

The Significance of the Month of Elul

Our rabbis understand the four weeks that lead up to the High Holy Days as a time of introspection and reflection, a time to consider our behaviours of the past year. According to the Zohar, one of the core mystical texts of our tradition, the Hebrew lunar month of Elul, which we are now in, has significance in and of itself. They read its very name as bearing great meaning. For Elul is an acronym for the phrase from the Song of Songs, “Ani L’dodi v’dodi Li, I am to my beloved and my beloved is to me.” The Zohar goes on to explain that at the beginning of this month of reflection we are back to back with the Divine; by the end of the month, as we begin Rosh Hashanah, we are face to face with the Divine, closer to that which is the Essence of our true selves.

The tradition instructs us to work during this month of Elul to repairing our relationships with each other, with ourselves and with whatever we understand the Divine to be. As Rabbi Rachel Barenblat (aka the Velveteen Rabbi) notes, this is the month of *teshuvah*: repentance / repair. She suggests that if we spend the month of Elul engaged in this work - truly considering how we have disappointed ourselves, learning to offer ourselves forgiveness and how we can cultivate gratitude in our lives, every day - then we can enter the High Holy Days better prepared to mend our relationships with the people in our lives and with our Source.

How can we do this work? I personally have found that my own preparations for the High Holy Days - the research I do in selecting readings for our supplements, the studying of a variety of texts to find meaning in our liturgy, the creating of sermons for our services - all give me avenues to understand more profoundly the themes of these Days of Awe, with the hope that I will share these insights with our congregation.

Perhaps you too could find the time in the coming weeks to find a prayer that we say on the High Holy Days, one that is challenging to you, and to deeply study it and find a meaning that relates to you personally. Perhaps you could take the time for an early morning or afternoon or evening walk and mindfully observe all that is around you. Perhaps you could take time to be with your friend, your partner, your child or your parent and share and hear what is important to them.

And finally, perhaps you could join us at our September 5th Shabbat morning service (Elul 21), in the third floor chapel, and at the learning session that precedes it, and in community consider and share how to ready our inner selves as we approach this period of intense celebration, reflection and recommitment to the core themes of the High Holy Days.

-Rabbi Aviva Goldberg