

Class on Elul – Section 3

Failure & Challenges are Meant to Be

We can take the month of Elul to look at where we are limited and flawed, acknowledging the Inner Critic's challenges to us. But instead of seeing these things as something to be ashamed of, each limitation can be seen as a symptom of distancing from G-d. They are simply challenges to help us to rectify erroneous beliefs by replacing them with Higher, more Resourced in the Truth from a Divine Perspective. Thus, our challenges help us to get to that place of complete surrender because nothing that we've tried before will resolve the challenge. This makes us automatically call out to G-d for help and to suspend our old beliefs and ways of doing things. We go beyond our limitations and expand in a new way than perhaps we have ever done before.

Teshuva – “Return or Repentance”

This is the meaning of teshuva. We return, we come back from our self-created idols and remember who we Really are. G-d is our beloved and bestows everything we need despite all of our limitations and flaws. We are given Life and can be grateful for our portion of it. This returns us to the G-dly part of us that is never tarnished because it is connected to Hashem. In this present moment in our existence, we can reach a place of pure peace where nothing is wrong with us. This place is where we can see that all the challenges have been for our greater good and we've learned and have grown. Sometimes it takes distance and time to see the bigger picture and to connect with the larger perspective of the trajectory of our lives.

Days of Moshiach

It's important to remember that the sages have said that this generation has been born during the precursor to time of Moshiach. Those of us who have reincarnated during this time in history are here for the express purpose of rectifying the last vestiges of brokenness and distance from Hashem. It's supposed to be a difficult time and very challenging. So, let's just acknowledge that – we have all chosen to be here at this time in the history of the world, to achieve the ultimate growth in the level of our souls and thereby helping to shift this earth into a welcoming place for the grand finale – the ultimate place of complete peace. A place where there is no more death, no hunger, no sickness, where everyone sees G-d everywhere and even all of our loved ones who have passed have come back! It's a time we've been promised and cannot even understand or fathom. But Elul is the time when we read the passages from Isaiah that outline it all. You can congratulate yourself for having chosen this challenge. You have chosen to assist in bringing Heaven to Earth.



18th of Elul

The number 18 has incredible significance in Judaism because each letter of the Hebrew alphabet is both a letter and a specific number. The #18 spells out the word for "life". In Jewish thought, Life is to be celebrated. The Jewish religion is different from all other religions because the focus is on **this** life and not on the next. Everyone is familiar with the toast, "L'Chaim", which means "to life!" Our purpose is on **this earth** and during Elul, we have the energy available to connect to the deepest part of life so we can make the most impact in the coming year.

Birthdays that Brought More Life

The 18th is when the Baal Shem Tov was born. He was the one who started the Chassidic movement in Judaism during the mid 1700's. It's his Kabbalah that we are learning here. He re-energized Judaism and gave people permission to experience complete joy in their Jewish practice which at the time had become rather stifled and rote. He made it possible for the common man to own his Judaism even if he wasn't a scholar. He also brought Kabbalah to the common man where before it existed only in secret, known by very few.

Another person of importance was born on the 18th of Elul – the person who started the Chabad movement. His name was Shneur Zalman of Liadi. He was the disciple of a rabbi named, Dov Ber of Mezerich, who was the disciple of the Baal Shem Tov. What Rabbi Dov Ber did was send all of his disciples to different Jewish communities around Europe to share the Chassidic philosophy. They all started different lines of Chassidic communities. The man who started the Chabad movement, Shneur Zalman, wrote a book called “Tanya” that helped the common man learn the innermost secrets of Kabbalah.

Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi and the Baal Shem Tov were both born on the same day in Elul and so the 18th is a special day on the Jewish calendar and is replete with the energy of the mystical secrets of Hasidism.

