

"GRIND IT OUT"

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The explicit descriptions of the disasters, personal and national, that make up a large portion of this week's parsha raise certain issues. Why do Moshe and the Torah paint such a harsh and unforgiving picture of the Jewish future before the people? And if we expect people to glory in their Jewishness, is this the way to sell the product, so to speak? We all support the concept of truth in advertising but isn't this over and above the necessary requirement?

The fact that the description of much of Jewish history and its calamitous events related in this parsha is completely accurate, prophecy fulfilled to the nth degree, only compounds the difficulties mentioned above. But in truth, there is clear reason for these descriptions of the difficulties inherent in being Jewish to be made apparent.

We read in this book of Devarim that God poses the stark choices before the Jewish people - life or death, uniqueness or conformity, holiness or mendacity. Life is made up of choices and most of them are difficult and fateful. Sugar coating the consequences of life's choices hardly makes for wisdom. Worse still, it erodes any true belief or sense of commitment in the choice that actually is made.

Without the necessary commitment, the choice itself over time becomes meaningless. The Torah tells us that being a Jew requires courage, commitment, a great sense of vision and eternity and deep self-worth. So the Torah must spell out the down side, so to speak, of the choice in being Jewish. The folk saying always was: "It is difficult to be a Jew." But, in the long run it is even more difficult and painful, eventually, for a Jew not to be a Jew in practice, thought and commitment.

According to Jewish tradition and Halacha, a potential convert to Judaism is warned by the rabbinic court of the dangers of becoming Jewish. He or she is told that Jews are a small minority, persecuted by many and reviled by others. But the potential convert also sees the vision and grandeur of Judaism, the inheritance of our father Avraham and our mother Sarah and of the sheltering wings of the God of Israel that guarantee our survival and influence. The potential convert is then asked to choose whether he or she is willing to truly commit to the project.

Without that commitment the entire conversion process is a sham and spiritually meaningless. And the commitment is not really valid if the downside, so to speak, of being Jewish is not explained and detailed. Judaism is not for fair-weather friends or soldiers on parade. The new phrase in the sporting world is that the players have to "grind it out." Well, that is what being Jewish means - to

grind it out, daily, for an entire lifetime.

The positive can only outweigh the negative if the negative is known and defined. Those who look for an easy faith, a religion that demands nothing, who commit to empty phrases but are never willing to pay the price of practice, adherence and discipline will not pass the test of time and survival that being Jewish has always required.

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