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THE OPEN CHECK

PAGE 40

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At a historic
Adopt-a-Kollel
gathering of more
than 1,000 *roshei*
kollelim in
Eretz Yisroel,
Rav Elimelech
Biderman
offered a stirring
perspective on
Elul, the year
ahead, and
the priceless
opportunities
Hashem places
in our hands

THE OPEN CHECK

BY RABBI YITZCHOK HISIGER

There are rooms in which the people sitting inside tell you more about the moment than anything being said from the podium.

Last week, more than a thousand *roshei kollelim* gathered at the Valley Convention Center in Kfar Saba for a convention of Adopt-a-Kollel *roshei kollelim*. They had come from across Eretz Yisroel, from different cities and communities, presiding over *kollelim* large and small, each with its own character and particular challenges. Yet, there was something that united virtually every man in the room. Each one carried upon his shoulders the responsibility for a group of *yungeleit* who have chosen to devote their days and years to Torah, and each one knew just how much more difficult it had recently become to make that possible.

A *rosh kollel* occupies an unusual position in the *Olam HaTorah*. His own life may revolve around a *Gemara*, but his responsibilities extend far beyond his own *shtender*. He knows the *yungerman* whose family has grown again and whose expenses have grown along with it. He knows the *yungerman* whose learning is flourishing even as things at home are becoming increasingly difficult. He knows when the monthly stipends have to go out, how much is still missing, which donor might possibly be approached, and how many days remain before another obligation arrives. He must somehow protect the serenity inside the *bais medrash* from the noise outside it, so that the *yungeleit* sitting within can continue learning without carrying every financial worry that he himself carries for them.

These have not been easy months in Eretz Yisroel. The financial pressures upon the Torah world have intensified, government support has been slashed, and the broader political battle surrounding *bnei yeshivos* and the Torah community has created an atmosphere of uncertainty that is felt far beyond the halls of government. The more than one thousand *roshei kollelim* who came together in Kfar Saba did not need anyone to explain the situation to them.

They are living it.

The convention was intended to give them *chizuk*, but as the day unfolded, it became something more. Rav Dov Landau and Rav Moshe Hillel Hirsch were there, along with Rav Gamliel Rabinowitz, Rav Yaakov Hillel, Rav Yitzchok Soloveitchik and Rav Yehoshua Dovid Turchin. Rav Shimon Galei addressed the gathering and later led the *Yom Kippur Kotton tefillos*. There were panel discussions dealing with the practical realities of running a *kollel*, *divrei brocha*, *divrei chizuk* and *divrei hisorerus*, and discussion of the extraordinary opportunity to connect *bnei chutz la'aretz* with the *zechus* of supporting *Toras Eretz Yisroel*. The day included a *siyum* and a *seudas mitzvah*.

But one of the moments that stayed with many of those present came when

Rav Elimelech Biderman rose to speak.

Rav Meilech began not with the crisis facing the *kollelim*, nor with fundraising, government cuts or politics. He began with the calendar.

Parshas Re'eh, he observed, always arrives at a particular moment. It is read either on *Shabbos Mevorchim Elul* or around *Rosh Chodesh Elul*, when the long summer days have begun slipping away and a *Yid* suddenly realizes that the season of the year is changing.

"*Re'eh anochi nosein lifneichem hayom brocha uklolah*," the Torah says. "See, I place before you today blessing and curse."

The *Zohar*, Rav Meilech said, explains that the word *hayom* is a reference to *Rosh Hashanah*. There is one day upon which the coming year hangs, one *hayom* upon which *brocha* and its opposite are placed before us and the events of the year ahead are determined. But the Torah uses another word as well: *Lifneichem. Before you.*

Before that *hayom*, before *Rosh Hashanah*, there is something Hashem places into our hands. There is a month that precedes the day upon which the year is determined, and that month is *Elul*. Long before we know what the coming year will contain, Hashem gives us an opportunity to invest in it.

To explain what that means, Rav Meilech told an old *moshol* that was once related in Yerushalayim.

A fisherman lowered a large net into the water and placed food inside. Before long, a school of fish discovered it. They swam into the net and found more than enough to eat, and since nothing appeared threatening, they remained there even after the food was finished. Rav Meilech described them as "*fabrenging*," lingering around as though there were nowhere else they needed to be. Eventually, when they had finished enjoying themselves, one of the fish decided that it was time to leave.

