

The 5 R's of Church Revitalization

20 Tevet 5784, B"H

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The Need for Church Revitalization & Revival

Many churches today are in great need of spiritual revitalization.

Extensive programming, elegant building layouts, and cinematic lighting will never bring revival to the church.

Some churches have become like the Church at Sardis, spoken of in the book of [Revelation](#):

"And to the angel of the church in Sardis write,
'These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars:
"I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead."

Revelation 3:1

"And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, 'These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: 'I know your works, that **you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.**' Revelation 3:1 (NKJV) (emphasis added)

Is there hope for a church like this?

Can a church that believes it is alive, but is actually dead, experience spiritual renewal, revival, and revitalization?

The answer is: yes!

There is **always** hope in Jesus our Messiah!

Let's examine some ways that established assemblies of believers can experience true church revitalization.

1. Revival Requires Repentance

Revival requires repentance – hungering hearts who long for a true, personal, and meaningful relationship with the Creator – with our Father who loves us and gave His Son to die on the cross for our sins.

I like the translation found in the NIV version of [Habakkuk 3:2](#). Here, the Prophet Habakkuk expresses a longing for revival:

[“LORD, I have heard of your fame;
I stand in awe of your deeds, LORD.
Repeat them in our day,
in our time make them known;
in wrath remember mercy.”](#)

[Habakkuk 3:2 \(NIV\)](#)



If a church genuinely wants to experience growth and a spiritual (and often, numerical!) turnaround, that entire congregation needs to get on its knees.

Remember all that God has done in the past! Give thanks for the history of that church!

I always remind church leaders that they must be cautious to entrust the future of their church to God's Almighty plan, not to their own personal plans.

If we are sincere in our prayers that God will repeat in our

day His awesome deeds, we must be willing to do things the way He leads us, not our own ways. When we are willing to obey Him and follow His leadership, we can experience a dramatic turnaround leading to noticeable church revitalization.

2. Revitalization is Restorative

Consider the etymology of the term, “revitalization.”

See the “vital” in there.

Have you checked your spiritual vitals? How is your spiritual pulse doing? Is your church or spiritual life’s heartbeat strong and life-giving?

To “re-vitalize” is “to give new life to” something again. Revitalization is life-giving.

Too many churches have settled in with their routine or their membership numbers. They are content because they make their budget every week, but is there truly “life?”

Life reproduces life. A healthy, life-giving church is full of people who have hearts for evangelism – reaching out to others in their community with the Gospel. Church revitalization occurs when a healthy church begins to see visitor numbers increase and overall enthusiasm increases among the church membership. This is very restorative and provides new hope across generations.

3. Recognition of what remains

Some churches will be beyond repair, in a sense.

Sometimes years of poor leadership, bad financial decisions, or a local crisis can cause a church to make the difficult decision to close its doors.

It can be quite the challenge to experience true church

revitalization in a church that has become overly comfortable or unwilling to accept change. Nonetheless, restoration should always be the initial goal, with the acknowledgement/recognition that churches are imperfect human institutions that are not always ultimately viable despite our best efforts.

There are times when planting a new church altogether is a much better option.

The freshness of a new, exciting work led by the Holy Spirit can draw many new souls into a saving relationship with the LORD. Church planting can revitalize a community. If your church leadership is unsure whether or not to work toward church revitalization or scrap it and support the planting of a new church instead, there are church consultants who can help you discern some next steps.

Sometimes it seems we give up too soon on some of the established congregations. Seeking revival and revitalization in an already established church can also bring greater vitality to the surrounding community. However, this requires a great deal of patience and prayer so that the leadership as a whole will be open to the changes necessary to get back on track with outreach and ministry.

[“And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.” Galatians 6:9](#)



"And let us not grow weary while doing good,
for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart."

GALATIANS 6:9

Working toward church revitalization is a process that requires patience and endurance.

A closer look at the Church in Sardis

Consider the passage from [Revelation 3:1-6](#):

"And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, 'These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: "I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead."

Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.

You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I

[will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.](#)
["He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."](#) ' Revelation 3:1-6

The command here is to ["be watchful" \(v.2\).](#)

Observation and Caring Analysis

Sometimes the first step is to simply observe what is going on in a congregation that needs revival. What has caused the lackluster feeling that seems to abound? Did the congregation abandon key components of a healthy doctrine? Did a tragedy occur that damaged the health of the church or community?

