

# 29 DAYS

A Daily Elul Calendar  
Preparing for the High Holidays

*A gift to you from*



CONGREGATION  
NEVEH SHALOM

## *acknowledgments*

I stumbled upon Rabbi Simon Jacobson's *60 Days: A Spiritual Guide to the High Holidays* in 2005 when I had twin 16 month olds and was eight months pregnant. Unable to attend services at shul, I engaged in this book's daily meditations, and doing so has been one of my most cherished High Holidays practices ever since.

I thank Rabbi Simon Jacobson for his permission to adapt a section of his book for our congregation, and to Rabbi Eve Posen and the Neveh Shalom staff for including this as part of this year's High Holidays packets.

I believe that even when we can't greet each other in the Atrium or smile at each other across the Main Sanctuary, we have the power to come together through our good intentions.

Wishing you Shana Tova and a meaningful High Holidays season,

Debbie Plawner

## welcome

While the year 5780 is coming to a close and the High Holidays are just a month away, it is very difficult right now to prepare for the future. We wonder where our sense of renewal, so critical at this time, will come from when we won't physically be all together in our Main Sanctuary.

This daily calendar is a way for our community to come together in spirit throughout the season of the High Holidays. Join us every day by simply stopping whatever else you are doing to take a minute or two to allow for awareness of and bring awe to this sacred time.

## how to use this calendar

This daily calendar is a home companion guide for the month of *Elul*. It offers a 29-day journey for finding hope, inspiration and a bridge to feeling connected to our traditions, our ancestors and each other.

This calendar has been adapted from *60 Days: A Spiritual Guide to the High Holidays*, by Rabbi Simon Jacobson.

# THE ENERGY OF TIME

When we travel through the Hebrew calendar, we revisit the energy of ancient days—energy of time and beyond—energy of freedom, of destruction, or mourning, of forgiveness, of empowerment, of joy.

In this calendar, we focus on one of the most powerful months of the Hebrew calendar—the month of *Elul*. *Elul* precedes the High Holidays and is a month of preparation for them. It is a time for us to prepare for the holiest month of the year, *Tishrei*, which contains the monumental holidays of Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Hoshana Rabba, Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah.

Together, these two months embody the energy of renewal after destruction, rebirth after loss, and the energy of love and forgiveness, and of empowerment and joy. *Elul* and *Tishrei* capture the very story of life itself.

In this 29-day calendar guide, we concentrate on accessing the power of *Elul* to get closer to God, improve our relationships, prepare for starting the New Year with renewed vigor, make our lives better and help build a better world.

# ELUL

*Elul* is a month of Divine grace, because in this month Moses began his last 40 days on Mt. Sinai praying for God's compassion and forgiveness after the Jewish people betrayed God by building the Golden Calf.

It is during this time that Moses came the closest any human being ever has to knowing God, and God revealed "The Thirteen Attributes of Mercy" (Exodus 33:18-34:8). The days of *Elul* are called the days of compassion because God was open to listening to Moses, and Moses was successful in his appeal for forgiveness and renewal. Ever since, the month of *Elul* has served as the month of Divine mercy and forgiveness.

This is why *Elul* has such power—"it is the month when the King is in the field and receives all people pleasantly and with a smiling countenance"—the Thirteen Attributes of Compassion radiate to each one of us. For this reason, this month—and the entire 40 days concluding with Yom Kippur—is dedicated to special prayers, sounding the shofar, soul searching and *teshuvah*.

The name *Elul* is comprised of four letters (*aleph, lamed, vav, lamed*) that are the first letters in the verse from King Solomon's moving and highly spiritual poem known as the *Song of Songs* (6:3):

אָנִי לְדוֹדִי וְדוֹדִי לִי

Ani l'dodi v'dodi li

**"I am for my beloved, and my beloved is for me"**

*Elul* is a month of love. In *Elul*, we find our way back to God and seek to repair the spiritual destruction caused by mistakes and transgressions of the past year. In this month we have the ability to recreate Moses' experience on the mountain and renew ourselves through God's love.

# ELUL 1

August 21, 2020

In the Book of Genesis (12:1) God tells Abraham, “Go from your land, your birthplace, the home of your parents, to the land that I will show you.”

