

BILVAVI ROSH CHODESH ELUL

Avodah of Renewal
Essence of Action
Essence of Ani l'Dodi
Mazal of The Virgin
Tribe of Gad

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Elul – Avodah of Renewal

Hashem Recreates the World Continuously

Hashem created the world on the 25th of Elul. On the surface, it seems that Hashem created the world one time, 5,773 years ago.

But, Hashem also re-creates the world every single day, as is explained in the *Gemara*.¹ “*Hamechadesh betuvo b’chol yom tamid ma’asei bereshis.*” (He renews, in His goodness, every day constantly, the act of creation.) Not only did this happen the first time on the 25th of Elul, 5773 years ago, but in fact, every single day, Hashem re-creates His world and renews it.

What difference does it make to us whether the world was created only one time 5,773 years ago, or if Hashem keeps re-creating his world every day anew?

With Hashem’s help, we will try to answer this question and explain how the fact that the world is constantly being re-created is relevant and has practical implications for every one of us. We will look into the immense repercussions of the fact that Hashem keeps re-creating the world. Hashem created the world, on the first day, on the second, third, fourth, fifth, and on the sixth day he created Adam.

On each day of Creation, it was said to be “*ki tov,*”² that it is good, and when Hashem completed the Creation, He testified that it was all very good. “*Vayar Elokim es kol asher asah, v’hinei tov me’od.*”³

But after Hashem had created the Creation, which was **all very good**, Adam and Chavah did not listen to Hashem, Who commanded them not to eat from the *Eitz HaDaas* (*Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil*). By eating from it, they not only damaged themselves, but they also damaged the entire world.

If a person would not have the energy he needed for each day’s spiritual work, then every morning he would start it from an imperfect, unclean, contaminated place.

But because Hashem continuously re-creates the world every day, He gives each person the opportunity to start each day from the depths of his soul, from a place that is totally innocent, totally pure and totally holy [thus providing perfect conditions for his spiritual growth].

¹ *U’mechadesh bechol yom ma’asei bereisheis* – “Who renews the Creation every day” (*Chagiga* 12:2). Also in the morning prayers, just before *K’riyat Shema*.

² *After each day, Hashem saw that it “ki tov – was good”* (*Bereishis* 1)

³ *Hashem saw that “v’hinei tov meod – and it was very good”* (*Bereishis* 1:31)

Continuation vs. Renewal

There are two frames of reference that Hashem gives us in order to observe the world. One view is that there was only one Creation, that Hashem created the world once 5,773 years ago and, ever since, the Creation continues every day from the previous day, day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year. Just about every one of us has been reincarnated many times during the 5,773 years since the “first” Creation. Sometimes we did good deeds, and sometimes, G-d-forbid, we did not-so-good deeds, sometimes we were good and holy and sometimes, *chas ve’shalom*, we were not so holy. If a person lived with only this perception, then they would live their life with all their past, which was sometimes good and sometime less good.

The second view is that Hashem planted in the world a force of re-creation continuously every day, every hour, every minute, every instant. Hashem re-creates and gives a person energy to always start with a new beginning that is not affected by the defects of the past– not affected from all the transformations the person has gone through in all the years since the world was created.

Knowing Our Strengths and Weaknesses

Each and every one of us knows their own soul to some degree. We all have our own weaknesses, which are expressed differently by different people. In some people, it is expressed by a tendency for sadness – some people get stressed easily while others get overwhelmed. For other people, it is expressed by fears. In other people, it is expressed by a tendency to be suspicious and in other people it is expressed in low self-esteem.

There are many other predispositions that people have, depending on their particular history. A great many of these tendencies are the results of the many situations that the person went through during his life in childhood, in adolescence, or at various other times in their life.

If a person would try to remember where certain difficulties stem from, he may be able to recall and sort through all kinds of adverse situations that he went through, along with the particular situation when this mishap was implanted in his soul.

Sometimes these situations happened in this life, but very often, these emotional difficulties do not stem from this lifetime, but from the many other lives that the person lived during his various incarnations (*gilgulim*) since the start of Creation.

Getting Rid of Our Emotional Blocks

Our soul, which is now clothed in our current body, went through thousands of years in This World, in *Gan Eden* or even in, *chas veshalom*, *Gehinnom*. We have a lot of baggage that has accumulated in our soul– we are an accumulation of a lot of scars and many emotional disturbances. And these disturbances can combine generating whole new disturbances!

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If each one of us had only one disturbance, or even a couple, it would have been much easier to deal with. But usually each one of us has at least a few disturbances, and many times dozens and even hundreds.

How can a person get rid of all these emotional blocks? Here we arrive to the special power we spoke about that is imbedded in the month of *Elul*.⁴

The advice seems to be to deal with one problem– to try to figure out how it started, what is its reason, and by finding its root reason, it would be possible to try to remove the source of that disturbance. Sometimes we can find the reason for a disturbance if we could track down its source. Sometimes, however, it is more hidden, especially if the reason for the disturbance was not in this life, but was in a previous incarnation. It is almost impossible to get to the bottom of any disturbance using the mind alone.

So, if it is difficult to solve one disturbance, how much more difficult is it to solve them all. Therefore, it is impossible to accomplish fixing everything. Of course, if we could clearly see the reason for the disturbance, we should go through it and fix it.

But for everything else, either because the reason is hidden or because there are too many disturbances, we have the power of renewal of “*Mechadesh betuvo bechol yom tamid ma’asei bereshis*”.

The *koach* (strength) that Hashem uses to renew the Creation every day gives us a new, tremendous and amazing ability to deal with the tribulations of our *nefesh* in order to attain a more *pnimi* (internal) and pleasant life.

The Renewal Within

This force of renewal is found in the inner recesses of everyone’s soul.

In the parts of the soul that a person is aware of which are closer to the physical, a person feels that every day is a continuation of the previous day. But in the very depths of everyone’s soul, is the place of “*Asher yatzar es ha’adam b’chochmah* – That He created man with wisdom.”⁵ Iyov asked “*Chochmah mei’ayin timatza?* – Wisdom, from where is it found?”⁶ The answer is that in the root of the creation of a Jew is the place that is known exclusively only to Jewish souls – Hashem is constantly re-creating continuously.

4 How do we balance this idea of concentrating on renewal with the avodah of Elul which is focusing on what we did wrong and doing teshuvah?

In response to this question, the Rav answered: “In fact there is an avodah of the part of the soul that sees the continuation of day after day. A person should do a cheshbon hanefesh with their lower soul for 5–10 minutes a day and it will fix what is needed, but the majority of our outlook should be on renewal.

The Ten Days of Teshuvah are also days of renewal, because if a person only does teshuvah, and only looks at the past, he will only focus on his shortcomings of the past.

The Rambam says that a ba’al teshuvah is called a breiah chadashah (new being).

If a person doesn’t regret the past they cannot feel the renewal of mechadesh bechol yom ... If someone does cheshbon hanefesh 5–10 minutes per day, then they should try to go back to the place of renewal also. This is the depth of a ba’al teshuvah who feels like a new being.”

5 Gamara Brachos 80b

6 Iyov, 28:12

This phenomenon, that Hashem re-creates the world continuously (and one's private soul in particular) means that the soul is re-created without any defects, impressions, or disturbances imprinted from the beginning of Creation.

“Chadashim labekarim, rabbah emunasecha”– “They are new every morning, great is your faithfulness,”⁷; *“Briyah chadashah mamash”*– “In actuality, a new creation”.⁸

As such, a person is like a newborn baby or like a new convert. He starts anew in that place in the soul, where there are no imprints. The *Mishna* in Avos explains, *“Kotev al neyar chalak v'lo kotev al niyyar machuk”*, that we can “write on a clean slate and not on an erased piece of paper”.⁹ There, a person can start anew; there he has a future that starts growing from a new beginning.

A person first must know that there is such a place in the soul, and then reach that place. He needs to understand that there is such a place in the soul where he could start anew, every day, every hour, and any time.

[When *bnei Yisrael* were in the desert for forty years, Hashem gave them *manna* from Heaven every single day for their sustenance.] What was the necessity for the *manna* to descend daily? Hashem could have brought it down once a week or once a month so that it would stay fresh. Hashem gave them the *manna* every day so that they will feel *“Chadashim labkarim rabbah emunasecha.”*¹⁰

Every morning when the *manna* fell, they felt that there was new food in the world, because it was a new world. This *manna* was white, and whitened their sins, and clearly allowed them to start every day from this new, white, blank page in their soul.

Believe In Renewal, Then See It

First of all, as we explained, a person must know that the inner strength in his soul experiences a new beginning every day.

It is only the external part of our soul that feels the world as if it is merely continuous; a day follows from the previous day, from the previous week, from the previous month, from the previous year. But in the depths of our soul, we can access the power of renewal.

⁷ Rashi, *Eichah* 3:23

⁸ *“Briyah chadashah mamash”* (*Chesed l'Avraham* 3:22).

⁹ *“Teaching a child is like ink on a new page, and teaching an old man is like ink written on an erased piece of paper”* (*Pirkei Avos* 4:25).

