



Elul

The Month of Mercy

תְּהֵא הַשָּׁעָה הַזֹּאת שְׁעַת רַחֲמִים וְעַת רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ

“Let this hour be an hour of compassion and a time of willingness before You”

IMPJ Resource Collection
Elul 5785

Edited and Curated by Rabbi Naomi Efrat



Dear friends,

As we enter the month of Elul, the month of mercy and forgiveness, we are met this year not only with the possibility of quiet reflection, but also with the continuous thunder of war.

The blood of both Israelis and Palestinians continues to be shed. Hostages remain underground, isolated and far from their families. Innocent lives are lost daily on all sides. Soldiers fall in battle, and children are dying in a war that is no fault of their own.

We are taught that the month of Elul, the final month of the Jewish year, is a time of *Teshuva* – a time when the gates of mercy begin to open as we prepare for the High Holy Days. We recite the ancient words:

“May this hour be an hour of mercy and a time of favor before You.”

"תהא השעה הזאת שעת רחמים ועת רצון מלפניך"

But how are we to say these words with sincerity, when suffering surrounds us? When mercy feels so absent? When justice feels so distant?

My personal understanding is that Elul does not turn away from reality. It meets us precisely where we are, in our brokenness, in our confusion, in our pain. The work of Elul is not reserved for peaceful times. It is perhaps most essential in times of turmoil.

"דַּרְשׁוּ יְהוָה בְּהִמָּצְאוֹ קְרָאֵהוּ בְּהִיטּוֹתָיו קְרֹב" (ישעיה נ"ה ו')

Seek God when They may be found, call for Them when They are near (Yesha'aya, 55, 6)

Sometimes, seeking means crying out. Sometimes it means asking hard questions. Sometimes it means refusing to become numb.

This Elul, our return to God (*Teshuva*) must include a reckoning with the suffering of others. We cannot approach Rosh Hashanah with clean hands if we ignore the cries of the hostages, the soldiers and innocent human beings on all sides.

Teshuvah (repentance), **tefillah** (prayer), and **tzedakah** (charity) are not abstract ideals; they are demands. They call us to repair, to intercede, and to act.



This Elul, we turn to God and ask:
Have compassion on our people.
Bring home the captives.
Protect the soldiers.
Heal the wounded.
Feed the hungry.
Open our hearts to one another.

May this Elul be a time of honest return – to truth, to responsibility, and to compassion.

We invite you to make use this resource collection for the month of Elul in your communities and congregations, as a light of hope, for life and for love. May sorrow be joined with consolation and may it be transformed:

From grief to joy, and from mourning to a day of goodness
יהי רצון שיתהפך היגון לשמחה והאבל ליום טוב

Rabbi Naomi Efrat

Kehillat HaPardes, Pardes Hanna
Editor and Curator, IMPJ Elul Resource Collection
5785



From: **And This Is the Light (Vehu Ha-Or)**

Leah Goldberg

Translation: Levi Morrow

"ואנחנו נחיה, אני אחיה, אחיה ואוהב את החיים הללו.
אוהב אותם על כיעורם, על חוליים, על אימתם – ולא אצא מדעתי.
אני רוצה לחיות. לחיות הרבה. לחיות חיי אדם אשר מותר לו לנשום.
לחיות באור, באורם של ימי העתידים לבוא".

We will live, I will live, I will live and love this life.
I will love this life with all its ugliness, its illnesses, its terror – and I will not lose my mind.
I want to live, and to live so much. I want to live the life of a person permitted to breath.
I want to live in the light, in the light of the days yet to come.

This month of Elul, we chose to draw optimism and energy for the year ahead from the writings of Israeli poets and IMPJ rabbis. We hope that you too will find inspiration, deepen your reflection, and find comfort in these words.





Elul, again

Rabbi Osnat Eldar

Translation: Rabbi Naomi Efrat

Behold—again Elul, cradling its remnants of
forgiveness,
and behind it trails the pageantry of my life—
steeped in green and quiet,
threadbare in its tangled seams.

