

Romemu Dvar Torah September 2, 2016

It's that time of the year. It's the time of the year that no matter how much lead time you have going in, you never have enough. Doesn't matter that the holidays are beginning a month later than they usually begin.

Doesn't matter. You use that time, right? That's the time you have to procrastinate. The more time you have, the more procrastination is possible.

Everybody knows that. How many people here have their tickets already for the holidays, already booked and ready? How many people have thought a thousand times already, I already have to buy them last week? It doesn't matter, right? It's never enough because as the great, the late great, Rabbi Alan Lew wrote in his book, this is real and you are completely unprepared. As much as we can imagine that we are prepared, we're not.

And it's that time of the year when we talk about acronyms and Judaism loves acronyms. So they made one up for this month, this month and change before the high holidays, this preparation that is added preparation. The month of Elul, which of course is not a Hebrew word.

Elul is Babylonian, but the rabbis hear in it the word El, which means towards, and Elul means towardsness. Elul is moving with intense towardsness. And that Elul, Aleph, Lamed, Vav, Lamed is, if you take the first letter of each of those words, Aleph, Lamed, Vav, Lamed, Elul is, I am to my beloved, and my beloved is to me.

Somehow the rabbis hear in the month of preparation for the high holidays, love is in the air. Somehow Tshuva, somehow this process of returning, repenting, pre-penting, as my friend Amichai calls it, somehow this preparation, introspection, reflection, readying, preparing, is is the love boat. Ani l'dodi v'dodi li.

Elul. Elul. Tomorrow morning in the parasha that's always read at this time of the year in the book of Deuteronomy of Devarim, Re'eh.

Re'eh, behold, look, see. Anokhin noten lifneichem, nosen lifneichem ayom, bracha u'klala. Behold, I am placing before you, says Moshe, blessing u'klala and curse.

Another acronym for you, Re'eh, which means to behold. Reish Alef-Heh is, whenever I see those letters, I think Rabbi Avram Ha-Kohen-Kook, whose own name became an acronym. The first chief rabbi of Palestine, Abraham Isaac Ha-Kohen-Kook, became Re'ihah, right? Rabbi R. Avram Alef Yitzhak Ha-Kohen-Re'ihah, to see the great first chief rabbi, the greatest mystic of the 20th century, Re'ihah, whose acronym name means to give a Kook, to give a look.

His last name was Kook also. He notes what others have noted in this verse tomorrow morning. Moshe says, behold, I give to you blessing, bracha, u'klala and curse.

It should say in Hebrew, bracha et ha-bracha vi et ha-klala, the blessing and the curse, a little vav in there, bracha et ha-klala, seems to signify that blessing and curse come together in some way, that they're interwoven. This Re'ihah, this rabbi Kook, who beheld and wrote

in his great work on tshuva, that tshuva always comes repentance, or returning, or cleansing, or remembering, or realigning, or recalibrating, whatever word you want to use that allows us to imagine spiritual work that cleanses, that readjusts. He says it always brings with it pain.

The beginning of the Re'ihah, the beginning of the Re'ihah is the beginning of the Re'ihah itself. The beginning of all return, he says, is ke'ev, is mach'ov, is painful. A sense of constriction, a sense of coming up against a block, something that's there that we want to see.

We've ignored it, but it didn't go away. He compares it to an operation. The pain of the surgeon having to remove something that with its removal will cause pain, but with its without it there will actually bring health.

That spiritual practice sometimes is the exact opposite of what it promises in the beginning. And for that reason, waking up is hard to do. They say that waking up is because waking up with something no longer a part of who you are that you've become accustomed to, that was there for some reason, a crutch, a habit, a way of being in the world.

Right? Like when I was in yeshiva, they used to say like the beginning of all cleaning your room is bringing light into the room and then you see what you've been living with. Right? And in that sunlight, you can see all the particles of dust that you've been avoiding. Man, my son this week, my elder son, Bear, had his tonsils removed.

And I'll tell you something, there's no way in the world that you can convince him now that it's going to be better for him later on. There's no way. They come together like a wink and a smile.

He's actually removing something that is obstructing something beneath it. In essence, he's unearthing. There's something there that wants to bloom.

His health that is being obstructed by, or the light that is there, is being obstructed by these tonsils that weren't working for him. And he's in pain. When we move, Rav Nachman Abrasov said, when we move to make a change in our life, we are going to meet resistance.

The great Russian orthodox, crazy, mystic Gurdjieff wrote that whenever there is a first force in the universe for good, there is an equal and opposite force that meets it to some degree. And that is our own resistance to change. It's our own resistance to hearing the wake-up call.

It's our own resistance to finally tuning in to what we've been trying to tune out. And it hurts a little bit until we adjust our eyes to the light that's streaming in, until we adjust ourselves. It's painful.

Re'ei anochi notim nefnechem ayom. Behold, I'm giving you this pathway to tshuva. And it's a pathway of love.

Because underneath that initial constriction, the tradition affirms that there is a heart that is shining with clarity. Like the dew that meets the yearning grass parched with its own inner intelligence of growth, but just needs the dew to be present for it so that it can push

through. That image of dew is an image that five years ago today, on September 2nd, 2011, my wife Ariella and I had that image of dew from the prophet Hosea, Hosea in chapter 14, who promised in what is known as perek ha'tshuva, the chapter of reconnection, of re-grounding, of re-soiling our souls in the divine.

The verse, chapter 14, verse 6, I will be like dew for you, Israel. I will be the dew, the tal. I will be that irrigant, that water, that irrigation that is always present, not too strong, but just enough to allow the sediment to move slightly and for that ever-present shining truth to come forth, to break forth.

That's why we named our little boy Tal. The poet Mark Nepo writes about dew. During the summer, once I was staying at a lodge near the foot of the Rocky Mountains, and every morning I would stroll along the path behind the lodge, and I would watch the tufts of grass stretch to meet the dew, the tufts of grass stretching to meet the dew.

The sun hitting the wet grass seemed an illumination, and in that crisp early light, I was reminded that everything in life has an inner quality that emanates from its center. I was reminded that everything in life has an inner quality. That's tshuva.

Each and every one of us has an inner quality that emanates from our center that yearns, but stuff gets in the way, waking up is hard to do. And the next 39 days until we arrive at Yom Kippur, people say it's 40, but really it's 39 until we get to Yom Kippur starting tomorrow, 39 days like the numerical value of the word tau. These 39 dew days to do this is to recognize where in our lives there are things that have become obstacles to the unique, innate light that emanates from your center to shine through, and to gently touch that place.

And invite it to shine. So I want to end as we began with an acronym, and I'll invite you to play with me too. Dew, D-E-W. D, drop the story. Drop the story. Whatever it is. Drop the story and E, engage your heart. Whatever story we find ourselves in in the next 39 dew days, drop your story, engage your heart, and W, a little bit tricky this one, wake up. Watch. Look. D-E-W, it's a kind of acronym for life. I am to my beloved and my beloved is to me the love story of the dew.

And the love story of every relationship, the love story of our own orbit of relationship is drop in and out of the story. Engage in this deep reservoir of light that is in your heart and wake up to what's here. Love, love me dew.

39 days. 39 wake up calls. The dew drops of divine love are searching for hearts in tufts of grass that yearn to be quenched.

May this elul, this beloved journey of dew be a journey towards the light that emanates from each of our centers. And may this entire energetic period help spread dew wherever it is needed. And it is so badly needed.

Please rise.