

YEMEI RATZON

The background of the page is a vibrant, painterly illustration of a village scene. In the foreground, a young boy in a red shirt and yellow cap is painting a white picket fence. To his right, an elderly man with a long white beard and a black hat is blowing a shofar. In the middle ground, a man in blue overalls is digging in a garden, and a woman in a purple apron is working nearby. In the background, a man is on a roof, and another is pushing a wheelbarrow. The scene is set in a village with colorful houses and lush greenery.

❶

**What are
Yemei
Ratzon?**

❷

**What do
we do
differently?**

❸

**How do I
take advantage
of Yemei
Ratzon?**

❹

**What is Aseres
Yemei Teshuvah?**

What are Yemei Ratzon?



In a Nutshell

Yemei Ratzon (Days of Favor) refer to the 40 days from Rosh Chodesh Elul through Yom Kippur. The *Yemei Ratzon* are a time of preparation for the Yamim Noraim (High Holidays).

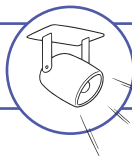
ELUL - THE FINAL MONTH

As the last month of the Jewish year, Elul is a time to pause, reflect, and realign before Rosh Hashana, the day Hashem judges us. It's like the final editing of a report – your last chance to fix up any mistakes before handing your paper in! During these days, our words and actions carry extra weight, and Hashem is especially ready to accept our teshuvah and help us forward.



I LOVE YOU, YOU LOVE ME

It's not just about fear or judgment—it's about connection and love! Hashem gave us a special opportunity: the gates of mercy are wide open during Elul. It's as if Hashem is gently reaching out His hand and waiting for us to take it. He invites us to come closer, fix what we need to fix, and return to who we truly are. It is a lot easier to grow and do teshuvah in Elul, because Hashem Himself draws near to us and invites us to draw near to Him!¹ What an opportunity!



Spotlight

Yemei Ratzon are a time of special closeness to Hashem.



THE KING IN THE FIELD

All year long, the King lives in the faraway capital city, inside his majestic, imposing palace. Tall golden gates surround it, with rows of guards in perfect formation. If you wanted to have an audience with the King, you would have to travel to the capital, wait in line with countless others from across the kingdom, and submit a request. Then you would have to wait for weeks, hoping your request will be approved and that you'll receive the rare royal invitation to speak with His Majesty, the King.

But once a year, something incredible happens: The powerful King leaves his palace and walks alone through the countryside. He brings no guards with him. There are no golden gates and no endless lines. He's just there—open, welcoming, and ready to speak with any of his dear citizens. You don't need a reason. You don't need an invitation. The king just wants to get to know his people, hear what's on their minds, and help them however he can. Anyone can walk right up and talk to him.

This is Elul! Hashem, the King of the world, is closer and more accessible than ever this month. He's waiting to help us come close to Him through teshuvah. All we need to do is be real and want to reconnect with Him, and He will welcome us with open arms.

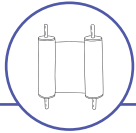


ZONIAK CHALLENGE

אני לדודי ודודי לי

"I am to my beloved, and my beloved is to me."²

This *pasuk* is hinted to in the name of a month.³ Can you figure out which month? What do you think this is hinting to?



The Power of Prep

Preparation makes everything better. Think about it—big moments in life always feel more meaningful when we get ready for them. A wedding, a championship game, even a big test—you don’t just show up. Preparation enhances the experience. The more important the moment, the more it needs preparation. And what day could be bigger than Rosh Hashanah? It’s when the whole world is judged, when we reflect on why we were created and what we’re doing with our lives. Walking into that day without preparation would be missing out on a huge opportunity to really tap into the awesomeness of the day. This is what Elul is all about. It’s a powerful preparation period. It’s our time to get ready, not just for Rosh Hashanah, but for Aseres Yemei Teshuvah, Yom Kippur, and the rest of the year.

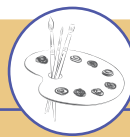
R’ Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, known as the Ramchal, wrote a classic work on spiritual development, called *Mesilas Yesharim* (The Path of the Just). In it, he gives step-by-step instructions for how to grow into the best version of ourselves. The first step on his ladder to greatness is *zehirus*—living with awareness and paying attention to how we act.⁴ He quotes Yirmiyahu HaNavi, who compares people rushing through life without stopping to think about their ways to a horse charging into battle.⁵ Horses don’t think or recognize the danger that they are in. They just charge forward, caught up in the rush. We can’t risk living like this and missing out on the purpose of our lives! Elul comes every year to shake us awake, to remind us to stop and actually pay attention to our actions and where we are headed.