¹⁰ *“Chachmah mei'ayin timatz – Wisdom where is its root?”* (*Iyov*, 28:12)

After a person knows and believes the fact, that the world is always being re-created, a person should try to observe the world and see all the things that are renewed each day.

Chazal say that a chicken lays an egg every single day.¹¹ *Chazal* also say that in the future a woman will be able to give birth every day instead of after nine months. This is simply because the world is constantly being re-created!

We need to observe this in order to silence the external noises in our soul in order to listen to the deepest internal place in us. If we do that, we can access the place of the inner wellsprings in the soul, where the soul is continually renewed. In the language of the *Mishnah* in *Avos*, it was said, “*Na’aseh k’ma’ayan hamisgaber*”. A person becomes like a flowing wellspring,¹² which keeps renewing.

A person who does not quiet his soul is only aware of things that happen externally, so he only sees the world as a continuation of the past.

Internal Quiet

A person has to quiet his soul, either by listening to a *niggun*, or nibbling on something tasty, or by relaxing in a comfortable position. All these are tools to reach the place of internal quiet where he can quiet their heavy feelings and thoughts.

When he is in a place of quiet, he can then dwell on this simple thought: **“I am being renewed. Hashem is in my heart, and is renewing me every moment.”**

Repeat this sentence dozens of times. This should only happen when you are in this quiet place – the deepest place in the soul. Try to repeat this from total awareness and slowly try to experience them as deep as possible in your soul.¹³

Each one of us should try to do this “quieting” every morning for a few minutes, and feel the reality of Hashem in the heart, and then try to believe and try to experience that “Hashem infuses in me every day new *koach*, renewing me from the start.” We can realize that “Hashem gives me a new *koach* to succeed. Even though I couldn’t succeed in the past, I was given new energies to succeed and if today I will not succeed, tomorrow I will be given again new energy so that I will succeed then.”

If a person starts each day with this process of internal observation it will fill him with mighty power. The whole day will be built from this great infusion from Hashem that resides in each of us and gives us power every day.

11 “*Asida ida sheteled b’chol yom.*” *The Gemara* compares it to a chicken laying eggs every day (*Shabbos* 30).

12 *Mishlei*, 18:14

13 In response to a question, the Rav explained that the best time to try this is at the very beginning of the day, before you start your daily routine. It’s best to get up a few minutes earlier, and do this before everyone else wakes up. Then you would start your day from this clean, pure and internal state.

Also, during the day, especially after a person fell in *emunah*, or did something inappropriate, or expressed something that had disappointed him, the advice is to go back to the place where we were at, and to believe that “Hashem is planting in me new power, which is not affected by all the failures of the past.”

If a person works on this correctly, with patience and clarity, from a stable place with the understanding that on one the hand the world continues forward to the next day, but that the world is also re-created every day, then he will receive great powers of strength and purity, beauty and liveliness.

The ones who work on this will merit, with Hashem’s help, that their obstacles will become smaller so that they will be able to overcome them. But even more so, the person will live an uplifted and happier life.

Questions & Answers with the Rav

Q1: *How do we balance this idea of concentrating about the renewal with the work of Elul of inspecting what we did wrong and doing teshuvah?*

ANSWER: In fact there is an *avodah* of the part of the soul that sees the continuation of day after day. A person should do a *cheshbon hanefesh* with his or her lower soul for 5–10 minutes a day and it will fix what is needed, but the majority of our outlook should be of renewal. The days of *teshuvah* are also days of renewal, because if the person only does *teshuvah*, and only looks at the past, he will only go into his shortcomings of the past. Going deep, the energy that a person has to do *teshuvah* is because he is renewing himself. The Rambam says that a *ba'al teshuvah* is called a “*breiah chadashah*” (new being). This is the how deep *teshuvah* goes, if the person regrets the past. A person who doesn’t regret the past cannot feel the “*mechadesh bechol yom*” ... But if someone did *teshuvah* 5–10 minutes per day, then he should try to go back to the place of renewal. This is the depth of a *ba'al teshuvah* who feels like a new being.

Q2: *I heard of the idea that a tzaddik falls seven times. I thought that this is to comfort us, that even tzaddikim can fall seven times, but could it be that we can become a tzaddik by doing this renewing work ourselves?*

ANSWER: Of course the first is true, but the main process should be the second part. From where does a *tzaddik* have the power to fall and get up and fall and get up again? A regular person, if he falls once or twice, says to himself, “I fell and tried to get up but couldn’t do it, so the next time I will fall, I will not be able to get up either.” If he fell twice and couldn’t get up, on the third time he will feel that now he has a *chazakah*, and for sure will not be able to get up. But a *tzaddik* believes that Hashem gives him *koach* to fix himself. With the power that Hashem gives, one can succeed in anything. If it was my own power, it is limited and I can’t succeed, but if I receive every day a new power, the question is who gave me the power?. On this *Chazal* say, “Hashem li *b’ozrai* — Hashem is my helper.” Therefore even if in the past you failed, a person knows that Hashem helps him. Therefore there is never a place of despair because he knows that Hashem will help him even if he fell many times.

Q3: *Is there a specific time of a day when this is happening? Also because it is Elul, should we do this Avodah specifically now? Is there anything in Elul specifically to take advantage of?*

ANSWER: At the beginning of the day, before you start the day, is the best time. It is best if possible to get up a few minutes earlier, before others, and do this before everyone wakes up, and then the day would start from this clean and pure and internal state.

Additionally, Elul gives the *koach* for all the year, like a person who takes upon himself to do certain things on Rosh Hashanah, because it is Rosh Hashanah he has the power to sustain this throughout the year. But if he makes certain commitments and only does them on Rosh Hashanah, then they are not so helpful. Elul is the time from where this light shines through the whole year. It is the time to accept/acquire this energy and to stretch it to the whole year.

Q4: *In regards to renewal of the Creation, going to the siddur and saying Modeh Ani for returning my soul, does it mean returning us the soul as it was, is it the same soul or a new soul?*

ANSWER: Like we say, it is “*Elokai, neshamah sh’nasata bi tehorah.*” You gave it to me pure, and I dirtied it and now you give it to me clean and pure again. A person needs to feel that Hashem is in his heart, so this feeling of “*mechadesh ma’asei bereshis*” is more real and pure. If a person doesn’t feel Hashem in his heart, he can’t feel the *mechadesh bi ma’asei bereshis*. The more a person feels that Hashem is in his heart, the more the feeling of renewal is more internal, deeper, and purer.

Q5: *The renewal is there already there, but do we need to do an action to access it?*

ANSWER: We need to uncover it and feel it. It already is there, but one’s personal *avodah* is to feel it.

Q6: *What are the different ways practically to internalize it?*

ANSWER: Most people have fantasies of the past and future; therefore, people don’t live in the present state of renewal. The more we quiet our thoughts and imaginations regarding the past and the future, and we focus of the present, then the person removes most of the screens covering his thoughts. When we are in the present and a person sits quietly, we can utilize tasting a fruit or hearing a *niggun*, and sitting comfortably to try to feel Hashem; then we have the possibility to feel the place of renewal. All this must be with davening to Hashem, asking him to help him get there in a complete way.

Q7: *A question on the avodah: I understand doing it when it is quiet, and we have time and space, but then the Rav mentions also accessing it when a person gets frustrated. Does the Rav have an eitzah (advice) on how to get there even if things are chaotic?*

ANSWER: We need to be deep into it and that allows you to be able to get into it in a flash. It works faster after we are experienced with this *avodah* for a while. If reality doesn’t allow, we must know that life is involved with pain, and not everything has a solution for this moment or exact second.

Elul – Essence·Action

Elul – The Month of Maaseh/Action

With *siyata d'shmaya*, we are nearing the month of Elul, may it come upon us for good tidings. Let us try to understand a little, with the help of Hashem, the *avodah* upon us during these days, and hopefully we will each merit to also act upon these words, each on his own level.

Each month contains a special power that is connected to the particular time of the year that it is found in. The power of Elul is called *maaseh*, action. The power in man to “act” is especially manifest in Elul.

The Sages state (according to one opinion) that the world was created on the 25th of Elul. The Creation is called the “handiwork of Hashem”, His *maaseh* (action), thus the month of Elul is rooted in the original *maaseh* of Creation. Hashem revealed the power of His *maaseh* in Elul, so to speak; He “made” the heavens and the earth, which is all in terminology of “*maaseh*”.

When Elul arrives each year, the power of Hashem’s *maaseh* returns each year, as it were. Being that man has an *avodah* to resemble Hashem (as the Sages say, “Just as He is merciful, so should you be merciful; just as He is compassionate, so should you be compassionate”), there must also be a power of *maaseh* on man’s own level, in some small resemblance to Hashem’s power of *maaseh*. What exactly is that *maaseh*, though, that we must perform?

The Gemara says that “the purpose of Torah is *teshuvah* (repentance) and *maasim tovim* (good deeds).” The simple meaning of this is that these are two different things the Torah leads to: repenting, and good deeds. It seems as if these two matters bear no connection; simply speaking, if a person commits a bad deed, he must repent over it, and thereafter he must perform good deeds. But the depth of the matter is as follows.

