

RABBI ZEV'S REFLECTIONS

In the Jewish calendar the most treasured time, is the month of Elul, giving us a gentle invitation to pause, reflect, and prepare our hearts as we approach Rosh Hashanah and the High Holy Days. In today's world, where life is often hectic, Elul offers us a much-needed moment to breathe deeply, look inward, and reconnect with what matters most. It is a time for soul-searching and personal growth; an annual opportunity to return to our best selves, to our loved ones, and to God. To reignite, reinvigorate that spark that God planted within each of us.



Even the name "Elul" feels inviting! Some say it stands for "Ani L'dodi V'dodi Li", "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine," from the Song of Songs. This beautiful phrase reminds us that the season is not just about judgment, but about love, reconnection, and forgiveness.

Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur as we know, are times for new beginnings and honest self-discovery. Elul acts as a month-long warm-up, making space for us to think about the year gone by, mend relationships, and realign with our values.

During Elul, traditionally the shofar is sounded daily meant to wake us up from our routines, inviting us and encouraging us to pay attention to our inner lives. It's like getting a friendly tap on the shoulder, encouraging us to reflect and grow, encouraging us to look inward with honesty and kindness. The practice of cheshbon hanefesh—a "soul check-in"—helps us reflect on how we've acted, spoken, and treated others. The goal isn't to feel bad, but to see where we might do better, and to know that positive change is always possible.

It's a time to reach out to friends, family, and anyone we may have hurt, intentionally or not. Before we ask for forgiveness from God on Yom Kippur, we need to make things right with each other—human to human: to have those heartfelt conversations, the apologies, and experience the sweet work of healing old wounds.

Today's world can feel busy and overwhelming, but Elul offers timeless wisdom that speaks to our lives today:

- giving us permission to slow down, unplug, and tune into our hearts
- Rebuilding our relationships, reminding us that forgiveness and understanding can bring us back together in a time when people can feel divided
- Allowing for our own personal growth with Teshuvah, or returning to our best selves, inviting us to be gentle with ourselves as we continue to learn and grow
- The High Holy Days are all about coming together in community and Elul reminds us that our actions matter and have an impact, not just for ourselves, but for everyone around us.

We can think of Elul as a gentle ramp leading up to Rosh Hashanah—the birthday of the world—when all of creation gets a fresh start. The themes of reflection, prayer, and generosity become even more important as Rosh Hashanah arrives, marking the beginning of the Yomim Noraim —the days of Awe.

Rosh Hashanah is both a joyful and serious celebration of new beginnings and a thoughtful look at where we've been. The shofar, which echoes through Elul, sounds even louder, calling us to continue our inner journey through the High Holy Days and into the heartfelt prayers of Yom Kippur.

Let's be honest: it's not always easy to make time for reflection or to ask forgiveness, especially if there's been hurt in the past. But Elul reassures us

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that growth takes time, and its rituals are there to help, not to judge. There are many ways to heal and move forward, and even the smallest steps count. As the shofar's gentle notes fill the late summer air, Elul calls out warmly: "Come back." In a world that longs for meaning and closeness, Elul shines as a source of hope and inspiration.

Elul's invitation is open to all: it's never too late to return, to heal, or to reconnect, to be that spark. As Rosh Hashanah and the High Holy Days draw near, let Elul remind you—you can always pause, look inside, and start again, with kindness and a full heart.

From me and my family to you and yours...

Shana Tova and G'mar Chatima Tova...May you be inscribed in the Book of Life for Blessing.

B'Y'didut - In Friendship

Rabbi Zev Sonnenstein

