

עלי דשח
ALEI DESHE

The Gutman Edition



RAV SHAUL ALTER

Moadim

Elul - Tishrei

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Introduction

With Hashem's help, we are pleased to present the *sefer* ***Alei Deshe on Elul and Tishrei*** — a selection of talks and *derashos* given by the Gerrer Rosh HaYeshiva, Harav Hagaon Rav Shaul Alter *shlita*, relating to the *Yamim Nora'im* from Rosh Chodesh Elul through Simchas Torah.

Since 5781, we have published ***Alei Deshe***, a weekly newsletter of the Rosh Yeshiva's talks translated to English, and with Hashem's help, this *gilyon* has been well received around the world. At the request of many—and with encouragement from the Rosh Yeshiva, who emphasized many times the great benefit the *tzibbur* has from this *gilyon*—we have decided to compile a *sefer* on the *moadim* based on the numerous previously published *gilyonos*.

The talks delivered by the Rosh Yeshiva during these special *yamim tovim* are full of *chiddushei Torah* on topics of *Chassidus*, *cheshbon hanefesh*, developing good *middos*, connecting to Hashem, *teshuvah*, and *emunah*. These talks were spoken with emotion and in a clear, penetrating style, imbued with a true love for Klal Yisrael; their purpose was to inspire the listeners in the *avodah* of the *Yamim Nora'im*.

This *sefer* was compiled from a careful selection of the talks that appeared in years of *gilyonos*. They are adapted for the reader's benefit, while the content and spirit remain faithful to the source. The English translation was done professionally and with care, and minor clarifications added where necessary, with the goal of making the content accessible to the general public.

Additionally, this *sefer* includes many of the Rosh Yeshiva's letters written to individuals. These were selected and translated from the letters published by *Machon Ivra D'dasha* in Hebrew.

If anything is not understandable, the mistake is ours.

We would like to take this opportunity to express profound gratitude to all those who took part in publishing the Alei Deshe *gilyonos*, from which these talks were culled.

First and foremost, heartfelt appreciation to the premier supporter of the project, **Rav Yosef Wassertheil**, who together with his *chashuve* family, were the initiators and supporters of these *gilyonos*. Their part in both the substance and the spirit of this undertaking is truly priceless.

Likewise, sincere heartfelt gratitude is extended to the generous people who have taken part in supporting and distributing the *gilyonos* over the years: **Rav Shaul Wassertheil and family, Rav Pesach Kohenstam and family, and Rav Zev Alter and family.**

In particular, we must express our heartfelt gratitude to the patron of this edition, **Rav Yehudah Leib Avraham Gutman and family**, whose generous support made the publication of this *sefer* possible.

With quiet devotion and mighty love of Torah, they took it upon themselves to support the printing and distribution of this edition, as part of the larger initiative of spreading the Torah of the Rosh Yeshiva *shlita*. May their patronage bring *berachah* and *hatzlachah* to them and their children, *berachos* in health and *parnassah*, and *nachas* from all their descendants for many years to come.

We hope that this *sefer* will awaken us and strengthen our *avodah* for these holy days. And may it be a *zechus* for the Rosh Yeshiva *shlita* and his family, whose Torah and devotion continue to illuminate the path of so many.

Maareches Alei Deshe

Yisroel Yosef Rottenberg — Yitzchok Rosenthal

Elul

Lessons from the Shofar

Questioning our Avodah¹

We are accustomed to reading the pasuk (Amos 3:6), אִם יִתְקַע שׁוֹפָר, בְּעִיר וְעַם לֹא יִחָרְדוּ — *If the shofar is sounded in a city, and the people will not tremble!* with an exclamation point: Even if the *shofar* is blown in the city, the people will not tremble! We must change the punctuation to a question mark: Is it possible that the *shofar* will be blown and people will not tremble?

During Elul our job is to question our *avodas Hashem*. When considering the Days of Judgment ahead, it is easy to think we are okay; we daven, we learn Torah, we serve Hashem; but in truth, we are too comfortable with ourselves. We must realize that we are still lacking in our *avodas Hashem*.

1. Ki Savo 5777.

Lessons from L'Dovid

Understanding Hashem's Coronation²

We tend to think of the great tzaddikim of our nation with our own limited faculties. When we read Sefer Shmuel, it can appear to us that Dovid Hamelech was a typical king, who spent his time waging wars and protecting his sovereign borders. But our Rebbe's have taught us that this is not the case, and we must be careful to avoid falling into this trap. These people were *kedoshim* and *tehorim* beyond our comprehension, and they were much deeper than our shallow, childish understanding of Tanach. Turning these people into ordinary mortals degrades their stature and defiles their holiness.

We can catch glimpses of Dovid Hamelech's true personality by careful contemplation of his words in Tehillim. There is always much depth beneath the surface of the *pesukim*, much more than can be seen by a superficial glance.