The following is copied from

http://www.chabadbythesea.com/calendar/view/day_cdo/aid/156785/jewish/Chai-Elul.htm

[Baal Shem Tov Born \(1698\)](#)

Elul 18 is the birthday of [Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov](#), the founder of [Chassidism](#). Rabbi Israel was born in a small town in Ukraine in 1698. His father, Rabbi Eliezer, who was a member of the secret society of "[hidden tzaddikim](#)," passed away when young Israel was only five years old; his last words to his son were, "[Fear nothing](#) but G-d alone. [Love every Jew](#) with all your heart and all your soul." The young orphan would spend much of his time wandering and meditating in the forests that surrounded his hometown; there, he one day met with one of his father's compatriots, and eventually joined their society. For many years, he lived disguised as a simple innkeeper and clay-digger, his greatness known only to a very small circle of fellow mystics and disciples. But on [his 36th birthday](#), he was instructed by his master to "[reveal](#)" himself and [publicly disseminate](#) his teachings. Drawing from the mystical "[soul of Torah](#)," the Baal Shem Tov ("Master of the Good Name," as he came to be known) taught about the [spark of G-dliness](#) that is to be found [in every creation](#), and about the great love that G-d has for each and every one of His children, scholars and simple folk alike. He emphasized the importance of [joy](#) and [simple faith](#) in serving G-d, rather than [asceticism](#). Initially, his teachings encountered fierce opposition from the scholarly elite and established leadership of the Jewish community; but many of those very scholars and communal leaders ended up becoming his devoted disciples. When Rabbi Israel passed at age 62 on [Shavuot](#) of 1760, the movement he founded was well on the way of becoming the most [vital force](#) in Jewish life.

Links:

[Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov](#)



[Chassidic Movement Founded \(1734\)](#)

After many years as a member of the society of "[hidden tzaddikim](#)," living under the guise of an ignorant clay-digger, Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov was instructed by his masters to reveal himself and begin to publicly disseminate his teachings. This he did on his 36th birthday, Elul 18, 5494 (1734).



[1st Chabad Rebbe Born \(1745\)](#)

Rabbi [Schneur Zalman of Liadi](#) (1745-1812), founder of the "Chabad" branch of [Chassidism](#), was born on Elul 18 of the year 5505 from creation -- the 47th birthday of his "spiritual grandfather", Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov (Rabbi Schneur Zalman was the disciple of the Baal Shem Tov's disciple and successor, Rabbi DovBer of Mezeritch).

Link: A [brief biography](#) of Rabbi Schneur Zalman

Laws and Customs



[Chassidic Holiday](#)

"Chai Elul" (Hebrew for "the 18th of Elul," also meaning "the life of Elul") is celebrated by the Chassidic community as the birthday of the "two great luminaries" -- Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Chassidism; and Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, the founder of Chabad. Chassidim wish each other "Gut Yom Tov!" and conduct joyous gatherings called [farbrengens](#).



[12 Days of Reflection](#)

Elul, the last month of the Jewish year, is [a month devoted](#) to stocktaking and introspection. A Chassidic tradition holds that the last twelve days of the year -- Elul 18 to 29 -- are specifically devoted to the twelve months of the closing year: on each of these twelve days, one should review the deeds and achievements of its corresponding month.



[Links](#)

A [Chai Elul anthology](#)



[Elul Observances](#)

As the last month of the Jewish year, Elul is traditionally a time of introspection and stocktaking -- a time to review one's deeds and spiritual progress over the past year and prepare for the upcoming "[Days of Awe](#)" of Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur.

As the month of Divine Mercy and Forgiveness (see "Today in Jewish History" for [Elul 1](#)) it is a most opportune time for [teshuvah](#) ("return" to G-d), [prayer](#), [charity](#), and increased [Ahavat Yisrael](#) (love for a fellow Jew) in the quest for self-improvement and coming closer to G-d. Chassidic master Rabbi [Schneur Zalman of Liadi](#) likens the month of Elul to a time when "the king is in the field" and, in contrast to when he is in the royal palace, "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."

Specific Elul customs include the daily sounding of the shofar (ram's horn) as a call to repentance. The [Baal Shem Tov](#) instituted the custom of reciting three additional chapters of [Psalms](#) each day, from the 1st of Elul until Yom Kippur (on Yom Kippur the remaining 36 chapters are recited, thereby completing the entire book of Psalms).

Assignment: What is your Teshuva this year? Make a list of 3 areas you can expand – despite your shortcomings. Also make a list of 3 strengths you have where you and others can obviously see your spark. Then write down some baby steps to take so that you can begin to actualize some new behavior in the coming year. Explore the part of you that remains unblemished.