

PARSHAS VAYISHLACH

by Rabbi Dr. Meir Tamari

The whole story of the rape of Dinah and everything connected with it is to teach us in all our generations, the persistent dangers of sexual harassment and misadventure and therefore the resultant ever-present necessity for careful and diligent application of the laws and ideal of modesty for the daughters of Israel.

Our sages taught that Shechem is a place that was destined for misadventure and tragedy; it was there that Dinah was raped and there the tribes sinned with the sale of Yosef. Shechem was the name of a whole province in Canaan ruled by Hamor, that stretched from Hevron north and west, [not to be confused with present day Shechem-Nablus]. Coming from Haran westward, towards Bet El and Hevron where Yitschak was, "Yaakov came Shalem [not as commonly explained, to the city Shechem in peace or complete, but in accordance with the literal meaning of the verse], that city [in the province] of Shechem" (Ber. 33: 18); Shalem, a town of that area controlled by Hamor. Therefore it was not more than a day or two from Hevron that the brothers later had to travel with their flocks, when the sale of Yosef took place [whereas present day Shechem is far more distant]. First he grazed his flocks on rented fields but in order to avoid enmity, later bought a field there. In connection with that purchase, the sons of Hamor, including Shechem, came to the tents of Yaakov and that is how Shechem saw Dinah and fell in love with her. She in her turn went out to see the girls of Shalem, as is customary amongst all girls of her age, to see and discuss jewelry, fashions etc. Far be it from us to ascribe her going out to any flippant, immoral or other cause as do Rashi and others, linking it as they do to a character shortcoming on the part of her pious mother Leah. Leah was the epitome of modesty, so much so that Yaakov had not recognized her on the wedding night till morning.

Remember, that she remained at home while Rachel had been the one to go out in public to look after the sheep of Lavan. In addition to the mother's piety, the text stresses that she was the daughter of Yaakov, while her brothers would have punished her had anyone have thought that she was in any way responsible; equal punishment for the adulteress as for the adulterer [Shechem in our case]. [It is intriguing to see how in 19th century Germany, Rabbi S. R. Hirsch too explained Dinah's going out in a similar fashion; he too sought the logical and textual interpretations that highlight the moral, religious and national traits of Torah]. "And he [Shechem] took her, and lay with her and violated her" (Ber. 34:2). He abused her in 3 ways: he took her away by force and not by consent thus withholding from her the joys of public marriage, he raped her and caused her pain, and denied her the natural pleasure associated with sexual relationships. In addition, her brothers

were angered " because he had done an evil deed in Israel, to lay with the daughter of Yaakov; which thing ought not to be done"(7). This verse tells us that they were angered by the tumah incurred by uncircumcised men entering the Abrahamic family, whether through rape or by marriage, by the insult to a person of Yaakov's stature, and by the act of rape that even according to the laws of 'âbnei noach', which are lenient in the limits of sexual immorality, nevertheless prohibits forced relationships [therefore corruption more than illegal].

The brothers were grieved and filled with indignation. Grief is like a breath that one takes in, keeping it within oneself and bemoaning the bad things that happen to one, whereas indignation is the action resulting there-from like the expelling of breath, causing one to seek justice and retribution for wrong done. We are told that they answered the invitation of intermarriage and unity proposed by Hamor and Shechem with 'âormah', in guile or fraudulently. According to many commentators this is usually understood as in that, while they spoke of circumcision as a condition for giving Shechem Dinah, in reality they intended to kill them while they were in the pain of the circumcision. However, there is no mention of Dinah in their reply nor is there any mention of the shameful act of Shechem in raping their sister, to which the people of Shechem could answer that if one person sins surely the whole community does not have to make compensation. The only guile in their answer can be that they were sure that nobody would agree to circumcision, considered by many tribes and nations in their times as degrading and shameful. This refusal would then permit a honorable severing of all relationships and contact between them, as there would be constant friction between areilim and bnei brit. However, the townsmen submitted to circumcision, either, because they coveted the wealth of Yaakov and hoped to share in it or because they feared Hamor, the lord of the country, leaving the brothers no alternative. A Noachide is liable to the death penalty for gezel so Shechem deserved death but it would have been forbidden to kill the people of the town for the crime of Shechem. However, they were required as Noachides to have just courts and so they should have protested and punished him. Since they did not, they became liable on their own account. The death penalty was only carried out on the 3rd day of their milah, not because there is particular significance to that day, nor because the pain is particularly greater then, but rather because that was simply the time sequence. As the Ralbag explains, Shimon and Levi did not kill the whole town at once. They attended to each house separately ostensibly to tend to the sick, sent the women and children outside, then closed the door and killed the men. In this fashion they killed all the men of the town, which after all, was only a small one; that also explains why none of the surrounding cities pursued them.

[In connection with Yaakov's blessing of the Tribes, Abarbanel linking it to the incident of Dinah, writes as follows concerning Shimon and Levi]. "Shimon and Levi are brothers, instruments of violence are mechiroteihem [a stolen craft; a translation following Rashi that violence was a craft of Eisav's misappropriated by them]" (Bereishit 49:5). This word mechiroteihem is a strange one and we can only understand it as signifying commerce and trade as derived from mechirah- sale. Yaakov was saying that their motivations and thoughts in all their dealings in buying and selling were rooted

in coveting material assets and so became weapons of violence; conducted in fraud and theft. Although they were as brothers, zealously bent on avenging their sister's shame, pain and suffering, they lusted after the flocks, herds and wealth of the townspeople. [Referring to the next verse where Yaakov does not wish to be associated with their secrets or counsel] therefore their killing was not done in a sudden burst of anger but rather deliberately, after which they set about looting the property.

Text Copyright © 2004 by Rabbi Meir Tamari and **Torah.org**.

Dr. Tamari is a renowned economist, Jewish scholar, and founder of the Center For Business Ethics (www.besr.org) in Jerusalem.