

Crying In Elul

Two Reasons To Cry In Elul

We are in the days of Elul, and nearing Rosh HaShanah. The Torah writes about a *yefas toar* (captive maidservant), who is given a time of thirty days to mourn her parents. The Zohar says that this refers to the 30 days of Elul, where we cry.

What do we cry for in Elul? In the month of Av, we cried about the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash*. That is where we find crying. But what is there to cry about in Elul? What is the concept of crying in Elul?

There are two kinds of crying in Elul. One kind of crying is when a person makes a *cheshbon hanefesh* (self-accounting) for the past year and he reflects into what he did. He wonders about his deeds and what will be with him this year. “The heart knows the bitterness of its soul” - if a person really feels the far-reaching consequences of what he did, he comes to feel pained at his sins of this year (as opposed to just merely knowing about it), these feelings can bring a person to tears. Our Rabbis point out that “Elul” is from the word “yelalah”, which means to cry.

That is one kind of crying that can happen in Elul, but there is another kind of crying in Elul, which is deeper. Elul is an acronym for “Ani L’Dodi, V’Dodi Li” (I am to my Beloved, and my Beloved is to me). When one thinks about how Elul is “Ani L’Dodi V’Dodi Li”, it must cause a yearning in his soul for this. This is the inner kind of crying that is needed in Elul, as well as on Rosh HaShanah. It is to cry from our soul, from yearning, for Hashem.

Yearning To Return To Our Source

When the soul of a person really feels the *Ribono shel Olam* (Master of the world) with a true feeling, a person has yearnings to return to his inner Source, where the *Ribono Shel Olam* is fully revealed and sensed.

It is written in the psalm of “L’Dovid” which we recite in Elul after the prayers: “*For my father and my mother have abandoned me, and Hashem will gather me.*” But one must have a yearning for “*And Hashem will gather me*”.

Here is a simple thought to think about. All of us, before we came down onto this world, lived in Heaven. It was decreed on us to come down onto This World, and we’ve been living here for many years, 20 years and 30 years and more. If we did not see our father for 20 years, wouldn’t we miss him? Of course we would. Our soul came down from Heaven where it came from, and it has been here on this world for at least 20 years and more. If one feels totally disconnected from Heaven, then he will not yearn for Heaven. After all, he doesn’t remember it anyway, he has no idea what it’s like,

so why he should miss it if he's not there... But when a person is even a bit open to some feeling for the spiritual, and he is aware that there is a more inner layer to our life, he has yearnings to return to the spiritual dimension that he came from.

Technology: Where Have We Come To?

Here is a very simple example from our world that can help us relate to what we are describing here.

Everyone here remembers what the world looked like 20 years ago, compared to what it looks like today. The world has changed drastically in just the last 20 years alone. If one doesn't feel the *tum'ah* (spiritual impurity) of today's times, he feels okay with it; he thinks that just as there were always "*nisyonos*" (tests) in each generation, so are there "*nisyonos*" in our generation as well. But if anyone even feels a little bit of the situation going on in today's times, he must feel some kind of yearning to return to a purer kind of world; at least the kind of world that was here 20 years ago.

If we would take a person from 20 years ago and put him in today's generation, he would faint from what he sees. We are very concerned when we watch the children growing up in today's new generation and of the challenges that they face [with technology] in today's times. But there are fully grown adults, who did not grow up using computers and laptops, and they grew up totally sheltered from any of these things, yet they have gotten used to these gadgets now - just as much as children growing up in this generation. How could this happen? And it has even become accepted as part of life to act this way.

We can understand why children of this new generation have such a hard time to withstand the temptations of these gadgets; they never saw a generation where these things were nonexistent, so it's like they never saw the light yet. But the adults of this generation are well-aware of the previous time in our world where these things didn't exist. How then could these adults get used to these gadgets when they go out there into the world, and they are just fine with it?

To Feel Like A 'Stranger' Towards This World

Is there a yearning in our soul to return to a different world than the one we see today? Do we wish we could return to the way things used to be? Does a person on this world feel that his house is his house, or does he feel "*I am a stranger in this land*"?

Someone who has suffering in his life surely knows what it's like to feel like a 'stranger' on this earth. But if someone has a pretty good life - if he has a good wife and good children (*Baruch Hashem*), and if he also has good health and livelihood and *nachas* and he has everything he needs—what does he feel like? Does he feel like a "stranger" to this earth as he is supposed to feel, or does he feel instead that everything is good here on this world?

What To Yearn For

Our soul must feel a yearning to go back to a purer world. We used the above example so that we can make this matter very practical, even for those who are living a very materialistic kind of life.

The soul of a Jew must always be filled with yearnings! There are some people who are too embarrassed to cry. Why are they embarrassed? What is there to be ashamed of about crying? A person who lives a truthful kind of life lives a life of yearnings- he cries. If a person yearns, can he restrain himself from crying? There is no such thing. If there are yearnings, a person cries.

A child cries when he doesn't get what he wants badly. But a mature adult, a *bar daas*, must cry about things that an adult needs to yearn for. And what should an adult yearn for? An adult must yearn for totally different things than the things that the world wants.

