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פרשת שופטים - אלול

WITH

R' AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"l

BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

A Program for Salvation

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Part I. Preparing with Gratitude

Looking Forward

I recall when I was in Slabodka in Europe how on Rosh Chodesh Ellul they began saying a *mussar shmuz* every day; instead of three times a week, now it was every day. And not a short *shmuz* – it was an hour and a half each time. We spoke constantly about the Yom Hadin – even among ourselves. The entire month was spent in preparation and the air was saturated with gravity, a seriousness. All of our thoughts were, “We’re approaching the Day of Judgment. Are we prepared?”

The truth is that some of the great men in the not so long ago didn’t even wait for Ellul. One month alone should be enough to prepare for Yom Hadin? The Alter of Slabodka, *zichrono levrachah*, already in the middle of the month of Av used to go to Kelm to prepare for Ellul. Others did similar things. They didn’t wait for Ellul – already in Av they were busy preparing.

But now we are already in Ellul and so the question is what do we do now? We're already behind schedule and so to delay anymore would be foolhardy. And therefore we should do the best we can, *bli neder*, and spend some time now preparing for Yom Hadin. Anything else would be reckless.

Looking Backwards

So we'll begin by saying that the first thing to do before the year comes to a close is to look back on the past year and to thank Hakadosh Baruch Hu that last Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur He inscribed us for another year of life.

Nobody knows. Nobody knows. I remember once there was a member in my synagogue who went to sleep. In the morning, his wife came and said, "Mordechai! Wake up!" Mordechai didn't move. "Mordechai, wake up!" He didn't move. It was all over; he had passed away in his sleep. This happened to a young man by the way. Don't take it for granted! I've seen so many cases where people suddenly left the world, *lo aleinu*. Friends, family, acquaintances, members of my shul; so many people are taken away unexpectedly. And therefore that's number one – we should be happy and full of gratitude to the One Who gave us life.

Otherwise, how can we even think about appearing before Hashem on Rosh Hashanah? Imagine a person is going to stand in shul and ask, "כְּתִיבֵנִי בְּסֵפֶר הַחַיִּים - Hashem please inscribe me in the Book of Life!" Shouldn't he first discharge his obligation to say thank you for what he was written in for this past year? Always 'give me, give me.' Every year you come and ask for more; more and more. What about thanking for what you got up to now? Is thanking such a small thing?

First Things First

It's not small at all. Just the opposite; the most important function of a person in this world is to recognize the *chasdei Hashem* to him. It's such an important statement, I'm going to repeat it. *Of all the things that are expected of us in this world, the foremost is the obligation to thank Hashem.*

And so if it comes into your head during these days, "What should I do to prepare?" so now you know. The first obligation is to think about how you lived a year up until now. You survived! You're here to tell the story.

Of course you have to do other things too. A person has to make time to think about his sins; there's a lot of *teshuvah* you have to do, various *aveiros* you have to spend time considering. You have to make resolutions,

and you have to find ways and means of making sure your resolutions will have a *kiyum*. You can finish *mesichtas* too, why not? Absolutely there's a lot of work to do. But more than anything else, the top of the list before Yom Hadin, is the requirement of thanking Hashem, of giving gratitude to Him for the past year.

"I gave you another year of life," Hashem says, "and it was much more than life in general. All the needs of your life I gave you." If you're still here, it's a result of thousands and thousands of benefits, thousands and thousands of miracles. Your kidneys were working. Your pancreas was working. Your heart was pounding away every day. Your liver is functioning - did you once this year thank Hashem for your liver? You never even thought about it. All year long your blood circulation was working. Do you know how many miracles there are in your blood? Even your blood clotting - just the fact that you didn't bleed to death every time you got a cut this past year is a miracle! There are *nissei nissim* in the process of blood clotting. Every process in the body is so deep and profound that it's astounding what Hakadosh Baruch Hu is doing for us all the time.

