

Elul WhatsApp / Telegram Messages

Day 1 – Sunday 1st September

Hello there. Thank you to everyone who has joined one of the WhatsApp groups or telegram channel. Over 10,000 people around the world have come together to create an online community. I find that very exciting, and I want to thank you.

During Ellul, the content will include a mixture of written, audio, and visual content that I hope you will find inspiring as together we journey towards Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and coming year, 5780.

Do please share the content, and if you can, invite your friends to visit www.rabbisacks.org/whatsapp, where they can also join one of the groups.

So what is Elul? One way of putting it, I suppose, would be to say: think of it as God sending us a WhatsApp message saying, how are you? Are you okay? I haven't heard from you in a while. I miss you.

That's what makes the Jewish idea of Teshuvah so beautiful, so unlike anything that we conventionally associate with religious ideas of sin, guilt and penitence. We don't believe in original sin. To the contrary, we believe that our natural instinct is to live in harmony with other people, with the universe, and with God. But sometimes we lose our way. We drift. We do things we know we shouldn't. And the sound of the shofar, that we begin to blow during Elul, is a call, saying, come back. Teshuvah literally means coming back, coming home.

One of the most beautiful ideas that the mystics formulated about this month is that they related the Hebrew word Elul to the initial letters of the phrase from the Song of songs: *ani ledodi vedodi li*. I am for my beloved and my beloved is for me. That makes Teshuvah an act of love, a coming together, a second honeymoon if you like between us and the divine presence. The shekhinah.

I don't know about you, but I do know that I have things to put right in my life. I suspect we all do. It's just that without Elul, would we ever really get round to doing it? The genius of Judaism is that it gives us this month in the year to think about where we are going, where we've gone off course, where we've failed in our duties, where we've upset other people, – and then begin to put them right, in the knowledge that the intense holiness of the Yamim Noraim, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, will lift us to the heights and inspire us to be a bit better in the coming year, closer to God, and thereby closer to the person the world needs us to be.

So think of it as a time of focus, of change, of personal growth, of spiritual rededication, of coming home.

Chodesh tov.