



IFR NEWS Elul 5772/Tishrei 5773

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תשרי



Inside this issue:

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I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine...

אני לדודי ודודי לי
Elul אכול Teshuvah Selichot

Origins & Customs of Chodesh Elul

The origins of Elul as a month of special Divine grace and mercy go back to the time of Moses, in the year 2448 from creation (1313 BCE)--the first year after the Jewish people went out of Egypt.

Seven weeks after the exodus, the people of Israel received the Torah at Mount Sinai and entered into an eternal covenant with G-d as His chosen people. But just 40 days later, while Moses was still up on the mountain, they violated their special relationship with G-d by worshipping a golden calf.

Upon descending from the mountain and witnessing their transgression, Moses smashed the two stone tablets on which G-d had inscribed the Ten Commandments; he then returned to Mount Sinai for a second 40 days to plead with G-d on Israel's behalf.

On the early morning of the 1st of Elul, Moses once again ascended Mount Sinai, taking with him the stone tablets he had hewn, by divine command, for G-d to re-

inscribe the Ten Commandments. On the mountain, G-d allowed Moses to "see My back, but not My face" (which Maimonides interprets as a perception of G-d's reality but not His essence) -- the closest any human being ever came to knowing G-d -- and taught him the secret of His "Thirteen Attributes of Mercy" (Exodus 33:18-34:8).

For the third time, Moses remained on the mountain for 40 days, from the 1st of Elul until the 10th of Tishrei (Yom Kippur), during which time He obtained G-d's wholehearted forgiveness and reconciliation with the people of Israel.

Ever since, the month of Elul serves as the "month of Divine mercy and forgiveness."



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IFR

Mission Statement

The IFR is a professional organization of rabbis united by a commitment to Jewish tradition and a desire to facilitate the Jewish spiritual growth and life cycle needs of all.

IFR provides a progressive, pluralistic forum, linking member rabbis in a spirit of friendship and a sense of community.

IFR provides support for members in their professional endeavors and offers continuing education. IFR encourages professional relationships with rabbis and other rabbinic organizations.

Special Customs for 25th of Elul

The 25th day of Elul commemorates the first of the six days of creation. Adam and Hava were created on the sixth day of creation, Rosh Hashanah, and thus the first day was 25 Elul. On this day, God brought a special “light of kindness” into existence, and this is thus a very auspicious and significant occasion. It is therefore proper to treat this day with special sanctity.

Rav Benayahu Shemueli (contemporary) outlines several specific customs that should be observed on this day (listen to audio recording for precise citation). He writes that before sundown on the evening before 25 Elul, one should immerse in a Mikveh.

He should first immerse for the purpose of eliminating the Ru’ah Ra’a (evil spirit), and then a second time as a Tikun (rectification) for the sin of anger. Thereafter, one should immerse five times corresponding to the five times the word “Or” (“light”) is mentioned in the story of creation, thereby bringing upon oneself the special “light” of Hesed that abounds on this special day.

One should be especially careful to avoid anger throughout the night and day of 25 Elul, and also to abstain from idle chatter. It is improper to fast on 25 Elul; to the contrary, one should eat a meal with bread and meat both at night and during the day, and recite Birkat Ha’mazon after each meal with special intensity.

One should also eat sweet treats on this day, as we commemorate the beginning of the world’s creation and thus hope to bring sweetness into the new year.

It is proper to give large amounts of charity on 25 Elul, as well. If it falls on Shabbat, as it does this year, one can pledge charity in the synagogue. The husband or wife should light five special candles on this day corresponding

to the five “lights” of kindness that came into existence on the first day of creation. If this day falls on Shabbat, these special candles should be lit before the onset of Shabbat.

If 25 Elul falls on a day when the Torah is read in the synagogue, one should try to receive an Aliya to the Torah.

Each day from 25 Elul through Rosh Hashanah, one should read the verses in the Torah that speak about that day’s creation.

On 25 Elul, one reads the verses that tell of the first day, on 26 Elul one reads about the second day, and so on, such that on the first day of Rosh Hashanah, one reads the verses of the sixth day of creation.

On the second day of Rosh Hashanah, one reads the verses of “Vayechulu.” There are special Bakashot that should be recited before and after each day’s reading.

Although the entirety of the month of Elul is an especially auspicious time for repentance and Kedusha, there is unique significance to the final week, when we commemorate the world’s creation.

