



GEULAS YISRAEL

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RAM YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

MAGGID SHIUR ALL PARSHA AND ALL DAF, OU.ORG

Elul and “Ani L’dodi V’dodi Li”: A Month of Love and Resilience

Every year, inevitably, the dog days of summer yield to the solemn currents of Chodesh Elul. Leisure and vacation fade, replaced by a season of spiritual intensity and sober introspection. The shofar’s piercing call, the daily recital of L’dovid Hashem Ori, and, for Sephardim, the midnight selichot, herald a decisive turn toward the Yomim Noraim – Days of Awe and judgment. As the Chasam Sofer once remarked, in Elul even the fish tremble. The serenity of summer fishing trips yields to the roaring tremors of Chodesh Elul.

DAYS OF AFFECTION

However, a second emotion stirs during these forty days. They are not merely days of judgment, but days of deep affection. We are the only nation that openly crowns Hashem on Rosh Hashanah, the sole human community to consciously exalt Him on the day of Malchut. And because of this devotion, on that awe-inspiring day of judgment, Hashem recalls our many zechuyyot, beginning with the Akeidah. It is a day of formidable justice, yet also a day of intimacy and mercy toward His people.

The devotion we show on Rosh Hashanah sets the stage for the intimacy of Yom

Kippur, a day of cleansing and mercy. It is His cherished gift to us—a day to purge our sins and cleanse our souls. Chazal teach that never was there a day as radiant and joyous as Yom Kippur.

These days which begin with Elul are not only solemn and awe-inspiring; they are also moments of intimacy and affection between Hashem and His people, who carry His Presence into the world.

TWO SHOFARS

Perhaps no symbol better captures the dual tonality of this profound season than the shofar. On one hand, its cry carries an ominous weight, warning us of the impending gravity of judgment in the Heavenly Court. As the Rambam (Hilchot Teshuva 3:4) teaches, the shofar acts as a clarion call, rousing us from our stupor and from our preoccupation with life’s trivialities. Its wailing, plaintive notes summon us to solemn—and even trembling—reflection.

Yet the shofar, sounded daily throughout Elul, also recalls a different moment: Moshe Rabeinu’s third and final ascent of Har Sinai. Fearing a repeat of the golden calf tragedy, Moshe instructed that the shofar be sounded

on the day he ascended. These final forty days, culminating in Yom Kippur, were days of love and reconciliation. Hashem had already pardoned His people, yet now came the gift of a second, enduring set of Luchot. During this period, Hashem also revealed the 13 Middot of mercy to Moshe and taught him the art of praying for the Jewish people. We recite this list nearly a hundred times during selichot and Yom Kippur—it is our divinely authored tefilla for mercy.

By blowing the shofar during the month of Elul, we recall that golden 40-day period when our relationship with Hashem—so badly ruptured—was repaired with love and compassion. During Elul the shofar carries both weight and warmth, its cry blending the tension of judgment with the promise of mercy.

LETTERS OF LOVE

The name of this powerful month, Elul, already hints at divine affection. The origin of the name is Babylonian and carries little meaning in Hebrew. However Judaism weaves together historical fact, cultural heritage, and national folklore. Because of Elul's monumental significance, throughout history, various phrases from pesukim became associated with this month, particularly those whose letters spell out the word E-l-u-l.

The most famous, of course, is the phrase Ani L'dodi V'dodi Li (which spells אלוהים) from Shir HaShirim. Almost every Jew recognizes this acronym; yet many are less aware of the precise moment in Shir HaShirim when this declaration of love occurs—a moment that resonates deeply with our current stage in history.

JEWISH HISTORY IN METAPHOR

Shir HaShirim serves as a chronicle of

Flawless Service
25 years +

Highest Prices Paid

Buying

Gold, Jewelry, Silver

WANTED

Member Diamond Club
 (All Types)

Diamonds, Gems, Precious Stones, Jade, Carvings,
Fine Mineral Specimens, Etc.

*** Alan Sussman, "The Collector" ***

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Jewish history, told through the metaphor of a man and woman in search of a relationship. Through this lens, it recounts the beautiful romance we once shared with Hashem, who drew us from the deep, dark bondage of Egypt into the luminous desert of faith. Yet time and again we strayed from His will—a pattern that ultimately led to our exile from the Land of Israel and our long, winding journey through the deserts of history.

For the past two thousand years, we have struggled to mend that punctured bond. At times, He has been ready to resume the covenant, but we have hesitated. At other moments, we have yearned for renewal, yet He has withheld it. Jewish history is a story of unrequited love—an elusive relationship lost thousands of years ago amid the deserts of Sinai and the hills of Jerusalem, still awaiting a long-anticipated reunion.

FINDING OUR FOOTING

The opening sections of Shir HaShirim paint the portrait of a shy and timid young woman, overwhelmed and intimidated by the prospect of marrying a famous and renowned king. She dwells in the countryside of Ein Gedi, surrounded by shepherds and vineyards. Her intended husband resides in an ornate palace in Yerushalayim, fashioned

from fine woods and plated with precious metals. When He calls to her, she does not immediately join him—uncertain and hesitant. As she herself confesses, “I am black, but beautiful”—unsure of her worthiness to wed this majestic prince.

