

# TOIL IN TORAH

*by Rabbi Berel Wein*

p>The book of Vayikra concludes this week with the Torah reading of Bechukotai. It presents rather stark choices to us. Blessings and disasters are described and it is apparently our behavior, actions and lifestyles - all of which are within our range of life choices - that will determine our individual fate and national future. It appears to be an all or nothing scenario with the Torah providing us with little or no wiggle room. And since the stakes are so high and the consequences of failure are so dire, the challenge before us is doubly daunting and even frightening.

Yet, the Torah also assures us that the Jewish people as an entity, if not all individual Jews, will somehow survive and yet prosper in the end and inherit all the blessings described in this week's Torah reading. The Jewish people will experience many defeats in the long history of civilization, in its relationship to the non-Jewish world. But none of these defeats will be of a permanent and eternal nature.

Somehow the seeming victor and conqueror will itself become vanquished while the Jewish people will continue to show resilience and fortitude. After several millennia of history and all types of human and national events, it is difficult to view the Jewish story in any other light. So, the true message that shines forth from this week's Torah reading is that of the eternal strength of the Jewish people. Not only have they survived all of the disasters outlined in this Torah reading but they have the uncanny ability to eventually triumph and succeed, no matter how great the odds against them are.

Rashi emphasizes the requirement to "toil in Torah" as being the interpretation of the first verse in Bechukotai. Toiling in Torah has many subtleties associated with it, aside from its simple meaning of hard and consistent study. In its broadest sense one can say that the Jew that toils, in no matter what field he or she is toiling, must always do so by associating one's endeavors with Torah values and behavior.

The commandment is not merely restricted to the Talmudic scholars of Israel but is a commandment to be observed by every Jew, no matter what line of work or profession one is engaged in. The life and survival of the Jew and of the Jewish people as a whole is dependent on the presence of Torah values, lifestyle and behavior in all aspects of human society. Toil, in the spiritual sense, is not restricted only to the study hall or to the scholar.

The rabbis have taught us, based on the biblical verse, that humans are born to toil; fortunate is the

person whose toil is in Torah. Again, in its narrow interpretation this refers to the scholar and student of Torah. But, also again, in its broadest sense it refers to a person who is able to experience and appreciate Torah life and values, no matter his work or profession. A person that feels that the Torah accompanies him everywhere will always be reckoned among those that toil in, with and for the Torah.

Shabbat shalom

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