

# PARSHAS VAYEISHEV

*by Rabbi Dr. Meir Tamari*

We have to understand the clarify the nature of the city of Shechem and this will help us to discover the whole nature of the quarrel between Yoseph and his brothers.

'Shechem was a place that was destined for suffering. In Shechem Dinah was abused, there the brothers sold Yoseph and it was there that the Davidic Kingdom was divided by Yeravam ben Nevat' (Sanhedrin, 102a). However, at the same time, Shechem was chosen as Yaakov's gift to Yoseph. It was sanctified as an Ir Miklat that could give sanctuary from the goel hadam and it was one of the 3 places of which the nations can never question our ownership; Har Hamoriah, Hevron and Shechem. This contradiction can be solved by looking at Bereishit 2, verse 1 ' Vayechulu hashmayim ve ha'aretz ve chol zeva'am'- vayechulu, from the word clall. All the 6 days of creation each of the constituent parts of creation was growing and expanding to realize their individual potential and purpose. Each one was an entity by itself, until through the power of the Shabbat they were all became united together into one comprehensive unit; so the creation became complete, as it is written, vanifash, it received its nefesh. The same is true of the human body where each organ develops and moves independently and yet the power of life and the nefesh unites them into one being. So too, the sons of Yaakov were each one growing and extending themselves spiritually, so that they each were considered complete and separate. However, because of their greatness they were unable to unite, as the Arie explained that the minds of people are not the same and therefore it is difficult for them to achieve unity. The Maharal taught that the lack of unity amongst the Jews is not because of any weakness of theirs, but on the contrary because of the spiritual and intellectual greatness of each individual. [This idea of great spiritual and intellectual people being unable to subjugate themselves to the greatness of another, is an oft repeated one in the School of Psyscha, as may be seen in the comments of the Shem Mi Shmuel on Lag Ba Omer] The brothers should have been united under Yoseph who represents the Shabbat, just as the parts of Creation were. What prevented this was because 'He brought to his father their evil report' (Ber.36: 2). So was born hatred between them and therefore Yoseph no longer had the power to unite them. Disunited, discord grew till the separation of their hearts was total, so they hated him. In this way we can easily understand the midrash, that after the sale of Yoseph, the brothers said, 'Let us disperse and separate'. We know that the greater the identification of the individual with the group or entity, the greater will be the power of the group to help and support that individual. So when the brothers lost the unifying nature of Yoseph, they naturally would want to separate and each go his own separate way.

When we remember that the word Shechem derives from division or part (Tehillim, 60:8 and 108:8),

then we will see that the nature of the very place contributed to all the tragedies that occurred there. The divisive nature of Shechem caused its inhabitants to see themselves as an independent and special creation; that moved Shechen benHamor to rape Dinah. The Avnei Nezer explained that the divisive nature of the place caused him to see himself as a special being and therefore he desired the daughter of Yaakov; his desire was specifically to join with Yaakov. Because of its nature of division, the place lent itself to the division of the brothers, since each one considered himself special and unique so that they could not subjugate themselves to another and become a united clall. The nature of Shechem also encouraged the disunity that resulted in the breakup of the Davidic kingdom, as the tribes seeing their own spiritual greatness and uniqueness, were unable to humble themselves and subjugate themselves to the Davidic dynasty.

' Now his brothers went to pasture their father's flock in Shechem' (Ber.37:12). Rashi noting the dots on the word 'et' comments that they went there to find themselves. [The Admor Menachem Mendel of Kotsk similarly teaches that a person should always know what he is looking for, based on ' And he said [to Yoseph], 'What are you seeking', verse15]. Troubled by their hatred of Yoseph, the brothers went to Shechem, a place conducive to individual worth and special importance, in order to re-discover their own value. Perhaps that is also why Yaakov sent Yoseph to Shechem.

How was it that Yoseph HaTzaddik sinned with Lashan Hara? He suspected his brothers and should have spoken to them about his suspicions. The ensuing discussion would have either shown them to be false or enabled him to reprimand them and cause them to repent. However, Yoseph in the modesty characteristic of all the descendants of Rachel, could not bring himself to bring himself to confront and criticize the brothers who were all older than him. Instead he brought their evil report to Yaakov. The Zohar writes that one who has to rebuke others but not do so, has the defect of speech visited on him and affliction follows (Part 3, 46b). Yoseph's 19 years in prison was atonement for the slander of his 10 brothers. Even though his motives were good, nevertheless, considering Yoseph's elevated stature this was considered a sin. Therefore, in order to restore him as Tzaddik yesod olam, the test of Potiphar's wife was necessary.

This is similar to, 'Because of the modesty of Rabbi Zechariah ben Avkulos the Second Temple was destroyed and we were exiled from our Land'(Gittin, 56a). So the sale of Yoseph was to the destruction of the 2nd Temple as explained by Sforno.

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