

EVERY MONTH SHOULD BE ELUL

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Today's Learning
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R' Moshe Schwab z"l (1918-1979) writes: With the arrival of the month of Elul, we are faced with the question, "What is Elul?" How is this month different from every other month?

R' Yisrael Salanter z"l said, "Every month should be Elul, but Elul is Elul." R' Schwab explains: All year long, a person should act the way we try to act during Elul. At the very least, when Elul arrives, one should be aware that his life, both the material and spiritual aspects, hangs in the balance. This is true of oneself, of one's family, and of every member of the Jewish people.

Elul is the time to prepare for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, the days on which, we believe with perfect faith, we will be judged. We understand that everything that will happen, whether on a personal or communal level, depends on those days. Yet, one cannot "leap" into Rosh Hashanah. One must prepare for it. To the degree that one prepares himself, to that extent he will experience Rosh Hashanah. Conversely, to the degree that one is lax in preparing for Rosh Hashanah, to that

extent he will miss out when Rosh Hashanah comes.

A person who knows that he has a court date in the distant future does not let his life be overshadowed by that upcoming event. However, when that date looms near, the litigant begins to fixate on it. So should we be when Elul approaches. All year long, we know that Rosh Hashanah is in the distant future, and we ignore it. When Elul comes, it is time to start focusing on our upcoming court date. Chazal say that on Rosh Hashanah, "Every living creature passes before Hashem." This really means, "_Every_ living creature." There are no exceptions. (Ma'archei Lev Vol. I, p. 57)

"Judges and police officers you shall appoint lecha/for yourself in all your cities . . . You shall not pervert judgment, you shall not show favoritism, you shall not accept a bribe . . . Pursue righteousness . . ." (16:18- 20)

The word lecha/for yourself appears to be superfluous. R' Moshe Feinstein z"l explains it as follows: One should judge himself to determine whether his actions are proper. In addition, one should be a police officer who enforces the judgments that one renders against himself. If necessary, one should punish himself.

When one judges himself, he should not pervert the judgment; he should be honest. One should not show favoritism to himself and say that because he is learned his actions must be correct. One should not allow himself to be bribed by his perceived self interest.

How can one judge himself honestly? By pursuing righteousness, i.e., having a qualified teacher. (Darash Moshe)

"So that his heart does not become haughty over his brethren. . . ." (17:20)

R' Chaim of Krasna z"l (died 1793) taught: The Torah obligates the king to lord over his subjects. A king may not even show honor to a prophet or a Torah scholar. [See below.] Nevertheless, this trait should only be for show. Inside, he must be humble, as the Torah says, "So that his heart does not become haughty."

However, a Jew other than the king should not say, "I will be humble in my heart but haughty on the outside." Rather, we read in Pirkei Avot (Ch. 4), "Be humble before every person," i.e., even when you are before people. (Mayim Chaim, Section 25)

Rambam writes: "We show great honor to the king and we instill awe and fear of the king in every

person, as it is written [in our parashah - 17:15], 'You shall place a king over yourself,' i.e., that his awe should be 'over' you.

"All the people must come to the king whenever he wishes, and they stand before him and bow to the ground. Even a prophet, when he comes before the king, must bow to the ground, as it is written [Melachim I 1:23], 'They told the king, "Here is Nathan, the prophet," and he came before the king and he bowed to the ground.' However, the Kohen Gadol need not come before the king unless he wishes to, and he does not stand for the king; rather, the king stands for him. Nevertheless, the Kohen Gadol must honor the king, and he should ask the king to sit, and he should stand when the king enters.

"Similarly, the king is commanded to honor those who study Torah, and when the Sanhedrin and scholars come before him, he should stand for them and seat them beside him. This is what King Yehoshaphat did - when a Torah scholar would enter, he would stand from his throne, kiss him, and call him, 'My master, my teacher.' When does this apply? In the privacy of the king's home. However, in public, the king should not do this, and he should not stand for any man. He also should not speak gently to anyone and should not call anyone except by his first name, all so that people will fear him." (Mishneh Torah: Hilchot Melachim 2:1 & 2:5)

Whether the honor of the king or the honor of a prophet is greater was the subject of a dispute between King Chizkiyahu and the prophet Yishayah. The gemara (Berachot 10a) states: "'Who is like the wise man and who knows how to forge a compromise?' [Kohelet 8:1] - Who is like Hashem who knows how to forge a compromise between two tzaddikim? Chizkiyah said, 'Yishayah should come to me just as Eliyahu went to King Achav.' Yishayah said, 'Chizkiyah should come to me just as King Yehoram went to Elisha.' What did Hashem do? He caused Chizkiyah to be ill and He instructed Yishayah to perform the mitzvah of bikkur cholim/visiting the sick."

