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ELUL 5778 – 2018 NEWSLETTER

Dear Members & Friends:

We hope that everyone had a healthy & restful summer vacation!

A few reminders:

- The High Holidays are coming soon. It is our intention to accommodate everyone in the best way possible, please contact the office to reserve your seats.
Rosh Hashana will be on Sunday evening, September 9th, 2018.
- It is a great Misvah to fulfill one's monetary obligations to the Synagogue before the Holidays. Please make your best effort according to your ability. Tizku Le'Mitzvot.
- Selihot begins on Monday, August 13th, 2018. Each Minyan is followed by Shaharit

Selihot and Shaharit Schedule is as follows:

| | |
|--------------------------------|---------|
| Selihot (Main Sanctuary) | 5:30 am |
| Shaharit Ness (Main Sanctuary) | 6:20 am |
| Selihot (2nd Floor Midrash) | 7:00 am |
| Shaharit (2nd Floor Midrash) | 8:00 am |
| Shaharit (Main Sanctuary) | 8:15 am |

Tizku Le'Shaneem Rabbot, Shana Toba U'Metuka!

**SAVE THE DATE:
SUNDAY AUGUST 26, 2018 9:00AM to 12:00PM
SPECIAL SOFFER AND SHAATNEZ SERVICES**

*"I am to my beloved, as my beloved is to me."
Ani Ledodee...Vedodee Li (Shir Hashireem)*

This is what the month of Elul is all about.

WHAT IS ELUL?

The month of Elul is the time of return, the time when we try to sensitize ourselves to our mistakes and rectify them. Elul is a time of preparation. Preparing for the day on which the whole world is to be judged - Rosh Hashanah.



A person cannot return to the path from which he has strayed unless he is prepared to search. That search has to start with an analysis of our own actions. This "soul searching" is reflected in the name of the month itself, for Elul is an Aramaic term suggesting, "soul searching".

The sign of the month of Elul is The Maiden, symbolizing modesty and purity, essential traits in a true return. The faculties of understanding and insight, which are astrologically connected to Elul, are feminine attributes. A person born under the influence of the sign Betulah (The Maiden) has a natural inclination to analyze in detail and a propensity to be a perfectionist. When used positively, these attributes are essential tools in returning to the spiritual path, for we must analyze in detail where we have gone wrong, if we are to have any chance of perfecting ourselves. Similarly, without the aspiration to perfect ourselves, we will never find the motivation to change even our smallest fault.

THE KING IS IN THE FIELD

When the king is enthroned in his palace, he is not easily accessible; an audience is granted only to those who have merited his attention. However, when the king is in public, anyone may approach him. Our Rabbis compare the month of Elul to a time when a king, returning to his palace, passes through the surrounding fields and greets his subjects with a shining countenance. During Elul, G-d -- the `King of the Universe' -- is available to anyone who turns to Him... and He graciously accepts our petitions and grants our requests.

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A MONTH OF MERCY

In the generation of the Exodus from Egypt, Moses ascended Mount Sinai three times. The first was to receive the Torah. The second was to plead with G-d for his forgiveness, after the Jewish people sinned in worshipping the golden calf. Then, on the first day of Elul, the month immediately preceding Tishre, Moses ascended the mountain a third time, to invoke G-d's abundant mercy for our complete atonement. He remained there for forty days, until Yom Kippur, when G-d cleansed us completely, as though we had never sinned. Since then, these days are marked as a special period of Divine Grace, during which our prayers find favor in G-d's eyes.

ELUL OBSERVANCES



Every weekday morning including the day of Ereb Rosh Hashanah, Selihot (special repentant prayers) are recited.



It is also proper to check one's Mezuzot & Tefilin.

Although many communities recite the chapter 27 of the book of Tehilim throughout the entire year after Shaharit, many people add this chapter Tehilim to the daily morning until Hosh'a'ana Rabba.



It is customary to give additional charity each weekday.



Elul is an appropriate time to reflect on our actions and attitudes of the previous year and resolve to correct our shortcomings.

ELUL, A TIME TO REFLECT: The Four Steps of Repentance

TESHUBA (Return or Repentance) is a generous gift from G-d, which allows us to erase our improper actions. The Torah tells us that no matter how far we stray or how many times we sin, G-d will wait for us to return to him through Teshuba. There are four basic parts:

1. LEAVING THE SIN

Leaving the sin consists of stopping the commission of the sinful act. One cannot do Teshuba if one continues to do the sin, even if he or she was to perform the next three steps perfectly.

2. REGRET

Regret consists in sincerely regretting one's wrong action. One must be sorry and uncomfortable over one's sins.

3. CONFESSION BEFORE G-D

Acceptance for the future consists of resolving in one's heart never to commit the sin ever again.

4. ACCEPTANCE FOR THE FUTURE

Confession before G-d consists of an oral confession spoken aloud, in which one formulates in words the commitments and attitudes one has reached in his or her heart. One should say, "I have sinned, I have done such sin; I deeply regret my actions, and I declare before G-d, Who knows my innermost thoughts, that I will never do this sin again."

The above steps only work for sins committed against G-d; for sins committed against other people, one must first ask forgiveness from that person before G-d will accept the Teshuba. This is the source of the practice by many Jews to contact all of their family, friends, and co-workers during this period to ask for forgiveness for anything that we may have done to upset them during the past year(s).

These four steps are of course only valid if we do Teshuba AFTER THE FACT. One cannot say in advance - "I can do this sin, then do Teshuba and He will forgive me..." It simply doesn't work that way as it may in other belief systems.