When Hashem created the world, He made it over the course of six days. This was an utterly pure and holy action, but even more so, Hashem created it with His ten expressions; His *dibbur* (word). He said “Let there be light” and there was light. He told the heavens to be created, and they were created. All of Creation is thereby powered by His word. When people perform an action, we usually attribute it to ourselves, thinking that it is our hands which do things. Our hands are the symbol of human action. But the symbol of Hashem’s actions is His word, for it is His word which created each thing.

Elul are days of *maaseh*, but it is hard to understand how exactly these days are days of *maaseh*. The *Tur* says that Moshe Rabbeinu stood for 40 days to receive the Torah, and the first 30 days of this were in Elul. The 40th day was Yom Kippur. Where is the ‘action’ in these 30 days of receiving the Torah? Moshe stood there for 40 days to receive the Torah, but how was this “action”? In truth, however, it shows that Elul is both a time of action and a time of

receiving Torah. It is just hard to understand how exactly it is a time of action. What we need to understand is that these days are of a different kind of action that the usual kind of “action” that we are familiar with.

This is a deep concept, so we will need to explain it very thoroughly.

Action/Building in Elul: Using Our Power of Speech in Selichos

The Gemara says that Torah scholars are called builders¹⁴, for it is written, “*And all your builders are those who learn [the Torah of] Hashem*”. How is something built? The power to ‘build’ [in the spiritual dimension] is not like how we build physically, which is through our hands, but through speaking words of Torah. A Torah scholar spends his day speaking of Torah, and that is how he builds the world.

This power is also given to all of us as well: we can build and perform deeds, through our power of speech. Just as Hashem created the world through His word, so did He give us the power to build, through words.

Where do we see this kind of ‘building’ take place, though? In Elul and in the Ten Days of Repentance, we make heavy use of our power of speech. There is *Selichos*, where we repeatedly ask Hashem for mercy. This is surely connected with the fact that we must increase our good deeds during Elul; but we just need to understand what exactly the connection is.

The way we know the answer to this depends on knowing what our soul’s power of *maaseh* is. What does it really mean to ‘do’ something? In the spiritual dimension, how can we ‘do’ something? We can understand that our body ‘does’ something, but how does our soul “do” something? If we understand what it is, we can understand what the *avodah* of “*maaseh*” in in Elul, but if not, then perhaps we will be able to increase our good deeds in Elul, but we will not have succeeded in developing the soul’s power of *maaseh*.

Let us reflect into the soul’s power of *maaseh*. The body performs actions, and it is our words which execute actions. Man is called “*nefesh chayah*” (living spirit), and Targum translates this to mean “*ruach memalelah*”, a talking spirit; man’s power of speech is essentially his spiritual power to “do” things. Thus, our power of *dibbur* (speech) is the source of our power to perform deeds (*maaseh*).

To illustrate this [on a deeper level], a Torah scholar lives in the realm of Torah words. He is constantly accessing his spiritual power of *maaseh*. In contrast, someone who does not live in the realm of Torah is not making use of the spiritual power of *maaseh*; the only *maaseh* he performs are physical actions with his hands,

Being that *dibbur* (speech) is identified with man’s title of *nefesh chayah* (living spirit), *dibbur*/speech is the source of all our spiritual actions. In Elul where we use the power of *dibbur* a lot [through prayer and *Selichos*], we are thus involving ourselves in a *dibbur* that leads to *maaseh*; we are involved with a kind of *dibbur* that is all about *maaseh*. Soon we will explain what it is, but this is the outline of the concept.

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Action Is About Completion

What exactly is the soul's power of *maaseh*/action that is contained in the power of *dibbur*/speech?

The Gemara says that one should perform that which he says. Otherwise, he has not completed that which he spoke about. We can learn from here that an “action” implies the *completion* of something. [On a deeper level], the “world of action” we live in is the finalized and completed form of all the higher worlds which precede it. What we “do” here on this world is the last step of everything that emanates from the higher worlds; it all ends here. Hashem intentionally created an imperfect world - and it is “completed” in the world of action we live in. We were created imperfect, and it is our task to complete ourselves, here on this world, this world of action.

A person thinks, then he says what he is thinking, and then he acts upon what he says. The action is the final step of the thinking process; it is the final step of everything. So action is not just an action – it is the completed and final step of a process.

What is the soul's power of *maaseh*, then? It is essentially the *completion* of the soul. Our body completes an action when it finishes “doing” some kind of labor or work, and our soul “does” something when it has completed its spiritual work on this world.

The Depth of Teshuvah: Uprooting the Reason to Sin

Let us try to understand a little more about the concept of *maaseh*.

Elul is the time where the world began (according to one opinion in the Sages, as mentioned earlier), but in the order of the months, it is the final month of the year. This shows the connection between Elul and *maaseh*: because Elul is the completion of the year. This is not because it is the ‘last month on the Jewish calendar’; it is the time of the year where *our soul has finished its work* for this past year.

Teshuvah (repentance) includes regret and confession, and the Ramban famously writes that Hashem knows what the person is really thinking as he does *teshuvah*, if he is earnest or not. The depth of his words is because *teshuvah* is about putting an end to the sinful action. If one continues to sin, his “action” continues, thus he has not reached completion. If one confesses the sin but he continues to sin, he has not yet ended his sinful action. He is missing his soul's completion. But if he does *teshuvah*, that means he has put an end to the sinful action; he has reached completion.

Thus, the soul's power of *maaseh* is to put an end to things; for one to place boundaries and limitations on himself that he will not cross.

Elul, the days of *maaseh*, are also days of *teshuvah*. The connection between these two facts lies in the understanding of the earlier-quoted statement of our Sages, “The purpose of Torah is *teshuvah* and good deeds”. It is because when we do proper *teshuvah*, we access the power of *maaseh*. The concept of *teshuvah* is thus connected to

the soul's power of *maaseh*, which is essentially the idea of putting an end to things, to place boundaries and limitations on any sinful acts which we were doing, so that the sinful actions won't continue to spread any further.

There are some parts of the soul which do not need boundaries to be placed on them. The desire in our soul to learn Torah, to *daven*, and to do *mitzvos* are all holy desires, which should only be increased, not decreased. But there are parts to the soul which we need to place limitations on. That is the idea of *teshuvah*.

Teshuvah is about returning the soul after one has sinned, not just to stop sinning. In order to do *teshuvah* in which one will not return to the **sin**, it is not enough to do *teshuvah* over the act itself, but to do *teshuvah* over the reason that motivated the person to sin. Often we are used to doing *teshuvah* over the sinful act, but not over the reason that caused us to sin. For this reason, the *teshuvah* of many people does not last. The depth of *teshuvah* is to stop the particular aspect in the [external layer of the] soul that is being motivated to sin.

Whenever our Sages said their words, they were not speaking to our bodies. They were speaking to our souls. The language of the soul is different than the language that the body understands. Of course, our body is a factor; much of keeping *Halachah* affects our body, not just our souls. But *teshuvah* is about returning the soul, not just to stop sinning. When one sins, the action is no longer here, but the motivation to sin is still here. We aren't supposed to do *teshuvah* just on the mere actions that we did; we are meant to do *teshuvah* on the motivations to sin, which remains on this world long after the sin is over. That is how we return our soul when we do *teshuvah* - and that is the depth of *teshuvah*.

To Feel Complete

Let's attempt now to explain this in clearer terms. We will ask: Why does a person sin? What is the internal source in the person that causes a person to do the opposite of Hashem's will, *chas v'shalom*?

In the blessing of *Borei Nefashos*, we say, "*Borei Nefashos rabbos v'chesronam*" –the Creator of many souls and their deficiencies." A person sins when he feels deficient about something and he seeks to fill that deficiency. If he would feel filled, he would not seek to fill himself with anything from the outside, and he would never commit the sin.

Thus, we can now understand better how the depth of *teshuvah* is not merely about stopping to sin, but about uprooting the reason that caused the sin in the first place.

For example, if a person spoke *lashon hora* about someone, why did he speak *lashon hora*? He was jealous of him, or doesn't like him. What is his *teshuvah*? To stop talking *lashon hora* about the person? Or to uproot his negative emotions towards him? The only reason why he spoke evil speech about the person was because he had an evil 'eye' towards the person. Every sin stems from some deficiency in the soul. That is where the main aspect of the *teshuvah* lies.

The main *avodah* of a person in doing *teshuvah*, besides for avoiding the sin, is to do "complete *teshuvah*" – to uproot the inner reason that caused one to sin. Incomplete *teshuvah*, by contrast, is to repent over the evil deed that

was committed, without regretting the evil motivation that caused it. *Teshuvah* is therefore about returning the soul's abilities to their pure source, after they had been used for evil.

For example, when a person steals 100 dollars, not only should he return the money; his *teshuvah* should be about regretting the desire he had to steal. If he would have been “happy with his lot” as the Sages teach, then he wouldn't have come to steal. He only stole because he felt deficient about himself. Had he felt complete within himself, he never would have come to sin. The main part of the *teshuvah* is thus to return the soul from its deficient state into its original, complete state.

