

COMMAND

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The word "tzav" itself conveys much of the basic message of Judaism and the traditions of Torah life. Even though we live, or believe that we do, in a world of ultimate free choice and personal autonomy, the structure of all civilizations and societies is that we are commanded to do certain things in life. Sometimes it is our family that makes these demands on us, other times it is our work or profession and still other times it is the government that intrudes upon our autonomy. There is always a piece of us, deeply hidden within the recesses of our psyche, which rebels against these intrusions on our private choices and lives.

The Torah recognizes this nature of ours and therefore emphasizes the necessary requirement of commandments that can thereby insure a moral lifestyle and a better society. Even the great Aharon, the paradigm of human goodness and peace, the holy High Priest of Israel, has to be commanded. The strength of being commanded - of "tzav" - is the bulwark of Jewish life and tradition. Without that ingredient of *asher tzivanu* - blessed be God Who has commanded us - there is no Judaism and ultimately no private or public Jewish life.

All of our lives, from the time of infancy onward, we are shaped and raised by commandments. The rabbis called this process *chinuch* - the laying of a strong foundation for our lives. Thus the word "tzav" which introduces our parsha this week is not only to be understood in its literal and narrow meaning as it applies to the laws of sacrifices in the Temple and to the High Priest of Israel but it is to be seen as the basic expression of the values and mindset of Judaism in all of its aspects.

Special note should be made that this word "tzav" appears in conjunction with the commandments regarding the sacrifice of the *olah* in the Temple. The *olah*, unlike any of the other sacrifices, was a sacrifice from which no human being obtained any immediate tangible benefit. It was completely consumed by the fire on the altar.

Thus there must have been a hidden voice of hesitancy that resonated within the person bringing that sacrifice and even within the priest that was offering it up on the altar to be totally consumed. After all, of what value was a sacrifice if no one would derive any immediate value from its offering?

Because of the limited range of human logic as compared to God's infinity so to speak, the Torah emphasized here the word "tzav" - this is an order, a commandment - not subject to human logic or choice. Many times in life demands are made upon us there are illogical and sometimes appear even to be capricious, but nevertheless they must be met.

By realizing the innate necessity in life for "tzav" - for bowing to Divine Will and for obeying commandments, we therefore make our lives easier to live and more meaningful as well. And we also must realize that life at times demands an olah from us, selfless sacrifice that shows little immediate or tangible reward or benefit. We are here to serve. That is our ultimate life's purpose.

Shabat shalom.

Chag kasher v'sameach

Rabbi Berel Wein Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com

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