

Preparing to Take Stock

Today is the first day (of two days) of Rosh Chodesh *Elul*, (which actually falls on the last day of the month of Av).

Elul is called *chodesh hacheshbon*, "a month of accounting," as it comes at the end of the spiritual fiscal year. It's also considered the month of preparation for the new spiritual year that begins with Rosh Hashana. The two themes of *Elul*—accounting and preparation—are interdependent, because how we account for the past is how we prepare for the future.

In *Elul* (the word in Aramaic means "searching") we examine the mistakes of the past year in order not to repeat them. In particular, this means taking an honest look at what is trapping us and preventing us from truly moving forward.

Obviously, fundamental changes do not happen instantly. But self-transformation is possible, and it is possible to the extent that we want it, that we examine ourselves and identify issues that need work, and that we invest ourselves in that goal.

In short, what will happen to each one of us on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur has a great deal to do with how we prepare for these great days.

We can be certain that if G-d created life, He gave us the power to change life. If G-d gave us the ability to get into patterns and habits, then He must also have given us the power of the soul to get out of the habit. Just like we got in, we can get out.

Any faith in G-d has to include faith in hope and faith in transformation—faith that we will be forgiven for past mistakes and faith that we can change.

Ask yourself: Do you believe that self-transformation is truly possible? Do you want to change? Are you prepared to resolve to do so?

Exercise for the day:

Open the journal you have prepared for the accounting work that you will do this month, and in it record your answers to the above questions.



"The *mazal* (sign) of the month of *Menachem Av* is the *Aryeh* (Leo), an acronym for *Elul*, Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, Hoshana Rabba²—four milestones in this time period,³ all built from the pain and destruction of Av. This parallels Moses' efforts to rebuild our relationship after the sin of the Golden Calf."

(The Shaloh)

Events

2448 (1313 BCE)—Moses carves the second set of tablets of the Ten Commandments to replace the tablets which he had shattered upon witnessing Israel's worship of the Golden Calf.

Laws and Customs

Rosh Chodesh Observances.

Today is the first of the two days of Rosh Chodesh ("Head of the Month") of *Elul*. (When a month has 30 days, both the last day of the month and the first day of the following month serve as the following month's Rosh Chodesh). Special portions are added to the daily prayers:

Hallel (composed of Psalms 113—118) is recited following the *Shacharit* morning prayer.

The Yaaleh V'yavo prayer is added to the *Amidah* prayer and to Grace After Meals.

The additional **Musaf** prayer is said.

Tachnun (confession of sins) and similar prayers are omitted.

Many have the custom to mark Rosh Chodesh with a festive meal and reduced work activity. The latter custom is prevalent amongst women,

who have a special affinity with Rosh Chodesh—the lunar month being the feminine aspect of the Jewish calendar.⁴

Some of the special *Elul* practices (see also *Elul* 1) begin on this day:

Psalm 27 is recited at the end of the morning and afternoon prayers (this special addition is recited throughout the month of *Elul* and the High Holiday season, until Hoshana Rabba—for a total of 51 days) (See *Elul* 2 and *Tishrei* 21).

Although the daily sounding of the **shofar** (ram's horn) officially begins on the second day of Rosh Chodesh *Elul*—announcing the opening of the gates of compassion—it is customary to practice sounding the shofar on the first Rosh Chodesh, introducing the *Elul* atmosphere of soul-searching and repentance.⁵

Breaking Damaging Patterns

Moses' *Elul* journey actually begins seven generations earlier, with Abraham's journey.

In the Book of Genesis (12:1), G-d speaks to Abraham and says: "Go from your land, your birthplace, the home of your parents, to the land that I will show you."

This is very strange because when you tell someone to travel, you specify the *destination* in detail, but you don't describe over and over again the point of departure. After all, the person knows where he/she is leaving from.

But here G-d tells Abraham to leave his land, his birthplace, and the home of his parents—three descriptions of his present location—and then, when it comes to the destination, He only tells him to go "to a land," without naming it or even hinting at where it is.

Chassidic thought, which gives voice to the inner dimension of the Torah, explains that in truth this verse is really a commandment issued by G-d to each of us: "Go on a journey of self-discovery. Leave behind anything that might hold you back. And then I will show you the landscape of your Divine soul—the true you."

If you want to discover your higher self, this is the secret.