This is the meaning of “complete *teshuvah*” which we daven for in *Shemoneh Esrei*, and this is also the idea behind the soul's power of *maaseh*.

Now we can understand better what the power of *maaseh* is. *Maaseh* is to feel complete and to feel that we lack for nothing; to feel complete within ourselves.

Of course, this is a power that needs to be used in its proper time and place. It does not mean that one should not have aspirations for holiness. If one learned a page of Gemara, he must certainly want to learn more pages of Gemara and he must not remain satisfied with the page of Gemara he learned. The power of *maaseh*, to feel complete, is only referring to being at peace from avoiding materialistic desires, not spiritual desires.

If a person is jealous of another person, if a person lusted after something, it was because he felt deficient about himself. The root of sin is always about some kind of deficiency the person felt. Thus the depth of *teshuvah* is to nullify the very desire for the sin, not just to regret the act of sin itself.

The days of Elul are called *yemai ratzon*, “days of will” – for it is the time to get in touch with our innermost will; to uproot the negative desires we have. This is what lays in the power of *maaseh*. When I don't feel a necessity to pursue a desire, because I feel complete within myself, this is called *maaseh* – the “action” is complete.

The Deep Source of Teshuvah

This is a subtle and deep approach towards *teshuvah*. We all know we must do *teshuvah*, we all resolve to be better this year, but there is much more to *teshuvah* than this!

Chazal say that *teshuvah* was one of the things that existed already before Hashem created the world. Why was there a need for *teshuvah* if nothing was missing at that point from Creation and there was no possibility of sin? It is to show us that the level of “complete *teshuvah*” is only when one connects to his deep inner source which lacks nothing.

If we do not know this deep source of *teshuvah*, it is very hard to actually do *teshuvah*. We all know what *teshuvah* is, we all want to *teshuvah*, but if we do not understand the deep source that it comes from, we cannot really do *teshuvah*.

The Sages said (concerning physical action): “The eyes sees, the heart desires, and the actions complete.” Not only does the body complete and “do” action that begins in the eyes and the heart (this was said in the context of physical desire), but so does the soul contain the power to “do” actions that complete: by feeling complete within itself, with no need for anything else outside of it. In this way, a person will never feel deficient, and he will never come to sin.

On *Rosh HaShanah*, it is brought in *Halacha* that one must rejoice¹⁵. How can we rejoice on *Rosh HaShanah*, when Hashem is judging the world? It is because if one doesn't rejoice on *Rosh HaShanah*, it is because he feels deficient. If he is incomplete, he cannot come to do real *teshuvah*. So we must really know what *teshuvah* is about. *Teshuvah* is not only about regretting the sin and resolving not to sin again. The depth of *teshuvah* is to reach the deepest part of our soul, where we feel complete. When we feel that completion, we will find there that we have no desire to sin.

“One who is greater than his friend, has a greater *yetzer hora* than him.”¹⁶ Why is this so? Compare this to a person who has a hundred dollars, who wants two hundred dollars. The more one has, the more he wants. But how indeed does one get rid of all his extraneous desires? By accessing the power of *teshuvah* that came before Creation. (In spirituality, we must aspire endlessly and always want more. But when it comes to materialistic desires, we must nullify all of these desires.) That is complete *teshuvah*: to return to the deepest part of ourselves, where there are no desires. In that place in our soul we find the deeper power of *teshuvah* that has been around before Creation.

The *teshuvah* in Elul leads to Rosh HaShanah, the beginning of the year; thus the *teshuvah* in Elul leads to a new beginning. It is not simply leaving this past year (5771) and entering the new year (5772). It is about reaching an entirely new beginning. Elul are days of *maaseh*. It is not about simply doing more good deeds, although that is also true that we must increase our goods. It is about reaching the completion of our soul, where we feel complete inside ourselves, where we are so attached in closeness to Hashem that we feel the greatest sense of completion from this.

Elul is depicted as “*Ani L'Dodi V'Dodi Li*” (“I am to my Beloved, and my Beloved is to me”)— one who does not feel this in Elul cannot feel completion, and then he will be missing the true depth of *teshuvah*. But if one feels the meaning of “*Dodi*” (“my Beloved”) in Elul – that Hashem is our Beloved companion Who fills all of our life – this enables him to feel completion at this, and from that place in himself, he is spurred on to do “complete *teshuvah*”.

The Deep Source of Our Completion

Thus, we can now understand that “Torah scholars are called builders” in the sense that they build from a place of completion in themselves, not out of deficiency. They build the world through their words of Torah, and the Torah is complete; thus they are building the world from a complete source.

¹⁵ Tur: Orach Chaim 597:1

¹⁶ Sukkah 52a

The more a person is attached in closeness with Hashem, he is connected to completion and perfection, and he lacks for nothing. It won't be possible for him to sin, because there is no more reason that motivates him to sin. Of course, we are human and imperfect. But when one is close to Hashem, he receives a special spiritual light of completion, which makes him feel complete and doesn't allow him to sin.

In the days of Elul and *Yomim Noraim*, we should know that these are not just days to increase Torah learning and to do more mitzvos, although that is certainly truthful to do; it is not the purpose. The purpose of these days is to enter the depth of this time, to enter the deepest part of our own souls, where our soul is connected to the reality of Hashem. It is a place in the soul which is attached to perfection, and when we connect to this place in our soul, we are connected to completion and perfection, and there is then no possibility of sin there, with the more we are connected to that place. It is there that we can do complete *teshuvah*.

In Conclusion

We ask Hashem in *Shemoneh Esrei*, “Return us, in complete repentance, before You.” To do *teshuvah* “before Hashem” is to do *teshuvah* and become closer to Hashem through it. If the *teshuvah* doesn't bring one closer to Hashem from it, it is not “complete” *teshuvah*.

May the Creator merit us to reach this perfection in our souls and to connect ourselves to the reality of the Creator, and to do His will always, throughout every day of the year.

Elul – Essence - Ani L'Dodi V'Dodi Li

The "I" That Connects To "My Beloved"

Elul/אלול is an acronym for "*Ani L'Dodi V'Dodi Li*" (אני לדודי, ודודי לי), ("I am to my Beloved, and my Beloved is to me").

There is "*Dodi*" ("my Beloved"/Hashem) - and there is our "*ani*" (the "I"). But what exactly is that '*ani*' that bonds with our '*Dodi*'?

Let us reflect on this. When Elul comes, every Jew feels somewhat inspired; we all feel some level of spiritual awakening. But is that inspiration on a level of "*ani*" ("I")? There is no Jew in Elul who does not feel inspiration (as long as his soul contains a bit of holiness). Everyone feels some kind of awakening. But the question is, if this inspiration translates into the level of "*Ani L'Dodi V'Dodi Li*." Has the inspiration become a part of one's '*ani*' - a part of his "I"?

Going Beyond Inspiration

The word for "inspiration" in Hebrew is "*hisorerus*", which is from the word "*raua*", "shaky". This implies that all *hisorerus*/inspiration is a shaky foundation to build upon. Although inspiration is better than nothing at all, and it is certainly important, we cannot [only] build ourselves on inspiration. We need something more than inspiration in order to build ourselves. When we rely on inspiration to do it for us, we are on a shaky foundation. But if we make something a part of ourselves and we allow it to become our actual level, we are connected to it on an ongoing basis.

Inspiration to do something nice does not come from the deepest part of our existence (our *havayah*). If it would be a part of our essence, then it wouldn't be inspiration. "*Ani L'Dodi V'Dodi Li*" is describing the bond we can reach with Hashem in Elul which can only come from being in touch with our "*ani*", with our "I", our inner self. If it is not coming from one's '*ani*', then there is no "*V'Dodi Li*" that follows.

Defining the "Ani" (Our "I")

So what is the '*ani*'? Similarly, what exactly is the "*Li*" ("to me") that is in the words "*Dodi Li*"?

It is definitely not referring to inspiration, as we explained above. It is much more than inspiration. Inspiration is wonderful, but it does not lead to "*Ani L'Dodi, V'Dodi Li*". So we first must understand what the "*ani*" is.

We are used to assuming that our “*ani*” (our “I”, our self) should become dedicated to our *Dodi* (“My beloved”/Hashem), and that all we have to do is direct our *ani* to our *Dodi*; to become closer to Hashem. But it is more than that: our *avodah* begins with the getting in touch with our “*ani*” in the first place.

Rav Chaim Vital said that the “*ani*” of a person is not defined by his physical flesh, but by the *nefesh*, the spiritual life-force of man.¹⁷ Yet, there is even more depth to the “*ani*” of a person than this.

There are three letters contained in the word “*ani*” (אני) – the letters *aleph* (א) *nun* (נ) and *yud* (י). There is a rule taught by Sages [in the *sefarim hakedoshim*] that the letters of *Lashon HaKodesh* (the Hebrew alphabet) which describe a word are really the very essence of the thing being described. The “I” of the person is called “*ani*” in *Lashon HaKodesh*, which will mean that the Hebrew letters *aleph*, *nun*, and *yud* are describing our very essence.

This “*ani*” of ours must become dedicated to our “*Dodi*”, but we first must know what the “*ani*” is. What is the “*ani*” in us? [Now the question has become clearer and deeper]: What does it mean that the Hebrew letters *aleph*, *nun*, and *yud* form our actual essence?

