

Up, Up and Away

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The month of Elul is unique in that it has the most acronyms associated with it. The most famous of these is Ani Ledodi Vedodi Li in which the essence of the month is expressed as emotionally connecting to Hashem. The final letters in each word is the 'yud' whose numerical value is 10. This alludes to the 40 days that Moshe Rabbeinu ascended Har Sinai to gain forgiveness for Am Yisrael, culminating with Yom Kippur. These 40 days have become profoundly imprinted in our lives as days of teshuvah and intense emotional connection with Hashem.

Rabbi Pinchas Friedman in Sheveli Pinchas offers another unusual acronym for Elul: **אֶחָד לְמַעַל וְשֶׁבַע לְמַטָּה**; one up and seven down. This well-known phrase taken from the Yom Kippur liturgy describes the service of the Kohen Gadol as he sprinkled the blood of his korban in the Kodesh Kodashim. On a simple level, this acronym reminds us of our goal during the month of Elul -- to reach total expiation of sin on Yom Kippur. It is essential, as our GPS reminds us, to have our destination clearly visible before beginning the journey.

On a deeper level, "one up and seven down" hints at the fundamental work necessary to accomplish our goal of teshuvah. The Rama, in Torat Haolah, notes that 'one' refers to the yetzer tov, and 'seven' refers to the seven names of the yetzer hara. By mentioning 'achat', 'one', with each sprinkling, the

Kohen Gadol is teaching us to keep our yetzer tov dominant over the seven aspects of evil that try to pull us down.

The Bnei Yissachar understands the dynamics of 'one' and 'seven' on a more personal level. Parashat Shoftim is always read as the month of Elul begins. The opening passuk enjoins us to place judges and officers at our gates. This can also be a reference to each person's own seven major gates -- our two eye, two ears, two nostrils, and one mouth-- through which we interact with the world around us. Our job is to ensure that the 'one' seichel controls these gates and dictates what we allow ourselves to see, hear, say, and smell (which includes that which incenses and provokes us). The purpose of the Kohen Gadol's avodah was to infuse every person with the power to succeed; to enable the "one" sole service of Hashem to prevail.

As we enter the month of Elul, we are reminded that our task is to have the One at the forefront of our minds. When we have this awareness of "Ani Ledodi" we can take the 'one' of our seichel and work to best utilize our 'seven' gates to serve Hashem.