

# *Foundations of Truth*

*On  
Chodesh Elul (Part 2)  
Getting Motivated*

*Torah Thoughts From  
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*Torah nuggets harvested from Rav Weinberg’s thought-provoking classes given at Yeshivas Ner Yisroel and Aish HaTorah, Jerusalem, that uniquely reveal essential foundations of Torah and Jewish thought. While these essays include some edits for readability, they largely preserve the Rosh HaYeshiva’s unique style and original messages.*

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## Chodesh Elul (Part 2): Getting Motivated

Rav Yaakov Weinberg zt"l (Elul 1988)

### Preparation

The source for our *Avodah* in *Chodesh Elul* is when Moshe ascended *Har Sinai*. These days are known as *Yemei Ratzon* “Days of Favor” starting on *Rosh Chodesh Elul* when Moshe went up accompanied by the *shofar* being blown for Klal Yisroel (see Rashi, Shemos 33:11).

So *Chodesh Elul* is itself a *zman* for *Teshuva*, a time of favor, and of blowing the *shofar*. However, even though historically, the source was that Moshe went up to accept the second set of *luchos* in *Elul*, **we need to understand that *Rosh Hashana* doesn't just happen to have a month of preparation before it. *Rosh Hashana* is unique among all of the *Yomim Tovim*, that it was designed and requires a month of *hachana*, a full month of preparation beforehand.**

*Rosh Hashana* is *Yom HaZikaron*, the *Day of Remembrance*. *Yom HaZikaron* means *Din*, judgment. *Zikaron* used in relation to *kaviyachol*, the *Ribono Shel Olam*, always means *Din*. Because the way the *Ribono Shel Olam* “remembers” obviously can't refer to the same way that a man remembers, which could potentially be forgotten. **When the *Ribono Shel Olam* remembers, it means that He's dealing with something and bringing it up into play. Bringing something up into play, to deal with, is the definition of *Din*, judgement.**

“*VaYizkor Elokim Es Noach - And Elokim remembered Noach*” (Bereishis 8:1) means that *Hashem* is making a decision. He's deciding that it's time for Noach to come back. Any *zikaron*, “remembering” in relationship to *kaviyachol*, means *Din*. **So *Rosh Hashana* as the *Yom HaZikaron* is the statement that *Rosh Hashana* is the *Yom HaDin*. As a result, *Elul's* purpose is to prepare for *Din*.** Everyone understands that *Din* requires preparation – when you're going on trial, where your whole essence, your whole being is at stake, of course you've got to prepare.

### Standing In His Presence

**For us, that preparation means even more - because we've got to prepare for the realization that we're going to be *Omed b'Din*, standing in judgement.** Fortunate is he who feels, who's *margish*, in actuality that he's going to face the King of Kings in judgement and that *Yom HaDin* is coming closer and closer. He who is able to feel this, and understands that the *Din* is real and the incredible kindness that *Teshuva* is, is already on a whole other level and in a different category of *Avodah* in *Elul*. **However, for most of us, our focus is to recognize and realize that the *Yom HaDin* is coming, and that in a few short weeks and days, we are literally going to be standing on trial.**

We are going to be defendants and there's going to be a judgment which will determine the what and the how of our existence. Certainly, this requires a tremendous amount of concentrated preparation on our part - just to become aware. To recognize and to realize, to be *margish* and feel this reality: The fact that we are facing a trial, where there's a real risk involved. We are going to actually be judged, where our entire being and future will be determined. **To feel this, is to actually start preparing for a *Rosh Hashana*.**

To be *margish*, to feel this, obviously changes every minute of the month. The awareness that we're about to be *Omed b'Din* would affect everything: how we learn, how we talk, what we do, how we deal with each other, everything! **This recognition is the goal of our *Avodah*.**

## Fear and Love

However, a question arises: Was this not equally true when Moshe went up *Har Sinai* and he didn't hear the *Ribono Shel Olam* say right away "v'Salachti K'dvarecha" – "I will forgive you..."? He didn't hear that *Klal Yisroel* was forgiven until *Yom Kippur*. Were these days of waiting not also days of incredible tension and worry? Was it possible for a *Yid*, knowing Moshe was up there pleading the case, wondering will He say *Selachti* or won't He forgive, not to be worried? And yet the *Zohar* and the *Medrash Tanchuma* deal with these days as "*Yemei Ratzon*", Days of Favor – *Yemei Ratzon!* **At a time of such tremendous trembling and worry, *Yemei Ratzon*?!**

We also know that *Elul* is *Ani L'Dodi V'Dodi Li*, further - *Yemei Ratzon*. So the foundation and *metzius* of *Elul* is *Yemei Ratzon* - closeness, relationship, and caring between *kaviyachol* the *Borei* and *Am Yisroel*, and *Am Yisroel* to the *Borei Olam*. In the midst of these days of unbelievable tension, where a person with their full senses, is *b'charada mamash*, trembling every moment with the worry and suspense of knowing what's coming, and not knowing how it will go. And yet at the same time *Yemei Ratzon*, is this possible?!

## Reward & Punishment

We've mentioned a number of times, that the *Rambam's 13 Ikarim* are those things which the *Rambam* says are required for a *Yisroel* to be aware of and accept as true, in order to be able to serve Hashem properly and accept and fulfill the Torah. **The *Rambam* is telling us that if a *Yid* doesn't know and accept, for whatever reason, each one of these 13 principles, it's impossible for him to be a *mekabel* and *mekayem* of Toras Moshe.**

One of them is *Schar V'Onesh*. If a Jew doesn't know and accept, as a fact of existence, that there's reward for *mitzvos* and punishment for *aveiros*, it isn't possible for him to be one who fulfills the Torah, and we've mentioned why. But there's another principle that the *Rambam* says: if a *Yid* doesn't know that the *Ribono Shel Olam* is aware of him and every one of his actions, it's also impossible for him to be a *mekabel* and a *mekayem* of Torah. Why?!

