

# THE MYSTERY

*by Rabbi Berel Wein*

This week's parsha deals with the frighteningly accurate prediction of the awful fate of the Jewish people over its long exile. The tochacha chillingly forecasts the horrors of the Holocaust and of all of the previous destructions, persecutions, pogroms and disasters that have befallen the Jews over the long centuries of dispersion. The Torah itself in a forthcoming parsha asks the obvious question: "Why all of this anger? What justifies such a fate for Israel?" In our generation there have been many Jews whose faith and Jewishness itself have been compromised or negated by the events of the Holocaust. Therefore, what message is to be gained from the detailing of all of these curses and disasters? Even more directly, what has been 'gained,' so to speak, by the actual occurrence of these events? The Torah itself is not exactly clear on this subject. It states that the abandonment of Torah by the Jewish people is the root cause for all of its troubles. Yet, many of the tragedies have befallen the Jewish people when they were, at least on the surface, a Torah abiding society. The majority of Eastern European Jews destroyed in the Holocaust were observant, traditional Jews. God therefore retains His inscrutable face, so to speak, and no satisfactory answer to the troubles of Israel is easily forthcoming. Part of the curse of the tochacha therefore is its apparent mystery and even unreasonableness. It is this very inexplicability that fuels the doubts and hesitations about faith and observance that pervade the Jewish world of today. The tochacha assumes the role of being the greatest of all of God's mysteries, the ultimate challenge to faith, belief and tradition.

Yet, it is the very fact that the tochacha declaimed by Moshe thousands of years before the event, is so chillingly accurate down to the smallest detail that itself testifies to its Godly origin. Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban) alluded to this already in the thirteenth century. How can we in the twenty-first century not be stirred by this eerie accuracy of prediction and detail? We are powerless to know the 'why' to the tochacha but we can certainly testify as to its author and source. "Is it not from the hand of God that good and troubles both emanate?" said the prophet Yirmiyahu. This is perhaps the ultimate comfort that we may derive from reading this sad parsha. We are like infants who do not comprehend the measures taken by our father to insure our survival. But we may be certain that we have a father who takes a direct hand in raising us. Rabbi Akiva upon witnessing the ruins of the Temple taught that just as it was apparent that the painful predictions regarding Israel had come to pass in dreadful and perfect accuracy, so too was he assured that the blessings foretold for Israel and its redemption also would be fulfilled down to the last point of detail. That view is our point of hope as well. The curses and pains of the past difficult year may disappear and the new year bring to us and all mankind the fulfillment of the great vision of redemption and peace as promised to us

by the great prophets of Israel.

Shabat shalom.

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