Many people get inspired and motivated to go on such a journey; they actually pack their bags—literally or metaphorically—and set out on their way. But after a while, they end up coming right back where they started, repeating the same old patterns.

Good intentions are pure and real. When you decide to leave, you really want to get someplace. But you have so many things weighing you down, so many "golden idols." So the key to meaningful change is not so much knowing how to get to a new place, it's knowing how to unload the past, so that it shouldn't shape your future and bring you back to your old patterns.

Ask yourself: In what areas of your life are you repeating old patterns? In what ways are they damaging to you?

Exercise for the day:

Identify and describe one damaging pattern that you want to break in the coming year.

List one thing you must do in order to break that pattern.



"In the *shtetl* of Lubavitch, on the Shabbat preceding the month of *Elul*, though summer still lingered and the day was bright and sunny, there was a change in the air; one already smelled the *Elul*-scent, a *teshuvah*-wind was blowing."

(The Rebbe Yosef Yitzchak)¹

Events

2448 (1313 BCE)—Moses ascends Mt. Sinai for the third time to pray and beseech G-d to forgive the people.² He will remain there for 40 days, descending on Yom Kippur, when he finally succeeds in his mission. The shofar was sounded when Moses ascended on Rosh Chodesh *Elul* and every day afterwards. This is why we sound the shofar every day of *Elul*.³ We recreate these 40 days beginning from the first day of Rosh Chodesh *Elul*.⁴ These 40 are hinted to in the 4 *yuds* (4x10) at the end of the words

ani l'dodi v'dodi li.⁵

Laws and Customs

Every day of *Elul* the shofar is sounded as a wake-up call, reminding us that these are special days of compassion, open to receive all our prayers and *teshuvah*, as did Moses on Mt. Sinai. The shofar also elicits awe, like thunder before the rain, and prepares us for Rosh Hashana.⁶

We recite three additional chapters of Psalms each day, from the 1st of *Elul*⁷ until Yom Kippur (on Yom Kippur the remaining 36 chapters are recited, thereby completing the entire Book of Psalms). This is a custom instituted by the Baal Shem Tov.

In the Sephardic tradition, *Selichot* (special prayers for forgiveness) are said beginning from the first day of *Elul*, through Yom Kippur. In the Ashkenazic tradition they begin in the week before Rosh Hashana (See *Elul* 21).

Today is Rosh Hashana of *Maaser Bebeima*, tithing of the livestock (*Rosh Hashana* 2a).⁸

From Rosh Chodesh *Elul* until Yom Kippur it is customary, when corresponding, to wish one another a *Kesiva vechatima tovah*, a happy and healthy new year.⁹

It is customary to increase charitable giving in the days of *Elul*.¹⁰

Identifying Personal Biases

By telling Abraham, "Leave your land, your birthplace, the home of your parents, and go to the land that I will show you," G-d instructed us, his descendants, that there are three forms of subjectivity we need to leave behind when we set out on the journey of self-discovery:

'Your land' represents the first level of subjectivity—the influence of society, community and peer pressure, which affect us in deep and profound ways. We all want to be liked and accepted by others, and we adjust our behavior accordingly.

The 'home of your parents' represents the second level of subjectivity—parental influence, which can be so subtle that we don't even recognize it. Often, we don't realize how deeply the attitudes of our parents permeate our own attitudes and behavior, for good and for bad.

'Your birthplace' represents the third level of subjectivity—inherent self-love. Each person is blinded by his or her selfish interests; no one is immune from that.

This does not mean that we must completely discard all good things that we have learned from our parents or our community, but it means that, first of all, we must become aware

of how these influences affect our behavior, our opinions, and our thought patterns. Only then can we begin to know who it is that we are and what it is that we think, know and believe.

Similarly, personal bias or self-love—which isn't a crime in itself—becomes a crime when we don't acknowledge it, and when it begins to distort our vision.

Ask yourself: Are you able to identify where you blindly follow convention (or politically correct opinions) and where your path is truly your own, arrived at by you through careful consideration?

Exercise for the day:

Select one significant event of the past day and identify how your reactions and behaviors were shaped by each of the three levels of subjectivity named above.

Describe what role the damaging pattern you identified yesterday played in these reactions and behaviors.



"The entire work of *Elul* and *Tishrei* is comparable to cleaning, repairing and rebuilding a soiled or broken container. Rosh Chodesh *Elul* is the time for soul accounting. Through our tears during *Selichot* we wash out our 'containers.' On Rosh Hashana we repair the container, reaching the epitome with the sounding of the shofar."