Mindfulness—being aware of what we’re doing—changes how we experience everything. As Jews, this concept comes up all over the place. Think about davening. We don’t jump straight into Shema and Shemoneh Esrei. We start with the morning blessings, then sing *Pesukei D’Zimrah*, “the verses of song”. Only then are we ready for the most powerful moments of tefillah. Before learning Torah, too, we prepare. We make a brachah which reminds us that learning Torah isn’t just another subject in class—it’s

connecting our human minds to Hashem’s wisdom. This changes the quality of our learning entirely! These steps of preparation help us be mindful and get the most out of what we are doing.

So what should we focus on as Elul begins? Chazal teach that the name “Elul” hints to a line from Shir HaShirim: “*Ani L’dodi V’dodi Li*—I am for my beloved, and my beloved is for me.”⁶ Elul is about love—our love for Hashem, and His love for us. The Alter of Kelm, Rav Simcha Zissel Ziv, explains how we need to prepare for *Yamim Noraim* during Elul. He brings the tefillah of *Avinu Malkeinu* as a model, and explains that before we can stand before Hashem as the King and Ultimate Judge, we need to first feel that He is our Father, Who loves us and wants what’s best for us. Only when we feel that love can we experience and accept the awesomeness of His judgment. Hashem judges us because He cares about us, like a parent disciplines their child because he loves him. This Elul, let’s not just drift through on autopilot, but use the time to mindfully connect to Hashem’s love and prepare for the powerful days ahead!⁷

What are some other areas in life where being mindful changes the experience and makes it more meaningful?



Cover Uncovered

Elul is when we begin preparing for the coronation of Hashem, the King of all Kings. We want to show Him that we are loyal “citizens” of His kingdom, ready to live according to His will. Just like a town rushes to clean up and fix everything before a royal visit—painting fences, sweeping streets, planting flowers, we use this time to examine ourselves, fix what’s broken, and polish our actions. The cover shows just that: people working together to get their town ready. But the work doesn’t stop there. During the *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*—the ten days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur—we double down, doing our best to return to Hashem and earn a good judgment. These 40 days are a time to reset, realign, and show Hashem: We’re ready to be part of Your kingdom!

What do we do differently?

SHOFAR, AND SO CLOSE

Every morning in Elul, we blow the shofar. We do this because Klal Yisrael blew a shofar on Rosh Chodesh Elul, after Moshe went back up to get the second *Luchos*, following the *Chet Ha'Egel* (Sin of the Golden Calf). They blew a shofar in order to remember to avoid another terrible mistake like *Chet Ha'Egel*. Today, we blow the shofar all month to wake ourselves up and remind us to do teshuvah and return to Hashem.⁹ However, we do not blow the Shofar on Erev Rosh Hashana.¹⁰



TEHILLIM TIME

We recite *L'Dovid Hashem*, chapter 27 of Tehillim after shacharis, and mincha or maariv, depending on one's custom.¹¹ We begin on Rosh Chodesh Elul and continue straight until the last day of Sukkos. There are many connections between this perek and the Yemei Ratzon, in particular its underlying theme of asking Hashem to bring us close to Him.

AVINU MALKEINU



Avinu Malkeinu ("Our Father, Our King") is a beloved element of the *Selichos* and *Yamim Noraim* davening, and also said on fast days throughout the year. Rabbi Akiva composed the main part of the tefillah, and it was later expanded into the full *Avinu Malkeinu*.

SAYING SELICHOS

Selichos are special early-morning tefillos that Ashkenazim say from the Motzei Shabbos before Rosh Hashana (for at least four days) until Yom Kippur.⁸ Sefardim say *Selichos* the whole month of Elul! The word *selicha* means "sorry", and that's what these prayers are about: preparing for the *Yamim Noraim* by doing teshuvah and davening for Hashem's mercy.

MARVELOUS MIDDOS

At the heart of *Selichos* are the 13 *Middos of Rachamim*, the "13 Attributes of Mercy". After the sin of *Chet Ha'egel*, Klal Yisrael deserved to be wiped out. Moshe begged Hashem to forgive them. Hashem responded by teaching Moshe to say the 13 *Middos*,¹² promising that any time we say them sincerely, He will forgive us.¹³ But it's not just about saying the words! These *middos* are also a model for how we should act: When we are patient, kind, and forgiving with others, Hashem treats us in the same way.