We Want it All

And we want it again. We want a lot! We don't want a little bit; we want everything. We want to be healthy not only in our blood and our pancreas. We want to be healthy in our eyes and healthy in our ears and healthy in our teeth. We want to be healthy in our throats, in our pharynx, in our larynx; going down and down - we want to be healthy in our gullets, healthy in our stomach, healthy in the intestine, healthy in the bladder, healthy in the heart, and in the spleen and the colon.

There are a lot of things we need and each one is a very big achievement by itself. Because if a man has health in all of the organs except one *chas veshalom* he'll discover it's not enough. Oh boy will he discover it then!

Here's a man who tries to use the bathroom one morning and he discovers that he can't. He tries but nothing happens. But he has to! Now, that's not a comfortable feeling at all. And even though everything else is functioning but this one thing is too important. You can't fool around with such a thing!

So he calls out to his wife, "Something is wrong! Emergency! I have an emergency here!" So they take a taxi or an ambulance, whatever it is, and they rush to the hospital. A true story, a man in my *shul*. I heard that story - he was telling me about it with tears in his eyes and I was thinking about

how important every function in the body is, how there are thousands of functions and processes that we need to work smoothly.

Uhuh?

And therefore life means a lot of things and it's all of those things that we're going to ask for on Rosh Hashanah. After a whole year of receiving benefits we are going to be standing and asking **כְּתִיבנוּ בְּסֵפֶר הַחַיִּים** – *write us for a year of life and all the things included in life*. It means the millions of things that we need. “Can we have another year?” So Hashem is looking at us, “Uhuh? What about the past year? You forgot that?”

So at least we should be able to say that we spent the last month of the year thanking. It's true we got a late start but we'll do it now for a month and we'll try to make up for the whole year. And so our hands are full; there's a lot of work to do. You have to start a new career, the career of **וַיִּתְבּוֹנֶנּוּ חֶסְדֵי הַשֵּׁם** – *meditating in the kindnesses of Hashem* (Tehillim 107:43).

Rabbeinu Yonah (Shaarei Teshuva 3:17) quotes those three words from Dovid Hamelech and he says we see from there that it's a duty to look back on all the happiness that you had in the past, all the successes in the past; to look back and enjoy all those weeks and days and nights and hours. And so if we'll listen to him, that's already enough to keep you busy the rest of the month.

Five Times Thirty

Even if you put it into practice for five minutes a day, you're superior to everyone else because the world doesn't do it. They talk about it sometimes but talk is cheap – we'll be the ones who do it. Five minutes a day – five minutes on the clock for thirty days – we're going to set aside for this project of looking back in gratitude at the road we traveled from last Rosh Hashanah till now.

Remember Tishrei? Each day is something to consider. Each day was a glorious cacophony of pleasures, of successes, of life. There were two days of Rosh Hashanah and then you were busy preparing for Yom Kippur. Ah, Yom Kippur! The day our *aveiros* were wiped clean and we became reconciled with Hashem. And then after Yom Kippur, we sat down to the meal at *motzei Yom Kippur*; how good the food tasted. Did you think about that? Ah! It was a pleasure to eat that meal. You filled your stomach and it was fun!

And probably you continued eating after *motzei Yom Kippur* too. Almost three hundred and sixty five breakfasts you ate this year. Did you

enjoy breakfast? Now don't tell me you didn't. If you didn't, then you have to take a course in living a normal life because everybody should enjoy breakfast. Almost three hundred and sixty five times this year you ate supper. And most of us ate three hundred and sixty five lunches. Not to mention what you did between meals. You think it's possible to fit that into five minutes of thinking?

Room and Board

What about all the occasions when you slept? You know there are some people who can't sleep. And most of us slept three hundred and sixty five nights. I don't think you were up in *mishmarim* all night. I don't want to be *choshed b'kesheirim* but I think you were sleeping almost every night.

And you didn't sleep on the railroad tracks or a park bench; you probably slept in a bed almost every night. Here's a poor woman, homeless, bedraggled and a little bit demented. All her worldly possessions are in the shopping wagon; she has nothing. She doesn't have a bathroom, she doesn't have a kitchen, she doesn't have a bed to sleep in. I see her on Ocean Parkway and she's trying to fall asleep on a park bench. It's *mammish* a heartbreak to look at her. If she could only have a place to sleep.

