

A BETTER SMELLING "SENT"

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

And Ya'akov arrived complete in the city of Shechem, in the land of Canaan, after coming from Padam Aram, and he camped facing the city. (Bereishis 33:18)

The posuk sounds innocent enough. Having just survived the fight of the millennium with the Angel of Eisav, and, a less climactic one with Eisav himself, Ya'akov arrived at the outskirts of the city of Shechem for what seemed to be a little "R & R."

However, not only was this not to be, but, Ya'akov's encounter Shechem was, in fact, the beginning of even greater troubles than he had previously survived, troubles which included the violation of his own daughter Dinah by a prince of Shechem, the sale of Yosef into slavery in next week's parshah, and, eventually, the division of King David's kingdom. In fact, Shechem is such a bad place for Jews that it has been called a "place ready for punishment" (Sotah 11a; Rashi, Bereishis 37:14)).

With all due respect to Shechem, it is part of Yosef HaTzaddik's territory in Eretz Yisroel, as Ya'akov promised his son on his deathbed:

"I have given Shechem to you, an extra [portion] more than your brothers, which I took from the Amorites by my sword and bow." (Bereishis 48:22)

-- and thus, it is the place where the holy Yosef HaTzaddik is in fact buried:

I HAVE GIVEN SHECHEM TO YOU: Because you troubled yourself with my burial, I am also giving you an inheritance for your own burial. Which is it? Shechem, as it says, "And the bones which the Children of Israel brought up with them from Egypt they buried in Shechem" (Yehoshua 24:32)

Shechem, furthermore, is one of the three places in Israel that the Jewish people purchased from the inhabitants of the land (Bereishis 33:19; Yehoshua 24:32), even though ALL of Eretz Yisroel was destined to be theirs -- eventually -- as a gift from G-d. The other two places were Hevron by Avraham Avinu from Ephron (Bereishis 23:16), and, Yerushalayim by Dovid HaMelech.

Providentially, Shechem was turned over to Palestinian rule December 12, 1995 -- Parashas Vayaishev -- the parshah in which Yosef was sold in Shechem. In fact, the Sunday of that week, Israeli soldiers fought with students attending the yeshivah located at Yosef's burial tomb -- the

same yeshivah that was destroyed by Palestinians in their most recent uprising when they also destroyed the tomb of Yosef as well.

And, lest we forget, it was on Har Gerizim and Har Eival, within one mile (west of) Shechem that the Jewish people stood and accepted upon themselves the blessings and the curses of Parashas Ki Savo (Devarim 27:11), upon entering the land.

And, Shechem's central role in Jewish history, says the Zohar, did not end then. Rather, just as it was a main player in the beginning of Jewish history, so, too, will the vicinity of Shechem be a main player in the end of Jewish history, for:

"In the time of the resurrection of the dead, many camps will arise in Land of the Galil, because that is where the Moshiach is going to be first revealed, since it is part of Yosef's territory. It will be the first place to be destroyed. It will begin there ahead of all other places, and then spread to the nations" (Zohar, Vayakhel 220a)

Writes Rav Saadiah Gaon:

"G-d will return us to the land even if we are transgressors who have yet to repent. There we will face troubles and distress and this will lead to the appearance of a man from the seed of Yosef on the Galilee Mountain" (Emunos v'Dayos, 8)

Adds the Vilna Gaon:

"Moshiach ben Yosef's task will be to confront Eisav, whereas the task of Moshiach ben Dovid will be to overcome Yishmael, and together, they are to eradicate the power of the Erev Rav (Jews against G-d and Torah) who are the greatest enemy. (Kol HaTorah, 2)

Three separate enemies? Perhaps. On the other hand, the parshah two weeks ago finished by recording for posterity:

Eisav saw that the daughters of Canaan were evil in the eyes of Yitzchak his father, so Eisav went to Yishmael and took Machalat the daughter of Yishmael son of Avraham ... (Bereishis 28:8-9)

The Biblical union of Eisav and Yishmael was sealed in Parashas Toldos. The posuk wants us to recall, lest we have already forgotten, that within Yishmael himself is a spark of Avraham, and the name of the wife that Eisav takes is a word we use to describe sicknesses such as deadly cancer. And, as the Pri Tzaddik points out, whatever exists on the outside of the Jewish people, can exist on the inside of the Jewish people as well, and vice versa.