FIRST FAST

The day after Rosh Hashana is *Tzom Gedalia* (the Fast of Gedaliah), when we fast to commemorate the death of Gedaliah, the leader of the Jewish people in Eretz Yisrael following the destruction of the First Beis Hamikdash.¹⁴ (Learn more about this fast in the Churban nugget.)



Corny Corner

What do cleaning light fixtures and fixing software have in common?

Both involve getting rid of a lot of bugs.

SHABBOS SHUVAH

The Shabbos between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur is called *Shabbos Shuvah*, the "Shabbos of Return." The name comes from the *Haftarah* (portion from Navi) that we read on this Shabbos which opens with the words, "*Shuva* (return) *Yisrael* to Hashem, your G-d."¹⁵ On this Shabbos, the rabbi usually delivers a speech, arousing everybody to do teshuvah.



Ask The Rabbi

with Rabbi Chaim Mintz
(Ask The Rabbi Book 1 pg. 385)

CAN A PERSON CHANGE?

Q Is it true — as I heard quoted in the name of the prophet Yirmiyahu — that just as a leopard can't change his spots, a person can't change himself?

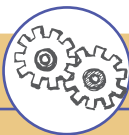
A Nothing could be farther from the truth! Although these words are found in Yirmiyahu¹⁶, if one looks at the text carefully, it is clear that they were issued as a challenge, not as a fact. The great prophet Yirmiyahu wanted to rouse the Jewish people to repent and shake them out of their complacency. He was not telling them that they couldn't change. On the contrary, he was telling them that, although it may be difficult, they definitely could! Anyone can repent, even in the final seconds of his life.

The Talmud¹⁷ relates a dramatic story illustrating this point. Elazar ben Durdaya was known as a degenerate, chasing after every immoral relationship he could find. He traveled the world and paid a fortune to commit grave sins. At one point he was told: "Elazar, there is no hope for you! You have reached the point of 'no return'!" He was struck by these forceful words, realizing how far he had fallen, and searched for help in arousing Divine mercy.

He began begging everything in nature — from the sky to the mountains, to the sun and the moon — to ask Hashem to forgive him. All of them refused to help him, claiming that they had their own worries to deal with, and were dependent on Hashem for their own existence. Finally, Elazar realized that there was nothing in the world that would help him, and was left with only one option. He sat down and wept with great remorse, until his soul departed. At that point, a Heavenly voice called out, "Rabbi Elazar ben Durdaya is destined for a place in the World to Come." When Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi, the great compiler of the Mishnah, heard this story, he cried and said, "One person may take years to earn his place in the World to Come, and yet some can earn it in a short time!" And then he added: "Not only are penitents accepted, they are even given honorifics, and he went from 'rags to riches,' being given the grand title of 'Rabbi Elazar'!"

This story has a powerful message. Even someone who has sunk to the lowest level of degradation still has a spark in his soul that can be reignited, and he can be welcomed into the World to Come with open arms.

IN SHORT: *Anyone can change even in the last seconds of his life.*



Small Seed, Big Growth

How can I pick a *kabbalah* (commitment) that I'll maintain the entire year?

Rav Yisrael Salanter taught that we can merit atonement on Yom Kippur simply by taking on one small commitment in our growth. It's not a shortcut; this is how teshuvah works! Real teshuvah takes time. It's like a beautiful garden — it doesn't grow in one day. Gardeners wait months to finally be able to enjoy the fruits of their labor.

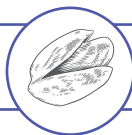
The Yemei Ratzon are like the first days of a gardening project. We need to approach them with the same patience. First, we need to cast a vision for our "garden." We began this on Rosh Hashanah when we decided what we'd like to accomplish in the coming year.

So, be your desired area of improvement *emunah*, *tefillah*,

a relationship, or a *middah*, now is the time to pick a "seed" and start that garden growing! Choose a *kabbalah* — a small, doable commitment. But choose one that will trigger further growth as the year goes on. With Hashem's help, this starting point will lead to growth in the whole area of your choice. For example, if you decide to work on your *tefillah*, a "seed" *kabbalah* could be focusing on the word *Atah* in the first *brachah* of *Shemoneh Esrei*. For a few seconds, you will focus and think, I'm actually standing in front of Hashem. He's here, listening to me intently. This little action will help you experience the reality that you are speaking to the King of all Kings, just a little more. Over time, your appreciation for the gift of *tefillah* will grow, inspiring you to daven more and work harder on *kavanah*, — all because you actually want to. It's one small step for now, and one great step for your future!