Beneath me, the earth cracks—
not for the first time, nor the last—
and viscous lava creeps with the patience
of one who knows
that someday

I will cease to see in its resistance
a rock for climbing,
and no longer plant bulbs of cyclamen
forced to bloom between its jagged edges.

I will forget the first law
of those who dwell near nature:
Never turn stones with bare hands.

Behold—again Elul,
cradling what's left of its forgiveness.

I forgive myself
for the costs of the past I was forced to pay,
and embrace the burdens
I was sentenced to bear.

No longer striking at sin—
I wrap it in softness
and release it
into a wilderness not mine.

At the corner of my mouth
a new smile stretches,
and the light in my eyes
tells a story
That is all my own.

הנה, שוב אלול עולל סליחותיו
ואחריו משתרכת תפאורת חיי טבולת ירק ושקט
בקרעיה המדבללים.

מתחתי האדמה נסדקת זה עדן ועדנים,
ולבה צמיגית מזדחלת בסבלנות של מי שיוצעת שיום
אחד

אפסיק לראות בהתקשותה סלע לטפוס,
ולא אשתל פקעות של רקפות, שיכרחו לפרח בין זיזיו.

אשכח את החוק הראשון של השוכנות סמוך לטבע:
אסור להפך אבנים בידיים חשופות.

הנה, שוב אלול עולל שארית סליחותיו,
אני סולחת לעצמי על מחירי עבר שנאלצתי לשלם
ומחבקת את אלה שנדנתי לשאת.

כבר לא מכה על חטא, אלא עוטפת אותו ברך
ומשלחת לדרך במדבר לא לי.

בזוית הפה נמתח חיוך חדש
והאור בעינים מספר ספור שהוא כלו שלי.





“Even now, especially now, it is possible and necessary to choose the path of hope, compassion, and responsibility” writes Rabbi Osnat Eldar.

Hebrew literary and artistic culture is what enables shared life, even in times of pain and war. It is a culture rooted in commitment to equality, to doing good, and to taking responsibility for the place we live in. Hope, after all, is an action.

Rabbi Eldar reminds us not to be swept away by hatred, not to grow numb to indifference, and not to build walls around the heart. Instead, we are invited to expand, to listen, to illuminate – and to return to our spiritual core: love of others, mutual responsibility, respect, and faith.

“There is within us a place for our spiritual well – that well. It is not weakness. It is not loss. It is strength.”

Rabbi Osnat Eldar is a mother of three and serves as the Rabbi of IMPJ Congregation Sulam Ya’akov in Zichron Ya’akov.





The Gazelle Awakens

Rabbi Sivan Navon Shoval

The gazelle awakens.
Her eyes are swollen, trodden with tears.
Waves of pain reveal to her that the pulse of life still beats
within.
Probing with her nose, she searches for a wind of awakening.
She licks her wounds with compassion, sipping drops of dew
Brought into the morning by the night.

Only then, does she awaken all those sheltered in her
embrace.
In the womb of her soul, she carries the prayer of the broken
mother,
Together cradling the heart crying out from the throes of
suffering,
Begging to quench that unbearable thirst for one more pulse
of life.

She draws close to her those whose arms have known
The embrace of a child from their own flesh born,
And asks of the mother, whose wisdom is rooted in the
depths of her womb,
To renew each day, in her divine kindness, the wonders of
creation.

Translated by Sivan Navon Shoval

הַאֵלִילָה מִתְעוֹרֶרֶת.
עֵינֶיהָ נִפְּחוֹת וְכִבְדוֹת מִבְּכִי,
נָלִי כְּאֵב מְגִלִּים לָהּ כִּי בִלְבָבָהּ פְּעִימוֹת חַיִּים.
הִיא מִגְשָׁשֶׁת בְּאַפָּה אַחֵר מִשֵּׁב רַעֲנָן,
מְלַקֶּקֶת בְּחִמְלָה אֶת פִּצְעֶיהָ,
לּוֹגֶמֶת טְפוֹת טַל שֶׁנִּשְׁאָא הַלֵּילָה אֶל הַבֹּקֶר.

