

# Israeli Rabbis on how they prepare for the High Holidays during the month of Elul

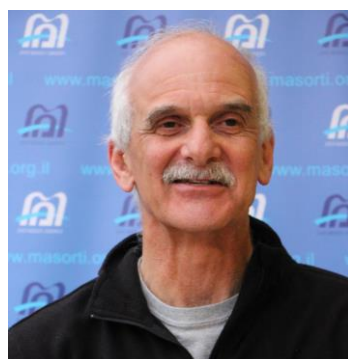
## Rabbi Elisha Wolfin - Kehillat VeAhavta in Zichron Yaakov



The month of Elul is the month of repentance, a time of preparation for the High Holidays. This is a unique time of year: a time of introspection, summing up of the year, soul-searching and preparation for new beginnings. I especially like Elul. Some people get excited when spring comes. I'm excited when autumn arrives. I love the convergence of autumn - everything

begins to converge inwards. Nature sheds its green leaves and the life energy of the tree returns from the edges, and makes its way inwards to the core - to the trunk and the roots. People return home from summer vacations, and they, too, involuntarily turn inwards. All this has a sweet note of melancholy. But it's not sadness; it's a special kind of quiet. The noise of summer makes room for the quiet of autumn. It feels as though nature, man, and indeed, the entire universe are repenting - everything just returns inward into itself, into its singularity. It is no wonder that the rabbis transferred the end of the year and New Year (Rosh Hashanah) from spring to autumn. It's much more appropriate. After all, "סוף מעשה במחשבה תחילה" Spring and summer are the "act" while the autumn is dedicated to thinking – returning inward for soul searching, reevaluation, recalculation. And when spring comes around once again, we will break out, departing Egypt with renewed and enthusiastic forces.

## Rabbi Arnie Bender - Kehillat Yaar Ramot in Jerusalem



I study Torah each week. This study often guides me towards the drasha that I will give on the weekly Torah portion. However, as the High Holidays approach, I tend to read more about family and the importance of maintaining good relationships between friends and family. My drashot on these occasions also emphasize Jewish Identity and the Israel connection.

On a personal level, I am very careful about my weight because I own one 20 year-old suit and only wear it (with few exceptions) on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur.

## Rabbi Chaya Rowen-Baker – Kehillat Ramot Zion in Jerusalem



It's not necessarily in the month of Elul ... But on the eve of Yom Kippur, I customarily go with a group from our congregation to immerse in living waters ... It began with immersion in the Mikve, but then evolved to immersion in a spring near Jerusalem. Immediately after Shacharit on the day preceding Yom Kippur, we meet at the synagogue and travel to the spring together.

When we arrive, we briefly discuss the significance of the immersion ceremony, and talk about the things that we seek to release in order to purify ourselves. We talk about the commitments that we wish to take upon ourselves in the coming year, hoping to draw strength from this ceremony. Usually I make a mental list for myself of things that I wish to change, and dedicate each immersion to one thing on the list.... After the discussion, each person immersing in the water receives a few private minutes to immerse him or herself in the spring, for as long as they desire. Women, men and children participate. This is an amazing experience that enables us to enter Yom Kippur in a completely different state of mind.

## Rabbi Gustavo Surazski – Kehillat Netzach Israel in Ashkelon



I am a fan of liturgical poems (Piyutim), and every year, during the month of Elul, I learn liturgical poems, with an emphasis on new melodies. The liturgy of the High Holidays is full of devotional songs that possess rare existential depth, and the connection between content and music is a spiritual experience of the first degree for me. This year I chose to study the piyut “Hayom Herat Olam” [Today is the [birth]day of the world”]. In this piyut, the motif of pregnancy is central, as is in the recitation of the Torah and the haftarah on the first day of Rosh Hashanah with the story of the pregnancy of Sarah, and the pregnancy of Hannah. I have been reflecting on why the motif of pregnancy is so central, what characterizes the state of pregnancy and what is the connection between pregnancy and Rosh Hashanah.