

KOL TODA



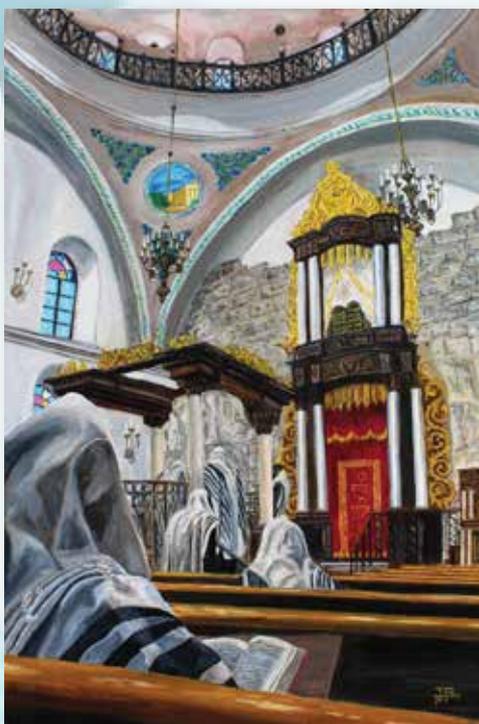
Gateways to Gratitude: Giving Thanks to Hashem

ELUL

A MONTH OF ELEVATION AND GRATITUDE

The days of Elul are special days of Heavenly compassion and closeness to Hashem.

During this month we read the haftarat of "Shiva d'Nechemasa" – the



seven comforting prophecies that we hope to see fulfilled in the very near future. One usually assumes that these readings are not related to the month of Elul but to the mourning of the month of Av. Upon closer examination, it becomes clear that these readings are in fact very closely connected to the month of Elul, so much so, that they should be in the forefront of our mind during this very special month.

The origin of the significance of the month of Elul as a month of closeness

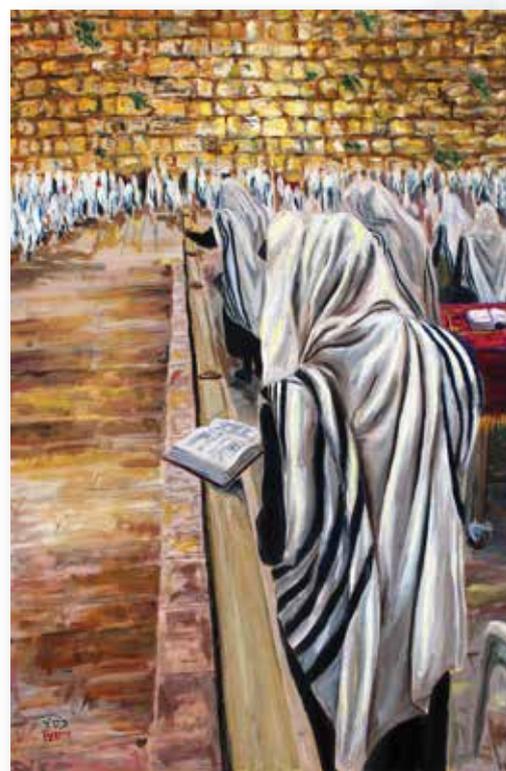
to Hashem and teshuva is from the time of the Sin of the Golden Calf. On the first day of Elul, Moshe ascended the mountain to ask for forgiveness for this sin. For the entire month, the Jewish nation spent the days repenting and fasting, and on Yom Kippur their

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prayers were answered with Moshe's descent, bearing the Second Tablets. As a result of this, these forty days from Rosh Chodesh Elul until Yom Kippur are infused with Heavenly compassion and are conducive to attaining exceptional closeness to Hashem.

The root of the Sin of the Golden Calf was lack of appreciation of G-d's kindnesses, as is described in Prikei d'Rabbi Eliezer: "Yisroel forgot the

wonders I did for them in Egypt and on the Sea of Reeds and they made a foreign god for themselves." This is described also in Tehilim (106:19-21): "They made a calf in Horeb and prostrated themselves before a molten image. They exchanged their Glory for the likeness of a grass-eating ox. They forgot God, their Savior, Who wrought great deeds in Egypt." The root of their sin was lack of conscious acknowledgment of all the many good things Hashem did for them that revealed the extent of His goodness and love for them. This caused them to mistakenly



think that worshipping the Golden Calf could bring them greater success.

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Thus, the remedy of the primary cause of this major historical sin, that is unfortunately still extant within us, is noticing and appreciating all of Hashem's kindnesses. To feel tangibly His love and goodness, and as a result of this to strengthen our commitment to His service, and to create a positive - loving - emotional relationship with Him .