Chasidic thought explains this verse is really a commandment issued by God 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, you have to journey. Begin today and ask yourself:

*In what area of my life am I repeating old patterns?*

*In what ways are they damaging to me?*

# ELUL 2

August 22, 2020

## ***Shabbat Shalom!***

*Today we read Parshat Shoftim which commands us to establish a judicial system; preparing for the cosmic Day of Judgement.*

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

“Your land” refers to the influence of society, community and peer pressure. The “home of your parents” represents parental influence. “Your birthplace” represents our personal bias or selfish interests. Become aware of how each of these influences your behavior through the following exercise:

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

# ELUL 3

August 23, 2020

Learning to be free from damaging patterns and personal bias is what is called in the Torah “leaving Egypt.” The Hebrew word for Egypt is *Mitzrayim*, which literally means “narrow” and which represents whatever it may be in your life that sets up obstacles, limits, or constraints.

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. The Torah tells us how to achieve freedom in every part of our lives, from the moment we wake to the moment we go to sleep, and even while we are asleep.

*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.*

# ELUL 4

August 24, 2020

The *Ethics of the Fathers* teaches, “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.

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. 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 freeing or oppressive? Man-made or self-made? Have you had the experience of hearing the truth resonate in your heart? Did you embrace it or reject it?*

# ELUL 5

August 25, 2020

Sensitivity to life is the goal of many of the practices from 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 upon food is saying thank you to God. But on a deeper level, the blessing has a profound meaning. When you are hungry, you want to put that food in your mouth immediately. 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 God created has sanctity to it.

*Before you eat focus on making a blessing with added intention, thanking God and concentrating on the spiritual energy contained within the food you are about to eat.*

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# ELUL 6

August 26, 2020

Three weeks have passed since Tisha B'Av, the destruction of the Temple. Not consoled by the initial messengers God sent, God begins to console the Jewish people Himself during this week.

Why doesn't God Himself console the people at the very beginning? Why does God send messengers and allow three whole weeks to pass before He acts? God teaches us here, that we have the power to console each other. Though we are mortals and may be weak, God tells us that one vulnerable person can console another. It's a great gift that one person can give to another.

*Make an extra call today to a friend who is feeling down, or send a greeting to a person you know is lonely.*

# ELUL 7

August 27, 2020

A teaching attributed to Rabbi Schneur Zalman, the founder of Chabad, is that in *Elul* “the King is in the Field.” During this month, God is very close by—all we have to do is reach out to meet Him.

Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are holidays. *Elul* is amid workdays. We are in the field and don’t have to wait until the High Holidays to find God. We can go out to meet God now.

*Sometime today, take a walk in nature and literally go out and meet God in the field. How on your walk will you approach God, what will you ask Him?*

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# ELUL 8

August 28, 2020

It takes initiative to go out and meet God, even when He is in the field, close and available. It takes initiative to extend yourself and it takes love.

God gave us the power to love each other—the power to unite the Divine image that was split at the time of the world’s creation into male and female—because God wanted us to learn through that how to love Him.

We learn to love through our interactions with one another, and we also, sadly, learn how not to love. We hurt each other sometimes. But in the healthiest sense, when we learn to love another person; it’s the first step toward learning how to love God as well. Take initiative:

*Find a new way today to express your love. Don’t wait—initiate something beautiful.*



# ELUL 9

August 29, 2020

Atop Mt. Sinai, Moses asks to meet God face to face: “I beg you, show me your glory.” (Exodus 33:18). God responded by saying it is impossible to see God’s essence in this world, but it is possible to see its reflection. In effect, God told Moses, “you’ll see My face by not looking.”

There are things we see in life by looking directly at them, and there are things we see with our eyes closed. There are things we hold onto by grasping onto them, and things we hold onto by letting go. Our creativity flows when we let go and stop trying to control or force it. The same thing is true of “seeing God.”

*Recall an event in your life when you were able to gain something by letting go. Examine the process—how did you get yourself out of the way in order to make it happen?*

*This Shabbat, let go of your need to DO and breathe and just BE.*

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# ELUL 10

August 30, 2020

We fear letting go and the feeling of being suspended in the unknown. It can be terrifying, but we get past these fears when somebody comes along and pushes us. This is why we all need help from the outside—why we all need mentors.

In the moment when you must let go, talking yourself into it is not likely to work because a brilliant mind cannot speak to a vulnerable heart—they don't speak the same language. So you must invite someone to push you—someone you trust.

*Identify an area, from the work of Elul you have done so far, where you would benefit from the friendly push of a mentor.*

# ELUL 1 1

August 31, 2020

At times when you must let go and you ask someone to push you, you must know where you want to be pushed. You must know your destination.

