

# APPRECIATE THE PRESENT

*by Rabbi Berel Wein*

The Torah reading of this week emphasizes to us the rule in life of seizing the moment of opportunity. Moshe tells the Jewish people that "we are traveling now to the place that the Lord has promised" to give to us as our national homeland. But this proposed victorious march somehow unravels. There is an incident with Yitro, the father-in-law of Moshe himself, who does not agree to accompany his adopted nation to its destination, the Land of Israel. Moshe's entreaties to him are of no avail. He has what to him are legitimate, if not even holy reasons to return to his home and abandon Israel. His behavior makes an impression, albeit only subconsciously on the psyche of the Jewish people in the desert. Their optimism and self-pride is weakened. They begin to complain about their present conditions in the desert. Having given up on their future, they can think only of their present.

One's present is always frustrating and fraught with problems. Now, the manna that fell from heaven daily is no longer an acceptable menu. When one is in a bad mood no food can taste good in one's mouth. A wife may have prepared the tastiest gourmet meal for her husband's supper, but if he arrives in a foul mood carrying his work's problems home with him, then the meal will somehow be unsatisfying. The complaints regarding the manna will lead directly to the disaster of the spies that will appear in next week's Torah reading. And the result of that debacle is that Moshe's grand march to the Land of Israel will never take place for the generation that escaped Egyptian bondage and lived under miraculous conditions in a vast wasteland.

Every human being, and nations as well, has moments of opportunity that are present to be grasped. No opportunities in life are permanent except for the ever present ability to repent and improve. Opportunities that we allow to pass us by will, in the main, never return. This is true in commerce, personal health, family relationships and all other areas of life as well.

The rabbis in Avot taught us that every person has "his hour" - his particular opportunity for advancement and accomplishment. The wise and holy person recognizes such moments and opportunities and acts immediately upon them. The fool and the lazy let these opportunities escape them. Rabi Akiva said that one should never procrastinate or postpone Torah learning for the opportunity may not arise again. Judaism is about action, optimism, and enthusiasm.

The national tragedies that the Torah deals with in this week's reading and in next week's parsha as well all stem from weakness of self and demoralization. If we do not believe in ourselves then nothing can be good, even manna from heaven. A generation of complainers and naysayers

eventually becomes a generation of tragedy and doomed hopes. Our generation has been blessed with many great opportunities, not the least of which is the ability to study Torah and to live in the Land of Israel. These opportunities should be grasped and treasured.

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](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

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