Someone who doesn’t like to think deeply will balk at this question. “What do you mean, “*Who am I?* I am who I *am!* That is who I *am.*” But if a person has never thought deeply about his *ani*“I”, it means that he has never reached his “*ani*” yet - and he definitely won’t be able to connect his “*ani*” with Hashem.

Returning to the original question: What is the significance that our “*ani*” consists of the letters *aleph*, *nun*, and *yud*?

The Concepts of Aleph, Yud, and Nun

The letter “*aleph*” represents beginnings; it is the source. *Aleph* is the first letter of the *Aleph Beis*, and Hashem created the world from the letter *Aleph*.

Where do the letters *nun* and *yud* come into the picture?

The Sages say that “Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world”. The Ramban says that “the Torah consists entirely of names of Hashem”. Although Hashem has many “names”, He has one name which is His main name: the four-letter name of *havayah*, which contain the letters *yud*, *hey*, *van*, and *hey*. Within Hashem’s name of *havayah*, the letter “*yud*” is the first and root letter; thus the letter *yud* represents a higher kind of beginning that precedes all.

The letter *nun* is equal in numerical value to the number 50, paralleling the concept of the “50 Gates of Understanding” which the world was created with.

¹⁷ Shaarei Kedushah 1:1

At first these concepts will appear abstract the first time we hear them. We hope to explain these concepts more clearly as we continue. At this point, all we can understand is that these three letters of *aleph*, *nun*, and *yud* (and the concepts they represent) form our “*ani*”, our “I”; and when we have these three aspects integrated, we can then connect our “*ani*” to our “*Dodi*”, to Hashem. If we are missing the integration of these three aspects, there is no formation of our “*ani*” - and then there is no “*ani*” to connect with to our *Dodi*.

“Aleph” – Getting To the Root/Source of Things

We encounter many things each day. Do we ever look into the source of each thing we encounter? For example, when learning a *halacha*, does a person make sure to look up the source of the *halacha*?

One kind of person learns the *halacha* because he wants to know what to do, but another person will not only learn the halacha to know it, he also looks into the source. He wants to understand it at its root. This is a power in the soul to search for the root of things, and it is a very deep power. One can keep looking further into the root of things, then into the root of that root, then into the preceding root, until he reaches the very Root itself.

Of course, if we ask any person what the very source and root of each thing is, every person will say, “Hashem.” But is that perspective carried over into our own soul as well?

Everything is rooted in the Torah. Does a person see how something is rooted in the Torah? To give another example, does a person ever wonder what the source of the word “Elul” is? Where does it come from? **We speak of Elul, Elul, Elul – but what is the word “Elul” and what does it come from? Do we ever think of this?**

This is just one example, but there are many more examples as well, of this idea. The point is not to amass knowledge. The point is to uncover the source and root of the things we come across.

This puts us in touch with the power in our soul to see beginnings. This is a unique ability to the Jew’s soul, called “*raishis*” (beginning; the power to see the beginning). The Sages state, “Yisrael is called “*raishis*” (the beginning)”, because a Jew’s soul has the special ability to get to the “*raishis*”/beginning of things. A Jew has the ability to see the “*raishis*” of each thing – to see the root of each thing, and at its deeper level, it used to get to the very Root of all: Hashem. A Jew can get to the *raishis* of the *havayah* (essence) of each thing.

The “*aleph*” of our “*ani*” is to get to the beginning of each thing, and then we have the power to connect to the Creator. This is one aspect of how our “*ani*” can connect to our “*Dodi*”.

“Yud” – Reflecting Into the Chochmah (Wisdom) Of Everything

The second aspect of our “*ani*” is the letter *yud*, which hints to the root of the four-letter name of Hashem. The letter *yud* represents the higher beginning of Creation – a beginning that came before the ‘beginning’ of Creation. We say how “*All of them You made with wisdom*” - Hashem created the world with His *chochmah* (wisdom); all of

the creation stems from Hashem's *chochmah*/wisdom. The inner essence of each thing is thus the *chochmah*/wisdom of Hashem which empowers it.

The “*yud*” aspect of our “*ani*” is thus referring to searching for the *chochmah*/wisdom that is found in each thing we encounter. The creation in front of us is not simple; it is very complex and deep¹⁸. You can see wisdom in each thing in Creation. If a person only sees what his eyes see, he only sees the superficial layer of what he is seeing. If he is seeing the G-dly wisdom in it, he is seeing its essence, its reality.

Thus, the second aspect of our “*ani*” is to think deeply into things. It essentially refers to our true *seichel* (intellect). This is not referring to normal level of human logic, which even the gentiles possess (and *Chazal* say that we can even trust this basic level wisdom found in the gentiles). It refers to a higher kind of *seichel* which comes from the Creator - a “G-dly” kind of intellect that is poured down into the soul.

To give an example of it, if a person eats bread every day, he should reflect on the concept of bread. He can think: Where does the Torah talk about bread? What is the purpose of bread according to the Torah? What is its concept? In this way, you gain doubly: you see its source in the Torah (which is the first aspect of our *ani*), and you also see the *chochmah* in it (the second aspect of our *ani*).

“Nun” – Expanding Upon Our Thoughts (Binah)

Now we will explain the third aspect of our “*ani*”, which is the letter *nun*. The letter *nun* is equal in numerical value to the number 50, corresponding to the “50 Gates of *Binah* (understanding)” that Hashem created the world with. *Binah* is the power we have to reflect deeper and expand upon our original thoughts, which gives us greater understanding [of the matter at hand].

Thus, in summary, our ‘*ani*’ is meant to look for the root of each thing in the Torah (this is the ‘*aleph*’ aspect of the ‘*ani*’), it can see the G-dly wisdom found in each thing (this is the ‘*yud*’ aspect of the ‘*ani*’), and it then reflects deeper into those thoughts (the ‘*nun*’ aspect of the ‘*ani*’). This parallels the statement of the Sages that “Hashem, the Torah, and Yisrael are one” – the “*ani*” of the Jew’s soul (Yisrael) is a part of the Torah (by seeing how the source of each thing is in Torah), and the Torah is connected with Hashem.

Reaching Our “Ani”

Thus, when one reflects into the root of each thing and into the wisdom of each thing, he reaches his “*ani*”. After reaching his “*ani*”, he can then dedicate his “*ani*” to Hashem: “*Ani L’Dodi, V’Dodi Li.*” How many people think

¹⁸ Editor’s Note: Elsewhere, the Rav has quoted the statement of the Chazon Ish that “There is no such thing as something in Creation that is not complicated – everything in Creation is complex and deep.” (See Getting To Know Your Thoughts_01_The Basis of Thought). In other places, the Rav has quoted the teaching of Rabbi Nachman of Breslev that there is an avodah to see the *seichel* (G-dly wisdom and intellect) in each thing.

they are already in touch with themselves, and they think that all they have to do is become closer to Hashem...? They are really missing their connection to their “*ani*” to begin with!

One’s awareness towards his “*ani*” is usually very superficial, shallow, and shaky. When one tries to connect to “*Dodi Li*” when he” hasn’t yet reached his “*ani*”, he will try to ‘inspire’ himself, but as we can all see, this inspiration does not last for very long. It usually lasts until a little bit after *Simchas Torah*, and then people quickly return to the routine of the year. In most instances, inspiration usually does not last. It is all because the person did not really use his “*ani*”. If he would have, it would have become “*Dodi li*”; the person would have felt that Hashem’s presence has become more permanent in his life.

“*Ani L’Dodi*” is not a perception that is reached through waking up one day and learning a *mussar sefer* or a *sefer* on *chassidus*, and to suddenly feel inspired and feel, “*Ani L’Dodi!*” There is a structure that must precede it; it is only reached through a certain approach towards life from during the rest of the year. When a person has the proper approach during the rest of the year, he gains a holy intellect from this, which enables him to come to the understanding of “*Ani L’Dodi*”, during Elul.

Removing Extraneous Desires From the Heart

In order to get to this understanding and live in this way, one needs to improve his spiritual heart. If one’s heart is not pure and it is full of desires for This World and it contains unfixed *middos*, the heart will block the true *da’as* (awareness) from the mind and it will prevent a person from accessing his higher intellect.¹⁹

Dovid *HaMelech* said, “*My heart is empty within me.*” One must empty out the heart from all traces of evil, and then there is space in his heart to allow his *da’as* to settle there. The truth of Hashem’s existence can then be internalized there. Then one can attain a bond with Hashem.

But if the heart remains unfixed, a person will continue to have desires that are for other things, and it will be like a “strange god” living inside the person. It will prevent his mind from having the clarity to see truth. One needs to uproot his desire for This World and the worldly desires which are not truthful. When one yearns instead for Hashem, this is “*Ani L’Dodi*”.

Yearning for Hashem needs to be accomplished both through our mind (which contains our *neshamah*/Divine soul, also known as the power of “*seichel d’kedushah*”, holy intellect), and through our heart (which contains our *Ruach*, the “G-dly spirit”, contained within man). These two parts (the mind and the heart) comprise our true “*ani*” that enables us to reach “*Dodi Li*.”

