

MAINTAINING FAMILY UNITY

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The long hoped for reunion of Yaakov and Yosef actually occurs in this week's parsha. The Torah records for us this poignant and emotional moment. Yet, it tells us that Yaakov remained apparently emotionless while Yosef wept. The rabbis of the Talmud compound the mysterious behavior of Yaakov by stating that Yaakov at that moment recited Shema. What does this mean?

Many commentators interpret this to mean that since in all of the years of Yaakov's separation from Yosef he was in a depressed mood, the Divine Spirit could not have rested upon him and he was therefore unable to communicate with Heaven - the understanding of Shema being that ability to communicate with Heaven. Now that he saw Yosef in front of his eyes, alive and well, his joy of the moment allowed that Holy Spirit to descend upon him once again and that is what meant by his reciting the Shema.

But this does not really explain why Yaakov was apparently emotionless at that moment. One can recite Shema with great fervor and intensity and still weep. In fact we find it strange that in the entire parsha Yaakov does not ask the brothers how Yosef ended up as the ruler of all Egypt and why did he so torture the brothers on their previous trips to Egypt. One would have thought that all of these questions would be uppermost in Yaakov's mind and therefore should have been posed on his lips as well. The Torah makes no mention of this. Why?

Well, I am not presumptuous enough to say that I have the answer to these questions regarding the behavior of our holy father Yaakov. However, there is an insight here that I do wish to share with you. Yaakov is well aware of the tensions that existed between Yosef and his brothers. He is also cognizant that his sons misled him when they showed him Yosef's bloody shirt. He is also aware of the dreams of Yosef for he himself harbored them as well over all of the long painful decades of separation from his beloved son.

And Yaakov, who was able to survive Lavan's schemes and machinations, is certainly not naïve. As he will say on his deathbed to Yosef, "I know, my son, I know." He meant that I know everything that has transpired in our family regarding you and your brothers. But Yaakov chooses not to mention it directly. He does not want to display undue emotion to Yosef or to his brothers. He contains his tears for his weeping will only rip open a scab on a wound that has to heal slowly and carefully.

The less said the better is his motto in this instance. Not every family secret need be publicly revealed nor every family dispute constantly rehashed. Yaakov says effectively, "I am aware of all

that has transpired between you and your brothers. I prefer to let the matter rest and not pursue it further." Reuniting the family is his prime goal.

Tears, emotional outbursts and reproaching them for their past errors, which the brothers themselves now recognize as being errors, will not realize his goal of building a united and strong family that will become the Jewish people. Many times, restraint and even silence are the best tools for family unity and tranquility.

Shabat shalom.

Rabbi Berel Wein

Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com