

A DREAMER MEETS REALITY

by Rabbi Berel Wein

There is a difference - to put it mildly - that is outlined clearly between Yosef and his brothers in this week's parsha. Yosef is the quintessential dreamer, his head in the stars and his youthful exuberance and certainty in the truthful outcome of his dreams becomes very irritating to his brothers.

Since his head is in the clouds in a world of Eisav and Shechem the brothers feel it to be the height of impracticality, if not even irresponsibility. to be a dreamer. The brothers have their feet firmly implanted on the ground, in the reality of the world in which they exist, with clear recognition of the inherent dangers and threats inherent.

Yosef feels the brothers have been unjust for rejecting his dreams immediately and they in turn are convinced that he and his dreaming constitute a veritable danger to the unity and survival of Yaakov's family. It is not only the contents of Yosef's dreams - that he will dominate the family - that disturb the brothers. It is the very fact that he is dreaming that raises their suspicions and fuels their enmity towards him.

In the struggle between Yosef and the brothers, the conflict is between the lofty and inspirational theory of Judaism and its sometime mundane practice of hope and actual reality - of what can be achieved even though it is not exactly what one dreamt of achieving. The conflict between Yosef and his brothers is never really ended. It is compromised by both sides recognizing the validity of the position of the other and living with that reality.

The Jewish people in its long and difficult history have somehow been able to combine the spirit and dreams of Yosef with the hardheaded realism of his brothers. Both traits are necessary for our survival and accomplishments, both as individuals and as a nation. Someone without dreams and ambition, who refuses to reach heavenward and conquer the stars, will never be a truly creative or original person.

But if this drive is not tempered by a realistic sense of the situation and the society that surrounds us, then all dreams are doomed to eventually disappoint. Yosef's dreams are realized only after he has been severely chastened by his brothers' enmity, slavery and imprisonment in Egypt. Even after he seemingly has them in his grasp, it is still a contest of wills.

Again, Yosef's dreams are finally realized but only after he has been subjected to many hard years of unpleasant reality. The brothers, realists to the end, are shocked to see that the dreamer has emerged triumphant.

The dreamer saves the world from famine while the realists end up being its customers. Thus the Torah teaches us that we need both dreamers and realists within our ranks. A nation built exclusively on dreams, without practical reality intruding, will find that reality rising to foil the realization of the dream.

A nation that ceases to dream of reaching greater heights will stagnate and not survive. So, both the brothers and Yosef are "right" in their pursuit of building a nation and of spiritual growth. We need a healthy dose of both values and views in our Jewish world today as well.

Shabat shalom.

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