This is exactly how the Alter of Kelm defined the objective of the month of Elul. He writes as follows: "The month of Elul is the most desirable of months as we see from the signs of the zodiac, as the Ramban writes, the zodiac sign of this month is a maiden, indicating the unique love between Hashem and the children of Israel. Hashem designated this month for them to arouse their hearts to increase and intensify their love of their Father in Heaven and come closer to Him" (Chochma U'mussar, volume 1, 85). Indeed, the earlier sages tell us that the name of the month – Elul – is an acronym of the verse "Ani Ledodi

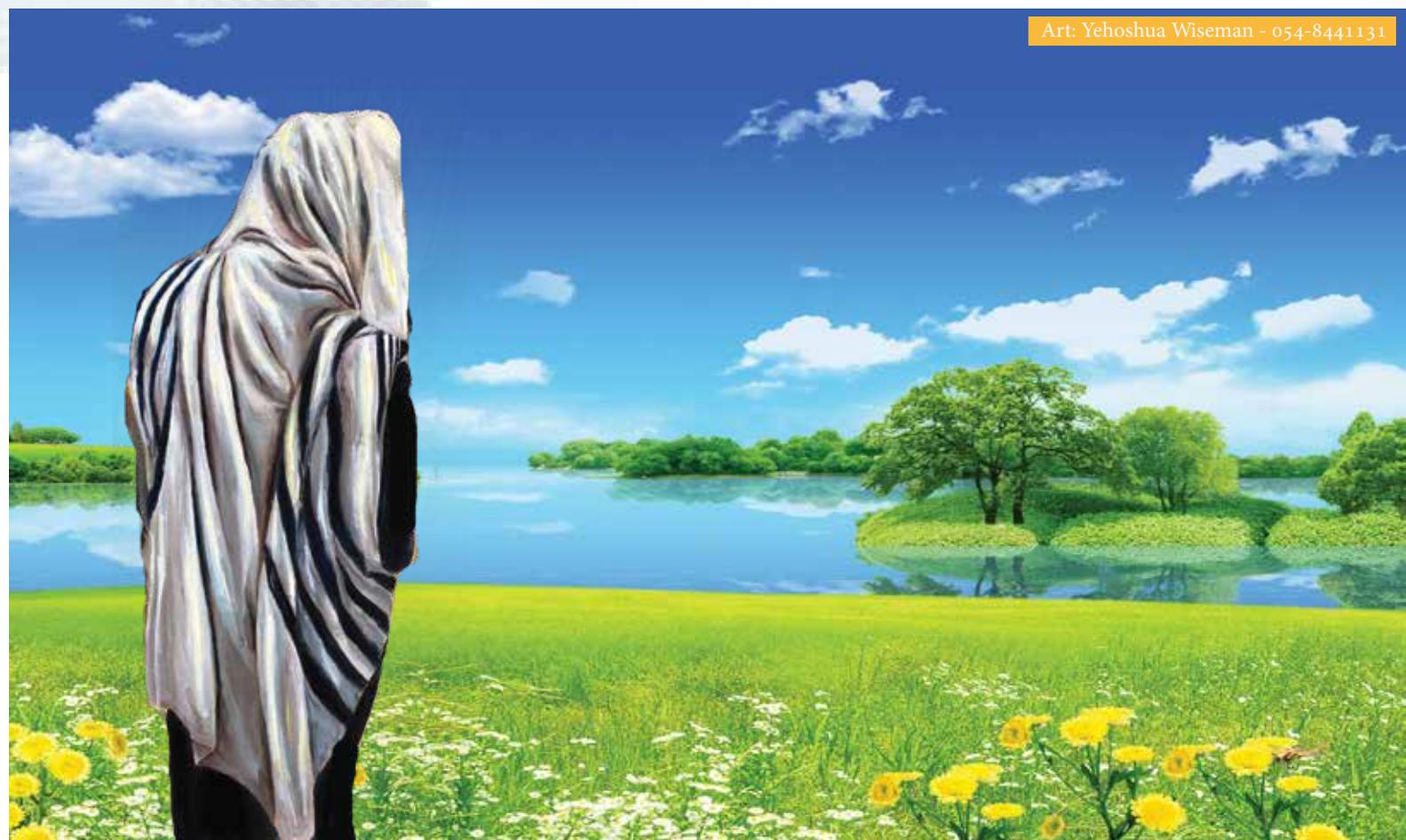
Vedodi Li" – "I am to my Beloved as my Beloved is to me". Our focus during these days should be to come closer to our Beloved Father in Heaven, to experience fully His love and kindness and to serve Him with elevated joy.