Be watchful, in love.

Check out the next part of that same verse. ["Strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die..."](#) (Rev.3:2).



"Strengthen what remains."

The Word of God doesn't say, "abandon the things which remain" nor does it say "quit now."

But the Word of God does acknowledge the life-cycle. That

certain things are “ready to die.”

Maybe a devotion to certain carpet colors needs to die.

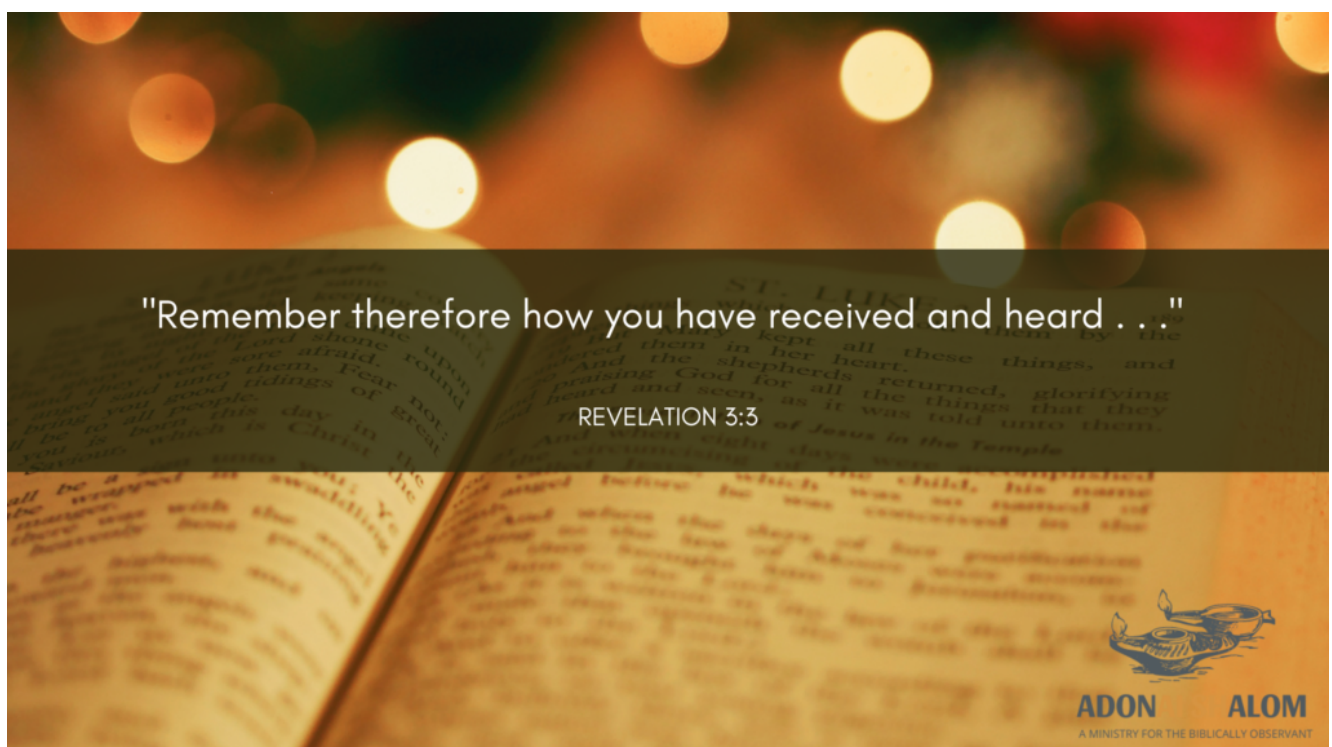
Maybe an obsession with certain music styles needs to die.

Maybe an overall mindset within the church that is hindering the work also needs to die.

Strengthening what remains

Strengthen what remains – make sure there is sound doctrine being preached and love being demonstrated. Make sure that what remains is so very strengthened that it has the capacity to receive newcomers and reach out to the community to invite them into the church.

