

ACCEPTANCE

by Rabbi Berel Wein

This week's parsha points out to us the inscrutable face, so to speak, of God and the difficulties embedded in our relationship with the infinite. The parsha opens with the famous commandment and ritual of the red heifer, which according to Jewish tradition defies all human rational understanding. It is the ultimate "I told you to do it, so do it and don't ask any questions!" instruction in the Torah.

The ritual defiles the pure and purifies the defiled. It is technical and detailed in the utmost and requires an unblemished animal of red color without black hairs appearing on its body. The Mishna in tractate Parah labors to ferret out all of the details inherent in this ritual but the basic mystery that underlies all discussion of the matter can never be satisfactorily addressed.

We are brought face to face with the fact that finite humans cannot fathom the infinite Creator and truly understand His motives and reasons for the commandments of the Torah. The Torah warned us of this fact when it said: "... humans cannot see Me and live."

Our great teacher Moshe was rebuffed in his attempt to understand more than what mortals could achieve in understanding God's conduct, so to speak, in matters of this world. That is the great lesson of the red heifer - the clear divide between human rational understanding and the Divine will. It humbles us to think that there are things that we cannot understand, puzzles that we cannot solve, knots that we cannot unravel. But those are the facts of human existence.

In this week's parsha we are witness to another event that is not easily understood. Moshe is barred from entry into the Land of Israel. Though the Torah gives us the reason that he smote the rock instead of speaking to it at Mei Merivah, the commentators to the Torah searched for more substantial reasons to justify the punishment of this great person for what apparently is a relatively minor offense.

At the end of all of the explanations we are again faced with the reality that we just cannot understand the ways of the infinite Creator as He deals with humans. The men of the Enlightenment, both Jews and non-Jews, blinded by their own arrogance, rejected the Torah and eventually God since they could not rationally understand everything about it. Their motto was and is: "If I don't understand it then it does not exist or have relevance for me."

But all of us, even the most knowledgeable and intelligent among us, know that there are mysteries in life that are beyond our ability to find a solution. Moshe's fate is certainly one of those mysteries.

And again, that is the reason that the Torah tells us of this incident so that we, like Moshe, realize that we cannot peer beyond the veil of Heaven.

The entire issue of the righteous suffering and the evildoers prospering gnaws at our faith and equilibrium. Yet the realization that we will never really understand these matters should serve as a solace and comfort for us. We must accept our finite state as we deal with the infinite Torah.

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