

A GOOD EYE

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The concluding book of the Five Books of Moses, Dvorim, is essentially a soliloquy of Moses, reviewing the events of the Sinai for forty years. It is the final testament of Moses to Israel, his last words of prophecy and leadership spoken and written in his 120th year, the year of his death. Moses has some very strong criticisms of Israel in this final message of his. In the Torah reading of this week he complains that the role of Jewish leadership is too overwhelming a task for any one human, even the greatest of all humans, Moses himself. Faced with the bitter memories of the failures of the desert the Golden Calf, Korach, the constant carping and ingratitude of Israel Moses could easily have made this book of Dvorim a diatribe of despair and pessimism. All would understand such an attitude and there would be many who would even justify such feelings of hurt, rejection and disappointment. But the great Moses does not leave us with discouraging words. Rather, he blesses Israel, with all of its shortcomings and spiritual weaknesses, for all of its generations: "May the Lord your God increase you as you are a hundredfold and may He bless you as He has promised you."

One of the most essential traits for leadership of any kind and most certainly for leadership in Jewish life is cultivating a "good eye." Our Rabbis in Pirkei Avot emphasize that having a "good eye" is a major goal and accomplishment in life. A "good eye" allows one to be optimistic and hopeful, even though the realities of life are often discouraging and negative. One of the tests of faith in Judaism is the ability to be optimistic even in the face of overwhelming difficulties. Again, the Rabbis of the Talmud taught us "Even if there be a sharp knife held at your throat do not despair completely." Despair, merciless criticism, pessimism, bitterness, cynicism - none of these traits and attitudes is acceptable Jewish behavior, and certainly not in those who occupy public leadership roles. The Torah demands that we always look at life and people realistically. We are not allowed to willfully fool ourselves as to the negative dangers that exist around us. All of that being said, the Torah then asks us to nevertheless be optimistic, hopeful, and to see life's realities and circumstances through the prism of a "good eye."

The words of Moses, even those hard and critical ones of Israel, were spoken with love and hope and a prophetic vision of a brighter future and the continuing protection and benevolence of our Creator. Moses' words were not limited to his time and generation of Jews but were intended for all generations of the Jewish people. Moses speaks to us of our real shortcomings and of God Himself. He warns us that these are unpleasant consequences that result from such attitudes and behavior. But he also blesses us and endows us with the gift of his "good eye" of being able to see the good in life and people and of being optimistic and strong hearted in the face of all adversity. It is this

message of Moses that makes the Book of Dvarim timeless and eternal.

Shabat Shalom.
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