[“Remember therefore how you have received and heard . . .”](#)
[Revelation 3:3](#)



In order for a ministry to feel refreshed and truly become resurrected, that ministry needs to be standing on the firm foundation of the Word of God. Any deviation from that, and it will fall (and, in that case, probably should because any

disinterest in sound doctrine is disinterest in remaining a truly Biblical work). Slick marketing campaigns can't save a church, but God's Word sure can.

Doctrinal soundness and purpose

Remember therefore, how you have received and heard. The congregation must be reminded of all that is their legacy. They have received the inheritance of the Gospel and must once again find purpose in that. Intentional church revitalization is not only possible, but it is something that should be sought.

Reminder: repentance is key

["Hold fast and repent." Revelation 3:3](#)



See, there it is. Repentance really is key. In a declining church, something happened at some point that caused the downward turn. Without repentance and a renewed vision, the work cannot be restored. But with repentance and obedience to God's will and way, church revitalization is absolutely possible.

4. Reassurance for the Remnant

[“You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.” Revelation 3:4-5](#)

There often remains a remnant of faithful believers who find themselves attending a struggling church. These brothers and sisters in the LORD are charged with praying for church revitalization and remaining faithful wherever God has them.

[God’s Word](#) is ever filled with comforting reassurances for those who are truly a part of the remnant:

[“They shall walk with Me in white.” Revelation 3:4](#)



We shall walk with Jesus! Wearing white – blameless, for those who love the LORD have been declared worthy ([Rev.3:4](#)). Jesus (Yeshua) says that those who have been deemed faithful will not be blotted out from the Book of Life and He will confess our names before His Father and His angels ([Rev.3:5](#)).

Church leaders responsible to help an assembly in need of church revitalization should identify the true remnant in that place who have persisted faithfully. Establish consistent prayer meetings and pursue God for help in increasing the spiritual vitality of that local church body.

Signs of church revitalization

A church that is beginning to experience church revitalization will begin to reflect greater love toward one another and neighbors. It is important to pray against the spirit of spiritual apathy. A church that is making a positive turnaround will begin to truly love the community around them. You will notice greater warmth among the believers and heightened enthusiasm.

A healthy church is also multigenerational. If a church has become stagnant, this is often related to a lack of age diversity among the regular attendees. A sign that a church is experiencing revival or revitalization is the presence of many generations, worshipping together in unity. A vibrant church experiencing revival will naturally reach out to the wider community around them.

Churches experiencing revitalization will naturally grow. People will be attracted to the presence of the Spirit of the LORD among the people.

If your church is in need of restoration and revitalization, please let us know so we can be praying for you! Pray for the leaders involved with plans to revitalize ministries – for steadfastness and wisdom! It is exciting to walk with the LORD, and so rewarding as we see churches revitalized and restored!

But always remember – it is not we ourselves who can make these changes – we need the LORD who touches hearts and brings about the healing and restoration our churches need!

Elul: repent and rejoice! the King is in the field

Elul 3, B"H 5783

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- [Elul, the High Holy Days, and the Coming of the Bridegroom](#)
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The Hebrew month of Elul

You may recall my [post](#) from July about [Tisha b'Av](#). In that [post](#), I introduced the Hebrew months of the year to help ubicate us in understanding the significance of certain dates on the Biblical calendar.

One of those months is called "Elul."

Elul (Heb. אֶלּוּל) comes from the root word "to search."

This is the time of year when we are reminded that the LORD searches our hearts and knows us and we repent for those things which we continue to struggle with in our ongoing journey in holiness.

We are to search inside of ourselves and turn away from that

which harms our relationship with the LORD Most High as we enter a new Biblical year.



Psalms 139:23-24

["Search me, O God, and know my heart;
Try me, and know my anxieties;
And see if there is any wicked way in me,
And lead me in the way everlasting." Psalm 139:23-24](#)

Medieval Jewish sages realized that each letter of the word "Elul" in Hebrew can serve as an acronym for the well-known phrase from [Song of Solomon 6:3 "Ani l'dodi, v'dodi li"](#) (Hebrew for ["I am my Beloved's and my Beloved is mine"](#)).



Song of Solomon 6:3

When we reflect on this time of preparation, we see that Elul is a time of preparation for the Bride, for truly the Bridegroom is coming. This is a time of self-examination as we prepare to meet our Coming King. He accepts us with the deepest of love when we come before Him with a pure and contrite heart, made beautiful by our relationship with Him.

