

The Month of Elul Is the Optimal Time to Free the Unblemished Internal Jewish Spark from Bondage

In this week's parsha, parshas Ki Seitzei, we read:

“כי תצא למלחמה על אויבך, ונתנו ה' אלקיך בידך ושביט שבינו, וראית בשביה אשת יפת תואר וחשקת בה ולקחת לך לאשה, והבאתה אל תוך ביתך וגלחת את ראשה ועשתה את צפרניה, והסירה את שמלת שביה מעליה, וישבה בביתך ובכתה את אביה ואת אמה ירח ימים, ואחר כן תבוא אליה ובעלתה והיתה לך לאשה”

“When you will go out to war against your enemies, and Hashem, your G—d, will deliver him into your hand, and you will capture its people as captives; and you will see among its captivity a woman who is beautiful of form, and you will desire her, you will take her to yourself for a wife. You shall bring her to the midst of your house; she shall shave her head and let her nails grow. She shall remove the garment of her captivity from upon herself and she shall sit in your house and she shall weep for her father and her mother for a full month; thereafter you may come to her and cohabit with her, and she shall be a wife to you”.

In the Arizal's "Likutei Torah" and in the holy Maggid of Koznitz's, zy"a, "Avodas Yisroel", these pesukim are interpreted as referring to the holy neshomeh. It should be noted, however, that the source for this interpretation is the Zohar Chodosh (Ki Seitzei 72a). there it elaborates on this idea even further:

“כי תצא למלחמה על אויבך” — the enemy under discussion here is the yetzer hara, the evil inclination; “ונתנו ה' אלקיך בידך ושביט שבינו” — Hashem will deliver this enemy into your hands in the merit of Torah study which counteracts and nullifies the yetzer hara; “וראית” — “בשביה אשת יפת תואר” — the beautiful woman in captivity referred to is none other than the neshomeh. The possuk in Mishlei (31, 30) compares the neshomeh to a woman: “אשה היא תתהלל” — a G—d — fearing woman is to be praised. As a result of man's sins, she has been sullied and wallows in captivity. Consequently, she tries to evade him and does not wish to illuminate his existence.

“וחשקת בה ולקחת לך לאשה” — yet, you desire to embrace and internalize her light within you; “והבאתה אל” — within your body which is designed to house the neshomeh; “וגלחת את ראשה ועשתה את צפרניה” — abstain from earthly pleasures; “והסירה את שמלת שביה” — thus, you will remove the neshomeh's garments of captivity that were created by your sins; as the possuk (Zechariah 3, 4) states: “הסירו הבגדים הצואים” — remove the soiled garments; “וישבה בביתך” — and she will dwell within your body.

“ובכתה” — she shall weep tears of teshuvah, repentance; “את אביה” — concerning her Father in Heaven, HKB”H, whom her body has sinned against; “ואת אמה” — and concerning the holy Shechinah, the Divine Presence, the maternal presence that is in exile due to our transgressions; “ירח ימים” — refers to the entire month of Elul; during this month, Moshe ascended the mountain to plead for HKB”H's mercy in the aftermath of the sin of the egel; “ואחר כן” — if you do all of these things, she will shine for you once more.

The Name **אלו** Combines the Two Words **ל** and **לו**

In honor of the month of Elul, the month designated for teshuvah, let us expand upon this vital concept. Let us delve into the issue of what is required of us during this crucial month, “ירח ימים”, in order to release the holy neshomeh, the “אשת יפת תואר”, from captivity, and to remove “את שמלת שביה מעליה”, the soiled garment created from our transgressions that surrounds her. Our explanation will be founded on the words of the "Sefas Emes", brought many times, in the name of his holy elder, the brilliant author of the "Chidushei HaRim", zy"a, concerning the reason why the month of teshuvah is called Elul.