(The Rebbe Yosef Yitzchak)¹

Events

5315 (1555 CE)—The first printing of the *Shulchan Aruch* (the definitive Code of Jewish Law) by Rabbi Yosef Caro (1488-1575) is completed in the Holy Land.

Laws and Customs

During *Elul*, even those immersed full time in Torah study, take off some time from their study to increase their prayers and supplications.²

Facts

The custom of reciting King David's Psalm 27 ("By David, G-d is my Light and my Salvation") each day of *Elul* until Hoshana Rabba³ is based on the *Midrash*⁴ which associates the "Light" of David and the "Light" of all human beings with Rosh Hashana, when by the light of the soul G-d searches out the deepest recesses of the human being. The *Midrash* associates the "Salvation" of David and of all human beings with Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, when everyone is redeemed. The theme of this psalm is also related to the revelation of the Thirteen Divine Attributes of Compassion which radiate during *Elul*.⁵ Indeed, the psalm mentions G-d's name 13 times.⁶

Learning to be Free

Identifying damaging patterns and personal bias is an essential step on a journey to freedom from our personal bondage.

In one way or another, we're all enslaved—by our psychological demons, or by social standards, by our parents' words and attitudes, or by our responsibilities, by the consequences of the mistakes we've made, or by our careers, employers, or employees.

Learning how to be free is what is called in the Torah "leaving Egypt."

The Hebrew word for Egypt is *Mitzrayim*, which literally means "narrow" and which represents all forms of enslavement, be it dependency, conformity, subjectivity—whatever it may be in your life that sets up obstacles, limits or constraints.

To be free, you must leave your personal *Mitzrayim*. But freedom is not enough. You can be free for a while and then be enslaved again. This is why fifty days after the Israelites left Egypt and tasted freedom for the first time, they received a guidebook—the Torah—on how to maintain freedom.

Look at your own life. There were undoubtedly many times you felt free, you felt inspired, you felt you could do anything, but then old patterns and biases took over. You couldn't maintain that inspiration. The resolve to change was there for a moment, but you couldn't sustain it.

This is where you need the guidance of the Divine Torah blueprint. It tells you how to access your soul, how to achieve freedom in every part of your life, from the moment you wake to the moment you go to sleep, and even while you're asleep.

Ask yourself: To what extent have you used the guidance of the Torah to access your soul? To what extent are you familiar with what the Torah teaches in this regard?

Exercise for the day:

Identify one area in your life where you badly need the objective guidance of the Torah because you have not been able to make meaningful progress on your own.



"He made the letter *Yud* king over action, and He bound a crown to it, and He combined one with another, and with them he formed *Virgo* [*Betulah*] in the universe, *Elul* in the year, and the left hand¹ in the Soul, male and female."²

(Sefer Yetzirah 5:8)³

Facts

Elul and Torah are intrinsically connected:

- 1) Moses spent all of *Elul* receiving the second set of Tablets of the Ten Commandments.
- 2) In the verse of the *Song of Songs*, "I am for my beloved and my beloved is for me; he feeds among roses;" 'feeds among roses' refers to Torah study.
- 3) The Thirteen Attributes of Compassion (the thirteen petals on the rose) parallel the Thirteen Rules of Biblical Interpretation.⁴
- 4) One of the acronyms of *Elul* is connected to refuge.⁵ Torah provides refuge from our own subjective blind spots and other forces in our lives that tend to cloud our judgment.

Every hour in the month of *Elul* is considered like a day; it has the power to atone for a day of the year. Hence, all the days of *Elul* (each day x 12 day-time hours) is more than all the days of the year.⁶

The Truth Within

The *Ethics of the Fathers* teach, "No one is free except the one who is immersed in Torah study," in effect identifying the practice of religion—the study and observance of Torah—with freedom.

Yet many people don't think of religion as freeing. They think of it as limiting, dogmatic, oppressive.

This is because the religion they have been exposed to is an invention of human beings. The religion they know is not the religion of G-d; it is not the religion of the Torah.

If your experience of religion is not freeing, then you have fallen into a man-made trap.

Freedom is Divine; it cannot be human. As soon as it's human, then there's someone who's in control of it, someone who wants to sell it to you and own it. That is when religion becomes another form of slavery; it becomes oppressive because it has lost its Divine nature.