Aseres Yemei Teshuvah



In a Nutshell

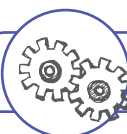
Aseres Yemei Teshuvah refers to the ten days that begin with Rosh Hashana and conclude with Yom Kippur. During this time, we daven, increase our Torah study, and give more tzadakah (charity). But the main focus of *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah* is... you guessed it – doing teshuvah! Our fate for the coming year is decided on Rosh Hashana but not sealed until Yom Kippur,²⁴ so *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah* is the time to do teshuvah and beg Hashem to change our judgment for the better.²⁵

TESHUVAH TIME

Although teshuvah is always effective, it is even more powerful during this auspicious time.¹⁹ Chazal teach that the *posuk*, “Seek Hashem when He can be found; call Him when He is near,”²⁰ refers to the *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*, the time when Hashem is close and “readily available” to all Jews.²¹ It’s a time to repent for all our misdeeds and mistakes. But teshuvah is more than saying sorry—true teshuvah means returning to Hashem and His will, so that every part of our life aligns with what He wants.²² It may sound like a lofty level, but every Jew can reach it! The best time to tap into this is during the *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*, when we crown Hashem as our King and accept His will as our own.²³

QUICK-FIX UP YOUR YEAR

The seven days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur each represent all the corresponding days of the year and have the power to atone for every sin committed on that day! This means if someone does teshuvah on Sunday in *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*, it atones for all the Sundays of their life! The same goes for each day of the week. By repenting and elevating all seven days, a person can repair the entire year!¹⁸



Prayer Points

During the *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*, our davening itself is extra powerful. We also add extra prayers and make some small changes to *Shemoneh Esrei*:

📖 We recite special *Selichos* each day.

📖 Some add “*Shir Hamaalos Mima’amakim*”, *perek* 130 of Tehillim, after *Pesukei D’zimrah*.

📖 We say *Avinu Malkeinu* after *Shacharis* and *Mincha*.

📖 We insert these phrases into *Shemoneh Esrei*:

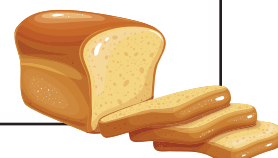
1. *Zachreinu L’chaim* (Remember us for life...)
2. *Mi Kamocha Av Harachamim* (Who is like You Father of mercy...?)
3. *Uk’sov L’chaim Tovim* (Inscribe us for a good life...)
4. *B’sefar Chaim* (In the Book of Life...)

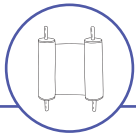
📖 We adjust a few conclusions in *Shemoneh Esrei*:

5. In *Ata Kadosh* we change *Hakel Hakadosh* (the Holy G-d) to *Hamelech Hakadosh* (the Holy King.)
6. In *Hashiva Shofteinu* we change *Melech ohev tzedakak umishpat* (King Who loves righteousness and judgment) to *Hamelekh Hamishpat* (the King of judgment.)
7. At the very end of *Shemoneh Esrei* we change the word *shalom* (peace) to *hashalom* (the peace).

COULD BREAD BE JEWISH?

There is a halachic restriction against eating *pas akum*, which is bread baked without any Jewish involvement in the process. Many people rely on a leniency to eat *pas palter* (“baker’s bread”) which refers to kosher bread products baked in a non-Jewish bakery or commercial setting. However, during *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*, when we are extra careful in our mitzvah observance, even those who eat *pas palter* year-round should be careful to only eat *pas Yisrael*.²⁶





The Power of the Moment

Rosh Hashanah begins a stretch of time unlike any other in the year. It is both uplifting and awe-inspiring: on one hand, we stand in judgment before the King of Kings; on the other, we feel the closeness of a loving Father welcoming His children home. And then come the *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*—ten days overflowing with urgency and possibility—culminating in the ultimate day of closeness, Yom Kippur.