Hence, the Pope in Rome wears a kippah, the Arabs perform Bris Milah, and, secular Jews (especially "chiloni" Israelis) are against both. Perhaps a deeper investigation into what happened in Shechem is in order.

Shabbos Day:

They said to them, "We are not able to do what you say, to give our sister to a man who has a foreskin, because it is a disgrace for us. We will only consent if you become like us by circumcising every male from your people." (Bereishis 34:14-15)

On the surface, it makes sense. Shechem wanted to marry Dinah, while his father was looking to create an even greater relationship between his family and Ya'akov's. Bris Milah was the only path into the bris of Avraham Avinu, which, by definition, included being circumcised. Dissuasion was probably out of the question at the moment, since the deed had been done already.

On the other hand, if ever there was an example of an insincere "conversion," of a conversion for marriage-sake only, it was Shechem's and his people's. Why go to the trouble of having the males of the entire city circumcised if it really amounts to very little in the end? Just to weaken them for a future attack of revenge by Shimon and Levi? Obviously not, since Ya'akov, we see later, had been against such revenge in the first place.

No, there was something very Hashgochahdik -- very Providential -- about Shechem, something which forced the issue of Milah there, and which compelled Ya'akov to later give the place to Yosef HaTzaddik as an extra portion, the one son of Ya'akov who was the "Shomer HaBris" -- the "Protector of the Bris."

We find a similar situation occurred in Egypt. All of Egypt, for the most part, were also forced to perform Bris Milah. According to the Midrash, when food shortages began to bite the Egyptians during the years of famine, and they came to Yosef to open up the store houses, Yosef required the Egyptians to perform Milah as a prerequisite to receive their portions of food (Rashi, Bereishis 41:55).

Why Yosef did this, the Torah does not reveal. However, the Arizal does in Sha'ar HaPossukim (Parashas Shemos), explaining that this was the way for Yosef to help rectify the Erev Rav, errant souls dating back to the 130-year period of teshuvah of Adam HaRishon after his sin (Eiruvin 18b). It is a long story, but, a very important one, one that is having, and, is going to have an impact on all of Jewish history until Moshiach comes and finishes the job that Yosef -- and really Adam himself -- began, on the way to world rectification.

We have two clues, the first one being the fact that Yosef was buried there, and, the second one being what actually happened in Shechem, which the posuk reveals:

Shechem son of Chamor the Chivi, prince of all the land, saw her (Dinah), took her, lay with her, and violated her. (Bereishis 34:2)

To begin with, Shechem was the son of "Chamor," which means "donkey," the Kabbalistic symbol of

physicality and materialism. And, lest you think this was only a family thing, the posuk informs you that he was the prince of all the land, the true representative of his people and their approach to life and the physical world. And, lest you think this was act of promiscuity on Dinah's behalf, the first "intermarriage" within the Jewish people, the Torah makes it clear that it was Shechem who did the seeing, the taking, and the violating.

The Arizal points out that Shechem's whole attraction to Dinah in the first place stemmed from the fact that he had received a spark of Adam's soul, which he surrendered to Ya'akov's family through the child he had with Dinah. This is why he was killed shortly after the incident; he was now a carrier of nothing valuable, and was without purpose to live.

However, with that spark came aspects of Shechem as well: the potential to be extremely materialistic, and, even promiscuous. Hence, this is why it was crucial that Osnas, daughter of Shechem and Dinah (who, by the way, was supposed to be have been Yosef himself; Brochos 60a), eventually marry Yosef HaTzaddik, who is called "Tzaddik" because of his extraordinary ability to remain true to G-d in the face of great materialistic temptation and, of course, promiscuity, as he exhibited in Egypt -- a place represented by the chamor, a place steeped in materialism and promiscuity.

No wonder Milah was the fate of the Egyptians, as it was the fate of the people of Shechem.

And, no wonder Yosef was buried in Shechem, for, as we learn from Chazal, tzaddikim, such as Moshe Rabbeinu and Yosef HaTzaddik are buried where they are to act as a spiritual protective barrier between the forces of the people who live there, and, the Jewish people within their physical or spiritual vicinity. Yosef, the "Guardian of the Bris" -- who is represented by the sefirah of Yesod ("Foundation"), the place of Bris Milah -- the one whose love for G-d allows him to withstand the temptations of materialism and unbridled sexuality, stands against Shechem which was a place of just the opposite.

