

Who Are You Doing Teshuvah For?

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Life is so incredibly topsy-turvy from the moment you wake up – or the moment you don't wake up!

The kids missed the school bus. Check.

The car door was left open and the ignition won't start. Check.

There was an accident on the highway and traffic is backed up for miles. Check.

So often it seems that life was engineered not to go our way. Guess what? There's actually a lot of truth to that.

It seems especially obvious when it comes to this month of

Elul. Three times Moses ascended Mount Sinai to attempt to receive the Tablets. During the first episode on the 17th of Tammuz, certain Jews were serving the Golden Calf and Moses destroyed them. Shortly thereafter, Moses again ascended to plea and score favor for the Jewish People. Forty days later he descended from the mountain, seemingly unsuccessful. But just then, God called on Moses again and told him to ascend the mountain for another forty days and nights. It was during this period, beginning on Rosh Chodesh Elul, that Moses successfully pleaded on behalf of the Jewish People and delivered the Tablets on Yom Kippur.

Elul is a month of incredible Divine favor. The word *ELUL* is an acronym for the verse “*Ani L’Dodi V’dodi Li* – I am my Beloved’s and my Beloved is mine” (Song of Songs 6:3). God is waiting for us with outstretched arms and asking us to return to Him during this special time of year that is spiritually the easiest time for *teshuvah* (repentance). But if this were true, why when we attempt to work on ourselves and increase our merits during this month do we often find that things don’t go our way?

Our *parashah* begins, “When you go out to war against your enemies” (Deuteronomy 21:10). Every war entails a conflict between opposing sides. Similarly, we desire to do *teshuvah* and plan what we’re going to work on. But then we’re faced with life’s opposing forces of turmoil (like the alarm clock not ringing in the morning). This creates an internal war that gives us much heartache, and may even cause us to abandon our *teshuvah* plans altogether. What can we do so that “HaShem your God will deliver him [your enemies] into your hands” (ibid.) and our desires will prevail?

The conflict we feel in our heart stems from our belief that we understand how life is supposed to proceed. However, every day presents various situations. When we are certain that our smarts and capabilities have the power to enforce our will and

overcome whatever may be, we crash into a gigantic wall of opposing willpower. Whose will is this? God's!

When we do *teshuvah*, we accept God's will upon ourselves. Even if we have good intentions (and this is fine and proper), our goal is not to demonstrate that we are "professional *teshuvah*-doers." Rather, we want to show that our whole desire is to accept God's will and rule over us.

This corresponds to the final part of the verse, "And you take him captive" (ibid.). Our job is to capture and incorporate God's wisdom and will into our lives. When things aren't going our way and we feel heartache, this is just God's friendly reminder that we're too caught up in ourselves; we aren't remembering that *teshuvah* is about returning to Him. Yes, we may have had a beautiful plan, but who was the plan beautiful for? Our *teshuvah* plan is not about hanging our report card on our fridge, but about doing God's will with utter purity and simplicity. To an outsider, doing a simple mitzvah when we had grander plans seems worthless and unappealing, but to God, its sincerity and wholesomeness is truly meaningful.

It's when we can demonstrate to God that we're willing to do His *teshuvah* that He will "deliver our enemies in our hands" by nullifying all opposing wills, and bless us with a sweet and successful life. Amen.

Based on Likutey Moharan II, 82