

# MAN WAS CREATED FOR TOIL

*by Rabbi Berel Wein*

So our father Yaakov wishes to spend the rest of his days in peace and serenity, enjoying his grandchildren and pursuing his spiritual growth. Is that not what all of us wish for ourselves as we grow older and we feel that the major battles of life are already behind us? Yet, as Rashi points out, based on difficult tests of Yaakov in his life - Lavan, Eisav, Shechem, etc, Midrash, the Lord, so to speak, is dissatisfied with this plan of Yaakov's.

The great drama of Yosef and his brothers yet lies before him. This situation can be seen as one of external enemies and Yaakov is steeled to the task of opposing them for such is the way of the world - certainly of the Jewish world. But Yosef and his brothers is a test of internal rivalries and enmities, a situation at the end of Yaakov's life that threatens to destroy all that he achieved in his lifetime.

Yaakov feels that he is entitled to rest on his laurels and savor his accomplishments. He has somehow overcome all of the wiles and aggressions of his external enemies and sees only peace and serenity ahead. He is therefore unprepared for the internal struggle within his own beloved family that, in the words of Rashi and Midrash, "now leaps upon him."

His very longing for the peace and serenity that has eluded him his entire lifetime is his very undoing because he does not choose to see the festering enmities and jealousies that are brewing within his own house and family.

Wishes and desires, illusions as to how things should be, often blind us to the realities of how things really are and we are therefore blindsided by events that could have been foreseen had we not indulged so mightily in our fantasies.

I think that is what Rashi and the Midrash had in mind when they quoted God, so to speak, that the righteous should not expect serenity in this world. The Talmud even goes so far to say that even in the World to Come the righteous are not at tranquil rest but rather are bidden "to go from strength to strength."

We all need times of leisure and rest in order to build up a reservoir of physical and mental strength to deal with the problems and vicissitudes of life. Judaism does not know of the concept or value of "retirement" as it is formulated in modern parlance. It certainly allows for changes in circumstances, occupations and interests. But "man was created for toil." One must always be busy with productive matters - Torah study, good deeds, self-education, etc. - even till the end of life.

And one must always be vigilant and realistic about the problems of life - externally caused or internally present in one's own household - in order to make certain that gains made in one's earlier years will not be squandered by illusions and wishful thinking later in life. This is true nationally as well as personally. We all desire peace and serenity but only realism and vigilance can protect us from our own errors and self-made problems.

Shabat shalom. Happy Chanuka

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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](http://www.rabbiwein.com)