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Chodesh Elul 5774  
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Rabbi Aharon of Zhitomir’s Revelation

To Elevate the Torah Mitzvos and Tefilos of the Entire Year
One Must Connect the Letter ‘א with the Letters לו”ל to Form "אלול"

With gratitude to Hashem, we now enter the final month of the year, the month of Elul — the month of teshuvah. This is a time of divine mercy and good will, during which HKB”H wishes to accept Yisrael’s sincere teshuvah for all of their wrongdoings of the past year. This is the time of the year when HKB”H forgave Yisrael after the sin involving the “eigel.” Moshe Rabeinu ascended to the heavenly realm for forty days and forty nights to pray on behalf of Yisrael.

It is fitting that we begin with the sacred words of the Panim Yafos (Acharei Mos), who associates the words of the following Mishnah (Ketubos 57a) with chodesh Elul: "נזנין לכתולה שנים עשר חודש" — a virgin is afforded twelve months [to get prepared for her marriage]. He sees this statement as an allusion to chodesh Elul, whose zodiac sign is a virgin — "besulah." Seeing as this is the month of teshuvah, it is within our power not only to make improvements from the present time forward but also to make amends for all that transpired during the past year.

Thus, we can interpret Chazal’s statement: נ匮ית לכתולה — the heavenly powers that be afford the zodiac sign of Elul — the "besulah" — the power to remedy all of the past twelve months — שים عشر חודש — thirty days of the year are considered like an entire year. This statement can be viewed as a reference to chodesh Elul. Including the first day of Rosh Chodesh, the month contains thirty days during which a Jew can perform teshuvah to make amends for his transgressions and to remedy the spiritual damage he has caused. If successful: "חשבים שה" — it will be as if he acted like a tzaddik throughout the entire past year.

Forty Days of Teshuvah Corresponding to the Forty Se’ah in a Mikveh

The allusion related to Elul is well-known and its source is the Avudraham. The first letters of the passuk (Shir HaShirim 6, 3): "א’ני ל’דודי ו’דודי ל’י — spell: אלאל. This passuk expresses the mutual devotion that exists between HKB”H and Yisrael. During the month of Elul, HKB”H opens His arms to accept Yisrael back as a result of their sincere, total teshuvah. The great luminary, the Bnei Yissaschar (Elul 1, 15) presents this allusion with a small addendum:

אמרו דורשי רשומות א’ני ל’דודי ו’דודי ל’י ראשי תיבות אלו”ל, שאז השם יתברך פותח יד לקבלינו בתשובה וنفسות ישראל עורגות לו וינהו之后 ה’. סופי תיבות של ד’ תיבות אלו המה ד’ יודי"ן בגימטריא ארבעים, מרמזין לארבעים יום שהייתה משה בהר לקבל לוחות האחרונות, מן ראש חודש אלול עד יום הכפורים, והמה עד היום ימי הרצון.

Not only is there an allusion in the first letters of the words א’ני ל’דודי ו’דודי ל’י, there is also an allusion in the last letters. Those four "yud"s possess a numerical equivalent of forty — alluding to the forty days that Moshe was on the mountain to receive the second luchos, from Rosh Chodesh Elul until Yom HaKippurim. Until this very day, these forty days are characterized by divine goodwill.

The Bnei Yissaschar proceeds to explain that these forty days of teshuvah act like a mikveh to purify and cleanse Yisrael. The forty se’ah of water in a mikveh elevate a Jew from a state of spiritual impurity — "tumah" — to a state of spiritual purity — "taharah." In similar fashion, these forty days of teshuvah elevate a Jew from the tumah of his transgressions to a state of taharah. Just like the forty se’ah of a mikveh contain 960 lug of water; so, too, the forty days of teshuvah contain 960 hours which serve to purify Yisrael for their Father in Heaven.

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With this in mind, he proceeds to interpret the Mishnah (Yoma 8, 49):

"אמר רבי עקיבא, אשריכם ישראל לפני מי אתם מטהרין, מי מטהר אתכם אביכם שבשמים, שנאמר (יחזקאל לו-כה) וזרקתי עליכם מים טהורים וטהרתם, ואומר (ירמיה יז-יג) מקוה ישראל ה', מה מקוה מטהר את הטמאים אף הקב"ה מטיטר את ישראל".

