

THE GREATEST WONDER OF ALL

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The title of this week's parsha says everything that needs to be said about the Jewish story, nation and people. After forty years of war, rebellion, strife, great accomplishment, Divine revelation, miracles, defeats, Torah study, and personal and national tragedies and heartbreak, Moshe remarks, almost incredulously, that *atem nitzavim* - you are erect and still standing proud and mighty.

Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban), in his famous thirteenth century debate with the apostate Jew Pablo Christiani, told King James of Aragon that the greatest proof of Jewish uniqueness is that the Jews have survived as a people and a faith over all of these many centuries in spite of its being "a sole and small lamb amongst seventy wolves."

I had a neighbor of mine in the United States who was a Holocaust survivor. She spoke to me often and told me that she wished to return to her hometown in Poland to revisit her house and the surroundings of her shattered youth. She finally did so and when she returned I inquired of her as to how the trip and visit played out. She told me that she was able to find her house, still intact and even familiar to her. Her former Polish neighbor, a girl that she knew and played with when they were both children, now inhabited the house. She said that the Polish woman immediately recognized her even though more than four decades had passed since they last saw each other. The Polish neighbor exclaimed: "Bella, you are still alive!?"

Much of the world then wanted to be rid of the "Jewish problem" once and for all. There are many malevolent nations and people around today that still want to solve the "Jewish problem." But somehow Bella is still alive.

All of the predictions regarding the long story of the Jewish people that are recorded for us here in the book of Dvarim have come to pass in all of their grandeur and in all of their horror. Tradition has it that Rabbi Eliyahu Kramer, the Gaon of Vilna, stated that all of Jewish history, past, present and future is recorded for us in this book of Dvarim.

Certainly the Holocaust fits eerily and almost perfectly in the descriptions of Jewish pain and suffering recorded in last week's parsha of Ki Tavo. The search for God, for meaning in one's life, for transcendent values and ideals that will somehow give justification to one's efforts and life's toils, is really the hallmark of our world today, especially the Western world.

This angst and soul-searching, the chaos and loneliness of human existence, the inscrutability of God's guiding hand, so to speak, in human affairs, are all poignantly recorded for us in this week's

parsha. Humans search for certainty in a very uncertain world. Many Jews, buffeted by ignorance, amnesia and false ideals, still somehow seek their identity and heritage and the road to spiritual fulfillment. We are a generation that wrestles with our own angels, the good ones and the better ones. But we are all still present here to do so. And that is the greatest wonder of all.

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