

CONSOLATION

by Rabbi Berel Wein

This week's parsha begins the seven week period of consolation and condolence that bridges the time space between Tisha b'Av and Rosh Hashana. In order to properly prepare for the oncoming year and its challenges one must first be comforted by the vision of better times ahead and the belief in one's ability to somehow overcome those omnipresent challenges. Healing occurs when one believes that there is yet a future ahead.

All medical doctors agree that hope and optimism on the part of the patient are great aids in the process of recovering from illness or injury. If we would not have time and vision to recover from the sadness before the advent of the High Holy Days then those most meaningful days of our year would clearly be diminished measurably in our minds and hearts.

Throughout the book of Dvarim, Moshe's pain at not being allowed to enter the Land of Israel is manifestably present. But Moshe is strengthened and even somewhat consoled by his vision of his student and loyal disciple, Yehoushua, succeeding him in the leadership of Israel, and in his firm conviction that the people of Israel will successfully conquer and settle the Land of Israel.

Comfort and consolation come in varying forms. What comforts one individual may not be effective for another individual. But again, all agree that such consolation is a necessary ingredient in the restoration and rehabilitation of those who were so depressed and saddened. There is no substitute for consolation and healing. Otherwise it is impossible to continue in life.

The parsha also deals with the Ten Commandments of Sinai. I have often thought that the repetition of this subject, which seemed to be adequately covered once in the Book of Shemot, teaches us an important lesson, which again may serve to be a source of consolation to us.

The "first" Ten Commandments was given at the beginning of the Jewish sojourn in the desert of Sinai. There was no Golden calf, no complaints about the manna, no spies, no Korach, no plagues of snakes - nothing had yet occurred to diminish the light and aura of Sinai. Well, in such a perfect society there is no reason not to recognize the values and laws of the Ten Commandments as being valid and even necessary in practice.

But now Moshe stands forty years later, after all of the disappointments and rebellions, the backsliding and the pettiness, the death of an entire generation, and reassures us in the "second" Ten Commandments that all of those values and rules have not changed at all. The lesson of the immutability of Torah and Halacha is thereby engraved upon the Jewish heart and mind.

Many things have happened to the Jewish people since Moshe's speech before his death. Many have mistakenly thought that all of the changes in technology, economies, world orders, etc. have made the Ten Commandments, Torah and Halacha somehow less relevant.

Moshe stands and speaks to us to remind us that the basic anchor of Jewish life and in fact of all world civilization lies in those words of Sinai. Everything has changed but human beings have not changed. And neither then has God's instructions for us.

Shabat shalom.

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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