
During the month of Elul, as we prepare for Rosh Hashanah, we can easily fall into a state of despair.

Rabbi Y. Klein

We look back at the past year and we think: Last Rosh Hashanah, I made promises. I made resolutions. I said, "I'm finally going to go to that shiur every day. I'm going to volunteer for that organization. I'm going to join that Shmiras HaLashon group."

And here we are, almost a year later, and we feel that we haven't accomplished nearly as much as we had hoped.

But there is a fundamental idea we need to remember during Elul.

Hashem doesn't look only at where we are today. He looks at the direction we are headed.

Perhaps you are not yet ready to join that Sunday kollel. Perhaps you can't commit to learning with a Torah partner or to finally invite that Baal teshuva couple. Perhaps you are not yet on the spiritual level you wish you were.

But as prepare for Rosh Hashanah, we should not think only about who we are today. We should think about who we want to become. What are our goals for the upcoming year? What am I yearning to achieve?

More important than where you are, is where you are headed.

There is a fascinating illustration of this idea in halacha.

Imagine that shekiah, sunset, is at 7:17 p.m. You look outside, and it is still bright. But halachically, it is already considered night. After shekiah, as the Mishnah Berurah discusses, you should not really daven Mincha. There are many halachos and mitzvos that are dependent on daytime, and after sunset, they no longer apply.

And yet, when you look outside, you see daylight.

Now look at the opposite situation.

At alos hashachar, at dawn, it is still pitch black outside. Your friend could be standing right in front of you, and you might not even see him. And yet, halachically, it is already considered daytime, and there are many mitzvos that can be performed at that point.

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So Think about this.

At sunset, it is bright outside, yet halachically it is night.
At dawn, it is dark outside, yet halachically it is day.

The Alter of Slabodka derives from this a remarkable insight: Things are not always judged by what they look like right now. They are judged by where they are headed.

At dawn, although it is still dark, the sun is about to rise. Light is coming. Therefore, halachically, it is considered day.

At sunset, although there is still light, the sun is disappearing. Darkness is coming. Therefore, it is considered night.

This is one of the most important ideas to internalize during Elul.

Elul is not about proving that we have perfected ourselves. It is not about proving that we never stumbled the entire year.

It is about setting the direction for the future, and that is what is important when we are judged on Rosh Hashna.

If you ask a financial advisor to recommend a stock with tremendous potential for growth, he won't look at how much the company is earning today. He will look at its potential.

Amazon is a classic example. When Amazon went public in 1997, it was losing money. In 1996, it lost \$5.8 million. But investors were willing to buy the stock because its revenue was growing rapidly, and they believed Jeff Bezos was building an empire. And investors that believed in its potential were rewarded handsomely. If you invested \$10,000 in Amazon stock in 1997 when it went public, it would be worth \$35.3 million dollars today.

Wall Street rewards potential. The market doesn't value a company just by what it is earning today. It also considers what investors believe that company can become tomorrow.

The same is true as we prepare for judgment on Rosh Hashanah.

Hashem certainly looks at what we accomplished this past year. But He also sees something far deeper: our potential. He sees not only who we are, but more importantly who we want to become.

There is a beautiful story told about the Telshe Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Elya Meir Bloch.

He was once standing with his talmidim at a train station in Cleveland. There were two trains sitting next to each other. One had a sign that said "New York," and the other had a sign that said "San Francisco."

He turned to his students and he asked, "How far apart are these two trains?"

They looked at the trains and they answered, "Rebbe, about ten feet."

He said, "Wrong. They are 3,000 miles apart."

He explained?

"Don't look at where they are now. Look at where they are destined to go."

The trains are physically next to each other, but they are heading in completely different directions.

And that is the message of Elul.

It doesn't only matter where you are. It matters which direction you are heading.

Maybe today you are not the person you want to be.

But Ask yourself: Where do I want go?

What am yearning to achieve in the upcoming year.

Because if you are heading in the right direction, you have already begun the journey.