And you, all year long you had a bed and a roof over your head. Maybe your landlord is a tough fellow; maybe the rent is too high. But you have a roof and beds and running water. How lucky she would be if she could have a little place, a shack with a roof over her head; she'd be the happiest person right now.

You put on garments every day. You took baths once in a while. What *didn't* you have? Think of all the months that passed by, one after the other. But not wholesale. Wholesale thinking is not enough because each month has so many days in it and *Shabbosim*, *yomim tovim*. The truth is every day was a *yomtiv*. If your heart was pumping, it was a glorious day. If you went to the bathroom successfully, it was a glorious day.

Look Back In Joy

And so when we look back now with gratitude we should include all of those glorious days, all of the successes we had, all of the *simchahs* that we had, all of the pleasures we had in our private lives. Believe me, that's enough to keep us busy for a long time; a month is not enough.

But at least with that you should go into the *yomim noraim*. You had an entire year, a good year, and you made an effort to look back and express gratitude to Hashem. With details! At least you'll have that under

your belt – you spent the last month of the year appreciating all the various kinds of happiness that Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave you this past year, before you had the boldness, the *chutzpah*, to ask for another year.

Part II. Preparing with Unity

The Achdus Attitude

Now, I would like to speak more about this subject but I want to digress now to another important element that must be part of our mindset when we talk about preparing in Ellul. Yes, the mindset of indebtedness to Hashem is number one because you can't ask for more before you say thank you for what you already got. But there's something else, something almost as important. There's a second vital attitude that we have to acquire for ourselves when we talk about coming before Hashem for the Yom Hadin.

Pay attention to what you're going to hear now because it'll come as a surprise to many of you. The second most important *hachanah* for Rosh Hashana is to stop thinking about yourself; you have to go into the Yom Hadin together with the Am Yisroel. Our connection to our people, *achdus* with our people, identifying with them, appreciating them and loving them, that's number two on the list. Let that sink in! Number one is Hakadosh Baruch Hu, absolutely; but number two, right on the heels of the first principle, is your connection to the Am Yisroel.

Bonding with Hashem

Now, that has to be explained because some might think that it's what you call nationalism. No, no; this has nothing to do with nationalism. The purpose is not because of the Am Yisroel. The purpose is because the Am Yisroel, that is our bond with Hashem. Our bond with Hakadosh Baruch Hu is only due to our bond with Yisroel and our bond with Yisroel is only valid because of our bond with Hakadosh Baruch Hu. And so *achdus* with our people has nothing to do with nationalism and it has everything to do with Hakadosh Baruch Hu. It has to do with what Hakadosh Baruch Hu is most interested in. Listen now and I'll explain that.

The Torah declares as follows: הֵן לַהֲשֵׁם אֱלֹהֵינוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְשָׁמַיִם הַשָּׁמַיִם – Behold the heavens belong to Hashem and space above the heavens and the world and all there is, וְרַק בְּאַבְתֵּיךָ חֶשֶׁק ה' לְאַהֲבָה אֹתָם – and only in your forefathers did Hashem delight to love them. Hashem owns all the millions of space-worlds, all the stars and planets and galaxies, but he doesn't

delight in them. He owns all of mankind, but he doesn't *delight* in them. What is His one delight, His one interest? The Avos.

Look, it's an open verse – we can't argue with a *possuk*. רַק בְּאֲבוֹתֵינוּ – only in your forefathers did Hashem delight to love them. *Rak* is a *mi'ut*; it excludes everything else.

So you'll say, maybe it's only the forefathers? No, not only them. וַיִּבְחַר בְּכֶם – *and He chose their children after them*. Which children? בְּכֶם – you, כִּיּוֹם הַזֶּה – *as of this day*. It means that whenever you'll read the words, wherever you are, as long as you're part of the Am Yisroel, then Hashem is thinking about you more than anything else in the universe. He's interested in the Am Yisroel. *Intensely* interested!

