

Breslov Customs – Elul

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Most Breslover Chassidim in Eretz Yisrael recite the prayers of *Yom Kippur Katan* every Erev Rosh Chodesh. But even those who do not observe *Yom Kippur Katan* every month recite the prayers on Erev Rosh Chodesh Elul and Erev Rosh Chodesh Nisan. In addition, many Breslover Chassidim travel to Meron on Erev Rosh Chodesh Elul to recite the *Yom Kippur Katan* prayers beside the grave of the holy Tanna, Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai.

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Rebbe Nachman encouraged his followers to recite the *Tikkunei Zohar* as well as additional prayers and supplications during the month of Elul. It is also customary to remain in the synagogue and *Beit Medrash* to learn Torah later than usual at night. Rebbe Nachman said, "The *niggun* with which the *Tikkunei Zohar* is recited, and the strain and fatigue produced by staying late in the *Beis Medrash*, are all made into great and lofty things on high" (*Sichos haRan* 294).

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Reb Nosson praises the custom of reading the entire *TaNakh* during the days of Elul and Tishrei, finishing on Hoshanah Rabbah (See *Otzar haYirah, Teshuvah haShanah, Elul*).

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However, not everyone can do this. Once, while recovering from surgery, Rabbi Elazar Kenig mentioned that he hoped to complete the Rebbe's *Sippurei Ma'asiyos* before Rosh Hashanah. This is an example of how we must adjust our goals to our abilities and circumstances at every stage of life, and how more modest *avodahs* are also meaningful.

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Breslover Chassidim recite Psalm 27 (*LeDovid HaShem Ori*) immediately after *Tachanun*, or after *Shemoneh Esreh* when there is no *Tachanun*, prior to *Kaddish*. This seems to have been a regional custom, which is also observed by the Chassidim of Chernobyl/Skver.

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Reb Nosson *darshans* on the common custom to sound the Shofar every day at the end of Shacharit from Rosh Chodesh Elul until Erev Rosh Hashanah (See *Likkutei Halakhos, Birkhas ha'Re'ah* 5:18).

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It is customary to recite additional *Tehillim* during Elul and the Ten Days of Repentance. (*Likkutei Moharan* II, 73. According to the *mesorah* of Chabad/Lubavitch, this also was the custom of the Baal Shem Tov, who would recite three chapters a day until Yom Kippur, when he would finish the rest of *Tehillim*; cf. *Sefer Minhagim?Chabad*, Elul, p. 54 ff. citing *Kovetz Mikhtavim leTehillim*, p. 207. *Matteh Ephraim* 581:8 cites the widespread custom of reciting ten chapters per day beginning on Rosh Chodesh Elul, so that one completes *Sefer Tehillim* twice before Rosh Hashanah, and one more time during the *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*; similarly Rabbi Chaim Elazar Spira of Munkatch, *Darkhei Chaim viShalom, Chodesh Elul*, 687.)

Selichot

Selichot for Ashkenazim follow the Polish *minhag*. As the *Shulchan Arukh* stipulates, they are recited on the days prior to Rosh Hashanah, and throughout the *Aseret Yemei Teshuvah* until Erev Yom Kippur.

Sefardim begin reciting *selichot* immediately after Rosh Chodesh Elul.

(*Shulchan Arukh, Orach Chaim* 581:1. Reb Noson mentions this custom in *Likkutei Halakhos, Devarim Haba'im beSeudah* 4:3; *Matanah* 5:20)

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In the passages that begin *E-l Melekh yoshev...* the *nusach* of the ARI *zal* is say *u'mitnaheg bachassidut*, adding the connecting letter *vav*, rather than "*mitnaheg*," as in most printed texts. When asked about this custom, Rabbi Elazar Kenig replied, "It is not a difficult thing to do, and it does not require a kabbalistic *kavanah*[which might be beyond the ken of the average person] ? so why not do it?" His answer

reflects a general rule regarding the ARIZal's customs. (See Rabbi Chaim Vital, *Pri Etz Chaim, Sha'ar haSelichos* 8, citing *Zohar* III, 228a, and *Tikkunei Zohar, Hakdamah*, 11c. Cf. *Siddur ARI Rav Shabbsai; Likkutei MaHaRiCH* III, p. 601; *Sefer Minhagim?Chabad*, et al.)

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The ARIZal recited *vidui* only once during *selichot* (although he did not omit the paragraphs between the other two repetitions of *vidui*), while the more common *minhag* is to recite it three times. Rabbi Elazar Kenig remarked that most Breslovers probably follow the common *minhag*, adding "and for some of us, that's still not enough!" He explained that each time we recite the *vidui*, we should do so with greater sincerity. (For the custom of the ARI, see Rabbi Chaim Vital, *Pri Etz Chaim, Sha'ar haSelichot* 8 [end]; similarly the GRA, cited in *Sha'arei Rachamim*; Rabbi Chaim Elazar Spira of Munkatch, *Darkhei Chaim viShalom, Chodesh Elul*, 703; *Sefer Minhagim?Chabad*, et al. Re. the threefold recitation of *vidui*, see *Likkutei MaHaRiCH* III, p. 602, citing the *Baal haRokeach, Minhagim*, and *Levush*; also see the Butchatcher Rov, *Eishel Avraham, Orach Chaim* 581.)

Khof Elul

The twentieth of Elul is the *Yahrtzeit* of Rabbi Avraham Sternhartz (1862-1955), grandson of the Tcheriner Rav, great-grandson of Reb Noson, and teacher of numerous Breslover Gedolim. An orphan, Reb Avraham was raised by the Tcheriner Rov, and during his youth met all of the living *talmidim* of Reb Noson, including Reb Moshe Breslover. He was *Baal Mussaf* and *Baal Tokei'a* for many decades in Uman, and served as Rav of Kremenchug until he escaped the U.S.S.R. at the height of the Stalinist purges, arriving in Yerushalayim in 1936. Reb Avraham immediately became a key figure in the

Yerushalayim community, attracting many *talmidim*, and soon established the Rosh Hashanah *kibbutz* in Meron. After his *histalkut* in 1955, his disciple, Rabbi Gedalia Kenig devoted himself to carrying on his revered teacher's legacy.

In Eretz Yisrael, *se'udot* are held in Reb Avraham's honor on the evening of Khof Elul. During the afternoon, many Breslover Chassidim travel to the Har Menuhot Cemetery in Yerushalayim to recite Tehillim and pray beside Reb Avraham's *kever*. Outside of Israel, many Breslover Chassidim also light a candle, give *zedakah*, share a *se'udoh* in his honor, and learn some of his teachings from *Tovot Zichronot*, etc.

(After Reb Avraham passed away, Rabbi Gedaliah Kenig published his teacher's *Tovot Zichronot*, Breslover teachings related to the first ten lessons in *Likkutei Moharan*, together with the Tcheriner Rov's *Yerach haEisanim*, *chiddushim* on *Likkutei Moharan* related to Rosh Hashanah, and Reb Avraham's *Imrot Tehorot* on the importance of traveling to *tzaddikim*, particularly Rabbi Nachman, for Rosh Hashanah. Some of Reb Avraham's letters were published by Reb Noson Zvi Kenig of Bnei Brak as *Rinat Zion*. A scholarly biography of Reb Avraham is being prepared for publication in the near future by Rabbi Nachman Burshteyn of Jerusalem.)

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