

A CALENDAR OF REPENTANCE FOR THE MONTH OF ELLUL**WEEK 2 – ‘Uncertainty’****8th -14th September/ 8-14 Ellul****Sunday 8th September****8 Ellul 5779**

May the One who answered Abraham on Mount Moriah, answer us.

May the One who answered Sarah by the terebinths of Mamre, answer us.

May the One who answered Hagar in the wilderness of Beersheba, answer us.

May the One who answered Isaac, when he was bound on the altar, answer us.

May the One who answered Rebekah, when she was big with child, answer us....

(Based on a Selichah, arranged by Rav Amram Gaon 821-875 with additional lines referring to some of the women in the Torah).

As we enter the second week of Ellul, we are conscious that we cannot escape the events taking place in the world around us. What can we ask for from God? From ourselves? From others – whether the intimate circle of friends and family, or our leaders?

Perhaps this week, as we contemplate the theme of uncertainty, we can think about those things that do feel more secure in our lives. Friendship, family, community, the beauty of these Autumn days, the late bloom of a rose in the garden or in the park. Let us try and focus on one thing that brings us a sense of gratitude and perhaps even joy in our lives.

Monday 9th September**9 Ellul, 5779**

Don't aim at success—the more you aim at it and make it a target, the more you are going to miss it. For success, like happiness, cannot be pursued; it must ensue, and it only does so as the unintended side-effect of one's dedication to a cause greater than oneself or as the by-product of one's surrender to a person other than oneself."

(Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*)

Tuesday 10th September**10 Ellul, 5779****Not Every Day**

Not every day does one encounter God,
 And not at every moment can one give oneself to prayer;
 Nor can every hour be an hour of loving-kindness.
 A person wanders and strays before reaching the journey's end.
 We start over again, and again we lose our way,
 Groping and searching for our forgotten path.
 But they – those who search and wander –
 God seeks them out with candles.

(Shifra Alon)

Wednesday 11th September
11 Ellul, 2019

9/11

‘In the Book of Job, when that man whose life has been turned inside–out and utterly destroyed ultimately confronts God and questions God’s justice, he hears not a defense of God’s actions, not a logical explanation of why God put Job through such a horrifying test. Instead God rails at him saying, in essence, ‘Just who do you think you are to question Me? Did you create the world? Are you the power behind its natural phenomena?’ Poor Job, in response, says: ‘I clap my hand to my mouth’ (Job 40:4).

‘That is what I wanted to do this week. Sit with my hand clapped over my mouth in silence...just listening...not trying to offer words of meaning or explanations...just sitting in silence, hoping, somehow, to hear the voice of God.’

(Elias Lieberman, ‘A Sermon’, Friday night 14 September, 2001, Falmouth Jewish Congregation, Cape Cod, Massachusetts in *Jewish Preaching in Times of War 1800–2001*, edited by Marc Saperstein)

Thursday 12th September
12 Ellul, 5779

‘If along the road, you chance upon a bird’s nest, in any tree or on the ground, with fledglings or eggs and the mother sitting over the fledglings or on the eggs, do not take the mother together with the young. Let the mother go, and take only the young, in order that you may fare well and have a long life’ (Deuteronomy 22:6–7).

‘[The Talmud] says that whoever thinks that the mitzvah of shooing away the mother bird shows God’s compassion should be silenced. Because they don’t understand. We can’t say that the mitzvah of shooing away the mother bird (I am told later, also a charm for fertility) is a symbol of God’s compassion. Because we can’t understand God’s compassion. If the mitzvah were a true symbol of God’s compassion, then surely we wouldn’t be allowed to take the baby bird at all.’

(Sherri Mandell from *Blessing of a Broken Heart*, quoted in *The Torah: A Women’s Commentary*.)

Friday 13th September**13 Ellul, 5779*****Fill the earth and tame it/subdue it...?***

‘God then blessed the human beings, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and tame it; hold sway over the fish of the sea and the birds of the sky, and over animal that creeps on the earth’ (Genesis 1:28).

‘God then blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and let the awe and dread of you be upon all the land animals, and all the birds of the sky, and all that creep on the ground, and all the fish of the sea: they are given into your hands...’ (Genesis 9:1-20)

Between the creation of the world and this blessing is the Flood – a terrible destruction over all the earth. The command to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth in Genesis, is modified. As though the Creator thinks – perhaps I got it wrong the first time. I do not need human beings to ‘tame’ the earth or ‘hold sway’ over it. I need human beings to regard all creatures with reverence, to see all life as sacred. My covenant does not only extend to humanity, it is with every living being ‘in your care – the birds, the beasts, and all the land animals in your care...’

Shabbat 14 September**14 Ellul, 5779**

‘Heaven and earth, and all their array, were finished. For with the seventh day God finished the work of creation, and on the seventh day God rested from all the work, now done. Then God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, having rested on it from the completed work of creation’ (Genesis 2:1-3).

We praise You, Eternal God, Sovereign of the universe. By Your commandments You have consecrated us to Your service. In Your love and favour You have given us Your holy Sabbath, to remind us that the world is Your creation. It is the first of our holy days, and a remembrance of our liberation from Egyptian bondage. You have called us to serve You as a holy people, and given us Shabbat as a token of your love. We praise You, O God, for the holiness of Shabbat (*Kiddush* for *Erev Shabbat*).

How can our celebration of Shabbat honour creation and all that is good in the world?