Now, this is not *drashos* I'm telling you; I don't say *drashos*. We're learning now a basic principle of *emunah*. Number one we have to understand that Hashem is always thinking. He's not just a word in the *siddur*. He's *chai v'kayam*; He's real and His reality includes His great Mind and Wisdom. And that great Mind, that infinite Intelligence, is concentrated only on one thing in the universe, on the Am Yisroel.

The National Reward

Now, if that's the case, we have to realize that when we're talking about preparing to appear before Hashem, we have here a second attitude that we have to work on acquiring in the month before Rosh Hashanah. We're not going to go into the Days of Judgement on our own, flying solo – instead we're going to appear before Hashem together with the Klal Yisroel! We want to come before Him together with the ones whom He is interested in, the ones whom He loves and is thinking about always. That's our ticket to a successful Rosh Hashanah.

It's the same like our ticket to Olam Haba. You know, if you hope for Olam Haba, eventually, after 120 years, you have to know that it will never be given to you on your own individual merit. That's very important to understand. You can never earn Olam Haba on your own. It's only because כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל יֵשׁ לָהֶם חֵלֶק לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא – it's a national gift for *kol Yisroel*.

If a man would go off, let's say, and say, "I'm going to keep the whole Torah. I'll move away from Boro Park. I'm going to move into let's say Nantucket, a small town in Massachusetts. No Jews are there. Or no *frum* Jews. I'll live by myself. I won't have any connection with Jews. I'll keep the whole Torah. I'll learn *mussar*. I'll do *mitzvos*." No, it won't help. *Kol haporesh min hatzibbur*, he will not see *b'nechamas hatzibbur*. He has to be together with the Klal Yisroel. Of course you have to keep the Torah too in order to

remain part of kol Yisroel, but only if you're connected with kol Yisroel, then you have hope – that's a prerequisite for a good judgement.

Don't Fly Solo

And so if we hope to be given another year, which we all do, nobody should be so foolish to go into Yom Hadin by himself. First of all, how can you be sure what you did or didn't do, whether you deserve another year on your own merits? Who knows? Who knows? And secondly, even if you're the biggest *tzaddik* you can't make it without being part of the nation. Your membership in the Am Yisroel, your connection to the nation that Hashem loves more than anything else, that's your salvation.

And so here's a very big *tzaddik* and he decides, 'I'm going away from my people this Rosh Hashanah; I'm going in the wilderness all by myself. I have no connection with any Jews, only I and Hashem alone.' Goodbye Charlie! Even if you'll say the whole *machzor* twice and you'll do everything, you're a failure because the connection with Klal Yisroel, that's our only hope. Yes, Torah and *mitzvos* and *teshuvah*, of course. Absolutely that's a requirement. But even with everything else you'll only be successful *b'soch Am Yisroel*.

Vision Therapy in Ellul

And that means that included in our work for Ellul, one of the first requirements is **וְשִׁים חֶלְקֵנוּ עִמָּהֶם**. We want to be together with the Am Yisroel because that's our connection to eternity, our bond to Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

That's why its so important to get into the habit of looking at Jews, *from* Jews, and thinking of their good qualities; to develop the *middah of ayin tov*. Our habit as human beings is to try to find faults in others, to belittle other people – that's the *derech* of people – and to find only virtues in themselves. But it's a habit we have to turn away from if we want to be connected with the Am Yisroel. We want to feel a certain affection for our fellow Jews, a certain love. And not only because it's a *mitzvah* to love your fellow Jews; that's true, but even more, it's also the biggest favor for yourself because your connection to the Am Yisroel is a lifesaver for you.

And therefore as much as possible we have to look for the virtues of the Jewish people, not their faults. Everybody has some faults – everybody is human – but don't concentrate on them. Never talk about the failings and the drawbacks that you see in Orthodox society. Think only about the positive virtues.

