

A "BEAUTIFUL" INSIGHT

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 293, "Get Me'useh": The Problem of the "Forced Get." Good Shabbos!

Setting Aside A "Yerach Yomim" For Mourning Our Past: A "Beautiful" Insight Into "Yefas Toar"

In the beginning of this week's parsha, the Torah teaches us a Halacha [Jewish Law] that is one of the most difficult Halachos to understand -- the Halacha of the "Yefas Toar" (beautiful captive woman). The Torah, under certain circumstances, gives permission to the soldier who falls in love with a beautiful non-Jewish woman on the battlefield to take her as his wife, provided that she converts to Judaism. The conversion process involves the following: She is brought into his house, her head is shaved, her clothes of captivity are removed, and she mourns for her parents for 30 days. After this process the soldier is allowed to marry her.

The Zohar, on this parsha, says that the 30-day period in which the woman cries for the loss of her parents is the month of Elul. [Elul, which began this past Friday, is the Hebrew month preceding Rosh HaShana.] What is the connection between the mourning of the "Yefas Toar" for her parents and the month of Elul?

The pasuk [verse] uses interesting terminology to describe the 30-day period. The pasuk calls this period "Yerach Yamim" (literally a moon's worth of days). The more common term would be a Chodesh (a month).

There is an interesting halachic practice -- when a Kesuvah (marriage document) is dated, the date is specified as being of a certain Chodesh; however when a Get (divorce document) is dated, the date is specified as being of a certain Yerach. The reason for this difference is that in the Hebrew language the word Yerach has the connotation of "ending" a month; while the word Chodesh (related to chadash -- new) has the connotation of the "beginning" of a month.

That is why the Torah uses the term "Yerach Yamim". The Torah is telling her that if she wishes to convert to Judaism and begin a new life, she must close the chapter on her last life. The Zohar tells us that "her father and her mother" refers to her idolatry. She must contemplate her past association

with idolatry and say good-bye to it. Before she can contemplate the new beginning, she must regret the fallacy of the false gods and meaningless pagan worship. That is how she is to spend this entire closing month - Yerach.

What is the significance of the month of Elul? Elul is that special month that a person needs in order to contemplate beginning the New Year and the impending Rosh Hashanna. A person cannot just begin the New Year without preparation. Rosh Hashanna must be preceded by a month of contemplation and reflection. We must look back at the previous year -- asking ourselves, "Where did we go wrong?" "Where did that year go?" "What happened to that year?"

So what does the Zohar mean when he says that mourning for her father and mother "a Yerach Yamim" refers to the month of Elul? It is meaningless for this captive woman to enter Judaism without going through a period of mourning, contemplation, and introspection. Similarly, it is meaningless for us to contemplate "Tik'u b'Chodesh Shofar - Blow the Shofar on the (beginning of) the New Month (Rosh Hashanna)" unless there is some preparation and contemplation about the year that was. If not, we cannot hold out much hope for the beginning of the New Year.

Of all the Jewish Holidays, it is the Yomim Noraim (Days of Awe) that require the greatest preparation. We cannot just arrive in shul on the Eve of Rosh Hashanna and say, "Now is the time to start repenting." It cannot happen all of a sudden like that. We cannot spiritually turn around on a dime. It requires a process -- a Yerach Yomim, a chodesh Elul.

Unfortunately, for those of us in the working world with all the distractions of making a living, the beginning of school, and all the other things that divert our attention - this is so difficult. Most of us are not in Yeshiva anymore, we are not able to have a Mussar Seder (a fixed daily period for studying ethical works), we can not sit and think, we do not have the time to daven properly, as Yeshiva students do.

However, it is a necessity that we all have to try to prepare properly for the Yomim Noraim. We need that Yerach Yomim so we can properly arrive at "Tik'u b'Chodesh Shofar" - the blowing of the Shofar on Rosh Hashanna.

Transcribed by [David Twersky](#); Seattle, Washington.
Technical Assistance by [Dovid Hoffman](#); Yerushalayim.

This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion (#293). The corresponding halachic portion for this tape is: "Get Me'useh": The Prohibition of the "Forced Get". The other halachic portions for Parshas Ki Seitzei from the Commuter Chavrusah Series are:

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