That was when they discovered the problem.

There was no way out.

The fish began swimming frantically from one side of the net to the other, searching for an opening. As the reality of their situation became clear, they began lamenting the mistake they had made. Why had they stayed around after eating? Why had they wasted all that time? Had they left immediately after the meal, they thought, they would have been safely on their way.

But they had misunderstood what had happened.

They had not become trapped when they lingered after the meal. They had been trapped from the moment they entered the net. Even while they were happily eating, oblivious to the danger around them, it was already *le'achar hamaaseh*.

A person reaches the middle of the year, Rav Meilech said, and inevitably there are moments when he begins re-

playing things in his mind. Had I done this differently, perhaps that would not have happened. Had I made another decision, perhaps things would have turned out another way. If only I had known then what I know now.

We all do it. We revisit conversations and decisions, wondering which turn in the road brought us to the place where we now find ourselves. Yet, we forget that there was an earlier moment, before we knew any of what the year would contain, when we stood before the year itself.

That moment was *Rosh Hashanah*.

And now, once again, before the next *Rosh Hashanah* arrives, Hashem gives us *Elul*.

That, said Rav Meilech, is the meaning of "*Re'eh anochi nosein lifneichem hayom*." Before the *hayom*, Hashem gives us this month as a *mata-nah*. The year ahead has not yet unfolded. We have not yet received its phone calls or celebrated its *simchos*. We do not know which doors will open, which will close, which things we will take for granted and which things we will suddenly discover are not to be taken for granted at all. We are standing before all of it, and there is still time to prepare.

Then Rav Meilech told a story.

A *Yid* from Bayit Vegan had made a *chasunah* and found himself afterward deeply in debt. He was a substantial *baal chov*, with no obvious way of paying what he owed. Eventually, people advised him that he had little choice but to travel to *chutz la'aretz* and attempt to raise the money. He went to America.

It was his first time collecting, and he quickly discovered that he was not particularly good at it. There are people who somehow know how to walk into an office, introduce themselves, explain their predicament and make an appeal without feeling that they would rather disappear into the floor. This man did not possess that gift. He spent several weeks trying, but as his return flight approached, he looked at what he had collected and realized with dismay that he had accomplished almost nothing. He barely had enough to cover the expenses of the trip itself.

With his flight back to Eretz Yisroel approaching and the debts waiting for him at home, he entered a *bais medrash*, took out a *Tehillim*, and began to cry.

Another *Yid* noticed him and came over. He asked what was wrong, and eventually the entire story poured out: the *chasunah*, the debt, the trip to America, the humiliating weeks of trying to collect money, and the realization that he was about to return home almost exactly as he had left.

The man listening happened to be an extraordinarily wealthy *Yid* and the story touched him. He took out his checkbook, wrote his signature on a check, and handed it over without filling in the amount.

The collector stared at it.

The *gvir* told him that he could write the check for any amount up to \$150,000.

One can imagine the transformation. Minutes earlier, the man had been sitting with a *Tehillim*, wondering how he would face his creditors when he returned home. Now he was holding a signed check that could wipe away the entire problem. The weeks of collecting, the worry, the embarrassment and the enormous debt that had followed him across the ocean had suddenly been reduced to one blank line on a piece of paper.

He left the *bais medrash* in a state of extraordinary *simcha*. The problem was solved. He was, as Rav Meilech put it, "*a geholfener*." And before heading back to Eretz Yisroel, he decided that after everything he had been through, he could finally allow himself to enjoy a proper meal.

He entered a restaurant and ordered himself an elaborate *seudah*. For weeks, he had been living like a man drowning in debt. Now he was a man with access to \$150,000.

Eventually, the bill arrived.

Forty-eight dollars.

He reached into his pockets and discovered that he did not have enough cash.

He explained to the restaurant owner that he had money at the home of his host. If the owner would allow him to leave for a few minutes, he would retrieve the cash and return immediately. The owner, who presumably had heard variations of that story before, refused. How did he know that this stranger would come back?

The man tried explaining his situation, but nothing helped. Finally, almost triumphantly, he pulled out the signed blank check.

The restaurant owner was not impressed. A blank check did not pay a \$48 bill.

The man thought about his predicament and finally arrived at what seemed to him to be the only solution. He took the check that could have been written for \$150,000, picked up a pen, and carefully filled in the amount.

Forty-eight dollars.

The bill was paid.