Whatever you'll say about them, the Jews give more charity than any nation in the world. No nation compares! The Jews are more moral than any nation in the world. No question about it! Is there a nation in the world that has a law that a man and a woman who are not married to each other cannot be together in a private place? That's a Jewish law! It's unequaled! So who is like this nation? **מִי כְעַמּוֹד יִשְׂרָאֵל גּוֹי אֲחֵד בְּאֶרֶץ**

Seeing Holiness

And therefore, don't be too critical. Look away from the faults that you like to see in your neighbors, in the *frum* people, in *bnei Torah*, and on the contrary look as much as you can at the *kedushah* of your people. It's an *am kadosh*. Yes, every Jew refrains from mixing milk and meat together; that's *kedushah*. Women are very careful. They tell the husband "Don't touch that. That's *fleishig*. That's *pareve*. That's *milchig*." She's like the *kohen gadol* managing all the affairs of the house *al pi din*. That's an *am kadosh*.

Do you ever hear about Jews who murder? Look how the Jew says **עַל חֵטָא** on Yom Kippur. He says **עַל חֵטָא** and he confesses almost every sin. Things he wouldn't even dream of doing he confesses. But one sin is missing there. **עַל חֵטָא שְׁחָטְאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּשִׁפְיַכַת דָּמִים**. We don't find that. Why isn't that said there? Why don't Jews confess the sin of murder?

The answer is, the Jews are trying their best to confess everything – even the things they're not guilty of – but this they couldn't even imagine. They couldn't think of such a thing! Up till now, until they became Americans, they became 'cultured', they learned the ways of Eisav, **יָדִים יָדִים**, **עֵשָׂו**, but up till now, a Jew couldn't dream of murdering anybody. And therefore, try their best, they couldn't remember to insert *shefichas damim* in the list of the *al cheits*.

It's because the Jewish nation is a nation of doves, a nation of peaceful people unlike all others. You know, when you see a crowd of black boys in the street, you have to know that one out of four is carrying a weapon. I'm not telling you something of my own. It's well known. One out of twenty was in jail already. That's also well known. Italian boys too. Maybe not as many as blacks, but believe me Italians are very far from being a kosher people. They're violent. They carry knives in their shoes.

But when you see a crowd of Jewish boys coming from a yeshivah, not even one has a weapon. Not even one was ever in jail. There's nothing to compare when it comes to the *bnei yeshivahs*, the Bais Yaakov girls.

National Perfection

And therefore, as individuals yes, we have faults. People are not angels after all. Nobody is perfect. But the Am Yisroel together is! Shlomo Hamelech said that. He calls us **הַשְׁלֵמִית**, *the perfect one*. It means that as a nation, together, we are perfect in the Eyes of Hashem.

And therefore those who are happy in the fact that they are members of the Am Yisroel, *shelo asani goy*, and they're proud of being *frum* Jews, they have a connection to *frum* Jews, they have an affection for *frum* Jews, those are the ones who are now ready to come on the Yom Hadin. And that's necessary for us to be *zocheh badin*, when we stand before Hashem.

We can't afford to be judged as individuals. We need the merit of the entire Klal Yisroel. It's when we come together as an *am echad*, when we stand before Hashem – all the *frum* Jews – as one person, that's how we find favor in the Eyes of Hashem.

As you stand on Rosh Hashanah and you beg Hashem “Please *kosveinu besefer hachaim*,” you don't say *kosveini*. *Kosveinu* – write us for life. It's everybody. And everybody is thinking, “We want to be written together in the book of *chaim*.” We're thinking about all of the entire nation together – the Satmerer, the Lubavitcher, the Lakewooder; everyone! The *frum* Jews in Teaneck and Meah Shearim and Australia and Los Angeles and Florida; the *frum* Jews in Mexico and England and Canada! Everywhere!

And Hakadosh Baruch Hu says “Oh, if that's the case then I'm going to judge you not as individuals; I'm going to judge you as a Klal Yisroel. And Klal Yisroel in My eyes is always the perfect nation, the nation I delight in.”

