

ALL WILL BE SET RIGHT

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The parsha ties together the observance of the Torah commandments, especially the warnings against paganism and idolatry, with the earthly blessings of longevity and prosperity. Over the ages this has caused great philosophic debate and discussion, for this cause and effect relationship is not always apparent in the national or personal lives of the Jewish people.

Many commentators hasten to add that these biblical promises refer to biblical times when the Divine Spirit was palpably present amongst the Jewish community and the spirit of prophecy was also present and prevalent in the Land of Israel. This means that it was applicable to First Temple times only, for in Second Temple times the spirit of prophecy was absent in the Jewish commonwealth.

Perhaps this is an insight as to why the rabbis attributed the destruction of the First Temple primarily to idolatry - a fulfillment of the cause and effect system of justice as outlined in this week's parsha - while the demise of the Second Temple was attributed to social dispute and baseless hatred, an issue never specifically mentioned in this week's Torah presentation.

It appears that different equations, moral gauges and causes affected the Jewish commonwealth's spiritual status during Second Temple times than were present in First Temple times when prophecy and Divine Spirit were current and abundantly visible. In any event, it is apparent that the direct cause and effect relationship between observance of God's commandments and blessings and prosperity and disobedience causing punishment and disaster has not always been evident in the annals of Jewish history and life, especially in our long years of exile and persecution.

The very fact that the Torah in this week's parsha makes this cause and effect relationship so patently clear, and in fact repeats it a number of times, raises the age old problem of why the righteous suffer and the wicked are rewarded, in this world at least. This basic faith dilemma has its biblical origins in the book of Iyov where the problem is raised, debated and thoroughly discussed, but basically left unanswered.

Over the long Jewish exile with its attendant difficulties and pogroms this gnawing problem of faith has always accompanied us in every generation and circumstance. The events of the Holocaust, almost unimaginable in its numbers and horror, has certainly been a test of faith for many Jews, even for those who themselves were spared that actual experience. Yet the faith of Israel is that somehow in the unfathomable system of God's justice, all will be set right.

In reality, this is the main message of this week's parsha. It informs us that our actions have consequences and that there is a guiding hand to Jewish and world history and events that will eventually reveal itself. So our task remains, as it always was - to fulfill God's commandments and to behave morally and justly. The whole system of God's justice, opaque as it may seem to us to be, is simply to remind us of our potential and greatness, of the importance of our behavior in the grand scheme of things, and to reinforce our sense of destiny as individuals and as a people.

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