

The King Who Was in the Field Now Dwells in the Hut

Aryeh Leib Thorne Toren · 29 September 2026

Learned Essay — 18 Tishrei 5787 / Tuesday, 29 September 2026 · Chol HaMoed Sukkot

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Today's portions

Cycle Today Chumash (Chitas) Vezot Haberakhah, 3rd aliyah — Devarim 33:13–17 (Yosef) Festival kria'ah (Israel) Bamidbar 29:23–25, the fourth day's offering: ten bulls Tehillim 88–89 Tanya Iggeret HaKodesh, middle of Epistle 22 — ratzon pashut, stiff-necked pardon Rambam (3 ch.) Hilchot Mikvaot 2–4 Rambam (1 ch.) Hilchot Gerushin 8 Daily Mitzvah Positive 109 — immersion in a mikveh Hayom Yom Both Om ani chomah and Adon hamoshia; one circuit, completed through tav

Customs now: sukkah, Four Kinds, Hallel, Hoshaanot, Musaf, Ya'aleh ve-Yavo, Simchat Beit HaShoevah. Elul's daily shofar and Selichot are not in force.

Elul is not a mood that expires when the month turns. Elul is a structure of relation: the King leaves the palace of distance; return is possible because will is real; power is measured against a law higher than itself. Sukkot does not cancel that structure. Sukkot houses it. The field was the King coming toward us. The hut is our coming under Him.

Moshe blesses Yosef with dew from above and the deep from below, sun-fruit and moon-fruit, early mountains and hills that do not cease — then names the source: uretzon Shochni s'neh, the goodwill of the One Who dwells in the thornbush, resting on the head of nezir echav. Only then come the horns of the re'em, Ephraim's myriads, Menasheh's thousands. The richest tribal land is blessed by the G-d who chose a bush that burned and was not consumed. Strength is real. The crown is not self-written. That is Elul's doctrine of limited power, built today in wood and sechach.

The musaf bulls decrease day by day. The Sages heard the seventy bulls of the week as an offering for the seventy nations. A people that offers for the nations may not devour them. Chol HaMoed is the weekday of the festival: the King remains, and life is not frozen into ceremony. Elul's urgency has to learn how to eat lunch.

Tehillim 88 still ends in darkness. Tehillim 89 still asks Ayeh chasadecha harishonim. Reciting them on Chol HaMoed is liturgical honesty. Rabbi Nachman, whose yahrzeit is today, forbade the choice between the pit and the niggun. Water-joy, Likkutei Torah teaches, has no flavor. It is the joy of one G-d with you at all times.

Today's Tanya is the interior of that joy. The Alter Rebbe cannot unload his whole heart; preoccupations encircle him like water. He reminds those who volunteer themselves to stand in prayer — service of the heart, loud voice, strong hand — against every obstacle. Wisdom is a gift. Will is aroused by accepting the yoke. Ratzon pashut is uncompounded. And Israel's stiff neck becomes the quality that draws pardon, because pardon, like simple will, stands higher

than chochmah. Moshe pleads middah keneged middah: a turning that flies free of intellect should elicit the Divine pardon Wisdom itself would not issue. That was Elul's bechirah. Today it has to stand up inside Hallel.

Rambam is in Mikvaot and the daily mitzvah is immersion: forty se'ah, nothing interposing, water we did not merely manufacture. Purification is undergone, not declared. Gerushin 8 belongs to the same moral world: a condition that never truly severs the bond does not create freedom. Will matters only if words mean what they say.

Hayom Yom is technical and therefore revealing. Two hymns, one circuit, hosha'ana doubled on the phrases chanted aloud, the circuit completed through tav. Selichot also walked an alphabet. Today the alphabet is walked in joy, Four Kinds in hand. We still need saving. We ask now as people already dwelling with the King.

Avodah: learn the Chitas in the sukkah; pray one blessing with simple will before hunting insight; keep one item of Elul's cheshbon as a weekday festival act; finish hosha'anot through tav; prefer one honest niggun to a complicated spiritual schedule. Chinuch: children already understand a fort that is allowed to be temporary. Bind the Four Kinds as four kinds of Jews. Permit sadness in the hut; then shake the lulav. Yosef nezir echav is the adolescent lesson: separation can be exile or vocation; the blessing lands on distinction without cruelty.

The portions scatter only if they are left ungathered. Gathered, they say: the King came near; will is ours to arouse; pardon was given from above argument; now live a week in a house that confesses its incompleteness, shake a bundle that includes the willow, offer bulls that decrease, and finish the alphabet. Dew and the deep both water the land. The pit and the chesed are recited on the same morning. The circuit must reach tav.

That is not Elul prolonged by nostalgia. It is Elul kept by dwelling.

All glory to the Ribono shel Olam · Errors are mine

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