

When you go out to war against your enemies... And you will capture its captivity. (21:10)

Every Jew fights a war, a battle for his spiritual future. The enemy is the *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, who is cunning and tireless. He will not give up until he wins, or is taken captive under the control of the person whom he has attempted to ensnare in his web of deceit. *Parashas Ki Seitzei* is replete with lessons and ideas on how to live appropriately, the values we should maintain, the ethical imperatives which should guide our lives and the moral compass to which we should adhere. In short, the *parshah* teaches us how to be an observant Jew.

The primary period of introspection for the observant Jew is the month of *Elul*, leading up to *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*. During this forty-day period, we *daven* differently, learn differently, act toward our fellow man differently and carry out *mitzvos* differently. *Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl*, was wont to say, "The entire year it is necessary to serve Hashem as we do during *Elul*, and, during *Elul*, our service to Hashem should manifest greater energy and vigor." *Horav Chaim Kamil, zl*, embellished this statement with a deeper explanation of its meaning. He related that with the *petirah*, passing, of the saintly *Chazon Ish, zl*, the *Ponevezer Rav, zl*, led the *maspidim*, eulogizers, in his tribute to the memory of this extraordinary Torah leader. The *Ponevezer* quoted Shmuel (*Moed Kattan* 24a) who commented concerning the passing of his contemporary, *Rav Azil gavra, d'mistafina minei*; "'There has passed a man whom I feared.' Whenever I had an issue to decide concerning the *yeshivah*, I was quite well aware that I was not the *Chazon Ish*, and that, regardless of what I would achieve, I could not even remotely compare to him or reach his level of erudition or *yiraas Shomayim*, fear of Heaven. Nonetheless, I have always been able to ask myself: 'How would the *Chazon Ish* approach this issue?' He was my lodestar by which to navigate a successful resolution. Unfortunately, now the great light that has illuminated my life is extinguished, the individual whom I used as my *moreh derech* and by whose wisdom I charted my life is gone."

Rav Kamil applies these words of eulogy to explain what *Rav Yisrael Salanter* teaches us: "The way we stand during the entire year is established during the month of *Elul*. Even if during the year it is difficult (challenging) to maintain the *Elul* plateau, nonetheless, we are able to assess our level during the year based upon the benchmark of *Elul*. Indeed, during the year, whenever a question, an opportunity, a situation, arises, we should ask ourselves: How would we act if it were *Elul*?"

The plateau upon which one stands during *Elul* is his real identity. During the course of the year, we unfortunately fail to maintain ourselves on this level. Make no mistake, however, our "*Elul* self" is our true selfhood.