The ultimate destination—the final goal of all human efforts throughout history—is called *geula* (“redemption”), when the world will realize its purpose and reach ultimate refinement. The Jewish people have always kept our eyes on this destination; it gave us power and freedom to forge ahead, despite all difficulties.

*Geula* is not a destination you can see by looking in front of you, you can only see it by looking inside of you. Real focus is your relationship with your Divine mission. If it is well developed, it can guide you past the moments of danger, and keep you moving with confidence even in moments of the greatest fear and darkness.

*What do you believe is your calling in this world? If you have difficulty with this, identify the steps you must take to discover your mission.*

אלול

# ELUL 12

September 1, 2020

The only thing that is eternal is a thing that is not driven by its own self, its own fuel. Whatever is driven by its own fuel, though it can be very powerful, is limited. This is why we need to get past the self in order to connect to the eternal so that we, too, can become eternal.

We are commanded in the Torah to be holy like God: “You shall be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy. ” (Leviticus 19:2) This means being compassionate, because God is compassionate. It means being patient, kind, just, loving, creative. When we become holy like God, we connect with God.

*Consider what it would take for you to connect with the part of you that is holy. Do something holy today.*



# ELUL 13

September 2, 2020

Even when we recognize our own inner glow, it is hard to actualize it. It's not easy. Because we live in a world that doesn't respect goodness and holiness; it respects wealth, success and power, the acquisition of which often demands the abandonment of holiness and goodness.

But Torah teaches us that we have the ability to access the inner part of ourselves and actualize it in every day life, without changing everything about ourselves and our work. We have to learn how to discover our own soul and bring it into the world that we are living and working in.

*Choose a simple act of holiness and demonstrate it in an environment that is usually oblivious to holiness. Resolve to make this a regular practice throughout Elul.*

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# ELUL 14

September 3, 2020

We tend to think of the English word “face” as describing the outer layer of a person. However, in Hebrew, the word for face, *panim*, comes from the same root as *p’nim* meaning interior. Hebrew teaches us that the essence of a face is the opposite of what we ordinarily think.

A mark of a holy person is that the inside is the same as the outside. And we recognize this. It is common when we meet such a person to say that he or she has an aura—a special glow. Ecclesiastes (8:1) states: “The wisdom of the person shines in the face.”

*As you interact with people today, be conscious of what your face projects and to what extent it is a projection of your inner self.*

# ELUL 15

September 4, 2020

The Baal Shem Tov taught that everything we see, whether good or bad, is really a reflection of ourselves. If it was not, we'd simply not see it.

We recognize a positive characteristic in others because we have it in ourselves. If we didn't have any element of it, we wouldn't recognize it. In other words: you are what you see. And you see what you are.

*Of the events of the past day, select a positive experience and identify how the goodness you encountered is embodied in you.*

*Of the events of the past day, select a negative experience and identify how this reflects a negative characteristic that you possess.*

# ELUL 16

September 5, 2020

Whatever shortcomings you may find you have as you undertake the process of facing yourself in the month of *Elul*, know that within God's compassion that radiates this month everyone can find refuge to safely undergo self-examination and endeavor to make atonement.

From this day of *Elul* onward the moon wanes until it disappears on the last day of *Elul*, only to be reborn with an entirely new face on Rosh Hashanah. We emulate the moon and its cycle, by using the next 14 days to clean up and remove any of our old baggage and thus prepare ourselves for a rebirth on Rosh Hashanah.

*Find refuge by dedicating time this Shabbat for spiritual introspection. Sincerely express to God your desire to return to your divine mission.*



# ELUL 17

September 6, 2020

In our process of returning to our true selves—our divine essence—we have much to learn from the way Moses reconciled with God after the sin of the Golden Calf.

Moses did not just plead. He took action. After he broke the tablets, he punished those responsible for making the idol, he made order in the Israelite camp, and he motivated the people to repentance. Then he told God, “If You don’t forgive me for their sin, erase me, I beg you, from the book which You have written” (Exodus 32:32). If you turn away from God and betray your true self, it is always possible to return through a process called *teshuvah*. Moses won this for us.

*Find one area of your life you gave up on and make a move to repair the situation. Do something, do anything, never resign yourself.*

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# ELUL 18

September 7, 2020

*Teshuvah* literally means “return,” which implies you’re not leaving something, you are coming back to something. It’s not just going back from bad behavior, it’s going back to your true self, your Divine soul. It’s not just damage control, it is returning to the essence that was always pure—it is returning to God.

