

THE STRENGTH OF TRUTH

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The book of Bereshith is completed in this week's Torah reading. The story of the emergence of first one person and then an entire family as being the spearhead of monotheistic belief in a pagan world is an exciting but difficult one.

At so many turns in the events described in the Torah the idea of monotheism and the few who championed its cause could have died at birth. Yet somehow the idea and the people advancing it survived and grew until, over the ages, it became the defining idea in the major religions of civilization.

Truth somehow survived, unable to be crushed by the great and mighty forces always aligned against it. Our patriarch Yaakov tells the Pharaoh that "my years are relatively few and very difficult ones." But Yaakov is not only speaking for himself in this statement. He speaks for the Jewish people as a whole in all of its generations and ages. And he also speaks for all those in the world who still value truth over falseness, accuracy over populism, reality over current political correctness and imposed intellectual conformity.

The Midrash taught us that the seal of God, so to speak, is truth. The book of Bereshith begins with truth inscribed in its opening words, the last letter of these first three words of the Torah spelling the Hebrew word *emet* - truth. Falseness requires publicity, media, excuses and greater falsehoods to cover and justify the original untruth.

In Yiddish there is a phrase that says: "The best lie is the truth." Truth needs no follow-up. It stands on its own for all eternity.

Jefferson in the American Declaration of Independence stated that truths are self-evident. If we merely contemplate, even on a superficial level, the events as described in the book of Bereshith, we must stand back in awe to realize the power of truth and the tenacity of individuals who pursue it and live by it.

How easy and understandable it would have been for any of our patriarchs and matriarchs to have become disappointed and disillusioned by the events of their lives. Yet their ultimate faith, that truth will survive and triumph, dominates the entire narrative of this first book of the Torah. Bereshith sets the pattern for everything that will follow.

All of the Torah is a search for and vindication of truth. God's revelation at Sinai was an aid in this

quest for truth, otherwise so many people could not have arrived at that moment of truth all together. But falseness, human nature, greed and apathy continually whittle away at the idea of truth as the centerpiece of human endeavor.

The rabbis taught us that the acts of the patriarchs, which are the main story of the book of Bereshith, guide us for all later generations. This Shabat we will all rise and say "chazak" - be strong - at the conclusion of the Torah reading. The never ending pursuit of truth requires strength of purpose and will. May we really have the strength of purpose and belief to "be strong."

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