And, now, towards the end of the Sixth Millennium, the thousand-year period that is spiritually fueled by the sefirah called "Yesod," we are witnessing Jews against Bris Milah (no kidding -- there is a drive among Israelis to make Bris Milah "elective surgery" only, which means that it will only be able to be performed on a consenting adult, and never on an eight-day old child, as the Torah commands), and, Jews who have succumbed to the "Sirens" of materialism and the lure of modern-day promiscuity.

The Left calls it progress. The Torah calls it a Biblical showdown. And, history calls it the time for Moshiach ben Yosef and an end to the destructive, punishing powers of Shechem ben Chamor..

SEUDAH SHLISHI:

G-d said to Ya'akov, "Go up to Beit El. Stay there and make an altar to G-d who ap-peared to you when you fled from Eisav your brother." Ya'akov said to his household and to all who were with him, "Remove the foreign gods that are among you. Purify yourselves and change your garments. We will go up to Beit El. I will make an altar there to G-d who answered me on the day of my distress, and Who has been with me along my way." (Bereishis 35:1-2)

Apparently, Ya'akov's family had picked up extra spiritual "baggage" along their way back to Eretz Yisroel, and the time had come to jettison all of it. And, you'll never guess where they left them, so, the next verse tells you:

They gave to Ya'akov all the foreign gods in their possession and the rings in their ears. Ya'akov buried them under the Elah tree near Shechem.

When it comes to life in This World, it is all a matter of trust. To be human is to trust; we need to trust in something, and yearn to, often taking risks just to create and maintain a trust relationship.

But, trust in WHAT? That is always the issue, for, some people trust no one else but themselves, while others trust other people too. But, how many people trust in G-d, and those that do, how much?

One of the most troubling aspects of what happened in Shechem was the fact that a daughter of the holy and loyal family of Ya'akov could be violated. What a shock that must have been!

Think about it for a moment. After persevering life with the deceitful and deadly Lavan for twenty years, and, then after overcoming the Angel of Eisav and Eisav the Evil himself -- before whom he had hidden Dinah to save her from her uncle's evil glance -- Ya'akov had finally felt reason to lower his guard at the edge of the city of Shechem. And then, completely out of nowhere and with no warning whatsoever, the family he had worked so hard to raise and protect was devastated by a diabolical act by one of the local princes.

Where was G-d?

He was there. He was there, and wanting to prevent the entire episode from happening. But He would not, because He could not, so long as Ya'akov's camp still retained its connection to false beliefs and sources of trust. As long as Ya'akov's camp remained "Shechem-like" by adhering to idol worship, it was subject to Shechem, as, tragically, history has proven time and time again. Hence:

Ya'akov buried them under the Elah tree near Shechem.

-- the time had come to leave behind Shechem, at least for now. And, once they did, the posuk tells us the result:

While they journeyed, the terror of G-d was upon the cities around them to pre-vent them from chasing after the sons of Ya'akov.

Having purged the camp of any traces of idol worship, Ya'akov's camp became an early version of the Mishkan -- the Tabernacle built by the Jews after leaving Egypt. The Divine Presence was able to dwell amongst it, and, envelope it. As a result, a different kind of spiritual atmosphere descended upon mankind, and the world feared the Jews and let them be.

When Nebuchadnetzar, king of Babylonia, destroyed the First Temple in the year 3338/423 BCE, the world was in shock. How does one destroy the House of G-d, given all of its intrinsic holiness? Did G-d not once "dwell" there and cause great miracles to happen there? How could any flesh-and-blood being put an end to all of that?

So, the Talmud answers that question with the words, "You grind already ground flour!" (Sanhedrin 96b). What the Talmud means to say, as the Nefesh HaChaim explains, is that long ago, maybe even beginning centuries ago, Jewish attitudes towards G-d and Torah destroyed the heart and soul of the Temple until all that remained was the physical structure itself, and THAT, anyone with the right army could destroy.