Now he merely had to find the *gvir* again, explain the unusual circumstances, and ask him to write another check.

He returned to the *bais medrash* and, to his relief, found the man. He told him the entire story, including the restaurant bill and the predicament that had forced him to use the check. Then he asked for another one.

The *gvir* listened and shook his head. He would not write another check.

The collector could not understand. The man had offered him as much as \$150,000 only a short while earlier. Surely he understood that the \$48 had merely been an emergency.

The *gvir* explained something the collector had not known.

“I don’t normally give people \$150,000,” he told him. “When you met me, I was facing a *mishpot* (legal case) and I desperately needed a *zechus*. When I saw you sitting there crying, I thought that, *min haShomayim*, you had been sent to me. I thought that Hashem

value of what he was holding.

Rav Meilech moved from the restaurant in America to an old *kretchme* somewhere in Eastern Europe.

The Lechovitcher Rebbe once announced during *Elul* that he was taking his *talmidim* on a trip. He brought them to a certain *kretchme*, where they sat and listened as the proprietor

been exhausted. He may have been preoccupied. He may have had a difficult month. Every word of his explanation may be true.

The field will still be empty.

Yet, Rav Meilech did not leave the room with an image of *Elul* as a frantic farmer racing against the calendar. Because if *Elul* were merely a month of fear, something essential



had placed this opportunity in front of me because I needed the *zechus*.”

But now, he said, he understood that he had been mistaken.

“If someone receives a blank check for \$150,000 and his *hasagos* are to fill it out for forty-eight dollars, then I realize that you are not the person I thought you were. I have to find someone else.”

The second check never came.

It is the sort of story Rav Meilech tells that makes people laugh before they realize that they have been laughing at themselves.

Because that man standing in the restaurant with his \$150,000 check is not as foreign to us as we would like to believe.

Elul, Rav Meilech said, is an open check.

Except that the amount available is not \$150,000. There is no number.

A person stands before Hashem with an entire year ahead of him. Health, *parnossah*, children, *nachas*, peace of mind, success in learning, *siyata diShmaya*, protection from things he knows to fear and from thousands of things he has never thought to fear — all of it belongs to a year that has not yet begun.

Hashem places the check in his hand.

And what does he write on it?

The man in the restaurant had more money available to him at that moment than he had probably ever possessed in his life. His tragedy was that he failed to appreciate the

spoke to the local peasants outside.

It was apparently the crucial work season, the short period during which the labor needed to sustain them for the coming year had to be done. The proprietor called out to the workers: “*Ver es geit nisht arbeten di chodesh vet nisht hoben tzu essen ah gantz yohr*. Whoever does not work this month will have nothing to eat the entire year.”

The Lechovitcher had heard what he came to hear.

“*Men ken aheim gein*,” he told his *talmidim*. “We can go home.”

He had taken them on an entire journey to hear one sentence from an innkeeper speaking to gentile farmers, because sometimes a person hears a truth differently when nobody is trying to teach it to him.

There is a season for planting and there is a season for harvesting. By the time the harvest arrives, the question of what will grow has largely been answered. A farmer who spends planting season doing something else cannot compensate by becoming enthusiastic at harvest time.

Rav Chatzkel Levenstein used to describe *Elul* as *yemei zeri’ah*, the days of planting. And, he would say, when it comes to planting, there is no “*taanos oneis*.” There is no excuse.

The farmer may have an excellent explanation for why he did not plant. He may have

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about it would be missing.

The *avodah* of *Elul*, he said, must be accompanied by *simcha*.

The very name by which we understand the month tells us why: *Ani leDodi veDodi li*.

The *Arizal Hakadosh* explains that these words allude to the extraordinary *ahavah* that Hashem shows *Klal Yisroel* during *Elul*: “*Lir-moz bozeh hachodesh Hakadosh Boruch Hu misratzeh im Yisroel vena’aseh Dodi lohem lekarevan l’teshuvah vehu karov lekora’av bachodesh zeh*. Hashem draws close to *Klal Yisroel* and becomes our *Dodi*, drawing us toward *teshuvah* and remaining especially close to those who call Him during this month.”

Rav Meilech lingered on that word, *Dodi*.

Why is Hashem described specifically this way?

A *dodi* is an uncle.