It's clear that this time is meant to move us forward. Yet many of us wonder: *Will this inspiration really last?* We hear the haunting words of Unesaneh Tokef and feel the weight of life and death, judgment and mercy. But deep down, there's a nagging thought: *I've tried to change before... and it didn't last. Why should this time be different?* Maybe our teshuvah will be as short-lived as our last attempt to stick to a diet or a workout plan.

The answer is that these days truly are different. Chazal teach that this is an *eis ratzon*—a time when the world is filled with an extra measure of Divine closeness and spiritual energy. Hashem draws nearer, making it easier for us to draw near in return. Our efforts carry more weight, our tefillos reach higher, and our small steps create lasting impact. Hashem gives us a boost, helping us climb higher than we ever could on our own.

Think of it like the sun. It shines every day, but in midsummer its rays warm us far more than in winter. It's the same sun, but certain times we feel its power more strongly. These

days work in a similar way. Hashem is always present, but during these ten days His “ear,” so to speak, is closer than usual. This is why even if we've failed before, now is not the time for despair—these days are supercharged for change.

We are never alone in this effort. Chazal teach us that, “In the way a person wishes to go, he is led.”²⁷ If we take even a single step toward growth, Hashem helps us climb even higher. They also teach that “one who comes to purify himself is assisted from Above.”²⁸ We need to want to do teshuvah, to try to do better, and Hashem Himself helps us come close to Him. Knowing our we will succeed helps motivate us to put in more effort. This is true in all areas of life – if a person has a job interview that they actually have a shot at, they won't waste the opportunity, and likely put in more effort than an interview for a job they know they will probably never get. During *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*, we have the Master of the Universe helping us along!





What we accomplish during *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah* doesn't end with Yom Kippur. Once we've tapped into the *eis ratzon* and experienced Hashem's closeness, we can return to it throughout the year, especially during other powerful *eis ratzon* moments: *tefillah b'tzibbur*, at *minchah*, when giving *tzedakah* before davening, when lighting Shabbos candles, and at *chupah* or a *bris*. Learning to recognize and access Hashem's closeness will have a year-round effect!²⁹









What's one way you can remind yourself—during the year—that Hashem is always near, especially during an *eis ratzon*?



TheZone Revolution

At TheZone, campers don't just learn about teshuvah—they live it. During our Shabbos Revolution, campers take on *kabbalos* to bring home. Here are just a few *kabbalos* taken on by fellow Zoniacs:

-  I'm going to bentch the entire bentching.
-  I will stay off my phone.
-  I'm going to start kissing the mezuzah.
-  I'm going to start to keep Shabbat.

-  I will sing zemirot.
-  I'm going to make brachos before I eat.
-  I'm not gonna color on Shabbos.
-  I'm going to say an extra paragraph of Shema.
-  I won't paint my nails on Shabbat.
-  I will start davening.
-  I will try to listen and be respectful.
-  I'm going to wash my hands before I eat bread.

How can I take advantage of Yemei Ratzon?

MERITS & MITZVOS

From Elul through Yom Kippur, Hashem gives us 40 days filled with closeness, mercy, and massive spiritual potential. But we have to use them! The Rambam teaches that each person should live like their judgment is hanging in the balance, with their actions split 50/50 between mitzvos and aveiros.³¹ Just one more good deed could tip the scale toward the side of merit and salvation! During *Yemei Ratzon*, every choice matters more than ever!

INSPECT, REFLECT, CORRECT, PERFECT



Now is the time for a *cheshbon hanefesh*—a real look inside. What's going well? What can you do even better? What needs fixing? Writing down your "accounting of the soul" helps you clarify your goals (and track your progress!) Remember, you can't really change if you don't know where you're holding. Make sure to include your wins, as well – every little success is priceless! And setbacks are expected, too – Hashem sees your effort and is proud beyond words. The key is to never give up and get back on track.



Did You Know?

In these days before Yom Kippur, some are careful to settle all debts so that they come to the holy day with a clean slate.

