

TO LIVE IN HARMONY DURING PEACEFUL TIMES

by Rabbi Berel Wein

All is well that ends well is a popular and well known aphorism. Apparently that should be the case here in this week's parsha when Yosef and his family are at last reconciled after over twenty years of pain and estrangement. Yaakov comes down to Egypt to embrace his long lost beloved son and the Jewish people begin the long sojourn in Egypt with the first century of that sojourn being successful and benign.

However, as is the case with many a popular saying or belief, the aphorism stated above is not exactly accurate. The enmity, discord and bitterness of the dispute of decades between Yosef and his brothers is not easily forgotten. We will see in next week's parsha how the brothers still suspect Yosef of ill intentions towards them and how Yosef after the death of Yaakov subtly distances himself from them.

Wounds may heal but they always leave their marks and scars. And the competition between Yosef and Yehuda, which is the centerpiece of the first part of this week's parsha. This continues for millennia in Jewish history almost splitting the Jewish people as a whole and not just its kingdom into two warring factions.

So, even though the affair of Yosef and his brothers appears to end well and satisfactorily in the narrative of this week's parsha, the residue of suspicion, competitiveness and bitter memories remain. This is so very evident as the story continues and clouds any truly rosy assessment of the conclusion of this gripping family tale of ours.

Every human event has consequences that are much more long lasting and important than originally thought. Since we all live in a time range that is limited, far reaching results of our behavior are naturally hard to discern and appreciate. If the brothers of Yosef would have realized that their behavior towards him would, centuries later, lead to the breakup of the Jewish kingdom in the Land of Israel, perhaps they would have acted differently. And, perhaps Yosef himself might have acted differently towards his brothers as well.

It is not for naught that the rabbis taught us that the true wise man is the person who can realize the future consequences of present policies and behavior. This idea is also the basic underpinning of the rabbis' other comment that even the wise must be very cautious in their statements, to guard

against the unintended consequences that may result.

Many times consequences are exactly the opposite of what is originally desired. The rabbinic ban on Spinoza immortalized him, and the ban against Chasidut translated into the most popular Jewish religious movement in Eastern Europe.

Yosef and his brothers, like all of us, are powerless to undo the past. But, in realizing the fissure that the events of the past created in Jewish life, a special attempt at true reconciliation must be attempted. It would take the slavery of Egyptian exile and the redemption that followed to achieve this unity that was expressed at the moment of revelation at Sinai. Troubles unite us. We should learn to live together in harmony even in more trouble-free times.

Shabat shalom.

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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