

UNENDING CONTINUITY

by Rabbi Berel Wein

This is the final Shabat of the year 5766. It has been a difficult year for the Jewish people, for the State of Israel and for me personally. This year of war, death, scandal, disappointment, and an overwhelming feeling of uncertainty - which is really the natural human state of being - leaves us somewhat bewildered and downcast. We pray that the new year that now comes upon us will be one of comfort and healing, of good tidings and new and fruitful beginnings, with peace and confidence in our future.

On his final day, Moshe gathers all of Israel to bid them goodbye. He speaks not only to those who stand before him in life but also to those who are no longer here but whose memory and influence are still present amongst the living. He also speaks to the generations of Israel still unborn who are yet to come and shoulder the responsibilities and duties of Jewish achievement and survival. He repeats the unbending and inexorable terms of the covenant between God and Israel. But he promises them that in the end all will be right somehow and that the blessings of God's covenant with us will descend upon us to comfort and refresh us.

There probably cannot be any more fitting introduction to our supplications and prayers for the new year than these words of Moshe's that appear in this week's parsha. The parsha places the events of our life into a Godly perspective so that even our tragedies and disappointments take on meaning and purpose. God's covenant with us as individuals and as a people is still operative. We really cannot ask for more.

Moshe goes to his death with faith but also with regret. He is not privileged to enter the Land of Israel, being denied his life's dream and his children will not succeed him in the leadership of the Jewish people. As is the case with human beings, even Moshe, no one passes away having accomplished all that was desired. Yet Moshe dies peacefully, with God's kiss, so to speak, on his face, knowing that the Torah that he taught Israel will guarantee its survival as a people and will be a human force for all eternity. He is comforted in the knowledge that all of his efforts and travails, all of his disappointments and frustrations will, somehow, not be for naught.

The Torah will remain within the Jewish people and will eventually restore them to their land and their faith. No matter how distant they may stray from their faith and mission, the Torah will not abandon them. God will employ many different means to keep the covenant effective between Him and Israel. Moshe can therefore say confidently "It [the Torah] is not an empty thing as far as you are concerned but rather it is within your mouths and hearts to fulfill its demands and promises." It is this

sense of unending continuity that is the greatest comfort to Moshe on his departure from this earth. It should also be the greatest source of comfort and hope for us as we depart from this year and enter into better and more blessed times.

Shabat shalom.

Rabbi Berel Wein Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com

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