ELUL (I)

A UNIQUE TIME

On Rosh Chodesh Elul, Moshe Rabbeinu ascended Har Sinai for the final forty days to receive the second set of luchos. At the conclusion of those days, on Yom Kippur, HaShem forgave the Yidden completely and that day was designated as a day of forgiveness. For this reason, those forty days are auspicious for teshuvah.

Though the month of Elul is an earnest time of teshuva, it is during this very time that we experience a particular closeness to HaShem.

In a classic maamar, the Alter Rebbe explains this by the mashal of a king who, on the way to his palace, walks through the fields. There, everyone can approach him and he greets them all with a smiling countenance, until he enters his palace with only his chosen courtiers.

So, too, during the month of Elul, as HaShem prepares to enter his throne room on Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur, He passes through the mundane world. Thus, we are able to connect to Him more easily than usual. At that time in particular, He inspires us and empowers us to do teshuva and return to Him.

In Lubavitch, even though Shabbos Mevarchim Elul would still be a clear and sunny day, the air felt different. There was a smell of Elul in the air; you could feel the first stirrings of a teshuva-breeze. Every person there was beginning to grow a little more serious. There was a smell of Elul in the air; you could already hear the shofar. It woke you up to the fact that the world was now filled with Elul. You dress hastily, a trifle dissatisfied with yourself for having somehow slept in so late. You recall that this was the time that Moshe Rabbeinu spent on the mountain. These are propitious days, days in which you can accomplish more than usual. You tell yourself that you really should become a mensch; you cannot let these hours be lost on sleep.

By the time you arrive at the beis midrash you find quite a crowd already there. Some are saying Tehillim, some are reading Chassidus, while others, whether standing or sitting, are davening.

At one farbrengen the Rebbe emphasized that the Friediker Rebbe told this narrative long after he had left Lubavitch, in order to inspire others to follow this lifestyle. Even today, every Yid is capable of feeling the “Elul air.”

CONSIDER

How does the joy of HaShem’s presence not detract from the seriousness of the time?

How is it possible to feel the “Elul air” today if one’s surroundings may not reflect the specialty of this time?

The month of Elul is compared to an ir miklat, to which one can escape from the yetzer hora who attempts to take revenge on a person.

At a farbrengen in 1951, the Rebbe delivered the following message which he asked to be publicized in all possible ways:

“How chassidim in Lubavitch conducted themselves throughout Elul. Secondly, for fifteen minutes after Maariv, the talmidim were to learn avodah’dike maamorim relevant to this time of year.

(לקוטי תורה דברים לב,א הוקייב רבי מנחם אב) 5707 (467)

The month of Elul is a month of reckoning. Just as a businessman must take stock every so often and correct any problems to ensure the business is profitable, the same applies in ruchniyus matters. After having served HaShem, and been occupied with Torah and mitzvos throughout the year, we have a month to make an accurate account of the past year, fix that which needs correcting and strengthen our positive traits. Through this excellent preparation, we merit a good and sweet year, b’gashmiyus and b’ruchniyus.

During one farbrengen, the Rebbe spoke of the joyful attitude to be had during Elul. Though one should be bothered by any wrongdoings they may have done throughout the year, yet thinking of their closeness to HaShem during this month should bring one to tremendous joy. As discussed in Tanya, distress over ones wrongdoings should not detract from the joy of the neshama.
MIXED CLASSES

What separation between genders is required by a speech or event? The Gemara describes how amoraim ensured a complete separation between men and women when they gathered for a lecture, and we find by Matan Torah that the men and women were separate. Poskim emphasize how imperative this is to preserve the sanctity of Am Yisroel, and that one is not allowed to speak in front of a mixed crowd.

While mingling is never appropriate, there is a special prohibition when people are gathered for a common program (lecture, chuppa, levaya) and there is more connection between them.

Is it necessary to have a full mechitza?

