
Sichos in English Classics 29

**City Dwellers
in the Field**



1st Day of Rosh Chodesh Elul, 5742 (1982)



Sichos In English
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IN PLACE OF AN INTRODUCTION

At the Shloshim of R' Yonah Avtzon A"H, Director of Sichos in English, a resolution was taken to reprint the original weekly Sichos in English publications.

To fulfill this, a weekly booklet including a translation of a *farbrengen* as it was first published will be distributed. Our intention is to reprint the entire set in the near future.

Following the Sichos we will include an addendum with pictures, notes, and insights into the process of its publication.

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CITY DWELLERS IN THE FIELD



1st Day of Rosh Chodesh Elul, 5742 (1982)

THE POWER OF ROSH CHODESH ELUL

1. Every Rosh Chodesh contains dual aspects: the general concept of Rosh Chodesh; and simultaneously, an element unique to the Rosh Chodesh of a particular month. A parallel to this would be man: Every person is created “in the image of G-d;” simultaneously, no two are *alike*, as our Sages said “The Supreme King of Kings stamped each person with the seal of Adam, and no two are alike ... differing in voice, appearance, and understanding.” Both the general concept and the unique element are important, as we see that although G-d’s Name illuminates in *all* the months, a *different combination* of the letters of G-d’s Name illuminates in each month in particular. Likewise, these different combinations are alluded to in different verses appropriate for each particular month.

The general concept of Rosh Chodesh is alluded to in its name. “Rosh,” meaning “head,” indicates that just as the head encompasses the vitality of the whole body and directs it, so too Rosh Chodesh encompasses and directs the entire month.

In addition to this general concept, Rosh Chodesh Elul contains a unique element. The Tur states: “We learn in Pirkei D’R. Eliezer that on Rosh Chodesh Elul G-d said to Moshe ‘Come up to Me on the mountain,’ which is when he went up to receive the latter set of tablets.”

Our Sages, on the verse “I stood on the mountain as in the first (forty) days,” comment that “just as the first (forty) days were in favor (from G-d) so too the latter (forty) days were in favor.” (As distinct from the intermediate forty days when G-d was angered

over the sin of the golden calf.) Indeed, in one respect, the latter forty days (when Moshe went up to receive the second set of tablets) are loftier than the first ones. The service of the first forty days was completely righteous; that of the latter forty was the service of *teshuvah* (on the sin of the golden calf). And the latter is loftier than the former, as our Sages said “In the place penitents stand not even the completely righteous can stand.”

The Tur continues that when Moshe ascended to receive the second set of tablets on Rosh Chodesh Elul, “they blew the shofar in the camp... Therefore our Sages ordained that Jews every year should blow the shofar on Rosh Chodesh Elul and the entire month, to warn Israel to repent, as stated ‘If a shofar be blown in the city, will not the people tremble in fear?!’”

Chassidus explains that the blowing of the shofar effects “*ta’anug*” (delight), an extremely lofty level. And the trembling in fear produced by the shofar is not a contradiction, for this fear is itself associated with *ta’anug*, as in the delight present in awe and fear before G-d. Thus the unique element in Rosh Chodesh is that then Moshe ascended to the mountain to receive the latter tablets — the distinction of *teshuvah*. It also possesses the idea of shofar blowing — the service of *teshuvah* with *ta’anug*.

In the month of Elul, G-d is as a “king in the field, when all are permitted and are able to receive him ... and he receives them all benignly and graciously ... so too in Elul *we* go to greet G-d in the field.” And the service of Elul is the proper preparation for Tishrei’s service, when after receiving the King in the field “the people follow the King to His capital city, to His royal palace.”

ALL JEWS ARE CITY DWELLERS

2. The Alter Rebbe explains that the 13 attributes of mercy illuminate in the month of Elul. But, since it is compared to the king in the field and not in the royal palace, the days of Elul are weekdays and not Yom Tov. He writes: “This is a parable to a king who, before he comes to the city, the people of the city go out to greet and receive him in the field; then all who wish may go out to

receive him, and he receives them all benignly and graciously. When he goes to the city, they follow after him to his royal palace.”

Simply put, the distinction of Elul is that even when a Jew is in the “field” — as he is on weekdays when he is engaged in agricultural work (i.e. worldly matters), the King nevertheless receives him graciously.

