

LETS END THE BLAME GAME

by Rabbi Naftali Reich

Yaakov has overcome the tremendous trials of living for over twenty years in an alien environment and being subjected to severe challenges and injustices. It was under these trying circumstances that Yaakov married and raised the 'shivtei kah,' the founding pillars of the Jewish people. After fleeing Lavan's home, he encountered Eisav and succeeded in subjugating his brother's angels, and was finally ready to make a triumphant return to his parents' home.

Yet his ordeals were far from over. Just when he looked forward to a period of respite, the tragic story of Dina's abduction and violation at the hands of Shechem ben Chamor, befell him, followed by his sons' devastating strike against Shechem in retaliation for the outrage.

How did this tragic chain of events come about? How could Providence have permitted Dina to be subjected to such a humiliating assault?

Our tradition teaches that many factors contributed to this disaster. The Torah tells us that Dina went out to associate with the 'daughters of the land'; the local girls. It seems her objective was simply to examine their culture and lifestyle. She was taken to task for this choice, as the verse says: 'kol kevuda bas melech prima'; a princess' place is in the home. In mingling with the gentile population, she compromised her modesty and so she, in turn, was compromised.

In another place, our sages indicate that her behavior was influenced by her mother, Leah, who, our sages call a "yatzanis;" one who tends to put herself forward even when not wholly appropriate. Leah went out to the field to greet Yaakov, informing him of her desire to be with him that evening. Dina's desire to go forth "among the daughters of the land" is seen as an outgrowth of her mother's tendency to act in an immoderately forward manner.

Our sages also view Yaakov as carrying an element of responsibility for the tragedy that befell Dina as well. Rashi tells us (chapter 32; verse 22) that before his encounter with Eisav, Yaakov placed Dina in a chest so that Eisav should not gaze upon her and desire her as a wife. For this, he was punished by having her fall into the hands of Shechem. Had Eisav married Dina, Rashi says, she may have influenced him so profoundly, he would have repented.

Dina's experience of being locked away from the world in a chest likely piqued her curiosity, sharpening her desire to investigate her surroundings. After all, when we excessively restrict our children from engaging the outside world, the temptation to taste the forbidden fruits and wander off the reservation is so much more acute.

Lastly, our sages tell us that Yaakov deserved to have his daughter abducted for tarrying excessively before returning home to his parents, who surely missed him and longed to see him. (Rashi Chapter 35;verse 1).

The sad and sorry saga that unfolded in Shechem was precipitated by a complex interplay of factors, as we have seen. From the perspective of our sages, we gain access to an even deeper dimension. Through these bizarre events, Hashem was planting the seeds and orchestrating events for later generations.

Our sages tell us that the union of Dina and Shechem gave birth to Osnas, who later became the wife of Yosef, the forbears of two of the twelve tribes, Ephraim and Menashe. For the Divine plan to be brought to fruition, it was necessary that Yosef marry one who was born of the union between polar opposites; the profane and the sacred. Dina's daughter, Osnas, chose to connect to her mother's spiritual legacy of sanctity.

This fascinating story is but one example of the multidimensional underpinnings of events that appear deceptively simple on the surface. The Divine plan that drives human events is so sublime and unfathomable, we are only afforded a tiny glimpse from time to time of its breathtaking sweep.

In our own lives, we can learn from the events in this portion how to view our own lapses of judgment. We tend to blame ourselves, and often find fault with our upbringing. We examine our parents' disposition and deflect the blame for our own poor choices onto our forbearers. But all of this is an exercise in futility and misses the point.

This week's portion teaches us that our job is to embrace the circumstances of our life even if they seem to be the product of our own faulty judgments. Instead of turning to recrimination, our task is to view Divine providence, in the context of history and our own personal lives, as the supreme guiding force. In the end, all will be understood and revealed as being part of a Divine plan designed for our own personal benefit and the benefit of the world at large.

Wishing you a wonderful Shabbos,

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