

LET THAT BE A LESSON!

by Rabbi Berel Wein

There are many things in life that appear to be simple and logical to one person and yet remain beyond the understanding of one's companion, friend or acquaintance. To our great teacher Moshe, someone who is blessed with the immense powers of prophecy and who is spiritually able to communicate with Heaven almost at will, the mission of life and of the Jewish people is simple and visible to all. It is to obey and treasure the laws and values that are represented in the Torah as elucidated and explained by Moshe to the entire congregation of Israel.

All these rules and values are, in his opinion, self-evident and visible to all. The choices that are presented to the people are stark and clear. They are between life and death, eternity and passing trends. It is all so simple to the prophetic eyes of Moshe. Part of his frustration with the Jewish people is their inability to see things as he sees them and to understand the challenges of life and history, as he perceives them.

Oftentimes geniuses are not necessarily the best of teachers because they cannot understand why the students are so dense and do not understand what is so patently obvious. The Torah reading this week, and the entire book of D'varim as spoken and taught by Moshe, is an expression of this frustration of the great and the holy, who see the obvious but are unable to make others see it easily as well.

The Jewish people, who heard the words of Moshe over three millennia ago in the desert of Sinai, had to appreciate and believe his message because of their faith in him and in the experiences of Godly revelation that they had witnessed and in which they had participated. They had to believe in the future that had not yet arrived and had to make their choices based on faith in that future alone.

In our time, well over 3000 years later, we need not rely solely on the prophetic advice and the words of Moshe, but rather we have the benefit of thousands of years of experience and history. We can look back and correctly assess the choices made by the Jewish people over all these millennia of its existence. We can judge which decisions were wise and which were foolish, which led to survival and eternity and which led to destruction.

Because of this ability to read and know our history, one would think that we could choose wisely based on facts and experiences that are self-evident and obvious to serious students of our past. Yet, the Jewish people have a propensity to make bad choices and to ignore the clear lessons of our history.

Therefore, the statement of Moshe that we should see clearly even today the choices that face us and the decisions that we performe are bound to make, our past should teach us in which direction these decisions should go and what pitfalls we should avoid.

Shabbat Shalom

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