

FACING THE COVENANT

by Rabbi Berel Wein

Moshe's final official act of his long career of Jewish leadership is to once again reiterate the everlasting covenant between God and Israel. To make it explicitly clear to Israel that this covenant is eternal and non-cancelable, Moshe states that it binds "those who are with us here standing today and those who are not here standing with us today." All Jews, wherever they may live and whenever their time on earth will occur are bound by the covenant. The covenant pursues us and at the same time inspires us throughout the ages. It is the constitution of the Jewish people and it never fails to enforce its terms upon us and to remind us of its existence and durability. The entire story of the Jewish people of the past century is foretold in the covenant. Ramban stated that it is amazing that someone - Moshe - could stand and accurately forecast and describe events that would befall Israel two thousand years later. What greater wonder shall we have living as we do an additional eight hundred years after Ramban! There is no way to understand or appreciate the Jewish story throughout the ages - the good and the better - without reference to the words and conditions expressed in the covenant. Truly, having to deal with the covenant and its attendant consequences and results is unavoidable.

The covenant states that there will come a time when Israel, reeling from tragedy and Holocaust, will say, "all of these troubles have befallen me because there was not God in my midst." This ambiguous statement, according to Rabbi Meir Leibush Malbim, lends itself to two interpretations. There will be Jews who will react to the horror and pain of Israel by saying that "God is not in our midst" - that we are not pious enough in belief and scrupulous enough in behavior and deeds. But there will be other Jews whose faith will have been crushed by events and tragedy who will state "that God is not in our midst" for there is no God that can come and help us. Thus both redoubled efforts at piety and blasphemy and scorn are the two reactions to the terms of the covenant as it acted itself out in human events. How painful it is in today's Jewish world to witness these two diametrically opposed responses to the covenant marching along side by side. A portion of the Jewish people is determined to strengthen the bonds of the covenant and to live an ever more rigorous Jewish life style while another portion of Israel distances itself from observance of the covenant - even from remembering that such a covenant yet in fact still exists and remains operative.

We are not allowed the luxury of forgetting or ignoring the covenant. Daily, it rises up and smites us in our faces. It gives us no rest, no free passes in life. Only by recognizing its existence and living by

its tenets and values can we achieve personal and national achievement and satisfaction. That is Moshe's lasting legacy to us as Jews. Remember the covenant and live by it!

Shabat shalom. Rabbi Berel Wein Text Copyright © 2004 by [Rabbi Berel Wein](#) and **Torah.org**