

RENEW THE COVENANT

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The Torah reading for this week is a fitting conclusion to the year that is about to depart from us. At the end of his long life and after decades of service to the Jewish people, Moshe renews the covenant between God and the people of Israel. He makes clear to the new generation of Jews standing before him, a generation that was not part of the experience of Egypt, nor present at the moment of revelation at Sinai, that the original covenant between God and the Jewish people remains in force. And he states that it will continue to be so throughout the Jewish future.

The covenant cannot be repealed, altered or ignored. It is the basis for all Jewish life and it is the leitmotif of all of Jewish history. Moshe admits that there will be events and occurrences in the story of the Jewish people that will be cruel, inexplicable and irrational. As he phrases it, there will be many "hidden, mysterious" events that the Jewish people will have to experience.

He offers no easy explanation to those events except to say that somehow they are related to the attempts of sections of the Jewish people to annul the covenant and its resultant consequences. The "hidden" part of the covenant belongs to God. The revealed part of the covenant - the obligations of Torah commandments and Jewish life - belong to the Jewish people and are relevant in all of their generations and locales. The Jewish people and the Jewish State will always be judged through its relationship to this eternal covenant.

The existence of the covenant has caused us much pain and angst throughout the centuries. The other nations of the world harbor resentment against us because of the uniqueness of our relationship to the Creator of all, as exemplified by this covenant. Many Jewish thinkers have attributed anti-Semitism, in all of its virulent and even more benign forms, to a jealousy over the existence of God's covenant with the Jewish people.

The covenant has, nevertheless, remained the rock of Jewish identity over all of the ages. Just the knowledge of its existence has created a stubborn Jewish people - with a resolve to maintain its faith and lifestyle though a very small minority in a world of many billions. The Torah itself is the very essence of this covenant. It details its terms and conditions, and its study helps formulate the life that Jews are expected to live.

That is why the Torah demands that we study and are aware of this covenant morning and night, traveling, at home, in all times and places. There were, and unfortunately still are, those amongst us who wish to discard the covenant and its obligations and merely to blend in with the surrounding

general society.

The Lord, so to speak, has warned us many times that He would not allow this to occur. All of Jewish history teaches us regarding the strength and eternity of this great covenant. In the year that is now dawning upon us, we should all resolutely renew the covenant in our hearts, minds and actions, in order to be blessed with a year of health, success and serenity.

Shabbat shalom Ktiva v'chatima tova

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