

# THE MONTH OF ELUL - AN OPPORTUNITY NOT TO BE MISSED

*by Rabbi Yehudah Prero*

The month of Elul is upon us. This month is dedicated to preparing ourselves for the upcoming holy days of Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur, which occur on the first, second and tenth days of the next month, Tishrei. During Elul, we should analyze all that we have done during the past year: Are we nicer people? Are we properly committed to the service of G-d and that which the Torah requires? Have we improved at all? If we have improved, then we know we are on the right track. During Elul, we should work on ways we can further improve ourselves. If we have not improved, then we have our work cut out for us. Elul is a time to plot our course, our game plan, for the upcoming year. It is a time for repentance and introspection. It is a time that we cannot let slip away. Our life depends on it.

There was a farmer who every winter went to an agricultural convention. At the convention, he explored new methods for improving his crop output. He tried to discover new methods for efficient irrigation, new hybrids that produced better produce, and new farm machinery. He expended all this effort so that he could be assured that the coming year's harvest would be successful, if not better than the last year's.

One year, while attending the convention, the farmer became ill and needed to be hospitalized. While in the hospital, the doctors discovered that he suffered from a very serious ailment that would require long term care. He was moved to a hospital near his home, and his lengthy treatment began. Months went by, and the farmer's health dramatically improved. He was finally discharged from the hospital and returned home.

What he found at home caused him great anguish. He surveyed the entire acreage of his farm. Here he was, halfway into the growing season, and much of the land remained bare. Apparently, his instructions on when and where to plant had not been followed. Any dreams of a successful harvest were dashed. The farmer knew that he could do nothing by that point in time. Starting to plant now would not help. It was too late for that. All of the new techniques he had learned about and all of the machinery he bought could not help. All of the preparations he had made for this season were for naught.

Elul is the "planting season." We may "prepare" ourselves during the year for this season by furthering our devotion to G-d and the Torah. However, if come Elul and the High Holy days, we do not "plant our seeds" - we do not make a firm commitment to improve and in fact act on it - we have missed our opportunity to assure ourselves of a successful year. We may try to plead that we were

victims of circumstance: 'I was busy with family problems...I needed to focus all my energies on making a living...I did not have the strength, and therefore I did not have the time to increase and improve my commitment to G-d.' However, just as excuses cannot convince seeds to sprout in the wrong season, so too excuses cannot help us after we have missed the time to prepare ourselves for our impending judgment. We should take advantage of this season so that we will all be the recipients of a bountiful harvest this year.

(Based on the thoughts of HaRav Yechezkel Levenstein zt"l)