

The Road of Elul

Posted by MendelZ - 01 Aug 2013 17:46

I received this today in one of the Divrei Torah emails that I subscribe to:

The Road of Elul - "Reaching the place that Hashem wants each and every one of us to be" -- as heard from Harav Michel Twerski, shlita

In Parshas Re'eh, we have the parsha of Maaser Sheni, the maaser that must be consumed in Yerushalayim. If a person is blessed with such an abundance that he is unable to bring all of the required food all the way to Yerushalayim, he is allowed to sell his produce, and with the money, he must purchase food in Yerushalayim and consume it there. The pesukim read as follows (Devarim 14:24-26):

"If the road will be too long for you, so that you will not be able to carry it, because the place that Hashem, your G-d, will choose to place His Name there will be far from you, for Hashem, your G-d, will bless you - then you may exchange it for money, wrap up the money in your hand, and go to the place that Hashem, your G-d, will choose."

We are standing a couple days before Elul, and everyone seems to be living a bit in denial.

Yes, it is scary. It feels that just yesterday we were standing on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, pledging to be better, bigger and more spiritual people. We fear that when we take a serious look at our progress, we may not be all that impressed with ourselves.

Elul is self-improvement month, a time when we all, individually and as communities, take some serious accounting of the past year's conduct between us and our spouses, our children, our friends, between us and Hashem.

We inevitably come up short. Not only do we feel that we haven't kept to our word from last year, stumbling over the very things that we committed to changing, but there may be areas that we thought were safe and sound that we managed to ruin and make worse.

Can we do teshuvah on all the times we ignored our better judgment and conscience? How can we possibly fix and elevate all that needs repair? What's more is even a person hasn't done any aveiros and he has kept his resolutions, has he done all he can to get to "the place where Hashem chose to place His Name"? Looking at where he is now and where he wants to be in his relationship to Hashem and His Torah can be a very sobering and potentially debilitating experience.

To some degree we have all given up on some part of ourselves. Why make it worse, you ask? We all feel this way whether or not we understand that it's what we feel, so why elaborate on these painful feelings? The Torah is speaking directly to this issue:

It is the onset of the month of Elul, and a person sees that - "the road is too long", for two reasons.

Firstly, he is carrying around a burden which he doesn't feel he has the strength to carry. He feels that his aveiros and his behavior in the past require him to take on a path of teshuvah that he is not capable of sustaining; he feels that - "he will not be able to carry it".

And secondly, the place that he wants to be is too far. He feels estranged and distant, "for the place that Hashem has chosen to place His Name" is too far away, that he will never get there.

The Torah says, Know that those feelings are themselves a wonderful blessing, as the pasuk continues to tell us that one will feel this way - "for Hashem [has blessed] you". Many people will live through their life, through many Elul's and never feel distant, never feel the weight of what they need to repair, their hearts stopped up and unfeeling. The fact that you do feel this way is a berachah from Hashem.

The Rebbe said the eizta is to talk to the Ribono Shel Olam. Tell him that you want to be close to Him, tell Him that you want to do teshuvah. Speak to Him and enunciate your feelings of love and yearning. "Oy Tatte, Father, Hashem, I want to be close to You. I don't want to listen to my yetzer hara; that is not the real me. I love You so much; it hurts to not be with You. I want to be with You. I want to give You nachas. Please help me come back to You." Each person in their own language and in their own way must find the words to express their yearning and feelings of estrangement from Hashem.

The pasuk says - "and you shall [lit. give it] into 'kesef' ". While the simple translation of 'kesef' is money, the root of the word comes from 'kisufin', which means longing or yearning. We say in Yedid Nefesh, "nichsof nichsafti" from the same word which means "longing". Take the feelings of distance and exchange them for kesef, for words of longing.

As we know, words are not enough. The pasuk continues - wrap up the 'kesef' in your hand. Do something to make the yearning a reality. Make something of it; act on your longing. If you can tie down the feelings of longing by putting them into something tangible - a good deed, a new resolution or practice, anything at all - then you've made it concrete and it won't fade away after the first few days of Elul have passed.

By doing this, the Rebbe said, one can be sure to reach the "place that Hashem will choose", the place that Hashem wants each and every one of us to be.

Would love to hear thoughts, comments, etc...

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Re: The Road of Elul

Posted by cordnoy - 01 Aug 2013 17:58

beautiful drush

nice

and although many of us know that certain kabbalos do not last after the ymei hadin (besides the biggie of course), do it anyway, for those actions, those positive thoughts, those longings will always remain with you, and will spark you to even higher goals and aspirations the next time kabbalah season comes around (and it wont necessarily be next rosh Hashanah).

thank you for sharing

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Re: The Road of Elul

Posted by MendelZ - 04 Aug 2013 22:36

Agreed.

Do something to make the yearning a reality. Make something of it; act on your longing. If you can tie down the feelings of longing by putting them into something tangible - a good deed, a new resolution or practice, anything at all - then you've made it concrete and it won't fade away after the first few days of Elul have passed.

The "binding the longing to your hand" could be a good ole fashioned resolution - the kind that often doesn't stick but is still good cuz it means you are in the fight. Or, it could be coming to GYE, making a phone call or joining a group.

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