



RABBI BARUCH

TAUB

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Torah Tidbits is proud to feature a guest dvar Torah from our esteemed OU faculty member Rabbi Baruch Taub. Yasher koach for your inspirational words and chizuk.

Elul: Not What You Think

It may come as a surprise to many, but the month of Elul and its attendant spiritual activities is not about Teshuva. A quick look at the time-line following Elul obviates this.

Immediately following Elul is Rosh Hashana – Yom Hadin when we are judged. Only after the judgement does the seasonal process of Teshuva begin, culminating on Yom Kippur which hopefully provides a positive response to our efforts of Teshuva during the Aseret Yemei Teshuva. So the timeline is :

Elul, Rosh Hashana, 10 days of Teshuva, Yom Kippur forgiveness.



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But what is unique about Elul?

The well known acronym of the letters of Elul אני לדודי ודודי לי (I am to my beloved and my beloved is to me), says it all.

ELUL is an extraordinary period that G-d has gifted us.

ELUL is the preamble of Teshuva.

ELUL is a month that G-d tells us He loves us and asks that we respond in kind.

ELUL is G-d telling us He cares about us and wants to desperately restore an intimate relationship with us.

ELUL properly addressed is the gateway to an inevitable Teshuva m’ahava.

You want to know what will motivate a process of Teshuva? G-d reveals His hand “I love you” He declares, “ love me back”.

ELUL is about the central motif of Torah – to work toward, develop and enjoy an intimate relationship with the Almighty. To love Him and appreciate His love for us.

There is a fascinating Midrash Peliah (a midrash of unknown origin) which is

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mentioned in the introduction of the 16th century Ein Yaakov by its compiler Rabbi Yaakov Ibn Chabib.


The Rabbis were debating in the Yeshiva “What is the central pasuk of the entire Torah?”

Ben Zoma said it is אחד ה' אלקינו ה' שנמע ישראל ה' אלקינו ה' אחד. Ben Nemus disagreed and insisted Is the central pasuk.

Ben Pazi said “no neither of you are correct. The central pasuk in the Torah which expresses the essence of Yahadut is את הכבש האחד תעשה בבוקר ואת הכבש השני תעשה בין הערביים”

The institution of bringing the daily Korban Tamid offering morning and evening to the Temple. (Can Ben Pazi really be serious?)

Rabbi “Ploni” (the anonymous rabbi) declared Ben Pazi as the winner hands down. It was so obvious to the rabbis in the Yeshiva and it wasn't even necessary to record the name of the Rabbi who declared the winner!

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Rabbi Yaakov Ibn Chabib in his Hakotev commentary offers an explanation of the various opinions. Ben Zoma held that שמע ישראל is the central verse as it represents mitzvot bein adam laMakom – mitzvot between man and G-d. Additionally Shma represents the entire theology, philosophy and hashkafa of the Torah.

Ben Nemus held that ואהבת לרעך כמוך Is the central verse as it relates to מצוות בין אדם לחברו – building a society of peace and harmony in symphony with all of klal Yisrael.

In addition this pasuk emphasizes not necessarily Hashkafa theology but halacha, how we react and interact with one another.

Ben Pazzi insisted “you’re both right!” We need both.

The korban Tamid was offered daily by the kohein as a dramatic fulfillment of the mitzvot בין אדם למקום between man and G-d. In addition it was offered on behalf of the entire enterprise of the Jewish people בין אדם לחברו. Both must work in tandem.

I want to add something to his explanation.

There is something dramatic about Ben Pazi’s conclusion. The korban Tamid was 24/7. It is constant and consistent. It represents on our part a desire to enjoy an intimate relationship with G-d.

The Almighty gives us the opportunity to return His love for us by gifting us this mitzva of korban Tamid.

What the korban Tamid achieves as a mitzva Elul achieves in a period of time!

Elul is unique. It is the only month in the calendar for which the Rabbis presented an acronym of the letters אלול. In fact there are close to thirty additional acronyms to the letters of Elul presented by the Kabbalists!

IT IS AS IF THE LETTERS OF אלול ARE LITERALLY LOVE LETTERS BETWEEN G-D AND MAN.

Fear and trembling, the attendant emotions of Teshuva are not what Elul is about. The Rambam in Sefer Hamitzvot – positive mitzva 3 – in discussing the mitzva of אהבת ה' - loving G-d, insists that the fulfillment of the mitzva can only be achieved with joy and happiness (עונג). Elul therefore the month of אני לדודי ודודי לי is a time of simcha.

How to actualize that love? Everyone can make their own checklist. Clearly improving the quality of davening is obvious. Responding to the needs of individuals and the community particularly during this Corona Elul is a given.

At the top of the list is redirecting ourselves to the great mitzva of Talmud Torah.

Having processed the enormous potential of the Elul experience

Who among us would not want to take advantage of this wonderful moment in time?

■ אלול שמח!