A father, Rav Meilech explained, gives his child everything. His love is limitless, but because he is the father, his love carries responsibility. A father sometimes gives his child a present, and sometimes he must tell him no. A father may buy the treat, but a father may also have to administer the proverbial *potch* when the child needs one.

An uncle has a different job. The uncle arrives with presents. There is something wonderfully uncomplicated about the affection of a *dodi*. He comes, he smiles, he reaches into his pocket, and the child already knows that

something good is about to happen.

That is the language the Torah world has always used to describe *Elul*. *Dodi*.

The month we sometimes approach with dread is, in its essence, a month of extraordinary love.

Rav Meilech quoted Rav Pinchos Koritzer, who noted that although there is generally a practice not to recite *Tehillim* at night, when the forces of *din* are more prevalent, *Elul* is different. During *Elul*, one may say *Tehillim* at night as well, because the month is *kulo rachamim*. All mercy.

That changes the way one sees the open check.

It is not being handed across the table by an angry creditor. It is being given as a gift.

And perhaps that is precisely what makes wasting it so painful.

Rav Meilech then quoted a question from Rav Chaim Kanievsky on the words of the *posuk*, “*Aryeh sha’ag mi lo yira?*” A lion has roared; who will not fear?”

Why, Rav Chaim asked, does the *posuk* say *sha’ag*, in the past tense? It would seemingly have been more appropriate to say *aryeh sho’eg*, a lion is roaring. What is the significance of the roar having already taken place?

Sometimes, Rav Chaim explained, it is the past that roars.

A person arrives at another *Elul* and now possesses something he did not possess last *Elul*: a year of hindsight.

He remembers what happened. There were the expected events, the things written into the family calendar in advance, the *simchos* and ordinary milestones. But there were also things that nobody wrote on the calendar because nobody knew they were coming. There were surprises that brought joy, and perhaps others that brought pain. There were difficulties he never imagined facing, expenses he never anticipated, disappointments he never expected, and moments when life changed in the course of a telephone call.

Last *Elul*, all of that was still hidden.

Now he looks backward and realizes that he once stood before that year too.

That is *aryeh sha’ag*. The past year itself roars to him. Not to terrify him and not to leave him brooding over what can no longer be changed, but to remind him that he is once again standing at the beginning of a year he cannot see.

This time, perhaps, he will appreciate where he is standing.

Rav Meilech then turned to a familiar *maamar Chazal*: “*Hachochom einov berosho*. The eyes of a wise man are in his head.”

The statement seems almost strange. Where else would a person’s eyes be?

He connected it to another familiar idea. The *arba minim* correspond to

different parts of the body. The *esrog* corresponds to the heart, the *aravos* to the mouth, and the *hadassim* to the eyes.

But a person has two eyes. Why are there three *hadassim*?

Because there is another kind of eye.

Everyone knows that *Rosh Hashanah* determines the year. There is hardly a Jew who needs to be informed of that fact. We say it in our *tefillos*, learn it in the *seforim*, and repeat it every year.

The *chochom* does more than know it. He sees it.

Hachochom einov berosho. His eyes are on *Rosh Hashanah*.

The third eye is the ability to be *ro’eh es hanolad*, to see what is being born from the choices being made today. It is not *ruach hakodesh*. The wise man does not know what will happen in January or March. He does not know which phone calls will come or what challenges the year will bring. His wisdom lies in recognizing that the ordinary-looking days of *Elul* are connected to all of it.

That is a difficult way to live because the present rarely announces its importance.

Planting does not look like harvesting.

A seed disappears into the dirt. There is no fruit, no tree, and nothing particularly impressive to show for the farmer’s work. For a while, there is not even evidence that anything happened.

Only later does the meaning of planting season become clear.

And this brought Rav Meilech to the peculiar wish many people have as *Elul* approaches.

There are, he said with characteristic humor, people who would prefer to go to sleep on *Rosh Chodesh Elul* and instruct someone to wake them up for *Kiddush* on *Simchas Torah*. It is not difficult to understand the appeal. Skip the nervousness of *Elul*, the early mornings of *Selichos*, *Rosh Hashanah*, *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*, the fasting of *Yom Kippur*, and all the intensity of the season. Wake up when everyone is dancing and there is a piece of cake on the table.

From *Rosh Chodesh Elul* through *Hoshanah Rabbah*, Rav Meilech noted, there are fifty-one days. *Nun-alef*.

