

PRECONCEIVED NOTIONS

by Rabbi Berel Wein

Yehuda finally confronts Yosef and in his frustration at the way events have developed, he speaks to the ruler of Egypt with direct and even harsh words. But what is most amazing in the whole Torah narrative regarding the brothers and Yosef is that not for a moment do the brothers realize that the Egyptian ruler, who has so unfairly tormented them, is in fact Yosef, their brother.

The brothers ask themselves all of the right questions - "Why does he ask about our father and our family? Does he think that we wish to marry into his family? What does Heaven want from us that we are so severely tested and tried? How could Binyamin steal the cup - is he the same type of 'holy' thief that was his mother? How come Shimon looks so fit after his imprisonment? Who put the money into our food sacks? How did the Egyptian ruler know our ages and our proper seating arrangement at his table? But they never arrive at the right answer.

Somehow they cannot connect the dots, obvious as the connection now appears to be. There are many explanations offered by the commentators throughout the ages as to the blindness of the brothers to the matter. But all of the reasons advanced trace themselves back to one basic explanation and idea.

And that idea is that the preconceived notion that the brothers had of Yosef's insufferable behavior and wild dreams that so affected and frightened them did not allow them to recognize Yosef and they could not imagine that somehow Heaven voted in his favor and that they were completely wrong in their assessment of him and the future of the house of Yaakov.

Many times in the Jewish world and in its history, Jews have tended to fall into this trap of preconceived notions and ideas. The brothers of Yosef were great and holy personages. They are the founders of our people and are our very ancestors. Yet, their error of preconceptions and fixed ideas blinded them to recognizing their brother and to the unexpected, even unwanted on their part, fulfillment of his dreams.

It is dangerous, both physically and spiritually to assert that events in the Jewish world will or never will happen. The Divine plan and its execution in real time is always hidden from us. "For your thoughts are not My thoughts nor are your paths (of their execution) necessarily My paths, says the Lord."

Since the State of Israel did not come into being according to anyone's preconceived program, many cannot bring themselves to deal with its reality even today, sixty-five years later. There are so

many Jews that do not look like us and perhaps do not behave like us - therefore there are many who cannot recognize them as the true brothers to us that they are. Letting go of preconceptions, even those that we deemed to be holy and once infallible, is a necessary step in the process of national redemption and brotherly reconciliation. Necessary is not always easy.

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