Part III. Preparing with Practice

Practical Applications

Now, in order to make this more realistic, it would be worthwhile to consider some practical applications of this principle of identifying with our people, the *am Yisroel*. In this place we mean business and therefore a general outline of this attitude of being together with the Klal Yisroel as one unit when we appear before Hashem on Yom Hadin is not enough – we have to think about some individual practices that will make it easier for us to acquire this attitude.

And although they might be very small steps, relatively speaking, they're a very valuable achievement for this time of the year. Ellul is the

time for small things, for getting started with small things – it's a way of showing Hashem that you mean business.

Blessing Jews

Number one. In order that we should identify with the Klal Yisroel one of the *eitzos* is to practice blessing our fellow Jews. You want to practice being one with your people? Bless them! As much as you can give them *brachos*.

Let's say you're walking by the Satmarer Yeshivah or the Bobover Yeshivah or the Mirrer Yeshivah or Chaim Berlin; as you walk by you say like this: "Hakadosh Baruch Hu should give long life and *parnassah b'revach* and *nachas* and happiness to the *rosh yeshivah*" – mention his name – say, "Rav Aharon Shechter and his *rebbeztin* and his sons and daughters, and his *eidems* and his *shneeren* and his grandchildren, they all should live long and all should be perfectly well."

You can add, "And also to all the *maggidei shiur* and all the *kollel* people and their wives and children; they all should live long and all should be perfectly well and they should all get along with each other."

As you pass a Bais Yaakov school, a Bais Rochel, a Bais Rivkah school, say, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu should bless all the girls there they should make the best *shidduchim*. They all should be healthy and live long and have the best children." Say it! Say it! Don't be stingy.

Blessings from Afar

Now suppose you don't walk by; you can say it anyhow. You say "Harav Pam and his *rebbeztin* and his children, his sons and daughters, all should live long. All of his *kollel leit* and his *ramim*, Hakadosh Baruch Hu should bless all of them with *arichus yomim*, *parnassah b'revach* and *nachas* from children, and *hatzlachah* in Torah. All the boys in the *cheder* and their sisters and parents and bobbies and zeidehs should have a good upcoming year *tuf shin lamed vuv*."

Practice that. And not merely in general. Mention names. Specify names. Your *frum* neighbors, your friends, the *mispallelim* in your *beis knesses*. Specify *brachos*. This one should marry off his daughter. This one should have *shalom bayis*. If you see a Jew on the other side of the street, you don't even know who he is but you see he's a *frum* Jew, so you say "Ribbono shel Olam, guard that Jew. Make him successful. Keep him well and healthy." Say these words. How much does it cost you to say it? Is it a big expense to say it?

Here you have a woman pushing a baby carriage. Her hair is covered. She has seven children; two holding onto the carriage, children running alongside. And you're watching them from the window. Give them a big *brachah*. "Hashem, please keep them healthy. And they should all do well in *cheder*, in Bais Yaakov, and get good *shiduchim*."

Now all this is practical. It's not merely a theoretical idea. Not that you're merely listening to me talk about it. Imagine you're doing that now. You're going to do it *lemaaseh*. Think, "In the month of Ellul, I'm going to demonstrate my *achdus* with the Klal Yisroel by giving *brachos* to my fellow Jews." Put it down in your book and begin practicing it – right away. As you walk out of here tonight make the first installment. Otherwise you'll forget and before Rosh Hashanah you might even not remind yourself at all and you missed a glorious opportunity.

The Two Minute Prep

So as soon as you leave tonight you'll pass a *frum* house; give *brachos* to the ones who live there. You see a *mezuzah* by the door? "Everybody in those homes, the *frum* people there, all should be well for long and happy years." Say that with your mouth. "They should all have *parnassah b'revach*, *nachas* from the children, the best *shidduchim* for their children, only *simchos* in those houses and the children should have *brissim* and bar mitzvahs and *chasunos*, always nothing but joy on those houses."

