

ISRAEL: OUR DESTINY

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The troubles, disappointments and disasters that visit the Jewish people on their trek through the Sinai desert begin in this week's parsha. Moshe announces that "we are traveling now to our ultimate destination - the Land of Israel."

But deep down in their hearts the people are not really that anxious to go there. They have in their minds and hearts two options, either to remain in the desert and live a life of supernatural miracles and there become the dor deah - the generation of exclusive intellect and Torah knowledge, or to return somehow to Egypt with all that that radical move would entail, physically and spiritually.

The Torah will soon detail for us that neither of these two options are satisfactory either. They will complain about the manna that falls from heaven daily and the seeming lack of variety in their meals. They don't like the water supply which is never guaranteed to them.

They remember the good food that they supposedly had in Egypt but according to Midrash, only a small minority actually wishes to return to Egypt on a permanent basis. They will press forward with Moshe to reach the promised Land of Israel, but they will do so reluctantly and halfheartedly.

And, this will lead inexorably to further rebellion, tragedy and the death of an entire generation - notwithstanding its being a dor deah - in the desert of Sinai. This makes this week's parsha a very sad and depressing one, for we already know the end of the story. We can already see that this generation has doomed itself to desolation and destruction.

Coming to the Land of Israel and its Jewish state, whether as a tourist and most certainly when someone immigrates, requires commitment and enthusiasm. There are many who came to Israel over the past one hundred years by default, but the country has truly been served and built by those who came with a sense of mission, purpose, happiness and expectation.

Moshe's clarion call, "that we are traveling to the place" of our destiny, echoes throughout the Jewish ages. Not all such calls are heard and even fewer are followed. Nevertheless the call has resonated within the Jewish people for all of its history. It is that call that appears in today's parsha and again it is that call that Moshe proclaimed millennia ago that was and is the guiding motive for the existence of the State of Israel today.

Just as then in the desert, there are options for Jews today present in our world. The many "Egypt" of the world beckon with all of their seeming allure but also with great underlying faults and

dangers. And there are those who wish to continue to live in a desert that demands nothing from them and contemplate themselves somehow as being a dor deah.

History has always arisen and smitten these options from the Jewish future. The long trek begun by Moshe and Israel in this week's parsha continues. We hope that we are witnessing, at last, its final successful conclusion.

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