

# TAKING STOCK

*by Rabbi Dovid Green*

This week we begin Deuteronomy, the last of the five books of the Torah. In this portion we learn how as the Jewish nation neared the Promised Land, Moshe Rabeinu reviewed the nation's deeds and experiences during the years in the wilderness. There they were, about to begin one of the most incredible chapters in the existence of our nation. So why, we might ask, was it necessary to look into that generation's past deeds at such an auspicious moment? Wasn't this a time for looking toward the future?

We can better understand the need for taking stock by examining the following parable:

A servant of a king, after many years of faithful service, was about to be given a highly responsible position in the king's palace. He was even being allowed to take up residency in the palace itself! The day for the servant to move his possessions into his new royal quarters would soon approach. The servant, was naturally elated and proud. The king asked his second-in-command, to offer the royal resident-to-be some counseling. This was out of kindness to the servant, to prepare him for the future and its new demands. The advice came in the form of reviewing the servant's past record over the years. The counselor not only reviewed the deeds of the servant which had brought glory to the king, but also where he had fallen short in his duties. Bringing reality down to earth during such a heady moment in the servant's career would ensure that a sober attitude would accompany his joy. This attitude would then be the catalyst towards his successful serious service of the king.

So it was with the Jewish people. Moshe reviewed the past events during the nation's sojourn in the desert, both positive and otherwise. Precisely because of this review, they would be equipped with the best attitude for the serious business at hand. Soon they would take up residence in the "palace" of the Holy Land. This would bring with it the challenge of fulfilling the many commandments which only apply when living there. They would also be responsible for the many commandments connected to the building of and service in the Holy Temple. Thus, taking stock of past deeds was actually the wise advice of Moshe Rabeinu, the King's counselor to the Jewish nation. Only a sober attitude would enable them to be successful in their new position. They would experience the seriousness **and** the joy of their upcoming service of G-d in the Holy Land. Moshe had helped prepare their future in a practical way by examining their past record, not by touting a fancy future, free of any awareness of the magnitude of their responsibilities.

The Jewish concept of repentance hinges on this same idea. The sages say that when the Torah

uses the word "atah" (spelled with an ayin), meaning "now", it refers to repentance. The underlying idea is that reflecting on the past is for the purpose of improving the present and the future. The focus is improvement. There is no room for depression or despair, as the future looks bright in the light of the commitment to improve.

The student of Torah knows that what comes along with his glorious status of being a servant of G-d is the need for a serious attitude coupled with joy, to strengthen him as he builds a foundation toward spiritual goals. May we merit to see the culmination of our ultimate goal as a nation in the recognition of G-d's majesty the world over. Good Shabbos.

***This weeks DvarTorah is dedicated in memory of Nechemya ben Chaim Dovid O"H***

Good Shabbos!

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