Rabbi Akiva praises Yisrael for undergoing the purification process. He cites the passuk (Yirmiyah 17, 13): מקוה ישראל ה’ — stating that Hashem is Yisrael’s mikveh. Rabbi Akiva is referring to the forty days of teshuvah, extending from Rosh Chodesh Elul to Yom Kippur. He says that just like the forty se’ah of water in a mikveh purify Yisrael; similarly, HKB”H purifies Yisrael during the forty days of teshuvah. As a result, at the conclusion of the process, on Yom Kippur, they stand before Him as new creatures. This is the implication of the passuk (Vayikra 16, 30): "כי ביום הזה יכפר עליכם לטהר אתכם מכל חטאותיכם לפני ה' תטהרו" — for on this day He shall provide atonement for you to cleanse you; from all your sins before Hashem shall you be cleansed.

Connecting the Letter 'א with the Three Letters לו”ל

After much thought, I would like to propose a practical explanation, relevant to each and every one of us, regarding the intimate relationship between chodesh Elul and the passuk: "א'ני ל'דודי ו'דודי ל'י — I am devoted to my Beloved and my Beloved is devoted to me — from which we derive the first lettersieroel. Additionally, I would like to explain in greater depth the matter of the taharah which HKB”H affords Yisrael during the 960 hours extending from Rosh Chodesh Elul to Yom HaKippurim. We find a wonderful allusion related to the name "אלול in Toldos Aharon, authored by the great Rabbi Aharon of Zhitomir, zy”a, (Yamim Noraim). [He was an outstanding disciple of the great Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, zy”a.]

He writes that the name "אלול connects the letter 'א with the letters לו”ל; it is our sacred duty during this month to connect these letters and form the name "ieroel. He explains the significance of this connection based on what we have learned in the Gemara (Pesachim 34a): "ולא כתבה ב_ivא נקועהтин פי חכם המלך האברע" (area or cavity in the floor of the Beit HaMikdash) — there was a small "lul" between the ramp and the mizbeiach on the west side of the ramp; there they would discard the invalidated bird chitas offerings.

Now, it states in the Tikunei Zohar (Tikun 10, 25b): "אורייתא בלא דחילו ורחימו לא פרחת לעילא — Torah without "yirah" and "ahavah" does not ascend heavenward. Additionally (ibid.): "תורה ומצוה בלא דחילו ורחימו לא יכילת לסלקא ולמיקם קדם יה — Torah and mitzvah without "yirah" and "ahavah" cannot ascend and stand before Hashem.

The Toldos Aharon writes that on the road way to "shamayim" there also exists a small "lul" — between the ramp and the mizbeiach, in which the invalidated offerings are kept — referring to the Tefilos a person prayed without proper ahavah and yirah, which could not ascend all the way to HKB”H. These Tefilos require tikun by means of teshuvah; teshuvah can retroactively supply the "ahavat Hashem" and "yirat Hashem" they lack; thus, making them complete. "Ahavat Hashem" and "yirat Hashem" are alluded to by the letter 'א — representing the Almighty. In this manner, the 'א is connected with the letters לו”ל ("lul") forming the name "ieroel.

To Unify All of One’s Actions for the Sake of the Aleph of the World

Like a loyal servant grasping onto the coattails of Rabbi Aharon, I would like to add a tidbit to his sacred words. First, I would like to address the comparison between the "lul" where the invalidated bird chitas offerings were discarded and the defective Tefilos that failed to ascend to the proper destination due to a lack of adequate "yirah" and "ahavah." Now, our holy sources teach us that these two midos act like two wings — תרין גדפין — carrying the Torah, Mitzvos and Tefilos heavenward. They deduce this fact from the language employed by the Tikunei Zohar: "אלא בחזרת ליעל". In other words, without proper "yirah" and "ahavah," the Torah cannot fly heavenward; just like a bird cannot fly without wings. Here are the words of the Be’er Mayim Chaim (Vayeitzei) expressing this notion:

"כי ידוע כל מצוה ואורייתא בלא דחילו ורחימו לא פרחת לעילא, כי אהבה ויראה נקראין תרין גדפין, והם כמיה כנפיים לעוף שעל ידם הוא מעופף לשמים, ואם יוחסר לעוף כנפיו לא יוכל לעוף למעלה بشום אופן, כן אהבה ויראה הם תרין גדפין, שבהם פורחין התורה והמצוות והתפילה לשמיים, וכאשר נחסר אהבה נשארין בלתי כנפים ועל כן לא פרחת לעילא".
Thus, all the Torah, Mitzvos and Tefilos that could not ascend heavenward due to their lack of wings — proper "yirah" and "ahavah" — are similar to invalidated bird chatas offerings. They cannot fly and ascend heavenward for they are like a bird without wings. For, it is due to a person's transgressions that his "yirat Hashem" and "ahavat Hashem" — his two wings — have become defective. Therefore, they are thrown into the "lul" designated for invalidated bird chatas offerings until they are rectified and rendered whole by this person's total, sincere teshuvah. By means of teshuvah, the deficient "yirah" and "ahavah" are supplied, enabling this person's Torah, Mitzvos and Tefilos to ascend like the pleasing fragrance of a kosher offering before Hashem.

