

TOUGH LOVE

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The final words of Moshe to the Jewish people in this week's Torah reading are those of blessings and prophetic hope. Moshe, who certainly had much cause to remember the Jewish people in a contrary mood, is most magnanimous in taking leave of them. After his long oration that constitutes most of chumash Dvarim, which contains many harsh words and stinging criticisms of the behavior, past and future, of the Jewish people, Moshe reverts and blesses his people with the love of a father and teacher.

In his blessings, Moshe recognizes the different talents and personalities of each of the tribes. Each one has a specific role to fulfill in Jewish life. Judaism is not a one-size-fits-all religion. Rather, it recognizes differences of attitudes and personalities and attempts to unite these different people into a whole nation under the direction and observance of Torah precepts and values. Moshe's words are a clear example of this goal and methodology.

But the outstanding feature of Moshe's blessings is that they are suffused with his love for Israel. Love many times is an uncontrollable emotion, perhaps even more so at the end of one's life. V'Zot Habracha is therefore a love song of Moshe to the Jewish people. All of the preceding words of Moshe in chumash Dvarim are examples of what today is called "tough love." V'zot Habracha is an example of emotional, passionate, almost unreasoning love. That is what makes V'Zot Habracha the most fitting Torah reading for Simchat Torah, for it is Moshe's love for Israel that fuels Israel's love for Torah.

V'Zot Habracha should really be the saddest of all of the parshiyot of the Torah since it records Moshe's passing from life in this world. But the Jewish people revel in joy on the day when this parsha is read. For Moshe has stood the test of time. The whole world studies his words and deals with the value system that he taught Israel. And his blessings to his people remain as vital and encouraging today as on the day that they were first given.

Judaism measures people and ideas in a long-run view. Those that still are pertinent and necessary after many generations are seen as being truly successful in their life's mission. Thus the celebration of Moshe's Torah that the holiday of Simchat Torah represents and commemorates is what validates Moshe's life work. The Torah states that Moshe's "eye did not dim nor did his vitality disappear."

The Netziv in his commentary to Torah states that this was true about Moshe even after his death. It is true about him as long as Jews study Torah and are faithful to Moshe's vision and directives.

Moshe remains the supreme teacher of the Jewish people, our mentor and guide in all matters. If we see him in this light then we can rejoice in celebrating his Torah and his life achievement. And therefore Moshe's blessings are not only fulfilled regarding Israel but they rebound regarding Moshe himself.

Shabat shalom.

Chag sameach.

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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