That's why the Torah was given—so that there would be a permanent record, a source that everyone could refer to. As a result, Judaism has remained a religion of uncommon strength, one that over and over again has defied being hijacked by people.

The Talmud teaches that every one of us is taught the Torah before we are born. Its meaning is ingrained in our psyches, and upon birth we're made to consciously forget. But the truth resonates. So when we hear it, we know. Great masters or teachers can't give us anything we don't already possess; they can help us in one thing only—to open our own pathway to the truth within.

Ask yourself: To what extent do you see religion as oppressive? To what extent is the religion in your life man-made or self-made? Have you gone to the source? Have you had the experience of hearing the truth resonate in your heart? Did you embrace it or reject it?

Exercise for the day:

Commit to regularly attend a Torah class that will help you in at least one area of your life (which you identified yesterday) where you have not been able to make meaningful progress on your own.



"And the tablets were the work of G-d, and the writing was G-d's writing engraved on the tablets."

(Exodus 32:16)

"Read not 'engraved' but 'freedom'—for there is no free person, except for one who occupies himself with Torah study." (Ethics of the Fathers 6:2)

The key to true freedom involves ensuring that the truth of the Divine letters is engraved in your spirit and not just superimposed like letters written on parchment.

Laws and Customs

During the month of *Elul* it is customary to have *tefillin* and *mezuzot* checked, as well as to review other *mitzvot* that require evaluation (*Mateh Efraim* 581:10).

Following the Shabbat *Mincha* afternoon service, some have the custom to continue studying *Pirkei Avot* ("Ethics of the Fathers") on each Shabbat of the summer (as we did on each Shabbat between Passover and Shavuot). The 1st Shabbat of *Elul* we read chapter 6; the 2nd Shabbat chapters 1-2; the 3rd Shabbat chapters 3-4; the 4th Shabbat, preceding Rosh Hashana, chapters 5-6.

Facts

During the month of *Elul* we read the portions in the Torah: *Sboftim*, *Ki Teitzei*, *Ki Tavo*, *Nitzavim-Vayeilech* (when Rosh Hashana falls on Monday or Tuesday we divide *Nitzavim* and *Vayeilech* into two separate weeks). We also read the last four Haftorahs of the "Seven Weeks of Consolation," which follow the "Three Weeks of Affliction." For seven weeks, beginning with the Shabbat after the Ninth of *Av* (*Tisha B'Av*), the Haftorah readings consist of prophecies describing G-d's consolation of His people and the rehabilitation of their relationship.

On the first Shabbat of *Elul*¹ we read *Sboftim*, which commands us to establish a judicial system. This is a major theme of *Elul*: preparing for the cosmic Day of Judgment. This is followed by the 4th Haftorah of the Seven Weeks of Consolation, in which G-d says: "It is I, I Myself come to comfort you." (See *Elul* 6.)

Developing Sensitivity

When the Rebbe Yosef Yitzchak was a child, he was walking in a garden one day and he ripped off a leaf and began rubbing it with his finger. His father rebuked him, "What right do you have to rip a leaf from a tree and mistreat it for no purpose at all?" When the Rebbe grew up he said that this incident had a deep impact on his life. It taught him to be sensitive to everything.

If a person is sensitive to a leaf on a tree, he will, without a doubt, be sensitive to all life forms—most of all to his fellow human beings. This is the essence of *tzedaka* ("charity"), one of the three pillars upon which the world stands (Torah and prayer being the other two). *Tzedaka* is sensitivity in action.

Sensitivity to life is the goal of many of the practices of the Torah. Some of them appear deceptively simple—for example, take the act of making a blessing before eating.

On a basic level, a blessing on food is saying thank you to G-d. That makes sense—whenever anyone gives you something, you say thank you. And if you can thank the waiter who brought you the food, you can definitely thank the Creator who created it.

But on a deeper level, the blessing has a profound meaning. When you are hungry, you want to put that food in your mouth immedi-

ately. But the Torah says, "No, you can't." First, you must be sensitive to the environment, to every fiber of grass, every cell of life, because everything that G-d created has sanctity to it. You have no right to consume a part of creation unless you are sanctifying it.

It's true that many people just make blessings by rote, without sensitivity. That is mechanical Judaism. But if you understand and appreciate the concept of a blessing, you know that little daily acts like it can sensitize your life.

Ask yourself: How sensitive are you to the world around you? Do you have a plan for developing/increasing your sensitivity?

