

Lesson # 40

What Does the Bible Say About The Heart?

The Month of Elul According to Sefer Yetzirah

According to *Sefer Yetzirah* or “*Book of Creation*”, each month of the Jewish year has a letter of the Hebrew alphabet, a *zodiac sign*, one of the *twelve tribes of Israel*, a *sense*, and a *controlling limb* of the body that correspond to it.

Introduction

Elul - EE-luhl is the sixth of the twelve months of the Jewish calendar (*counting from Nisan - nee-SAHN = the first month of the Jewish sacred year and the seventh month*).

It is called "*the month of repentance*," "*the month of mercy*," and "*the month of forgiveness*."
Elul- EE-luhl follows the two previous months of *Tamuz - tam-mooz* and *Av*, the months of the two great sins of Israel, the sin of the *Golden Calf* and *the sin of the spies*.

The four letters of the name *Elul - EE-luhl* are an acronym for the initial letters of the phrase in the *Song of Songs* (6:3 - *I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine: he feedeth among the lilies*): "*I am to my beloved and my beloved is to me*." "*I am to my beloved*" in repentance and consummate desire to return to my soul-root in God. "*And my beloved is to me*" with Divine expression of mercy of forgiveness.

This is the month that "*the King is in the field*." All can approach Him, and He shines His countenance to all.

Elul - EE-luhl is the month of preparation for the high holy days of *Tishrei - TISH-rey*. It is the month that Moses ascended to Mount Sinai a third time for a period of forty days from *Rosh Chodesh - rohsh KHOH-desh Elul - EE-luhl to Yom Kippur*, when he descended with the second tablets of the covenant. These days were days when God revealed to the Jewish people great mercy.

In "small numbering," *Elul- EE-luhl = 13*, alluding to the 13 principles of Divine mercy that are revealed in the month of *Elul*.

Letter: Yud – Ee-d (י)

The *yud - Ee-d*, is the first letter of the *Tetragrammaton - tet'ruh-GRAM-uh-ton*, G-d's essential Name *Havayah - kei-vav-kei*, the Name of mercy. It is also the final letter of the Name *Adnut*, the Name which enclothes the Name *Havayah- kei-vav-kei* to reveal and express it to the world. Thus, the

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yud is the beginning (of the essence of Divine mercy, *Havayah-- kei-vav-kei*) and the *yud* is the end (of the manifestation of Divine mercy, *Adnut*).

All created form begins with an essential "*point*," of energy and life force, the point of the letter *yud*. The end of the creative process is as well a "*point*" of consummation and satisfaction, a *yud*. "In the beginning G-d created..." *is the initial point*; "and G-d concluded on the seventh day..." is the final point.

The word *yud* means "*hand*." Our sages interpret the verse: "*Even My hand has founded the earth, and My right hand has developed the heavens*," that "G-d stretched out His right hand to create the heavens and stretched out His left hand to create the earth." The right hand is the point of beginning; the left hand is the point of end.

In the above quoted verse, the left hand (referred to as "*My hand*" without any definite designation of right or left) appears before the right hand. This accords with the opinion of Hillel that "*the earth preceded [the heavens]*." The earth represents the consummation of Creation--"the end of action is first in thought."

The *yud* of *Elul - EE-luhl* is, in particular, the left hand, the controller of the month's sense, the sense of action and rectification. This is the final point of Creation reaching its ultimate purpose and end, the *yud* of *Adnut* perfectly reflecting in created reality *the yud* of *Havayah-- kei-vav-kei*.

Mazal: Virgo (betulah, the virgin)

The *betulah - be-too-lah* symbolizes *God's beloved bride*, Israel, the bride of the Song of Songs who says to her groom "*I am to my beloved and my beloved is to me*."

The word *betulah* appears for the first time in the Torah (and the only time in description of a specific woman) [in praise of our matriarch Rebecca](#), before her marriage to Isaac.

In *Kabbalah* the union of Isaac and Rebecca symbolizes the spiritual service of prayer and devotion to G-d. Isaac (Yitzchak, 208) plus Rebecca (*Rivka - RIV - KAH*, 307) = 515 = *tefilah - teh-FEE-lah*, "*prayer*."

In *Chassidut* the verse "*I am to my beloved and my beloved is to me*" refers, in particular, to the service of prayer of the month of Elul- *EE-luhl*.

