

BEEN THERE DONE THAT

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The conclusion of the book of Bamidbar that these parshiyot mark, to a great extent ends the narrative section of the Torah. The generation of Egypt and Sinai is no more. Moshe's fate that he too will not enter the Land of Israel has been sealed. Yet, in order for the new generation and the new leader of Israel, Yehoshua, to succeed, a review as to what occurred to the previous generation is necessary. It would not be farfetched to suggest that the parsha of Maasei, which details all of the stops and way places of Israel in the desert journey of the Jewish people, can be considered already as part of Dvarim - "Mishneh Torah" - Moshe's repetition of the Torah at the end of his life. Only if one knows where one has been and has learned something valuable from that experience can one confidently continue on one's journey. Even though the future is always an unknown and uncertain commodity, knowledge of the past minimizes the surprises that may yet lie ahead. The Torah goes into great detail to inform us of where we have been, how we got there and what happened to us on that journey. This is all in the hope that something can be gleaned from the past and applied to our current and future situations and challenges.

For a people so rich in historic experience and worldly knowledge, the Jews somehow surprisingly are reluctant to incorporate hard-earned lessons of the past into current attitudes, values and behavior. The past errors of the encouragement of assimilation, of belief in utopian solutions to human and societal problems, of naive pacifism and lack of self-pride, of worshipping strange gods and false idols, all are repeated again in our times. It is as though the long journey of Israel and all of its way stations has been forgotten, misinterpreted and ignored. We could construct our own parshat Maasei from the experiences of the Jewish people over the past three hundred years. We would be wise to remember the debacle of nineteenth century Jewish German assimilation, the destruction that the Jewish left foisted upon us in its blind and foolish belief in Marxist doctrine and the uncaring aloofness of Western civilization, in the main, towards Jewish suffering and persecution. If we remembered our own Maasei, we could easily say: "Been there, done that" to most of the ideas now floated about for solving our problems. We are not doomed to repeat all of the past errors committed on our journey through history. Yet, if we forget or ignore the lessons that those past errors produced, our present and future problems are bound to increase, substantially and intensively.

Thus, it is obvious that every generation writes its own parshat Maasei. The greatness of such a parsha is only realized when it has meaningfully absorbed the lessons of the previous parshiyot

Maasei of Jewish life. This guide to the past is the strongest guarantee of the success of our journey into the future.

Shabat Shalom.

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