From all that has been said, it should be clear that during the month of Elul, we must rectify all of the deficient Tefilos that could not ascend heavenward. Additionally, all of the Torah and Mitzvos which were performed without the two wings of "yirah" and "ahavah," and thus remained down below, must be rectified by means of total, sincere teshuvah. They, too, remain in the "lul" of invalidated bird chatas offerings until they are provided the two wings necessary for them to ascend heavenward to Hashem.

**One Who Serves G-d by Reviewing What He Has Learned One Hundred and One Times**

Continuing on along this path, let us explain our sacred duty during chodesh Elul: to rectify the invalidated offerings comprised of our Torah, Mitzvos and Tefilos, which lie in the "lul" until we connect the "לול" with the "א" to form "אלו". Let us refer to what we have learned in the Gemara (Chagigah 9b):

>אמר ליה בר הי הי להלול, מאי דכתיב (מלאכי ג יח) ושבתם וראיתם בין צדיק לרשע בין עובד אלקים לאשר לא עבדו, היינו צדיק היינו עובד אלקים, היינו רשע היינו אשר לא עבדו, אמר ליה, עבדו ולא עבדו תרוייהו צדיקי גמורי נינא, ואינו דומה שני פרקו מאה פעמים לשונה פרקו מאה ואחד פעמים.

Bar Hei Hei is asking Hillel a question from a passuk in Malachi which appears to be redundant. The passuk mentions the difference between a righteous person and a wicked person, and between one who serves Hashem and one who does not. Isn't a tzaddik one who serves Hashem, and isn't a rasha one who does not? Hillel answers that one who serves Hashem and one who does not, may both be completely righteous; nevertheless, there is no comparison between the tzaddik who reviews his studies one hundred times to the one who reviews his studies one hundred and one times.

At first glance, this is disconcerting. How can someone who only reviewed his studies a mere one hundred times be classified as "אל עבד" — one who has not served Hashem — simply because he failed to review his studies one more time? Conversely, one who reviewed his studies one hundred and one times is classified as "עבד אלקים" — one who serves G-d — simply because he reviewed his studies one more time. Clearly, it is worthwhile to clarify this matter.

We find an explanation in the Arizal’s Sha’ar HaMitzvos (Vaeschanan). A person who has reviewed his studies one hundred times or less is still under the control of the angel of forgetfulness, known as מ”ס; this name possesses a numerical value of one hundred. Thus, if this person reviews his studies even one more time, he will no longer be controlled by this angel. Here are the words of the Arizal:

>שר הממונה על השכחה נקרא מ”ס...镀锌 שור מ”ס הצרפתית ו”ל, אמר מ”סбит פסקתי את פסקתי מ”ס, אמר מ”סбит פסקתי את מ”ס, אמר מ”סбит פסקתי את משך, אמר מ”סбит פסקתי את נחמה, אמר מ”סбит פסקתי את הערמה, אמר מ”סбит פסקתי את מצווה, אמר מ”סбит פסקתי את הבטלה, אמר מ”סбит פסקתי את הלול.

We find the following addition in the Megaleh Amukos (Nitzavim). A person who reviews his studies one hundred times plus one, empowers the malach מיכא”ל — whose name possesses a numerical value of one hundred and one — to subdue the מ”ס and his powers of forgetfulness.

This is still not very reassuring. It seems unlikely that just because a person failed to review his studies one more time — to surpass the number one hundred — he should fall under the control of the angel of forgetfulness known as מ”ס. Furthermore, the Gemara states (Megillah 7b):

>אמר חכמי ארבעין זימנין ודמי ליה כמאן דמנח בכיסיה — learning something a mere forty times is enough to be considered as if it rests securely in one's pocket; so, even forty times is a considerable achievement.

It is essential to have in mind that one’s learning and performance are for the sake of HKB”H.

I was struck by a wonderful idea in defense of our righteous master, the Arizal. Toward the end of the sefer
Toldos Yaakov Yosef, he presents a magnificent interpretation of this Gemara in the name of his teacher and master, the holy Baal Shem Tov, zy”a. When it states: “<size><em>על דרך שאמר אדוני אבי זקיני זללה</em>,” he explains: “he who forgets even a single item of his Torah learning is considered guilty of death. For great above the heavens is Your kindness.” How can this be? The second passuk speaks of those who perform a mitzvah “l’ishmah”; and the first passuk speaks of those who perform a mitzvah not “l’ishmah.” Yet Rashi has explained that anyone who forgets even a single item of his Torah learning is considered guilty of death.

