

FROM EGYPT TO ISRAEL

by Rabbi Berel Wein

Sponsored by Judy Citer, Sherry Simantov and Ruth Gross in honor of the yahrzeit of their beloved father, Yehudah Aryeh Ben Yehoshua a"h

Our father Avraham and our mother Sarah are the paradigm Jews. Their lives and the events that occurred to them are symbolic of the story of the Jewish people throughout the ages. This is certainly the meaning of the well known phrase of the rabbis that "the behavior of our forbearers are the signs of the future for their descendants." Thus in this week's parsha we see Avraham and Sarah going into exile in Egypt. This occurs after God has promised them that the Land of Israel will be given to them and their descendants. Almost immediately, they are forced to enter Egypt where the incident of Sarah's abduction by the Pharaoh takes place. In spite of all of the troubles, Avraham and Sarah succeed in the Egyptian exile. They become wealthy and accepted, even respected. But Avraham and Sarah return home to the Land of Israel.

Their sojourn there is also one crisis after another. They are devastated by the betrayal of Lot and by the delinquency of Yishmael. The Land of Israel is not an especially hospitable place. They are caught up in a regional war that initially does not concern them but their participation in becomes almost inevitable when Lot foolishly moves to Sdom and is taken captive. Betrayal, heartache, danger and disappointment dog their steps in the Land of Israel. But Avraham and Sarah refuse to give up or to lose faith in God's promise to them. The dream of a productive life in the Land of Israel remains real in their hearts and minds.

This is truly a paradigm of our situation today here in the Land of Israel. Even though many of our Israeli brethren arrived here with little choice in the matter, most Jews are here because of their will to be here. We can all leave for success and acceptance in the "Egypt" that abound in the world today. And even though "Egypt" always carries with it the danger of a "Pharaoh's" behavior towards us, the fact is that most Jews emerge from "Egypt" with wealth, acceptance and even begrudging respect. Yet, it is obvious that the center of the Jewish world has now shifted to the Land of Israel. The Jewish people are unwilling to relinquish God's promise to us - to let Him off the hook, so to speak. So we are confronted by betrayals and delinquencies, wars and struggles, disappointments and unforeseen difficulties. Somehow, even Sdom is allowed to flourish in our holy land and it is the followers of Avraham and Sarah who are constantly held up to ridicule and abuse.

Yet, in spite of all of this, the faith of the Jewish people in God's promise regarding this land is valid

and firm, and it allows us to continue and improve and be of good spirit in the face of all of our troubles. This is an exact imitation of Avraham and Sarah, a reaffirmation of the continuity and tradition of Israel over more than 3700 years of history. It is this spirit that guarantees us, as it did Avraham and Sarah, success, eternal reward and achievement.

Shabat shalom.

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