But not all is clear: The Alter Rebbe writes that “This is a parable to a king who, before he comes to the city, the *people of the city go out* to greet and receive him in the field.” It seems the Alter Rebbe is talking of *city dwellers* who *go out to the field* to greet the king there, and not farmers who live in the “field.” How can we say the king waits for city-dwellers to come from the city to greet him in the field?

A Jew, every day upon awakening, says: “I give thanks to You... that You returned my soul to me...” After washing his hands he says “The soul You have given me is pure, You created it, You formed it, You blew it inside me, and You guard it within me.” He understands that since his body is alive only because his soul is within it, the soul is the principal part. Since this soul is from G-d — “*You gave it... You created it... You guard it within me*” — every Jew in essence belongs to “the *city of our G-d*,” “people of the city” in the above parable.

Nevertheless, there are times (on weekdays) when even a city-dweller must go from his place to the “field” to engage in *worldly* pursuits: A Jew, after praying and learning Torah at the beginning of the day, must leave the synagogue and prayer hall to elevate worldly matters (“the field”).

If a Jew, being a “city-dweller,” should not wish to go to the “field,” he should know that the *King* is found in the field, and there “receives them all benignly and graciously.” When the king is in his palace “one enters only with permission, and then only special people.” Thus, if he wishes to greet and be greeted by the king, he must go to the field. And while a Jew must actually engage in worldly affairs, the true intention is so that simultaneously he can greet and request of the king all his needs, knowing he will be received graciously and warmly.

DIFFERENT LEVELS OF SHOFAR

3. In terms of man's spiritual service: Tanya (Ch. 36) explains that the purpose of the creation of all the worlds is not for the sake of the upper (spiritual) worlds, but ultimately for the sake of this lowly, physical world — "G-d desired to have a dwelling place in the lowest of all worlds." True, the revelation of G-dliness is greater in the upper worlds; However, this very revelation is a *lowering* of the Divine light. The ultimate purpose is to have a dwelling place in this lowest of all worlds, a dwelling place for G-d's *Essence*, not just revelation. Thus, the *Essence* of G-d is specifically in the "field," for the making of a dwelling place for G-d is specifically in this physical world.

Jews, then, who are "city-dwellers" (since their soul is "a part of G-d Above") go from the city to the field (to engage in worldly matters), for it is specifically in the field that they receive the King and the King receives them graciously — the making of a dwelling place for G-d's *Essence* in this physical world. It is only by lowering oneself to go from the "city" to the "field" that one makes this dwelling place for G-d.

We find the concept that all Jews are "city-dwellers" in the "city of our G-d" mentioned in halachah. The Rambam renders the halachic decision that every Jew "wishes to perform all the mitzvos and to refrain from the transgressions" — notwithstanding his outward appearance. Hence every Jew, because of his true inner desire, belongs to the "city of our G-d" — "city-dwellers." Indeed, the Rambam's ruling refers not just to people in the "field," but even to those in a "desert." A desert is a desolate, unpopulated place, and in spiritual terms is much lower than a field. And even Jews in a desert really belong to "the city of our G-d." And, just as after going to the field city-dwellers receive an elevation, so too the greater descent of being in the desert effects a yet greater elevation. For since the desert is the lowest level in this physical world, the making of a dwelling place for G-d there — the revelation of G-d's *Essence* — is of the loftiest level.

As above, the strength for the service of Elul comes from Rosh Chodesh, when Moshe went up to receive the second set of tablets.

Therefore, we start to blow then. Although we only begin to blow the shofar on the second day of Rosh Chodesh, nevertheless, on the first day of Rosh Chodesh we practice blowing.

Indeed, in one respect the blowing for practice on the first day of Rosh Chodesh is loftier than the actual blowing on the second day (and the rest of the month). The principal concept of blowing the shofar is one blast, the “tekiyah gedolah” (the “great sounding”). This is similar to the “great shofar” of the future redemption. Therefore on Yom Kippur after Neilah (concluding prayer) we blow one blast, and it is of the level of the “great shofar.” The blowings on Rosh Hashanah are of the regular level of shofar, whereas on Yom Kippur, it is of the level of the revelation of the “great shofar.” That is, after the 100 blowings on Rosh Hashanah, we reach the ultimate in shofar blowing on Yom Kippur after Neilah — the “great sounding.”

