

“When you will go out to war against your enemies, and Hashem, your G-d, will deliver him into your hand, and you will capture its captives.” (21:10)

The pasuk’s text is enigmatic. It begins by referring to our enemies in the plural, “your enemies,” – but then it changes to the singular, saying, “And Hashem, your G-d, will deliver him into your hand.” Horav Mordechai Gifter, z.l., addresses this question and derives a profound lesson from the pasuk. Whether we realize it or not, we enter battle daily against all sorts of enemies or, rather, one enemy in the guise of many different enemies. The yetzer hara, evil-inclination, man’s archenemy is extremely cunning and seeks ways to destroy our spiritual development. He attacks us from all sides, transforming himself into many forms. Indeed, at times it appears that we are waging war with many diverse enemies. This is, however, not the case. As man possesses one yetzer tov, good inclination, so, too, does he possess one yetzer hara. Evil has many faces, each one seeking a vulnerability in our spiritual armor.

Hence, the beginning of the pasuk refers to the yetzer hara’s bombardment, in its many guises. We are being challenged by “our enemies.” This is not, however, a reason to despair. The battle might seem to be overwhelming, but – in reality – it is not. We must realize that it is not a multitude of enemies that we must conquer, but actually one solitary enemy: a formidable one, but still only one. The Torah, therefore, closes the pasuk in the singular, to teach us that we can win. We must arm ourselves with determination to triumph over our enemy. The sooner we see through his many disguises, the sooner we will succeed in prevailing over him.