

MOSHE'S PERSONAL ASSESSMENT

by Rabbi Berel Wein

This week's parsha, Dvarim, is in reality a continuation of last week's parsha of Maasei. This is because it also forms a narrative review of events that occurred to the Jewish people during their forty years of life in the desert of Sinai.

Just as last week's parsha reviewed for us the stations where the Jews encamped during those forty years, so does this week's parsha review for us key events that befell the Jewish people during those decades of supernatural life and wanderings.

But there is a fundamental difference between these two narrative views of past events. The review in parshat Maasei is essentially presented in an objective, even detached manner. It is full of facts, names and places but it is basically an unemotional and factual report regarding a long forty year journey of the people of Israel.

This week's parsha contains a review of facts and events by Moshe. It is a personal and at times emotional and painful review of those years in the desert. Moshe bares his heart and soul and shares his frustrations and emotions with us.

Parshat Dvarim, in fact all of Chumash Dvarim is a record of how Moshe personally saw things and it records his impressions and feelings regarding the events of the desert of Sinai. In many ways it is one of the most personal and emotional books in the entire canon of the Bible. It is not only Moshe's words that are on display before us in the parsha. It is his viewpoint and assessment of the Jewish people and its relationship to God that is reflected clearly and passionately in his words.

Personal opinion and passion are key to the service of God according to Jewish tradition. Judaism does not condone "holy rollers" in its midst but the entire idea of the necessity of kavanah/intense intent in prayer and the performance of mitzvot speaks to a personal view of the relationship to God and Torah and a necessary passion and viewpoint.

Everyone is different and therefore everyone's view of events also is different one from another. Thus, everyone's service of God and Torah, albeit within the parameters of established and recognized halacha, must contain nuances of personal difference.

The importance of the Torah emphasizing to us that the book of Dvarim is Moshe's personal record of events is to stress to us this recognition of individuality that exists within every human being and how that affects one's view of everything, spiritual and physical, in life.

Moshe's recorded personal anguish at witnessing the sins of Israel in the desert is a greater indictment of those sins than just the description and listing of the sins themselves would have been. Life is personal, never objective. Moshe's personal view of the events of the desert makes these events real and tangible to us.

We are also involved in the narrative because of our empathy with Moshe. This is what makes the entire book of Dvarim so real and important to us. People speak to people. Moshe speaks to us.

Shabat shalom,

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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