The "*virgin*" of Elul (*Rebecca*) gives birth (retroactively, with respect to the order of the months of the year) to the "*twins*" of *Sivan - see-VAHN (Jacob and Esau, the sons of Rebecca*, as explained above). The first tablets, given in Sivan, were broken (*because of sin*). The second tablets, given to Moses in

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Elul - *EE-luhl* (the month of repentance) are whole. Repentance is identified in *Kabbalah* with "mother" (in general, and Rebecca in particular). "Mother" is *binah - bee-naw* = 67 = *Elul*.

In *Kabbalah*, the "mother" remains forever (*on the spiritual plane*) a "virgin." In a continual state of *teshuvah - te-shoo-VAH* and *tefilah - teh-FEE-lah* her "ever-new" union with "father" never ceases-- "two companions that never part." With the coming of *Mashiach - Ma-ShIa-Ch* such will be the state of the lower groom and bride. ("Father" and "mother" correspond to the first two letters of *Havayah - kei-vav-kei* --"the higher union"; "groom" and "bride" or "son" and "daughter" correspond to the second two letters of *Havayah-- kei-vav-kei* --"the lower union").

The *betulah* symbolizes as well the "virgin earth," the land of Israel destined to be married to the people of Israel, as the prophet declares: "As a young man marries a virgin so will your children marry you [the land of Israel]" (*Isaiah 62:5*). Here we see that the children marry "mother earth" who remains "virgin earth."

The earth represents the rectification of action, the sense of the month of Elul- *EE-luhl*, as described above.

Tribe: Gad

Gad means "camp," as in the verse (*the blessing of our father Jacob to his son Gad*): "Gad shall organize [lit. camp] camps [army camps], and he shall return with all his camps" (*Genesis 49:19*). The special talent of Gad is to organize a "company."

The name Gad means as well "good fortune." It is truly the "good fortune" of Israel to be G-d's beloved bride, and this "good fortune" reveals itself through the means of our good deeds, especially those which are intended to rectify our blemishes and beautify ourselves, as a bride for her groom.

The "good fortune" of *Gad* relates, in *Kabbalah*, to the thirteen principles of mercy that are revealed in the month of *Elul- EE-luhl*, in order to arouse the soul from its root (its "good fortune") to return to God.

Gad = 7. Gad was the 7th son to be born to Jacob. *Mazal - mah-zehl*, the more common word for "good fortune" = 77. The middle letter of *mazal* is *zayin - ZAH-yeen* = 7. When the two letters *gimmel dalet* that form the name Gad (= 7) are substituted for the *zayin - ZAH-yeen* (= 7) of *mazal - mah-zehl*, the word *migdal*, "tower," is formed. The verse states: "A tower [*migdal - mig-dawl* = 77] of might [oz = 77] is the Name of G-d, into it shall run the *tzadik - tez-a-dek* and become exalted." In *Kabbalah*, the "tower of might" represents the bride, the *betulah- be-too-lah* of *Elul- EE-luhl*, the soul-root and *mazal - mah-zehl* of the Jewish People. The *tzadik*, the groom, runs, with all of his might, to enter the "tower of might."

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Sense: Action

The sense of action is the "*sense*" and inner "*knowledge*" that through devoted deeds of goodness one is always able rectify any blemished or broken state of the soul. This is the sense necessary for the spiritual service of *Elul*, the service of repentance and true *teshuvah* – *ye-shi-va* to G-d. The sense of action is thus the sense never to despair. This is the "point," the *yud* (of *Elul*), of Divine service. Without it one can neither begin (an act) or end.

The sense of action is the inclination to fix a broken object (to "*save*" a situation) rather than to throw it away.

In addition, the sense of action is the sense of organization and the sense of management of complex systems (*as Gad, the tribe of Elul signifies "camps" and "company"*).

Of the letter *yud* of *Elul* it is said: "G-d with wisdom [the point of the *yud*] founded [rectified] the earth [*the sense of action*]."

Controller: Left Hand

As mentioned above, G-d stretched out His left hand to create the earth (and, as quoted above: "G-d with wisdom founded the earth" [Proverbs 3:19]).

The right hand (the more spiritual of the two hands, which creates the heavens--"Lift up your eyes and see Who has created these"--the inner, spiritual dimension of reality) controls the sense of sight, whereas the left (more physical) hand controls the sense of action.

The mitzvah (commandment of action) of the *tefilin shel yad* is performed on the left hand (the right hand puts it on the left hand, i.e. "sees" to its being performed on the left hand).

It is the left hand which touches the heart. This teaches us that all rectified action derives from the good emotions and intentions of the heart.

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The Jewish Heart

The Secret of Elul

Love. It is the most powerful of the human emotions. We all crave it. We cannot live without it. And yet, it is so overwhelming, so all encompassing, that there is no way to measure it, prove it, define it or even describe it.

