

JEWES ON THE MOVE

by Rabbi Berel Wein

Our father Avraham is a wanderer. All of his life he moves from place to place driven by his inner voice to spread the message of the one God in the world and other times by Divine command itself. In this, as in all other matters, he is the harbinger of the wanderings of his children throughout the ages. The Jewish people are a people of wanderers, moving restlessly from one country and continent to another.

There have been numerous reasons given to this Jewish restlessness. The most obvious one is the attempt to escape poverty and persecution and find a better life for one's self and family. However there have been spiritual reasons also advanced for this phenomenon of constant movement. One is in order to acquire righteous converts from the souls of non-Jews who really wished to accept the Torah when offered to the world before Sinai but whose voices were drowned out in the noise of the general "no" of their fellows.

A more kabbalistic reason was offered for the Jewish wanderings. It stated that there are scattered throughout the world holy "sparks" - nitzotzot - that are enclosed in imprisoning "husks" - klipot - and that those "sparks" can only be released through the positive and holy behavior of Jews who are then physically present there. Another explanation advanced for the scattering and wandering of the Jewish people is that this is somehow a guarantee of Jewish survival. It allows Jews to escape from annihilation in certain areas of the world by moving somewhere else.

Undoubtedly all of these reasons have validity to them. However, the bottom line to all of this is that Jews follow in the footsteps of our father Avraham and are constantly mobile and on the move.

Again like our father Avraham, Jews have had a profound influence on all areas of the world where they have lived. Avraham, a lonely, single, unique individual, single-handedly changed the course of human civilization. The prophet Yeshayahu described Avraham as being one of a kind. Well, that description fits all of Israel as well. A small, persecuted, unique people, Jews have contributed to all facets of human civilization in a grossly disproportionate manner.

This is in fulfillment of God's promise to Avraham in this week's parsha that "through you all of the families of the world will be blessed." Perhaps it is the very wanderings and restlessness of Jews that has contributed to this unnatural outpouring of talent and contribution to all of human society. A sedentary people rarely look for new adventures or inventions. It is usually very self-satisfied with what it already has. Immigrant-built nations like the United States and Israel have pushed the

envelope of technology and creativity forward more than the sedate and established powers of the Old World.

The common wisdom in life is "If it is not broken, then why fix it?" The Jewish people, always striving for perfection and utopian achievement, constantly view the world and society as still somehow broken and therefore in need of fixing. If we no longer wander geographically now that we are home in Israel, we still wander in our souls and minds in search of greater perfection and spirituality. We cannot help but to do so. It is in the genes that our father Avraham transmitted to us.

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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