There are two levels of *teshuvah*. The first level involves cleaning up the mess in your room, so to speak, because your room has to be clean before you can bring something new or fresh in there. This is step one—making order and repairing that which was broken. But step two, the critical step, is connecting to your essence.

*Identify a few areas that need to be cleaned up in your life. Then, listen to music or read something that helps you recognize what you are really about, what you really want.*

# ELUL 19

September 8, 2020

Judaism teaches that a soul is never damaged. The body perhaps, the psyche perhaps, but the inner core of goodness that is the soul, never. The essence always remains intact.

Although that is true, the damage that we do in our physical lives can create a ruin so big it completely obscures the pure essence underneath.

And yet, Moses taught us that there is never a ruin so big that it can't be rebuilt; there is nothing that breaks that can't be mended.

Our sages say that "tears bathe in the soul." When we cry out to God with genuine sincerity, we wash away the muck that obscures our pure essence.

*Take the first step to mend one thing that is broken either in your relationship with a friend, or a loved one, or God. Allow yourself to cry.*

# ELUL 20

September 9, 2020

We all make mistakes and break things in our life, but life also breaks us. We have all experienced broken promises or broken relationships. Now, in this pandemic, our sense of safety, freedom and security is broken.

Different people react in a different manner to the hurt that inevitably accompanies breakage. Some people are devastated. Others grow because of it.

Why is a broken wall the holiest place for Jews? Because Jews know that this isn't a perfect world. The reality is that the world is a broken place – it's a broken place full of broken people whose job is to mend what is broken.

*In your prayers today describe to God your broken heart and explain why it is broken.*



# ELUL 21

September 10, 2020

Moses had faith. Although he knew that the Jews had sinned and there was no excuse for it, he had faith in God's mercy. And his faith gave birth to hope.

As a result, we human beings have the faith inside of us that we can achieve the impossible—build a machine that can fly; find a cure for any disease; walk on the moon. And Moses was the first one who brought this absolute faith into the cosmic consciousness.

Faith in God's mercy gives us the courage to fight for forgiveness when we have transgressed and are sincerely sorry. Our faith also gives us the right to challenge God when we are suffering. And our faith means even if we don't get what we want, we still move forward.

*Cultivate your faith by looking for examples of things you absolutely believe in that don't have a rational basis—like love, for example.*

# ELUL 22

September 11, 2020

As we approach the final week of *Elul*, when we begin to recite *Selichot*, the special prayers for forgiveness, we have the confidence that as weak as we may feel, we have tremendous strength nevertheless.

The cumulative *mitzvot* of the past generations give us that strength. The good that our parents, grandparents and great-grandparents did lives on forever and accumulates, and it is our inheritance.

We are asked to do only that which we are capable of. When we stand on their shoulders, we lay claim to everything they achieved plus we add our own small part—and that small part, added to the good deeds of our ancestors, might just be enough to tip the scales and bring redemption.

*Identify something positive your parents or grandparents did and take it one step further.*



# ELUL 23

September 12, 2020

In our prayers before and during the High Holidays we repeatedly ask God to forgive us in three ways: *Selach Lanu*, *Mechal Lanu*, *Kaper Lanu*.

- With *Selach Lanu*, we ask for “pardon” and say to the one we have injured: “I am sorry for what I did; I sincerely regret having done it, and I will never do it again.”
- With *Mechal Lanu*, we ask the one we’ve injured to “wipe away” the transgression as if it never happened and restore the relationship to the former level of warmth and intimacy.
- And *Kaper Lanu* is when we request from the one we’ve injured to grant us “atonement” and ask God to take away the guilt and hurt we feel for what we did.

*Make a list of people you have hurt in some way. Describe what you must do to ask for their forgiveness. Begin.*

# ELUL 24

September 13, 2020

As we petition God to forgive us, we repeatedly recite the 13 Attributes of Compassion that God revealed to Moses after the sin of the Golden Calf. These radiate during the month of *Elul*, when we relive Moses' experience.

*"Hashem, Hashem, Almighty, compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, abundant in kindness and truth, keeper of kindness for thousands of generations, endurer of iniquity, transgression and sin, and cleanser of those who repent." (Exodus 34:6-7)*

Each of these words is profoundly mystical and contains the greatest secret of life, the key to repairing whatever is broken. According to the Talmud (*Rosh Hashanah* 17 B), God told Moses: "Whenever Israel sins, let them recite this and I will forgive them." This assurance means that repentance is always possible and God will treat us compassionately in return.

