

VENGEANCE VS. CONCILIATIONS

by Rabbi Berel Wein

Joseph's first dream comes to realization in this week's parsha. His brothers come down to Egypt and prostrate themselves before him. The dream of the sheaves of the brothers bowing to Joseph's sheaf is at last fulfilled. But strangely, Joseph does not feel himself satisfied. It is human nature that the expectation of the realization of events is always greater and more exciting than the fulfillment of the realization itself. No vacation or event that we plan for ourselves can live up to our imagination and expectation regarding it. And Joseph is further burdened by the enormity of what has transpired. He has the brothers, who sold him as a slave and were deaf to his shouts and tears and pleas for mercy, in his hands. But what is he to do with them now? And what of his beloved father, the old man, broken in grief, whom he has not seen or communicated with for twenty-two years? Are the brothers telling him the truth about his father's condition? And what about Benjamin, his younger brother? Is he like the other brothers in attitude and belief or is he different? Does he mourn for his lost brother Joseph or is he sanguine about his fate, as his ten older brothers seem to be? All of these questions plague Joseph at the moment of his seemingly great triumph when his brothers are in his power and abjectly bow before him. His triumph therefore seems somewhat hollow to him at that moment.

Joseph comes to the great realization that his ultimate triumph over his brothers lies not in punishing them - though he will certainly cause them great anguish on their road of repentance - but rather to eventually conciliate them. Vengeance is momentarily more satisfying than is conciliation. But in the long run, vengeance lies not in human hands. And it will only continue to widen the rift within Jacob's family. Joseph's greatness and heroism lies in the fact that he chose the road of healing and conciliation rather than that of punishment and vengeance. Joseph, out of all of the avot and the brothers is called tzadik - righteous and holy. This is certainly due to his behavior in escaping from the clutches of Potiphar's wife. But Joseph's righteousness and piety is exhibited not only in that incident. It is apparent in his treatment of his brothers after his dream of their bowing down to him has been realized. He will protect his brothers from the Pharaoh and the ravages of Egyptian society. He will support them physically, financially and spiritually for the rest of his life. He still weeps at the gulf of suspicion that yet exists between him and the brothers. Conciliation is a long and difficult road to traverse. But Joseph realizes that it is the only hope for his family's continuity and purpose.

In the rough and tumble of Jewish and Israeli politics, organizational life and competitive societal forces, the temptation for excluding others and even punishing them is very strong. But the lesson of

Joseph should remain instructional to all of us today as well. A Jewish society that can cast away old hatreds and feuds and truly attempt to be conciliatory one to another will certainly be stronger and holier in purpose and action. In this respect, we should all profit from and attempt to emulate Joseph's wisdom and course of behavior.

Shabat shalom.

Rabbi Berel Wein Text Copyright © 2004 by [Rabbi Berel Wein](#) and **[Torah.org](#)**