The *Ohr Pnei Moshe* quotes a remarkable *Medrash* concerning Moshe Rabbeinu’s plea to enter Eretz Yisroel. Moshe begged, “*Ebra na*. Please, let me cross over.”

Hashem responded, “*Im ebra na atah mevakeish, ani mevatel selach na*. *Im selach na atah mevakeish, ani mevatel ebra na*. If you ask for *ebra na*, I will nullify *selach na*. If you ask for *selach na*, I will nullify *ebra na*.”

Rav Meilech saw in those words — *ebra na*, which begin with an *alef* and a *nun*, equal numerically to fifty-one — an allusion to the fifty-one days stretching from *Rosh Chodesh Elul* until *Hoshanah Rabbah*. There is a per-

son whose entire attitude toward these *nun-alef* days is *ebra na*. Let me cross over them. Let me get through them. Let them pass as quickly and painlessly as possible so that I can emerge safely on the other side.

But those very days are the days of *selach na*. They are the opportunity for *selicha*, for *mechilah*, for *teshuvah*, for the closeness that the *Arizal* described as *Dodi*. If *selach na atah mevakeish*, if a person wants what these days can give him, *ani mevatel ebra na*. Then he has to stop this *ebra na* attitude.

It was a striking thought to hear in a room filled with more than a thousand *roshei kollelim*, because if there were ever people who could be excused for wishing that a difficult period would simply pass, they were sitting in that hall.

The *Olam HaTorah* is enduring a time that nobody would have chosen. The men responsible for maintaining *kollelim* have watched financial pressures mount and resources disappear. They have been forced to think about problems that they would much rather never have had to contemplate. Each one surely has moments when he wishes that he could turn the calendar forward and arrive at a calmer period, when the political turmoil has subsided, funding has stabilized, and the uncertainty hanging over so many families has disappeared.

We all know that feeling, even far removed from the responsibilities of a *rosh kollel*. There are periods in life that we do not particularly want to experience. We merely want to survive them. A person facing financial strain looks ahead to the day when the bills will finally be manageable. Parents waiting for a child’s *shidduch* wonder when the long period of uncertainty will end. Someone dealing with illness dreams of the appointment at which the doctor will finally say that the ordeal is behind him. Another person is struggling with a child, a business, a relationship, or some private burden that follows him throughout his day, and his deepest wish is often very simple: Let me get past this.

Ebra na.

Let me cross over.

Yet, Rav Meilech’s words suggest that there are times when our eagerness to reach the other side can prevent us from seeing what Hashem has placed inside the very period we are trying to escape.

The Lechovitcher did not take his *talmidim* to the *kretchme* to teach them how to harvest. He brought them there to hear that there is a month when the work has to be done, even though the results will not be visible until much later. Rav Chatzkel called *Elul yemei zeri’ah* because planting requires a person to invest in something whose eventual form he cannot yet see. The seed goes into the ground, the earth closes over it, and for a while the field looks much as it did before. The farmer con-

tinues because he understands something about time: Not everything important produces an immediate result.

Perhaps no audience could understand that better than *roshei kollelim*.

The work of maintaining a *kollel* is itself an exercise in planting for a future that cannot yet be seen. A *yungerman* sits down in the morning and opens his *Gemara*. He may spend hours on a few lines, work through a difficult *sugya*, return to it the next day and struggle again. There is no applause when *seder* ends. No one standing outside the *bais medrash* can necessarily point to what was produced during those hours.

Years later, the picture may look different. That *yungerman* may become a *talmid chochom*. He may become a *rov*, a *rosh yeshiva*, a *maggid shiur* or the father of a home built around Torah. Perhaps he will remain a *kollel yungerman*, quietly becoming the person whom everyone else in the *bais medrash* approaches with a difficult *shailah*. The hours that once seemed to disappear into a *Gemara* will have become part of the Torah infrastructure of another generation.

But when the seed is being planted, nobody can see the tree.

A *rosh kollel* makes sure the planting can continue.

He worries about the stipend so that the *yungerman* can worry about the *Rashba*. He thinks about tomorrow’s funding so that someone else can spend tomorrow thinking about a *Ketzos*. From the outside, his day may sometimes appear to involve budgets, donors and endless telephone calls. In truth, he is protecting a field.

That may be why Rav Meilech’s open check belonged in that room as well.

