

# ARMED WITH TORAH

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The parsha of Ki Teitzei contains a host of specific mitzvot. In this it resembles more the parsha of Kdoshim in Chumash Vayikra than it does the other parshiyot of Chumash Dvarim, which are more general and are devoted to national history and Jewish destiny. But the truth be said, the mitzvoth in Ki Teitzei are the backbone of all Jewish history and are the tools of survival that insure that there will always be a Jewish destiny to pursue. It is undoubtedly with this in mind that the rabbinic commentators over the ages interpreted the opening verse of the parsha - "When you go out to war against your enemy" - in an allegorical and not merely a literal sense. The "war against your enemy" refers to the ongoing war of conscience and morality within ourselves in which we are constantly engaged all of our lives. "The enemy" lurks within us. It is a war between right and wrong, discipline and hedonism, instant gratification and long-term benefit. Every day of our lives we make these choices and fight these battles. The Torah, which always advises us to choose life and eternity, supplies us with these mitzvoth - the material aid in our struggle. The rabbis taught us that the Lord wished to give Israel merit and strength and therefore He gave us many mitzvoth. All of our lives, in all circumstances, we would be able to win the crucial battle of human morality because these mitzvot would always be at hand.

The example of "yefat toar" - the beautiful woman captured in war is an example. The Torah gave us a mitzvah to help moderate desires of lust. It is obvious, as Rashi points out, that the Jewish soldier's desire to marry such a woman, having no other commonality except for momentary physical passion is not really such a good idea. Passion and physical desire are part of marriage but they are certainly not all of marriage. The Torah, by emphasizing the legal and moral consequences, legal and moral, of his behavior attempts to put the entire matter in perspective before the actual liaison occurs. The mitzva serves as a brake on the passion and therefore mitigates an otherwise immoral and dangerous relationship. The rabbis taught us that, "the Torah spoke only regarding man's evil inclination." All of the mitzvot are intended to save us from ourselves, our weaknesses and foibles, our foolishness and unhealthy desires. From the outside, looking at Judaism with its 613 commandments and rituals, our faith may appear confining and cumbersome. Yet any Jew experiencing and living Judaism from the inside, considers all of the rules, rituals and commandments to be mighty weapons in the war that we perform conduct daily against wrongdoing and self-destruction. Impulse and passion are to be avoided. Perspective and understanding of the consequences of one's behavior are to be treasured and nurtured. Observance of mitzvot allows us to gain that necessary perspective and long view that can make life's struggles

holy and worthwhile.

I wish to thank the many of you that expressed your condolences to me on the passing of my father, of blessed memory. May we only know good tidings one from another.

Shabat Shalom.

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