

THE COVENANT AND REMEMBRANCE

by Rabbi Berel Wein

These final parshiyot of the Torah always coincide with the approaching end of the old year and the beginning of the new year. This is in line with the contents of these parshiyot which contain the review of Moshe's career as the leader of Israel and of his life and its achievements. So too does the end of the year demand of us a review, if not of our entire past life at least a review and accounting of our actions during the past year.

Moshe's review is really the main contents of the book of Dvarim itself. Though it recalls historical and national events, there is no doubt that Moshe himself is the central figure of the book. He records for us his personal feelings and candidly admits as to his disappointments and frustrations. But he never departs from his central mission of reminding the people of Israel of the unbreakable covenant that has been formed between them and their Creator.

That covenant is renewed again in this week's parsha. It is no exaggeration to assert that it is constantly renewed and at the year's end we are reminded of this automatic renewal. That is the essential essence of remembrance that characterizes this special season of the year. For remembrance brings forth judgment and accountability and leads to an eventual renewal of spirit and faith.

Moshe reminds the people that the future is also contained in their remembrance and observance of the covenant. All the generations past, present and future are bound together in this covenant of accountability. And through this process, the mortal Moshe gains immortality, as all of us can acquire this immortality through our loyalty to the covenant.

Moshe at the end of his life has in no way lost his acumen, strength or vision. He leaves this world in perfect health and free of bodily ailments and restraints. Yet he tells us in this week's parsha that he "can no longer go forth and return." For humans exist by the will of God and when that will decrees the end of life then the human being will cease to function on this earth. Who can claim greater merits in this world than Moshe had? Yet the hand of human mortality struck him down.

Part of the great lesson of Torah is that life continues without us necessarily being present. Moshe sees far into the distant future but knows that he will not be present to see those events actually unfold. He harkens back to the covenant of remembrance as being the instrument of his continuing presence throughout all of Jewish history. As long as the covenant is remembered and observed, Moshe is still present with Israel.

It is this covenant that defines us as a people and even as individuals. Our relationship to it is under constant heavenly review. It should be self-evident that for our part we should enthusiastically renew our allegiance to it at this fateful part of our life and year.

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