LET'S BE FRIENDS, MAKE AMENDS

Want Hashem to forgive you? Start by making peace with others. Say sorry. Let go. Clear the air. It's not just a nice thing—it's a key to getting forgiven from Above. If you hurt someone, it's not enough to say "sorry" to Hashem—you must ask forgiveness from the person you wronged. At the same time, try to be someone who forgives others easily. When we show others mercy and forgiveness, Hashem mirrors that back to us!³⁶

GET IT TO THE T



The three big tools of *Yemei Ratzon* are Teshuvah, Tefillah, and Tzedakah. These aren't just buzzwords—they're the formula for changing your year. Return to Hashem (teshuvah), speak to Him (tefillah), and give to others (tzedakah) is the way to change your decree for the better.³⁰

SLOW AND STEADY

Tafasta meruba lo tafasta, roughly means, "if you grab too much, you get nothing."³⁵ It's a most important rule when it comes to inner work and growth. You may feel inspired and ready for change, but remember, slow and steady wins the race! Take small steps. Pick something doable and stick with it. Work on one *middah*, one mitzvah, or one relationship. One small change is more powerful than you can imagine!



Then & Now

In the Jewish calendar, times aren't just dates, they are spiritual mines filled with tremendous potential. The 40 days from Elul through Yom Kippur are filled with extra power for teshuvah and getting close to Hashem. You can see how this played out in the earliest stages of our nation's history.

15 Nissan

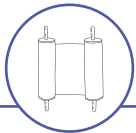
Then: Hashem miraculously saved Klal Yisrael and took them out of Mitzrayim.

Now: We celebrate Pesach. The first night is known as *Leil Shimurim*, (a night that is guarded).³² Even today, Hashem gives us a special protection from harmful elements on that night.³³

6 Sivan

Then: Matan Torah: Moshe Rabbeinu goes up to *shamayim* (Heaven) to receive the Torah.

Now: We celebrate Shavuot, the day Hashem gave us the Torah.



Achieving “Successful” Teshuvah

On Rosh Hashanah, we crown Hashem as King and realign ourselves with our mission in His kingdom. However, there are plenty of obstacles holding us back from actualizing this and being our best and most productive selves. During the *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah* and Yom Kippur, we have the chance to do teshuvah to remove those obstacles so we can fulfill that mission.

That sounds simple enough, but in reality, the teshuvah process itself can be full of roadblocks. The introspection and inner work stir up reactions and emotions that can hold us back. We might feel overwhelmed and discouraged, thinking: *I can't do this. I'm a failure. Why do I always mess up?* Or we might feel angry and frustrated, asking: *Why is this so hard? What do You even want from me?* How can we clear the way for a truly “successful” teshuvah?

We're not the first to struggle with this. Thousands of years ago, Kayin—the firstborn of Adam HaRishon—brought a *korban* to Hashem. But it wasn't a proper offering, and Hashem rejected it. Kayin reacted as many of us would: he grew angry and depressed.

Hashem's response is a lesson for us all: *“Why get angry and depressed? Isn't it true that if you correct your actions, you'll be forgiven? And if not, your sin will remain?”*³⁷ Hashem was telling Kayin: mistakes are just mistakes. They can be fixed. After stumbling, he had two options: stay down and bear the consequences, or correct his actions and be forgiven.

Kayin's emotional reaction is understandable—he was human, after all. But Hashem instilled in us the ability to rise above that first wave of emotion. He gave us the strength to respond to mistakes and criticism by focusing on the future and getting back on track. When

overwhelm or some other negative emotion is blocking your teshuvah, remember Hashem's words to Kayin. Remember that mistakes are just mistakes. You have a choice in front of you: do nothing or do teshuvah and get back up.

Even if we can try to shift our mindset, we all know that when we fail repeatedly in a certain area, it's easy to feel like there's no point in making another effort. However, beneath that discouragement lies the mistaken belief that our relationship with Hashem is built on being flawless and presenting Him with spiritual “trophies.” That's not what Hashem wants most. What He truly desires is us—our real, striving selves!

Think about the healthiest, closest relationships—between parents and children, spouses, or close friends. They're not built on perfection or performance; they're built on connection. What matters most is the closeness, the presence, the desire to be together.

Hashem wants the same. We give ourselves to Him when we invest in the relationship as we struggle and wrestle with choices. Our searching, our questions, and even our failures are part of that bond. “Connecting with Hashem” doesn't mean being perfect. It means caring enough to engage with Him, to keep coming back, to try again even after we fall.

Trying, falling, and trying again isn't second-best. It's hard—but it's exactly what Hashem wants. He loves us and believes in us, even when we struggle to love and believe in ourselves. He's right there, just one step away. Shifting our mindset this way helps us take that step and reconnect—to Hashem, and our mission in His kingdom³⁸

What holds you back from achieving “successful” teshuvah?

