

## September 6, 2019/6 Elul 5779

Dear chevreh,

We are in the Hebrew month of Elul, during which we are called to deep introspection, with the goal of arriving at the Days of Awe more aware of ourselves. This is a time marked by critical soul-searching. We are also called to work on relationships with others.

Jewish tradition emphasizes that the month of Elul is a special time of Divine good will and mercy – a time that is particularly conducive to prayer and *teshuvah*, repentance. The month is part of the preparatory process for entering into the awesome and cleansing days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. God is said to be especially close at hand at this time.

The Sages emphasize that although a person can repent at any time of year, this is a time that is especially conducive to repentance and making amends: “Seek the Lord when God is found, call God when God is near” (Isaiah 55:6) is an allusion to Elul.

A well-known teaching describes Elul as a time during which “the King is in the field.” The analogy is to a great king who pays a surprise visit to his subjects while they are at work in their fields. In this metaphor, for the average man or woman, the king is inaccessible, away in his palace, distant and removed.

One never dreams that one will actually see the king, let alone speak with the king. Then suddenly, one day, while this person is bent over menial labor in the field, one feels a gentle tap on the shoulder, turns around, and shockingly, it is the great king who is standing over the astonished soul. The king's usual place is in the capital city, in the royal palace. Anyone wishing to approach the king must go through the appropriate channels in the palace bureaucracy and gain the approval of a succession of secretaries and ministers. She must journey to the capital and pass through the many gates, corridors and antechambers that lead to the throne room. His presentation must be meticulously prepared, and he must adhere to an exacting code of dress, speech and mannerism upon entering into the royal presence.

However, there are times when the king comes out to the fields outside the city. At such times, anyone can approach him; the king receives them all with a smiling face and a radiant countenance. The peasant behind her plow has access to the king in a

manner unavailable to the highest ranking minister in the royal court when the king is in the palace.[Chabad.org]

The month of Elul, says Rabbi Schneur Zalman, is when the king is in the field. We are the humble subjects and we are invited to have a closer encounter with the Divine. This can also be read as the Divine in the space between two human beings having an encounter in a Buber-esque fashion. We all have an opportunity to avail ourselves of this sacred time of Elul. I personally have committed to a meditation practice during this time, with mindfulness framed by Psalm 27 themes, as this practice illuminated by Jewish teachings brings me closer to my soul. I'm also committed to having some difficult conversations with loved ones.

What are ways that you can use this auspicious time that the "King is in the field" to stay open to connection and Presence?

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Many of us were worried about friends and family down south in our own country. So far, it appears that the Bahamas bore the biggest brunt of this dreadful hurricane, yet the United States has been affected as well.

The Greater Miami Jewish Federation has established a special relief fund to provide immediate assistance to those in the Bahamas and elsewhere impacted by Hurricane Dorian. The organization has pledged to absorb all administrative costs so all of the proceeds will go toward relief efforts.

You can donate by visiting [JewishMiami.org/hurricanedorian](http://JewishMiami.org/hurricanedorian). Checks can also be mailed payable to Greater Miami Jewish Federation, 4200 Biscayne Boulevard, Miami, FL 33137. Note "Hurricane Dorian Relief Fund" in the memo of each check.

I look forward to seeing you at 7:00 pm for services this evening following the potluck and tomorrow morning at 9:30 am for services.

Wishing you a sweet, beloved Elul.

Shabbat shalom,  
Rabbi Diana