

Remember the days of old, consider the years of each generation, ask your father and he will declare to you, your elders and they will tell you." (32:7)

In previous generations, the "*Torah* world" did not tend to study Jewish history for various reasons. Quite possibly the foremost reason has been the imperative to concentrate totally upon *Torah* study. This is in accordance with the dictum presented in *Brachos 8b*, "*From the time the Beis Hamikdash was destroyed Hashem only has in His world the four cubits of Halacha.*" The essence of His world revolves primarily around the dissemination of *Torah*. We will also focus upon another reason which is suggested by the *Chazon Ish*. Jewish history can only be recorded by someone who has the Divine Inspiration and the exceptional insight of a "*Navi*" (prophet). The ordinary man lacks the perception to understand the profundity behind the events of the past.

Rabbi Shimon Schwab Shlita clearly defines the boundaries of history. He explicitly distinguishes between history and mere storytelling. We are mandated by the *Torah* to "*remember the days of old, and to consider the years of each generation. Go ask your father and he shall tell you, and your elders and they shall speak about it*". Our forefathers heeded this Divine imperative in Biblical times, producing the history recorded in our *Tanach*. This procedure was discontinued because history must provide a realistic reflection of reality. By its inherent nature, history must convey the bad as well as the good, the ugly as well as the beautiful. History cannot spare the righteous their weaknesses and cannot disregard the virtue of the wicked. It must paint a lucid and unbiased picture of the truth. Only a *Navi*, mandated by his Divine calling, has the ability to report history impartially as it actually occurred.

Bearing this notion in mind, the only practical purpose of preserving a realistic historical picture is satisfying one's curiosity. It is more productive to focus our teaching upon the positive memories of our people, their unshakable faith, and their devotion to the Almighty and His *Torah*. For example, when Noach became intoxicated, his two sons Shem and Yefes took a blanket and walked into the tent backwards in order to cover their father's nakedness. *Horav Schwab* cites their desire to remember their father always as a *tzaddik*, in spite of his momentary weakness, as the reason for their ingenious response to an embarrassing situation.

Certainly, when we clearly examine our history we will believe we have discovered the inadequacies of our greatest spiritual heroes. Rather than seeking ways to demean our leadership, it would serve us better to reflect upon their virtue, to be inspired by their example, and learn from

their experiences. Instead of faithfully recording the history of our forbearers, we should place a veil over their human failings so that we always glorify that which is great and beautiful. A history book which is not authored by one who is replete in *yiras shomayim* definitely can not be a source of inspiration. It is often necessary to exchange realism for inspiration, for lack of understanding of the true essence of a historical event can be spiritually detrimental. This is the *Torah's* mandate. "*Turn to your elders for guidance to illuminate the various historical events*".

By reflecting upon the lessons of the past, we will develop the tools to understand the present and to prepare for the future. As the *Malbim* notes, *Am Yisrael* relives its history through its festivals. On *Pesach* we celebrate the Exodus from Egyptian bondage. Our deliverance from the wicked Haman is remembered on *Purim*, while *Chanukah* recalls our liberation from the Greeks. *Tisha B'Av* has become the focal point for reflecting upon our national tragedies.

We can summarize this concept with the following story: Napoleon Bonaparte once entered a *shul* on *Tisha B'Av*. He was shocked to see all of the congregants sitting on the floor and reciting the *Kinos* in its very sad tone. He immediately sought an explanation for this strange sight. His aide explained that the Jews were mourning the destruction of their Temple. "*When did this tragedy occur?*" he asked. The response was, "*seventeen hundred years ago!*" Napoleon was so impressed by the behavior of the Jews that he exclaimed, "*A nation that does not forget its destruction, even after such a long time will one day enjoy a very bright future.*" Every event that transpires conveys Hashem's message to us. We must reflect upon every occurrence and seek the hidden message, as the *Baal Shem Tov* says: Forgetfulness leads to exile. Remembrance is the secret of redemption.