On the other hand, one should keep in mind that Teshuba is an ongoing process that cannot be accomplished overnight. No matter how many times a person may stumble in the Teshuba process, that person has to simply pick him or herself up and keep trying to stay on the right path. What G-d is really looking for is the sincerity of the effort that a person puts into their Teshuba!

**Repentance, Prayer & Charity, can remove any negative decree! It's up to us!
Moreover, remember...A Journey of a Mile begins with One Small Step.**

Days of Reconciliation-

The month of Elul is the last of the months in the general Jewish calendar year and precedes the Days of Awe, commencing with the Jewish New Year, Rosh Hashanah. Thus the month is characterized by a somber mood reflecting what the Rabbis have called the Days of Reconciliation.

I am to my beloved as my beloved is to me-

During the month of Elul, it is customary to make a special effort to improve relationships with one's friends and acquaintances as a token of unbounded love, symbolized in the Hebrew acronym of the first letters of the word ELUL. These letters spell out the Hebrew verse from the Song of Songs (6:3): I am my beloved and my beloved is mine.

Days of Forgiveness-

According to tradition, Rosh Hodesh Elul marks the day when Moses ascended the mountain with the new Tablets of stone, having first pleaded for the grave sin of the Israelites who had worshipped a golden calf in the desert. Divine mercy is proffered, and forty days later Moses descends the mount with the Second Tablets as a mark of renewed Divine favor. These 40 days, from Rosh Hodesh Elul, until the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, have thus been fixed for generations as days of repentance and forgiveness. Forty days is very significant in Judaism. According to our Hachamim, it takes forty days to form a fetus, the flood lasted forty days, and Moshe got the Torah after being on Mount Sinai for forty days and nights because it takes forty days for a person to transform him/herself into a new being.

Between the forty days of Elul and Yom Kippur, take one small deed and try to improve. It can be saying a Beracha (blessing) with added Kavannah (concentration), saying a kinder good morning to a spouse, or not speaking Lashon Ha'ra (negative comments about an individual, family or institution) even for as little as for fifteen minutes a day. Whatever it is, that small step can make the difference.

Prayers and Supplications-

Thus, not only is an effort made to improve human relationships: With the approaching Days of Awe, it is customary to set the mood of self-reflection that will culminate in days of prayer and supplication. This period is marked by the recitation of numerous Selihot (penitential prayers) with some rising in the middle of the night throughout the month of Elul or, at least, the few days preceding Rosh Hashanah, to pour out their hearts to Heaven.

A Special Psalm-

Psalm 27 is recited after prayers in the synagogue. The psalmist acclaim: A psalm of David, "The Lord is my light and my salvation... for he will hide me in his tent..." The Midrash explains the appropriateness of this recitation during this period:

**H-shem is my light, on Rosh Hashanah,
And my salvation, on Yom Kippur,
For HE will hide me, in His tent, on Sukkot.**

THE BEN ISH HAI - RABBENU YOSEF HAIM ZT"l.



5592 - 5669 // 1832 - 1909

The 13th of Elul is the 109th anniversary of the passing of The Ben Ish Hai,

Hacham Yosef Haim was born in 1832 in the city of Baghdad where his father was the Rabbi. When his father passed away, Hacham Yosef Haim was only twenty-five years old. Nevertheless, the Jews of Baghdad accepted him to fill his father's place and Rabbi Yosef Haim became the Rabbi of Baghdad.

The title **Hacham** – "wise one," the traditional Sephardic title bestowed upon rabbis – was appended to his name. Despite his young age, he was highly respected, and one of his disciples, Rabbi David Hai Ha'Cohen, testified that if Rabbi Yosef Chaim had lived during the time of the Temple, it would never have been destroyed. For unlike then, when the Jews disregarded the admonitions of the prophets, the entire Baghdad community lovingly obeyed every word uttered by Rabbi Yosef Chaim. During his lifetime, per his influence, all the Jews of Baghdad observed Shabbat and Torah law.

Hacham Yosef Haim refused a salary for his public service. Instead, he supported his family by collaborating in his brother's business. He personally funded the publishing of his books, refusing sponsorship or charity, and any income from these books would be distributed to the poor. He was also known to donate his books for free to Torah scholars.

He attempted to bridge the gap between the Sephardic and Ashkenazic communities, who often followed widely differing practices, by referencing his contemporaries abroad, and reflecting on their approaches in his own writings. He felt strongly that Torah scholars needed to show mutual recognition for one another, even when they disagreed, lest their names be forgotten with the passage of time.

Though his legal decisions carried weight primarily amongst Sephardic populaces, his Ashkenazic counterparts recognized his genius, held him in high esteem, and often quoted his rulings.

Hacham Yosef Haim was a great leader who guided his people through a time of religious upheaval. His contribution to Jewry was not restricted to Baghdad. His opinion on Halacha (Jewish law) issues was sought throughout the Sephardic world and is still followed by thousands of people from these communities. Indeed, his decisions are considered to be of Halacha significance even outside of the Sephardic communities.

Hacham Yosef Haim authored many works, both of Halacha and Hagadah (sections of the Talmud that deals with esoteric, non-legal subjects). His most famous book is Ben Ish Hai, a book based upon the weekly portion of the Torah with a discussion of the portion and practical Halacha. This book is considered the standard reference in many religious Sephardic homes and is studied by Jews worldwide. Due to the popularity of this book, Rabbenu Yosef Haim came to be known by its name, and today he is referred to as the Ben Ish Hai.

May his merit shield us, Zechuto Yagen A'lenu, Amen.