It is incredulous to think that one who forgets just one item of his Torah study owes his life; however, if this is understood to mean that he has forgotten to include the proper intent and dedication to Hashem, the “זוז” in his studies, it makes perfect sense. This, once again, is the message of the Baal Shem Tov, zy”a, that one must review his studies one hundred times plus one more — i.e. one must incorporate the one and only one, HKB”H, the “זוז” into one’s Torah studies.

Support for this idea is found in the Gemara (Yoma 72b): “רבי יוחנן רמי, כתיב (תהלים נז) כי גדול מעל שמים חסדך, הא כי גדול עד שמים חסדך, והא כי גדול עד שמים חסדך, והא כי גדול עד שמים חסדך, והא כי גדול עד שמים חסדך, והא כי גדול עד שמים חסדך, והא כי גדול עד שמים חסדך, והא כי גדול עלי רווכ,” (Ravé pointed out a contradiction. It is written in one passuk: "For great until the heavens is Your kindness"); and it is written elsewhere: "For great above the heavens is Your kindness.” How can this be? The second passuk speaks of those who perform a mitzvah "l’ishmah"; and the first passuk speaks of those who perform a mitzvah not "l’ishmah." Rashi explains that those who perform "l’ishmah" are rewarded above the heavens, while those who perform not "l’ishmah" are only rewarded until the heavens; for, he performed a mitzvah nevertheless.

In Tzemach Hashem LaTzvi (Ki Sisa), he explains Rava's meaning based on the statement from the Tikunei Zohar cited above: “רבי יוחנן רמי, כתיב (תהלים נז) כי גדול מעל שמים חסדך, הא כי גדול עד שמים חסדך, והא כי גדול עד שמים חסדך, והא כי גדול עד שמים חסדך, והא כי גדול עד שמים חסדך, והא כי גדול עד שמים חסדך, והא כי גדול עלי רווכ,” — without "yirah" and "ahavah" one's Torah cannot ascend to the heavens. For, when a person engages in Torah-study and the performance of Mitzvos not "l’ishmah," the two wings — "yirah" and "ahavah" — are absent; hence, the person's Torah and Mitzvos remain down below unable to ascend to the heavens. Therefore,
"midah k'neged midah" — measure for measure — Hashem's kindness is only manifested "until the heavens." On the other hand, if a person engages in Torah-study "l'shmah," solely for the sake of Hashem, he is filled with "yirah" and "ahavah." In this case, his Torah ascends all the way to the heavens before Hashem. This, too, is "midah k'neged midah"; Hashem's great kindness is manifested "above the heavens."

A similar explanation appears in the sefer Masok MiDvash, authored by Rabbi Yitzchak Pirchi, z"l. He applies this idea to explain the significance of the passuk (Bereishis 1, 6): "ויאמר אלהים לאנקו את שמים ובין המים אשר מעל לרקיע ובין המים אשר تحت לרקיע "— G-d said, "Let there be a firmament between the waters, and let it separate between water and water." G-d made the firmament, and He separated between the waters which were beneath the firmament and the waters which were above the firmament. And it was so. He refers to the elucidation in the Gemara (B.K. 17a): "אין מים אלא תורה, שנאמר והוי כל צמא לכו למים" — there is no water ("mayim") other than Torah, as it states: "Ho, everyone who is thirsty, go to the water."

This then is the interpretation of the passuk: "ויאמר אלהים לאנקו את שמים ובין המים אשר מעל לרקיע ובין המים אשר تحت לרקיע "— in other words, HKB"H created the "rakia" (firmament) to act as a dividing wall, between two types of water — namely Torah-study "I'shmah" and Torah-study not "I'shmah." "ויאמר אלהים לאנקו את שמים ובין המים אשר מעל לרקיע ובין המים אשר تحت לרקיע "— the waters beneath the "rakia" represent Torah not "I'shmah"; it remains beneath the heavens. "ויאמר אלהים לאנקו את שמים ובין המים אשר מעל לרקיע ובין המים אשר تحت לרקיע "— the waters above the "rakia" represent Torah "I'shmah"; it ascends higher and higher until it reaches Hashem.