This is a time of special divine kindness, and we must take advantage of this unique opportunity by observing these customs to the best of our ability, and, more generally, enhancing our devotion to Torah and Mitzvot.



Teshuvah - Returning to God

Hebrew Centering Prayer

Brenda Shoshanna, Ph.d.

We are all searching for our precious ruby, for that which will make our lives complete. We spend most of our lives seeking and struggling to find that which will bring meaning and wholeness. Then the month of Elul comes, the month of preparation for the Jewish holidays, when we are called to make Teshuvah, to return to Hashem, to turn around.

But, before we can return we must know where it is we must return to and where we are right now. Where is the place we must return to? How do we return? What does this call really mean?

In Judaism HaMakom is called The Place, it is another word for the name of God. This is the place in which we can rest, be renewed, find our deepest Center and become whole. And, the month of Elul, preceding Rosh Hashanah is a very powerful and crucial time for doing this. During this month it is said that God is particularly available, more energy is present to return.

The Torah guides us clearly in this process - it asks a vital question, "Who can come to my holy mountain?" Then it answers, "He who has clean hands and a pure heart." Teshuvah also means to purify ourselves.

How do we actualize this and make it real in our lives? It's one thing to beg for forgiveness, it's another to truly wash the slate clean and come to God and to one another with clean hands and a pure heart. To do this we must become aware of and take responsibility for what is going on within.

Centering Prayer, which includes a practice of daily meditation, is wonderful beginning. In this practice we return daily to our place, sit down, face ourselves, turn away from distractions. Some take a sacred word with them, others simply return to their breath, to the moment, to the essence of themselves. During this period, we do not move, simply look within. Sittings can range from twenty to forty minutes, depending upon you.

As we take on a period of Centering prayer, first we stop our external activities, take our atten-

"The precious ruby we have lost
Has fallen out on the road
Some say it is to the east of us,
Others to the west,"

tion back, and return it within. As we do this we are taking time to notice whatever is occurring within our own mind, body and soul. As we do this, the frantic restless mind quiets down. Confusion and sorrow dissolve on their own and we begin to realize that all the guidance we need is always available.

The second step in this process (which can be done alone or with a group), is to slowly read aloud a small paragraph from scripture. One phrase will stand out, touch you, or wound your heart. You then take this phrase into the next sitting period with you and savor it. You do not analyze the phrase, or think about it intellectually in anyway, simply allow it to accompany you, talk to you and affect you in any way it does.

The Siddur further instructs us in this process of return and purification. It says, "Purify Your Heart To Serve Me in Truth."

Take this beautiful phrase into Centering Prayer, savor it, and look deeply at what it means to purify yourself, to serve, to be sincere. Also look to see who is the Me that is calling to You?

Some questions you may ask yourself (or be asked by a leader of the group) are: How does your heart want to respond? What Invitation is present for you in this phrase? How is God speaking to your life at this moment? What can you say Yes to?

Again, do not jump to an answer, do not think about it, just dwell with your phrase and the question, savor them. Let answers or images or memories come on their own. In this practice, we do not grab at intellectual understanding. Instead, we simply face and experience the truth of the moment and of ourselves. Whatever it is within that needs to be seen comes up to our attention. We see it, feel it, taste and digest it, and then we let it go.

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We do not linger in misery over what we see or seek to change it. Just become aware. Awareness is all. Our inner being knows what to do, and in Centering Prayer we allow our Inner Being to rule. We allow ourselves to be guided.

Centering Prayer also addresses another central practice of the month of Elul - to contact anyone you might have offended in the past year and ask to be forgiven. But many of us do not know exactly how our behavior has affected another or what we must be forgiven for. In Centering Prayer we find out. We become truly acquainted with ourselves and only then are we able to directly see the pain our actions may have unknowingly caused, and how to heal it.

As we do this practice, we will see that these phrases we sit with and savor are more than words, they are the seeds of a vital experience which can change the direction of our lives.

Centering Prayer is a way of connecting, communing, becoming One, not only with God, but with our deepest selves. Only then are we able to become one with others, to love our neighbors as ourselves. Only then are we able to do mitzvot whole heartedly, for their own sake, *l'shmo*.

It has been said that all sin comes from separation from God - from each other and ourselves. Centering Prayer is a process of letting go of separation and resting in wholeness once again. It is a process of discovering our precious jewel, realizing that it has never been lost, only covered with misunderstanding.

