

Covenants

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

This week's very short reading from the Torah tackles the question of what it means to be Jewish. We use the word Brit, covenant to describe this connection but there are several Brits in the Torah. There is the covenant with Avraham over the Land. Then there is the covenant of circumcision. Later comes the covenant at Sinai to the "constitution." These three are very physical and practical. They deal with the material.

In the Torah this week, we deal with the more mystical and national covenants. There is the personal commitment to God, the religious. And there is a commitment to the people. These depend much more on how we feel personally. They are subjective. We have personal and the national.

This final Biblical Covenant was the one we read this week, on the Plains of Moab before Moses dies. In it, Moses says that the covenant was made with all future generations (just as Circumcision is performed without asking permission). He also said that anyone is free to walk away. And yet he declares that if anyone does chose to walk away, then he or she forfeits the Divine protection as well as the benefits of the Jewish way of life. It seems strange to offer a choice and then warn you that if you make the wrong choice you are doomed.

We need both. Every group needs to have its common ideas, morality and culture. But every individual needs to make a personal commitment too.

The Torah says that we have the freedom to accept or reject. Accepting means Jewish continuity, survival and a meaningful life. Rejection means abandoning the faith and the people. That is the choice we all have and each one of us resolves it in his or her own way and degree. We can be part of it. Or walk away from it. Do we really want to be like everyone else or are we prepared for being different?