

❖ PARSHAT SHOFTIM

"For man is [like] the tree of the field" (20:19) Man is compared to a tree. A tree produces fruits which in turn cause other fruit producing trees to grow. In like manner, we are not to suffice with personal growth in matters of Torah and good deeds. We must produce fruits with seeds for new trees and new fruits. We must exert positive influence upon our environment - upon friends, acquaintances, and anyone we happen to meet - that they, too, produce "fruits". This will cause all of creation to blossom, thus bringing about the redemption.

The Talmud lists a number of signs for the approaching redemption and concludes that the most manifest sign is when "You, mountains of Israel, you shall shoot forth your branches and yield your fruit..." (Ezekiel 36:8) To be like the trees of the field, that "the shoots taken from you will be like unto you," to blossom and cause a chain-reaction of self-perpetuating fruits of Torah and mitzvot in oneself and others, is an assured way to bring about the speedy coming of Moshiach. This applies especially to the study and application of the teachings of "Primiyyut Hatorah" - the deeper, inner dimension of the Torah - which is referred to as the "Tree of Life"...(From: Insights on the Geula, Chabad in Cyberspace)

"Is the tree of the field a man that it should enter the siege before you?" (20:19) QUESTION: The Gemara (Ta'anit 7a) interprets the words "ha'adam eitz hasadeh" literally - "man is the tree of the field" - actually comparing people to trees, and learns that just as one is careful with the fruit one eats, one should be careful from whom one learns Torah. What lesson can man derive from the tree?

ANSWER: Unlike all other plants, which wither after their season, the tree weathers the storm, remaining in existence throughout all seasons and for many years. The tree derives its uniqueness from its root system: the stronger the roots, the healthier the tree. The roots of the Jew are his faith in Hashem and attachment to authentic Torah teachings, as conveyed to us by our forefathers, the patriarchs Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. Every Jew is exposed to many different "seasons" during his lifetime. Unfortunately some succumb to temptation and forfeit their affiliation with Hashem and Torah. Contingent on how strong a Jew is "rooted" is his ability to be a staunch Torah-observant Jew throughout his entire lifetime. (From: VeDibarta Bam by Rabbi Moshe Bogomilsky)

❖ ELUL

Our Sages have noted that the word "Elul" is an acronym for a number of verses in the Tanach (Bible). One such verse is "Ina leyado vesamti lecha - it chanced to happen and I set aside a place for you." This verse refers to the cities of refuge the Jews were commanded to establish. Who fled to the cities of refuge? A person who had killed someone unintentionally. There he was protected from the relatives of the victim, who could not exact retribution. An accidental killer had to uproot himself and leave his home and family. His exile atoned for the great sin he had committed. An intentional murderer was also offered temporary sanctuary in the city of refuge. No one was allowed to touch him until his sentence was determined by the court. A person who commits a sin damages his G-dly soul, extracts its vitality and "spills its blood." Symbolically, a sinner is a "murderer." What does a murderer do? He flees to the cities of refuge.

The month of Elul is the year's "city of refuge." In Elul we assess our conduct, identify misdeeds and get rid of bad habits. Returning to G-d in teshuva atones for our sins in the same way exile in a city of refuge atoned for murder. When a person does teshuva he is protected from the "blood

avenger" - the Evil Inclination. It simply becomes stripped of its power to entice. Even a person who sinned intentionally can find refuge in the month of Elul. Just as the city of refuge protected an intentional killer until his trial, so too does Elul provide sanctuary to an intentional sinner until Rosh Hashana. Of course, if he repents before then, he is forgiven.

Let us therefore take advantage of this special month to correct our undesirable behavior, for our actions have the power to make amends. And surely we will all be inscribed in the Book of the Righteous for a good and sweet year to come.(From: Lchaim 5759, #581)

THE REBBE WRITES To the Sons and Daughters of Our People Israel, Everywhere, G-d bless you all!

Greeting and Blessing:

The month of Elul, bringing the current year to a close, is -- as is well known -- the Month of Divine Mercy and Grace. It is also the time for every Jew to make a soul-searching self-evaluation (cheshbon hanefesh) in regard to the outgoing year -- of all the achievements and failures and missed opportunities; it is the month of Teshuva (Repentance) -- regret for the past and good resolutions for the future, by way of preparation for the coming year, with a view to making certain that the new year will be a better one in every respect.

The auspicious nature of the month of Elul is explained by the Alter Rebbe, author of the Tanya and Shulchan Aruch, by means of the parable of the "King in the Field": When a king is about to return to his royal city, the inhabitants of the city go out to meet the king and to welcome him in the field. Then everyone who so wishes may come out to greet the king, and the king receives everyone graciously and shows a friendly face to everyone... Later on, when the king proceeds to the city, they follow... So in the month of Elul, G-d makes His countenance to shine on you, which refers to the emanation of the Thirteen Attributes, that it be in a manner of face to face.

Thus, the month of Elul is a time of (great responsibility as well as of) great opportunity, since this is the time of the year when G-d causes His Thirteen Attributes of Mercy to shine forth, making it possible for every Jew -- regardless of how the situation was in the past -- to attach oneself to G-d with heart and soul, in a way that induces action, expressed in a substantial increase (in quantity and quality) in the study of the Torah and in the fulfillment of its mitzvot.

May G-d grant that each and all of us should take the fullest advantage of this auspicious period in all that has been said above, And reflect with a soulful reflection, to the extent of it permeating and guiding the daily conduct, on the words of David, the Sweet Singer of the Songs of our People Israel, in the Psalm that we begin to recite on Rosh Chodesh Elul, twice daily: "G-d is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear?... my oppressors and enemies have stumbled and fallen; if an army besiege me, my heart shall not fear... now my head is raised... teach me, O G-d, Your way... hope unto G-d, be strong and let your heart be fortified and hope unto G-d..."

And G-d our King since the days of old will work salvation in the midst of the earth, including that in the radiance of the countenance of the King the Source of Life everyone will be blessed with a good and sweet year, both materially and spiritually, With esteem and blessing for being "written and sealed for good, for a good and sweet year". (From: L'Chaim 5756, #431, Free Translation from Hebrew, Rosh Chodesh Elul, 5735 [1975])

THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL ARE CALLED ERETZ CHEIFETZ, FOR THEY POSSESS NUMEROUS "PRECIOUS ARTICLES" IN THE LOVE AND FEAR OF G-D, AND IN FINE CHARACTER TRAITS. BRINGING THESE TRAITS TO THE SURFACE DEPENDS ENTIRELY UPON THE INDIVIDUAL STIMULATING THEM. IT IS CLEAR THAT THROUGHOUT THE EARTH ARE WELLSPRINGS OF LIVING WATER; THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THEM IS ONLY THAT SOME ARE NEAR THE SURFACE, OTHERS FAR. EVERYTHING THEREFORE DEPENDS ON THE WELL-DIGGER, HIS PATIENCE AND PERSEVERANCE. NOW SINCE RATZON ("WILL") IS A SUPERIOR FACULTY THAT "ISSUES DECREES," RULES OVER ALL THE OTHER FACULTIES, * AND COMPELS THEM TO ACT ACCORDING TO ITS ORDERS - IT FOLLOWS THAT THE ESSENTIAL AVODA IS TO AROUSE ONE'S WILL TO EXERCISE ITS EFFECT - BOTH UPON THE PERSON HIMSELF AND UPON OTHERS. (FROM REBBE'S HAYOM YOM ELUL 2)

A Jew must have in his own personal life both "judges" and "officers" - "judges" to decide on the proper mode of behavior to follow, and "officers" to ensure that the decision is acted upon.

-The Rebbe