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Parshas
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// Without Pressure!

Elul! The eis rotzoin - yemei horachamim! The yeitzer hora is worried about its great potential. But he has this weapon against elul. Anxiety and pressure. Indeed, many people have this negative feeling about elul… instead of anticipation of experiencing Hashem's rachamim.

Even in mundane matters from too much pressure, a person is capable of doing incorrect things...

The Rebbe gives an example (Sichos HaRan 27): During a fire, from the great panic caused by the flames, people grab all sorts of useless items, all kinds of rubbish etc, due to the pressure and lack of yishuv hadaas to the point where a person doesn't think about what he's doing...

This is especially so in matters of avodas Hashem. During special times that are auspicious for attaining wonderful things, and particularly in elul, we should remain aware of this nisoyon. Not to fall into all types of feelings of pressure and feelings of guilt – "what will become of me, I've fallen so many times, I'm so far away, Elul is here! How much have I accomplished… how much haven't I yet done. I waste so many precious seconds… Am I going in the right direction...?

The tzaddikim have taught us this fundamental rule: Tension and pressure are not yiras shomayim as some might imagine. They come from the sitra achra (Evil Side)! These words don't exist in the dictionary of of avodas Hashem! If you feel any pressure from something, understand immediately on the spot - it comes from the sitra achra, banish it from yourself right away. The correct feelings that come from the side of kedusha, and especially during these days are longings and desires stemming from yearnings for Hashem, which make you want to do so much to come closer. Without pressure.

// The Gates Are Open!

It's brought in S. Chassidus (Arizal alludes to this), that during these forty days - from Rosh Chodesh Elul until the end of Yom Kippur Neilah, the heavens are open on the level of "Pesichas HaHeichal" - opening of the Oron Hakodesh. As before Krias Hatorah, when an eis rotzoin (time / aura of heavenly favor) prevails which causes the opening of the gates of heaven. It is customary for people to try as much as possible to take advantage and utilize this for tefillos and requests - this level of eis rotzoin prevails throughout all the 40 days of rachamim!

So, with a bit of yishuv hadaas, you'll realize that the proper feeling during these days is exactly the opposite of pressure. "Now is a holy time? There's a wonderful eis rotzoin? I'll start anew now; I'll take advantage of it! I'll take upon myself to speak to Hashem and ask to return to Him"

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Gemstone

One who hears himself being shamed but remains silent is called a chossid, and Hashem himself protects his nefesh (soul).

(Sefer Hamiddos, Merivoh 29)

Questions and Answers

The Heart is Working!

Q I'm tired of all these ups and downs. Why can't my avoda go smoothly?

A Dear…

A person's life is like an EKG (electrocardiogram), which checks the strength of the heart's movement. When the lines go straight up and then straight down, it's a sign that the heart is beating and functioning properly. However, when the lines are straight in one continuous line, it's a sign that the heart isn't beating and functioning properly at all...

And so, it is with a person's life. When one has ups and downs, and knows that this is the reality of life, and that one must cope with them and make a new beginning each time, this is a sign of a good and healthy life. In the end, such a person will merit to reach what they need to reach. Ashrei lo - fortunate is he.

Know, my dear friend, that all this is the secret of the "kavonoh / avoda of Elul," these holy days in which we find ourselves now. The Rebbe z"l (Likutei Mohoran 1:6) calls this "boki b'rotzoi v'boki b'shoiv" (proficient in advancing and proficient in retreating). "Boki b'rotzoi" is the awakening and enthusiasm that a person receives, whether from a sefer they learned or from a drosho they heard, and they begin to get very excited, feeling a great aliyoh and mochin d'gadlus (expanded consciousness).

But at the same time, one must also be "boki b'shoiv" and understand that this awakening will pass, and they will feel a yeridah – fall and mochin d'katnus (constricted consciousness). What does one do then? Knowing beforehand that this is how it must be, one then tries to revive oneself with every small nekudoh that one can acquire. Thus, one is "boki b'shoiv" and has a soft pillow to place underneath, so that their bones won't break in their descent, and they will rise afterwards healthy and whole.

Therefore, don't be so afraid of the descents that come after the ascents. Know that this is how it needs to be, and it's all in order to raise and elevate you to an even greater height. Then you'll be prepared for everything in advance, and you'll have tremendous strengths to rise anew each time, and you'll feel a sweet taste all the days of your life.

(Oshiv L'Ish, 11 Elul 5780)

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What a wonderful time this is, that Hashem brings us extra measures of rachamim to accompany us towards the days of judgment and the new year. This is a golden opportunity of open heavenly gates. Of course, one needs pure eyes to be able to see this, but we have emunoh in the words of the tzaddikim which is enough for us. Wherever we are, on the street, at home or in the beis medrash, we'll remind ourselves that the gates are open, we'll open our mouths with a few more words to Hashem.