A Hasidic Rebbe asked where is God? The answer came - God is wherever you let him in.

As we open our hearts, our minds, our hands to feel and see our oneness with all, we can live unreservedly and become able to find God in each moment and each encounter, no matter what is going on.

A blessed and healing New Year to all.

IFR member Brenda Shoshanna, Ph.d. is a psychologist and long term practitioner of both Judaism and Zen. She is the founder of One Tent, All Faith Center for Sitting and Centering Prayer.

A Yom Kippur Meditation

(submitted by Rabbi Frank Tamburello)

Jonah (an epilogue)

"I am Jonah, son of Ammitai. I returned to earth to find the whole world as corrupt as the city of Nineveh. I see people everywhere doing harmful, hateful things to one another.

Shall I fly back into the stratosphere, as I once sought to run back to the city of Tarshish, to avoid spreading the message of love, of charity, of kindness?

No, no. I'll stay to proclaim to all of humankind as I once did to Nineveh: 'Think about what you do, how you act! Stop plotting against one another. Stop making war on each other and on the natural world. Use your hearts and minds for the betterment of all who share the world with you.

Remember, we are mortals, and as mortals we often go astray. We will transgress and walk in the ways of darkness. But we also know the path of loving-kindness is always there for us to follow. Only when we are one with each other will there be hope for the world.' "

- adapted from the writings of Emil Weitzner



Ravenous Ravens



Rabbi Frank Tamburello's
column featuring Jewish Holiday Eats and
Treats: Rosh Hashanna 5773

Noodles Baked With Apples (Lokshyna) - from Galicia, Ukraine

6 large tart apples (Golden Delicious recommended)
2 Tbs sugar
1 tsp. cinnamon
8 oz. flat noodles
3 Tbs. oil (sunflower seed oil was traditional)
3 Tbs. fine bread crumbs

Peel, core, and grate apples. Add sugar and the cinnamon and let stand ten minutes. Boil noodles in three quarts water until opaque or al dente. Rinse in cold water and drain. Saute' 2 tablespoons bread crumbs in 1 tablespoon oil until golden. Mix with noodles in a large bowl.

Use 2 tablespoons oil to cover bottom and sides of a souffle pan or casserole and sprinkle with remaining bread crumbs. Cover bottom with a layer of noodles, then with alternate layers of apples and noodles. Press down lightly. Bake in pre-heated oven for 45 minutes or until done.

Loosen edges with a sharp knife, invert onto a platter, and sprinkle with sugar. Serve in wedges.

Marta Farley, **Festive Ukrainian Cooking.**



Apples and honey, Rosh Hashanah's symbols of a sweet new year, are perfect additions to a loaf of challah.

Round Challah Makes one 9-inch round loaf



Ingredients

4 ounces (1 stick) unsalted butter or nondairy margarine, plus more for bowl, pan, and plastic
3 1/2 cups unbleached bread flour, plus more for surface

3/4 cup warm water (100 degrees)
2/3 cup honey
2 large eggs plus 3 large egg yolks
2 teaspoons active dry yeast (from one 1/4-ounce envelope)
2 teaspoons coarse salt
1 1/2 tart green apples, preferably Granny Smith, peeled and cut into 1/4-inch-thick slices (about 1 3/4 cups)

Directions

Butter a large bowl, and melt 4 tablespoons butter in a saucepan over medium-low heat; let cool. Combine 2 tablespoons melted butter, the flour, water, 1/3 cup honey, the eggs and yolks, yeast, and salt in a large bowl.

Mix until dough forms. Turn dough out onto a floured surface, and knead until smooth, about 10 minutes.

Transfer dough to buttered bowl, and brush with 1 tablespoon melted butter. Cover with plastic. Let rise in a warm place until dough almost doubles in volume, about 1 1/2 hours.

Turn dough out onto a floured surface. Pat into an 8 1/2-by-14-inch rectangle. Top with apples; knead to incorporate. Return to bowl.

Brush with remaining tablespoon melted butter; cover. Let rise again in a warm place until dough almost doubles in volume, about 1 hour more.

