

# THA PAST

*by Rabbi Berel Wein*

All of the people involved in the human drama described for us in this week's Torah reading are haunted by their past actions, behavior and attitudes. Pharaoh is disturbed by his dreams of an empire where the strong overwhelm the weak and suddenly this past dream turns into a nightmare of the weak devouring the strong. Pharaoh's butler thought that he had placed his past indiscretions behind him and could safely forget everything and everyone associated with his time in prison.

He is now forced to recall the young Jewish Yosef and once again bring back the entire sordid story to the attention of Pharaoh. Yosef rises to power and position and attempts to build a new life for himself far away from his homeland and his family.

And, lo and behold, there now appear before him his ten brothers with whom he disagreed vehemently years ago and were the agents in his being sold as a slave to Egyptian aristocracy. Suddenly his heavenly inspired dreams of long ago and the bitterness of his relationship with his ten brothers descend upon him once more. The brothers do not realize that they are standing before their brother Yosef. But they remember remorsefully the feud with him and their less than charitable behavior towards him and see their current danger in Egypt as somehow being Divine retribution for their callousness and lack of compassion towards a brother.

And back in the Land of Israel, the old father Yaakov is inconsolable over the disappearance of Yosef for he remains convinced that the old dreams of Yosef were true prophecy and thus somehow must yet remain valid and will be fulfilled.

The past never disappears, not in personal life nor in national and international affairs. All attempts to "move on" so to speak are always hampered by the baggage of the past that we are always forced to carry with us. Our generation of Jews is still haunted by the Holocaust.

The nations of Europe are still possessed of their ancient and almost inbred disdain and hatred of Jews and Judaism. They cannot expunge that demon from their very being. The Left is still haunted by the false vision and unattainable economic and social theories of nineteenth century Marxism with all of its malevolent byproducts. The past compresses upon our world and gives us little room for serenity and comfort. But there is a positive past that also exists in the Jewish world - the past of Sinai and Jerusalem, of Torah and chosiness, of thousands of years of traditional Jewish life and unwavering moral values.

That past is also slowly returning to many Jews who had forgotten about it or who never really knew

much about it. The past is therefore a mighty weapon in shaping our present and certainly our future. It is the past that saves Yosef and his brothers and restores Yaakov to be the father of the nation of Israel. The past is not always pleasant to recall. But it is always necessary and instructive. As we dream on of a glorious future we must remember that our past always accompanies us on life's journey.

Shabat shalom

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