His teaching is based on the following possuk (Tehillim 100, 3): “דעו כי ה' הוא האלקים הוא עשנו ולו אנחנו עמו” — Know that Hashem, He is G—d, it is He Who made us and we are His, His nation and the sheep of His pasture. Tradition teaches us that the word “lo” in

this possuk is written as “ולא”, with an aleph, yet is read as “ולו”, with a vav. With an aleph, the possuk suggests that we are unworthy and inadequate to be His people; with a vav, it means that we merit being close to Him. In fact, both can be viewed as serving the same purpose. By recognizing our lowly stature and the fact that we have failed to serve Hashem adequately — “ולא אנחנו עמו” (the way the possuk is written) — we merit to draw closer to Hashem by means of sincere teshuvah — “ולו אנחנו עמו” (the way the possuk is read). Both processes enable us to achieve the goal of being “עמו”, HKB”H’s people.

This is why the month most suited for teshuvah is called Elul, אלול — a combination of the way the word “lo” is to be written, ל“א, and is to be read, לו“א, in this possuk. This allusion in the name Elul is meant to teach us the essence of teshuvah — to combine the process of “ולא אנחנו עמו” with the process of “ולו אנחנו עמו”. By recognizing our lowliness and inadequacy, we are driven to perform teshuvah and, thus, merit to draw closer to HKB”H; conversely, as we draw closer to HKB”H, our inadequacy becomes more apparent.

This allows us to add a lovely tidbit concerning the term teshuvah, spelled “תשובה”. The numerical difference between the word “lo” with an aleph (=1) and the word “lo” with a vav (=6) is five, the numerical value of the letter hei, ה. At the momentous revelation at Har Sinai — when the Torah was given — Yisroel became HKB”H’s people, a realization of: “ולו אנחנו עמו” with a vav. Unfortunately, due to their sins and transgressions, the word לו“א (meaning to him) was diminished by the value of five, the equivalent of the letter hei, and was transformed into לא“א (meaning not); this new reality could be described as: “ולא אנחנו עמו” with an aleph, meaning that they were no longer His people in the fullest sense.

Therefore, HKB”H granted us the mitzvah of teshuvah. The Hebrew word “תשובה” can be broken down to spell “תשוב ה”, meaning let the letter hei return; this is a reminder that it is incumbent upon us to restore the value of the letter hei to its proper place, so that we may merit once again our previous status of: “ולו אנחנו עמו” — to be truly close to Him. This is alluded to in the possuk (Bereishis 2, 4): “אלה תולדות השמים והארץ בהבראם” — **These are the products of the heavens and the earth when they were created.** Citing the Midrash, Rashi comments: “בהבראם בה ברואם” — the word בהבראם employed in the possuk can be interpreted as “בה ברואם”, indicating that Hashem created the world with the letter hei. This signifies that the purpose of creation is to restore the value of the

letter hei as things were meant to be — to the situation of: “ולו אנחנו עמו”, with Yisroel fulfilling their intended role as HKB”H’s people.

The Zodiac Sign for Elul is the Virgin — the Innermost Untainted Aspect of a Jew

As it is the nature of Torah to be elucidated with seventy different facets, we can suggest a novel and practical explanation for the intimate association of the name Elul with the combination of the written and spoken forms of the word “lo.” Let us introduce an important concept concerning the month of Elul gleaned from the incomparable teachings of the “Sefas Emes” (Elul 5647):

“והנה מזל אלול בתולה, היינו שיש נקודה פנימית בנפש ישראל שאין שולט שם מגע נכרי, גן נעול, מעיין חתום, ונקראת בתולה, ועל זה הנקודה נאמר אני לדודי, שלעולם לא נתרחקה זו הנקודה מדביקות בשורשה ושמורה לשמו יתברך, אך לא בכל עת יכולים למצוא זו הנקודה, ועתה הזמן גורם שנתעוררו בני ישראל בתשובה, ונתקרבו נפשות בני ישראל אליו יתברך.”

He teaches us that there is an innermost place in the soul of every Jew that is invulnerable and inaccessible to outside, foreign influences; this spot is referred to as “בתולה” — pronounced “betulah” and referring to a virgin, an untouched, untainted maiden. Regarding this protected, innermost place Scriptures states: “אני לדודי”, “I am devoted to my beloved” — for this element of the soul has never been separated from its attachment and closeness to the Blessed One, its source; however, it is not always possible to find this spot. Seeing as Elul is the time most conducive to perform teshuvah, it is the opportune time to locate this innermost spot.