17 Tammuz

Then: Moshe Rabbeinu descends and sees the Jews sinning with the Golden Calf. Things seemed beyond repair. In response, Moshe broke the *luchos* and began praying on behalf of Klal Yisrael, desperately trying to obtain Hashem's forgiveness.

Now: We fast and daven for the *Geulah*, when we will be closer than ever to Hashem.

1 Elul – 10 Tishrei

Then: Hashem tells Moshe to come back up the mountain—He's is going to forgive Klal Yisrael! Moshe ascends to receive the second set of *Luchos*, and spends 40 days there.

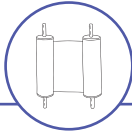
Now: These 40 days of *Yemei Razton* are an auspicious and opportune time to do teshuvah. The gates of mercy open. Hashem is close. It's a time for spiritual repair and renewed connection.

10 Tishrei

Then: Moshe comes down with the second *Luchos*. Hashem fully forgives Klal Yisrael!

Now: Yom Kippur becomes the day of complete atonement for all generations. Like the Jews in the desert, we beg for forgiveness—and Hashem gives us a second chance.³⁴

Zoniac Zone



Summary: A Time To Recalculate

The Yemei Ratzon are a powerful time to recalculate and make sure we are headed in the direction we want. Hashem is closer than ever, helping us along our journey towards Him. And that journey called teshuvah doesn't mean being perfect. It doesn't mean never saying another word of *lashon hara*, never again spacing out through a Shemoneh Esrei, or never again saying something less than nice to your sibling—it just means you are getting back on the right path and realigning your

direction. Don't think, "By next year I'll never say *lashon hara* again," but "I want to become someone who speaks more positively." It's not about results. It's about choosing the road you want to travel.



From Driving to Selichos

When Moshe and Ruth first connected with Oorah, they were searching. Coming from a traditional background, they cherished their Jewish identity, but much of Torah life was unfamiliar territory. Ruth's heart was already leaning toward greater observance—especially keeping Shabbos—but they lived far from shul.

Moshe wanted to daven in shul, but walking the long distance felt impossible. So he drove. Ruth longed for him to stop, but when she turned to Rav Chaim Mintz for guidance, his advice surprised her: "Don't push. Let him grow at his own pace."

She listened.

Months passed. As Elul arrived, something shifted. The early-morning calls of Selichos stirred Moshe's heart. Together, the family began waking before dawn to join the minyan. The spiritual momentum carried forward. By the next year, every Shabbos morning at precisely 6:20 AM, the whole family - Moshe, Ruth, and their two boys - set out on a 2½-mile trek to shul. No cars. Just footsteps, laughter, and the rhythm of a family walking together

toward something higher.

Moshe's growth didn't stop there. After work each day, he began learning Daf Yomi with his boys by his side. Torah became the family's new language, one they spoke with excitement and pride.

The changes rippled through the entire home. The boys, who had once been in public school, now thrived in Torah schools thanks to Oorah's support. They began taking active roles in shul—reading from the Torah, leading Nishmat Kol Chai on Shabbos—turning what had once been distant traditions into deeply personal experiences.

Looking back, Moshe and Ruth see a life transformed—not in a single dramatic moment, but step by careful step. Each decision, each mitzvah, each effort brought them closer to Hashem and to each other. What began with questions and uncertainty became a steady walk toward connection, meaning, and joy. Just one step, then another, until a family finds itself walking together, hand in hand, all the way to shul.



Life of a Shteiger



Standing up to the American dream
Did my time, made my choices
Went the distance, now I'm stead on my feet
Just a man and his will to Shteig

Many times, it can happen so fast
You're enticed to trade the Torah for a partying
Don't lose your grip on your mission in life
You must fight just to keep it alive

It's the life of the Shteiger, it's the thrill of the fight
Risn' up to the challenge for survival
With the strength of a tiger, he's prepared to fight
And he's changing the course of his life...he's the Shteiger

Face to face, with the pull of the street
Standin strong, fighten fiercely
The Yetzer harah fights, still we wont face defeat
Holdin strong with our sights on the prize

It's the life of the Shteiger, it's the thrill of the fight
Risn' up to the challenge for our survival
With the strength of a tiger, he's prepared to fight
And he's changing the course of his life...he's the Shteiger

Risn' up, straight to the top
Had the guts, without the glory
Went the distance, now I'm not gonna stop
Just a man and his will to Shteig!