אֲזִי הִיא מְעוֹרֶרֶת אֶת כָּל הַחוֹסוֹת בְּחִיקָה.
בְּרַחֲם נִפְשָׁה נִשְׁאֵת תְּפִלַּת הָאֵם הַשְּׁבוּרָה.
יַחַד אֶתֵּן הִיא אוֹחֶזֶת אֶת הַלֵּב הַזּוֹעֵק
מִנִּפְתּוּלֵי יִסּוּרִים,
מִחֻפְּשֵׁת לְגִמְעַ עוֹד פְּעִימוֹת שֶׁל חַיִּים.

כִּן הִיא מֵאֲמֶצֶת לְקִרְבָּה זְרוּעוֹת
שִׁידְעוּ חֲבוּק פְּרִי בֶטֶן שֶׁנּוֹלַד מִגּוּפָן,
וּמִבְקָשֶׁת מִהָאֵם הַיּוֹדֵעֶת עֲמֻק בְּבִטְנָהּ
לְחִדּוֹשׁ בְּטוֹבָה בְּכָל יוֹם מַעֲשֵׂה בְּרָאשִׁית.

In this poem, the gazelle – a symbol of the Shekhinah in many Midrashim, as well as in the literature of the Zohar and Kabbalah – appears as a birthing, compassionate mother and as the object of the Divine. She is attributed with both the concealment of the Divine Presence and the ability to give birth to and nourish the world.

Rabbi Sivan Navon Shoval lives in Jerusalem with Oren and their three daughters. She previously served as the Rabbi of Kehillat Shir Chadash in Tzur Hadassah. In her recent Hebrew-language poetry and liturgy, she explores spiritual themes through a feminine lens.

This image reminds us of a much earlier poem by poet Yona Wollach:



Poem

By: Yona Wollach

In a hidden crevice between cliffs
A gazelle is drinking water
What of me and her?
Those are but the cliffs of my heart
That is but the spring of my life
These are but all that is concealed
She is but my love.

בנקיק נסתר בצוקים איילה שותה מים
מה לי ולה אלא צוקי לבי אלא מעיין חיי
אלא נסתר איילה מה לי ולה אלא אהבתי.

In another later poem, she writes in agonizing clarity:

The Gazelle

Gazelle, oh gazelle,
How beautiful you would have been
If only you were not
Wounded.

איילה, הו איילה
כמה יפה היית
לו לא היית
פצועה.

These two poems connect the gazelle, the female deer, innocent and light-footed, with the searing pain of life. On the surface, we have nothing in common with the gazelle.

And yet, in her innocence, her beauty, and her wounds, we find ourselves. In many ways, the gazelle is the face of feminine God, she is the face of Shekhinah.

Yona Wallach (1944–1985) was a groundbreaking Israeli poet known for her bold, experimental style. She became a central figure in Israel's literature during the 1960s and 70s. Her poetry blends eroticism, mysticism, psychological depth, and feminist themes, often challenging religious and social norms, with a deep connection to God.



We remember / a Contemporary Yizkor
student Rabbi Rina Levanon
Translation: Levi Morrow

We remember our brothers and sisters, the loyal and faithful, the brave and courageous,
whom we lost amidst the horrors of war.

We remember the shining eyes, the warm embrace, the confident heart,
the photo albums, the life stories, the homes built with great effort and burned in an
instant.

We remember the loving families, the beauty, the hope,
the eyes that look upon us with trust.

May the souls of those who have left us be bound up in the bond of life,
and their memory be connected to us by a thin thread of life,
like a bouquet of wildflowers and rainwater,
squills, golden puddles, almond trees,
oleanders and mulberries,
laughter carried on the flight of swings,
a beating heart, tenderness, and compassion.

May our souls be connected to theirs in deep memory and gratitude,
and may we choose life.

We remember
and we choose life.

In the gentle hand extended,
in the thin ray of dawn,
in the sprouting stem,
in the breath of the earth.