לך אָמַר לְבִי בִקְשׁוּ פָנֶיךָ ה' אֲבִקֵּשׁ.

On Your behalf, my heart has said, "Seek my presence." Your presence, Hashem, do I seek (Tehillim 27:8).

Rav Chaim Vital offers us a window into David Hamelech's world. The Gemara (*Berachos* 3b) relates that the *chachmei Yisrael* would come before Dovid Hamelech daily, reporting that Klal Yisrael needed sustenance, and every day the same discussion would ensue. But why was it necessary for the *chachmei Yisrael* to come each day? Whatever Dovid Hamelech said yesterday should apply today as well.

Dovid Hamelech answers this question: לך אָמַר לְבִי בִקְשׁוּ פָנֶי — *it is for Your sake, Hashem, that I instructed them to seek my presence.* When they come before me, they will learn to appreciate *malchus*. They will

2. Shoftim 5777.

understand how to approach the King of Kings, for אֶת פְּנִיָּהּ ה' אֲבַקֵּשׁ — *Your face, Hashem do I seek.*

Dovid Hamelech was not a typical king looking to strengthen his monarchy; he understood, as Chazal say (*Berachos* 58a), מלכותא דארעא כעין, מלכותא דרקינא — *the earthly royal protocol is a microcosm of the Heavenly royal protocol.* By ruling with pomp and circumstance, Dovid would enable people to see a small hint of Hashem's Glory.

The *berachah* recited when seeing a Jewish king is שחלק מכוּבוֹ ליראיו — *Who has apportioned from His own honor to those who fear Him.* Dovid Hamelech wished for those who saw him to witness Hashem's honor. Inside, he was humble and brokenhearted.

In the times of Rav Meir Don Plotzki, author of the *Kli Chemdah*, Reformers made a play called "The Brokenhearted." Rav Meir Don called all of the town to a *drashah* in the large shul. With tears running down his cheeks, he described at great length how Dovid Hamelech was the true brokenhearted soul.³

As we approach Rosh Hashanah, we must know what it means to be *maskilim* Hashem. To coronate the true King, we must picture in detail the royal protocols of human kings. We don't live with a monarchy that is כעין מלכותא דרקינא, but we must try to imagine it. This is why we read the parshah of שׁוּם תַּשִּׁים עָלֶיךָ מֶלֶךְ — *Appoint upon yourself a king* (*Devarim* 17:15), during Elul. When we learn about crowning a king, we can crown Hashem as our King on Rosh Hashanah.

In Eretz Yisrael, in times of old, they read the Torah according to a three-year cycle. They did not need to read *Parshas Shoftim* during Elul, because they lived constantly with the sovereignty of Hashem. As Chazal put it sharply (*Kesubos* 110b), anyone living inside Eretz Yisrael can be described as living with the Higher Authority. Although we live in Eretz Yisrael today, we are distant from this; we must read *Parshas Shoftim* before Rosh Hashanah.

3. This was spoken from a kindred soul. R' Meir Don endured terrible suffering in his life. While he always smiled and radiated joy, inside, his heart was broken. Joy is no contradiction to a broken heart.

A Dwelling Place for the Shechinah⁴

אַחַת שְׁאַלְתִּי מֵאֵת ה' אוֹתָהּ אֶבְקֶשׁ שְׁבִתִּי בְּבֵית ה' כָּל יְמֵי חַיִּי לַחֲזוֹת בְּנֹעַם
ה' וּלְבַקֵּר בְּהִיכָלוֹ.

One thing I asked of Hashem, that shall I seek: That I dwell in the house of Hashem all the days of my life, to behold the sweetness of Hashem and visit in His Sanctuary (Tehillim 27:4).

Once we are asking to *dwell in Hashem's house*, what is the additional request to *visit*?⁵

Dwelling in the house of Hashem is a *tefillah* that our homes be holy and pure so they can serve as a resting place of the *Shechinah*, and we will then live in Hashem's house. This is a continual request; we seek this *כָּל יְמֵי חַיִּי* — all the days of our lives. “To visit His Sanctuary” refers to visiting the Beis Hamikdash at specific times.

מִי הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר בָּנָה בֵּית חֹדֶשׁ וְלֹא חֲנָכּוֹ וְגו'. וּמִי הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר נָטַע כֶּרֶם וְלֹא חָלְלוֹ וְגו'. וּמִי הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר אָרַשׁ אִשָּׁה וְלֹא לָקַחָהּ וְגו' וַיָּשֶׁב לְבֵיתוֹ כִּי יָמוּת בַּמִּלְחָמָה — *Who is the man who has built a new house and not inaugurated it ... And who is the man who has planted a vineyard and not redeemed it ... And who is the man who has betrothed a woman and not married her? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the war (Devarim 20:5-7).*

It would be particularly upsetting if any of these men fell in battle, because their new endeavors would end up in another person's hands.⁶ On the other hand, war by its very nature causes a great deal of suffering. “The sword consumes one way or another” (Shmuel II 11:25). Why is the Torah concerned about this form of anguish more than any other?

