



# **Illuminating Our Journey: a Nireh Or Guide to the High Holidays**

RABBI HAYLEY GOLDSTEIN WITH ART BY LIZZIE SIVITZ

**HighHolidays@Home**  
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# Welcome

The cycle of the Hebrew Calendar is full of deep and ancient wisdom to guide us through our days, months and years. From the beginning of the month of Elul through the end of Simchat Torah is it's own cycle within the greater cycle. For these eight weeks, we go on a journey. A journey that begins with *teshuva*/return and ends with forgiveness and rejoicing. We hope this guide, created by Nireh Or for HighHolidays@Home, acts as a companion for you as you navigate this holy journey.

I am my beloved's



and my beloved is mine

# Week One

The journey of the High Holidays begins in this month of Elul, the last month of the Hebrew Calendar. In 13th Century Vienna, Rabbi Chaim Eliezer noticed something interesting about its name. He noticed that it contains four letters, and that each of those letters could contain a word from the beautiful line in the Song of Songs,

אֲנִי לְדוֹדִי וְדוֹדִי לִי

**I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine**

As we begin this month of introspection before the High Holidays, what would it mean to relate to the Divine as a lover? How might it shift or change the process of *teshuva*, of return, to think of G!d not as a punishing force, but as a lover that you long for closeness to? This week, see if you can try speaking to the Divine like your lover or best friend.





The King is in the field  
המלך בשדה



# Week Two

The work of *teshuva*, return, starts with ourselves. For many of us, this is the hardest kind of *teshuva* to make; the one in which we look inwards and the ways we have missed the mark in our relationship with ourselves, in regard to the promises we made and didn't fulfill, and the ways that we are too hard on ourselves, becoming our own worst enemy. This hard work of self-*teshuva* can lead to shame and despair if done alone. Rabbi Shneur Zalman, the founder of the Chabad movement, taught that, in this month of Elul,

## המלך בשדה

### The King is in the field

Whereas we might normally think of G!d as dwelling on high or in a palace, during this month They are with us in the field. They are doing the work alongside us, keeping us company with love as we tend to our inner garden. This week, how can you sense the Divine in your day to day life and as you embark on this journey of self-*teshuva*?

וְעַל הַכּוּרִישׁ הַגָּדוֹל  
שֶׁבְּאֵן עֵבֶר הַיָּמָנִי  
עָשִׂיתִי אֶת הַמִּינִי  
עַל פְּנֵי הַמִּקְדָּשׁ הַשֵּׁנִי



# Week Three

We've embraced G!d as our lover and companion and we've looked inward at our relationship with ourselves. Now, it's time to look outward at our relationships with others. In this third week of Elul, let us look deeply at our relationships and consider how we are supporting or harming one another. Sometimes, as we learn in the Mishna\*, we may even need to make *teshuva* for harm we did not directly cause,

**ועל המריש הגזול שבנאו בבירה שיטול  
את דמיו מפני תקנת השבים**

About a stolen beam that was used to build a building, the victim receives the value of the beam, due to the healing of the repentant sinners

Our ancient text reminds us that sometimes we need to work towards healing and repair of systems that are broken, even if we ourselves did not break them. This week of Elul, how can you work towards greater repair in the world? How can we continue to work towards justice, knowing that this repair helps not only the ones we harmed, but lifts us in our work of *teshuva* as well?

\*The Mishna is the earliest known Rabbinic text, dating back to 200 CE.





HITBODEDUT IS THE HIGHEST  
AND GREATEST LEVEL OF ALL



# Week Four

In this last week of Elul leading up to Rosh Hashanah, we look at our relationship with G!d. Rebbe Nachman, the 18th Century Hasidic Master, prescribed a practice called *hitbodedut*, or spiritual self-seclusion. He recommended that people take time each day to talk, scream, cry or sing to the Divine. He said that if a person had nothing to say, that they should talk to G!d about having nothing to say.

Rebbe Nachman went as far as to say,

הַתְּבוּדוֹת הוּא מַעֲלָה עֲלֵיוֹנָה  
וְגָדוּלָה מִן הַכֹּל

**Hitbodedut is the highest and greatest level of all**

Perhaps Rebbe Nachman meant that, beyond the words of any formal prayers, our personal relationship with G!d is what matters most. And, if we can cultivate that, we can live in greater alignment with who we are meant to be. In this last week before Rosh Hashanah, take some time for *hitbodedut*. What do you notice about your relationship with the Divine? How can you keep cultivating and tending to that relationship?