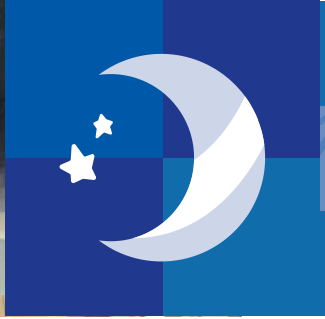




נזכר את אחינו ואת אחיותינו, הנאמנים והנאמנות, האמיצים והאמיצות
שאבדנו בתוך אימת המלחמה.
נזכר את העינים הנוצצות, את החבוק החם, את הלב הבוטח,
את אלבומי התמונות, את ספורי החיים, את הבתים שנבנו בעמל רב
ונשרפו ברגע.
את המשפחות האוהבות, את היופי, את התקווה,
את העינים המביטות אלינו נכונה.
תהא נפשו של ההולכות וההולכים מעמנו צרורה בצרור החיים,
וזכרון קשור אלינו בחוט דק של חיים,
כאגדת פרחי בר ומי גשם,
חצבים, שלוליות זהבות, שקדיות,
הרדופים ותות-עץ,
צחוק נשא על טיסת נדנדות,
לב פועם, עדינות וחמלה.
תהא נפשו קשורה בנפשו, בזכרון עמוק ובהודיה,
ונבחר בחיים.
נזכר
ונבחר בחיים.
ביד הרכה המושטת,
בפס האור הדקיק של השחר,
בגבעול המפציע שוב,
בנשימת האדמה.

This contemporary Yizkor brings softness and a glimmer of hope to the traditional memorial prayer, which is steeped in mourning and sanctifies death. It offers a place of hope even in the darkest, most difficult places, and a reminder that even from loss, a fresh, green sprout can still grow.

Student Rabbi Rina Levanon is married to Arnon and a mother of three. She serves as the Rabbi of the Gilboa Regional Council and IMPJ congregation at Kibbutz Beit HaShita. A writer and multidisciplinary artist, she is also an entrepreneur in the fields of education, culture, and spirituality.



As the month of Elul unfolds and slowly draws to an end, so too will the Jewish year. We believe and know that at the end of each year, there is an opportunity for healing, for buds of hope, for growth that emerges from pain.

In the midst of Elul, as our thoughts begin to turn toward Tishrei, the High Holy Days and the new year unfolding before us, we understand that the coming year will require us to cope with trauma, and at the same time, to seek growth rising from the abyss, and to nurture a cautious hope that the future can be better.

It is precisely for this moment — the transition from Elul to Tishrei — that this special Havdalah ceremony was created, marking the separation between the year that has passed and the one that lies ahead.

We invite you to hold this ceremony in your own communities, using the words of Rabbis Dagan and Dafni Kellen, or your own words, as a way to mark this transition to the Jewish New Year of 5856, with intention and hope for healthy growth.





Havdalla for the Jewish New Year

Rabbi Na'ama Dafni Kellen &
Rabbi Gabby Dagan

May it be Your will—King whose peace endures,
And before us, people of the State of Israel,
That we honor through our deeds the memory of those murdered on October 7th and
afterwards, and the fallen of the War, and that we act with courage and dedication to
create a society in which justice and peace prevail.
For the sake of our brothers, sisters and friends—may we seek goodness, may we
speak peace.
And may the verse be fulfilled within us: “There is nothing more whole than a
broken heart.” And let us say:
Amen.

השיבנו אדני אליך ונשובה, חדש ימינו כקדם
איכה, ה, כ' א

'Return us to You, and we shall return; renew our days as of old.'
Lamentations 5:21

These words carry a profound promise: no matter how far one has wandered, the door to return (Teshuva) is always open.

Elul is a time to prepare our hearts for renewal, just as we pray for the renewal of our days “as of old” — days of peace and connection. It is a call to embrace hope amidst hardship, to rebuild what has been broken, and to step forward with courage toward a better tomorrow.