

The King is in the Field

"My heart says of you, 'Seek His face!' Your face, Lord, I will seek."
Psalm 27:8

Jewish History

Moses ascends Sinai for 3rd 40 days (1313 BCE) – “Second Chances - Redemption”

On the early morning of the 1st of Elul of the year 2448 from creation (1313 BCE) Moses ascended Mount Sinai, taking with him the stone tablets he had hewn by divine command (see "Today in Jewish History" for yesterday, Av 30), for G-d to re-inscribe the Ten Commandments. On the mountain, G-d allowed Moses to "see My back, but not My face" (which Maimonides interprets as a perception of G-d's reality but not His essence) -- the closest any human being ever came to knowing G-d -- and taught him the secret of His "Thirteen Attributes of Mercy" (Exodus 33:18-34:8).

Moses remained on the mountain for 40 days, until the 10th of Tishrei (Yom Kippur), during which time He obtained G-d's whole-hearted forgiveness and reconciliation with the people of Israel following their betrayal of the covenant between them with their worship of the Golden Calf. This was the third of Moses' three 40-day periods on Mount Sinai in connection with the Giving of the Torah. Ever since, the month of Elul serves as the "month of Divine mercy and forgiveness."

<https://www.chabad.org/calendar/view/day.asp?tdate=9/1/2019&show=8#history>

It is now the new month of Elul and thousands of Jewish worshipers will flock to Jerusalem's Western (Wailing) Wall Plaza to recite penitential prayers called selichot.

As is traditional, Sephardic Jews will recite selichot for the entire month of Elul in anticipation of the Jewish High Holy Days also known as the Days of Awe, which starts next month on Rosh HaShanah (when the Hebrew New year begins) and ends ten days later at Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement).

Although Sephardic Jews recite these penitential prayers all month, Ashkenazi Jews will begin selichot one week before Rosh Hashanah.

Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are the most revered days in the Hebrew calendar, when God judges all of mankind.

The month of Elul, therefore, is considered an important period of reflection, introspection, and repentance before those "days of judgment."

To stress the reverential nature of this month, the shofar or ram's horn is sounded at each morning prayer service during the month of Elul.

Elul and 40 Days of Favor

"Good judgment wins favor, but the way of the unfaithful leads to their destruction." (*Proverbs 13:15*)

The first day of Elul also begins the 40-day period of the year referred to as **Yemei Ratzon**—Days of Favor.

This year, **2020**, Elul begins Friday, August 21st at 6pm, these **40 "Days of Favor"**, when "*The King is in the Field*", will run until Monday, September 21st at 6pm (the beginning of Yom Kippur/The Day of Atonement).

According to Jewish tradition, it was during this time that the Lord forgave the People of Israel following the sin of the Golden Calf. (*Pirke d'Reb Eliezar*)

It is during this period that we, therefore, repent and make confessions for our sins up to the 40th day of prayer and fasting on Yom Kippur.

Why 40 days?

The 11th century French rabbi, Rashi, a famous commentator in the Talmud (a text of rabbinic teachings on the Bible), links it with God's call to Moses to ascend Mount Sinai on three different occasions, each time for 40 days.

On the first occasion, Moses received the Torah. Upon his return, he saw that the people had fallen into sin—the abomination of worshipping the Golden Calf.

In anger, he destroyed the two tablets of the law on the 17th of Tammuz and burned the calf the next day. (*Exodus 32:19; Deuteronomy 9:11*)

He then ascended the mountain for a second time to plead with God for His forgiveness, returning after 40 days, on the 29th of Av. (*Exodus 32:30–31; Deuteronomy 9:18*)

On the first of Elul, he ascended the mountain for a third period of 40 days to invoke mercy and complete atonement. **He descended the mountain on Tishri 10 or Yom Kippur, says Rashi, with the second set of tablets and the assurance of God's forgiveness.** (*Exodus 34:1, 27–28; Deuteronomy 10:1–5*)

This 40-day period, therefore, represents a period of repentance and mercy following the incident of the Golden Calf.

It's no coincidence that there are 40 days in these "Days of Favor".