Now you can't do it all the time, all day long. תַּפְסֵת מְרִבָּה לֹא תַפְסֵת. But once a day, from now until Rosh Hashanah, make it your business to spend about two minutes saying these words. Practice it every day from now until Rosh Hashanah. Two full minutes. If you want, do one minute in the morning and one minute in the evening but whatever it is, two minutes every day. Starting now!

You should know that you're blessing yourself, because you become now bound up with a certain attitude of affection for the Am Yisroel. And then on the Yom Hadin as you appear before Hakadosh Baruch Hu, He's going to look at you in a different way entirely. I guarantee it. It will make a tremendous difference because now you're appearing before Him *besoch amo Yisroel* – you're coming to the Yom Hadin among the nation that He loves most.

Praise the Nation

A second application. It's number two on the list but it's no less than the first one. What is it? To praise the Am Yisroel. Not only to bless them

but to find ways and means, opportunities, to speak up on behalf of your fellow Jews. Get into the habit of saying good things about your people.

Now you can't do it all the time - you have to eat too; you have to sleep and *daven* and learn; you have to bless Jews too - but once a day say something in favor of the *frummeh*.

Praise the Boys and Girls

You know a yeshivah man is a beautiful thing. You don't realize what an exception he is. Among all the nations of the world, they don't have anything like it. A *bachur* is *kadosh*; he spends his day learning Hashem's Torah. He's not wasting his time, not fooling around with *narishkeiten* or wicked things, immoral things. A yeshivah boy has nothing to do with girls; *frum* girls have nothing to do with boys. They don't even talk to each other. An *am kadosh*. You have to appreciate that, speak about that. This month you'll get into the habit of praising yeshivah men.

Now, our *frum* girls are just as precious. The *frum* girls are unusual in the world today. They were always unusual but today especially. Each girl, the future mothers, are diamonds. A diamond is *nothing* compared to them. And so make it your business this month to speak well of the girls' schools; praise them. Bais Yaakov, Bais Rivkah, Yeshiva of Brooklyn, all the other places, Bais Rochel. Speak highly of them.

Try it out at home. Say to your wife, "I was thinking; there are so many *frum* girls in all the *frum* girls schools, thousands of *frum* girls, and all of them are ambitious to raise Torah families. They want to get married and have beautiful children, *shomrei mitzvos*, boys and girls. We're such a special nation!" So your wife will look at you funny. But you did it. You can put it down in your notebook that you did it.

Jewish Nationalism

You could speak once a day in favor of the practices of the Jewish nation in general. "What a *frum* nation we are! Hakadosh Baruch Hu has given us ways, *darkei kedushah*. The Am Yisroel is so different from all the *umos haolam*." It's very important to speak about that. Praise the *darkei haTorah*, the special ways of our people.

If you're a *mechanech*, a *melamed*, speak in praise of the *tzaddikim*, *talmidei chachamim* and *bnei yeshivah*. Your *talmidim* will never forget it. They might not remember the Gemara or the Chumash you taught them but this I guarantee you they'll remember.

Sometimes it takes a little planning. Rabbeinu Yonah says when you get together with a group of people, prepare yourself for the opportunity; prepare your mind to say at least one statement in praise of the righteous people. It will sink in the minds of the listeners. Could be they'll think you're eccentric but it'll sink in.

Table Talk

Now, when you're sitting together with your family, it's an opportunity. Whenever you're sitting at the table, even with your wife alone or your wife and children, you should know here is an opportunity. Before you come to the table, take out a minute and think, "What am I going to do at the table? How can I utilize this opportunity?"

So let's say you decide that today I'm going to talk about the *roshei yeshivas*. You sit down at the table with your children and you wait for an opportunity. "Children, you know the *roshei yeshivas* are our leaders." The children are busy eating – they're hardly listening to you. Say it anyhow. "They're our leaders. They're the head of our nation. They're the ones who are the teachers of our people."

Not only *roshei yeshivas*. That's good for one day. The next day, something else. Plan beforehand, today I'll speak about the *tzedakah* that the Am Yisroel gives, the *chessed* organizations we have. Now the children don't know that it's planned. They think *agav urcha* you happen to mention it. No. You're planning it beforehand with a scheme; a special scheme to prepare your family for Rosh Hashanah.