Accordingly, the haftarot of consolation and comfort are most appropriate for this period. In these prophesies Hashem reveals his great love for us, such as (Yeshayahu 49:14-15, Haftara of Parashat Eikev): "And Zion said, 'Hashem has forsaken me, and my Lord has forgotten me.'" To this Hashem answers: "Can a woman forget her baby and not feel compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, but I will not forget you." With these words Hashem discloses that even in times of the greatest darkness, when His "face" is hidden from us, His unquenchable love for us is always present. Indeed, an ideal way to achieve the closeness to Hashem that is the objective of the month of Elul, is to read and internalize the words of consolation of the prophets that reveal Hashem's amazing love for us.

Focusing on these words of the prophets will bring us to see this love of Hashem in our personal daily life. Perceiving the many kindnesses that surround us continuously is the key to closeness to Him. Nothing helps a person feel the goodness of Hashem and His exceptional love toward us, more than noticing His many kindnesses and expressing heartfelt gratitude for them. This is the way to come closer to Him all year round and especially during the month of Elul.

May we merit seeing the fulfillment of these delightful heart-lifting prophesies, such as is brought at the end of the haftarah of parshat Eikev that the day will yet come when the entire world will be full of enthusiastic wholehearted gratitude to Hashem permeated with the sublime elevating joy of songs of praise : "For Hashem will comfort Zion, He will console all its ruins; He will make her desert like Paradise and its wasteland like the garden of Hashem; joy and happiness will be found there, thanksgiving and the sound of song" (Yeshayahu 51:3).

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Tzaddikim Thank Hashem

Once, Rav Dov Yoffe zt"l, the renown mashgiach of Kfar Chassidim, needed to be hospitalized. This was especially difficult for him, but he said: "When a child falls and is hurt, his mother kisses him and he feels better. Why is this? The pain is still there? The answer is, yes, the pain is still there. Whatever hurt is still painful, but the motherly demonstration of love changes totally the child's perception of the pain, easing it considerably. So too, I am now in pain, but remembering Hashem's love for me makes it bearable and even acceptable ..."

Rav Yoffe was once asked how to convey to one's children feelings of joy and fulfillment while living in large families, difficult living conditions and tight budgets.

He answered:

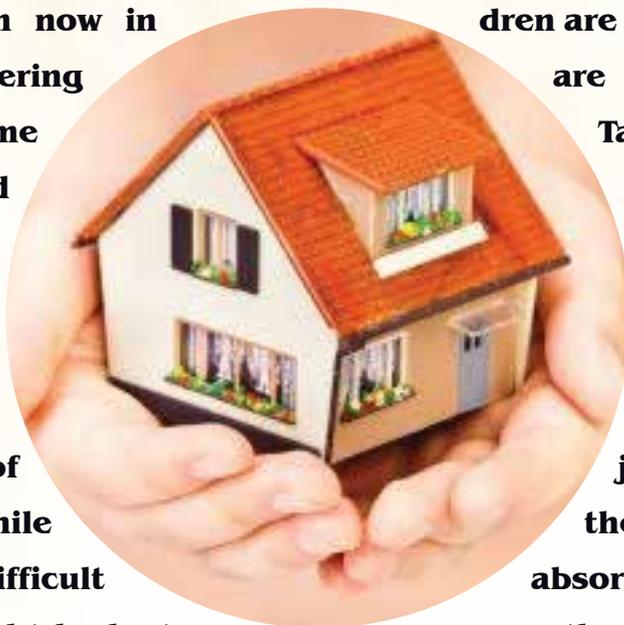
"We must always live with awareness of Hashem's kindnesses, reminding ourselves day and night to thank Him for our healthy limbs, sound mind and the gift of the Torah

that transforms our world into a Gan Eden! When we remember these wonderful things, all other issues dissipate. We must remember what we have and rejoice with it – it is all so incredibly wonderful!" Rav Yoffe also recommended reading Orchos Tzadikim, Sha'ar Hazechira where 30 points are mentioned that should be reviewed constantly.

Then he continued:

"Do you know the Shenker family? Their children are known far and wide. The sons are famous Roshei Yeshiva and Talmidei Chachomim. One of their sons told me that although the financial means of the family was always extremely meager; his parents always radiated joy and thankfulness for what they had. This is what they absorbed and this is what made them into what they are."

The Vilna Gaon's brother used to say: "If I'd live thousands of years, I'd not have enough time to thank Hashem for even one of His kindnesses ... so, when do I have time to complain?"



A Word of Gratitude

"True success in the service of Hashem starts with the realization that even this success is a gift from Hashem."

[Pri Ha'aretz, Shoftim]

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