The **number 40** has *great significance* in Judaism; in addition to **repentance**, it is associated with **testing, judgment, renewal, and new beginnings**.

Although the Bible does not specifically state that this number is significant, the pattern of 40 is strong in Scripture.

- Forty days after their arriving at Mount Sinai, God transformed the Jews from a nation of Egyptian slaves to a nation of His people (**renewal**).
- For their rebellion, the Israelites wandered for 40 years in the wilderness (**judgment**).
- After 40 years of wandering, the next generation entered their Promised Land (**new beginning**).

We can also see the pattern of judgment, renewal, and new beginning in the 40-day period of rain at the time of the Ark.

This pattern even extends into the Brit Chadashah (New Testament):

- Yeshua (Jesus) was tempted and tested for 40 days and nights. (*Matthew 4:2*)
- He emerged from this testing into a new ministry (**new beginning**) with a **mikvah** (immersion) and anointing by the Holy Spirit (**renewal**). (*Matthew 3:16*)
- Yeshua spent 40 days between His resurrection (**renewal**) and ascension into heaven (**new beginning**). (*Acts 1:3*)

The King Is in the Field

"Your procession, God, has come into view, the procession of my God and King into the sanctuary." (*Psalms 68:24*)

Although **Elul is a month of repentance**, it is also a time to contemplate God's mercy and forgiveness.

It is, in essence, a **period of renewal**—an opportunity to draw close to God.

Traditionally, this period is considered to be a time when God is accessible, when . . .

"the King is in the field."

Rabbi Schneur Zalman, the founder of the Hassidic Chabad Orthodox branch of Judaism, explained that to meet with a king, one must go through "appropriate channels." This generally means gaining the approval of a long line of bureaucrats before gaining access to the throne room.

As well, one must meticulously prepare for the meeting, including proper dress.

There are, however, times when the king leaves his palace and goes out into the field.

At this time, anyone can approach him, and all usual decorum and bureaucratic requirements are suspended.

During the month of Elul, it is said that God makes Himself accessible in this way.

Because of the King's presence, more time is spent in Torah study, in more fervent prayer, in greater generosity and giving. His presence has made the field a holier place. (*Chabad*)

This is the month in which we are, in a sense, welcomed back as being children of God; we are experiencing a rendezvous (engagement, meeting, appointment) with the Lord of the Universe. To prepare for this, we need to examine ourselves closely. Still we have the certainty that God will forgive us, no matter what our sins might be.

These 40 days are a time of meeting with the King of Kings—a time to be happy.

Elul and Teshuvah

Elul ends on Erev Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year's Eve).

This is a time to pause and consider our ways, to set goals for personal improvement for the coming year.

In fact, the Hebrew root of the word **shofar** (שופר) is the word **shaper** (שפר) which means to improve.

Sounding the shofar during this month reminds us to look within ourselves to discover what is in need of development, what needs to be renewed, and what needs to be let go of. We can evaluate our achievements and consider where we may have missed the mark.

This process is referred to as **teshuvah** (repentance – *stop doing it our way and start doing it God's way*) or a spiritual return to God, and it is not passive.

For **teshuvah** (repentance – *stop doing it our way and start doing it God's way*) to be effective, we must set aside personal time away from distractions so that we can review the year, contemplate our accomplishments, and consider our relationships with others.

We do this because we want to start the New Year fresh and because we know that holding grudges only hurts ourselves. As the year draws to a close, now is the time to rid ourselves of resentments so we can face the New Year with a clean heart.

As Believers, we know that the throne of God is always accessible to us through Yeshua. Yet, we sometimes need a structured time to make right what has gone wrong. So let us take full advantage of these 40 days of favor, sincerely repenting of our sins against others and against God, asking for His mercy as we extend mercy to those who have sinned against us.

“Give us our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.” (*Matthew 6:12*)

As we take these steps to nullify our debts against others and contemplate our own character, now is a good time to draw closer to God and prepare for a new beginning through greater dedication to Him and His word, as well as through contemplation of His manifold mercies.

“Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” (*Hebrews 4:16*)