

SEEING THE HAND OF GOD

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The miracles performed by God through Moshe and Aharon, the apex of which is reached in this week's parsha by the splitting of Yam Suf and the final deliverance of the Jewish people from the oppression of Pharaoh and the Egyptians. We are then further witness to the miracle of the manna falling six times a week to sustain the Jewish people in the Sinai desert and the ongoing miracle of water supplied to millions in that arid climate.

With all this, the Jewish people are trained and accustomed to a completely miraculous supernatural existence and way of life. They are, to a certain extent, lulled into believing that this is always the way things will be. Their passive role in all of these events is somehow the norm that will always be expected of them.

In the name of God, Moshe told them at the Yam Suf that God would fight their battle with Pharaoh and that they might remain quiet and passive in the ensuing struggle. It is this experience of constant visible and recognizable Divine intervention on their behalf, during the forty year span of residing in the desert of Sinai, that makes preparation for entry into the Land of Israel so difficult, as we will read later in the Torah.

A dependent society that is accustomed only to supernatural intervention will find it difficult to suddenly change and become self-reliant and independent. From this vantage point of practical living, the rabbis of the Talmud constantly reminded us not to rely solely on miracles.

Through the long and bitter centuries of Jewish exile amongst the Christian and Moslem nations of the world, the Jewish people somehow survived - barely so, but survive we did - in nothing short of a miraculous fashion. Powerless and defenseless, despised, hated and ridiculed, Jews nevertheless persevered, convinced that Divine intervention would somehow guarantee their continuance - individually and nationally.

Because of this enforced condition of passivity, Jews waited for supernatural deliverance from their plight. The hand of God, so to speak, acting almost invisibly and through seemingly natural forces and occurrences in the last century, changed these dynamics of Jewish life. Passivity now gave way to activity and great human effort and sacrifice.

God's miracles were always present with us but much of the Jewish nation girded its loins to struggle on its own for independence, self-reliance and national realization. The fact that these efforts proved successful is itself nothing short of miraculous. Viewing the Jewish world at the

beginning of the twentieth century, who could have imagined what that Jewish world would look like a scant one hundred years later.

There are those who refuse to see the hand of God, so to speak, in these remarkable events. And there are those who refuse to see that positive human effort and initiative were necessary to bring this wonder about. But the truth is that both factors were and are present in the events of Jewish life today and will continue to be so in our immediate future as well.

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