¹⁹ Refer to “Getting to Know Your Thoughts”

Why Inspiration Often Doesn't Last

Inspiration as well stems from our heart, but it first has to pass through the various desires that are in our heart, and if there are still unholy desires in our heart, the inspiration wanes. There are many desires in the heart, in quality and in their magnitude, so if a person feels awakened to desire something holy, it is quickly washed over by the many desires in the heart that contradict it. For this reason, inspiration is usually gone as soon as it appeared.

What was missing from the person? Did he not have a desire to improve? He surely had a holy desire; we aren't arguing with that. But the problem is that he didn't uproot the other many desires of his heart, so his one desire to improve didn't stand a chance, against all those many desires.

The days of Elul are called “*yemai ratzon*”, “days of will”. The simple meaning of this is that Elul is when Hashem's desire for the Jewish people is more revealed and He draws us closer to Him. But it is also because these are days where we can reveal one *ratzon* (will) alone: “Our desire to do Your will.” The *Gemara* says that we all want to do Hashem's will, but the *yetzer hora* (evil inclination) prevents us. So what, then, is our *avodah*? Our *avodah* is to get rid of the unholy desires in the heart.

Practically speaking, one cannot uproot all negative desires at once. They must be uprooted slowly and in steps.

Improving the Mind and the Heart

Our *avodah* in Elul is really two-fold. We need to gain a holy mind and a holy heart, and integrate them.

We gain a holy mind by thinking into the source of each thing. One can keep probing into the source of each thing, more and more, until he discovers its beginning in the Torah.

We gain a holy heart by getting rid of our unholy desires. We cannot do it by simply trying to want the right thing, as many people think. This won't do much; at best we will be able to inspire ourselves for some time, and it will not last beyond Elul. It is of course a wonderful thing to desire holiness, but it will not be enough to implement change; we will also need to get rid of the other desires in ourselves, if we are to really change. This is because as long as the unholy desires remain in our heart, they prevent us from holding onto our holy desires.

Inspiration Vs. Lasting Change

The Ramban says that one must be able to turn inspiration into lasting change. From this we can see that inspiration itself is temporary and it doesn't have much value. It can definitely get a person started on the path towards change, but after inspiration goes away, it is very difficult and unrealistic for a person to keep it up. Often when a person is inspired he makes resolutions to change in certain areas, but soon after he is back to routine.

Instead, a person needs to accept upon himself something that he can never veer from, long after the inspiration is over. If inspiration has caused a person to take upon himself an absolute change which he never reverses, then the

inspiration has served its purpose. But if the inspiration is just something that came and went with time, such inspiration is not describing Elul.

Thus, the point of this time of inspiration is so that we can resolve to make *absolute changes* in our life; *decisions*, and not merely to feel spiritual awakening. It must cause a person to feel obligated to change and to accept himself a certain change that he will never veer from.

That change, as we explained, consists of two parts. We need to make use of our mind (holy intellect) and our heart for it. As we explained, these changes must be gradual and in steps. When we attempt to remove our unholy desires,²⁰ this must not be done rapidly and in an extreme manner, but slowly and in steps. We must slowly eliminate each desire, one by one.

If this is what our inspiration in Elul leads us to, the changes are permanent; our mind and heart is changed. This enables us to truly build ourselves, to build our own inner worlds, to reach our true “*ani*”, and it is that *ani* which can become the “*Ani L’Dodi, V’Dodi, Li*” (“I am to my Beloved – and my Beloved is to me”).²¹

²⁰ See the author’s sefer, Getting to Know Your Thoughts

²¹ For more on how to maintain our inspiration, see Tefillah #0119 – Inspiring Ourselves Vs. Building Ourselves

Elul – Mazal of Virgin

Elul – The Mazal of Besulah\Virgin

The month of Elul, as is well-known, contains the *mazal* of *besulah*, virgin.²²

The verse “*Ani L’Dodi, V’Dodi Li*” (“I am to my Beloved, and my Beloved is to me”)²³ refers to the month of Elul. Thus [since the *mazal* of Elul is *besulah*\virgin], the term “*ani*” is referring to the aspect of *besulah*\virgin. The relationship between the Jewish people and Hashem are compared to a *chosson* and *kallah* (a groom and bride), with Hashem depicted as the *chosson* and the Jewish People as His *kallah*.

There are different relationships that a *kallah* (bride) may later have towards her husband. She may [*chas v’shalom*] become widowed or divorced from him. Or, she may retain her original status of being a “virgin” towards him.

Let us see what the concept of *besulah*\virgin is, which each Jew needs to have [in his relationship towards Hashem], in the month of Elul, the month where the concept of the *besulah*\virgin takes hold.

The virgin girl has a pure status, since she has not yet had relations with any man, but this also means that she has not yet become exclusively designated to the man who betroths her in marriage.

The first and only person whom the Torah calls a *besulah* is Rivkah Imeinu. The Torah says that she was a beautiful maiden, and a virgin, whom no man had relations with. From here we learn what the concept of a *besulah* is all about.

Of Rivkah, the Torah also says that she had a painful pregnancy, when her future sons, Yaakov and Esav, were clashing within her. She went to seek out the word of Hashem concerning this matter. She passed by the house of idols and she felt intense movement, and when she passed by the Beis Midrash she also felt intense movement. She didn’t know what kind of baby she was having, an idol worshipper or a Torah scholar, and she was confused.

The depth of this was that she was like a *beinoni*, a person who is “in between” different states, whose status is *teluyah*, pending – one who is not here neither there. That is the very concept of a *besulah*: she has not had relations with any man, but she is not yet designated to her husband, because her status is *teluyah*, pending, resembling the *beinoni*, whose fate lies in the balance.

22 Sefer Yetzirah 5:4

23 Shir HaShirim 6:3

The Connection Between Mazal Besulah\Virgin and Seeking Hashem In Elul

In Elul, our *avodah* is to seek out Hashem, as it is written, “*Seek Hashem, where He is found*”²⁴, which refers to the month of Elul. But this “seeking out” of Hashem must come from the same purity of the *besulah*, just as the pure, holy *besulah* Rivkah Imeinu sought the word of Hashem, as the Torah says, “*And she went to seek Hashem.*”²⁵

That is why the *mazal* of Elul is *besulah*, the virgin - it is because we must seek out Hashem like the original *besulah*\virgin, Rivkah, who sought Hashem. This is an additional insight into the verse “*Seek Hashem where He is found*” – it means that **we must “seek Hashem”, from our “besulah” aspect.**

In the 40 days which span Elul through the Ten Days of Repentance, the climax is the holy day of *Yom Kippur*, where there was an *avodah* of the *Kohen Gadol* in the *Kodesh Kodashim*. The *Kohen Gadol* is the only one of whom it is said (in the Torah) that he is required to marry a *besulah*\virgin. A regular *Kohen* can marry a widow, but the *Kohen Gadol* can only marry a *besulah*. Thus, at the end of this 40 day period, which is on *Yom Kippur*, is the *avodah* of the *Kohen Gadol* - who is the full revelation of the concept of *besulah*. In the general sense, all of the Jewish people have the *mazal* of *besulah* in Elul, but it is the *Kohen Gadol* specifically where the concept of *besulah* is manifest in the actual, *halachic* sense, for he is only permitted to marry a *besulah*.

The Concept of “Besulah” In Halachah, and In The Soul

Returning to our original question: What exactly is our “*Ani L’Dodi*” (I am to my Beloved) aspect in Elul, and how does it relate specifically to the *mazal besulah* of Elul?

Moshe ascended the mountain of Sinai in Elul, and he remained there for 40 days, and it is our own *avodah* during these days to resemble this 40-day ascent of Moshe on the mountain. When Moshe ascended the mountain, he wasn’t here on this world, because he was in Heaven. This 40-day period is therefore not just a period of seeking forgiveness and atonement, in the simple sense; it is a period when Moshe wasn’t on this world. That represents the inner dimension of our *avodah* during these 40 days from Elul through *Yom Kippur*. To resemble Moshe’s ascent to Heaven, when he wasn’t on this world at all, one needs to become closed off from the rest of the world, to become separate and disconnected from This World, so that he can avoid any negative influences from anyone.

That is the implication of the *mazal of besulah*\virgin in Elul – one must be like a *besulah*, a “virgin”, in the sense that he\she is closed off from any strange, unwanted influences that come from the people of this world.

How can one attain such a level of purity on this world, though, especially if we are influenced by the surroundings, (as the Rambam famously said, that a person is mainly influenced by the opinions of his surroundings²⁶)? How can we remain like a *besulah*?

24 Yeshayahu 55:6

25 Beraishis 25:25

The *avodah* that we have during these days tells us the answer. Our *avodah* in Elul is to be like Moshe when he ascended the mountain for 40 days, when he wasn't on this world at all. That is how we can be like a *besulah* towards Hashem – by being disconnected from This World, during this time of the year. This is a very clear definition of the depth of our *avodah* during these days. It is to have 40 days when we are not in this world! In Heaven, Moshe didn't eat and didn't sleep - and that is the depth of the *avodah* we have during these days of Elul, through Yom Kippur.

