

DINAH, KIRUV WORKER

by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

Dinah, Leah's daughter whom she bore to Yaakov, went out to look at the daughters of the land.

Be'er Mayim Chaim: The Torah relates that Dinah went out to look at the daughters of the land / *bivnos ha-aretz*. The phraseology seems a bit forced. "*Bivnos*" sounds like the preposition "in" - in the daughters of the land. We should have expected *es bnos ha-aretz* instead.

More surprising is Chazal's explanation^[2] of why we are reminded here that Leah was Dinah's mother, a fact we were well aware of from a previous *pasuk*. ^[3] They explain that the purpose was to link Dinah's behavior to that of Leah. In the episode of Ruvain and the *duda'im*, Leah also showed unexpectedly forward behavior in "going out"^[4] to claim her husband away from sister Rochel. Daughter Leah followed her example, and pushed the envelope by moving beyond the family circle and "going out" to tour the surrounding area and its population. Like mother, like daughter - both were too outgoing.

While this approach offers a unique perspective on events in the *parshah*, and allows us to draw important conclusions about behavior, it still seems out of character for a Torah that takes pains to employ delicacy of expression. After all, the Torah prefers to take an extra, precious word to speak about mere animals as being "not *tahor*" rather than call them "*tameh*."^[5] Given the Torah's preference for genteel circumlocution, why would the Torah hang the dishonorable label of "one who goes out" on Leah, particularly since her intention at the time was a lofty one: she wanted the greatest share in establishing the *shivtei Kah*, the founding Jewish family.

That, perhaps, is the point. Chazal meant to compare Dinah's reasons for going out to the holy intentions of her mother. Dinah as well went out for a mitzvah-purpose. She looked to the example of her illustrious great-grandparents, Avrohom and Soro. Avrohom made a career of bringing men into the fold of belief, while his wife ministered separately to the women. Dinah sought to do the same. Thus, she went out not to observe the daughters of the land, but to peer inside them. She studied them to learn about their inner character and content, to determine which women might be drawn closer to a more spiritual existence. She certainly did not go out to parade herself and her beauty in front of the people of the region.

Dinah miscalculated, however. Chazal take "Every honorable princess dwelling within"^[6] to mean that the Torah greatly promotes a more private, modest role for women. Soro indeed took an active role teaching and guiding - but she did so beyond the public gaze. "Behold [Soro was] in the tent."^[7]

For this reason, Devorah praised Yael as "blessed beyond the women of the tent." [8] Chazal [9] offer that the women of the tent mean the four matriarchs. In what way was Yael superior to the *imahos*? The point is that the righteousness of the matriarchs remained in the tent, outside the public domain. Yael acted quite differently - leaving the tent to engage, and then seduce, Sisera. Devorah's point is that despite this, Yael remained as righteous as before, a feat not attempted by the *imahos*.

Yet a crucial difference remains between Dinah and Yael. The latter had no choice. To save the Jewish army and nation, Sisera had to be stopped. There was no Plan B. Yael had one chance, and she exercised the option to save many lives. Dinah, on the other hand, had noble intentions - but far less compelling cause to act as she did. It is praiseworthy to bring appropriate non-Jewish souls to a place of greater connection to G-d. Yet, we do not tell people to commit even a small misdeed in order to prevent others from committing larger ones. [10] Dinah was entitled to be more selfish; she should not have compromised her own sense of *tzniyus* to help others.

Dinah tried emulating her mother, but she sacrificed too much in trying. That set her up for failure.

[1] Based on Be'er Mayim Chaim, Bereishis 34:1

[2] Tanchuma

[3] Bereishis 30:21

[4] Bereishis 30:16

[5] Pesachim 3A

[6] Tehilim 45:14

[7] Bereishis 18:9

[8] Shoftim 5:24

[9] Nazir 23B

[10] Eruvin 32B
