

# THE ARMY OF G-D

*by Rabbi Berel Wein*

The word "tzav," which introduces this week's parsha to us, is usually translated as meaning "command." In a world where Western society treasures individual autonomy and freedom as a value that supersedes all other values, "command" does not resonate too well. Parents, teachers, even doctors and sometimes judges as well all have had to currently relinquish in one way or another the ability to command. However, Judaism still believes in a command structure of living. Every mitzvah of the Torah is based upon God's ability and wish, so to speak, to command humans - His creatures - to do or not do certain actions and behavior. Therefore, the blessing that Jews recite before performing a mitzvah states explicitly "that You have commanded us to..." It is almost that without the command there would be no mitzvah, just perhaps a socially acceptable good deed. It is not only this understanding that one is commanded that creates and achieves the fulfillment of a mitzvah. It is that the command itself is the mitzvah and the individual action or non-action required is only a particular detail to the greater mitzvah of obeying God's command.

Because of this understanding of the nature of God's commandments, we may also now appreciate more fully why the Talmud teaches us that a person who performs a mitzvah out of loyalty to being commanded to do so has a greater reward in Heaven than one who performs the same good act or behavior out of personal choice and as a volunteer. The obvious explanation for this concept is that it is much harder to do something good when one is told to do so than when one does the very same act out of the goodness of one's own heart and volition. There is an innate rebelliousness within all of us that bristles at being told what to do. The sullen teenager cleaning up his room, the recalcitrant student handing his term paper to the teacher on the last possible day, the employee who feels exploited by the demands and commands of the boss - all of these individuals are really each one of us at certain stages of our lives. Overcoming one's innate displeasure at being commanded is the challenge, heart and crux of Judaism.

I think that it not for naught that the Torah describes the Jewish people as being "tzivot Hashem - the legions, the army of God." An army is based solidly on a command structure. Otherwise, it is purely a group of individuals who may or may not be able to perform correctly and nobly when the time of battle arrives. Discipline and command are the necessary foundations for any army. Judaism views all of us, all human beings but especially and particularly Jews, as being members of the army of God. The Supreme Commander therefore has a right to order his troops as to how to conduct the battles of life and society. Seeing God in this light allows us to overcome any feelings of resentment at being commanded to do His will. Perhaps this is why the first lesson that Aharon and his sons

needed to learn on their mission to be the kohanim - the holy priests of Israel was tzav.

Shabat Shalom.

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