SHABAT OUTWEIGHS THE NINTH DAY OF AV

by Rabbi Berel Wein

This year the Shabat on which parsha of Dvarim is being read publicly in the synagogue is itself the ninth day of Av. There are differing customs as to how to treat this Shabat and whether any restrictions whatsoever should pertain to our usual Shabat pleasures and enjoyment. Even though the prevailing custom is to treat this Shabat in the usual and normal fashion, the parsha of Dvarim all by itself is sufficient warning to sober our attitudes.

For the review that Moshe provides for us of the events of the forty-year stay in the desert of Sinai by the Jewish people, contains within it the harbingers of all later disasters and tragedies that would befall the people of Israel. Rebellion against Moshe's authority and God's directions, internal disputes, pettiness and ingratitude, attempts to renounce previous commitments, disloyalty to the Land of Israel, all are on display in Moshe's oration as recorded in Dvarim.

Moshe's tone in describing these failings of the Jewish society of his day is one of grave disappointment, yet there is little indication in his words of despair or undue foreboding about the future of the people. Moshe does not mention God's offer, so to speak, to build the Jewish people through him solely while eliminating the rest of Israel from the future.

He does not portray himself as being indispensable for Jewish survival and success. In spite of all of the harsh facts of Jewish failures that Moshe outlines for us, he expresses no doubts that the people will enter the Land of Israel and that God will continue to be with them even in their darkest hours.

In a deeper sense that is what the lesson of this Shabat teaches us. Shabat outweighs the ninth day of Av. That day will be overcome in Jewish history and national life. Jews will yet again inhabit the Land of Israel. Eventually our Temple will somehow be rebuilt. Thus the ninth day of Av is essentially temporary - a long temporary but still only temporary.

Shabat is permanent and eternal. Permanence always overcomes the temporary and eternity always triumphs over fleeting faddishness. In pushing off the observance of the fast day from Shabat to the next day, the Halacha reaffirmed the centrality and permanence of Shabat as a supreme value in Jewish life.

The rabbis declared that the ninth day of Av will yet be a holiday on the Jewish calendar. But that calendar is firmly rooted and based upon Shabat. The Jewish world faces great challenges, disappointments and dangers in our time just as it did in the time of Moshe. Many of them are caused by the absence of Shabat in the lives and hearts of so many Jews.

Moshe's sense of ultimate optimism regarding the fate of his beloved people is based upon the resilience of Jews to learn from their sins and errors and to adopt a Torah lifestyle, with Shabat as its centerpiece. May we live to see Shabat completely vanquish the ninth day of Av.

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