

# TORAH IS INTEGRITY

*by Rabbi Berel Wein*

The book of Vayikra concludes with a description of Jewish destiny and a foretelling of dire events that that will befall the Jewish people. The clear message in this parsha, and as repeated later in the book of Dvarim and in the words of the prophets of Israel over the next millennium, is that the Jewish people and its behavior and society are held to a high standard of loyalty and piety.

The consequences of backsliding from these Torah standards are major and painful. God's relationship with the Jewish people is serious business and the unbreakable covenant between the Jewish people and the Creator is eternally present and binding.

Ramban and others ascribe the events portrayed in Vayikra to the times and destruction of the First Temple. The descriptions in Dvarim - which are longer and more intense - refer to the times and destruction of the Second Temple and its millennia long aftermath in the exile of the Jewish people.

Also present and implicit in the difficult message communicated in this parsha, and in Dvarim as well, is the ultimate promise of God to preserve us and not completely forsake us. All of Jewish history, even until our very day, has lived up to these forecasts and events as recorded for us in the parsha.

The Ramban counts as one of the proofs of Torah's divinity the fact that words written and taught so many centuries earlier than the actual event would eventually take place are accurate, detailed and cogent.

The book of Vayikra is replete with laws, ritual commandments, sacrificial service, purity and impurity and the technical details of being a Jew. It has very little narrative to it and it is the most scholarly difficult of all of the books of the Torah. If the Torah's objective was to induce people to a so-called user friendly faith, then this is not the book that should have been presented.

But the Torah is integrity itself. Therefore, in Jewish tradition the law demands that those who apply for conversion to Judaism should initially be discouraged and not enticed into thinking that somehow becoming Jewish guarantees paradise in this world or even the next. The rewards of Judaism are great but there are costs, responsibilities and sacrifices that accompany those rewards.

And, an awareness of those costs is necessary for true Jewish commitment. Jewish history is not to be seen as a random occurrence of events. It is rather part of the actual results of the covenant entered into between Israel and the Creator at Sinai. Everything that was foretold in such detail and

exactness in the Torah, as to what would befall Israel in its long journey through history and civilization, has in effect occurred and happened.

It is at once sobering to see how this has unfolded in Jewish life. But it is also encouraging, for it guarantees the fulfillment of the blessings of the Torah upon Israel as formulated in this week's parsha. The covenant in all of its parts reigns forever.

Shabat shalom

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