When we speak of the intellect, it is represented by the mind. And when we speak of the emotions, specifically of love, they are represented by the heart. But why?

When our back is turned, we have no idea of the state of the other. The symbol of the heart is probably one of the most well known symbols. Spanning continents, cultures, religions, languages, that little red heart means love. It is used to sign letters, to represent the word “love” itself, and has inundated the buyers’ market by being plastered on cards, t-shirts, necklaces, balloons and just about everything else.



How is the image of the heart as we most commonly know it, the symbol for this passionate experience of love?

Elul usually occurs in [August–September](#) on the [Gregorian calendar](#). Elul, is the key to unlocking the inner and most potent meaning of the heart. As is well known, the Hebrew letters that make the word “*Elul*,” an *aleph*, *lamed*, *vav* and *lamed*, are an acronym for the phrase (from the biblical *Song of Songs*): *Ani L’dodi V’dodi Li*, which means, “*I am to my beloved and my beloved is to me.*”

This beautiful and romantic phrase is that which represents our relationship with our Creator, which is often paralleled to that of a husband and wife, a bride and groom, in our individual lives.

The *Zohar* explains that at the beginning of *Elul* we are *achor el achor* meaning “*back to back*” and by the end of *Elul* we are *panim el panim* meaning “*face to face.*” But how can it be that we are back to back? Wouldn’t that imply that G-d has His back turned to us as well? How can we say such a thing when this is the month in which--as Chassidic master Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi teaches us-- “the King is in the field”? Is it not the month when G-d is more accessible than ever, when He is waiting for us to greet Him, when He is there for us in the “*field*” of our everyday lives?

The fact that we are described as back to back and then face to face is an incredible lesson. Often, when we feel angry, hurt, abandoned, whatever the root of our pain may be, we turn our back. When

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our back is turned, we have no idea of the state of the other. And it is often easier to believe that we are not the only one with a turned back. It is easier to think the other also turned around, that the other isn't facing us at all, because if that is the case, then *even* if we turn around it won't help, so why bother. Why make that first move only to turn around and see the back of the other?

But this rationalization is the cause of many unsettled arguments, hurt feelings, and broken relationships. How classic is the scene, played out endlessly in movies, of the couple who walk away from one another. At some point the man turns around, wanting to call her name, ask for another chance, beg for forgiveness. He is about to speak, but realizes that her back is turned. She is walking away. He tells himself that it is too late, she just doesn't care. So he turns back around. Seconds later, she turns to look at him. She doesn't want this to end. She wants to say something but can't garner the courage, doesn't have the strength. And why, why should she when his back is turned?

The month of Elul teaches us the necessity of being willing to turn around. She looks at him longingly but it just doesn't matter, she assumes he couldn't care less as he continues to walk away from her. And we, the viewers, sit on the edge of our seats, hoping that maybe they will both turn around at the same second that they will finally realize that the other does care, that even though they appear to be back to back they really want to be face to face. Sometimes that fairytale ending does happen, other times they simply continue to walk in opposite directions right out of each other's lives.

It is the month of *Elul* that teaches us the necessity of being willing to turn around. The King is in the field, our Creator is there, and no matter how we may feel, He has never had His back turned. All we need to do is turn ourselves around to realize that He is there and waiting for us. The "back to back" that we experience in the beginning of the month is based on our misperceptions, our fears, our assumptions. Only when we turn around do we realize the truth, the inner essence, and then we are "face to face" which does not only mean that we can finally look *at* each other, but more so, that we can look *in* each other, for the root of the word for face, *panim*, is the same as *pnimiyut*, which means "*innerness*."

So now the question is how this lesson is taught to us, not only in the month of Elul, but through the name "*Elul*" itself. A Hebrew name is not a mere way of referring to something, but actually represents its soul. *Chassidut* teaches that every parent is gifted with Divine Inspiration is when he or she names a child. It is the name that represents the deepest aspects of this person. *Kabbalah* and *Chassidut* teach us that to uncover the essential meaning of a Hebrew word we need to analyze the letters that comprise it, their numerical value, their form and their meaning.

As we said above, the word Elul is comprised of an *aleph* followed by a *lamed* followed by a *vav* followed by the final letter, another *lamed*. The first letter in Elul is also the first letter in the Hebrew

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alphabet. The letter *aleph* is numerically equivalent to one, which represents the idea of G-d's total unity. א

So now we must answer how all of this is related to the heart. Here is where our *lameds* are once again defined. At this point it is important to think again about the symbol of the heart and to question its origin. And so it should come as no surprise that the meaning of this symbol will once again be found in the word for heart itself.

