

FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN

by Rabbi Berel Wein

Human beings are by their very nature creatures who are eternally dissatisfied and fearful. It is a rare person that, even at a joyous family occasion, can grasp the moment and fully enjoy it. Even as the bridal couple stands under their marriage canopy, observers and the families of those concerned are already fretting about what the future will hold for the young couple. Rarely can a person truly live and enjoy the present.

In the Torah reading of this week the generation that left Egypt, received the Torah on Sinai and witnessed all of God's miracles on a first-hand basis, nevertheless begins to fray and fall apart. Their main concern, the doubt that hovers in their minds throughout the 40 years of existence in the Sinai desert, is how they will fare when they finally do reach and settle the promised land of Israel. This task appears to be so daunting that it frightens them. The reassurance given them by Moshe, that God will continue to perform miracles on their behalf does not resonate with them. Their frustration will eventually burst forth in the Torah reading of next week with the story of the spies and their evil report regarding the land of Israel. The father-in-law of Moshe himself leaves them and no arguments or persuasions can change his mind. In its way, this was a crushing blow to the morale of the Jewish people and only confirmed their doubts as to whether they have a future in the land of Israel.

In effect, the mindset of the people was that today's miracles do not guarantee the presence of miracles tomorrow and that the land of Israel is too risky an adventure to entertain.

The fear and disaffection for the land of Israel lies at the root of all of the upheavals and rebellions that we will read about this Shabbat and in the coming Torah readings as well. They may complain about food, their leaders and all sorts of other gnawing issues that trouble them but that is only a cover for their fear of the future and for the unknown that the land of Israel represents to them.

This is a situation that exists even today in the Jewish world. It is a lack of self-confidence that we paper over with bravado. Deep down we are aware of the precarious nature of our situation and of the hostility of the world towards our state and us. To a great extent we whistle when passing the graveyard because of our lack of faith in ourselves, our future and even in the God of Israel.

We cannot be satisfied with the moment because of our concerns, no matter how unwarranted they may be regarding the future. Naturally, we are somewhat traumatized by our past and it is not a simple matter to simply ignore the problems and enemies that loom over us. Nevertheless, we are bound to rely upon our faith that all will yet turn well for the Jewish people and the state of Israel and we attempt to live our lives and order our priorities accordingly.

Shabbat shalom

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