

There is No Lull in Elul

By Rabbi Yehudah ben Shomeyr

Lev. 23:24-32 Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, In the seventh month, in the first [day] of the month, shall ye have a sabbath, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, an holy convocation. Ye shall do no servile work [therein]: but ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Also on the tenth [day] of this seventh month [there shall be] a day of atonement: it shall be an holy convocation unto you; and ye shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD. And ye shall do no work in that same day: for it [is] a day of atonement, to make an atonement for you before the LORD your God. For whatsoever soul [it be] that shall not be afflicted in that same day, he shall be cut off from among his people. And whatsoever soul [it be] that doeth any work in that same day, the same soul will I destroy from among his people. Ye shall do no manner of work: [it shall be] a statute for ever throughout your generations in all your dwellings. It [shall be] unto you a sabbath of rest, and ye shall afflict your souls: in the ninth [day] of the month at even, from even unto even, shall ye celebrate your sabbath.

Once summer hits its peak and the roller coaster begins its decent from the crest of the big hill, the summer solstice has passed and the days get noticeable shorter, there is a slight hint of a change in the weather. You know the solar year is beginning to wind down.

When Tish B'Av comes to the Lunar Calendar; the time when us Jews mourn the loss of both the first and second Temple, there is a noticeable change in the spiritual weather. The Hebraic year starts to wind to a close as well and everything seems to shift in the soul. You begin to stop and realize that it was because of Selfishness and Idolatry that the first Temple was destroyed, and it was because of the Cooling and Callusing of the heart that the second Temple was destroyed and in both cases there was a failure to keep the marriage contract of Torah that sent us into exile. Even to this day one really begins to feel the impact of what it is to be a Jew.

Just as at Pesach (Passover) we are commanded to retell the story of the exodus in the first person as if it happened to us personally. And just as when the Torah was given to at Mount Sinai, we are taught that we were there to hear and receive the Torah through the DNA of our ancestors. The same holds true with Tish'BAv onward. You think, "I am in exile because of my sins." And as a Netzari Jew, the line of Thinking progresses to say, "And it was my sins that nailed Yeshua to that execution stake!"

Once Tish B'Av has passed and the month of Elul is inaugurated a Jew can't help but feel the weighty awe and solemnness of the season. To remember that Elul leads to the New Year (Rosh Hashanah, the Feast of Trumpets) and that leads us to Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), the single most solemn day of the entire year; a day when even non-practicing Jews get Jewish. A day when the Levitical Priests of days gone by would enter the Holy of Holies in the Temple and sprinkle the blood on the Ark of the Covenant, G-d's Throne on Earth, to confess and make atonement for sin on behalf of all Israel. The time of the season when it is said that the Books in Heaven are open and G-d balances the Books and sets all the accounts and seals the events for the New Year, one can't help but be in silent awe. One can't help recoiling into oneself to take spiritual inventory of the year that has just gone by.

After the last apple is dipped in honey to symbolize a sweet start to the New Year is eaten and once everyone has been greeted with, "La Shannah Tova!", and once the last blast of the Shofar has sounded one is left hearing the reverberating echo in the soul that acts as a supernatural alarm clock that shakes and wakes the soul from its summer slumber.

One begins to see the leaves on the trees begin to drain of color from a hearty, thick, rich, lush, green, to a pail sickly yellow, as if the trees are even in awe of the impending Judgment of Yom Kippur. One begins to truly understand the phrase, "turning over a new leaf".

You see, during the month of Elul, we have 30 days to take an account of the entire year. To replay those security tapes in our brains, to try and recall if we have wronged anyone in anyway. To make a list of things we need to make right. To make a list of people we need to seek forgiveness from and make amends with. It is such a humbling and beautiful thing. 30 days to make sure everything is right between me and my fellow man. Then comes Rosh Hashanah, the New Year, the Feast of Trumpets, which on the one hand anticipates a great and fresh New Year, and on the other hand is a shaking to the core. For the shofar blast has announced the 10 Days of Awe; a time of getting nitty gritty, a time of getting down to business with the All Mighty G-d. Once you're cleaned the slate with your fellow man one can channel every ounce of energy, focusing on their personal relationship with G-d and making things right between you and Him.

Once Yom Kippur arrives the Books in Heaven are closed and the unrepentant are blotted out and the repentant are sealed for a sweet new year, and those that straddle the fence has one last change to repent.

Yom Kippur has been marked by a day of mourning, chest beating, fasting and confessing ones sins. It's the saddest, most somber day on the Hebrew Calendar. But have you noticed that in the English language the word Atonement symbolizes the potential of that day? At-One-ment. For this reason I have come to make it one of the most festive days of the year. For if I've truly spent Elul making things right between me and my neighbor, and if I've truly spent the 10 days of Awe making sure things are right between me and G-d, then even though I'm denying myself of food and other luxuries as the Scripture commands (Lev.23:27) I can be so busy thanking and praising G-d for His mercy, grace and forgiveness, that I won't have to time to think of food, sex or other things I have been commanded to abstain from for that day. I won't have to mope around mournfully because my business has already been taken care of. HalleluYah! Glory be to HaShem! I can look forward to a clean slate and a fresh start to the New Year. Now I can focus on the plans and dreams G-d has for me for Him!

This Elul, this Rosh Hashanah take care of business. Don't treat Yom Kippur like April 15th and wait till the last minute and rush to get the paperwork done. This year don't beat your chest and hang your head low on Yom Kippur. Instead, be ready ahead of time to wave your hands in the air and hold your head toward heaven in praise and thanks to G-d for His Goodness, His Loving-Kindness, His mercy that endures forever and are new every morning.

Shalom and LaShanah Tova!

-- Rabbi Yehudah