GIDD IS CLOSE TO THE BROKEN HEARTED

# Week Five

This week we celebrate Rosh Hashanah, the head of the year. It is fitting that to mark the head of the year, we use the horn from the ram's head. The shofar, says the Gemara\*, is meant to mimic crying. Why would we want to mimic crying at the beginning of the New Year, when we are planting new seeds of hopes and dreams? Psalm 34 helps us understand,

צָעֲקוּ וַיִּשְׁמַע וּמִכָּל-צָרוֹתֵם  
הִצִּילָם: קָרוֹב יי לְנִשְׁבְּרֵי-לֵב  
וְאֶת-דֹּכְאֵי-רֹחַ יוֹשִׁיעַ:

They cry out, and G!d hears, and saves them from all their troubles. G!d is close to the brokenhearted; those crushed in spirit G!d delivers.

Rosh Hashanah is also known as the Day of Judgment, a day in which we pour our hearts out to G!d in hopes of a joyful, healthy, and abundant year. When you hear the shofar this year, what hopes and prayers do you hear within it? How can you cry out to G!d for a better world?

*\*The Gemara is the commentary on the Mishna, which dates back to about 500 CE.*





אני מוכן להיות

I AM PREPARED TO BE

# Week Six

When G!d reveals Themself to Moses by the burning bush, Moses asks what the Divine would like to be called by the Israelites. In response, G!d says,

אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה וַיֹּאמֶר כֹּה  
תֹּאמַר לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶהְיֶה  
שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלֵיכֶם:

“Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh” I will be what I will be; and G!d said: ‘Thus shall you say unto the children of Israel: I will be (Ehyeh) has sent me to you.’

Rebbe Nachman connects this name of G!d to the process of *teshuva*, explaining, “The meaning of *ehyeh* is ‘I am prepared to be,’ Before *teshuvah* a person does not yet have a being. It is as if they do not yet exist in the world. But when a person prepares to purify and do *teshuvah*, they are then in the aspect of *ehyeh*. In other words, they will then exist in the world i.e. “I am prepared to be.” As we approach Yom Kippur, the day that all of our work of *teshuva* culminates in a collective celebration of forgiveness, how can we step into this definition of *teshuva*? How are you fully existing or half-existing in your life, your relationships and world currently? How can you fully claim your readiness to exist?





# בסכות הושבתי את בני ישראל

I CAUSED THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL TO DWELL  
IN BOOTHS WHEN I BROUGHT THEM FORTH



# Week Seven

This week begins Sukkot, when we build a beautiful, shabby, and holy house outdoors. The Sukkah is meant to be a half-built, temporary structure imitating the temporary and half-built nature of our lives and physical beings. On the verse from Exodus,

בְּסֻכּוֹת הוֹשַׁבְתִּי אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל  
בְּהוֹצִיאִי אֹתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם

I caused the children of Israel to dwell in  
booths when I brought them forth

The Sfat Emet, a Hasidic master who lived in 19th Century Poland, teaches, “[This verse] means that G!d implanted in the hearts of Israel the power to escape the prison of the body and nature, to dwell in this world as temporary visitors.” As we dwell in the Sukkah this year, what does it mean to you to be a temporary visitor in this world? How can that move you forward towards joy and expansiveness?





# Week Eight

In Pirkei Avot, the Ethics of our Fathers, we learn from Ben Bag Bag,

**הַפֶּה בָּהּ וְהַפֶּה בָּהּ, דְּכֻלָּא בָּהּ**

Turn it, and turn it again,  
because everything is in it

The “it” that Ben Bag Bag is telling us to keep turning is the Torah, which comes to mean not only our sacred scroll but the teachings passed down orally, as well as the myriad of innovative and radical reads that have been built off of the original text. This week of Simchat Torah, as we celebrate our relationship with Torah and roll it back to the beginning, what might it mean to turn it? What new meaning might you find if you simply shift your perspective, look at it from a different angle? This year, how can you commit to turning the Torah, constantly searching for wisdom within it?