That's a practical application. Will you do that tomorrow, *bli neder*? And you should know how much of a reward you're going to get for saying these words; the tremendous reward of becoming one with the Am Yisroel. It makes you tied up together with your people. By speaking well of them, we're together with them.

Reviewing the Plan

So now we have two suggestions *lema'aseh* for how we're going to become attached to the Am Yisroel. I'm going to repeat these things now so that you shouldn't forget them – I mean business here when I'm telling you these things.

We're going to, number one, bless them. Even one minute a day is a tremendous achievement if you'll do it. And number two, we're going to praise them. It's very important to practice that. And you should learn to practice them. Don't forget these details.

Now these little points you should know although they're easy but they're like diamonds. Each time you do it, you have found a precious diamond. Because what happens now? Hakadosh Baruch Hu says, "Oh, it's a different story now. Not only did you spend a month thanking Me for what I gave you this past year, but you're also not coming on your own. You're *echad* with your fellow Jews; you're *echad* with My people, with the nation I delight in. And even though you yourself, maybe you have some faults but you're identified with My beautiful nation. You honored them and blessed them and praised them and therefore, I'm going to judge you together with them."

And when you appear on the Yom Hadin, Hakadosh Baruch Hu says "You know how to live. You showed Me by your example of how you lived during Ellul that you know how to live. You thanked Me every day! And every day you made sure to practice identifying with the Am Yisroel! So you made a good preparation for the next year and therefore I trust if I give you another year of life – many more years! – you'll practice the same thing over and over again. And for that you deserve to be written *l'alter l'chaim tovim ul'shalom*."

Have A Wonderful Shabbos

LET'S GET PRACTICAL

A Month of Practice

This week I will *bli neder* begin establishing three habits for this month of Ellul. One. I will spend some time each day thinking back to the previous year and thanking Hashem for all that he has done for me. Two. I will spend one minute each day privately blessing Torah Jews. Three. I will spend one minute each day praising Torah Jews. This is the best preparation for the upcoming Yom Hadin.

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138 - Our King | 956 - Bilam's Message II

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What should we think about during Chodesh Ellul when we hear the shofar?



When you hear the *shofar* being blown there are many things to think about; not one thing. But number one you have to think *לא יחרדו ועם לא יתקע שופר בעיר* – *Could it be that they blow a shofar in the city and the people are not afraid?!* (Amos 3:6). You have to be afraid right away! You have to be afraid; *eimas hadin* – fear of the judgment. It's very important. The day is coming and you must be afraid.

Now, being afraid however has to have some practical results. You're saying in *selichos* all the time something that you never do. *נחפשה דרכינו ונחקורה* – *We will search out our ways* (Eichah 3:40). Do you search your ways? You never do it! Did you sit down for five minutes once in your life and search out your ways? Never! Oh, but he's saying *selichos*; *נחפשה דרכינו ונחקורה*. *Mmmmmuh mmmmmuh*. He's mumbling the words. What a pity.

So the *shofar* says, "Start searching your ways!" At least five minutes! Five minutes by the way is a very small time to make an inventory on your business. A businessman who makes only five minute inventory will go broke. He needs much more than five minutes. But at least that! At least you shouldn't be a *shakran*. The whole world is deceiving Hashem. *בפיו ובשפתיו כבודני* – *With his mouth and his lips he honors Me*; he says "I will search out my ways," *ולבו רחק ממני* – *but his heart is far away from Me* (Yeshaya 29:13). He doesn't think about it at all. It's a terrible thing.

So when you hear the *shofar*, think about your ways. *Nachpesah!* And if you search you'll find. If you mean business you'll find because there's no lack of things to discover. Oh yes, there's plenty to find. And therefore we should be sure to make use of the *shofar* blowing in Ellul and not merely let it blow for nothing.

TAPE # E-124 (September 1997)

This week's Q&A sponsored:

In honor of the Chasuna of Jonathan Slomianski To Laurene Osher Dana
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