Exercise for the day:

Make a special effort to increase your charitable giving, beyond your natural tendency.

Place a charity box in your home, office and car. Teach your children to give of their money and time to others.

Before you eat focus on making a blessing, with added intention, thanking G-d and concentrating on the spiritual energy contained within the food that you are about to consume.



"*Tzedaka* is far more than charity. *Tzedaka* means 'righteousness' and 'justice.' When you contribute money, time or resources you are not just being benevolent and charitable. You are actually doing what is just and right—you are completing the give and take cycle that defines the structure of the universe. *Tzedaka* spiritualizes the material, unites diversity, and, above all, makes us G-d-like because we become givers and not just takers. Indeed, more than the giver gives to the recipient, the recipient gives to the giver."¹

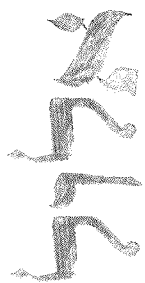
Events

5537 (1777)—The first Chassidic *aliyah* ("ascent" i.e. immigration to the Holy Land)—led by Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk, Rabbi Abraham of Kalisk and Rabbi Yisroel of Polotzk—reached the Holy Land.²

Facts ☉

Elul and *tzedaka* are intrinsically connected:

- 1) It is customary to increase charitable giving in the days of *Elul*.
- 2) One of *Elul's* acronyms relates to giving charitable gifts.
- 3) The permutation of G-d's name that radiates in *Elul* is from the verse *Ve'tzedaka tibe'yeb lannu ki*,³ meaning "It is our *tzedaka* to (safeguard and keep this entire mandate)." (Deuteronomy 6:25).



To Console and be Consoled

This first week of *Elul* is the fourth week in the Seven Weeks of Consolation, which began immediately following the destruction of *Tisha B'Av*. G-d comforts and consoles us while we work on rebuilding our relationship with Him during *Elul* (as Moses did on Mt. Sinai), thereby showing us that a relationship with Him is a two-way street.

The *Midrash*¹ explains the progression of these seven weeks as a dialogue between us and G-d (which reflects our introspection in the month of *Elul*):

Week One: G-d sends His messengers, the prophets, to console the people after the destruction of the Temple.

Week Two: The Jewish people ask the messengers, "Why are you coming here? We want G-d to come."

Week Three: The messengers return and tell G-d, "The nation is not consoled."

Week Four (the first week of *Elul*): G-d agrees and begins consoling the people Himself.

Week Five: G-d's consolation intensifies.

Week Six: The consolation reaches a more profound and powerful level.²

Week Seven (the week before Rosh Hashana): The Jewish people tell G-d, "We rejoice in Your consolation."²

Why doesn't G-d Himself console the people at the very beginning? Why does He send messengers and allow three whole weeks to pass by before He acts?

G-d teaches us here, that we have the power to bond with each other and to console each other. Though we are mortals and may be weak, G-d tells us that one vulnerable person can console another. It's a great gift that one person can give to another.

Ask yourself: Have you developed the sensitivity to console others in times of sorrow in their lives? Do you seek out opportunities to offer consolation or do you shirk away from such occasions? What has been your experience in being consoled by others?

Exercise for the day:

Console someone—visit a sick person in a hospital; or call a friend who is feeling down; or send a greeting to a person you know is lonely.

In the first week, we read a message from the prophet Isaiah: "Be comforted, be comforted, my people," says your G-d." (Isaiah 40:1-26).

In the second week, we read the response of the nation: "And Zion said: 'G-d has forsaken me; my G-d has forgotten me.'" (Isaiah 49:14).

In the third week, we read, "O afflicted, storm-tossed, unconsolated one..." (Isaiah 54:11) The prophet informs G-d that the people are not consoled.

In the fourth week, we read, "It is I, I am He Who comforts you..." (Isaiah 51:12). G-d agrees to come to console the people Himself. This is the first week of *Elul*.

In the fifth week, G-d's personal consolation continues and we read, "Sing out, O barren one, who has not given birth, break out into glad song and be jubilant..." (Isaiah 54:1)

In the sixth week, the consolation intensifies, "Arise! Shine! For your light has arrived and the glory of G-d has shined upon you." (Isaiah 60:1)

And finally **in the seventh week**, we read, "I will rejoice intensely with G-d, my soul shall exult with my G-d ..." (Isaiah 61:10) The people signify that they are consoled, and now are ready for the renewal and rebirth of Rosh Hashana.

