

[Home](#) › [Collections](#) › [Encyclopedia](#) › [Dinah: Midrash and Aggadah](#)

# Dinah: Midrash and Aggadah

*by Tamar Kadari*

Dinah was the only daughter of Jacob and Leah, and the Rabbis present her as possessing many positive qualities, as was fitting for the daughter of the progenitors of the Israelite nation.

## Her Birth

The Rabbis state that Leah was actually pregnant with a son; when Rachel saw that her sister was pregnant, she prayed, resulting in a change of the embryo's gender (JT *Berakhot* 9:3, 14a). Another tradition relates that Leah, and not Rachel, was responsible for this change: Leah knew that Jacob would be the father of twelve tribes. When she realized that she was with child and that Jacob already had ten sons (she had borne him six sons, Bilhah and Zilpah had each given birth to two sons), she said: Shall my sister Rachel not even be as one of the handmaidens? Leah therefore prayed to God on behalf of her sister, entreating Him: "Turn what is in my womb into a female, and do not prevent my sister from bearing a son." God accepted her prayer and the fetus in her womb was transformed into a girl. Gen. 30:21 therefore states: "Afterwards she bore him a daughter,"—that is, after Leah's prayer. Since Leah had rendered judgment [*danah din*] on herself, the newborn was named Dinah (BT *Berakhot* 60a; *Tanhuma* [ed. Buber], *Vayeze* 19).

According to another midrashic etymology, each of Jacob's children was born together with his future spouse, except for Dinah, who was born alone. It therefore was said of her: This girl is with justice [*din*] and judgment (*Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* [ed. Higger], chap. 35).

In an attempt to resolve the discrepancy between the list of those who went down to Egypt with Jacob and the total number of seventy given in the Torah, the Rabbis assert that a twin was born together with Dinah, and she was one of the seventy souls who came with Jacob (BT *Bava Batra* 123a).

## The Episode of Dinah and Shechem Son of Hamor

The Rabbis note that Shechem was a city predestined for evil happenings: Dinah was abused there, it was the place of Joseph's sale, and the kingdom of the Davidic line was divided in this city (BT *Sanhedrin* 102a). The story of Dinah is one of the most difficult Biblical narratives, and the Rabbis offered different explanations for how Jacob's daughter became involved in this episode.

### 1. As Punishment for Jacob

In an attempt to come to terms with the rape of Dinah, the Rabbis suggest that this was a punishment for her father. What was his sin? According to one tradition, he was punished for what he had said upon building the altar in Shalem upon his return from Paddan-aram. Gen. 33:20 tells that "he set up an altar there, and called it El, God of Israel." The midrash reads this as "he called himself *el* [god]." Jacob said: You are God in the

heavens, and I am God on earth; since he usurped authority for himself, he was punished by the rape of his daughter (*Gen. Rabbah* 79:8).

Another tradition has Jacob punished for what he said to Laban when they divided the flock between themselves (*Gen.* 30:33): “In the future when you go over my wages, let my honesty toward you testify for me.” He boasted that his honesty would later come to light, which was not at all certain. Instead, Jacob should have acted as *Prov.* 27:1 counsels: “Do not boast of tomorrow, for you do not know what the day will bring.” He accordingly was punished “tomorrow” (that is, in the future). Instead of “let my honesty toward you testify [*ve-antah*] for me,” his daughter was abused [*va-yeaneha*]; and his honesty was not acknowledged (*Gen. Rabbah* 73:9).

A third tradition suggests that Jacob’s tardiness in honoring his vow was the cause of his punishment. When he was in Bethel, during his flight from Laban, he vowed that if God favored him, he would return to Bethel and there erect an altar to the Lord (*Gen.* 28: 20–22). Jacob, however, procrastinated in fulfilling his pledge: first he lived in Laban’s house for twenty years, and even after returning to Canaan, he first dwelled in Shechem. He therefore was punished by experiencing all three of the cardinal sins of idolatry, forbidden sexual relations and bloodshed: forbidden sexual relations—by Shechem’s rape of Dinah; bloodshed—the ensuing slaughter of the inhabitants of Shechem by Simeon and Levi; and idolatry—following this massacre, Jacob commands all the members of his household to rid themselves of foreign gods (*Lev. Rabbah* 37:1).

Yet another tradition claims that Jacob was penalized for preventing Dinah from marrying his brother Esau. Before his encounter with the latter, Jacob sent his family across the Jabbok River, as we are told in *Gen.* 32:22: “That same night he arose, and took his two wives, his two maidservants, and his eleven children.” The midrash asks: Where was Dinah? and answers that he had locked her in a chest, saying: “So that Esau should not see her and take her from me.” God told him: You withheld Dinah from your brother, and, due to her good attributes, she could have reformed him. Since you did not want to give her to Esau, who was circumcised, you are punished through her being taken by one who was uncircumcised (Shechem son of Hamor); you did not give her in legitimate matrimony, therefore you are punished by her being taken by Shechem illegitimately (*Gen. Rabbah* 76:9; *Tanhuma* [ed. Buber], *Vayishlah* 19).

## 2. As Punishment for Leah

The Rabbis alternately explain the rape of Dinah as retribution for Leah’s improper behavior regarding the mandrakes. In the Biblical account, Reuben found mandrakes (an aphrodisiac) in the field, and brought them to his mother Leah. Rachel, who was barren, asked Leah to sell them to her, in return for forgoing her right to be with Jacob that night. *Gen.* 30:16 tells that upon Jacob’s return from the field, Leah came out to greet him and called him to come to her tent. According to the Rabbis, Leah was bedecked as a harlot when she went to meet her husband. For acting in such an immodest manner, she was punished by her daughter behaving in the same fashion when she went out to visit the daughters of the land (*Gen. Rabbah* 80:1).

