

DUALITY OF EMOTION

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The mood of this almost final portion of the Torah is one of seeming contradictions - sadness on one hand and soaring optimism on the other hand. Moshe's sadness is evident in his words and his disappointment in not being able to enter the Land of Israel. But his optimism is abundantly evident in his statements regarding the eventual survival and triumph of the Jewish people and the reconciliation of God and Israel at the end of days.

This duality of emotion has continued within the Jewish people throughout our many years of existence. There is more than enough sadness to go around in the story of the Jews in history. Yet Jews on the whole have always been upbeat, even sanguine about their future. This attitude is reflected in the summation of the rabbis regarding the end of the old year and the coming of the new year. "Let the curses of the old year end with the passing of that year; let the blessings of the new year commence with the advent of this new year."

Even though we know that the new year will not be free of problems and even difficulties, nevertheless we are confident that we will benefit from its attendant blessings. Hard realism always tempered with optimism seems to be the Jewish formula towards life and circumstances. The mood of the parsha seems to be not a temporary one but rather it is a guideline for all later generations of Jews. Sadness is not in order but seriousness is. The struggle to prosper begins with a spirit of inner optimism.

Moshe's demise is not only his personal tragedy. It is a tremendous blow to the Jewish people, though as is usual in human affairs, it is not appreciated until after it happens. Yet the Torah views Moshe's death as being a source of comfort and strength for the Jewish people. It teaches us that even without the physical Moshe being present and active in our midst, the spiritual Moshe - the Torah of Sinai that he transmitted to Israel - will be sufficient in itself to be the guarantee of Jewish survival and success.

No human being, even Moshe is indispensable. Yet no human being is replaceable either. Moshe teaches this to the Jewish people on his final day on earth. He cautions them to heed the Torah and its commandments. It is their only guarantee of success and longevity in this world.

Life will be different without the presence of Moshe. Yehoshua is not Moshe. Yet all of this is immaterial in the long run of the Jewish story. For the people will remain and the Torah, which is eternal, will always be there to guide and inspire Israel.

Moshe, who sees all of the events that will befall the Jewish people until the end of days, is serene and peaceful at the end of his life. He is comforted by the knowledge that the God of Israel will see the people through the times of sadness and not allow them to despair of their future and fate. His optimism overcomes his sadness and out of this is born the nature of Israel in all of its generations.

Shabbat 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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