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The first verse of this week's Torah portion, Ki Teitzei, seems to contain a grammatical error. "When you go forth to war against your enemies," it begins, "and the Lord your G-d will deliver him into your hands." Why does the Torah begin the verse with the plural-enemies-and continue in the singular?

Every word in the Torah is exact, every letter conveying a multitude of nuances and meanings that teach countless lessons. This verse, which seemingly deals with the subject of conventional warfare, alludes to a different type of war, a spiritual war that is waged by every individual.

A Jew may face two types of enemies: one who threatens his physical existence, and one who threatens his special holiness as a member of the Jewish people—his Jewish soul. The Torah uses the word "enemies" to refer to both these threats, for the body and soul of the Jew work in tandem, united in their service of G-d. Whatever imperils one's physical well-being threatens one's spiritual equilibrium, and vice versa.

The Torah tells us how to emerge victorious over both types of enemy: "When you will go forth" a person must gird himself with the strength that comes from absolute faith in G-d, even before encountering the enemy. Next, one's approach must be that of ascendancy—"against (literally, 'over') your enemies." Know that G-d Himself stands beside you and assists you in your struggle.

Armed in such a manner, victory is assured, not only against conventional enemies, but against the root of all evil—the Evil Inclination, equated in the Talmud with "the Satan (enemy of the soul), and the angel of death (enemy of the physical body)."

When a Jew goes out to "war" fortified with the knowledge that there is no force in the world able to stand in the face of goodness and holiness, not only are external manifestations of evil vanquished, but its spiritual source is defeated as well. The Torah therefore uses the singular-enemy-to allude to the Evil Inclination, the origin and prototype of all misfortune.

The verse concludes with the words "and you shall take captives of them." If a Jew is not careful and falls prey to the Evil Inclination, all of his higher faculties, given to him by G-d to be utilized for good, also fall into its snare. The Torah teaches that sincere repentance has the power to redeem these captive prisoners, elevating them until even "willful transgressions are considered as merits."

Such warfare brings Moshiach and the Final Redemption closer, when the Evil Inclination will be totally vanquished and the victory over sin will be permanent. (From: Living with Moshiach, www.moshiach.net)

"If you see your brother's ox or sheep going astray, you must not ignore them. You must return them to your brother." (Deut. 22:1) Here the Torah commands us the mitzvah of "hashevat aveidah", returning a lost object. Seeing how the Torah wants us to be careful to guard our brother from a financial loss, how much more so when it comes to a spiritual loss. Every one of us has a double and triple duty not to ignore a Jewish soul that has lost its way and to help him or her return to their source. (From HaShaloh HaKadosh (translated from Sichat HaShavuah 38, www.ascent.org.il)

G-d on the Campaign Trail

A US president has four years between elections, a congressman needs to renew his mandate every two years, while dictators stay in office for as long as they can keep their generals happy (or terrified). But G-d is up for reelection every year.

Every Rosh Hashanah, we crown G-d king. According to the Kabbalists, without this annual coronation (effected by our resolve to submit to the divine sovereignty, our recitation of the "verses of kingship" included in the special prayers of the day, and our sounding of the shofar), G-d's "kingship" would not be renewed, and the whole of creation - which derives from the divine desire to be king - would cease to exist.

(We don't usually think of kings requiring election to their office, but that's because the word "king" is a rather imprecise translation of the Hebrew word melech. A melech, by definition, is a sovereign whose kingship derives from a people's freely chosen desire to submit to his rule. A king who reigns by force or exploitation is not a melech but merely a moshel or "ruler".)

How does G-d prepare for His annual reelection? Does just He sit up there in His "palace" trusting in our good sense to proclaim Him king once again? Does He go after the vote, mingling with the masses, pressing the flesh, kissing babies? Here's how Chassidic master Rebbe Schneur Zalman of Liadi (1745-1812), describes the month of Elul - the month that precedes the divine coronation on Rosh Hashanah:

It is like a king who, before he enters the city, the people of the city go out to greet him in the field. There, everyone who so desires is permitted to meet him; he receives them all with a cheerful countenance and shows a smiling face to them all. And when he goes to the city, they follow him there. Later, however, after he enters his royal palace, none can enter into his presence except by appointment, and only special people and select individuals. So, too, by analogy, the month of Elul is when we meet G-d in the field... (Likkutei Torah, Re'ei 32b; see also Likkutei Sichot, vol II p. 632 ff.)

While this description bears some resemblance to a politician running for office in a modern democracy, there are, of course, some significant differences. Such as the fact that a campaign promise by G-d is far more likely to be fulfilled than one that is made by your typical office-seeker.

Last week, we entered the month of Elul. The king is in the field; if you need something from Him, now's the time to ask.

By Yanki Tauber; based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe.-
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THE CHASSID R. HENDEL (1) RELATED: IT WAS KNOWN TO ALL CHASSIDIM THAT AT ONE'S FIRST YECHIDUS THE ORLA (INSENSITIVE "THICK SKIN") WAS REMOVED. WHATEVER ELSE, ONE WAS IMMEDIATELY RID OF THE ORLA OF THE HEART. (FROM REBBE'S HAYOM YOM, ELUL13)

Wasting Life on Purpose

Once you have found the meaning of life, will there be enough life left to live meaningfully?

Better to live life as meaningfully as you know how, and find more meaning as you go along. You will gain and so will those you influence. - the Rebbe's reply to someone who had quit teaching to determine the meaning of life.

-Be Within, Be Within, Stay Above by Tzvi Freeman