Another midrashic explanation of Leah’s sin with the mandrakes is that she was ungrateful to Rachel. God asked her: Is this the reward for a good deed? Is this the reward of your sister Rachel, who gave you her signs with her husband [that Jacob and Rachel had agreed upon, so that Laban would not be able to deceive Jacob], to spare you embarrassment on your wedding night? As punishment for this behavior, God caused Leah even greater embarrassment with the episode of Dinah (*Gen. Rabbati*, *Vayishlah*, p. 168).

## 3. Shechem’s Guilt

The Rabbis compare Shechem to a snake that bites a person within his own home. They relate that Dinah would stay within her tent and not go about, as was fitting for a daughter of Jacob. But Shechem enticed her to come out, by bringing young women drummers who played outside her tent. When Dinah emerged from her tent to see the “daughters of the land” playing, he kidnapped her.

## 4. Dinah's Responsibility

In contrast to these approaches, another conception stresses Dinah's responsibility for her conduct and the consequences of her actions. The proponents of this view argue that her father and brothers would sit in the academy and study, while she preferred to go out and see the daughters of the land (*Avot de-Rabbi Nathan*, version B, chap. 3). Dinah desired to be seen, and not just to see others. She wanted the land's young men to see her beauty, and Shechem did indeed see her and desire her. The Rabbis compare this to a person who goes in the marketplace holding a piece of meat in his hand, with a dog following him. Eventually the dog will succeed in grabbing the meat from his hand. According to this analogy, Shechem's general behavior was completely unbridled, totally lacking any self-control; Dinah should have been careful, and not shown him her beauty (*Tanhuma* [ed. Buber], *Vayishlah* 19). Some Rabbis claim that Dinah is representative of the weakness from which all women suffer. God took the care to create woman from a rib, which is a concealed, modest place; notwithstanding this, women like to go out to public places (*Gen. Rabbah* 18:2). The instance of Dinah casts light on the danger at hand when any woman goes out to the marketplace (*Gen. Rabbah* 8:12). These dicta reveal the anxiety of the Rabbis at the thought of their wives and daughters leaving the protected home for the marketplace and the streets of the city.

## Dinah's End

When Simeon and Levi came to the city and killed Shechem and Hamor, they extricated Dinah from Shechem's home. Since they risked their lives for her, the Torah (*Gen.* 34:25) calls them, specifically, "Simeon and Levi, brothers of Dinah" (*Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*, *Masekhta de-Shirah*, *Beshalah* 10). The Rabbis relate that the brothers were forced to drag Dinah out, because she was too ashamed to leave Shechem's house. Finally, Simeon vowed to her that he would marry her. They wed, and a son was born from this union, "Saul the son of a Canaanite woman" (*Gen.* 46:10); Dinah was the "Canaanite woman," because her behavior was like that of the Canaanites. According to another explanation of this appellation, when she died, Simeon buried her in Canaan (*Gen. Rabbah* 80:11).

A different midrash relates that Dinah was married to Job, basing this on Job's telling his wife: "You talk as any shameless woman [*ha-nevalot*] might talk!" (*Job* 2:10), and on the episode of Dinah in *Gen.* 34:7: "because he had committed an outrage [*nevalah*] in Israel" (*Gen. Rabbah* 19:12). Dinah converted Job, and therefore Jacob had erred when he opposed her being married to his brother Esau, a union which would have led to the latter's reformation (see above) (*Tanhuma* [ed. Buber], *Vayishlah* 19). For more on Job's wife, see the entry: "Wife of Job."

According to another midrashic account, Dinah was impregnated by Shechem and gave birth to Asenath. Jacob's sons wanted to kill the baby, so it would not be said that there was harlotry in Jacob's tents. Jacob brought a gold plate and wrote on it the name of the Holy One, blessed be He; according to another tradition, he recorded on it the episode with Shechem. Jacob hung the plate around Asenath's neck and sent her away. God dispatched the angel Michael to bring her to the house of Potiphar in Egypt; according to another exegetical tradition, Dinah cast Asenath on the wall of Egypt (i.e., the wall surrounding the palace). That day Potiphar went out for a walk with his servants next to the wall and heard the infant's crying. When they brought the baby to him, he saw the plate and the record of the episode. Potiphar told his servants, "This girl is the daughter of great ones." He brought her to his home and gave her a wet nurse. Potiphar's wife was barren, and she raised Asenath as her own daughter. Consequently, she was called "Asenath daughter of Poti-phaera," for she was raised in the home of Potiphar and his wife, as if she were their own daughter (*Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* [ed. Higger], chap. 37; *Midrash Aggadah* [ed. Buber], *Gen.* 41:45).

These different midrashic accounts of Dinah's marriage teach that Dinah overcame the episode of her rape by Shechem, rehabilitated herself and was married. According to some of these traditions, either she herself or her daughter married some family member from Jacob's clan. Her descendants included renowned individuals.



