

HONESTY

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The Torah reading of Dvarim always immediately precedes the week that contains the fast day of Tisha B'Av. The relationship between the Torah reading and the events of national tragedy that Tisha B'Av marks are obvious even to the most cursory glance at the Torah reading of Dvarim. The word *eycha*, which signifies tragic amazement at the turn of events, occurs in Dvarim and in the Book of Lamentations (*Eycha*) as well. The words of Moses in Dvarim predict the spiritual downfall of Israel in its land and its eventual physical national destruction and its exile from its land. Yet, there is an even deeper connection between the words of Moses in Dvarim and the commemoration of the tragedies of Israel on the day of Tisha B'Av. And it is regarding this deeper, almost hidden connection, that I wish to write these following few sentences.

The entire discourse of Moses in the Book of Dvarim is one of close scrutiny of past events and of unrelenting honesty regarding those events. We all know that admitting past error is a most difficult process. It demands honesty, courage, forthrightness and unequivocation. In Moses' review of Israel's forty years in the desert, all of these qualities are amply present and duly demonstrated. For only through an honest appraisal of the past, painful as that may be, can one learn the appropriate lessons from which future improvements in life may be realized. The Torah abhors falseness and disdains "whitewashing" people, even great people, and events. Only the truth can instruct us and allow us to better ourselves and our society. All of Torah is true to this overriding principle of honesty, and the Book of Dvarim is the clearest example of this principle at work in the works of the Bible. And this is also its innate bond and strong connection to Lamentations/*Eycha*. For the words and descriptions that appear in *Eycha* are searingly true and painfully honest. The prophet Jeremiah allows for no romanticization of Jewish destruction and exile. His description of the horrors of defeat and despair, of hunger and disease, of the destruction of Temple and national sovereignty, know no soft edges or glib comfort and/or weak reassurances. There is no room for false heroics or romanticization of martyrdom in the words of the prophet. False comfort is often counter-productive. The lessons of *Eycha* require study and internalization. Hence, they must be left in their unvarnished honesty and not prettied up to fit later sensitivities.

Our generation is plagued by a dishonest sense of observation and reality. We wish to be told pleasant things and soothing reassurances, even if they be not true. We are looking for emotional highs and feel-good faith and are averse to digging the trenches of apparently minute ritual observances and the vagaries of everyday life. The whole bloody story of this most tragic of human centuries is one of self-deception and unwarranted naive faith in the powers of social ideas and

societal engineering. The blindness of the West as to the true aims and policies of Hitler, the willing turning away of its gaze by the Left to the realities of the policies and actions of Lenin and Stalin, are but two bitter examples of the cost in lives and humanity of the folly of being unrealistic and patently dishonest. This tendency towards willful self-deception is still alive and well in the Jewish world today. The formidable forces, both external and within Israel, arrayed against Jewish survival are aided and abetted by well-meaning but hopelessly unrealistic and naive Jews themselves. Not to have learned anything about non-Jewish enmity and assimilatory practices and life-style is a form of national suicide. It should be opposed.

Shabbat Shalom.
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