Interestingly enough, the three letters of "Shechem" (shin-chof-mem) are also within the word "Mishkan" (mem-shin-chof-nun), with the addition of the letter "nun," which always symbolizes the "Nun Sha'arei Binah" -- the "Fifty Gates of Understanding." The extra "nun" makes the total numerical value of the word "Mishkan" equal 410 -- precisely the number of years the First Temple stood (2928 - 3338) before being destroyed by Nubuchadnetzar's army.

Today, the terror of G-d is just about nowhere, and, "they" are chasing after the sons of Ya'akov -- us. And, looking at the Jewish people -- all around the world -- it's as if we have returned to that Elah tree and dug up what Ya'akov buried long ago -- on the way to becoming "Yisroel" a few verses later. If we return to Shechem at its false gods and beliefs, then Shechem, G-d forbid, will return to us.

MELAVE MALKAH:

A Song of Ascents. G-d, remember Dovid -- all of his suffering. How he swore to G-d, and vowed to the Strong One of Ya'akov, "If I enter the tent of my home; if I go upon the bed that is spread for me; if I allow sleep to my eyes, slumber to my eyelids; before I find a place for G-d, resting places for the Strong One of Ya'akov" (Tehillim 132:1-5)

From the first posuk, it seems as Dovid is merely trying to have G-d recall how difficult his life had been so far, and perhaps use it as a merit in his favor. However, the words that follow indicate that the suffering to which Dovid HaMelech refers is not that which he personally persevered while consolidating his G-d-given authority over the entire Jewish people, but, the pain he personally felt seeing the Presence of G-d and the Holy Ark residing in temporary quarters, after so many centuries already.

That's some vow. Can you imagine swearing off personal pleasure and comfort for about seven years until the House of G-d is built? Extraordinary devotion. Extraordinary leader. Thus, Tehillim is extraordinary.

Behold! We heard of it in Efrat, we found it in the forested field. We will arrive at His Tabernacles, we will bow at His footstool. (6-7)

Tabernacles, as in two: the one on earth, and, most importantly, the one Above. As Ya'akov said, and Kabbalah confirms, the Temple on earth corresponds to the Temple Above, the one in the Sefiros that is the "root" of the one man builds on earth. First we do mitzvos and learn Torah to construct the spiritual Temple Above, and, that gives us the right to construct the physical one on earth.

Arise, G-d, to Your resting place, You, and the Ark of Your strength. Let Your priests be clothed in righteousness, and Your devoted ones will sing with joy. (8-9)

Building an edifice for G-d is not enough. It must be inviting for the Divine Presence, a place within which G-d will want to dwell, a place that can support all those in His service.

For the sake of Dovid, Your servant, do not turn away from the face of Your anointed. G-d has sworn to Dovid a truth from which He will never withdraw: From the fruit of your issue I will place upon the throne" (10-11)

Shlomo HaMelech

If your sons keep My covenant, and this, My testament that I shall teach them, then, their sons, too, forever, shall sit upon the throne. (12)

Until Moshiach ben Dovid comes and establishes one last, final, and eternal throne, upon which he will sit and be G-d's emissary, in the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. And, as a result of man's efforts:

For G-d has chosen Tzion, He desired it for His habitation

-- and G-d replies:

This is My resting place forever; here I will dwell for I have desired it. Her sustenance I will bless abundantly; her needy I will satiate with food. I will clothe her priests with salvation, and, her devout ones will always sing joyously. There I will cause pride to sprout for Dovid; I have prepared a lamp for My anointed. His enemies I will clothe with shame, but, upon him, his crown will shine. (13-18)

And, no longer will Shechem and anything Shechem-like be a place set aside for punishment, but, it will shine with the light of Dovid HaMelech, the light of Malchus, the Supernal Light with which G-d made creation, and, with which He will bring the Final Redemption.

Boruch Shem Kavod Malchuso L'Olam Va-Ed -- Blessed be the Name of glorious His Kingdom forever -- where the first letters of the six words spell: B'Shechem lamed-vav, "In Shechem, thirty-six," with the "thirty-six" referring to the number of hours the Hidden Light shone on Day Six of

creation for Adam HaRishon before being hidden within creation for the righteous in the Time-to-Come -- not to mention the number of candles we light Chanukah-time (not including the shamashim).

Thus, the gematria of Shechem: 360, or, 36 x 10 Sefiros rectified at the time of the Final Redemption.

Have a great Shabbos,
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