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RABBI WEIN'S WEEKLY BLOG

Our father Avraham had to deal mainly with his son Yitzchak in order to continue the tradition of monotheism and humanity that he had begun. His other children were sent away from his home so that in effect all of his efforts were concentrated on his son Yitzchak. Yitzchak himself had two sons, Yaakov and Eisav. He attempted to divide his attention and share his legacy with both of them.

The sons were of greatly different temperament and potential and Yaakov found it impossible to reconcile the two. Both would now be forced to go their separate ways in life and in history. It was recognized early on that the two personalities would never mesh and therefore only through Yaakov would the legacy of Avraham and Yitzchak be fulfilled.

Now we see that Yaakov had 12 sons. Every father and mother knows that every child is different and the wise parent recognizes the subtleties of those differences and incorporates them into the parenting process. Now just imagine having to deal with 12 different sons each one of whom had a different personality, different talents and different perspectives on life and the family.

Yaakov himself in his final words to his

sons at the end of this book describes each of them in a different way, emphasizing their characteristics, talents and abilities. So, it shall not be surprising that sibling frictions abounded in his family. What is surprising is that apparently all of those frictions were channeled into the contest between Yosef and his 10 brothers.

That Yosef was the lightning rod for all of the differences in the family is clear from the description of the Torah in this week's reading. The Torah tells us that they could not speak peacefully one with another. The commentators over the centuries have provided various reasons for the behavior of both Yaakov and Yosef as to why this family discord occurred. However it is clear from the biblical narrative itself that Yosef was so special, both in his own mind and in the eyes of his father, and that the brothers felt threatened by the family situation that he created.

The task of reconciling 12 different personalities, all of them strong and powerful, would now occupy the rest of the narrative of the Torah. The ability to live in peace and harmony, given the fact that there are always varied personalities, ideas and viewpoints has remained the main challenge in Jewish life today. It would take a tortured and completely unpredictable path to reunite Yosef and his brothers and allow the people of Israel to be formed positively.

At the end of the story the brothers are reconciled with Yosef but their different personalities still do not meld. Reconciliation in human terms is always a process and there is no magic bullet or instant formula that can accomplish it. It takes time and patience and changing circumstances and eventually the intervention of Heaven itself to bring about true family and national reconciliation.

Hopefully we are in the midst of such a process, with all of its ups and downs, in our current struggles in the Jewish world. The story of Yosef and his brothers and their eventual reconciliation should provide us with hope and faith for our future as well.🕍