A WELL-READ ONLINE COMMUNITY

**Red Tent (Diamant) - Discussion Questions**
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**Discussion Questions**

1. Read Genesis 34 and discuss how *The Red Tent* changes your perspective on Dinah's story and also on the story of Joseph that follows. Does *The Red Tent* raise questions about other women in the Bible? Does it make you want to re-read the Bible and imagine other untold stories that lay hidden between the lines?
2. Discuss the marital dynamics of Jacob's family. He has four wives; compare his relationship with each woman?
3. What do you make of the relationships among the four wives?
4. Dinah is rich in "mothers." Discuss the differences or similarities in her relationship with each woman.
5. Childbearing and childbirth are central to *The Red Tent*. How do the fertility childbearing and birthing practices differ from contemporary life? How are they similar? How do they compare with your own experiences as a mother or father?
6. Discuss Jacob's role as a father. Does he treat Dinah differently from his sons? Does he feel differently about her? If so, how?
7. Discuss Dinah's twelve brothers. Discuss their relationships with each other, with Dinah, and with Jacob and his four wives. Are they a close family?
8. Female relationships figure largely in *The Red Tent*. Discuss the importance of Inna, Tabea, Werenro, and Meryt.
9. In the novel, Rebecca is presented as an Oracle. Goddesses are venerated along with gods. What do you think of this culture, in which the Feminine has not yet been totally divorced from the Divine? How does El, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, fit into this?
10. Dinah's point of view is often one of an outsider, an observer. What effect does this have on the narrative? What effect does this have on the reader?
11. The book travels from Haran (contemporary Iraq/Syria), through Canaan and into Shechem (Israel), and into Egypt. What strikes you about the cultural differences Dinah encounters vis-à-vis food, clothing, work, and male-female relationships.
12. In *The Red Tent*, we see Dinah grow from childhood to old age. Discuss how she changes and matures. What lessons does she learn from life? If you had to pick a single word to describe the sum of her life, what word would you choose? How would Dinah describe her own life experience?

שָׁבָם בְּחֶמְדָּם הַחֲוִי וְ  
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the livestock in front of me and [following] the  
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near Seir."

<sup>15</sup>Esau said, "Pray let me then leave behind with  
you a portion of the force that accompanies me."  
But [Jacob] said, "Why should my lord show me  
such favor?" <sup>16</sup>So that day Esau started back on his  
way to Seir, <sup>17</sup>while Jacob went on to Succoth, where  
he built a house for himself and shelters for his live-  
stock; that is why the place was called Succoth.

<sup>18</sup>Thus Jacob, in his journey from Paddan-  
aram, arrived safely in the city of Shechem, in the  
land of Canaan; he made camp facing the city. <sup>19</sup>He  
bought the portion of the field where he had  
pitched his tent from the sons of Hamor, She-  
chem's father, for a hundredweight. <sup>20</sup>He then set  
up an altar, calling it El-Elohei-Yisrael.

<sup>34</sup> [One day] Dinah, Leah's daughter whom  
she had borne to Jacob, went out to see the women  
of the locality, <sup>2</sup>and Shechem son of Hamor the

אֲשֶׁר-לִפְנֵי וּלְרֹגֶל הַיְלָדִים עַד אֲשֶׁר-אָבָא  
אֶל-אֲדָנִי שְׁעִירָה:

<sup>15</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר עָשׂוּ אֶצִּיגָה-נָא עִמָּךְ מִן-הָעָם  
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<sup>18</sup> וַיָּבֹא וַיַּעֲקֹב שָׁלֵם עִיר שָׁכֵם אֲשֶׁר בְּאֶרֶץ  
כְּנָעַן בְּבָאוּ מִפְּדַן אֲרָם וַיַּחֲנוּ אֶת-פְּנֵי הָעִיר:  
<sup>19</sup> וַיִּקֶן אֶת-חֻלְקַת הַשָּׂדֶה אֲשֶׁר נָטְהוּ-שָׁם  
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אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: ס

לְדֹת וַחֲמֵצָה דִּינָה בַת-לֵאָה אֲשֶׁר יָלְדָה  
לְיַעֲקֹב לִרְאוּת בְּבָנוֹת הָאֶרֶץ: <sup>2</sup> וַיֵּרָא אֶתָּה

## Dinah and Shechem

### SEX AND SOCIAL STATUS

(34:1-31)

**D**inah, acting independently and of her own  
initiative, goes out to visit "the women of the  
locality." In the span of just two verses, the local  
Hivite prince, Shechem, spots Dinah, has sex with  
her, falls in love with her, and wants to marry her.  
Her brothers react violently and destroy Shechem  
and his city.

Dinah's status and her standing in society stead-  
ily decline as the story progresses. She moves from  
fulfilling the proper role in the proper place (virgin-  
daughter in father's house) to a socially ambiguous  
role with no proper corresponding physical place.  
Her story serves as a warning in the larger—and  
probably overriding—issue of the political and eth-

nic identity of the Israelites in relation to the other  
people in the land.

Throughout the story, Dinah's location corre-  
sponds directly to her perceived position in society  
and illustrates the precarious state of the daughter  
in biblical Israel. Though she seems free to move  
about, she is not secure anywhere. One need only  
consider the plight of Jephthah's daughter in Judges  
11, the concubine in Judges 19, and the daughters  
of Shiloh in Judges 21, to get the message that  
women, or at least daughters, are vulnerable to ca-  
lamity when they "go out."

### RAPE? (34:1-4)

A crucial question for modern interpreters is  
whether or not Dinah was raped. When consider-  
ing the modern concept of rape—characterized by  
an aggressive act and lack of mutual consent—there

Hivite, the local prince, saw her; he took her and lay her down and raped her.<sup>3</sup> He was then capti-

שָׁכַם בֶּן-הַמֹּר הַחִיטִּי וַיִּשָּׂא הָאָרֶץ וַיִּקַּח  
אֹתָהּ וַיִּשְׁכַּב אִתָּהּ וַיַּעֲנֶה: <sup>3</sup> וַתִּדְבֶּק בְּפִשּׁוֹ

is little question as to what happens to Dinah; the author tells us that Shechem saw her, took her, lay with her, and humiliated her. To us, this string of verbs screams "rape" (and is in fact even translated that way in v. 2). The assumption made by most interpreters is that Dinah did not consent to the sexual act. However, the question of consent, so central to the modern notion of rape and of women's rights in general, is entirely ignored in this text. Dinah's consent is not the issue. The ambiguity of the Hebrew verbs describing Shechem's actions toward Dinah compounds the difficulty of interpretation.

