

VICTORIES AND TRIUMPHS

by Rabbi Berel Wein

Victories and triumphs inevitably are followed by letdowns, frustrations and sometimes even disappointments. The high point of the story of the Exodus of the Jewish people from Egypt is recorded in this week's parsha with the eternal song of Moshe and Israel at the Reed Sea.

The exultation of Israel at seeing its hated oppressors destroyed at its feet knew no bounds. It is as though its wildest dreams of success and achievement were now fulfilled and realized. However, almost immediately the people of Israel, faced with the problems of the real world which seemingly never disappear no matter how great the previous euphoria may have been, turn sullen and rebellious.

Food, water, shelter all are lacking. And even when Moshe provides for them the necessary miracles that are required for minimum sustenance in the desert of Sinai, their mood of foreboding and pessimism is not easily dispelled.

And this mood is heightened by the sudden unprovoked attack of Amalek against the people of Israel. Again, Amalek is defeated by Yehoshua and Moshe but the mere fact that such an attack occurred so soon after the events of the Exodus has a disheartening effect upon the people.

The moment of absolute physical triumph is not to be repeated again in the story of Israel in the Sinai desert. But physically speaking, the experience of the desert of Sinai will hardly be a thrilling one for Israel. So it is with all human and national victories. Once the euphoria settles down, the problems and frustrations begin.

In relating the miracle of the sweetening of the waters at Marah, the Torah teaches us that "there did the Lord place before them laws and justice and there did He test them." There are many interpretations in Midrash, Talmud and rabbinic literature as to what those "laws and justice" actually were.

But it is certainly correct to say that the main "laws and justice" that were taught to Israel at Marah was that the problems of life go on even after miraculous victories and great achievements. Victories bring high if sometimes unrealistic expectations. Measured realistic response and realistic assessments are necessary in order to harvest the fruits of such victories.

The less grandiose our expectations are the less painful our disappointments become. The generation of the descendants of those who left Egypt, who were now accustomed to the grueling

challenges of the desert and who had not shared in the euphoria of the destruction of the Egyptian oppressor, were much better equipped to deal with the realities entailed in conquering the Land of Israel and establishing Jewish sovereignty and society there.

Our times have also witnessed great and unforeseen accomplishments here in Israel. But because of that very success, we are often given over to disappointment and frustration at the current unsolved problems that still face us. We would all wish to sing a great song of exultation and triumph over our enemies and problems.

With God's help we may yet be able to do so. Yet until then we would be wise to attempt to deal with our realities and problems in a moderate, practical and wise fashion.

Shabat shalom.

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