As our holy sources explain, in every single Jew — even if he is a frequent sinner, chas v’shalom — no matter who he is or what situation he is in, there exists a spot in the innermost chambers of his heart that is of divine origin. This divine spark is the source of a Jew’s neshomeh that was implanted in him by HKB”H; this sacred spot remains untouched and untainted by one’s sins and transgressions; it remains clean and pure.

In the sefer Butzina D’Nehora, authored by the great Rabbi Reb Baruch of Mezhbizh, zy”a, he applies this concept to interpret the following possuk in Tehillim (37, 10): “ועוד מעט ואין רשע והתבוננת על מקומו ואיננו” — **Soon there will be no wicked, you will contemplate his place and he will no longer be there.** In other words, even a Jew that has committed so many sins as to be considered wicked, nevertheless: “ועוד מעט” — there still remains within him

that innermost spot; “ואין רשע” – which is not wicked, because the damage caused by his misdeeds cannot reach that spot. To which David HaMelech prays to Hashem: “והתבוננת על מקומו” – contemplate this innermost spot; “ואיננו” – and you will realize that the wickedness does not exist in this innermost haven, for all of one’s sins are merely external manifestations that do not stem from the depth of one’s heart.

**“From the Depths I Call to You Hashem”
from the Innermost Spot in My Heart**

Now, we can begin to appreciate the depth of the mitzvah of teshuvah. It is somewhat difficult to comprehend how someone that has fallen prey to the yetzer hara, is totally under its control and is filthy with sin can suddenly awaken and summon up the strength to perform teshuvah. The explanation, however, is that the mechanism and source of the mitzvah of teshuvah hinges on the sacred, innermost spark that we have been discussing. By awakening this inner spark that is unblemished from one’s sins, one is able to arise to perform sincere teshuvah and to cure all of his 248 limbs and 365 sinews.

This fundamental idea is also expressed in Dover Shalom (230) in the name of our holy master, Sar Shalom of Belz, zy”a. Once, on Tu B’Shvat, at his hallowed table, while discussing the possuk (Tehillim 130, 1): “שיר המעלות” – **“A song of ascents, from the depths, I called to You, Hashem”** – he raised the question: how is it possible for a person to overcome the yetzer hara that controls him?

To accomplish this feat, it is recommended that one pray to Hashem that He stir the holy spark that occupies one’s innermost being – that place where the yetzer hara has no power or dominion. In this manner, he will overcome the yetzer and draw closer to Hashem. This then is the meaning of the possuk: “שיר המעלות ממעמקים קראתיך ה’” – I beseech You from the innermost portion of my heart that remains untouched by the harmful effects of my sins.

I also found this holy idea articulated in the sefer "Neos HaDesheh" from a handwritten letter penned by the great and holy author of the "Avnei Nezer". Here are his beautiful words:

“שיר המעלות ממעמקים קראתיך ה’. נראה ביאור הענין, דהנה בכלי שרת הדין אם הם טהורים כשרים וראויים לעבודה, מה שאין כן אם נטמאו אינם ראויים לעבודה, ואם עבר בהם גם העבודה נפסלת, ואם כן כשאדם חוטא ואבריו נטמאו בטומאת העבירות, אם כן איך מועילה אחר כך תשובה, הלוא אבריו טמאים ואיך יכול לעבוד בהם להקב”ה?

אך צריך לשוב באבר שלא נפגם, וזה בפנימיות הלב ועמקו, שבאמת אף אם איש ישראל חוטא לפעמים, אין החטא מעמקי הלב רק בחיצוניות, אבל הפנימיות של ישראל טובה, אם כן צריך להתחיל לשוב מזה המקום שלא נפגם, ואחר שהתשובה נתקבלה ממילא נתקנו כל האברים, וזה ממעמקים מעומקא דלובא”.

He is expounding on the same possuk: “שיר המעלות” – “ממעמקים קראתיך ה’” Concerning vessels used in the Sanctuary for the holy service, if they were pure and uncontaminated, they were allowed to be used; if, however, they were ritually impure and contaminated, they could not be used. If they were used for another purpose, they were also disqualified. If so, when a person sins and contaminates his limbs with his sins, how can he subsequently perform teshuvah? After all, he would be serving Hashem with contaminated, impure and unworthy limbs.