If we contemporary interpreters are sensitive to the ancient context in which the story was recorded, we need to entertain the possibility that there is a fundamental difference between our modern concept of rape and what may represent rape in the biblical text. In our society, forcing a woman to have sex against her will is seen as terrible both for its emotional and psychological consequences, and for the humiliation and debasement suffered by the woman as an individual. The Bible, even in its rape laws, was primarily concerned with the juridical and social-status consequences of the tort involved in sleeping with a virgin without either marrying her or compensating her father. As with adultery, the problem was not treated as an emotional or psychological one. When Amnon rapes Tamar in II Samuel 13, the violation that has taken place is made clear when Tamar begs Amnon not to reject her but to request her for his wife. It is his rejection subsequent to the sexual act that damages Tamar's life the most, because as an unmarried non-virgin princess, she has completely lost status in her society. In contrast to Tamar, Dinah is not granted a voice in the story; instead, her body and life form a site for settling issues between men.

If Shechem marries Dinah after having sex with

her, she would have full status as a wife in his household. The story, however, aims at excluding such a union with the other peoples in the land. Thus Jacob ignores his obligation to protect the women of his household when he does not subsequently negotiate Dinah's marriage to Shechem. (For a different perspective on this episode, see *Another View*, p. 202.)

1. *Dinah, Leah's daughter.* Dinah is introduced as the daughter of Leah, the wife that Jacob did not want. (On the status of offspring as a function of Jacob's favoring Rachel, see at 33:1-2.)

Dinah is referred to as "daughter" seven times in this story. See also at v. 4, s.v. "girl."

*went out to see the women of the locality.* Dinah goes out of her father's house to a public space, literally "to see the daughters of the land." Dinah seems free to leave, but she does so at her own risk. She is going out to "see" her peers, but she is ultimately "seen"—with dramatic consequences. Nowhere in the text is she criticized for her action.

2. *Shechem.* The name both of the prince and of the settlement (today's Nablus). In the book of Joshua, this locale becomes the site of a special covenant ceremony for the Israelites (Joshua 24). Later it rivaled Jerusalem; this rivalry may account for the hostility with which the city is portrayed in the present story.

*he took her and lay her down and raped her.* Interpretive debates about the story and its import revolve around the meaning of the word *innah*, here rendered as "rape." The meaning of the other verbs as well is both affected by, and in turn influences, how one interprets the actions involved in this episode.

Deuteronomy 22 contains several laws about sexual offenses with terminology similar to what appears here. From the usage in Deuteronomy one can conclude that *innah* means "violate," not

the livestock's footsteps of the near Seir."

<sup>15</sup>Esau said, you a portion of But [Jacob] said such favor?" <sup>16</sup>So way to Seir, <sup>17</sup>when he built a house for stock; that is why

<sup>18</sup>Thus Jacob, aram, arrived safely land of Canaan; he bought the portion pitched his tent from chem's father, for a up an altar, calling it 34 [One day] I she had borne to Jacob of the locality, <sup>2</sup>and

## Dinah and SEX AND SOC (34:1-

Dinah, acting independently, goes out to locality." In the span of the Hivite prince, Shechem, she falls in love with her, and Her brothers react violently and his city.

Dinah's status and her story decline as the story progresses, fulfilling the proper role of a daughter in father's house) role with no proper correction. Her story serves as a warning, probably overriding—issue

מֵאֵד בִּירְבֵּלָה עֲשָׂה  
בְּתִיעֶקֶב וְכֵן לֹא יֵעִי  
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חֲשָׁקָה נִפְשׁוּ בְּבִתְכֹנִי  
לְאִשָּׁה: 9 וְהִתְחַתְּנוּ  
לָנוּ וְאֶת־בְּנֵינֵינוּ תִקַּח  
תִּשְׁבוּ וְהָאָרֶץ תִּהְיֶה  
וְהָאֲחֻזָּה בָּהּ: 11 וַיֹּאמֶר  
וְאֶל־אֶחָיו אֲמָצָאֵהָ  
תֹאמְרוּ אֵלַי אֲתָן: 12 וַיִּמְתֵּן  
וְאֶת־הָאִשָּׁה כְּאִשֶּׁר  
אֶת־הַנַּעֲרָה הַנַּעֲרָה לְאִשָּׁה  
וַיַּעֲנוּ בְנֵי־יַעֲקֹב אֶת־  
אֲבִיו בְּמִרְמָה וַיִּדְבְּרוּ  
אִתָּם: 14 וַיֹּאמְרוּ  
לַעֲשׂוֹת הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה  
לְאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ עָרְלָה  
אֲרִבֹּנָאֵת נְאוֹת לֶךְ  
לְהַמְלִי לָכֶם בְּלִי־זָכָר:  
לָכֶם וְאֶת־בְּנֵיכֶם נִקַּח  
וְהָיִינוּ לָעַם אֶחָד:  
אֵלֵינוּ לְהַמְלוֹל וְלִקְחָנוּ

*b'mirmah*; here "this  
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or both women and men  
rity, see at 27:1-28:9 (in-

a binding marriage re-  
nd sex (not necessarily in  
nd Shechem are already  
art of the negotiation, the  
at they cannot give Dinah  
l he is circumcised. In "a  
m is able to convince the  
ome circumcised in order  
with Jacob's family.

vated by Jacob's daughter Dinah and, falling in love  
with the young woman, spoke tenderly to the  
young woman. <sup>4</sup>So Shechem said to his father  
Hamor, "Obtain this girl for me as [my] wife."

