

WE'RE OUR OWN ENEMY

by Rabbi Berel Wein

Winston Churchill, in a speech to the House of Commons, once quoted the altered, semi-facetious aphorism: "We have met the enemy and they are us," in describing the shortcomings of policy of the then government in England. In this week's Torah reading we find this idea described in detail. The Torah reading begins: "*When you shall go forth to do battle against your enemy and the L-rd, your G-d, will deliver that enemy into your hand...*" Who is that unnamed enemy that the Torah bids us to do battle with? The rabbis and commentators of Israel long ago maintained that the true enemy of all human beings lurks within us. It never subscribed to feel-good, whatever-goes, gimmicky, currently fashionable but rapidly obsolescent projects. There never was a free lunch, a quick fix, a comfortable, no-standards, no-requirements, pain and sacrifice-free, with-it-today Judaism. Instant panaceas, public-relations slogans that are inherently empty of true value, do not lead a person individually or Israel generally to any spiritual growth. Instead of fighting "our enemy" they become part of the "enemy" itself.

This special month of Elul, which leads us to the Holy Days; the Ten Days of Penitence from Rosh HaShana till Yom Kippur; the joyous holiday of Succot; the special role of Torah in our lives symbolized by Simchat Torah, all are weapons to allow us to triumph over "our enemy." The tragedy of American Jewry is that it is unaware to a great degree of the existence, importance and necessity of these Holy Days and what they should impart to us. Jews are so abysmally ignorant of Judaism that they are unable to realize that we are our own worst enemies. At a recent "outreach" seminar on Judaism, a woman from the audience rose and asked the rabbi who was the lecturer: "These are all wonderful ideals that you have talked to us about. But we need something practical in our lives. We need at least one day in the week when the family could all come together, eat together, converse together. A day without television and work, a day of reading and relaxation, of thinking together and becoming more spiritual. Rabbi, why doesn't Judaism have such a day?" It is not that Jews do not observe the halachic requirements of the Sabbath - it is that Jews do not know any longer that there is a Sabbath! If one does not recognize that there is an enemy, then one will undoubtedly be ill-prepared to defend one's self against that enemy's thrust. And so we are witness to the ravaging of the American Jewish community and it is happening without complaint, almost without notice.

I am convinced that there are large pockets of unaffiliated Jews who are searching for some deeper significance to their lives. They are searching for something to satisfy their souls. So, why is there not a larger stream of newly-interested and newly-committed Jews? One reason, I am convinced, is that they have been scared off of Judaism by incessant anti-Torah propaganda, mostly orchestrated by

certain Jewish groups themselves, who are interested in promoting their own personal and organizational agendas. Our personal enemies are within our own camp. Thousands of Jews pursue other religions, completely ignorant of their own faith and thus fundamentally unable to make any intelligent spiritual choices in their lives because of this ignorance of and subtle prejudice against Judaism introduced into their lives by Jews themselves. Generations of self-hating Jewish authors, comedians, media stars and political figures, have all taken their toll from American Jewry. It is time that we awoke to the dangers that lurk within us and defend ourselves in order to guarantee our survival as Jews. Please accept my best wishes to you and yours for a happy, healthy, and prosperous New Year.

Shabat Shalom.

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