Hence, it is essential to repent with an untainted limb – the innermost aspect of the heart. By beginning one’s process of teshuvah from this untainted place, and one’s teshuvah is accepted, then the remaining limbs will be healed in the process, as well. This is the meaning of the reference to ממעמקים, “from the depths,” from the innermost, depths of one’s heart and being.

This explanation coincides with the words of the Yismach Yisroel (Noach) which state that this innermost point of one’s being arouses a person to perform teshuvah. He employs this concept to interpret the possuk (Yeshayah 6, 10): “ולבבו יבין ושב ורפא לו” – **and its heart will understand, so that it will repent and be healed.** The root and mechanism of teshuvah require that the sinner contemplate the depths of his being, the innermost aspect of his heart, which conceals the glowing ember of the divine spark that is never extinguished. This contemplation will enable him to ignite a fire in his heart which will continue on to purify and sanctify all of his 248 limbs and 365 sinews.

This illuminates for us the words of the “Sefas Emes” concerning the sanctity of the month of Elul: “והנה מזל אלול בתולה, היינו שיש נקודה פנימית בנפש ישראל, שאין שולט שם מגע נכרי” – In other words, the yetzer hara is incapable of harming this protected and secluded innermost point.

Since the month of Elul is designated for performing teshuvah – and, as explained, the key to the process is the revelation of the innermost aspect of one’s being that remains untainted – therefore: “מזל אלול בתולה” – the

zodiac sign for the month of Elul is the virgin. During the month of Elul, we reveal the innermost aspect of our beings that remains untouched and unsullied by any foreign influence. If successful, we will merit to purify our entire body and being of any sinful blemishes — thanks to David HaMelech's advice: "ממעמקים קראתיך ה'".

He who Knows All Secrets Will Testify that Said Person Will Not Commit This Same Sin Ever Again

Continuing along this exalted path, let us endeavor to explain another issue concerning the revelation of one's innermost aspect during the month of Elul. The Rambam (Hilchos Teshuvah 2, 2) writes:

"ומה היא התשובה, הוא שיעזוב החוטא חטאו ויסיר ממחשבתו, ויגמור בלבו שלא יעשהו עוד שנאמר יעזוב רשע דרכו וגו', וכן יתנחם על שעבר שנאמר כי אחרי שובי נחמתי, ויעיד עליו יודע תעלומות שלא ישוב לזה החטא לעולם."

"What is teshuvah? It is when one abandons one's sins and removes them from one's thoughts; he resolves that he will not commit the sin again . . . he regrets his transgressions . . . and He Who discerns all testifies on this person's behalf that he will not commit this same sin ever again."

All of the commentaries are bothered, however, and taken aback. For, according to the Rambam's definition, if a person commits the very same sin again after doing teshuvah, then all his acts of repentance up until that time are null and void. This is truly a disturbing and frightening thought. For, the future transgression reveals that HKB"H, Who is omniscient and knew what was to come, never attested to the fact that this person would not ever return to his old ways. If this is the case, there are very few individuals alive who can satisfy these criteria and whose teshuvah would ever be accepted.

Notwithstanding, we can reconcile this difficulty with the Rambam's definition of teshuvah, based on what we have established thus far. We have explained that the mechanism of teshuvah requires that a person stimulate the innermost aspect of his being — that place that is unharmed and untouched by the deleterious effects of one's sins, the depths from where he must cry out to Hashem in the sense of: "ממעמקים קראתיך ה'". If he accomplishes this feat, HKB"H will certainly be able to testify on his behalf that he will not repeat this same sin ever again. For, at the moment of teshuvah, when he arouses his innermost being, a repeat performance of said sin is not even in question. After all, even when he was committing the transgression, the harmful effects were only external and never reached this innermost place.