<sup>5</sup>At the time that Jacob heard that his daughter  
Dinah had been defiled, his sons were in the field  
with his livestock, so he kept quiet until they came  
back. <sup>6</sup>Shechem's father Hamor now went to Jacob  
to speak with him, <sup>7</sup>and meanwhile Jacob's sons  
had returned from the field. When they heard, the  
men were grieved and became extremely angry,  
for he had committed an outrage against Israel by

"rape" (22:23-24). The expression "he took hold of  
her" is apparently the one used for rape in Deu-  
teronomy (22:25) as well in the Tamar/Amnon story  
(II Samuel 13:14)—and it is not used here in the  
present verse. Consequently, the word *innah* should  
not be translated as rape, and what happened to  
Dinah certainly should not be understood as an  
act of rape in the modern sense of the word. Rather,  
the term demonstrates in this passage, as elsewhere,  
a downward movement in a social sense, meaning  
to "debase" or "humiliate" (Genesis 16:6). Though  
an affront to the woman's family, the term does not  
carry with it the psychological and emotional im-  
plications for the woman that the contemporary  
notion of rape suggests. In this particular text, the  
woman has no voice, and the narrator has no inter-  
est in whether or not she consented to the sexual  
act. Bear in mind that according to ancient Near  
Eastern mores, Dinah would have been considered  
to have been disgraced even if she had consented.

4. "girl." Heb. *yaldah*; literally, "a (female)  
child," which suggests that she is rather young.  
Similar terms such as *bat* (daughter) and *naara* (girl  
or young woman) appear repeatedly in this passage  
(see at v. 1). Taken together, these descriptors sug-  
gest that Dinah's youth was relevant to the events  
that follow.

"girl... wife." Heb. *yaldah... israh*. The tran-  
sition from childhood to adulthood (for *israh* can

בְּיָדָהּ בְּתִיעֶקֶב וַיֹּאמֶר אֶת־הַנַּעֲרָה  
וְיִדְבֹר עַל־לֵב הַנַּעֲרָה: 4 וַיֹּאמֶר שָׁכֶם  
אֶל־חֲמוֹר אָבִיו לֹאמֹר קַח־לִי אֶת־הַיְלָדָה  
הַזֹּאת לְאִשָּׁה:

5 וַיַּעֲקֹב שָׁמַע כִּי טָמְאָה אֶת־דִּינָה בִּתּוֹ וּבְנָיו  
הָיוּ אֶת־מִקְנֵהוּ בַּשָּׂדֶה וְהַחֲרָשׁ יַעֲקֹב עָרַ-  
בָאֵם: 6 וַיֵּצֵא חֲמוֹר אֲבִי־שָׁכֶם אֶל־יַעֲקֹב  
לְדַבֵּר אִתּוֹ: 7 וּבְנֵי יַעֲקֹב בָּאוּ מִן־הַשָּׂדֶה  
כְּשָׁמְעָם וַיִּתְעַצְּבוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים וַיַּחֲרֻר לָהֶם

also mean "woman") is brought on by a change in  
status involving sexual relations.

#### BROTHERS' INTERPRETATION: AN OUTRAGE AGAINST ISRAEL (34:5-24)

Jacob hears what has happened to Dinah and,  
somewhat uncharacteristically, waits until the return  
of his sons. There is irony here in that on the Ca-  
naanite side the son (Shechem) goes to his father  
(Hamor) to negotiate on his behalf, while Jacob  
remains silent throughout the entire story until v. 30,  
when he chastises his sons for having made trouble  
for him in his new land.

5. *defiled*. Heb. *timei*, indicating that Dinah's  
status has changed for the worse. Other forms of  
this word are used in Leviticus for "pollution" or  
"impure," a condition that can be temporary (as in  
11:44; 15:31; 18:20). Something defiled can often  
be rendered pure with proper ritual purification.  
In the case of Dinah, it appears that marriage to  
Shechem could potentially change her status from  
"defiled" to "pure."

7. *an outrage against Israel*. The sons are  
angry because of the "outrage against Israel." The  
only "Israel" in this story is Jacob himself; but he is  
not the one outraged. Rather, it is his sons, the  
*B'nei Yisrael*, who are affected and who take action  
in response.



lying with Jacob's daughter—such things were not done.

<sup>8</sup>Hamor now spoke with them, saying, "My son Shechem has set his heart on your daughter; pray give her to him to be [his] wife. <sup>9</sup>Make marriages with us—give us your daughters and you yourselves take our daughters. <sup>10</sup>Live among us and the land will be before you; settle and trade here and acquire property here." <sup>11</sup>And Shechem said to [Dinah's] father and brothers, "Let me but find favor in your sight, and I will give you whatever you ask. <sup>12</sup>Exact from me bridal money and gifts to excess, yet I will pay whatever you demand of me; only give me the girl to be [my] wife!"

<sup>13</sup>The sons of Jacob answered Shechem and his father Hamor deceptively, speaking thus because he had defiled their sister Dinah. <sup>14</sup>They said to them, "We cannot do this thing, giving our sister to a man who has a foreskin, for this is a shame to us. <sup>15</sup>Only on this condition will we consent to you: if you become like us by having every one of your males circumcised. <sup>16</sup>Then we would give you our daughters and would take your daughters and settle among you and become one people. <sup>17</sup>But if you do not listen to us [and consent] to be circumcised, we shall take our daughter and leave."

