

# Reflections



The founder of the Chassidic movement, Shneur Zalman of Liady, had an interesting way of referring to this time of year: "*Ha melech ba-sadeh*", he said – "the King is in the field".

With these words he summarised his notion of a special intimacy between God and the Jewish people. During the rest of the year God is the all-powerful monarch, who may be imagined to be reigning from the throne in a central chamber of a great palace. This indeed is often the imagery applied to our prayers in Jewish liturgy – in the Amidah, the standing prayer at the heart of almost every Jewish service, we may be visualised as approaching the divine ruler's throne room through a series of imposing courts and antechambers. But Shneur Zalman said it's all different in the month of Ellul, as the Days of Awe draw near: the Sovereign is in the field. Meaning: nearby, on the edge of town, in an open space, accessible. Waiting to meet us.

Throughout our lives we have powerful experiences of all that is distant and majestic – and the things that are close, immediate, intimate. Religious-minded people tend to envisage our relationship with the divine and eternal in similar contrasting metaphors of awe-inspiring distance and tender closeness. Sometimes stark contrasts are best dealt with by trying to imagine their elements as equally true, at one and the same time. These are the Days of Awe, yes, but: "the Ruler is in the field", *ha melech ba sadeh*.

Shana Tovah

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