This understanding of the Rambam's concept of teshuvah can actually be deduced from the specific language employed by the Rambam: "ועיד עליו יודע תעלומות שלא ישוב לזה החטא לעולם". He refers to HKB"H as: "יודע תעלומות" — He Who discerns all that is hidden. This title implies that HKB"H sees and acknowledges the status of the innermost aspect of one's heart. Scriptures describe this phenomenon as follows (Tehillim 44, 22): "הלא אלקים יחקר זאת כי הוא יודע תעלומות לב" — for, G—d will investigate this, since he discerns what is hidden in the heart. We see, therefore, that since HKB"H is "יודע תעלומות" — discerns all that is hidden — He can, indeed, testify on one's behalf that with regard to one's innermost being that is revealed during the process of teshuvah, this person will not repeat this same sinful act ever again.

It is now quite obvious why the month of Elul is the optimal time to reveal one's innermost being. As the time designated for teshuvah, Elul is when we require HKB"H to testify on our behalf: "יעיד עליו יודע תעלומות שלא ישוב לזה החטא לעולם". Therefore, HKB"H arranged that Elul would be the time best — suited to reveal one's true inner self; so that He would be able to attest to the fact that, from the perspective of this innermost haven, this person will never repeat this sinful act again.

Under All Circumstances You Are Considered His Children

Frolicking in the wonderland that is Torah, I have come up with my own explanation for this amazing gift that HKB"H has given us — the opportunity to reveal our innermost selves during these days of divine mercy, Elul. This idea is founded on what we have learned in the Gemarah (Kiddushin 36a). There, we find a dispute between Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Meir regarding the possuk (Devorim 14, 1): "בנים אתם לה' אלקיכם, בזמן שאתם נוהגים מנהג בנים אתם קרויים בנים, אין אתם נוהגים מנהג בנים אין אתם קרויים בנים, דברי רבי — יהודה, רבי מאיר אומר, בין כך ובין כך אתם קרויים בנים" — "you are sons to Hashem, your G—d": when you behave like sons, you are referred to as sons; when you do not behave like sons, you are not referred to as sons; this is the opinion of Rabbi Yehudah. Rabbi Meir says, under all circumstances you are considered sons.

The Gaon Chida, ztz"l, in "Rosh David" (Emor) explains why teshuvah is effective for Yisroel but not for goyim. For, the Gemarah states (Kiddushin 32a): "האב שמחל על כבודו - כבודו — a father is permitted to forego his honor. Seeing as HKB"H is Yisroel's father and we are His children, He is permitted to forego His honor and accept

our teshuvah. With respect to the goyim, however, HKB"H is a king, as it is written in Tehillim (47, 9): **מֶלֶךְ אֱלֹקִים עַל גּוֹיִם** — **G—d is king over the nations (goyim).** Concerning this latter situation, the Gemoreh teaches (Kiddushin 32b): **מֶלֶךְ שְׂמַחַל עַל כְּבוֹדוֹ אֵין כְּבוֹדוֹ מַחֻל** — even if a king forgoes his honor, it is not forgiven. Therefore, it is inappropriate to accept their acts of teshuvah.

This, however, raises a difficulty. According to Rabbi Meir's opinion — that Yisroel maintain the status of HKB"H's children even when they do not act accordingly — all is well. Yisroel's teshuvah is effective, since they are considered to be G—d's children. Yet, according to Rabbi Yehudah — who holds that when the people of Yisroel sin, they are no longer considered sons but, rather, are considered slaves — how can their teshuvah be effective? After all, a king cannot forego his honor with regards to his slaves' misbehavior.

G—d's Children with Respect to Our Innermost Selves

It appears that we can propose a novel idea to address this difficulty. According to all opinions, Yisroel are considered G—d's children with respect to their innermost Jewish selves — that were never tainted by sin. With respect to the remainder of their bodies and beings that were affected and blemished by their misdeeds, they are considered slaves. This relationship is reflected in our prayers when we proclaim: **אֲבִינוּ מִלְכֵנוּ חֲטָאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ** — **Our Father, our King, we have sinned before you.** In this formula, we refer to HKB"H both as our father and our king. We allude to the fact that from the perspective of the sinful act, we are slaves and He is our king; yet, from the perspective of our innermost selves that were never defiled, we are HKB"H's children and He is our father.