In similar fashion, this is the difference between the blowing on the second day of Rosh Chodesh Elul (when we blow ten soundings) and that of the first day (when it is practice blowing — just a simple blast). The halachah states that “all soundings are kosher for (the mitzvah of) shofar.” Hence, when we blow a simple blast on the first day of Rosh Chodesh (for practice), it is already the principal concept of the shofar, similar to the “great sounding” at Neilah on Yom Kippur which is loftier than the 100 soundings on Rosh Hashanah. In other words, the simple sounding of the shofar on the first day of Rosh Chodesh is similar to the simple “great sounding” (one great blast) on Yom Kippur.

In greater clarification: the phrase “*great* sounding” and not “long sounding” indicates that this sounding is not just greater in quantity (i.e. longer than any of the blasts on Rosh Hashanah) but also in quality — such as the *meaning* in the blowing (similar to the meaning in the phrase “blow on a *great* shofar for our freedom”). In our case, when we blow just one simple blast on the first day of Rosh Chodesh (for practice) with great meaning, directed to G-d Himself, it is a “great sounding.”

This is the distinction of the month of Elul, the preparation to the service of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. And since Rosh

Chodesh encompasses all the days of the month, this concept already exists then, beginning from the first day of Rosh Chodesh.

In addition to the above, extra strength is given from the *renewal* of the moon on Rosh Chodesh. This is associated with Jews, for “Jews count according to the moon,” and, just as the moon is the “small luminary,” so too “Ya’akov is the small one.” Moreover, this is also associated with the redemption, for “Jews are destined to be renewed like the moon.”

There is a special distinction in Rosh Chodesh Elul now, in the times of exile. In the times of the Bais Hamikdosh, when the new moon (Rosh Chodesh) was fixed according to visual observation, Rosh Chodesh was *not* necessarily two days. In the times of exile however, when Rosh Chodesh is fixed by the calendar Rosh Chodesh Elul is *always* two days. And hence every Jew enjoys the distinction of Rosh Chodesh for two days — including the strength derived for the entire service of Elul.

RABBIS AND THEIR SERMONS

4. The month of Elul is the time when Rabbis prepare their sermons for this month and the Days of Awe. Some of these Rabbis suppose that since it states of Elul “If a shofar is blown in the city, will not the people *tremble* in fear,” and likewise the “Days of Awe,” their sermons must be full of anger, “fire and brimstone.” They think that the more they shout at and admonish Jews in their sermons, the greater the speaker they are, and the better the job of “educating” their flock.

However, Torah tells us “the words of Sages are heard *quietly*,” teaching us that when the words are not spoken “quietly,” they do not achieve their desired effect. Moreover, a person knows in his heart on what spiritual level *he* stands — and how can one have the audacity to publicly admonish Jews in such reprehensible terms?

It is recorded in Scripture that when G-d commanded Yeshayahu to be a prophet to the Jews, Yeshayahu commented improperly about the Jews (“I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips”). For this he was immediately punished, as stated

“One of the Serafim (angels) flew to me, having a live coal in his hand ... and he laid it upon my mouth.” Now, Yeshayahu’s improper comment about the Jewish people was not said publicly, but when he was talking to *G-d*. He was answering whether he accepted the mission of prophesying to the Jews, and of course, he had to tell the truth to *G-d* — that he was afraid of the mission because “I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.” Nevertheless, Yeshayahu was punished for unseemly words against the Jews!

Moreover, Yeshayahu’s words were not idly said, but were necessary for concrete action — that he cannot prophesize to the Jews since they are “a people of unclean lips.” In addition, he did not say anything bad about the Jews’ hearts or minds, but only their lips — and that only to *G-d* and not publicly. Nevertheless, it was considered unseemly conduct to talk thus about *G-d’s people!*

The lesson from this is clear: People rationalize their instinct to criticize and condemn others by saying it is for the purpose of correcting the other’s misdeeds. Indeed, they say, it is because they *love* Jews that they so severely denounce them. The above story teaches us differently: One need not search for a great lover of Israel than the prophet Yeshayahu; and yet we see what was the result of his improper comment about them. And the reason why Yeshayahu did so, despite being chosen by *G-d* as the prophet of the true and complete redemption, is because through this we in later generations know how not to act!