The person who is *יָרָא וְרָךְ הַלֵּב* — *fearful and faint-hearted* on account of his sins—is also sent home from the battlefield. The Gemara (*Sotah* 44b) understands this to include even someone who is guilty of talking between

4. *Shoftim* 5777.

5. Most *mefarshim* explain, in accordance with the simple *pshat*, that בָּקַר here does not mean to visit but rather to ponder and investigate.

6. *Rashi*.

donning the *tefillin shel rosh* and the *tefillin shel yad*. As explained by the *Sfas Emes*⁷, the *shel yad* represents action, and the *shel rosh* represents Torah study. The actions of the hand must conform closely to the teachings of the Torah, and one who interrupts between the *shel rosh* and the *shel yad* breaks this connection. This is especially important for soldiers engaged in a *milchemes mitzvah*.

Alternatively, perhaps the *shel rosh* signifies the submission of the mind to the Torah, while the *shel yad* signifies the submission of the heart—the submission of the *taavos* which motivate action. For a soldier to be worthy for battle in Hashem's army, his mind must be in complete control of his *taavos*; his actions had to conform fully to the dictates of the Torah. As the *Sfas Emes* observes,⁸ soldiers tainted with sin are referred to as *רַךְ הַלֵּב* — *faint-hearted*, because they did not subjugate their other heart—their *yetzer hara*—to the Will of Hashem; the soldiers were required to be of one strong, unified heart for Hashem.⁹

These soldiers were of outstanding character and were completely free of *aveirah*. When such people marry, build homes, and plant vineyards, they do so to fulfill the will of Hashem. The Torah is concerned that the marriages and homes built by these extraordinary people will be ruined with their deaths and taken over by people of lesser greatness. No battle losses can parallel such devastation.

Every *chassan* must be aware that the *yetzer hara* is battling constantly to prevent his home from being a dwelling place for the *Shechinah*. The ammunition effective in this battle is *קדש עצמך במותר לך* — *Sanctify yourself with what is permitted to you*.¹⁰ As my father explained,¹¹ the fearful soldier is portrayed by Chazal as being fearful of *עבירות שבידו*, the *aveiros* in his

7. *Shoftim* 5651.

8. *Shoftim* 5647.

9. The word *לב* when spelled with a double *beis*, *לֵב*, is understood by Chazal to represent two opposing forces within a person, his good heart, the *yetzer tov*, and his bad heart, the *yetzer hara* (see *Berachos* 54a).

10. See *Ivra D'dasha* vol. 1 pp. 444-448.

11. *Pnei Menachem* p. 98.

hand—in his possession¹²—a reference to areas left to his prerogative. We must not squander the opportunity to raise the mundane and make it holy.¹³

Chazal tell us (*Sotah* 17a) that when a husband and wife are *zocheh*, the *Shechinah* dwells between them. This is reality. We must be sure that we do not, *chas v'shalom*, drive the *Shechinah* away from our homes.

There are three partners in the creation of every child: two parents and Hashem (*Kiddushin* 30b). This partnership begins at the wedding, and its basis is to establish upright generations, loyal to Hashem. In a partnership, no partner may introduce changes to the terms without the approval of all partners.¹⁴ We must keep this awesome responsibility in mind as we set out to create a holy resting place for the *Shechinah*.

The Torah's instructions for battle apply to every day of our lives. The *Chovos HaLevavos* relates:¹⁵ A *chassid* met some men carrying away the spoils of war after a great victory over their enemies. He remarked, "You have returned successfully from the minor battle. Now prepare for the major battle!" "What is the major battle?" they asked. He replied, "The war of the *yetzer*."

We are always in a state of war against the *yetzer hara*. A person can build his home, and die spiritually in the battle with the *yetzer hara*. He may be alive physically, but he is as good as dead. A different man has taken over his home and fields—he himself is that other man.¹⁶ He has assumed a different identity. He must keep on fighting until he gets the upper hand and gains control over his inclinations.

12. See *Rashi* to Bereishis 32:14 and elsewhere.

13. See *Pnei Menachem*, p. 112, *l'chasan*.

14. *Choshen Mishpat* 176:10. However, some *tzaddikim* held to the principle that after the fact, the actions of a single partner are determinative for the partnership, and they would therefore work wonders at the time of Friday night *Kiddush* and the like (see *Pnei Menachem*, Bereishis, p. 13; *Be'eros Hamayim* (Rimanov) on *Aggados Hashas, Shabbos*). The matter is the subject of extensive debate among the *poskim*, see *Mishpat Shalom* by the Maharsham (176:14) who cites at great length the different opinions and variables in this matter.

15. *Yichud Hamaaseh* 5.

16. This is along the lines of the Gemara in *Chagigah* (15a), which refers to a *Tanna* who had strayed from the right path as *Acher* – "other."