

# CHOICES AND MIRACLES

*by Rabbi Berel Wein*

Even though Moshe in his review of the life of the Jewish people in the desert of Sinai over the past forty years recounts all of the miracles that occurred, he does so not for the purpose of narrative but rather to teach an important moral lesson for all ages. That stark lesson is that after all of the miracles that God may perform on our behalf, our fate is in great measure in our hands. And the lesson of all of Jewish history is summed up in the verse "For not by bread alone - even miraculous bread such as the manna - shall humans live, but rather by the word of God, so to speak, - the values, commandments and strictures of Torah shall Jews live."

All attempts to avoid this lesson, to substitute other words, ideas and ideologies for the words of Torah have turned into dismal failures. But reliance upon miracles is just as dangerous a path. My teachers in the yeshiva would say to us, then pious young men, that prayer helps one to become a scholar in Torah. But they emphasized that sitting and studying Torah for a protracted time with concentration and effort may help even more in the quest for true Torah scholarship. Moshe uses the constant miracles of the desert to drive home the point that much of the responsibilities of life are in our hands and our decision making processes. In essence the clear conclusion from his oration is that God helps those who help themselves.

In our post-Tisha B'Av mood and run-up to Elul and the High Holy Days it is important to remember how much of our fate truly lies in our own actions. The small choices that we make in our everyday lives add up to our life's achievements and accomplishments. That is what Rashi means when he states that "these are the commandments that one grinds under with one's heel - ekev!" The small things that we think to be unimportant at the moment often translate into major decisions and sometimes even have irreversible consequences. The question always before us is do our actions measure up to the standards of God's word, so to speak. We live not "by bread alone" or by miracles alone, but by our own choices and our very own behavior and deeds.

While recently driving on a New York City highway - an exercise in patience and utter futility - I missed the exit that I was supposed to turn off on. Miles and a quarter of an hour later I was able somehow to retrace my journey and exit at the proper place. I felt that it was a miracle that I was able to do so. It was, in fact, my negligence of not exiting correctly from the highway originally that forced the necessity of of this "miracle." Moshe teaches us that this is truly a daily occurrence in our lives. His message to us is as clear and cogent today as it was to our forbearers in the desert of Sinai long ago.

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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