*lying with Jacob's daughter—such things were not done.* The reason Jacob's sons give for their rage is clearly expressed. The "thing not to be done" is to have sex with Jacob's daughter.

**8-17. Hamor now spoke with them.** The negotiation occurs only among men. They alone discuss the details involved in changing Dinah's status from unmarried virgin in her father's house to married wife and future mother in her husband's house. The negotiations as stated do not convey Dinah's consent or desire. It is Shechem's wish that was expressed (v. 4), and it is his father's negotiation that now takes place on his behalf.

**12. "girl."** Shechem here refers to Dinah as a *naara* rather than as *yaldah* (child, girl); see at v. 4.

מֵאֵד כִּי־נִבְלָה עַשָּׂה בִּישְׂרָאֵל לְשֹׁכֵב אֶת־  
בְּתִיעֶלֶב וְכֵן לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה:

וַיִּדְבֹּר חָמוֹר אֹתָם לֵאמֹר שְׁכֶם בְּנִי  
חָשָׁקָה נַפְשׁוֹ בְּבָתְּכֶם תְּנוּ נָא אֶתְּהָ לּוֹ  
לְאִשָּׁה: <sup>9</sup>וְהִתְחַתְּנוּ אִתָּנוּ בְּנֵיכֶם תִּתְּנוּ  
לָנוּ וְאֶת־בְּנֵינֵנוּ תִקְחוּ לָכֶם: <sup>10</sup>וְאִתָּנוּ  
תִּשְׁבוּ וְהָאָרֶץ תְּהִיָּה לִפְנֵיכֶם שְׂבוּ וּסְחָרוּ  
וְהָאָחוֹז בָּהּ: <sup>11</sup>וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁכֶם אֶל־אֲבִיהָ  
וְאֶל־אֶחָיו אֲמַצְאֲחֵן בְּעֵינֵיכֶם וְאֲשֶׁר  
תֹּאמְרוּ אֵלַי אֲתָן: <sup>12</sup>הֲרַבּוּ עָלַי מֵאֵד מִהֵרָ  
וּמִתָּן וְאֶתְּנָה כְּאֲשֶׁר תֹּאמְרוּ אֵלַי וְתִנוּ־לִי  
אֶת־הַנָּעַר הַנִּפְעָרָה לְאִשָּׁה:

<sup>13</sup>וַיַּעֲנוּ בְנֵי־יַעֲקֹב אֶת־שְׁכֶם וְאֶת־חָמוֹר  
אָבִיו בְּמִרְמָה וַיִּדְבְּרוּ אֲשֶׁר טִמָּא אֶת־דִּינָה  
אֶתְּחָם: <sup>14</sup>וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלֵיהֶם לֹא נוֹכַל  
לַעֲשׂוֹת הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה לְתֵת אֶת־אֲחֹתֵנוּ  
לְאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ עֵרְלָה כִּי־חִרְפָּה הוּא לָנוּ:  
<sup>15</sup>אֲך־בָּזָאת נָאוֹת לָכֶם אִם תְּהִיוּ כָמוֹנוּ  
לְהַמִּיל לָכֶם כָּל־זָכָר: <sup>16</sup>וְנִתְּנוּ אֶת־בְּנֵינֵנוּ  
לָכֶם וְאֶת־בְּנֵיכֶם נִקְחָ־לָנוּ וְיִשְׁבְּנוּ אִתְּכֶם  
וְהָיוּ לָעָם אֶחָד: <sup>17</sup>וְאִם־לֹא תִשְׁמָעוּ  
אֵלֵינוּ לְהַמִּיל וּלְקַחְנוּ אֶת־בָּתְּנוּ וְהִלְכְנוּ:

**13. deceptively.** Heb. *b'mirmah*; here this word is applied to "Jacob's sons," a reminder that earlier it referred to Jacob himself (see at 27:35). On subterfuge as a recourse for both women and men who face abuses of authority, see at 27:1-28:9 (introduction).

**14-24.** Entering into a binding marriage requires both negotiation and sex (not necessarily in that order); so Dinah and Shechem are already halfway there. For their part of the negotiation, the brothers tell Shechem that they cannot give Dinah to him in marriage until he is circumcised. In a surprising move, Shechem is able to convince the males of the town to become circumcised in order to benefit from contact with Jacob's family.

vated by Jacob's daughter Dinah with the young woman, sp young woman. <sup>4</sup>So Shecher Hamor, "Obtain this girl for

<sup>5</sup>At the time that Jacob he Dinah had been defiled, his s with his livestock, so he kept back. <sup>6</sup>Shechem's father Ham to speak with him, <sup>7</sup>and me had returned from the field. <sup>8</sup>men were grieved and beca for he had committed an ou

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**4. "girl."** Heb. *yaldah*; child," which suggests that Similar terms such as *bat* (dat or young woman) appear rep (see at v. 1). Taken together, gest that Dinah's youth was that follow.

