

BOUNCE BACK

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The opening sections of the Torah with which we are currently engaged in studying, deal with one of the central problems of human existence and that is the ability to cope with tragedy, disappointment and frustration. The adjustment of human beings to being driven out of the Garden of Eden is really the entire story of human civilization and of its very bleak moments.

This week we read of the difficulty of Noach and his descendants to cope with the tragedy that they witnessed when the great flood destroyed the Mesopotamian human civilization. There were different reactions to what they had witnessed and experienced. Noach himself forsook much of his spiritual greatness and accomplishment to become a person of the earth, traumatized by the experiences of the past.

The English expression for this type of attitude is that one attempts to drown his sorrows away. As is recorded for us in this week's Torah reading, this attitude and behavior leads to disaster and complete family dysfunction. The opportunity for resilience, and family and national rebuilding is lost and squandered.

There is a strong inclination within each of us to be overwhelmed by challenging circumstances and tragedies. It is not easy to put one's life back together after witnessing an event such as the great flood. Yet, this is exactly what the rabbis pointed out to us as the major difference between Noach and Abraham. Tested ten times, Abraham's resilience never wanes, and he continues to look forward towards accomplishment.

This week's Torah reading indicates another reaction to tragedy with rebellion and an abandonment of principles, beliefs and faith. The generations after the flood, in their anger and despondency over the punishment that Heaven meted out to human kind, rebelled against God and morality by building of the tower of Babel. They knew of God and they knew of the flood, but they rebelled as a sign of their displeasure with what human kind suffered at the hands of Heaven.

It is historically accurate to say that after great wars and tragedies, decades of decadence and immorality suffuse human society. It is this rebellion against what experience should have taught them that leads to further disaster. It is a different symptom of the same malady, the lack of resilience which often engulfs entire societies and, as history has proven, eventually leads to their demise and disappearance.

This description of human behavior as outlined above, is of enormous instruction to us in our time.

We are still the generation reminiscent of the sword raised to destroy the Jewish people and endanger the existence of the Jewish national state. Only by our resilience and tenacity in following the lead of our father Abraham are we guaranteed to have overcome the challenges that face us.

Shabbat shalom

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