This *avodah* ends with Yom Kippur, when we resemble angels. That is when we actually do not eat and we wear white to resemble a Heavenly state, like the *Kohen Gadol* in the *Kodesh Kodashim* on Yom Kippur, who must be married to a pure *besulah*. But this period of purity begins with Elul, with entering into the innermost chambers with Hashem, which we must be trying to reach for all these 40 days of Elul.

The full revelation of this is on Yom Kippur, but these 40 days of Moshe Rabbeinu ascending to the mountain represents the idea of disconnecting from the world, during this time. For this reason, some had the custom to fast for 40 days before Yom Kippur, to reflect how Moshe didn't eat in Heaven for 40 days, because he wasn't part of this world then.

The verse “*Ani L'Dodi V'Dodi Li*” (“I am to my Beloved, and my Beloved is to me”) depicts the month of Elul. The implication of “*ani*” (I) is that one's “I” should be like the *besulah*. To the degree that one makes himself like a *besulah* in Elul, there will be “*Ani L'Dodi*” (I am to my Beloved), and accordingly, that is how much of a revelation there will be of “*Dodi Li*” (My Beloved is to me).²⁷ Then there will be a special love (*chibah yesairah*) that the “Groom” (Hashem) will show towards His *kallah besulah*, His virgin bride.

Disconnecting From The World – Through Bittul (Self-Nullification) To Hashem

We need to understand the *pnimiyus*, the inner depth, of these days. Our *avodah* during these days is that we should not be found here on this world, just as Moshe wasn't on this world, when he ascended the mountain for 40 days.

In order for one to become separate from the world, he needs to have *bittul* (self-nullification). One needs to be *batel* (בטל>nullified), which has the letters ל, ט, ב, (beis, tes, and lamed), similar to the root letters of the word *besulah*, which contains the letter ל, ה, ב. The power of *besulah* in Elul is the power to bring a person from the level of *besulah* spelled with a letter ת\tav, to *bittul*, which is spelled with the letter ט\tet.

The *avodah* of being like a *besulah* [in Elul] reveals two aspects [disconnection from the outside, and self-nullification]. As explained, one aspect of *besulah* is to be safeguarded from the rest of the world, so that no one else can enter. On a practical level, this means that one needs to disconnect from the world, similar to how Moshe

26 Rambam Hilchos De'os 6:1

27 Sfas Emes: L'Chodesh Elul

Rabbeinu ascended the mountain for 40 days, when he was not part of this world. This is what enables the *besulah* to become designated to Hashem – it is through *bittul*, self-nullification.

The verse of “*Ani L’Dodi V’Dodi Li*” implies that if I am designated to my Beloved alone, “*Ani L’Dodi*”, and to no one else - only then can there be “*Dodi Li*”, that “my Beloved is to me”. That is the implication of *besulah* – to be designated to Hashem alone. There is only *Ani L’Dodi* if I am *batel* (nullified) to Him, and only then there can be “*Dodi Li*”.

In clearer terms to help us understand the concept, the Rambam in *Hilchos Teshuvah* says that only when one regrets, confesses, and resolves not to sin again, can “The Knower of all hidden secrets can testify, that the person will not revert back to sin”.²⁸ The commentators wonder what the source for these words of the Rambam is. But along the lines of our discussion, the explanation of the Rambam’s words is because a *besulah* guards her opening, and if the Creator knows that the person is still apt to return to sinning, it is as if the opening isn’t closed anymore.

The month of Elul contains the *mazal* of *besulah*, but it seems that we are no longer a “*besulah*\virgin” towards Hashem. For if a *besulah* has relations, whether in the usual fashion or in the unusual fashion, she is no longer a *besulah*, and so have we “cohabited” with other “men”, by committing sins. So how we can still be like a *besulah* towards Hashem? Haven’t we lost our “*besulah*” status by now?

The answer to this is that we can only be a *besulah* if we are like the *ketanah*, a minor girl under the age of three, whose *besulim* return even after it has been broken. Without being like a *ketanah* under the age of three, we cannot be like a *besulah* in Elul, and even if we would do *teshuvah*, we would only be like a widow or divorcee towards Hashem. Only from resembling the *ketanah* under the age of three can our *teshuvah* be genuine, lasting, and complete.

Resembling The Purity of The Besulah Ketanah – Through Bittul

This is the depth of the *mazal besulah* of Elul. There are two kinds of *besulos*\virgins. There is a kind of *besulah* who has never cohabited at all, and there is also a *besulah* who loses her *besulim* but later her *besulim* return (which is only possible with a *ketanah*, a minor girl under the age of three). The month on Elul is not like the first kind of *besulah*, who has never cohabited\sinced. That is an altogether different level of purity. The month of Elul is rather like the *besulah* whose *besulim* returns to her even after it has been broken, which is only possible by a *ketanah* under the age of three.

Therefore, **in Elul, one needs to be like the *ketanah*, within his soul, by nullifying himself totally to the Authority**, and in this way, then even if the *besulim* have been broken, the *besulim* return. On a similar note, the

*Raavad*²⁹ writes that the *mazal* of *besulah* in Elul implies “a woman, who has light *daas*”³⁰ [one should be pure-minded and ready to nullify himself to the Creator, just as a woman nullifies herself to her husband].

The more *bittul* (self-nullification) that a person feels towards the Creator, the more that the ‘*besulim*’ [purity] can return. A *besulah* implies that she is designated only to her husband. According to the level that one makes himself like a *besulah* towards Hashem, that is how much he becomes betrothed and designated to Hashem.

Practically Speaking: Practicing Times of Disconnection From The World In Elul

Making this matter practical, each person must find during these days some time of the day where he is not of the people of the world. He needs time to silence his soul and be dedicated to Hashem, where there is only Hashem, where he transcends time and place. The *Beis Din* sanctifies the times, and this is because the Jewish people can be above time and be disconnected from the world. If a person acquires during these days a deep place in his soul where he is disconnected from everything, just for some time of the day, he acquires new “*besulim*” for himself.

If one only does *teshuvah* on an external level, he is only doing *teshuvah* from the outer, superficial layers of his existence, and he won't succeed. He needs a new place in himself, “the place where *baalei teshuvah* stand”³¹ - a place which is not a place. This means a disconnection from the world and a place where one is completely dedicated to Hashem. If one reaches this place in his soul, he is connected to period of the 40 days when Moshe ascended the mountain. This is also the point where the “*besulim* return”. If we want to define what our actual, practical *avodah* is during these days, that is the definition.

In order for one to reach the *avodah* of these days, he must reach a place in his soul where he feels disconnected from the world. Then his soul will hear Hashem saying **סלחתי כדברייך**, “*I have forgiven you, as you have spoken.*”³² These are days where any person can become disconnected from the world, similar to how Moshe ascended to Heaven, during this time.

May the Creator merit us to serve Him as we should during these days, and to merit forgiveness from Him, and that all of Creation should merit the complete revelation of Him. *Amen V'Amen.*

29 peirush HaRaavad: Sefer Yetzirah 5:4

30 Shabbos 33b

31 Berachos 34b

32 Shemos 14:20 (this verse is often recited in the Selichos prayers).

Elul – Tribe of Gad

Elul – The Tribe of Gad

We are in the month of Elul. Each of the 12 months corresponds to one of the 12 tribes. The Gra and others wrote that the tribe of Gad corresponds to the month of Elul.³³ What is the connection between Gad and Elul?

Gad: Concealment

When Gad was born, Leah said, “*Ba Gad*”, “Gad has come”, and Rashi explains that this means [according to one interpretation]: “*Ba Gad, ba mazal*” – “When Gad comes, mazal comes”.³⁴ Our Sages explain that the word “*Gad*” is equal in *gematria* (numerical value) to the number 7, and the word “*ba*” is equal to 9, and since a normal pregnancy can take either 7 or 9 months, Gad represents the fetal state (*ibbur*) of man, which normally lasts for 7 or 9 months.

In Moshe’s blessing to Gad, Gad is given a portion that is by “*Eiver haYarden*”, the crossing of the Jordan, which is not part of Eretz Yisrael proper. The *Eiver haYarden* is also the area where Moshe is buried, though his exact burial place is not known. This can be understood on a deeper level as follows. In the 40 days when Moshe ascended the mountain of Sinai, which began in Elul [and ended on Yom Kippur, when he brought down the second set of *Luchos*], no one knew where Moshe was. This is in connection with the fact that Gad’s portion is not in Eretz Yisrael proper, but in *Eiver HaYarden*, Moshe’s burial place, which no one can see or know of. A fetus in its mother cannot either be seen [by the human eye]. The fetal state [which corresponds to Gad, as explained above] is the beginning state of a person. It is the beginning state of one’s formation, where he cannot be seen, because he is hidden, covered over, and concealed. Thus, Gad represents the idea of concealment.

Anything that exists first begins in a fetal state, a state of pregnancy, which eventually leads to its “birth”, when it emerges into the outside. The “pregnancy” of each thing can also be prolonged, where it undergoes a process of *ibbur* pregnancy and it takes a certain amount of time the “fetus” to develop and emerge.

