

# TURNING BACK TO HASHEM: UNDERSTANDING OUR CURRENT CHALLENGES AND EMBRACING HIS CALL AND GUIDANCE

ELUL אֱלוּל  
Ani אֲנִי  
Ledodi לְדוּדִי  
Vedodi וְדוּדִי  
Li לִי

I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine

Song of Songs 6:3

## AM YISRAEL IS FACING TREMENDOUS CHALLENGES

In recent months, faced with serious challenges, we have found ourselves too often focused solely on political, security, and institutional factors.

While certainly, our *hishtadlut* (practical endeavor) plays a relevant role, this perspective is misaligned with what we should be focusing on and from what Hashem is asking of us.

We are called to recognize that Hashem desires our return to Him, to His Torah and mitzvot, and to internalize the profound truth that we have no one else to rely on but Him.

The month of Elul offers a crucial opportunity to reflect on this misalignment and correct our course.

AN EXCESSIVE FOCUS ON  
POLITICAL, MILITARY, AND  
INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS  
DISTRACTS FROM WHAT  
TRULY MATTERS

HASHEM WANTS US TO  
RETURN TO TORAH AND  
MITZVOT

“UPON WHOM IS THERE  
TO RELY?  
ONLY UPON OUR FATHER  
IN HEAVEN”

Sotah 49b.

The only way to truly comprehend reality is by turning to our Torah, which provides the ultimate perspective for understanding the world as it is.

UNDERSTANDING  
REALITY THROUGH  
TORAH

The keys to understanding both events that have occurred and those yet to come are clearly outlined in the Torah, Nevi'im (Prophets), and Ketuvim (Writings). Torah teachings make these truths accessible, guiding us toward a deeper grasp of the world as it is.

TORAH, NEVI'IM, AND  
KETUVIM OFFER THE  
ULTIMATE PERSPECTIVE

Elul is a uniquely auspicious time to reconnect with Hashem, as He is especially close to us and grants us a special potential to return to Him. During this month, we are given additional strength to guide us on this path. The resolutions (*kabalot*) we make now are easier to fulfill, and even small commitments are deeply valued by Hashem, holding great significance in the Higher Worlds.

RESOLUTIONS MADE IN  
ELUL ARE EASIER TO  
FULFILL AND HOLD HIGH  
SIGNIFICANCE

### ELUL: REAWAKENING THE MONTH'S ORIGINAL POTENTIAL

Every moment in the Jewish calendar is intrinsically linked to the original historical event that defines it. Each year, the same divine flows and spiritual potentials that were generated during that initial event are reawakened and made accessible once more.

TRACING BACK TO THE  
REPENTANCE AFTER THE  
SIN OF THE GOLDEN CALF

The special significance of Elul, which awakens our desire to return to Hashem, originates from the first Elul when Israel engaged in sincere repentance after the sin of the Golden Calf. The deep longing to reconnect with Hashem felt in that moment continues to echo in our collective soul during this month, carrying through all generations.

THE DEEP DESIRE TO  
RETURN TO HASHEM  
CONTINUES  
IN THIS MONTH

### ELUL: A TIME FOR TESHUVAH AND SPIRITUAL ACCOUNTING

Elul is a time for teshuvah (repentance) and cheshbon hanefesh (spiritual accounting), a process of returning to Hashem by acknowledging our missteps, feeling sincere remorse, and committing to meaningful change.

A TIME FOR REPENTANCE  
AND SELF-EXAMINATION

During this period, we carefully examine our actions over the past year, asking whether we have truly aligned ourselves with Torah, mitzvot, and behavior that embodies *ha'tov v'hayashar b'einei Hashem*—that which is good and upright in the eyes of Hashem. This process prepares us for the approaching Days of Awe, when we stand before Hashem in judgment.

PREPARES US FOR  
THE DAYS OF AWE WHEN  
WE STAND BEFORE  
HASHEM

## ELUL: THE KING IN THE FIELD

During Elul, Hashem is likened to a king who leaves His palace and enters the field, making Himself accessible to all. The "field" symbolizes our everyday lives, where Hashem meets us, offering an opportunity for spiritual reconnection.