In Hebrew, the word for heart is *lev* which is spelled *lamed-beit*. Rabbi Abraham *Abulafia*, in the year 1291, wrote a manuscript by the name, *Imrei Shefer*, in which he defines the meaning of the heart.

Rabbi Abulafia teaches that the word heart, *lev, lamed – beit*, needs to be understood as two *lameds*. This is because the letter *beit* is the second letter in the alphabet, and is numerically equivalent to two. So he explains that the word needs to be read and understood as two *lameds*.

But it is not enough to have two *lameds*. As Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburgh explains, in order for their to be a relationship, the *two lameds* need to be connected. They need to be face to face. When we turn around the second *lamed* to face the first, we form the image of the Jewish Heart (as seen in the picture at the beginning of this article). While the heart, as we are used to seeing it, is quite clear in this form, an entirely new part of the heart is also revealed.

The heart and the love it represents, can only thrive, can only flourish, when there is a totality in connection. This is because the letter *lamed* is the tallest of all the letters in the Hebrew alphabet. The reason is because the *lamed* represents the concept of breaking out of boundaries, of going beyond your potential, of entering the super-conscious from the conscious.

The heart and the love it represents can only thrive and flourish, when there is a totality in the connection.

The *lamed* also means two things simultaneously. It means *both "to learn" and "to teach"* which shows us that the two are intertwined and both are essential. In a relationship, I must be willing to learn from the other, thereby making myself a receiver. Yet the other person also must be able to learn from me, which then makes me the teacher, the giver.

Furthermore, the image of the *lamed* can be broken down into three other letters. The top part of the letter is that of a *yud*, the smallest of the Hebrew letters, and the letter that represents the head. The head contains the mind, the intellect, but also the face. י

The next letter in *Elul* is a *vav*. In Hebrew, the *vav* ך serves as a conjunctive "and." As a word *vav* means "*hook*" and in its form it looks like a hook. So in this case the *vav* is the hook which is connecting

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the *yud*, the mind, with the bottom letter, the *chaf*, ך which represents the body. Physically speaking it symbolizes the neck which transports the flow of blood from the brain to the heart.

This teaches us that the heart, that the love that it represents, can only thrive, can only flourish, when there is a totality in connection. The Jewish heart, true love, represents a mind to mind, face to face, eye to eye, body to body, soul to soul connection.

The *vav*, the connection between the head and the heart must always stay healthy with a clear flow. If anything cuts it off, the relationship cannot continue. As we all know, one of the quickest ways to kill a person is a slit right across the neck. The neck is our lifeline. It ensures that our head, our intellect, rules above our emotions and that there is a healthy interchange between the mind and the heart.

The heart that we are all familiar with, the symbol that represents love throughout the world, lacks the *yud* and the *vav*, it is missing the mind and the neck. The popular symbol represents only the physical connection between bodies.

So this is why and how Elul is the month that begins back to back and ends face to face. At the beginning of the month we are unaware of the reality that *"I am to my beloved and my beloved is to me."* However, by working on ourselves during this month, by being willing to turn around and make changes, we come to realize that our Creator has never had His back turned. He has always been facing us and just waiting for us to turn around. And once we do, we are then like two *lameds* that are face to face, which form the Jewish heart and is the essence of the month of Elul.

Elul then must be understood as an *aleph* representing G-d, followed by a *lamed* - ל, *vav*- ו, *lamed*, a *lamed* that is connected (*vav*) to the other *lamed*.

And the Jewish heart, this idea of love as a totality of connection, is not merely the work for the month of Elul but is the entire purpose of our creation. This Jewish heart is a symbol for why we were created and what we are meant to accomplish. For the Torah is the blueprint of creation and the guidebook of how we connect to the Divine. And it is not a book that has a beginning, middle and end, but rather a scroll, since we are taught that the "end is *endwedged* in the beginning, and the beginning in the end."

So what do we find when the Torah scroll's end rolls into the beginning? How does the Torah end and begin? The last word of the Torah is "*Yisrael*," *Israel*, which ends with the letter *lamed* and the first word is "*bereishit - Be-re-sheet*," meaning "in the *beginning*" which begins with a *beit*. When we join the first and last letters of the Torah, we have *lev*, the Hebrew word for heart.

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May we be blessed with the ability to tap into the powers of the month of *Elul*, recognize and reveal our ability to both learn and teach, and through that, come face to face within ourselves, with our loved ones, and with our Creator, as we are taught through the Jewish heart.