The Situation Of The World Today

Logically speaking, from the perspective of our straight intellect (*seichel hayoshor*), this Rosh HaShanah should really be the last Rosh HaShanah ever. The world cannot survive anymore the way it is. But Hashem desires that it should continue, so it continues. His thoughts are above our logic. But from the viewpoint of our own logic, it really doesn't make sense that the world should continue anymore.

If you know what goes on in the world today, your *seichel hayoshor* can tell you that it should not go on anymore, and every day that goes by, you can feel a yearning to live in a purer and cleaner world than the way it is now.

Yearning For A Different Life

A Jewish life, throughout the generations, and especially in this generation, is a life that needs to be filled with yearnings. If a person doesn't yearn for a different world than the world of today's times, it is a sign that he has become too accepting of the lifestyle of today's times, as if today's lifestyle is a valid way of living.

A *yefas toar* cries over her parents for 30 days, and the 30 days of Elul are days where we are meant to cry over what we yearn for and what we miss. At the very least, each person needs to at least feel what kind of situation we are in now and where our true place is; to wonder where a Jewish *neshamah* really belongs and how it must live.

True, we will never be able to totally free ourselves from all of the obstacles today; there are many factors which enslave us, both on our outside and inside. But we must make sure that we never lose our yearnings. We must yearn for a totally different kind of life than the lifestyle of today's world. Yes, we must eat, drink, make a living, make sure we have good health, and have nachas from the

children. But our source of vitality in life needs to come from a totally different area than any of these.

When Rosh HaShanah comes – the day where Hashem created man – each Jew has to reflect on the following simple reflection: How did man look when Hashem created him, and how does man look in the year 5773? Man looked like “*adam*” then, and he looks a lot different now.

In order to yearn, one must think about what was before, in comparison to what is now. Does man now have yearnings to return to the original state of man, when he was in Gan Eden? Or has man gotten used to the lifestyle of today and he’d rather stay here?

Every single week, for once a week, each of us is able to have a small spark of the World To Come: Shabbos. Shabbos is called a resemblance of the World To Come; it reminds us a little bit of where we come from. It reminds us a little of how a different world looks like. We have this one time of the week where we can see how a different world looks like in which there is no work, no labor, no having to earning a livelihood (at least in action) – where we can have a little bit of a yearning for a different world.

Most people are busy all day making a living, from morning until night. Does a person have a yearning to return to a world where there is no work, where he can instead have a day entirely devoted to serving the Creator from morning until night? “The Sages desired the days of *Moshiach* only so that they could sit and be entirely dedicated to learning Torah and receiving more wisdom.” Of course, a person will say “I can’t just leave my job and not earn a livelihood.” But is there at least a yearning for a world in which you don’t have to work? Does the person have such a yearning?

If a person just reflects a little bit into what the world used to look like at the beginning of Creation and he compares it to where we are now and to where we have to get to, he will be filled with yearnings. These yearnings make a person feel more alive, and they connect the person to a different world, removing him somewhat from this current lifestyle.

One of our thirteen principles of faith is that we believe that *Moshiach* will come, “and even though he tarries, I await for him.” Why must we await *Moshiach*? What does our soul yearn for in *Moshiach*’s coming? Part of the belief is that even though he tarries, we still yearn for his arrival. The point is not to be able to say these words of the *Ani Maamin* by heart and to believe that *Moshiach* will come. The point is to truly yearn for a different kind of life than today’s times.

The Darkness of Today

There was always a spiritual slumber throughout all of the generations. For this reason, we need the *shofar* to awaken us, as the Rambam says, that the purpose of *shofar* is to awaken man from his ‘slumber’ and from chasing trivialities. But if a person is very sick, he needs even more than the usual to help him. In the plague of darkness in Egypt, everyone was paralyzed. If we would blow *shofar* during the plague of darkness, would it awaken them from their spiritual slumber...?

We must know what the world is found in right now, and what our *avodah* is now. Our Sages compare the final generation to the order of events that took place in the redemption from Egypt. We are right now in the three days of the plague of darkness of Egypt, where darkness fills everything, and it is paralyzing. You can even feel it tangibly - just like they tangibly felt it in Egypt.

If somebody doesn't tangibly feel the darkness in our times, he is not just blind; he is missing the sense of touch. The darkness in today's times is not the darkness you see at night. It is the kind of darkness that was the plague of darkness in Egypt. It is a darkness which envelopes the entire world; **we are referring to all the kinds of technology that exists today.**

It is not the *yetzer hora* (evil inclination). It is much more than the *yetzer hora* – it is darkness itself which you can feel, tangibly. It is not felt by those who have become numb to feeling the spiritual. But those who do feel the spiritual, can feel the darkness.

The darkness of today's times is not the same as the darkness that was here 20 years ago or even 10 years ago. Now there is a new kind of darkness that has descended onto the world. Everyone knows of different problems that it has caused; each to his own. But in any case, it is essentially a darkness that has come down onto the world. Even if a person hears *shofar* 100 times, he is not "hearing" it these days. Maybe his head is busy thinking about his four species on Sukkos, his *sukkah* and how it needs to get built, and *Simchas Beis HaShoeivah*. But he's not "hearing" the [message of] *shofar*.