During this time of Divine nearness, the Gates of Prayer and Repentance are especially open.

He is especially ready to listen and accept our prayers.

"For which is a great nation that has a God  
Who is close to it, as is Hashem, our God,  
whenever we call to Him?"

Deuteronomy 4:7

HASHEM IS ACCESSIBLE  
LIKE A  
KING IN THE FIELD

GATES OF PRAYER AND  
REPENTANCE ARE OPEN

## UNDERSTANDING DIVINE GOODWILL IN ELUL AND BECOMING SUITABLE VESSELS TO RECEIVE IT

The Sefat Emet raises a profound question about the month of Elul:

Elul is often regarded as a time of heightened Divine Goodwill (eit ratzon), but since Hashem is constant and unchanging, how can His qualities, such as goodwill, appear more pronounced at specific times?

HOW CAN HASHEM'S  
GOODWILL SEEM  
HEIGHTENED IF HE IS  
CONSTANT?

The Sefat Emet clarifies that the heightened sense of Divine Goodwill during Elul does not result from any change in Hashem's nature, as He is always constant and unchanging. Instead, it reflects an increased ability on the part of the Jewish people to receive and absorb His kindness. During Elul, this kindness is channeled through the Yud-Gimmel Middot HaRachamim (the thirteen attributes [lit: measures] of mercy), which refine and adjust it to a level we can more easily understand and embrace.

These attributes effectively set limits on His otherwise boundless mercy, making it more accessible to us.

On our part, we must do everything in our power to make ourselves into suitable vessels to receive Hashem's goodness.

How do we become suitable vessels?

Engaging in negative behaviors, becoming overly focused on the material world, or neglecting to align one's life with the teachings of the Torah generates kelipot (literally, "shells" or "husks"). These kelipot act as layers that "settle" on the soul, diminishing its ability to properly discern between good and evil and distancing it from its true source, Hashem. They serve as spiritual barriers, blocking the channel through which God's blessings flow to the vessel.

**HASHEM IS CONSTANT; WE ARE THE ONES WHO CHANGE**

**OUR ABILITY TO RECEIVE HIS GOODNESS INCREASES IN ELUL**

**THE 13 ATTRIBUTES OF MERCY MAKE HASHEM'S MERCY MORE ACCESSIBLE**

**OUR ROLE:**

**BECOMING VESSELS, ENGAGING IN TORAH STUDY AND SPIRITUAL REFINEMENT TO RECEIVE HASHEM'S BLESSINGS**

To become a proper vessel, one must avoid these negative influences by engaging in Torah study, living in accordance with Torah requirements, and refining oneself spiritually and ethically.

OVERCOMING BARRIERS  
NEGATIVE BEHAVIORS  
CREATE KELIPOT (SHELLS)  
THAT BLOCK DIVINE  
BLESSINGS.

### THE DIVINE PURPOSE OF CREATION: RECEIVING HASHEM'S GOODNESS THROUGH RECOGNITION AND OBEDIENCE

Hashem's primary purpose in creating the world was to bestow His abundant goodness upon His Creation. He crafted a world of perfect design and beauty, tailored specifically for human existence.

In return, He asks that all of humanity recognize that everything, even the smallest details of our daily lives, comes solely from Him. We must understand that all things are governed and sustained by Hashem within a carefully orchestrated plan—one that remains beyond our complete understanding while we are in this world.

With this recognition comes a responsibility: all of humanity is called to observe the Seven Noahide Laws, while the Jewish people are further entrusted with the observance of the Torah and its mitzvot.

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Composed by the Emor Project

The sections related to the teachings of the Sefat Emet are based on *Days of Awe: Sfas Emes - Ideas and Insights of the Sfas Emes on the High Holy Days* by Rabbi Yosef Stern - Artscroll - Mesorah Heritage Foundation.