

# THE WAR IN YOUR LIVING ROOM

*by Rabbi Berel Wein*

The Torah discusses the problems of war in this week's parsha. On the surface, it seems to be a continuation of the halachic rules of war already mentioned in the previous parsha of Shoftim. However, many of the commentators have transferred the scene of battle from warring with external physical enemies to a struggle with one's own self and one's base desires and inappropriate behavior. Going to war against "your enemy" is thus really going to war against one's own self. "We have met the enemy and they are us!" Therefore, in this light, the examples that the Torah gives us in this week's parsha are most relevant and telling regarding a war with one's own weaknesses and baseness. The Torah tells us of sexual desires that force a soldier to make a bad choice in marriage. Overwhelmed with physical desire, he brings a stranger, a person who is probably completely incompatible into his home and life. The rabbis warn that his lust for her will turn eventually into shame and even hatred. The basis for their family life will never be on firm ground and there is scant hope that their relationship will be loving, successful and respectful. The war against illicit sexual desire is an unending one.

The Torah then deals with monetary matters, especially as they pertain to a family situation. Money is a great cause of family rifts and quarrels. The rabbis cautioned that in one's lifetime one should not play favorites with children over monetary matters. And at one's death all wealth is to pass to heirs according to the Torah's rules of inheritance. Money is a great test in life. The rabbis stated that most people do not always pass this test successfully. One must constantly war with one's self regarding money and the means of gaining it and distributing it. Realizing that this is a war that must constantly be fought can aid in successfully pursuing this struggle and triumphing over our own inner enemy.

Finally, the Torah deals with the upbringing of children. One needs no license to become a parent. Usually we learn on the job itself and sometimes this is insufficient to meet the true needs of the child. One should avoid attempting to relive one's own life through one's child. The temptation to do so is very strong. Perhaps that is what the rabbis meant when they described the ben sorer u'moreh - the incorrigibly rebellious and sociopathic child - who appears in this week's parsha as "speaking in the exact voice as his father and mother." A child must be allowed to speak in his or her own voice. The tendency to dominate our children is innate within parents. Overcoming that harmful behavior pattern requires a mighty struggle. Thus we see that the war with our own selves that we embark upon is multi-faceted, wide-ranging, and difficult but of supreme necessity and importance. Like all wars, we cannot fail, but must win.

Shabat shalom.

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