What Will Awaken Us?

There is a need now for a new force to awaken people from their spiritual slumber and from the new darkness that has befallen the world in recent times. What worked 20 years ago to awaken people doesn't work anymore. In our times, not only will it "go into one ear and come out the other ear"; it doesn't even enter the ear in the first place, because the person doesn't even hear. This is not just another kind of "*yetzer hora*" we have in the world; it's a whole different existence, of darkness, that has entered the world.

Most people are no longer inspired by the ways they were inspired 10 years ago. For some people the same old inspiration works, but for most people, they are not inspired anymore by what worked 10 years ago. We need a deeper kind of inspiration these days which can shake our hearts. It needs to be an awakening that causes us to stay awakened, and not just to return to routine after we are inspired. Can anyone today say that there is something that inspires him? Can any person today know of something that would cause him to yearn and return to a purer and more spiritual life, a life of closeness with Hashem?

Many people today claim that they feel helpless, due to their various human weaknesses. Or, they blame it on their community or on the city they live in. But that is not the issue. It is because darkness fills the world today.

There is no “shepherd” or “leader” anymore who can lead the entire *Klal Yisrael* today. One by one, each of the *Gedolim* have left the world, one after the other, and the world is left an orphaned generation. These days, each person lives by according to what he thinks he is correct; each person lives according to how he wishes.

A Changed World

These words are not here to cause inspiration; the purpose here is to simply explain what situation the world is found in right now. Compare this to a family who moves into a new house, and the day they move, the father tells his little children, “Write down the address of the new house, this way if you get lost, you shouldn’t return to our old house and know how to get back to our new address.” So too, the “address” we lived in 10 years ago is not the same “address” anymore. It is a new world entirely.

Any *bar daas* can see that the world has changed so much in the last few years – even physically. Even the weather has changed. It is much hotter lately. Does anyone here know the reason of why there are hotter temperatures lately? It is because the world today is closer to *Gehinnom*. The heat of *Gehinnom* is starting to penetrate into the world. There are also natural ways to explain it, but this is the deeper reason.

The world today is not the same anymore. What is the new address we live in today? The new ‘address’ we live in today is: a “world of darkness”. That is what we live in today.

Finding The Light In The Darkness

But, the Torah tells us that in the plague of darkness in Egypt, all of the Jewish people had light in their homes. Therefore, all of what we said until now is only one side of the coin. There is another side of the coin: there was light in every Jewish home, even amidst all of the darkness outside.

Similarly, by the sons of Korach, [as they were falling into *Gehinnom*, they did *teshuvah*], there was a special place prepared for them where they could be protected from *Gehinnom*, even as they were surrounded by it. So too, even though we are surrounded by *Gehinnom*, there is a light in the darkness available to us – for those who want it and yearn for it and will do anything to connect to it.

For the amount of darkness that descends onto the world, there is an equal amount of light that comes onto the world. The light of Hashem is therefore more readily accessed in our times, much more than ever. However, one must be willing to separate himself from the darkness of the world, with *mesirus nefesh* (total willingness), to be willing to give up his soul for *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, and to really agree, that the world today is not such a good place to stay on.

After all, is it really such a ‘good’ world to live on? Look how much suffering fills most people’s lives. It’s so ‘good’? Does anyone realize that the world cannot continue on anymore like this?

The Jewish people had light in their homes during the plague of darkness. Every Jew had it. Similarly, each Jew today has the *bechirah* (free choice) to decide if he will continue to remain immersed in the darkness of today’s times, continuing to buy more technological gadgets and to fall further and further into the “50th Gate of Impurity” (otherwise known as the ‘point of no return’) – or if he will choose to live a different life altogether: to instead live a life of Hashem’s light, of closeness to Hashem, a life in which our desire is to desire what Hashem wants, to desire His Torah, truly, and in our heart.

This is the new power of free choice we have been given now, and it is available to anyone who desires to live a truthful life.

If someone truly chooses to live a truthful life in our generation in the times we live in, and in the year we are found in, to truly desire Hashem – then Hashem’s presence will be revealed to him in a great light, in rays of the *Shechinah*, which is pure bliss to behold. But one has to really choose and he must really want to separate himself from the lifestyle of the world today.

There was never such a deep power of choice since the beginning of Creation as the choices we must make today in our *bechirah*, where we are faced with such darkness..¹

I hope that the words here should reach their desired intent and cause a yearning for true life - not simply to break through the darkness, but out of revealing a total hope that we can merit eternal life.

In Conclusion

Let us pray together that *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* should merit all of *Klal Yisrael* - even before it comes Rosh HaShanah - that we should desire to disconnect ourselves from all of the technology and gadgets today that are causing people to fall into the lowest possible places, and to instead choose the truest kind of life that exists, to choose eternal life, a life of Torah, of Hashem, of *ahavas Yisrael* and true connection to others; not superficially, but from the deepest place in ourselves.

May we all merit together to be written and sealed for a good year.

¹ See also *Bein HaMitzarim 005_ A Time of Light and Darkness*