



ELUL—OUR OWN TIME

There is a famous *mashal* from the Alter Rebbe, comparing Elul to the time when a king travels through the field on the way to his palace. Most of the year, the king is secluded in his palace, and access is strictly controlled. When passing through the field though, anyone can approach the king and be greeted warmly.

This is written in Likkutei Torah in response to a question: A *yom tov* is defined as a time when there is a special revelation of holiness only accessible in this specific time. In Elul, Hashem's 13 *middos harachamim* are revealed; this begs the question—why is Elul not a *yom tov*. To this the Alter Rebbe responds with the above *mashal*.

He doesn't spell out the connection between the two and what the answer therefore means. It is implied, however, as follows: Generally, on *yom tov* there is a revelation that is beyond the capabilities of this world,

higher than *asiyah*. This holiness is incompatible with the mundane, so we must avoid doing *melacha*. But during Elul, the 13 *middos* are revealed. These are unaffected by the state of the recipient—every Jew, no matter where he is spiritually, can connect with them. There is no need to avoid contact with the world in order to benefit from the Elul revelation.

This explains why we are allowed to do *melacha* during the month of Elul and it does not interfere.

What about the other aspect of *yom tovim*—the extra joy? On all other *yom tovim* we are commanded to be extra joyous, but why is there no record of such an instruction for Elul?

There are several preconditions to doing any mitzvah, none of which are counted as *mitzvos* themselves. Namely:

1) Practical preparations of the tools and materials needed

for this specific mitzvah (leather for *tefillin*, knife for a *bris*, etc.).

2) Educating children how and why to do *mitzvos*.

3) *Kabbolos ol malchus shamayim*; accepting Hashem's yoke.

The simple explanation would be that since we are commanded to wear *tefillin*, for example, and in order to do that the three above conditions are necessary, there is no need to specifically command us about it. It is self-understood that we must do those things in order to fulfill the main mitzvah.

On a deeper level however, we see that (the second and third conditions) have a significance independent of what they lead to; they sometimes even exceed the mitzvah itself. For example, the Gemara¹ talks about the greatness of schoolchildren reciting verses of Torah.

According to this, why is there no separate mitzvah for children



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לזכות
 הרה"ת ר' דובער שיחי גרליק
 והכלה המהוללה מרת הענא תחי' גארדאן
 לרגל חתונתם בשעטומ"צ
 ט' אלול ה'תשע"ח
 נדפס ע"י הוריהם
 הרה"ת ר' לוי יצחק
 וזוגתו מרת חנה ומשפחתם שיחי גרליק
 הרה"ת ר' יוסף יצחק
 וזוגתו מרת רחל מאטל ומשפחתם שיחי
 גארדאן



to learn [or be taught by adults]?

Chinuch (and *kabbolas ol*) are entirely different than other *mitzvos*. As we've said above, they technically have to happen earlier chronologically—because without them it makes no sense to do *mitzvos*. But there is a much bigger difference though: most *mitzvos* are our *response* to Hashem's *command*. When we accept Hashem's yoke it is from our own initiative. It cannot be from top-down; this must come from within ourselves.

So where does it actually come from? From deep within our essence—revealing our natural connection with Hashem.

Chinuch is not just a drill of how to perform various actions. It is educating children to follow the positive and holy soul within them and what it leads them to do and not to do. Once they've been raised with these values and come of age, they will continue with *kabbolas ol*, doing the *mitzvos* that they were commanded.

Crowning Hashem as king on Rosh Hashanah is like the *kabbolas ol* for *mitzvos*. Elul is like the years of training before then. This may be why

there are no rules specific to Elul in Gemara and *rishonim*. Blowing *shofar* every day, saying *Ledovid Hashem ori*, etc. are later *minhagim*. Just like for children, there are no top-down rules, only customs created by *our initiative*.

This relates back to the Alter Rebbe's example: when the king is in his palace, the environment is awe-inspiring and intimidating, generating distance. When the king is in the field, greeting everyone with a smile causes his subjects to reciprocate and want to connect with the king.

Similarly, there is no specific *mitzvah* that all our mundane actions be *leshem Shamayim*. The entire reason we were created is to serve Hashem. Therefore we don't need a specific commandment—it [should be] self-understood. This is emphasized in Elul: *Ani Ledodi* means that the purpose of “*Ani—I*” is to serve “*Dodi—Hashem*.” Devotion like this is expressed primarily when interacting with the world in mundane activities, rather than in the ascetic rhythm of Shabbos and Yom Tov.



Now we can explain why we are not commanded to be happy during Elul:

The joy a Yid has when realizing that his essence is bound with the essence of Hashem—and that Hashem greets him warmly—does not need a command. On a *yom tov*, the joy comes from the extra revelations happening then, and is therefore limited and defined. Elul—celebrating our deep connection with Hashem—defies any description and prescription.



This has an important lesson for us:

Yiddishkeit has many *mitzvos*, *halachos* and *minhagim*. However, there are still many things during the day where we have a lot of leeway [to determine on our own how to conduct ourselves]. This shouldn't be a cause for concern, or to start looking around for more rules. These are the places where we can show our own initiative in how to best serve Hashem in mundanity.

Similarly in bona-fide *mitzvos*—beyond the basic rules, it is up to us to choose how to perform each *mitzvah* in the most beautiful way we can. **1**

(Based on *sichas Shabbos Parshas Shoftim 5748*)

1. Shabbos 119b