*Do one deed today that expresses compassion, especially to someone who may have wronged you. Describe how it felt to do it.*

# ELUL 25

September 14, 2020

Since Rosh Hashanah is the birthday of the first humans—Adam and Eve—who came into being on the sixth day of creation, today coincides with the first day of creation and carries with it nothing less than the energy of the creation of existence, time, space, matter, darkness and light.

If thus far you have not taken full advantage of the opportunities inherent in *Elul* to prepare for the High Holidays, the time to start is now. Preparation is essential for success in anything in life. Moses was on the mountain for 80 days. You don't have to physically go to the mountain, but you have to climb. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur will only be the sum total of what you do today.

*How well prepared are you for the High Holidays? Identify the strengths and weaknesses in your preparatory work thus far.*

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# ELUL 26

September 15, 2020

Part of the preparatory work of *Elul* is to examine how compassionate we are in our own actions.

Compassion doesn't mean that you look the other way and ignore crimes committed against you or others; compassion is not a contradiction of justice.

First, compassion means being sensitive to another person's soul; it requires remembering that each of us—however coarse and imperfect we may be on the outside—is endowed with the perfect Divine soul on the inside. And second, compassion means transcending our own comfort zone out of love for another.

*Identify what it would mean for you to transcend your comfort zone for the sake of compassion. Reach out in compassion to someone whose divine soul you have had a hard time recognizing.*

# ELUL 27

September 16, 2020

Compassion is love in the purest sense of the word. In the Book of Genesis (18:1), while Abraham was communing with God, he noticed three nomads approaching across the desert. Without so much as an “Excuse me” to God, he immediately stood up and ran to greet them and prepare a meal for them. From this strange incident, the Talmud derives that welcoming guests is more powerful than welcoming God.

The truth is that when Abraham turned to greet his guests, he didn't turn away from God, he turned away from one level of God to experience a higher level of God. This higher level is defined by selflessness, by doing for others. To love God and to love other people is the same thing. When you love God, you will love other people more. And that's the whole point of it.

*Demonstrate your love for your neighbor and your love for God in one specific act.*

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# ELUL 28

September 17, 2020

Moses had unconditional love for God and the Jewish people. He said to God, "I don't accept that You say it's too late and the Jewish people can't be forgiven. I will stay here until You relent. I know that You truly love them and they love You." And so he prevailed.

In the final days before Rosh Hashanah, to win pardon for our transgressions, we must demonstrate to God that we love God and each other with a kind of relentless, unconditional love. That we forgive each other as we hope God will forgive us, that we are compassionate toward each other as we hope God will be compassionate with us.

*Express unconditional love to someone in your life.*

# ELUL 29

September 18, 2020

When God created human beings in His image, He invested something Divine in us. There is a partnership between us and Him to perfect the world.

In the month of *Elul*, we take out our ledgers and make sure our accounts are in order. Rosh Hashanah is audit day. God checks the box to see how we took care of His investment in us. In doing so he doesn't look for perfection. He didn't create imperfect human beings to ask, "Why weren't you perfect?" He asks us only, "Why aren't you as much as you could have been?" But that's a tough question and tonight each individual must know how to answer it.

*One day left to Rosh Hashanah, how will you answer to God?*

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You have completed hard but exhilarating work this past month of *Elul*—using its energy of love and compassion, accounting and preparation, you are now ready for Rosh Hashanah—to renew your life and reconnect with your life’s mission, and for Yom Kippur—to return to God and a life of holiness, and for Sukkot and Simchat Torah—to be filled with joy.

If you enjoyed this booklet, you can continue your journey into *Tishrei* with the complete teachings, meditations, and a guide to High Holiday prayers available in the book “60 Days: A Spiritual Guide to the High Holidays” by Rabbi Simon Jacobson. It can be purchased at [www.meaningfullife.com](http://www.meaningfullife.com).

May you be **BLESSED** with a  
HEALTHY, SWEET and  
MEANINGFUL year. One filled with  
JOY and HAPPINESS for YOU and  
your FAMILY  
a month of work—  
**A LIFETIME** of blessings.



“Please  
REMEMBER me,  
and through doing that,  
REMIND me  
of my MISSION  
on earth  
so that  
I may never  
forget IT.”