

MONTH OF ELUL – TEACHERS' GUIDE

1 2

The zodiac sign for the month of Elul is Virgo, the *besula*. There is a hint to this in the verse in Yirmiyahu, that *besula* is connected to repentance. Like a woman before her wedding, yearning for her husband, so too the Jewish people during the month of Elul yearn for their 'husband', for closeness to G-d. (see the last source for a deeper connection between the zodiac sign and the month of Elul)

3 4

The Aramaic translation of the word 'search' is elul. The month was given this name to hint to us that we should use this month to search our deeds and actions in order to fully repent, and draw closer to G-d.

5 6 7 8

Blowing the shofar during the month of Elul is a custom which dates back to Mount Sinai, when Moshe ascended the mountain for the final time to receive the second set of tablets. The idolatry of the Golden Calf was a result of a miscalculation as to when Moshe was due back in the camp. Therefore this time they sounded the shofar on the day that he ascended so that there would be no mistake as to when he left, and when he should return.

The sound of the shofar also awakens us from our slumber of the year, reminding us to examine our deeds, return to G-d and repent.

9

The Satan is the prosecuting angel who stands against us on the Day of Judgement (Rosh Hashana). Even though angels are not fooled by tricks, we nevertheless avoid blowing the shofar on the day before Rosh Hashana to remind ourselves of the seriousness of the day, and that we will be standing before G-d in judgement on Rosh Hashana. We should imagine a real trial, with prosecution and defense, arguing for our souls.

10 11 12

There are many different hints to the word Elul in scripture (even though the name of the month, like the names of all the months came from Bavel when the Jews returned from the exile). Each of these hints at a different aspect of preparing ourselves for the Day of Judgement. This is a time when G-d is our beloved and longs to bring us close to Him. This is through *teshuva*, *tefilla* and *tzedaka*, repentance, prayer and charity.

13 14

The universal custom is to recite Tehillim 27 during the month of Elul. This not only alludes to the festivals of the month of Tishrei, but also to the month of Elul itself.

The Malbim explains that we must bring ourselves close to G-d in order to receive His direct providence. This is based on the Rambam in Moreh Nevuchim who says that direct providence is only extended to the righteous. Everyone else only receives indirect providence. Elul is the time to come back to G-d and once again become close to Him.

15 16

R' Tzadok explains the word Elul as an anagram of Lulei, "had I not". This is the time to repent, and we must bear in mind that even the smallest sin can distance us from G-d. We must examine all our deeds throughout the past year and make sure that we use the month of Elul properly. After it has passed we don't want to be left saying to ourselves "Lulei" - "if only..."

17 18

Elul and Yom Kippur are historically set aside as times for repentance and atonement. It was during these forty days that Moshe prayed for forgiveness and received atonement for the nation from the sin of the Golden Calf. Giving Moshe the second set of tablets showed G-d's complete acceptance of the nation's repentance and demonstrated to them that their sin was forgiven. From that day on Yom Kippur was set aside as a day of atonement.

19

Chemdas Hayamim offers a kabbalistic interpretation of the Talmud (which is also brought in Halacha) that one should not go after a woman. He understands it as an allusion to the time of repentance - the month after the lion (i.e. Elul) rather than the month after the *besula* (i.e. Tishrei) when it will be too late. He also cites the Arizal who explains the verses in the beginning of parshas Ki Tetzei (which is always read during Elul) as alluding to repentance and returning to G-d.

Please send any comments or feedback to dsedley@torahlab.org