Thus, the essence of the dispute between Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Meir concerns the circumstance where one is engaged in sin. In that circumstance, the innermost place in one's being appears to be dormant and concealed; for, it is covered by the filth of one's misdeeds and its voice cannot be heard. Since this innermost element is not apparent when one sins, but, rather, it is in a virtual state of exile — concealed somewhere within man's being — Rabbi Yehudah takes the position that it is inappropriate to refer to one as a son at such time. In his opinion, they should be referred to as slaves, reflecting the fact that the parts of their beings that are apparent are engaged in sin and rebellion against Hashem, chas v'shalom.

Nevertheless, Rabbi Meir, the Tanna, believes: **בֵּין כֶּךָ** — **בֵּין כֶּךָ קְרוּיִים בְּנִים** — it makes no difference, under all circumstances Yisroel are considered HKB"H's children. It

is true that when one sins, his innermost self is obscured within the confines of his heart. Still, since the root of the Jewish being derives from this innermost element, and so do all thoughts of teshuvah that stir within one's being on a daily basis, Yisroel remain G—d's children even while engaged in sin. With respect to the untainted, flawless, innermost aspect of their being, their status does not change.

Let us just add one tiny morsel to this explanation. Rabbi Meir's position in this dispute reflects his opinion elsewhere. He learned Torah from his teacher Rabbi Elisha ben Avuyah, who strayed from the path of righteousness. The Gemarah (Chagigah 15b) questions how Rabbi Meir was able to continue learning Torah from an apostate. It answers: **רַבִּי מֵאִיר רְמוֹן מִצָּא תוֹכוֹ אֵכֵל קְלִיפְתּוֹ זֶרֶק** — **Rabbi Meir found a pomegranate; he consumed its inner contents and discarded its outer peel.** We can suggest that due to his tremendous sanctity, the Tanna Rabbi Meir was able to discern the untainted innermost aspects of his teacher's being and learn Torah from that element only.

This seems to be implied in the Gemarah's response: **רַבִּי מֵאִיר רְמוֹן מִצָּא תוֹכוֹ אֵכֵל קְלִיפְתּוֹ זֶרֶק** — only Rabbi Meir possessed the ability to draw exclusively from the pure, untainted innermost element of his teacher's being while rejecting the derivatives of the external, defiled areas of his being. Therefore, concerning our topic, he expresses a consistent opinion: **בֵּין כֶּךָ וּבֵין כֶּךָ קְרוּיִים בְּנִים**. Under all circumstances, Yisroel are considered to be HKB"H's children, since HKB"H certainly discerns the innermost aspect of their being.

Do Not Focus on the Container but Rather on Its Contents

Similarly, this coincides perfectly with Rabbi Meir's opinion in the Mishnah (Ovos 4, 20): **רַבִּי מֵאִיר אָמַר, אַל תְּסַתְּכַל בְּקַנְקַן אֶלָּא בְּמָה שִׁישׁ בּוֹ** — **Rabbi Meir says: Do not focus on the container, but, rather, on its contents.** As we have learned, Rabbi Meir believes that we retain our status as HKB"H's children even when we are engaged in sin and are not following His precepts. In his opinion, the main focus is our innermost self that remains pure and untainted. Hence, he asserts: **אַל תְּסַתְּכַל בְּקַנְקַן** — do not focus on man's external being which is flawed by sins; **אֶלָּא בְּמָה שִׁישׁ בּוֹ** — rather, focus on man's innermost being which remains in a state of perfection; that reflects his essence.

Now, we can reconcile very nicely the difficulty we had with Rabbi Yehudah's opinion. We were bothered by the fact that if Yisroel are considered slaves rather sons —

when they are not abiding by Hashem's will — how can teshuvah ever be effective? In truth, even according to Rabbi Yehudah, they are only referred to as slaves because the innermost aspect of their beings appears dormant and is in a virtual state of exile while they are engaged in sin. When a Jew awakens to perform teshuvah, however — calling out from the depths of his being, **“ממעמקים קראתיך”** — even according to Rabbi Yehudah he would once again be considered a son, for he is revealing his innermost self. This allows HKB”H to accept their teshuvah, since, as a father, He can forego His honor: **“אב שמחל על כבודו - כבודו מחול”**.