It's the life of the Shteiger, it's the thrill of the fight
Risn' up to the challenge for our survival
With the strength of a tiger, he's prepared to fight
And he's changing the course of his life...he's the Shteiger

The life of the Shteiger x4



Zoniac Challenge

The 40 days from Rosh Chodesh Elul to Yom Kippur represent renewal and new beginnings. How do these other "forties" relate to this theme?

- 1 It rained for 40 days during the flood in Noach's time.
- 2 Moshe went up to Har Sinai for 40 days to receive the Torah.
- 3 The Jews wandered in the desert for 40 years between leaving Mitzrayim and entering the Land of Israel.
- 4 A baby develops in its mother's womb for 40 weeks.



ZONIAC DILEMMA

Shooting for the Moon

Naava left the *Avinu Malkeinu* program buzzing. The speakers had painted a powerful picture: *Yemei Ratzon* - 40 days when Hashem is close, when every step counts, when one mitzvah could tip the scale for the whole world. Naava felt fired up. This is it. I'm going all in. That night, she pulled out a fresh notebook and titled a new page: *Kabbalos*. She listed five things:

- **Wake up for Shacharis on time. Every day.**
- **Stop speaking lashon hara. Not even a word.**
- **Say Tehillim every day.**
- **Always wear a shell under my dress.**
- **Be nice to my siblings. All. The. Time.**

By day two, she had already overslept, mumbled through half of Tehillim, and yelled at her brother for taking her charger without asking. Frustrated and embarrassed, Naava looked at the list. So much for that. She ripped out the page and shoved the notebook into her drawer. "I guess I'm not really cut out for this teshuvah thing..."

Is Naava right? What could she do differently to better take advantage of the Yemei Ratzon?



Daily Challenge

Focus on Hashem being Avinu, (our Father) from Avinu Malkeinu, and feel His love wash over you once a day.



Sources

- 1) Mishnah Berurah introduction to siman 581
- 2) Shir HaShirim 6:3
- 3) Mishnah Berurah introduction to siman 581
- 4) Mesillas Yesarim, Ch. 2
- 5) Yirmiyahu 8:6
- 6) Shir HaShirim 6:3
- 7) Based on Why Preparation Is Essential for a Spiritual Experience by Chief Rabbi Warren Goldstein
- 8) Mishnah Berurah 581:6
- 9) Tur 581
- 10) Tzitz Eliezer 12:48
- 11) Mishnah Berurah 581:2
- 12) Rosh Hashana 17
- 13) Shemos 34:6–7
- 14) Yirmiyahu 40–43
- 15) Hoshea 14:2
- 16) Yirmiyahu 13:23
- 17) Avodah Zarah 17a
- 18) Shaar Hakavanot, Inyan Rosh Hashanah
- 19) Hilchos Teshuvah 2:6
- 20) Yeshayahu 55:6
- 21) Rosh HaShanah 18a
- 22) See Derech Chayim, Shaar HaTefillah, ch. 84; Kuntres HoAvodah, ch. 5; the maamar entitled Kinyan HaChayim 5688, ch. 13
- 23) Based on Sefer HaSichos 5748, Vol. I, pp. 1-6
- 24) Unesaneh Tokef, Yamim Noraim Tefillah
- 25) Maharsha to Yevamos 49b
- 26) Tur, Shulchan Aruch, and Shulchan Aruch Harav, Orach Chaim, 603
- 27) Makkos 10b
- 28) Yoma 38b
- 29) Based on Essay by Rabbi Heshy Kleinman, Mishpacha Magazine
- 30) “U’Nesaneh Tokef” prayer
- 31) Rambam, Hilchos Teshuva, 3:4
- 32) Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 481
- 33) Shemos, 12:42
- 34) Rambam Teshuvah 1:3, Gemara Yuma 85
- 35) Yoma 80a:4-5
- 36) Rosh Hashanah 17a
- 37) Bereishis 4:6–7
- 38) Based on Removing the Roadblocks to Teshuvah, by Rabbi Levi Lebovits, Mispacha Magazine, 8-8-24



Dig Deeper *Resources for Advanced Learning*

- 1) Sefer Sha'arei Teshuvah
- 2) Mishnah Berurah and Mateh Efrayim 581-582 (Elul), 602-603 (Aseres Yemei Teshuvah)
- 3) Tehillim Perek 27 and meforshim