Elul, the High Holy Days, and the Coming of the Bridegroom



The month of Elul precedes what are known as the High Holy Days. These days include [Yom Teruah](#) (also known as [Rosh Hashanah](#)) and [Yom Kippur](#). Yom Teruah occurs on the first day of the next month which is known as Tishrei. The High Holy Days are customarily a time of introspection as Yom Kippur serves as the yearly day of atonement. Israel *pleads* to be written in the Book of Life, and sealed for another year.

Now that our Messiah and Almighty Savior Yeshua (Jesus Christ) has come, those who have confessed Him as LORD and King have the assurance that the names of the saved are [written in the Book of Life](#), never to be blotted out.

Elul is like the month before the wedding. Preparation is made because soon the Bridegroom will come. The Bride may prepare for the Coming Bridegroom with grace, dignity, and confidence because she has been set apart, consecrated, made ready for the moment when her King comes.

Repentance and Holiness

As saved and sanctified children of God, we continue to pursue holiness and the path of righteousness.

Hebrews 12:14 exhorts us to “Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.”

Though we may not experience all that which tremendously occurred at Mount Sinai, we now spiritually experience the glory of Mount Zion.

The writer of Hebrews continues: “For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard it begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore. (For they could not endure what was commanded: “And if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned or shot with an arrow.”

And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.”)

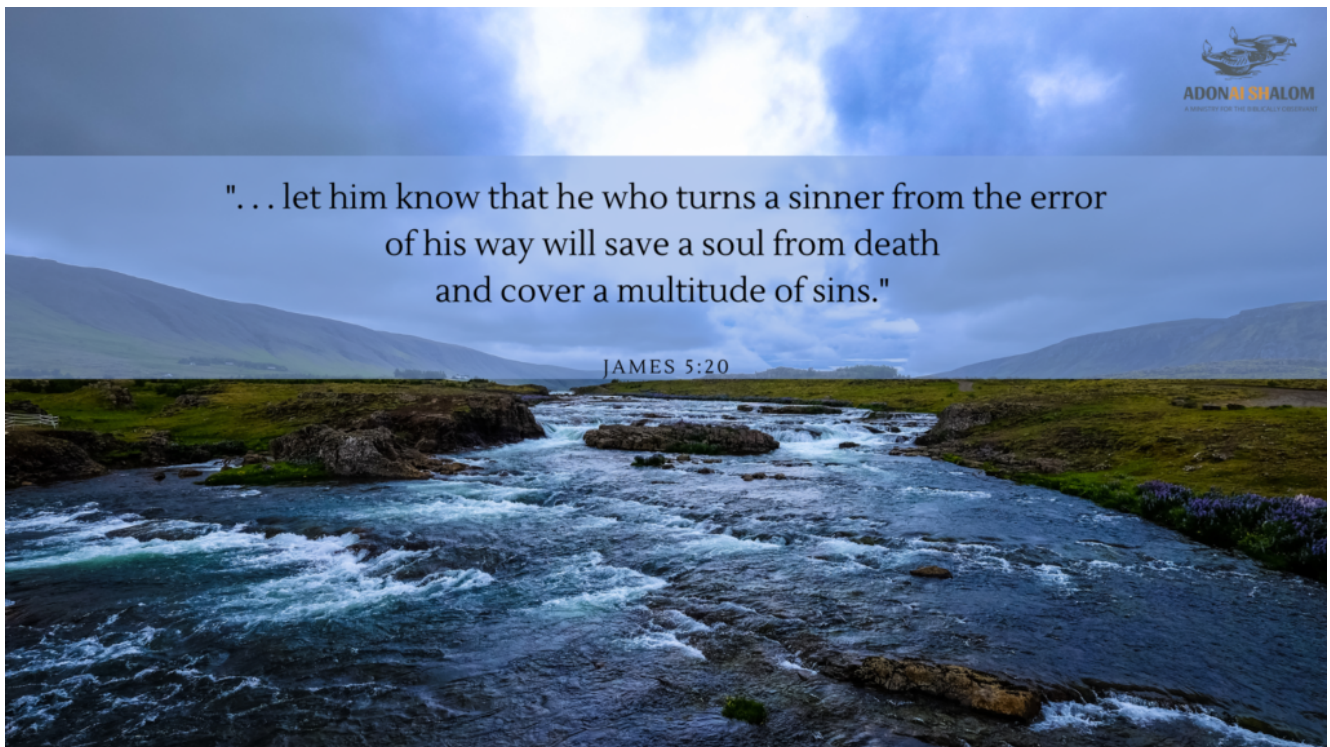
But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.”

