

CONCENTRATE!

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The key word in this week's parsha is naturally the word that begins the parsha - re'eih. The word means "see!" in the imperative, immediate sense. It is plain to understand that Moshe somehow needs the Jewish people to understand that it is insufficient to understand intellectually or even believe emotionally in God's role in our lives. One must be able to see it clearly, to identify and quantify it in daily living.

The Talmud in one of its magnificent metaphors describes the scene in Heaven where the righteous encircle God, so to speak, and point at the Divine Presence itself, seeing it, so to speak, in clarity and acuity. At the miracle of the splitting of the Red Sea, the Jews also pointed their finger at the Divine Presence that was saving them from Pharaoh's hordes and stated: "This is my God." There are times in one's individual existence and certainly in Jewish historical experience that God can be "seen," so to speak, in our world. But in order to see one has to look and one has to focus.

It is insufficient merely to peek or glance. For true sight demands a degree of concentration, of appreciation of detail, of recognizing depth, color and shape. And that is where the idea of ritual and commandments takes center stage in Jewish life and worldview. The commandments of the Torah are meant to be our corrective lens in order to "see" things properly. Some people have better physical eyesight than others. The same can be said for the important aspect of spiritual eyesight as well.

There are people who suffer from not being able to see things from afar. They are so locked into seeing the trees that they are almost unaware of the forest that those trees constitute. Knowing the minutiae of the commandments is important, necessary and praiseworthy. But seeing the underlying values and principles of Judaism is also important, necessary and praiseworthy. There are people who feel that they are far-sighted but who trip over the objects that are immediately in front of them.

By ignoring observance of the commandments and possessing only "Jewish values" the likelihood of sin is greatly increased. God told Kayin that "at the open door [as one only steps out of one's home] sin crouches in wait" to ensnare us. Thus in order to be able to "see" things correctly and clearly in Jewish life one cannot be near-sighted nor far-sighted. One has to have balanced and near perfect vision. In a world where such good eyesight is rare there are many physical and medical procedures that advertise the restoration of perfect sight.

Moshe himself, so to speak, advertises such a product in today's parsha reading. It is the

understanding of the necessary studying and observance of the commandments combined with a deeper appreciation of true Jewish values that are the corrective lenses that can help restore our balanced and focused vision of Jewish and general life. In truth, Judaism subscribes to the aphorism that seeing is believing.

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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