"girl... wife." Heb. *yale* sition from childhood to ad



וְאֶת־אֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׂדֶה לָקְחוּ:  
וְאֶת־כָּל־טָפֹם וְאֶת־נָשִׁי  
בְּלִי־אִשֶׁר בְּבֵית:  
30 וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֶל־  
עֲבָדָתָם אֲתִי לְהַבְאִישׁ  
בְּכֹנְעָנִי וּבִפְרִי וְאֲנִי מֵן  
עַל וְהַכּוֹנֵנִי וְנִשְׁמַדְתִּי אֲנִי  
הַכּוֹזֶה יַעֲשֶׂה אֶת־אֲחֹרֹן  
לָהּ וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־  
בִּית־אֵל וּשְׁבָשֵׁם וַעֲשֵׂה  
הַנְּרָאָה אֲלֵיהֶם בְּבִרְחָה  
וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֶל־בִּיתוֹ וְ  
הָסִרּוּ אֶת־אֱלֹהֵי הַנֹּכַר  
וְהִטְהָרוּ וְהַחֲלִיפוּ שְׂמָלָם  
וְנָעֻלָה בֵּית־אֵל וְאֶעֱשֶׂה  
הַעֲנָה אֲתִי בַיּוֹם צִרְתִּי  
אֲשֶׁר הִלַּכְתִּי: 4 וַיָּתֶנּוּ אֵי  
אֱלֹהֵי הַנֹּכַר אֲשֶׁר בְּיָדָם וְ

*B'nei Yisrael*

RENEWAL, DEATH,

3 (35:1-36:43)

with the covenant renewal at  
n it takes the reader through  
life and character. Jacob now  
ple than before, and his sons  
melight.

THE RENAMING OF  
ISRAEL (35:1-15)

old buries all the foreign gods  
their ears—presumably also

<sup>18</sup>Their words seemed good to Hamor and Hamor's son Shechem, <sup>19</sup>and the youth did not delay doing this thing, for he yearned for Jacob's daughter, and he was preeminent in his father's household. <sup>20</sup>So Hamor and his son Shechem went to the gate of their city and spoke to their fellow-citizens, saying, <sup>21</sup>"These people are peaceably disposed toward us; they will settle in the land and trade here; plainly, the land is open wide on every side before them. We will take to wife their daughters and give our daughters to them. <sup>22</sup>But only on this condition have these people agreed to settle among us and become one people: every male among us must be circumcised as they are circumcised. <sup>23</sup>Their livestock and their possessions—all their animals—will be ours; let us consent to them, that they may settle among us." <sup>24</sup>All who went out of the city gate listened to Hamor and his son Shechem; and every male, every able-bodied man, was circumcised.

<sup>25</sup>On the third day, when they were in [the greatest] pain, the two sons of Jacob Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, each took his sword; they went undisturbed into the city and killed every male. <sup>26</sup>And they also killed Hamor and his son Shechem by the sword; then, taking Dinah from Shechem's house, they left. <sup>27</sup>Jacob's [other] sons went over the slain and plundered the city, whose inhabitants had defiled their sister, <sup>28</sup>taking their sheep, their cattle, and their donkeys, and all that

#### BROTHERS' REVENGE (34:25-31)

Rather than framing their sister's loss of virginity in the context of marriage, "Jacob's sons" had arranged marriage deceptively (v. 13). Rather than following through with the terms they had negotiated, Simeon and Levi—now also identified as "Dinah's brothers" (v. 25)—exact revenge.

<sup>26</sup> taking Dinah from Shechem's house. After her initial encounter with Shechem, Dinah does not return to her father's house. But in Shechem's

<sup>18</sup> וַיִּטְבוּ דְבָרֵיהֶם בְּעֵינֵי חָמוֹר וּבְעֵינֵי שָׁכֶם בֶּן־חָמוֹר: <sup>19</sup> וְלֹא־אַחֵר הִנָּעַר לַעֲשׂוֹת הַדָּבָר כִּי חָפֵץ בַּבַּת־יַעֲקֹב וְהוּא נֹכְדָד מִכָּל בֵּית אָבִיו: <sup>20</sup> וַיָּבֹא חָמוֹר וּשְׁכֶם בְּנוֹ אֶל־שַׁעַר עִירָם וַיְדַבְּרוּ אֶל־אֲנָשֵׁי עִירָם לֵאמֹר: <sup>21</sup> הָאֲנָשִׁים הָאֵלֶּה שְׁלָמִים הֵם אֲתָנוּ וַיֵּשְׁבוּ בָאָרֶץ וַיִּסְחָרוּ אִתָּהּ וְהָאָרֶץ הִנֶּה רַחֲבַת־יָדַיִם לִפְנֵיהֶם אֶת־בָּנֹתָם נָקַח־לָנוּ לְנָשִׁים וְאֶת־בָּנֹתֵינוּ נָתַן לָהֶם: <sup>22</sup> אָךְ בְּזָאת יֵאָתוּ לָנוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים לְשֶׁבֶת אֲתָנוּ לְהִיּוֹת לָעַם אֶחָד בְּהֵמוֹל לָנוּ כָּל־זָכָר כַּאֲשֶׁר הֵם נְמָלִים: <sup>23</sup> מִקְנֵהֶם וּקְנִינָם וְכָל־בְּהֶמְתָּם הָלּוא לָנוּ הֵם אָךְ נִאֲוֹתָהּ לָהֶם וַיֵּשְׁבוּ אֲתָנוּ: <sup>24</sup> וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ אֶל־חָמוֹר וְאֶל־שָׁכֶם בְּנוֹ כָּל־יִצְאָי שַׁעַר עִירוֹ וַיִּמְלּוּ כָּל־זָכָר כָּל־יִצְאָי שַׁעַר עִירוֹ:

