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SPECIAL PREPARATION FOR ELUL

# The Elul Opportunity: Awakening Together

One of the greatest gifts Hashem ever gave us is Elul.

Left to our own devices, many of us simply wouldn't do it.

Life is busy. The routine is relentless. There are bills to pay, laundry to fold, emails to answer, children to entertain, and endless distractions competing for our attention. Summer, especially, has a rhythm all its own. School is out, schedules are fluid, vacations are planned, and we try to create memories with the people we love.

And then, we blink and it's Chodesh Elul.

The shofar begins to sound each morning. We add *L'David Hashem Ori V'Yishi* to our daily tefillot. We increase our tzedakah. The

language of teshuvah slowly finds its way back into our vocabulary.

It's as though Hashem lovingly interrupts our lives and says, "Wake up. Don't let another year simply happen to you."

How grateful I am that He built this into the Jewish calendar.

This past Shabbat I found myself lingering over a familiar verse:

וַעֲתָה יִשְׂרָאֵל, מָה ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ שָׁאֵל מֵעַמּוֹ, כִּי אִם לִירָאָה אֶת ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ...  
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What does Hashem ask of us? The very first answer is *yirah*.

Not simply fear of punishment, but living with an awareness that I stand in the Presence of Hashem. That my choices and actions matter because He is here.

If I'm honest, I realized this is an area where I have work to do.

My love of Hashem feels genuine. My desire to serve Him is real. But Chazal teach us, ה' - ראשית חכמה יראת - the beginning of wisdom is awe of Hashem. It's the foundation upon which everything else is built.

So I began thinking practically. What habits could strengthen that awareness? How could I carry Hashem's Presence into ordinary moments instead of limiting it to extraordinary ones? But while reflecting, another thought occurred to me.

Elul asks us to think about ourselves. Yet it never asks us to think only about ourselves.

There is the *prat*—the individual.

And there is the *klal*—the Jewish people.

We spend so much of Elul asking, "Where do I need to grow?" Perhaps we should also

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ask, “How does my growth strengthen Am Yisrael?”

Chazal describe the Jewish people as one body. No organ can perform every function. The eye cannot hear. The heart cannot walk. The hands cannot think. Each part contributes something unique that every other part depends upon.

The same is true spiritually. Some Jews naturally connect through heartfelt tefillah. Others through rigorous Torah learning. Some inspire with music. Some through extraordinary acts of kindness and generous donations. Some sacrifice on the battlefield. Some dedicate themselves in the Beit Midrash. None of us embodies every strength.

And that’s exactly the point.

My avodah doesn’t compete with yours. It complements yours.

Perhaps when I become a stronger version of myself, I’m filling a space that someone else cannot fill. And when I celebrate the gifts Hashem gave another Jew, they help complete what is lacking in me. Our differences actually help us.

I’ve been privileged to witness it firsthand at Beit Binyamin. Over the past two years, our retreat center has welcomed an extraordinary cross-section of Am Yisrael. Bereaved parents, wives of reservists, soldiers, volunteers, therapists, rabbis, teenagers, retirees, religious and secular Jews, Israelis and visitors from abroad.

They do not all think alike. They do not all connect and serve Hashem in the same way. Yet every single person brought something indispensable.

Beit Binyamin reminds me that Am Yisrael becomes strongest not when we become identical, but when each person brings their unique strengths in the service of something greater than themselves.

That thought became especially tangible while participating in the OU’s film *Beit HaMikdash in the Making*.

There were stone carvers and woodworkers.

Women practicing weaving and tailors sizing garments for the Kohanim.

Researchers studying laws and techniques.

Bakers preparing the Lechem HaPanim.

Those caring for the Parah Adumah.

Builders. Teachers. Torah scholars.

And one day there will also be musicians, singers, gatekeepers, craftsmen, Kohanim and Levi'im—each fulfilling a role no one else can.

No single person could ever build or operate the Beit HaMikdash.

Only a nation could.

Perhaps that is true of Elul as well.

Yes, Hashem asks each of us to engage in deep, personal work. To examine our choices, our character, our relationships, and our connection with Him.

But He never intended us to become identical.

He asks us to become the fullest version of ourselves - and then bring that unique self into the service of the *klal*.

Maybe that’s why Moshe’s words begin, ועתה ישראל - “And now, Israel.”

מה ה' אלקיך, Only afterward does he ask, שואל מעמך - what does Hashem ask of you?

The individual lives within the nation.

This Elul, I certainly have my own work to do.

But I also want to notice the holiness in the people around me. To appreciate the Jew who serves Hashem differently than I do. To recognize that their gifts are not a challenge to mine, but a completion of them.

Because when every Jew brings their unique avodah to Hashem, together we

become something none of us could ever become alone.

And perhaps that is exactly the kind of nation worthy of building - and filling - the Beit HaMikdash once again. The kind of nation Hashem is proud to call his children. His holy treasured nation.

בנים אתם לה' אלוקיכם...ובך בחר ה' להיות לו  
לעם סגולה. ■

The **Airleys** have built **Beit Binyamin**, a retreat center in Tzfat for those directly affected by the war. Soldiers, Zaka members, security forces, bereaved families and widows can come for respite, relaxation and rejuvenation. For more information and to donate, visit [Beitbinyamin.org](http://Beitbinyamin.org)

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An advertisement for Premium Moving and Storage. On the left is a cartoon illustration of a smiling man with a beard, wearing a baseball cap with a deer logo and a t-shirt that says "PREMIUM MOVING". In the background is a white moving truck with the same deer logo and "PREMIUM MOVING" text, parked in front of a building with a sign that says "MAXI BOX STORAGE".

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