

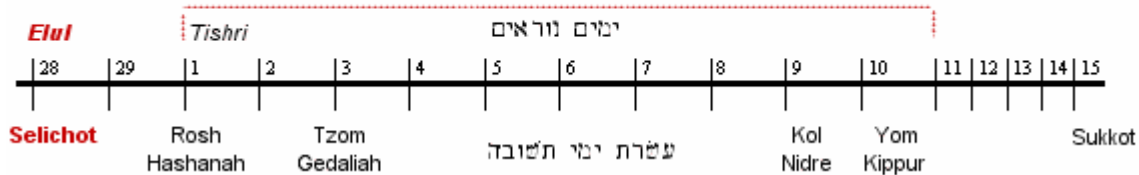


Elul and Selichot -

The Season of Teshuvah

click timeline

Days of Awe



שׁוֹבֵה נֹשְׁבָה יִשְׂרָאֵל נִאֲמַיְהוָה לֹא־אֶפְיֵל פְּנֵי בְּכֶם כִּי־הָסִיד אֲנִי
 נִאֲמַיְהוָה לֹא אֶטּוֹר לְעוֹלָם:

Return, faithless Israel, declares the LORD. I will not look on you in anger, for I am merciful, declares the LORD; I will not be angry forever. - Jer 3:12

ELUL is the 6th month of the Biblical calendar (late summer/early fall), the month set apart for repentance, or *teshuvah*, in spiritual preparation for the High Holidays (Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur). If you were to count from Tishri as the first month of the calendar (as the Rabbinic tradition does), Elul would be the last month of the year - a time to make “New Years Resolutions” and to turn away from sin before the start of the New Year. The month of Elul is therefore a time each year to prepare for the *Yamim Nora'im*, the Days of Awe, by getting our spiritual house in order.



The name *Elul* is claimed to be an acronym of *ani l'dodi v'dodi li*, “I am my Beloved's and my Beloved is mine,” a quote from *Song of Solomon* 6:3, where the Beloved is the LORD and the “I” is the *Kallat Mashiach*, the Bride of Messiah:

I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine...



Although it is a somber time of soul-searching, Elul reminds us of the high calling we have to examine ourselves and prepare ourselves as the spotless and blameless Bride of the Mashiach (2 Peter 3:14).



According to some Rabbinic traditions, Elul is also the time that Moses spent on Sinai preparing the second set of tablets after the idolatrous incident of the golden calf. According to this tradition, Moses ascended on Rosh Chodesh Elul and descended on the 10th of Tishri, at the end of Yom Kippur, when repentance and restoration of the people was complete. Elul then represents the time of national sin and then forgiveness obtained by means of teshuvah before the LORD.

Selichot

Selichot are additional prayers for forgiveness (you can obtain a Selichot prayerbook at any good Jewish bookstore). In the Ashkenazic tradition, these prayers are recited at least ten times (in the morning service) before and including Yom Kippur.

The Selichot service is built upon a recitation of the thirteen merciful attributes (*Shelosh Esrei Middot*) that God revealed (see [Exodus 34:6-7](#)):

שְׁלֹשׁ עֶשְׂרֵה מִדּוֹת

¹יְהוָה ²יְהוָה ³אֵל ⁴רַחוּם ⁵וְתַנּוּן ⁶אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם
⁷וְרַב־חֶסֶד ⁸וְאֱמֶת:
⁹נֶצַח חֶסֶד לְאֱלֹפִים ¹⁰נִשְׂא עֲוֹן וּפְשָׁע ¹¹וְחַטָּאת
¹²וְנִקְהָ לֹא ¹³יִנְקָה פֶקֶד עֲוֹן אָבוֹת עַל־בָּנִים
 וְעַל־בְּנֵי בָנִים עַל־שְׁלִשִׁים וְעַל־רִבְעִים:

Definition: *Shelosh Esrei Middot*. After the Jews had committed the grievous sin with the golden calf, Moses despaired of the Jews ever being able to find favor in God's eyes again. God, however (as explained in the Talmud (Tractate Rosh Hashanah 17b)) donned a tallit, and, in the role of a chazzan, showed Moses the order of the thirteen attributes of mercy. God proclaims thirty-two words (Exod. 34:6-7) that have become known in Jewish tradition as the Shelosh Esrei Middot, the Thirteen Attributes of God:

"And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation." (KJV)



According to traditional interpretations, the thirteen attributes are articulated as follows:

1. The LORD (YHVH)
2. The LORD (the repetition of God's name indicates that God is merciful to one who has not yet sinned and also to one who has sinned but has repented)
3. *El* - God the Mighty
4. *Rachum*: God the compassionate;
5. *Vechanun*: God is gracious;
6. *Erech Apayim*: God is slow to anger, patient in waiting for our repentance;
7. *Verav Chesed*: God is abundant in kindness to both the righteous and the wicked;
8. *Ve'emet*: God is truthful and faithful in carrying out promises;
9. *Notzer Chesed La'alafim*: God extends kindness for a thousand generations, taking into account the merit of our worthy ancestors (*Zechut Avot*);
10. *Nosei Avon*: God forgives iniquity, defined in the tradition as wrongful deeds committed with premeditation;
11. *Vafesha*: God forgives transgression, defined as wrongful deeds committed in a rebellious spirit;
12. *Vechata'ah*: God forgives sin, those wrongful deeds that were inadvertent;
13. *Venakeh*: God will not cancel all punishment, only for those who are repentent.

In addition to the Shelosh Esrei Middot, the chanting of a number of psalms and prayerful poems (*piyyutim*) are recited during services throughout the month of Elul. The tone of a Selichot service is set in Psalm 130:

“Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD. Lord, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.”

As Messianic believers, we affirm that forgiveness is obtained by exercising *emunah* (faith) in the sacrifice of Yeshua as the *kapparah* for our sins, and by evidencing wholehearted *teshuvah* in our daily life. In Rabbinic Judaism, however, Selichot are said as a means of rendering a favorable verdict of “din,” or “judgment” by God during the Days of Awe.

“Sin” (*chet* in Hebrew) means “failure in our relationship with the LORD.” Our goal should be to continually move closer to the LORD, but *chet* causes us to move away from Him. *Teshuvah* means “return” and the period of Selichot is therefore set apart as a means of returning to the LORD:

כִּי אָדָם אֵין צְדִיק בְּאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה-טוֹב וְלֹא יִחַטָּא

For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.

- *Kohélet 7:20*



The Season of Teshuvah

Teshuvah is a sort of death and rebirth: a death of the past life and the birth of a new life and a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). It is an awakening from the sleep induced by sin, and manifests itself as the power of the Holy Spirit working in the heart of the believer who trusts in God's salvation through Yeshua.

Teshuvah is a gift from the LORD and involves four basic steps:

1. Forsaking the sin (Proverbs 28:13).
2. Regretting the breach in your relationship with God and others (Psalm 51).
3. Confessing the truth before God and making amends with others we have harmed (1 John 1:9; James 5:16, Matthew 5:23-4).
4. Accepting the future and moving forward with the LORD (Philippians 3:13-14; 1 John 1:9).

The season of Teshuvah runs forty days from the first of Elul to Yom Kippur. Each day at the synagogue the shofar is sounded and special prayers are made regarding turning to YHVH for restoration. The last ten days of this 40 day period (beginning on Rosh Hashanah and ending on Yom Kippur) are referred to as the "High Holy Days" or the "Days of Awe" (*Yamim Nora'im*).