# A REALISTIC VIEW OF LIFE

*by Rabbi Berel Wein*

Our reading of the book of Vayikra is completed on this Shabat with the reading of the double parsha mentioned above. It is ironic that the book of Vayikra, which began on such a joyful and positive note with the dedication of the mishkan, should conclude on such a somber and baleful note with the reading of the tochacha in the parsha of Bechukotai. But this seeming turnaround in reality mirrors the reality of human life.

And the Torah is nothing if not reality and practicality. Wrong behavior, no matter how nobly motivated, always brings sad consequences to it. The behavior of the sons of Aharon in bringing a "strange fire" at the dedication of the mishkan not only costs them their lives but it changes the tenor and tone of the remainder of Vayikra. The remainder of the book teaches us laws, responsibilities, values, commandments, discipline and accountability.

Just as the sons of Aharon were accountable for their behavior and hence its tragic results, so too the Jewish people as a whole is held accountable for its behavior to be judged in light of its accountability to its mission and God's commandments. That is certainly the stark and simple message of the tochacha that marks the completion of the book of Vayikra.

The multiplicity of laws and commandments, values and admonitions that characterize the book of Vayikra clearly spell out Jewish responsibility and accountability to its destiny and mission. The tochacha is a stark reminder of the consequences of failing to live up to those standards of Godly life.

Jewish history has verified over and again the basic narrative and lesson of the book of Vayikra. Mistakes of judgment, no matter how altruistic and holy they may have been in their original formulation inevitably have led to tragedy, loss and sadness. The "strange fires" offered on the altar of Judaism over the past centuries have burned brightly for a moment in history and then flickered into ashes. But before they disappeared from the scene, hundreds of thousands of the "sons of Aharon" were victimized by their original allure.

For reasons that are inexplicable Judaism seems to attract "strange fires" onto its altar. But the results of these "strange fires" unalterably remain the same, somehow activating Jewish assimilation and alienation, in short the coming of a tochacha itself. And though the exactitude and true measure of the tochacha is beyond our ken of human comprehension, there is no denying that every word mentioned in the tochacha in the parsha of this week has come to pass before our very own eyes.

The book of Vayikra therefore, like the living Torah itself, is not just past history or a book of laws alone. It is current events, the immortal godly perspective of life and people and of the destiny of the Jewish people. But the book of Vayikra, again like all of the other books of the Torah, ends with our proclamation of chazak, chazak v'nitchazek - let us be strong and strong and strengthen others. That is always the post- tochacha response of the Jewish people and the strength of our survival.

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

Text Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Berel Wein and **Torah.org**