// Be Smart

The Rebbe reveals to us the power of Elul (Likutei Moharan 1: 141). 'Elul' is hinted at in the pasuk (Devarim 30:6): "umol hashem elokecha Es Levovcho V'es Levav zarecho", and the Targum translates this as: 'And Hashem your G-d will remove the foolishness of your heart.'

All the spiritual wars we have, the difficulties in serving Hashem and difficulties attaining the sweetness of life - they all come from foolishness.

For if we would have a bit of true seichel, would we still listen to the voice of the soton, whose entire purpose is to take away our life and pleasures physically as well as spiritually?

This holy month of Elul, is the time, when our words to Hashem, are especially effective to achieve that we should merit to cut out this foolishness.

Hashem Himself is this expert Mohel, we just need to ask!

(Ishei Yisroel Ki Teitzei 5783)

Sparks

Young Vintage

The elderly Chossid, Rav Avrohom Sternhartz z"l, when he was already over eighty years old, would come every day to the beis medrash to learn with renewed enthusiasm. His custom was always to rise at chatzos, and recite Tikkun Chatzos. He would then learn together with his chavrusa until Shacharis at HaNeitz. After davening, he would go home to eat, and when he finished, he would return to the beis medrash, where he had several chavrusos.

When he arrived at the beis medrash, he would stand at the doorway, place his hand on the mezuzah, and say: "Ah a nieyer tog! - Ah, a new day!" In this way he merited to renew himself each day in an extraordinary way, learning most of the day in the beis medrash, until Mincha and Maariv, then he would go home to eat and sleep, and so the cycle would begin anew each day. Even though he was already eighty years old, he was full of hischadshus.

(Asher BaNachal 15,115)

The Bochur Who Didn't Come at Night...

It was a late-night hour in the home of the holy Gaon Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin zt"l - the great talmid of the Vilna Gaon zt"l. R. Chaim had risen at chatzos for his holy avodah, and today he was thirstier than usual...

R. Chaim had a holy minhag: not to put any food or drink into his mouth without someone answering "omein" to his brocho. He was very strict in this practice; it was routine for him - just as it's forbidden to eat or drink without a brocho, so too he wouldn't make a brocho before ensuring someone was there to hear it and answer "omein."

But now, at midnight, there wasn't a living soul outside, all the household members were asleep. Who would answer "omein"?... R. Chaim didn't wake up any family member in the middle of their sleep because of this practice, because although it's a very holy minhag, it mustn't come at the expense of others.

A short while passed, and his thirst grew stronger, but he stood firm in his custom - not to make a brocho if no one answers "omein"

Another hour passed, and R. Chaim felt he was reaching the limits of his strength, and he was almost forced to make the brocho and drink, but he remained strong at his minhag - that someone should answer "omein"! And he didn't put a drop of water in his mouth...

After some time, he heard knocking at the door; he opened it, and behold, one of the bochurim from his yeshiva was standing before him.

"Rosh Yeshiva, I have a very strong kasha in learning, I couldn't wait until tomorrow, so I came now to the Rosh Yeshiva, even though it's late, please forgive me"...

There was no limit to R. Chaim's joy - "Boruch Hashem, how beautiful!"... And he immediately added: "It's perfectly fine that you came now; in just a minute ask your question…" and he promptly made the brocho on the water with kavonoh, the bochur answered "omein" and then R. Chaim also hurried to make "Borei Nefoshois". After the bochur answered "omein" to this brocho as well, the bochur asked his question, and they discussed the learning. During the bochur's stay in the house, R. Chaim didn't stop thanking him with various expressions of praise and gratitude, until he said to him: "You literally saved my life!"...

Even the next morning, he was still filled with wondrous joy over the mofes that occurred to him, and he again approached that bochur, and thanked him from the depths of his heart for enabling him to drink the water by answering "omein" to his brocho.

And here a wondrous thing happened... This bochur looked at R. Chaim in astonishment: "I beg your pardon, but I don't know what the Rosh Yeshiva is talking about"... R. Chaim continued to thank him for coming to him in the dead of night, and answering "omein" thereby allowing him to drink the water, but the bochur maintained his position: "Rebbe, what are you referring to?"...

Realizing what had really occurred he later explained the meaning of the matter to his talmidim: "When I was so thirsty that night, but stood firm in my custom not to make a brocho until someone would answer 'omein', they saw from Heaven my great persistence, and sent me a messenger from Heaven - apparently Eliyohu HaNovi - in the guise of that bochur, to come to me to 'ask a question,' and give me the merit to make a brocho on the water and drink to quench my thirst"...

How great is the virtue of answering "omein" to a brocho, as it says in the holy Zohar, that answering "omein" creates a protective seal for the brocho, and is greater than the brocho itself, as our holy Chachomim say (Brochos 53b) : "Greater is he who answers 'omein' than he who makes the brocho."