

OUR DIFFICULTIES

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The Torah completes the book of Vayikra in a very stark and disturbing manner. It describes in great detail the negative face of Jewish uniqueness and its special role in human affairs. The Jewish nation is blessed beyond all others but it is also held to a very rigorous standard. Though it is difficult for us ordinary mortals to justify logically in our minds the events of a 1900 year exile of torment and persecution, somehow in Heaven everything that has occurred to us is justified and necessary. It is certainly not pleasant to have to recall the difficulties of our history. Perhaps that is why Jewish history remains a relatively ignored subject in so many Jewish schools today. But the inclusion of the prediction of what would happen to the Jewish people, as detailed in this week's parsha, remains very instructive.

It is not only the content of that prediction that is so awesome - it is the infinite accuracy of the events that would befall Israel that is so wondrous and incredulous. Ramban declared, almost a millennia ago, that if anyone could predict and accurately describe events that would occur hundreds of years hence, that person would be recognized as a prophet of enormous talent and greatness.

What shall we say nine hundred years after Ramban's detailed prophecy of Moshe's, regarding the fate and events that would befall Israel during its historic journey through human civilization. One has to be particularly prejudiced or obtusely ignorant not to be awestruck by the words that appear in this week's parsha.

We are a different and difficult people. That description of us shines forth from almost every parsha of the Torah. We have a very different and difficult history to relate ourselves to. That is really the reason that the parsha is so detailed and insistent in describing the bleak events of the Jewish future. Most people like to blend in and not advertise their differences and particularities. We all crave recognition, but not all of us want to be treated as celebrities with all of the attendant psychological and emotional baggage that such status invariably brings with it.

The Torah does not allow us to forget for an instant that we are the celebrities on the world stage of events - for good or for better. Moshe emphasizes that truth in his description of the difficulties that Israel will have to encounter and overcome in its future existence. The accuracy of Moshe's words is ironically vaguely comforting for it confirms to us in a most vivid fashion the uniqueness of the Jewish people and the truth of its faith and Torah.

It is most fitting that at the end of the parsha the congregation rises to strengthen itself and others in the core faiths and observances of Torah and Jewish life. To know and believe in our story is to come closer to our Creator and His Torah. Just as the words of the parsha have been completely fulfilled, so too will the blessings of the Torah be recorded for us and promised to us, and be actualized in our lives and days.

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