We can now appreciate the wonderful connection between the words of the Arizal and the Baal Shem Tov, zy"a. He who reviews his studies even one hundred times, but lacks the proper "kavanah," his Torah remains beneath the heavens in Olam HaZeh. Because he failed to dedicate his learning to HKB"H, the "rakia," he remains under the control of the angel of forgetfulness — whose name equals one hundred. If, however, he reviews his studies one hundred and one times — having in mind that he is learning for the sake of Hashem, the "rakia," his Torah ascends to the heavens and reaches Hashem. In this case, the angel of forgetfulness has no power over his Torah, as we state in our Tefilos (Mussaf Rosh HaShanah): "אחד equip本金_method Mohamed" — there is no forgetfulness in the presence of Your "Kisei HaKavod."

This ties in very nicely with what we have learned in the Gemara (Pesachim 50a). Rav Yosef, the son of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, took ill and his neshamah left him. When he regained full strength, he related to his father that he heard them saying the following in heaven: "אשרי מי שבא לפני תהלמים — "Fortunate is he who comes here (לcame) and his learning is in his hand." The Megaleh Amukos (Nitzavim) explains the allusion in this declaration as follows: The word "לcame" possesses a numerical value of one hundred and one, alluding to the fact that this person arriving in "shamayim" has reviewed his studies one hundred and one times. This being the case, he is assured: "והם יזו פורים פורים הוי לcame" — that all that he has learned will remain in his possession and will not be controlled by the angel of forgetfulness.

Based on what we have learned, the message is clear. Since he engaged in Torah-study for the sake of Hashem, the "אזהה", his Torah ascends to the heavens reaching Hashem, in keeping with the passuk: "וי תם מצה טפיה תמך "— for great above the heavens is Your kindness. Therefore when he departs this world and goes up to the world above: "והם יזו פורים פורים הוי לcame" — the Torah he has studied, that has already ascended, awaits him.

The Letter 'א of אֶלּוֹד Represents the "אזהה" Missing from the Torah the Mitzvos

At this point, we can shed some light on the words of the Toldos Aharon. Our sacred task during the month of Elul is to join the letter 'א with the letters יולין to form the combination אֶלּוֹד. We must do so to remedy all of the Torah, Mitzvos and Tefilos that failed to ascend to heaven and remained in the "lul," because they lacked the two wings necessary to elevate them — "yirah" and "ahavah." As explained, the lack of the letter 'א, representing the "אזהה", must be corrected. These Torah, Mitzvos and Tefilos lacked the element of "I'shmah"; they did not satisfy the criterion of "אזהה. As a consequence, they must be rectified by means of teshuvah — connecting them with the letter 'א, HKB"H, the one and only true "אזהה in the universe. By successfully making this connection, they will ascend from the "lul" to their proper place in "shamayim" before Hashem.
Obviously, this ties in beautifully with the name of the month אֶלְעָל, which is an acronym for אֶ'ני לֶדַודי וּדַודִי לֶי. For, the whole purpose of connecting these letters is to retroactively repair all of our Torah, Mitzvos and Tefilos that were left behind stuck in the "lul." Through our avodah in the month of Elul, we ensure that all of our actions satisfy the criterion of being solely for the sake of Hashem — reflecting the intimacy of: אֶ'ני לֶדַודי וּדַודִי לֶי.

We can now better appreciate the message of the Bnei Yissaschar. The forty days extending from Rosh Chodesh Elul to Yom HaKippurim constitute a mikveh capable of purifying Yisrael with its forty se’ah. Seeing as it is our responsibility during these forty days to rectify all of the Torah, Mitzvos and Tefilos that were not performed "l’shmah," they clearly require taharah. They must be cleansed of the tremendous defect of improper and inadequate "kavanah" — not "l’shmah" — resembling "pigul."

Therefore, HKB”H with His infinite mercy and kindness gave us the forty days from Rosh Chodesh Elul to Yom HaKippurim to remedy these invalidated offerings that remained stuck in the "lul" by connecting them with HKB”H, the "aleph" of the world. In the merit of teshuvah, HKB”H will purify them of all impurities and defects just like a mikveh. Thus, they will be worthy of ascending to HKB”H like a pleasant fragrance.

Now, this provides us with a very nice understanding of the allusion presented by the Panim Yafos regarding the Mishnah we began with: "נתנו לשתולה חמשה ועשר — a "besulah" is afforded twelve months. In other words, the zodiac sign of Elul — the "besulah" — if afforded from "shamayim" the power to rectify all twelve months of the preceding year. This, indeed, is our sacred duty; it is our task to rectify our Torah, Mitzvos and Tefilos from the entire past year that were incapable of ascending to the heavens and were forced to remain in the "lul." In the merit of accomplishing this tikun, may we merit a "ktivah va’chatimah tovah" and a year of "geulah" and "yeshuah" — swiftly, in our times. Amen.