Chizkiyah was one of our most righteous kings and Yishayah, one of our greatest prophets. Surely their disagreement was not egotistical. Rather, they appear to have disagreed over whose honor the halachah ranks higher, the king's or the prophet's.

Why did Hashem forge a compromise? Why didn't He resolve their dispute? Because, although the honor of a prophet is greater than the king's _personal_ honor, the honor of the _institution_ of the monarchy is greater than the honor of the prophet. Thus Rambam writes (Sefer Hamitzvot, mitzvah 173), "The level of the King should be greater than the level of the prophet in our eyes." It is only in our eyes that the honor of the king should be greater. In private, the honor of the prophet is greater. (R' Yisroel Reisman shlita, Pathways to the Prophets, Shmuel I, Tape #35)

An Astonishing Midrash

"Anochi/It is I, anochi/it is I, who will console you." [From the first verse of the haftarah] - since "anochi" was said twice, Bnei Yisrael will be consoled.

R' Yehonatan Eyebchutz z"l explains: The midrash says that when Bnei Yisrael made the golden calf, Moshe argued to Hashem, "The commandment, 'Anochi Hashem Elokecha'/'I am Hashem your G-d,' was stated in the singular number, not plural [i.e., "Elokecha"/"your" is singular]. Bnei Yisrael thought that You were talking to me alone."

But is that why Elokecha is singular, or is it so that the Aseret Hadibrot/Ten Commandments will have exactly 613 letters? If the Torah had used the plural form "Elokechem" there would have been an extra letter! Maybe, therefore, there was no merit to Moshe's argument.

Perhaps one could answer that had the Torah only been concerned with the number of letters, it could have said, "Ani Hashem Elokechem," i.e., taking one letter from "anochi" and giving it to "elokecha" to make "elokechem." But could the Torah do this? After all, the gemara states the word "anochi" forms the acronym of certain worthwhile ideas. Had the Torah said "ani" instead of "anochi" those allusions would have been lost!

In fact, however, the word "anochi" appears twice in the Ten Commandments, and only one of them is necessary to provide the allusions found by the gemara. The other one could have been shortened to allow "elokecha" to become "elokechem" and still left the Aseret Hadibrot with 613 letters. Since Hashem did not do this and instead said "anochi" twice, Moshe can say that Bnei Yisrael did not sin and they can be consoled from their punishments. (Midrash Yehonatan)

R' Meshullam of Bezier z"l
died approx. 4998/1238

R' Meshullam studied under his father, R' Moshe ben Yehuda of Lunel, son-in-law of R' Meshullam ben Yaakov. The younger R' Meshullam is best known for his Sefer Ha'hashlamah, designed to "complete" the Sefer Ha'halachot of R' Yitzchak Alfasi ("Rif"). In reality, however, R' Meshullam often disagrees with Rif's rulings. Sefer Ha'hashlamah is quoted by some later commentators, especially Meiri (13th century), who refers to R' Meshullam as "the great rabbi, father of all who dwell in the tents [of Torah]." The work also is quoted in Bet Yosef.

The work printed in the margin of the standard edition of Tractate Yevamot under the title Tosfot Chad Me'kamai ("Additions by One of the Ancients") actually is an excerpt from Sefer Ha'hashlamah.

The elder R' Meshullam was the leading scholar in Lunel, Provence in the middle of the 12th century. In addition to his daughter, the mother of R' Meshullam of Bezier, he had five sons. One of these was the R' Asher of Lunel who is quoted in Tosfot to Bava Kamma 64a. The famous traveler, R' Binyamin of Tudela, mentions meeting "R' Meshullam and his five sons who were wise and wealthy."

There were a number of other medieval sages with the name "R' Meshullam," most notably R' Meshullam ben Kolonimus, also known as "R' Meshullam of Mainz" and "R' Meshullam Hagadol (the Great)." He authored many of the hymns in our Yom Kippur machzor and died in approximately 1020. (Sources: The ArtScroll Rishonim, p. 171, 161, 168, 184; Koreh Ha'dorot, page 16a)

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The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ("lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah"), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at [Project Genesis](#) start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page. Text archives from 1990 through the present may be retrieved from <http://www.acoast.com/~sehc/hamaayan/>. Donations to HaMaayan are tax-deductible.