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Shosh's Breakfast Recipes for Elul

MAPLE-PECAN MUFFINS



1 cup flour
1/2 cup whole wheat flour
1/2 cup steel cut oats
1/2 cup sugar
3 tsp. baking powder
1 tsp. cinnamon
1/2 tsp. baking soda
1/2 tsp salt
2 Tbs. pure maple syrup
1 cup non-fat soymilk
1/2 cup unsweetened applesauce
1 egg
1 Tbs. canola oil
1 tsp. pure vanilla extract
Topping:
6 oz. pecans, chopped
4 Tbs. brown sugar
2 Tbs. flour
1 1/2 Tbs. oil

Preheat oven to 400°F.

In a large mixing bowl, combine both flours, oats, granulated sugar, baking powder, cinnamon, baking soda and salt. In a medium sized bowl, mix together maple syrup, soymilk, applesauce, egg, oil and vanilla.

Pour liquid mixture from medium sized bowl into dry mixture in large bowl, and stir until well blended. Pour mixture into muffin cups (suggestion: silicone muffin cups). Set aside. In a small bowl, mix together ingredients for topping. Sprinkle topping on top of muffin mixture. Bake 10-12 minutes.

BREAKFAST BLUEBERRY SMOOTHIE

2 cups blueberries
1 cup vanilla low-fat yogurt
1/2 cup low-fat milk
2 tsp. honey
12 ice cubes
1/4 cup mango, peeled, pitted and diced



Place all ingredients except the diced mango in a blender and work to a froth. Pour into glasses and top with diced mango.-Serve immediately. Serves four.

CRANBERRY NUT LOAF



1/2 cup freshly squeezed orange juice
1/4 cup canola oil
1 egg
3/4 cup brown sugar
2 cups flour
1 1/2 tsp. baking powder
1 tsp. sea salt
1 1/2 tsp. baking soda
1 Tbs. grated orange peel
1 cup dried cranberries, chopped
1/2 cup walnuts, chopped

Preheat oven to 350°F.

Mix together orange juice, oil, egg and brown sugar in medium sized mixing bowl. Add dry ingredients: flour, baking powder, salt, baking soda and grated orange peel. Place into loaf pan. Top with dried cranberries and walnuts.

Bake 30 minutes until golden brown. Remove from oven. Cool and slice. Serves 6-8.

IFR Rabbis News & Shmooze



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Susan Pazo**



Continued from Ravenous RAVS page 6

Preheat oven to 375 degrees, with rack in lowest position. Butter a 9-inch round cake pan. Roll dough into a rope (about 24 inches) on a floured surface. Coil into a circle, and transfer to pan. Butter plastic wrap, and cover dough. Let rise again until dough almost doubles in volume, about 45 minutes more.

Heat remaining 4 tablespoons butter and 1/3 cup honey in a saucepan over medium-low heat until butter melts. Brush dough with half the honey-butter. Bake until golden brown and firm, about 35 minutes.

Brush challah with the remaining honey-butter. Let cool in pan on a wire rack for 30 minutes. Turn out loaf from pan, and let cool.

IFR DUES 2012-2013

Now is the time to renew your membership in the IFR. Please make your check for \$100.00 payable to:

The International Federation of Rabbis
Send your check (s) to the IFR President

Rabbi Suzanne H. Carter
5091 Washington Road
Delray Beach, Florida 33484

IFR News Editors

Rabbi Barbara Aiello
Rabbi Frank Tamburello
Design/Layout: shosh

On Forgiving-Elul

By Rabbi Eli Mallon

With the Jewish High Holidays approaching, one of the major themes is "forgiving." Although we're told to ask others for forgiveness, I've found that people struggle more with doing their own forgiving; even wondering "how" to forgive, let alone "if."

I've also been asked what Judaism teaches about "forgiving ourselves."

I'd like to encourage wider discussion, knowledge and practice of forgiving. I'm hoping that other rabbis and teachers will find this purposeful as well.

I've prepared a small pamphlet of readings about it, some from Jewish sources, some from readable "psychological" sources (e.g. the Mayo clinic). I'm hoping to encourage people to forgive -- or to begin the process -- to whatever extent is possible for them.

Many -- if not all -- other traditions have much to say about this, too. As I've prepared this mainly for use in Jewish services and classes, please feel free to add other sources, too!

Another thing; it doesn't include is personal narratives. To keep this small, I didn't search out biographical anecdotes. Personal narratives can be particularly powerful, though, as models.

"Forgiving" is a theme for all groups -- religious and secular. Whatever the other differences, it affects us all personally in the same way.

