



by Rabbi Dr Raymond Apple z"l

KI TEITZEI

Peace-Loving but Not Pacifist

The portion takes it for granted that war is sometimes a regrettable necessity.

Judaism is peace-loving, but not pacifist. When nothing else works, one has to fight. Unfortunately, war requires the use of force. In the Talmudic phrase, KOL D'ALIM G'VAR - whoever is more powerful prevails.

People are going to be hurt. That's what war is. Don't ever let anyone tell you that war is noble and cleansing. When lives and limbs are shattered it is an unmitigated tragedy. When weapons are unleashed they are no longer our servants but our masters.

The ideal is of course to change weapons of war into instruments of peace, to turn warriors into statesmen, to bind up the wounds of the enemy as well as one's own, to see the other side's point of view even without endorsing it, to say that everyone has a right to sit quietly under their vine and fig tree with none to make them afraid.

A homely saying of a former colleague of mine sums it all up. When people asked, "Aren't you and I related?" he used to say, "My grandmother and your grandmother dried their washing under the same sun".

Let me adapt his saying and apply it to the dream of peace: "My grandchildren and your grandchildren ought to be able to run and play in the same sunshine".

No Bread & Water

The Torah prohibits marriage with Ammonites "because they met you not with bread and with water" (D'varim 23:5).

The Israelites in the wilderness did not receive even elementary humanity on the part of some of the desert tribes. The Moabites provided bread and water, though for a price (2:29). The Ammonites did not even do that much.

These tribes could not have been expected to love and cherish the Israelites and treat them as welcome guests, but they could at least have acted with a modicum of basic decency. To bring such people into the Israelite fold by means of marriage would be to lower the ethical standards of Israel.

If someone is hungry and thirsty, the Jewish ethical conscience immedi-

ately comes forward with food and water. If a Jew fails to act in a humane way, their Jewishness does not appear genuine.

There is a modern application of this teaching. In Australia and elsewhere there are refugees who were not invited to come, but they are there, and while their applications for permission to stay are undergoing due process, they have to be treated with basic decency and be given access to food, clothing, health care and education.

It is said that some are not genuine refugees and some may even have been planted there with hopes of setting up criminal cells. All of this reinforces the need for full and proper screening. But in the meantime, the modern equivalent of the Biblical bread and water must be assured. -OZ

Y'HI ZICHRO BARUCH