

FIND SERENITY

by Rabbi Berel Wein

Our father Yaakov lives in a very violent and dangerous world. Escaping from Lavan and his treacheries, he falls into a wrestling match with an angel and an actual encounter with Eisav, who apparently is determined to kill him. Extricating himself from these difficulties, bruised, wounded and slightly poorer materially for the events, Yaakov then suffers the tragedy of his daughter Dina being kidnapped and assaulted and the resultant war that his sons, led by Shimon and Levi, conduct against the leaders and citizens of Shechem.

Yaakov is appalled by the violence perpetrated by his sons but is apparently powerless to limit it. Even on his deathbed he will reprimand Shimon and Levi for their violent nature and behavior. This parsha therefore turns into a litany of tragedies and untoward events that befall Yaakov. I have always felt that when Yaakov told the Pharaoh that "my years have been few and bad" he was referring to this week's parsha and its events.

It certainly seems that any assessment of Yaakov's life, based on the events of this week's parsha, must certainly be a bleak one, full of shade with very little light shining through. Yet in the assessment of Jewish history and rabbinic tradition, Yaakov's life is seen as a triumph and success. He is the one who takes a family and builds it into a nation. He takes thirteen disparate children, each one with a distinct personality and differing goals and welds them into the people of Israel. He imbues them with the belief of monotheism, good purpose and probative behavior, in spite of their living in a world of paganism and dissolute behavior.

Yaakov is strengthened in his belief by the promises made to him by God many years earlier in his life, before he embarked on his fateful journey to Aram. He never questioned the validity of God's support of him, of his eventual salvation and survival, no matter how difficult the circumstances. In this he is the paradigm of all future Jewish existence that mimics his life and circumstances.

Jewish life and events can be characterized as always being one of "out of the fire into the frying pan." There never seems to be a letup, a respite from the challenges and dangers that constantly arise. Yet we Jews are constantly aware of God's promise that He will never completely forsake us and that within us is the ability of being an eternal and constantly renewed people.

Being a loyal and Torah abiding Jew can create within each of us a sense of serenity and harmony. However, as a nation and people, such a pleasant passage through the waters of human history is unlikely. It is natural for us to wish that this would somehow be otherwise. But the events of the life

of Yaakov stare us in the face. They chart our course in life as well. Faith in God and the will to persevere under all circumstances define our goals and hopes in this difficult world in which we live. For, after all, we are all the children of Yaakov.

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