

When a guest comes, we clean up the house for him, and we sweep up any problems and hide them. We say to him, "*Baruch Hashem*, all is well" and we smile for him. But if he's part of our family, we include him in all our problems.

During Elul, we are building a certain relationship with Hashem, and it continues into the Ten Days of Teshuvah. We must not think that it ends after 40 days! A person must not have the notion that we get closer to Hashem from Elul until Yom Kippur, and then we say goodbye to Hashem, *chas v'shalom*. Rather, the mindset should be, that our Avodah begins in Elul – and it never ends.

As is well-known, Moshe went up to Heaven during these 40 days to receive the second set of Luchos, and he came back down the day after Yom Kippur. Was it the same Torah as the first set of Luchos? Or are we learning today only from the second set of Luchos? The second set of Luchos can be compared to a guest whom we make into a permanent member of our household. The Torah tells us what to do, and one has to subjugate himself to the Torah. Hashem's Torah owns us, and we are the guests that must abide by the rules of the Owner. The question is if a person really understands that, or if he feels that really *he* is the owner of himself...

When a person calls to Hashem and invites Him to enter his heart, what does he do when Hashem comes? Is he prepared to give up his private ownership of himself? Is he ready to give up some small thing for Hashem?

After Elul

There are many inspirational speeches given during Elul about the Holy Days. The question is: After Yom Kippur, does a person feel that Hashem has more of a space in his heart? If not, he is like a person who gives a gift to his friend, and after two weeks he asks for the gift back. Hashem is giving us a gift. It is our choice to use it, or *chas v'shalom* - to give it back. Of course, we don't give it back to Hashem, but if we don't know how to keep the gift, the gift goes away on its own, along with the time of the year that brings it.

If one realizes the value of the gift we have in Elul, he knows how to use the gift of Elul properly and really acquire a closeness with Hashem in his heart. If one doesn't realize that there is a gift here, these days pass and go on, and the gift vanishes with it.

Imagine if a person would come here and tell the audience how to make a lot of money, and he gives strategies on how to make it happen, and after the lecture, no one tries his ideas. Did anything happen from the lecture? He said nice ideas, but no one is practicing them and actualizing them.

We are in days that have an opportunity contained in them. Does anyone here have a clear path in how we will get closer to Hashem by the time these holy days are over? If someone does, that's wonderful; if not, one must realize that Hashem is giving us a gift, and we need to know how to use it.

To illustrate, if someone gets a car for a present, but he doesn't know how to drive, he doesn't know how to use his gift. He has to learn how to drive and then he can know how to use the present he has. So too, Hashem gave us these forty days as a gift, but they are apt to just pass by like all the other days, if we don't know how to use them. We all know that these days will pass. If a person knows how to use these days to get closer to Hashem, he is doing very well, but if he doesn't know how to go about these days, then what will it help him to just know that Elul is a special time? What does he gain from this knowledge? Compare this to a person who knows that in order to get a job, you need to make effort to land yourself a job – yet he doesn't make any active effort to get a job. Of what use is his knowledge? He has to take action, or else he won't get a job.

So if one knows that these days of Elul are a gift from Hashem, he has to also be very clear *how* he

can get closer to Hashem during these days. But if someone remains satisfied with just hearing speeches and ideas, maybe he will feel inspired and enjoy the speech, but he goes on with life as usual and returns to routine. The next day he is back to before.

We must do something; it is not enough to know of inspiration. Compare this to visiting a mourner. When we visit a mourner, we can console him or her by joining in his pain, but we can't take away the troubling situation. We cannot bring the deceased back. But Elul is not like that. During Elul, Hashem give us something which we can actually use to take away the problems.

Inspiration doesn't last for that long. It stays for 2 or 3 days at best, but it goes away eventually.

When you buy a car, it's not inspiration; it's a lasting acquirement. When you get married, it's not just inspiration; you have gotten married. So too, when a person gives Hashem space to enter his heart, this is not inspiration - it is something that must be actively achieved, in the practical sense. *"For the matter is very close to you, it is in your mouth and in your heart to do so."*

So we must seek to make closeness to Hashem into something we can actualize and practically acquire.

The problem is that people remain superficial each year. People hear lectures, enjoyable Divrei Torah about Elul which we have all heard of, such as the words *"Ani L'Dodi V'Dodi Li"* and *"Dirshu Hashem"*, but what do we gain from hearing all these *pesukim*? We have all heard of these *pesukim* even before all the speeches about them....

Reflect on the following. Do you feel that you have gotten closer to Hashem since last Elul? If "yes", continue the good work. If "no", you must clarify and research how you can get closer to Hashem, what practical path you need to take.

We are all used to hearing speeches at least once a week. There are good speakers who speak, and they have good intentions, and they all say words that are truthful which inspire us. But the question is if their words are truly building the life of the listeners, or if they are just nice speeches and nothing more.

We all have free choice when we hear a speech to either continue on as usual, or to take it to heart and try to see how to actualize it in our life in a practical way.

Hashem should merit that each person here should understand what these days are about, and to seek the way in how to become closer to Hashem, and to try to make it actual and practical; through doing that, one will surely merit to be written for a good year.

[1] Shir HaShirim 5:2

Source: <https://bilvavi.us/english/ellul-002-allowing-hashem-enter-heart>