Facts

The Seven Weeks of Consolation correspond to the seven emotions³ (which evolve from the seven Divine emotional attributes). These are: love, discipline, compassion, ambition, humility, bonding and sovereignty. These emotions comfort us, like the glow on a teacher's face as he prepares to "give birth" to a new revelation (which was conceived in the Three Weeks of Affliction). These "glowing" emotions motivate and prepare us for the work we must do to receive the new revelation and perspective on life. This work entails *teshuvah*. In order to grow and be receptive to a new perspective, we must suspend our former perspectives and free ourselves from old behavior patterns. *Teshuvah* consists of two steps (the Two Weeks of *Teshuvah* which follow the Seven of Consolation): "Lower" *teshuvah* which cleans up the past, and "higher" *teshuvah* which opens up the future. It is the latter that allows us to finally receive the new revelation of the Second Tablets on Yom Kippur. After all this work we are finally ready to celebrate our reception of the new "concept." And we celebrate this on Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah (Reb Hillel of Paritch).⁴

Netzach ("endurance" and "ambition") radiates in this first week of Elul (the fourth of the Seven Weeks of Consolation).

The King is in the Field

In *Elul*, G-d comes to console us. During this month, G-d is very close nearby—all we have to do is reach out to meet Him.

What does this mean? It means that all year round there are many layers that shroud your own essence from yourself; there is a split between your inner self and your outer self—who you truly are and what you do, your spirit and your activities. In *Elul* many of these layers are stripped. You can access, if you wish, your true self, since it is part of the higher reality and the essence of all of existence called G-d.

In *Elul*, “the King is in the field,” writes the Alter Rebbe.¹ He uses the analogy of a king who is returning home from his travels as a way of explaining the phenomenon of *Elul*.

The king had been traveling; he had left his palace and gone to a far off land outside his kingdom. And now he is on his way home. He is about to enter his palace and he stands outside in the field greeting his people. Then he goes back into the palace and again mounts his throne.

When the king is in the field, writes the Alter Rebbe, every person has the opportunity, without petitioning for an audience, to go over to him, say hello and ask for whatever he or she

needs. The king is smiling, he is happy to be home, he is in his informal mode, and he is predisposed to grant all requests.

That’s *Elul*. On Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, the King is back in his palace on his throne.

Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur are holidays. *Elul* is amid workdays. We are in the field, we are still living our normal lives. Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur have a very powerful energy, because on those days we petition the King in his inner sanctum. But in *Elul*, we petition the King on our turf.

It is a profound message of hope that we don’t have to wait for Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur to find G-d. We can go out to meet Him now.

Ask yourself: If you could literally go out to meet G-d in the field, how would you approach Him, what would you ask Him?

Exercise for the day:

Write a letter to G-d—say what you would if you were to meet Him in the field outside your home right now.

Sanctify one mundane (“field”) item in your life, and use it for something that would make the “King” proud.

“During *Elul* ‘the king is in the field’ and everyone who so desires is permitted to meet him, and he receives them all with a cheerful countenance and shows a smiling face to them all.” (Rabbi Schneur Zalman)²

Events

2367 (1394 BCE)—Moses’ parents, Amram and Jocheved, remarry after having separated because of Pharaoh’s decree that all male Jewish babies be killed. Their reunion was prompted by their six-year-old daughter Miriam’s rebuke. Moses is born six months and one day later on Adar 7, 2368 (Talmud, *Sotah* 12b).

2449 (1312 BCE)—The Spies who slandered the Land of Israel die in the desert (Talmud, *Sotah* 35a; see Numbers 13-14).³

Facts

The sin of the spies who died today was not in their actual scouting effort; indeed the word *Elul* means “to scout/search” in Aramaic—in context of the scouting of the spies (see *Av* 30). Search and discovery is healthy and necessary in the *Elul* accountability process. The sin of the spies was that they did not merely scout out the land but they came to a decisive conclusion: “We cannot conquer this land that consumes its inhabitants. It is too powerful for us.” But they and we have no right to question whether the mission can be accomplished; our job is to figure out *how* to do it, not *whether* we can or not. In the month of *Elul*, when we search and scout out our own lives, we repair the sin of the spies, which took place on *Tisha B’Av*, 40 days after they went out on their mission on *Sivan* 29. Yet again, we see how *Elul* repairs and transforms the broken pieces of *Av*.⁴