



Laws & Customs: Month of Elul

For the year 5785

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Up to – but not including – the period of Selichos

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☞ MONTH OF ELUL

On *Rosh Chodesh Elul*, Moshe Rabbeinu ascended *Har Sinai* to receive the second set of *Luchos*. He returned with them on *Yom Kippur*, with Hashem having granted complete forgiveness for the sin of the golden calf. These forty days are an especially auspicious time for *Teshuvah*.

The *Arizal* taught that the thirteen attributes of divine mercy are revealed in the month of Elul, assisting in one's efforts to do *Teshuvah*. The Alter Rebbe explained this idea with the famous parable of *Melech B'Sadeh* – the King in the field. The month of Elul is thus known as the *Chodesh Horachamim* (month of mercy), and the gates of mercy are open to all who wish to come close to Hashem through *Teshuvah*, *Tefillah* and *Torah*. These ideas should be publicized as much as possible.

Elul is the month of preparation to usher in a new year replete with good and blessing, both physically and spiritually.

The word Elul is an acronym for a number of *Pesukim* alluding to the ideas of *Torah*, *Tefillah*, *Tzedakah*, *Teshuvah* and *Geulah*. The month of Elul is an appropriate time to increase in all of these matters.

One should increase learning *Chassidus*, particularly those topics applicable to the *Avodah* of the month of Elul.

One should also increase in *Ahavas Yisroel*, *Gemilus-Chessed* and the Ten *Mivtzoim*.

The Rebbe Rashab would refer to Elul as the season for reciting *Tehillim*.

Elul is the "month of reckoning". During this month, one should make an accurate assessment of all one's thoughts, words and deeds, and reflect on all the experiences that occurred during the course of the year. One should improve and strengthen one's qualities, and at the same time, regret and correct one's deficiencies – both the errors and wrongs that were committed, as well as those things which were not performed as well as they could have been. One should resolve for the future to fulfil *Mitzvos* in the best possible manner; to be more diligent with regards to *Torah* and *Tefillah*; and to correct one's negative *Middos* as well as acquire positive *Middos*.

During Elul, one should be enthused with much *Simcha*, in recognition of the special closeness that Hashem shows us – "The King is in the field".

Even though Elul is a time to arouse others to *Teshuvah*, this should be done in a pleasant and humble way, and not by G-d forbid saying harsh things about others.

☞ L'DOVID HASHEM ORI

We begin reciting *L'Dovid Hashem Ori* on the first day of *Rosh Chodesh* (Sunday). During *Shacharis*, it is recited after *Shir Shel Yom* (or after *Borchi Nafshi* on *Rosh Chodesh*). During *Mincha*, it is recited before *Aleinu*.

We do not recite an extra *Kaddish* on account of *L'Dovid Hashem Ori*. [During *Shacharis*, the *Kaddish* of *Shir Shel Yom* is recited after *L'Dovid Hashem Ori*.]

Some non-Chabad communities recite *L'Dovid Hashem Ori* at *Mincha* after *Aleinu*, or after *Ma'ariv*. When davening *Mincha* with such a *Minyan*, one must still recite *Aleinu* together with them. If one needs to defer *L'Dovid Hashem Ori* as a result, he should recite it before *Al Tirah*.

☞ SHOFAR

The purpose of hearing the *Shofar* is to arouse feelings of *Teshuvah*.

There is a dispute whether to commence blowing the *Shofar* on the first or second day of *Rosh Chodesh*. *Minhag Chabad* is to make a point of practicing the *Shofar* on the first day of *Rosh Chodesh*, (thus hearing the *Shofar* in an informal way,) but to begin blowing it formally only on the second day of *Rosh Chodesh*.

Our custom is to blow ten sounds. [*Tekiah-Shevarim-Teruah-Tekiah*; *Tekiah-Shevarim-Tekiah*; *Tekiah-Teruah-Tekiah*.]

If one was unable to hear the *Shofar* with a *Minyan*, he should still endeavour to hear the *Shofar*.

During Elul, one does not need to repeat the sounds if the *Shofar* was *Possul* (e.g. it had a crack or hole). Similarly, one does not need to repeat any sounds blown incorrectly (e.g. the *Tekiah* was too short). If the *Ba'al-Tokeah* chooses to fix his mistake, he certainly does not need to redo the entire section, as he would were it *Rosh Hashana*.

☞ OTHER CUSTOMS OF ELUL

There is a tradition from the *Ba'al Shem Tov* to recite three chapters of *Tehillim* each day of Elul. Ideally, these should be recited immediately after the *Tehillim* that is normally said at the end of *Shacharis*.

If one neglected to recite these chapters of *Tehillim* on the appropriate day, he should do so at the earliest opportunity.

Beginning on the first day of *Rosh Chodesh*, one wishes (both in person as well as in writing): "*Kesivah V'Chasima Tovah L'Shana Tova U'Mesukah*". [The Rebbe included these wishes at the end of his letters. From *Rosh Chodesh* onwards, he would write only "*Kesivah V'Chasima Tovah*", and would begin adding "*L'Shana Tova U'Mesukah*" from around the 18th of Elul onwards.]

Although the basic requirement is to check *Mezuzos* and *Tefillin* twice every seven years, the Rebbe encouraged checking them every Elul (unless they were checked within the last 12 months). The Rebbe urged that this directive be publicized.

The Alter Rebbe's *Niggun* known as the *Daled Bavos*, which is normally sung only on special occasions, may be sung during the entire month of Elul.

☞ DATES IN ELUL

6 Elul (Shabbos) – The sixth chapter of *Pirkei Avos* is recited after *Mincha*.

11 Elul – The wedding of the Rebbe Rashab to Rebbetzin Shterna Sara.

13 Elul (Shabbos) – The wedding of the Friediker Rebbe to Rebbetzin Nechama Dina. The Rebbe encouraged that the day be utilized to learn the Friediker Rebbe's *Maamarim* on the topic of marriage.

When reading the last *Possuk* of the *Parsha*, the word *Zeicher* is read twice, first with a *Tzeirei* (*Zeicher*), and then again with a *Segol* (*Zecher*).

The first and second chapters of *Pirkei Avos* are recited after *Mincha*. The opening *Mishna* of "*Kol Yisroel*" and concluding *Mishna* of "*Rabbi Chananya*" is recited only once.

14 Elul – Being thirty days before *Sukkos*, one begins learning its *Halachos*. This thirty-day period should also be utilized to ensure that the *Yom-Tov* needs of the poor are met, as well as planning *Tishrei Mivtzoim* and *Sukkos* festivities.

15 Elul – The founding of *Tomchei Temimim*. One should visit *Tomchei Temimim*, participate in a *Farbrengen*, and resolve to strengthen one's adherence to all matters that *Tomchei Temimim* stands for.

18 Elul – The birthday of the *Baal Shem Tov* and the Alter Rebbe. On this day, the *Rebbeim* would say "*Gut Yom Tov*".

One should participate in a *Farbrengen*, share stories of *Tzadikim*, resolve to increase in learning *Nigleh* and especially *Chassidus*, and increase in *Ahavas Yisroel*.

To someone who asked whether to recite *Tachnun* on *Chai Elul*, the Rebbe responded, "Regarding matters which depend on one's feeling, one should not ask, as doing so is itself the proof that one lacks feeling."

The last 12 days of Elul (18-29 Elul) correspond to the 12 months of the year. On each of these days, one should make a reckoning of the corresponding month, and make all necessary corrections.