See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven . . .” Hebrew 12:18-25, emphases added.

We are to live our lives with quiet and holy fear (reverence).

To do this fully, a true believer and follower of the LORD will very obviously seek to live in humility, all too aware of our faults and failings, but awesomely and intimately aware that He is perfecting us each and every day. We live with an

attitude of repentance, thankful that His mercy blots out a multitude of sins. We do the work of ministry, always seeking to share the Word with those who do not yet know Him – not to gain a place in heaven, but to demonstrate our heavenly citizenship! The world glorifies sin. We glorify only Jesus (Yeshua), the One who died to take away our sins and the One who will return for us!



James 5:20

["... let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins." James 5:20](#)

On the [Day of Shavu'ot \(Pentecost\)](#), Peter urged his listeners to repent:

["Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began."](#)

[For Moses truly said to the fathers, 'The Lord your God will](#)

raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear in all things, whatever He says to you. And it shall be that every soul who will not hear that Prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.'

Yes, and all the prophets, from Samuel and those who follow, as many as have spoken, have also foretold these days. You are sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.' To you first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities." Acts 3:19-26.

Teshuvah: Biblical Repentance

The Jewish understanding of the concept of "*teshuvah*" is slightly different than the traditional Christian interpretation of repentance.

Standard Christian repentance is about simply turning away from sin. There is nothing wrong with that. But *teshuvah*, true Biblical repentance, goes deeper than that.

Teshuvah is a "*return*." More specifically, a return to our first love after being astray.

Inherent in *teshuvah* is the acknowledgement that we have sinned, but this is more about returning to the Way of the LORD than about guilt: it requires an action on our part to strive to *right the wrong*.

"Teshuvah" is seen as an action. It is often said one is "*doing teshuvah*."


Teshuvah means the individual identifies the wrongs they have committed and actively works toward a *behavioral change* "to right the wrong." The sinner confesses to God, but also goes

back to the one he or she has wronged to ask for forgiveness and attempt to right the wrong.

Christians know that we cannot earn our salvation, so the concept of “teshuvah” gets a bit difficult for many Christians to understand. I have even found that some Christians simply do not want to understand because they would rather remain complacent. Some use texts about grace to shirk any semblance of responsibility, which is a truly irresponsible way to view YHVH’s immense and perfect grace. I believe in grace. I also believe in doing what is right.

Teshuvah is something the Christian can do in gratitude for salvation. Any decent person of faith ought strive to right their wrongs, right? The difference is, we know that we will never be able to erase the evil we have done to another so we cannot completely right our wrongs and we know that. We trust in our Merciful LORD, the Righter of Wrongs to bring healing, restoration, and ultimately wholeness.

Elul is the time of year when *teshuvah* is emphasized. Hosea uses the term “teshuvah” in admonishing the people of Israel to return to the LORD.



"Take words with you, and return to the LORD.
Say to Him, "Take away all iniquity;
Receive us graciously,
For we will offer the sacrifices of our lips."

HOSEA 14:2


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Hosea 14:2

“Take words with you,
And return to the LORD.
Say to Him,
“Take away all iniquity;
Receive us graciously,
For we will offer the sacrifices of our lips.” Hosea 14:2,
emphasis added

Biblical repentance is about returning to the LORD with nothing hindering our relationship. We are cleansed and made new by the blood of the Lamb and we are victorious by the word of our testimony.

We are ready to meet our Beloved.

“Hatred stirs up strife,
But love covers all sins.” Proverbs 10:12



Proverbs 10:12

40 Days of Repentance: Elul or Lent?

The time of repentance observed in the month of Elul is set by Biblical precedent.

