

A HOLY MINDSET

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The direct message of these two parshiyot is clear: In order to live a meaningful life that contains within it the necessary elements of spiritual sanctity one must limit one's desires and physical behavior patterns. The Torah does not award accolades for great intellectual or social achievements if they are unfortunately accompanied by uninhibited physical dissolute behavior. It is not only the message that counts - it is just as much the messenger as well.

There are many laws, mitzvot and strictures that are the stuff of these two Torah parshiyot. The Talmud warns us against the dangers of false preaching and hypocrisy. All faiths and political systems are strewn with the remains of noble ideas preached by ignoble people and dissolute leaders. The Torah is therefore prescient in demanding that Jews must first dedicate themselves to the goals of righteousness and probity before it instructs them in the details of Jewish living and normative behavior.

The Torah is wary of those who immerse themselves in purifying waters while still retaining in their hands, hearts and minds the defiling creature itself. The Torah is keen to apply this concept to its entire worldview. Justice is to be pursued but only through just means. The Jewish nation is not only to be an obedient and observant nation - it is charged with being a holy nation. Without the goal of personal holiness being present in Jewish life, observance of the Torah laws oftentimes will be ineffective, a matter of rote behavior and not of spiritual uplift and improvement.

This required dedication to holiness in life is achieved in the small, every day occurrences in human life. It defines how we speak and what we say and hear. It prevents us from taking advantages of others in commerce and social relationships. It fights against our overwhelming ego and our narcissistic self. Holiness opens up to us the broad panorama of life and allows us to view the forest and not just the trees.

It demands inspiration and makes us feel unfulfilled if we achieve only knowledge. It creates a perspective of eternity and of future generations and lifts us out of the mundane world of the ever-changing present. It infuses our behavior with a sense of cosmic importance and eternal value so that everything in life, in fact living itself, is of spiritual importance and value.

It impresses upon us the realization that we are not only to be judged by our current peers but by past and future generations as well. Even achrei mot - after one's departure from this world - kedoshim tihiyu - shall later generations be able to judge one as being holy, dedicated and noble.

This is the mindset that the Torah demands from us as we proceed to fulfill all of the laws and mitzvot that are detailed for us in these two parshiyot. For in the absence of such a dedication and mindset, the perfunctory observance of those laws and mitzvot cannot have the necessary effect upon our souls and lives.

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