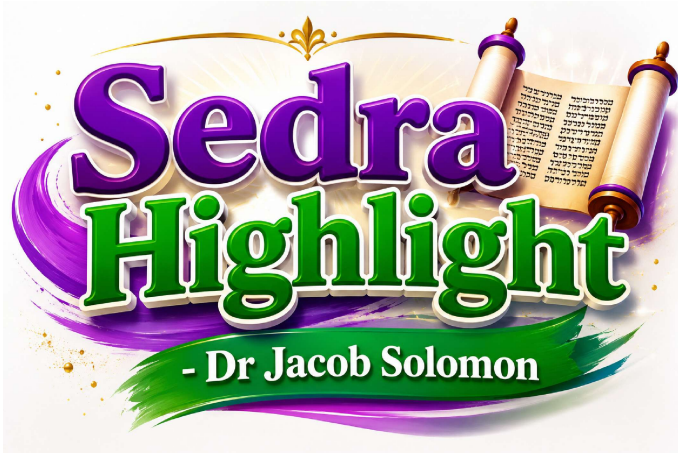




KI TEITZEI

When you go to war against your enemy... and you see a beautiful woman taken captive, and you desire her... (21:10-11).

In permitting a soldier to sleep with a woman (even a married one) among the enemy captives, the Midrash (Sifri 212) states that the Torah spoke only in response to the evil inclination. Thus, the Torah acknowledges the often-inflamed passions of a soldier in battle. Whether or not he may cohabit with her just once, before putting her through the long process described in the subsequent p'sukim, is debated by the Rishonim (medieval Jewish authorities). Most (for example Tos'fot on Kiddushin 22a) permit it; but others, notably Rashi and the Ramban, understand the plain meaning of the text as saying that he may not do so until he has put her through the lengthy ordeal lasting a whole month. According to either interpretation, the purpose of the long delay is so that his desire will evaporate in the interim, and that he will set her free (implied in Tanchuma 1).

The Ha'amek Davar observes where the soldier sees the beautiful woman in the first place. Not, as might be expected, inside a city when taking it by siege (20:19) where there should be lots of women to choose from, but by the field of battle itself. He explains what young women would have been doing at the field of battle, which gives a powerful insight into human nature. Their generals knew that attractive women love and compete with each other for strong men and gallant warriors, so the soldiers would have something to look forward to on exiting the battlefield victoriously. So they were there, looking at their very best, in order that the men would fight at virtuoso level.

But with G-d behind the Israelites, even the most determined and highly motivated soldiers would be suffer defeat: "G-d will put them into your hands" (21:10); the women would fall into the hands of the victorious Israelites. In their best condition, made up and dressed up in the most enticing way for prospecting the victors of their own side, rather than cowering in terror when under siege... It is precisely the young woman in that conditions that would tempt them beyond what flesh and blood could reasonably endure... so that the Torah ordained: Take your time and get to see that "a little bit of powder and a little bit of paint, makes a

young woman what she jolly well ain't".

More broadly, does the Torah set aside the laws of morality for the soldier in battle? Surely, a man should exercise self-control at all times! Many other situations occur where a normal healthy man experiences extremely strong physical urges. Why does the Torah's leniency only extend to this specific case?

One suggestion may be found by considering the famous passage from the Talmud (B'rachot 5a) where R. Hama said in the name of Resh Lakish that a person should always be on guard against the Evil Inclination. Basing himself on T'hilim 4:5, he recommends that if a person finds himself unduly tempted, he should occupy himself with studying Torah. If that fails, he should read the Sh'ma. And if that does not manage to subdue the Yeitzer Hara (Evil Inclination), he should consider the Day of Death - as Rashi explains: as far as his stay on Earth is concerned, Silence.

Does this three-point prevention plan apply to the soldier? Unlikely, for the following reasons. When on the field of battle, he can scarcely enter the Beit HaMidrash to study and contemplate Torah! Likewise, he is unlikely to have the peace of mind to consider and appreciate the admonitions contained in the Sh'ma at the moment when he is physically fight-

ing for his life. And finally - the Day of Death - for him, seems so close that he is virtually living it; not viewing it from afar. In the heat of battle it is unlikely to hold the same terrors: indeed, a tender-hearted soldier would not be on the battlefield in the first place (20:8).

This therefore should help to explain the uniqueness of the soldier's situation. He is severely tempted by the beautiful captive woman, but the Torah does accept that the spiritual resources available to temper his passions are just not available in his case. 🌿📖