It sounds very much like a Hebrew “Lent” for those familiar with Lenten practices.

I will be controversial here, but I’m not one to shy from that . . .

Lent is a manmade invention championed by the liturgical world. It is not Biblical.

Historically, significant efforts were made to distance the “church” from its Jewish (and Biblical, mind you) history. It is no secret that Catholic and Lutheran churches alike were plagued with antiSemitism for many many years.

Those who invented Lent took the concept of Elul (a 40 day time of prayer and fasting lasting from 1 Elul to 10 Tishrei) and “*Christianized*” it, citing a time to prepare to honor the death and resurrection of Christ. Sadly, the Western inventions of things like Advent and Lent have served to confuse the body of Christ and isolate us from the true Biblical feast days and their significance.

Elul is about returning. Let us return to the basic (Hebraic!) tenets of our faith – to seek to walk on the path of righteousness, guided by the LORD Himself as written in His Holy Word.

From Genesis to Revelation, the Word of God is available to us and if we are not spending time in the Word, that is another reason for repentance.

Collectively, we should repent that the church has strayed so far and has actually contributed to the unbelief of the Jewish

people as they observe the glaring discrepancies of many unBiblical “Christian” practices.

May we return to the essence of Elul.

***Cheshbon haNefesh*: The accounting for the soul**

Cheshbon haNefesh is a Hebrew term used frequently throughout the month of Elul. “*Cheshbon*” is used in modern Hebrew to describe an invoice or bill, such as at a café. *Cheshbon*: what is owed, what must be paid, the account. *Nefesh* refers to the soul or what makes you you – it is a word that is also translated as “life” or “being.” *Nefesh* is the life force within you.

During Elul, we are reminded of His gracious gift. We fall on our knees in the humblest of gratitude, thankful that Yeshua (Jesus) shed His precious blood in payment to redeem our souls.

We owe everything to our Savior yet we know our account has been paid in full.

Elul is a time to reflect on how we are using our *nefesh* – how are we using the life that is within us to advance the Kingdom of God? It is a time to take ourselves to account.

This is a time to realize where we truly fall short in our relationship with our Creator. In what ways do we fail to love? Do we truly love Him with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind?

HaMelech ba’sadeh: The King is in

the field

It is often said during Elul that “the King is in the field.”

The King of all kings, who may seem unapproachable, who is far in His heavenly palace seated on His throne is the same King who reaches out His scepter even when we are unworthy of His mercy. The King of all kings is the same King who comes to our level – He humbled Himself and walked in those fields ripe for harvest.

The Chassidic interpretation is that the King comes when the laborers are in the field – meeting His workers where they are. Surprising them with His presence. Demonstrating kindness.

The King is coming.

The King is in the field.

The King of all kings is approachable and He loves you.

You can go to Him and He will receive you with open arms.

And you will be raptured away in love together.



HaMelech ba'sadeh:
The King is in the field



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Personal Prayer and Devotional Time during the month of Elul

It is traditional to read [Psalm 27](#) daily during the month of Elul.

[The LORD is my light and my salvation;](#)

[Whom shall I fear?](#)

[The LORD is the strength of my life;](#)

[Of whom shall I be afraid?](#)

[When the wicked came against me](#)

[To eat up my flesh,](#)

[My enemies and foes,](#)

[They stumbled and fell.](#)

[Though an army may encamp against me,](#)

[My heart shall not fear;](#)

[Though war may rise against me,](#)