The pamphlet is far from comprehensive. It's just meant as a beginning, as if to say: Forgiving is possible and doable.

If you read it, I hope you find this pamphlet useful.

Of course, you're most welcome to share it with anyone who might find it relevant to themselves and/or their work, too. This is how I hope the idea spreads.

You might also decide to prepare your own materials/handouts. That's fine, too. If you do, though, I suggest that you focus on "how" we forgive, rather than on our "duty" to forgive or any complicated intellectual discussion of it. I'm hoping that people see this as something that's part of Jewish tradition that can be practiced in an ongoing way. The High Holidays would be the ideal time to emphasize it.

For a copy of the pdf file, please email me at: rebem34@aol.com, with "booklet" in the subject line. I'll reply with the file of the booklet attached. The booklet may also be found on the IFR website under "Sermons".

IFR CONFERENCE 2013



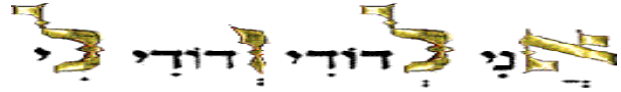
Tuesday March 5 2013
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To Do List for the Month of Elul

Rabbi Barbara Aiello



This year, on August 19 the Hebrew month of Elul begins. Although there are no festivals or fast days, no days of special “simcha” or study, it is, nonetheless one of the most important months in the Hebrew calendar.

Elul is the month of preparation. Because Elul leads us to the “Yamim Norim,” the High Holy Days, it is a time for Jews to make intensive preparation for the work to be done beginning with Rosh HaShanah and ending with Yom Kippur. Our traditions give us an entire simcha-free month to look inside our souls, to ask for forgiveness from others, to contemplate the changes we must make for the New Year and to draw closer to God. In fact, Elul is God’s mirror. With it, we step back and take a long, hard look at ourselves. We admit our mistakes and make plans to change.

The name “Elul,” originates from the Babylonian period. It first appears in the Hebrew Bible in the book of Nechemiah (chapter 6 verse 15). The word, Elul (Hebrew letters “alef, lamed, vav, lamed”) is thought to be an acronym of “Ani l’dodi v’dodi li,” which translates to “I am my Beloved’s and my Beloved is mine.” These are the words from the Song of Songs (chapter 6 verse 3). In this context The “Beloved” is believed to be the One God and the “I” signifies the people of Israel (meaning all the Jewish people and any person who has ever struggled with the concept of God).

The Adult Center for Liberal Jewish Learning (Kolel) states that at the time the Hebrew months were named, the Jewish people spoke the Aramaic language. This is important because in Aramaic “Elul” means “to search.” Thus it has been our tradition from ancient times, says Kolel, for Jewish people to use this month to search their souls.

During the month of Elul it is traditional to sound the shofar each weekday morning. The shofar serves as a spiritual “alarm clock,” to remind us to take time each day to examine our behavior, ask for forgiveness and prepare to change. Our great sage and teacher, Maimonides (Rambam) taught us in Hilchot Teshuvah about the symbolic meaning of the sound of the shofar:

“Awake all of you who are asleep. Search your ways and mend them in repentance.”

What can we do to observe Elul. The good people at Kolel have several suggestions.

Things to Do in Elul:

Make time every day for personal reflection, meditation and prayer. These things prepare us for “Cheshbon HaNefesh,” - “the accounting of the soul.

Think of the people you have hurt during the past year. Meditate on what you have done. Find the person and make an apology. Ask for forgiveness.

Think of those things that you should have done but did not do. Did you borrow a tool or a book from a friend and fail to return it? Did you forget to send greetings for a birthday or special occasion? Make your apology for these sins of omission. Return the item and make a belated greeting.

Hear the sound of the shofar each day during the month. Find a synagogue where the shofar is sounded or invest in a shofar and sound it yourself each morning.

Read Psalm 27 each morning.

Give Tzedakah. Now is the time to give charity to those in need. Now is the time to make a special donation to the synagogue.

If you can, make a visit to the burial place of your loved ones.

Find your Tallet. Take it to the drycleaner for cleaning and pressing. Polish and shine the Mezzuzot at your doors. If you don’t have a mezuzah, now is the time to purchase one and put it beside your door.

The best way to assure a “Shanah Tovah” a Good New Year, is to begin now in the Month of Elul.