Some rishonim explain that the separation by the lecture is primarily to prevent intermingling, for which a low barrier would suffice, while others write that seeing each other is also a concern, according to which a full mechitza would be necessary. Some poskim write that although a mechitza is generally required, in a situation where there is no other way to be mekarev them to Torah and mitzvos, one may rely on the first opinion.

Under difficult circumstances in Communist Russia, the Rebbe — as an exception for that unique situation — gave a rare allowance for men and women to participate in the same class, on condition that the seating be separate. The Rebbe emphasized that the heter is only appropriate when there is no other way to be mekarev them, and the goal is to connect them to Yiddishkeit and prevent intermarriage.

(Although we cannot compromise on halacha for the sake of being mekarev people, since there is room for leniency in halacha, it is permissible when there is no other choice.)

In another response from the Rebbe regarding a shiar taking place in a kibutz, the Rebbe was adamant that the class should have a mechitza between the genders.

In conclusion, regular shiurim should ideally be separate classes for men and for women. By a lecture that is open to men and women, one is to be very careful to have a mechitza.

THE HEAVIER LOAD

Reb Nosson (known as Bobby) Vogel was one of the founders and leading supporters of Lubavitch Boys’ School of London. As the strain of funding the school became more demanding, he said to the Rebbe that he felt that it was too difficult for him to continue. The Rebbe smiled a beautiful smile, and said, “Since you are a businessman, I’ll speak to you in business language.”

“Imagine that you are straining yourself to carry a heavy sack, filled with gemstones.

“You know that the Gemara describes how amoraim ensured a complete separation between men and women when they gathered for a lecture, and we find by Matan Torah that the men and women were separate. Poskim emphasize how imperative this is to preserve the sanctity of Am Yisroel, and that one is not allowed to speak in front of a mixed crowd.”

Two business partners once came to the Alter Rebbe to help resolve an argument. The Alter Rebbe looked into their contract, where he found their exact issue addressed, and the two left pleased with the ruling. Soon, however, they returned with a different argument, and again the Alter Rebbe looked into their contract and again found a clause that resolved the exact problem. After a few more repetitions of this occurrence, the Alter Rebbe inquired about the author of their contract. It was Reb Boruch Mordechai.

Two business partners once came to the Alter Rebbe to help resolve an argument. The Alter Rebbe looked into their contract, where he found their exact issue addressed, and the two left pleased with the ruling. Soon, however, they returned with a different argument, and again the Alter Rebbe looked into their contract and again found a clause that resolved the exact problem. After a few more repetitions of this occurrence, the Alter Rebbe inquired about the author of their contract. It was Reb Boruch Mordechai.

THE HEAVIER LOAD

Reb Nosson (known as Bobby) Vogel was one of the founders and leading supporters of Lubavitch Boys’ School of London. As the strain of funding the school became more demanding, he said to the Rebbe that he felt that it was too difficult for him to continue. The Rebbe smiled a beautiful smile, and said, “Since you are a businessman, I’ll speak to you in business language.”

“Imagine that you are straining yourself to carry a heavy sack, filled with gemstones.

“You know that the Gemara describes how amoraim ensured a complete separation between men and women when they gathered for a lecture, and we find by Matan Torah that the men and women were separate. Poskim emphasize how imperative this is to preserve the sanctity of Am Yisroel, and that one is not allowed to speak in front of a mixed crowd.”

Two business partners once came to the Alter Rebbe to help resolve an argument. The Alter Rebbe looked into their contract, where he found their exact issue addressed, and the two left pleased with the ruling. Soon, however, they returned with a different argument, and again the Alter Rebbe looked into their contract and again found a clause that resolved the exact problem. After a few more repetitions of this occurrence, the Alter Rebbe inquired about the author of their contract. It was Reb Boruch Mordechai.

“The heavier load,” he said, “is when you can’t carry the weight. The significance of the Gemara is to teach you how to carry the weight of your responsibilities.”

Reb Nosson left the Rebbe’s room with a new perspective and a lighter heart. (Parshios Im HaRebbe, Vol. 1, Page 64)