Thus, we understand clearly the significance of the “Sefas Emes”'s observation: **“מזל אלול בתולה”** — the zodiac sign for the month of Elul is the virgin. The month of Elul is the optimal time to reveal one's innermost self that has not been defiled by a stranger's touch, because: (a) our ability to perform teshuvah and battle the yetzer hara stems from this innermost element that is immune to the influence and power of the yetzer hara — **“ממעמקים קראתיך ה”**, and (b) with the awakening of this innermost element, Yisroel retain their title and claim to being **“בנים למקום”**, HKB”H's children. As such, it is appropriate for HKB”H to accept their acts of teshuvah and to forgive their transgressions, for that is what a father does: **“אב שמחל על כבודו - כבודו מחול”**.

“A Woman Who Is Beautiful of Form” Refers to the Innermost Self

Based on what we have discussed, come and see how we have been enlightened with regard to the combination of the two forms of the word “lo” — the written and the spoken — in the possuk: **“דעו כי ה' הוא האלקים הוא עשנו ולו אנחנו”** — **“ולא”** with an aleph, suggests that we are no longer HKB”H's people; whereas, the way we read the possuk, **“ולו”** with a vav, suggests that we are devoted to Him and are His people. David HaMelech wanted to divulge to us the magnificent kindness Hashem performs on our behalf. Even when we are lacking and undeserving, due to our misdeeds, chas v'shalom, and we are best described as: **“ולא אנחנו עמו”** with an aleph, nevertheless, we still house a concealed inner spark that affords us the description of: **“ולו אנחנו עמו”** with a vav.

We find a possuk in sefer Devorim (32, 5) that beautifully illustrates this vital lesson: **“שיחת לו לא בניו מומם”**. The commentaries labor to clarify the meaning of this possuk. Let us divide the possuk up into three parts and suggest a

wonderful elucidation that is germane to our subject. (1) **“שיחת”** — literally, he destroyed or defiled — even when Yisroel follow a path of destruction and defilement, chas v'shalom. (2) **“לו לא”** — here the text juxtaposes the two forms of the word “lo” — they still possess both aspects, **“לו אנחנו עמו”** with a vav and **“לא אנחנו עמו”** with an aleph, the former relating to their innermost being and the latter to the remainder of their body and being. (3) This confirms that: **“בניו מומם”** — even when they are blemished by their destructive ways, they remain His children.

Thus, we have provided a novel interpretation of the “Chidushei HaRim”'s insight — that the month of teshuvah is called Elul, because it is a time to integrate the two aspects of the word “lo,” **“לא”** and **“לו”** — which together spell **“אלול”**. Seeing as Elul is the optimal time to reveal the innermost element of our being, during this month we exemplify the aspect of: **“ולו אנחנו עמו”** — we are devoted to HKB”H and strive to draw closer to Him. This process allows us to correct the damage we caused that resulted in our falling to a state of: **“ולא אנחנו עמו”**. Combining both processes, we are able to successfully transform and elevate all 248 limbs and 365 sinews to a state of: **“ולו אנחנו עמו”**.

Finally, we can revisit the interpretation of the pesukim we introduced in the names of the Zohar Chadash, the Arizal and the “Avodas Yisroel”. **“וראית בשביה אשת יפת”** — **“and you will see among the captives a woman who is beautiful of form”** — this is a reference to the innermost element of the Jewish being, which is free of all blemishes. As the “Sefas Emes” taught us, this is the concept of the **בתולה**, the virgin, a pure maiden untouched by foreign hands and influences; yet, when enticed by the yetzer hara, it is as if she has fallen into captivity.

“וחשקת בה ולקחת לך לאשה” — you will desire to free her from captivity, so that she will illuminate your being, once again; **“והסירה את שמלת שביה מעליה”** — thus, you will allow her to remove her garments of captivity, the layers of sins and transgressions which have obscured her pure light; **“וישבה בביתך”** — and she will shine within your body; **“ובכתה את אביה ואת אמה”** — and she will cry tears of teshuvah to her father, HKB”H, and to her mother, the Shechinah, on behalf of her body that has sinned against them; **“ירח ימים”** — during the month of Elul, the opportune time for revealing the innermost aspect of one's self; **“ויאחר”** — and, alas, you will unite with her as one, she will no longer be a captive; instead, she will assist you by illuminating your path in the service of Hashem.