The man in the restaurant did not lose the \$150,000 because someone stole his check. He did not lose it because the bank failed or because the *gvir* changed his mind before giving it to him. He lost it because he did not understand what was in his own hand. Faced with an immediate \$48 problem, the enormous opportunity he had been given shrank to the dimensions of the problem directly in front of him.

That is a very human mistake. The urgent has a way of making the important invisible.

A ringing phone is louder than a distant future. A bill due today is more tangible than something being built over twenty years. The problem sitting on our desk demands attention; the seed beneath the soil makes no sound at all.

And *Elul* arrives quietly enough that it, too, can disappear beneath the urgent.

Perhaps this is why the Torah begins with *Re’eh*.

Look.

Before doing anything, notice what is in front of you.

Notice the check before writing on it. Notice the planting season before it

passes. Notice the fifty-one days before asking for them to disappear.

Ani leDodi veDodi li. The opportunity is not being given grudgingly, Rav Meilech explained. Hashem is not waiting for us to fail. The month itself is an expression of *ahavah*, a time when Hashem draws close to *Klal Yisroel* and invites us to draw close to Him.

The father may sometimes have to say no. The *Dodi* arrives with the present.

And the present of *Elul* is not merely another chance to feel guilty about what has already happened. It is the gift of not yet being *le'achar hamaaseh*.

There are many things in life we discover only after they are gone. We appreciate health differently after illness, people differently after losing them, opportunities differently after missing them, and time differently after wasting it. The fish in the net looked backward and suddenly understood exactly when they should have acted, except that by then their newfound wisdom could no longer help them.

Elul is Hashem allowing us, for once, to have that realization beforehand.

We stand before a year whose contents remain hidden. Nobody in that convention hall

The third *hadas* is not the ability to predict the future. *Hachochom einov berosh* means something subtler. The *chochom* understands that there is a future, and therefore he sees the present differently.

The room in Kfar Saba eventually moved on from Rav Meilech's *drosha*. The program continued. There were other speakers, other moments of *chizuk*, and the emotional *Yom Kippur Kotton tefillos* led by Rav Shimon Galei. Eventually, the convention ended, and more than a thousand *roshei kollelim* returned to the places from which they had come.

The next morning, presumably, the phones began ringing again.

The financial challenges had not disappeared during the convention. The political situation had not changed because a thousand people had gathered in one hall. There were still stipends to cover, *yungeleit* to encourage, donors to call and problems to solve.

But perhaps the purpose of *chizuk* is not always to make the problem disappear. Sometimes it allows a person to walk back into the same problem seeing it differently.

There is a field in front of him.

He does not know exactly what will grow from it.

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We can remember the man from Bayit Vegan staring at a restaurant bill for \$48 while an open check sat in his hand.

We can hear the roar of the year that has already passed and recognize that we are once again standing before a year that has not.

And perhaps we can understand why Rav Meilech began with those words: *Re'eh anochi nosein lifneichem hayom.*

Hashem has given us something before *hayom*.

Before we know what the year will bring, before we find ourselves in the middle of its stories and wondering how they will end, there is a month placed quietly into our hands. It is serious because the year is serious, but it is precious because it comes from our *Dodi*. It is not a month we need to escape. It is a month we have been fortunate enough to receive.

The temptation will always be *ebra na*. Let me get through this. Let me cross over. Let me arrive safely on the other side.

Rav Meilech's final thought turns that instinct on its head. The fifty-one days from *Rosh Chodesh Elul* through *Hoshanah Rabbah* are not an obstacle separating



knows what the coming months will bring to the Torah world. Nobody knows what government will be sitting in Yerushalayim, which decrees will materialize, which will disappear, where funding will come from, or what new challenges will emerge. Nobody reading these words knows precisely what his own family will experience during the year ahead.

We are not supposed to know.

If we knew, it would not be *Elul*.

His job is to plant.

And now *Elul* comes to all of us in much the same way. We can spend it wondering when it will be over, counting down the days until life returns to its familiar rhythm after the *Yomim Tovim*. Or we can hear the proprietor of that old *kretchme* calling across the years to his workers, reminding them that there are certain months whose importance becomes apparent only after they are gone.

us from the rest of the year. They are the opportunity that precedes it. If what we seek is *selach na*, if we want the *mechilah*, the *rachamim*, the closeness and everything else that these days can contain, then we cannot spend them wishing that they would simply pass.

Because sometimes the greatest *matanah* is not reaching the other side.

It is realizing, while we are still here, what Hashem has placed in our hands.