We find this concept in all three dimensions – *Olam* (World\place), *Shanah* (year\time), and *Nefesh* (soul).³⁵ The year goes through a process of “pregnancy”, taking a full 12 months until it is complete, and this “pregnancy” can be

33 peirush haGra: Sefer Yetzirah 5:3

34 Rashi to Beraishis 30:11

35 Sefer Yetzirah 3:1

prolonged whenever there is a leap year, such as when there are two months of Adar that year. The soul also has *ibbur* pregnancy, and this we find in the idea of pregnancy itself. The place in the world where there is *ibbur* is in Eretz Yisrael. The Sages called it “*iburah shel ir*”, the place “where the city extends”, and this is by the *Eiver haYarden*, the crossing point at the Jordan - which is Gad’s portion.

Note that the *Eiver HaYarden* is not part of Eretz Yisrael proper, but in the section of land in Eretz Yisrael that is called *iburah shel ir*, an extension of Eretz Yisrael – but it is not the actual land of Eretz Yisrael itself.

Gad – The Hidden Beginning

The *Zohar* says that had Gad been born from one of the main mothers (either Rachel or Leah), he would have been the greatest of the tribes. Let us try to understand the depth behind this.

The Sages state that first of tribes to go out to war against our enemies, is Gad. The depth of this is that Gad represents the idea of *raishis*, the first. This is connected with the *Zohar*’s statement that had Gad come from one of the mothers, he would have been the greatest of the tribes. Gad is really the *raishis*, the first, except that he is the “hidden” first, the hidden beginning. This is also why Gad represents the fetal state [as explained earlier], because the fetal state is hidden, concealed beginning of a person. And that is also why Moshe’s burial place is in Gad’s portion, a place of concealment.

Gad – The Power To Rectify The Root of Sin

The month of Elul corresponds to the tribe of Gad. The month of Elul is the time of doing *teshuvah*. Every sin creates “concealment” [of G-d’s light] to come to the world. Gad, who represents the idea of concealment, is the power to do *teshuvah* [to repent and return to G-d] over the concealment [of G-d’s light] that is created from sin.

Through Gad, we have the power to do *teshuvah*. How? The power of Gad reveals that the beginning of each thing is always a state of concealment. When one does *teshuvah*, on a simple level, this means that repents over the acts of sin he committed. However, there is a more inner aspect to *teshuvah*, which is more important: one must repent over the concealment that was created from his sin. After the sin, Adam needed clothing, *begadim*, which covers the skin, and this is another hint that sin creates concealment and covering; and in addition, the word *begadim* is from the words “*ba Gad*”, which implies that sin is rectified through Gad.

When the time for *teshuvah*, Elul, arrives, on a deeper level, our *avodah* during these days is to fix the original betrayal*bege*d of Adam, which caused the need for clothing*begadim*.

Eliyahu HaNavi and Redemption & the Connection to Elul\Gad

The Sages state that Eliyahu HaNavi comes from Gad, from his mother's side. The Sages also said that Eliyahu's name hints to *ba l'hagid*, "he comes to inform" the good tidings of the Redemption. [Thus, the month of Elul, which corresponds to Gad, is also connected with Eliyahu HaNavi. Soon the connection will be explained further].

In Elul, Moshe ascended the mountain of Sinai, but his ascent was not complete, because after 40 days, he descended from the mountain. In contrast to this, Eliyahu ascended the mountain and never descended from it. These are two different levels of ascension. Moshe's ascension was incomplete, whereas Eliyahu's ascension was complete. Eliyahu's burial place is unknown, and in this aspect, Moshe bears a similarity to Eliyahu, because his burial is also not known.

In Elul, Moshe ascended the mountain, and then descended, when he came to give the second set of Tablets. Eliyahu also ascended the mountain, but he did not descend. Eliyahu comes from Gad, who corresponds to the month of Elul. The implication of this is that the month of Elul contains two deep aspects: Moshe's ascension, and Eliyahu's ascension.

In Elul, there is the power of Gad, which is described as "*ba Gad*". Eliyahu comes from Gad, and Eliyahu represents the good tidings of the Redemption, for he is the one chosen to inform the Jewish people of the Redemption.

On a deeper level, Eliyahu will reveal the level of the first set of *Luchos*. On Yom Kippur, we received the second set of *Luchos* from Moshe, and this was the apex of the 40 days of Moshe's ascension on the mountain which began in Elul. But this was only the external revelation of Elul, for was a revelation that came after sin [the sin with the Golden Calf]. The inner revelation in the month Elul is the first set of *Luchos*, which Eliyahu will reveal when he informs the Jewish people of the Redemption, when the world will be returned to the state of before the sin of Adam.

This is the depth of why Gad is the most prominent of the tribes [according to the Zohar]. It is because he is the tribe who represents the informing of the Redemption, which will signify the revelation of the first set of *Luchos*. Gad is the hidden "first" of the tribes, the hidden beginning, from whom the Redemption is revealed.

Before the arrival of the Mashiach, the Sages that the Jewish people will endure *chevlei Mashiach*, the birth pangs of Mashiach. The onset of labor is usually painful, throughout the pains of pregnancy, labor, and birth. So too, the Redemption will be preceded with pain. However, when Eliyahu will come to inform the Jewish people about the Redemption, at that point, there will no longer be *chevlei Mashiach*, and instead, the Mashiach will be in the category of "painless birth", reminiscent of the level before the sin, where childbirth would have been painless.

Returning to the Painless Fetal State B/4 the Sin

This is from the power of Gad, as implied in the term “*ba Gad, ba mazal*”, which means that Gad has the power of good *mazal*. In Elul, we prepare for the new year, for Rosh HaShanah, which is the birth of the world, as we say on Rosh HaShanah, “*HaYom Haras Olam*”, “Today is the birth of the world.” Rosh HaShanah is a time when the world undergoes a new birth. This comes from the power of Gad, who represents the fetal state - one which is holy, undamaged from the sin of Adam, and painless. It is the level of before the sin of Adam, where no rectification is required and where is no need for pain.

Of Eliyahu it says, “*And he will return the hearts of the fathers to the hearts of the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers.*”³⁶ That is how Eliyahu will reveal the redemption – it will be a joyous return, not like a birth which is painful, but a birth that is painless and full of joy [the level of the future, when there will be no more pain].

Anything that we traverse throughout the month of Elul is like the fetal state, for Elul corresponds to Gad, who represents the fetal state [as explained earlier]. But this “fetal state”, this process of pregnancy and birth, does not have to be like the painful kind of pregnancy and birth which we are familiar with. Instead, it is a “pregnancy” and “birth” which can be pleasant and joyous to us. The Sages state that “In Elul, the King comes to the field.” The depth of this is because Elul is like the fetal state, where something is emerging into the outside. Instead of pain and ruination, which is a result of sin, we can have Gad’s power during this time of the year, a level where there is no pain.

In Yaakov’s blessing, Gad is compared to the heel, because the heel is the end of the body, and so is Gad at the end of the year, for Elul\Gad is the last month of the year. Gad, Elul, is the heel of the year, the endpoint of the year, which shows that the year can end with the power of Gad, a good end to the year, a pleasant end.

Increasing Good Actions in Elul – Connecting To the Power of Gad

The month of Elul, which corresponds to Gad, contains the power of holy action³⁷, for Gad is the first of the tribes to go out to war against the enemies of the Jewish people. But Gad’s power of action\war is unlike like the war of Yaakov against Esav, which is a painful war filled with strife. Rather, Gad reveals a rectified state of war, one that begins with rectification, not with ruination.

Yaakov and Esav began to quarrel with each other in the womb, when they were yet in their fetal state, and Rivkah complained of the pain of this pregnancy as Yaakov and Esav clashed inside her. But Gad reveals a kind of fetal state which is painless. Thus, through Gad, the painful war fought between Yaakov and Esav becomes rectified.

36 Malachi 3:24

37 Editor’s Note: The Sages describe Elul as the month of maaseh\action. Refer to [Essence.of.Rosh.Chodesh_07_Elul - Action](#)

This is also the depth of why we “increase good deeds” in the month of Elul. [Besides for the simple meaning, that we increase good deeds as part of doing *teshuvah*, it is also because] it is a way for us to connect to the power of Gad, a fetal state which is painless, which rectifies the impaired fetal state of Yaakov and Esav where there was clashing and war.

Thus, Elul is the power of holy “action”, for Gad rectifies the strife in the fetal state between Yaakov and Esav, so that there is no more war between Yaakov and Esav. From Gad’s power – the revelation of a “painless pregnancy” - the war between Yaakov and Esav will cease, and through that, we will merit the full meaning of “*ba Gad, bad mazal*” (the “good *mazal*” of Gad).

In Conclusion

May we merit from *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* that we should have “*ba Gad ba mazal*”, the level of before the sin, where there is no pain in pregnancy and birth, and instead, may we have only *simchah* [joy] and *nachas* [pride from our children] in the home.³⁸

³⁸ Editor’s Note: For more on the power of Gad, refer to [Mazal.of.Rosh.Chodesh_013_Teves - Goat](#)



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