

THE PATHWAY TO CONSOLATION AND REDEMPTION

by Rabbi Berel Wein

Moshe's long and beautiful valedictory address begins in this week's parsha. It is perhaps the most personal part of our holy Torah, for it lays bare the humanity and emotions of Moshe himself. His frustrations with a people who are destined and charged with holiness and seemingly always shy away from that destiny are clearly evident in his words. His cry of "eichah" - how can it be? - is the forerunner, in the words of the Midrash of the ultimate "eichah" which causes us to weep and mourn on Tisha B'Av.

It is not only the stress of leadership that pains Moshe, though that is certainly part of his burden. It is the relentless carping and unappreciative attitude of Israel towards its blessings and its relation of uniqueness with God that gives him a sense of brooding sadness and impending troubles. Moshe will state in the Book of Dvarim: "I know that after my death, in the future, you will stray from the path of Torah and worship strange gods. Terrible things will then befall you until the day of final redemption arrives."

It is the anguish of a parent who fully knows what an error the child is making in pursuing a matter and is absolutely incapable of stopping the personal disaster from happening. The valedictory address of Moshe is therefore not a purely past event but rather a reminder of our weaknesses throughout our history and in current times as well. "Eichah" - how can this be? - is a word that aptly fits the Jewish world of today.

Moshe zeroes in on the two main faults of personality that lie at the root of Jewish weakness and disaffection. These are ingratitude and lack of self-worth. The matter of ingratitude is addressed many times in the Torah. The complaints about the manna, the water, the Land of Israel, even the Exodus from Egyptian bondage are quite numerous in the Torah. The entire forty year miraculous sojourn in the desert of Sinai is one long litany of complaint and ingratitude.

The rabbis defined wealth as being satisfied. There are therefore relatively few truly wealthy people in our world. Ingratitude affects family relations, business ventures, and the general psychological well-being of individuals and a society. Lack of self-worth is also very prevalent in Jewish society. In a world where other faiths have hundreds of millions of adherents, Judaism is the smallest of all faiths, number wise.

Moshe told us in the Book of Dvarim that this would be the case - "for you are the smallest in numbers of all nations." But the inner strength of the Jew always lay in the deeply held conviction of

being holy and special, of being chosen by God for an eternal mission in this world. In recent times this belief in ourselves and our mission has been eroded by secularization, ignorance of Judaism by Jews and the pernicious influences of a hedonistic and loose environment.

Moshe's words therefore stand as a rallying cry to combat these twin evils that weaken us and endanger our survival and progress. This season of the year presses us to heed Moshe's words and message ever more diligently. It is the pathway to ultimate consolation and redemption.

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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