

# SETTING REALISTIC GOALS

*by Rabbi Berel Wein*

This week's parsha, as do the next few parshiyot of the Torah as well, combines in its text exalted hopes and blessed situations as well as dire predictions and warnings of wretched events that will somehow all occur to the Jewish people. There are wonderful blessings and predictions of happiness and stability and unlimited success in the parsha. But there are also almost unspeakably dire predictions of how close the Jewish people will come to annihilation and disappearance in the future.

It is as though, so to speak, on the surface of the text, the Torah cannot make up its mind regarding the Jewish future and destiny. And it must also be noted that the Torah makes little provision in its statements for an "ordinary" existence. It always seems to be an "all or nothing" situation for the Jewish people - great moments of triumph and/or desperate times of persecution, discrimination and potential destruction.

Part of the main unfulfilled hope of secular Zionism was to make the Jewish people "normal" - to avoid the extreme swings of Jewish life and history. But it is obvious that the State of Israel, the crowning achievement of Zionism, has not succeeded in making us "normal."

We are not Paraguay or Australia. In the short space of sixty-two years of Israel's as an independent sovereign nation - only a blink of an eye in terms of history - it and the Jewish world has experienced soaring moments of success and miraculous accomplishments as well as terrible times of tension, pressures, fear and loss. Apparently this pattern is destined to continue and it has truly been the hallmark of Jewish life over the past century of our existence.

As the Torah indicates, the end of the pendulum we will be on is partially dependent upon us - on our behavior and spiritual thoughts, plans and acts. Just as the events of Jewish life always appear to us as being somewhat extreme, so our goals and behavior are also judged in the extreme, so to speak.

We always have to aim high for ourselves - very high - when it comes to matters of personal development, spiritual attainment and Torah observance. The status quo is an unacceptable state of being in the matter of spirit and tradition. A business that does not grow at least incrementally will surely sink. The same is true for human beings in their spiritual growth.

This is essentially the message of Elul and the High Holy days now upon us - the message of how to attain blessings. Even though spirituality and faith exist in extremes, as I have pointed out above, all

extremism must be tempered by the recognition of one's true self and capabilities. Reasonable and reachable goals should always be our true agenda.

Religious life is not a sprint race. It is a long marathon requiring pace, consistency, training and commitment. There will be a day of greatness and tranquility for the Jewish people. So we are told by our prophets who have never misled us. But we have to do our part to make that promise a reality.

Shabat shalom.  
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