**Why isn't it enough that he knows that for every mitzvah there is *schar* and for every *aveirah* there is an *onesh*?** If he knows that he's held accountable for all of his actions, his thoughts, and words, why isn't that enough? What difference does it make that he understands and is aware that the *Ribono Shel Olam* knows everything he does? **As long as he's responsible and knows that all of his activities result in consequences, that he will have *schar v'onesh*; why isn't that enough?** Why is it necessary in order for him to be *mekayem* the commands of Hashem, that he also be aware of the fact that the *Ribono Shel Olam* knows him and is aware of every single thing that each one of us does?!

## Relationship

It seems that the *Rambam* is saying that it's not reward and punishment that will keep us doing *mitzvos*. A *yid* will not keep *mitzvos* in order to earn the most incredible and greatest of rewards, or in order to escape the most intense and deepest of pain. He will only keep *mitzvos* if it affects his *shaychus*, his relationship to the *Ribono Shel Olam!*

Even if he knows that he will suffer eternal pain for an *aveirah*, but if he doesn't know that it is the *Ribono Shel Olam* who is reacting to what he's doing, it will not prevent him from doing *aveiros*. **It is not the pain of *onesh* and it is not the joy of *schar* that is enough to motivate us to keep the Torah. We will we keep the Torah only if it makes a difference to our *shaychus* with the *Ribono Shel Olam Himself*.**

**Schar is not just reward – schar is the Ribono Shel Olam's approval and relating to us. Onesh is not just an punishment but is the Ribono Shel Olam's reaction to what we're doing.**

The Rambam says, and no one argues with him: that only if I know that the Ribono Shel Olam knows me, cares and will react to me - **that my actions will affect the way he deals with me** - only then is it possible for me to serve Him! I cannot serve a Ribono Shel Olam who doesn't know me and doesn't care personally about what I do and who I am. I will not be *oved* Him, says the Rambam because of a reward. **I can only serve a Ribono Shel Olam who relates to me, responds to me, and cares about how I act!**

### **It's Not About Me**

**The yesod of Din is not that I'm going to be on trial. The foundation of Din is that the Ribono Shel Olam will judge me.** That I will face Him and that He will measure me. That He will go through all that I did, all that I thought and said, and make a judgment on me. **Not that I might die, but that He might judge me and find me distant from Him. That He might remove Himself from me!**

Then does judgment become meaningful. **Not just that I'm facing a crisis in my existence, but that I face the Melech HaMishpat, the King of Judgement, who's going to sit in judgement and personally weigh me and all that I am.** He is going to make a decision Himself about His relationship with me. This is what *Yom HaZikaon* is.

First I have to know *Ani L'Dodi V'Dodi Li*. **First I have to know, that He's concerned and cares. That He knows and that He responds.** When I know that He's sitting on the *kisei mishpat*, that He's the Judge and King, that He's the one who responds and carries out, then I can prepare myself to understand the workings of a *Rosh Hashana* and of a *Yom HaDin*.

### **A Time For Closeness**

Therefore, *Rosh Hashana* is the *Yom Tov* that we acquire the *middah* of *yirah*. ***Yirah* is not the fear of punishment. *Yirah* is the fear of the Ribono Shel Olam deciding onesh.**

***Yirah* is not the fear of pain and the desire for reward. *Yirah* is that the Ribono Shel Olam should not remove us from Him and the desire that He should embrace us and bring us close.** Because it is this and this alone, no matter who we are, that is the real motivation for us to be servants of *Hashem*. It is only this aspect which will make us *makirei ha'emes*, people who can recognize truth, to know the *Torah* and want it and seek it.

The desire for *schar* is not a desire for wealth and ease. The fear of *onesh* is not a fear of pain alone, but primarily it's the fear of being removed and distant from His presence. The recognition that this is really the only *onesh* that matters and that being brought into His presence is the only *schar* that has significance. **Therefore, we have to be *marginish* and feel, not only that we are coming and approaching a day of trial and judgment. But above all, that we are approaching a day where we will be tried by *kvayochol*, and be subjected to the *Din* of the Ribono Shel Olam Himself!**

### **A New Preparation**

Judgment is not just simply reward or punishment but it is the closeness or distance from Him that makes the difference. **That judgment is a response, a reaction of our Creator who cares and is filled with love for us.** Who is a *Dod* and seeks our intimacy *kaviyachol*, as we seek Him. The judgment is, can He grant that closeness?

The preparation is now not only what will happen to us, but an understanding into the depth of *tov v'rah*, good and evil, *schar v'onesh*, and of our entire relationship and connection with the *melech malchei hamlachim*, King of Kings! Not to a judge who punishes, but a King who sits in judgment as a *Dod*. As one who cares and responds.

**That the *yirah* is a *yirah* that is real – knowing that he has a *shaychus* and a desire, and is reaching out to us. This is the realization, the *yirah* that we can be *zocheh* to and this is what we have to prepare ourselves for.**

That's what a *Chodesh Elul* is. It's not merely to prepare for *Din*, but a time for deep *avodah* in recognizing the foundations of our connection with the *Ribono Shel Olam*. So that we will truly know what we are facing in that *Yom HaDin*, and so that we know who we are facing in that *Yom HaDin*!

In this recognition itself, lies the deepest and most intense – the most *mamoshos'dik* and tangible preparation for *Rosh Hashana*. That brings a person to a full *Teshuva*, that comes from *Ahava*, that we can be *zocheh* to, by using these days as preparation.