The above is especially important now, in the month of Elul. It is the month of mercy, when Moshe went up on the mountain to receive the second set of tablets. Moshe at that time prayed for mercy even for those who had sinned with the golden calf; and indeed, effected that *G-d* should say “I have forgiven according to your words.” Hence, in this month which is the time to ask for and strive to receive blessings for a good and sweet year for all Jews — *G-d* forbid to speak bad about Jews! The Alter Rebbe writes that in Elul the “King is in the field,” and receives every Jew graciously and favorably. Yet these Rabbis stand before the King when He is receiving Jews graciously and scream at and find fault with Jews!

The vast majority of Jews are not guilty of the faults these people scream about. And even if there are a few who have some remote connection to such faults, who appointed these people as a “prophet” to denounce the only son of G-d — “You are sons to the L-rd your G-d!?”

If a person wishes to fulfill the mitzvah of “You shall surely admonish your fellow,” the halachah rules it must first be done privately, and even then in a quiet manner, not angrily and vehemently. It is related of R. Zusia, one of the disciples of the Mezritcher Maggid, that when he wanted to cause a Jew to change his ways, he would stand nearby and say “*Zusia* has committed such and such a sin” (and would enumerate these things the *other* had done, but would say “*Zusia* has done it”), and would cry over “his” transgressions. When the other would hear this, he would be aroused to true repentance.

Another important point: Even when speaking in the manner of “the words of the Sages are heard quietly,” there are two ways: to talk of the bad things the other has done and the punishment he will get; or talk of good things, the reward received for doing good. Why talk of the bad, when one can talk of the reward received for doing mitzvos, for repenting etc? There is so much literature about this aspect that it will suffice for sermons for the entire year! Indeed, talking of a person’s faults is useless. The best way to get a person to mend his ways is when one talks pleasantly about the greatness of doing *good*. When one explains to a person about the inherent greatness of every Jew, that, as the Rambam writes, through *one* mitzvah he can “tilt himself and the entire world to the meritorious side,” it is the best way to influence him to become better.



ADDENDUM

Behind the Scenes of Sichos in English

To add a bit of flavor to the points elaborated upon in the Sicha, we present a letter of the Rebbe, dated "In the days of Elul". The Rebbe takes a somewhat candid approach to the "King in the field" parable. Picturing the worker in the field's appropriate response.

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By the Grace of G-d
In the Days of Elul, 5740
Seventh (Shemittah) Year,
A Shabbos Unto G-d
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Greeting and Blessing:

I received your correspondence, and may G-d grant the fulfillment of your heart's desires for good.

The present days are particularly auspicious for Divine favor and grace, as explained by the Alter Rebbe in his well-known parable of the "King in the Field." Briefly: There is a time when a king goes out to meet his people in the field. At such a time all formalities pertaining to royal audiences in the palace are dispensed with, and even the workers in the field, dressed as they are in their work clothes, have an extraordinary opportunity to approach the king, greet him personally, and present petitions to him; and the king receives everyone graciously and with a simile, and grants their requests.

Such a time is the month of Elul, when the King of Kings is, as it were, "in the field," and everyone can come close to Him. At the same time, every Jew has the opportunity to approach G-d even in his "work clothes," in the midst of his occupation with worldly matters of his daily routine. But together with this extraordinary opportunity, the Jew must become even more keenly aware that he is in the presence of G-d, the King of Kings, and must obey His laws and ordinances, as set forth in the Torah, which regulate his conduct at all times, including the time when he is at his job or in his business.

It is this mutual "reaching-out" and togetherness between G-d and man that gives this time of the year - the transition from the old year into the new, and preparation for it - its special significance, and makes man worthy of receiving G-d's blessings for a truly happy new year.

Especially as the outgoing year is the "Seventh (Shemittah) Year, a Shabbos unto G-d," and the coming year is a year of Hakhel,

And every Jew - man, woman, and child - will realize in his and her life: "We Your people and the flock of Your pasture, we thank You for ever, from generation to generation we will relate Your praise."

With the traditional blessing of a Kesivo vaChasimo Tovo, for a good and sweet year,

לעילוי נשמת
הרה"ח הרה"ת ר' **יונה**
בן הרה"ח הרה"ת ר' מאיר ע"ה
אבן

מנהל ועד שיחות באנגלית
למעלה מארבעים שנה
שבהמשך פעולותיו בהפצת המעיינות
נזכה לגאולה השלימה תיכף ומיד ממש

נדפס על ידי חתנו ובתו
הר' **יצחק וחנה** ומשפחתם שיחיו **וואלף**



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