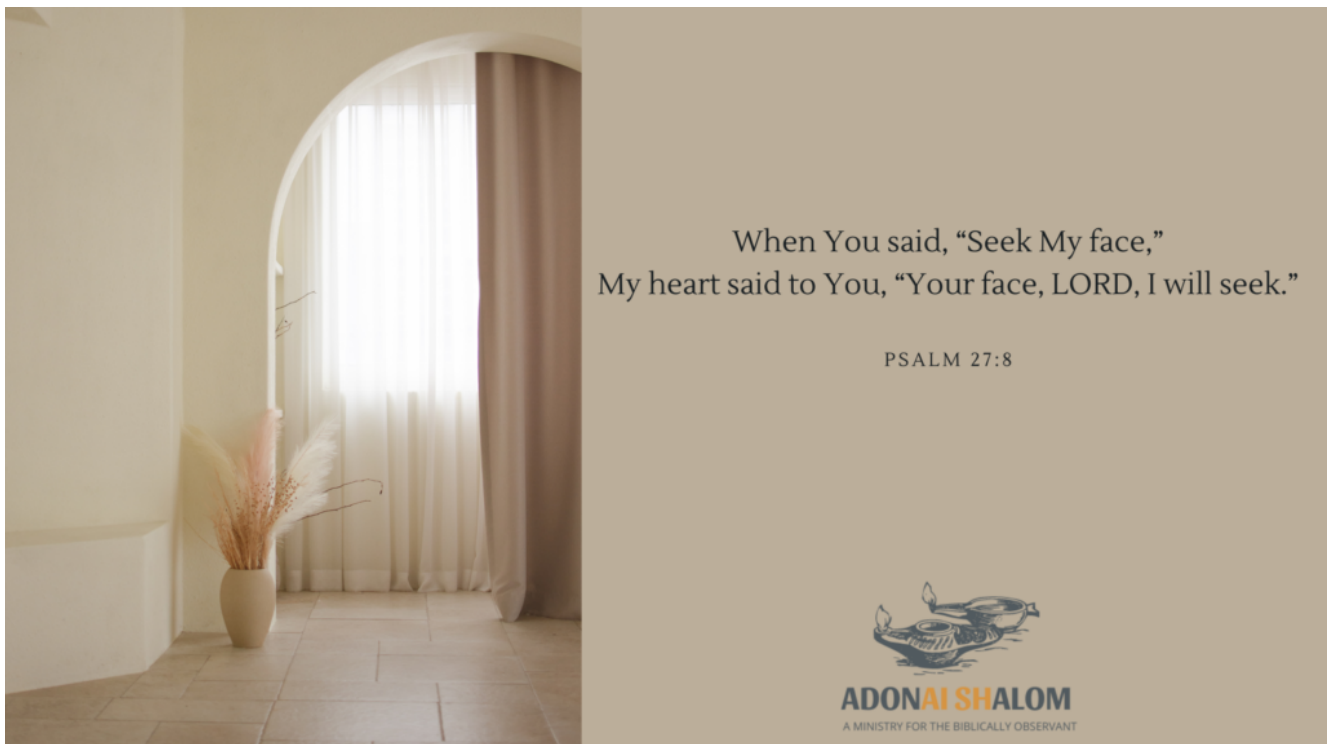
[In this I will be confident.](#)

[One thing I have desired of the LORD,](#)

[That will I seek:](#)

That I may dwell in the house of the LORD
All the days of my life,
To behold the beauty of the LORD,
And to inquire in His temple.
For in the time of trouble
He shall hide me in His pavilion;
In the secret place of His tabernacle
He shall hide me;
He shall set me high upon a rock.

And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around
me;
Therefore I will offer sacrifices of joy in His tabernacle;
I will sing, yes, I will sing praises to the LORD.



Psalm 27:8

Hear, O LORD, when I cry with my voice!
Have mercy also upon me, and answer me.
When You said, "Seek My face,"
My heart said to You, "Your face, LORD, I will seek."
Do not hide Your face from me;
Do not turn Your servant away in anger;
You have been my help;

Do not leave me nor forsake me,
O God of my salvation.
When my father and my mother forsake me,
Then the LORD will take care of me.

Teach me Your way, O LORD,
And lead me in a smooth path, because of my enemies.
Do not deliver me to the will of my adversaries;
For false witnesses have risen against me,
And such as breathe out violence.
I would have lost heart, unless I had believed
That I would see the goodness of the LORD
In the land of the living.

Wait on the LORD;
Be of good courage,
And He shall strengthen your heart;
Wait, I say, on the Lord!

Perhaps you would like to reflect on this passage during this time, as well. This [Psalm](#) truly speaks to the relationship aspect of our faith: that we call upon Him and He answers and we are to seek His face.

The King is in the field and the harvest is ready but the workers are few.

Will you meet Him in the field?

Will you share the Good News that the King is coming back again!?

Repent and Rejoice!

Our King is coming for us!

Please comment below! I'd love to hear your thoughts about the month of Elul and the coming of our Almighty King!