Of course, this image of a reluctant, shy girl—intimidated by a mighty king—serves as a metaphor, offering a profound lens on our earliest betrayals and failures against Hashem. Shir HaShirim portrays our early religious missteps not as outright acts of treachery, but as arising from the natural asymmetry inherent in our relationship with Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

Monotheism is no easy path. To be chosen by the Melech Malchei HaMelachim and entrusted with His mitzvot is an awe-inspiring and daunting destiny. It took time for us to find our footing, steady ourselves, and fully orient our lives toward the rigorous demands of monotheism. Our early errors—the golden calf, the meraglim, and even some struggles during the initial centuries in the Land of Israel—are seen by Shir HaShirim as the challenges of a people still learning to meet the exacting call of Torah and mitzvot.

In perek 2, confronting this asymmetry and her hesitation to join him in Yerushalayim, the young girl longingly declares her devotion to her beloved and her conviction that their relationship—though not yet fulfilled—will one day be fully realized: “Dodi li va’ani lo.” We may not be united now, but he will wait for me, and we will remain forever bound in loyalty to one another. Spoken in the early stages of Shir HaShirim, this phrase is a declaration of faith in an eventual reunion that will restore the bond to its full glory. The path may not always be smooth, but the bond

endures, eternal and unbroken.

FROM TIMIDITY TO CONFIDENCE

Fast forward to the end of the 6th perek of Shir HaShirim. The woman is still not united with her beloved. Indeed, she has been searching for him for some time after their bond was ruptured by her own refusal to answer the door. She encounters night watchmen who strike her violently and remove the jewels from her head. Chazal interpret this section of Shir HaShirim as a metaphor for galut, caused by our failure to return from Persia to rebuild the Second Mikdash. Only 42,000 Jews returned with Ezra, while the majority remained amidst the luxury and palaces of Persia. Because of this collective apathy and inertia, the Second Mikdash never gathered lasting momentum, and ultimately, we were exiled once more—this time for two millennia. Two thousand years during which we were exposed to hatred, violence, and the stripping away of our national pride. We have faced these violent watchmen who sought to tear away our crown and rob us of our jewels.

In the end of the 6th perek, as her search for her husband almost reaches its culmination, the woman declares “Ani l’dodi v’dodi li,” reaffirming her belief that, though they are not yet together, they remain eternally committed and will one day reunite.

While this declaration of ani l’dodi v’dodi li mirrors the first declaration of dodi li va’ani lo, there is one crucial difference. In the earlier phrase of “Dodi li va’ani lo,” she placed her husband—Hashem—first. In this later declaration, she places herself first: “Ani l’dodi v’dodi li.”

What may seem a small difference is, in fact, profound. By the end of Shir HaShirim, she has transformed from a timid, uncertain

girl into a confident, self-assured woman. In the early stages, she placed her beloved first in their mutual declaration of love; now she names herself first, followed by her beloved. She has evolved from a shy, hesitant girl who hoped her husband would love her into a confident woman who first declares her own loyalty and expects the same in return.

This shift mirrors a transformation in Am Yisrael over the past two thousand years—a deepening confidence in our relationship with Hashem. This confidence enables us to declare our devotion with certainty and courage, rather than with mere longing and hesitation.

MESIRAT NEFESH

What changed through history? What gives this woman the confidence she so sorely lacked at the beginning of her relationship? By extension, what should give Am Yisrael the courage to utter the phrase “Ani l’dodi v’dodi li” with newfound confidence?

Chazal see the watchmen’s violent confrontation as a metaphor for the resilience Am Yisrael has developed throughout history. For over two thousand years, we faced unimaginable persecution and relentless pressure—challenges that might have crushed us if we had abandoned faith in Hashem. From the moment we left Yerushalayim, we defended Him, even at the cost of our lives. From Chananya, Mishael, and Azarya in the fiery furnace, through Daniel in the lions’ den, the Macabim who sacrificed for Torah, and Rebbe Akiva with his colleagues, we remained defiant.

Our survival stands as one of the greatest anthropological miracles in human history. Against all odds, we endured—without a common country, flag, currency, or any of

the usual cultural bonds that hold nations together.

Yet our miracle is also profoundly religious. Condemned to live among hostile nations determined to undermine our faith, we not only survived, but transformed the world into a vessel of monotheism, preserving the presence of Hashem on this earth.

This endurance should fill us with confidence and empower us to proclaim: Ani l’dodi v’dodi li. The mesirat nefesh of Am Yisrael over the past two thousand years should infuse our tefillot with both pride and anticipation. Our prayers must weave together the raw, desperate pleas of an underserving heart with the steadfast confidence earned through millennia of mesirat nefesh.

If this is true after two thousand years of galut, it is all the more so after the past two years. Mi Ke’amacha Yisrael. We have courageously defended our Land, our people, and Hashem’s prophecies at great cost. This mission has been carried by the devoted few who understand both the immense mitzvah and the historic duty to help shape the final chapters of our nation’s story. The courage and mesirat nefesh our people have displayed rivals that of the heroic generations who came before, those who safeguarded Hashem’s presence in our world.

As Elul arrives, affirm your love and confidence, praying that Hashem swiftly reveals His Presence to a world that longs for redemption. ■



Rabbi Taragin’s newest sefer entitled **“To be Holy but Human: Reflections upon my Rebbe, Rav Yehuda Amital (Kodesh)”** is now available at: mtaraginbooks.com and in bookstores