<sup>25</sup> וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי בְּהִיּוֹתָם כְּאֲבִים וַיִּקְחוּ שְׁנֵי־בְנֵי־יַעֲקֹב שְׂמֹעוֹן וְלֵוִי אֲחֵי דִינָה אִישׁ חֶרֶב וַיָּבֹאוּ עַל־הָעִיר בֶּטֶח וַיַּהֲרֹגוּ כָּל־זָכָר: <sup>26</sup> וְאֶת־חָמוֹר וְאֶת־שָׁכֶם בְּנוֹ הָרָגוּ לְפִי־חֶרֶב וַיִּקְחוּ אֶת־דִּינָה מִבֵּית שָׁכֶם וַיֵּצְאוּ: <sup>27</sup> בְּנֵי יַעֲקֹב בָּאוּ עַל־הַחֲלָלִים וַיָּבִיזוּ הָעִיר אֲשֶׁר טָמְאוּ אֲחֹתָם: <sup>28</sup> אֶת־צֹאֲנָם וְאֶת־בָּקָרָם וְאֶת־חֲמֹרֵיהֶם וְאֶת אֲשֶׁר־בַּעִיר

house, her status is equally problematic as she is not officially his wife. An alien in a foreign household, lacking a negotiated marriage and children, Dinah is literally on the social fringe. Her removal from Shechem's house at this point in the story does nothing to improve the situation. With a voided marriage but the sexual status of wife, there is no acceptable place for her in society.

<sup>28-29</sup> The brothers kill all the men but spare women and children, taking them captive instead.

gled into Israel and sold into young women—typically in e raped, abused, incarcerated ing” 15–25 clients over 14–18 eek. The women become in- 1 ever-growing debt to their 1 all walks of life pay approxi- 5 brothels per month and the activity are estimated at \$750 slavery and human trafficking 1, taking place in nearly every : is estimated that 600,000— ly women and children—are s worldwide every year. (For —and to get involved in this e Task Force on Human Traf- 1 site.)

ence as well in the challenges happening right now in the ah were raped and became n South Dakota in 2007, she et an abortion. Dinah in the aftermath of her v. We never hear from her, just from the women and girls in victims of violence and whose it the legacy of Jacob as Israel, demands that we confront the lves and our world—and not facts. The feminist educator omen to hear each other “into challenges us to go even fur- vices for all of our sisters.

—Laura Geller

stands for strength in the biblical world. Thus, Jacob does not actually change the name given by Rachel—for all Jacob’s children bear names given to them by

their mothers—but rather “translates” it to its most positive interpretation.

—Gail Labovitz

## Contemporary Reflection



AFTER TWENTY YEARS, Jacob is coming home. Anticipating that the reunion with the brother he cheated all those years ago will be disastrous, he sends messengers laden with presents ahead to his brother. But just to be on the safe side, he divides his camp in order to minimize the losses should he come under attack. The story continues: “That same night, he got up, took his two wives, his two maidservants, and his eleven children, and crossed at a ford of the Jabbok [river]. . . . Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him” (32:23–25). The nocturnal wrestler wounds and blesses him and gives him a new name—our name: Yisrael, one who wrestles with God.

Jacob’s wrestling with God is a powerful image and legacy. We never know with whom Jacob is wrestling: is it himself, his conscience, his brother, God, or all of these parts of himself and of his life? Jacob names the place Peniel, meaning “Face of God,” for, as he states, “I have seen God face-to-face” (32:31). Somehow, alone, separated from his “two wives” and his “eleven children,” Jacob discovers the face of God in his adversary—and Jacob is blessed.

Eleven children cross the river? But Jacob already at this point has twelve children. What about Dinah, his daughter? What happened to her? Rashi, quoting a midrash, explains: “He placed her in a chest and locked her in.” While many commentaries understand that by locking Dinah in a box Jacob intends to protect her from marrying his brother Esau, we know the truth of the story. Hiding Dinah—locking

her up—is a powerful image about silencing a woman. And that silence echoes loudly through the rest of the Torah.

What happens next? Dinah gets raped (Genesis 34).

In an ultimate act of silencing, the commentaries understand Dinah’s rape as Jacob’s punishment for withholding her from Esau. Dinah’s rape is *Jacob’s* punishment? What about Dinah? What has she done? How does she feel? Our text is silent. We only know what her brothers and father think: that she has been

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defiled (34:5–7), that she must not be treated as a whore (34:31). No one in the Torah or the midrashic accounts asks her what she wants, what she needs, or how she can be comforted.

Her silence is loud enough to reverberate through the generations. We hear it in the reports of other fathers who perceive their daughter’s rape as their dishonor, their punishment. Fortunately for Dinah, in Genesis the blame and punishment fall entirely on the perpetrator and his people, not on her. Other women are not as lucky. In 1998, in Pakistan, Arbab Khatoon was raped by three men in a village in Jacobabad district. She was murdered seven hours later. According to local residents, she was killed by her relatives for bringing dishonor to the family by going to the police. In 1999, Lal Jamilla Mandokhel, a 16-year-old mentally retarded girl, was reportedly raped several

times by a junior clerk of the local government department of agriculture in a hotel in Parachinar, Pakistan. The girl's uncle filed a complaint about the incident with police—who took the accused into protective custody but then handed over the girl to her tribe. The elders decided that she had brought shame to her tribe and that the honor could only be restored by her death; she was killed in front of a tribal gathering.

Similar stories are reported not only in Pakistan but also in Bangladesh, Great Britain, Brazil, Ecuador, Egypt, India, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Pakistan, Morocco, Sweden, Turkey, Uganda—as well as Afghanistan, Iraq, and Iran. No wonder women are silent!

This outrage is only part of a much larger problem of violence against women. For example, according to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), more than five thousand brides die annually in India because their dowries are considered insufficient. Widney Brown, advocacy director for Human Rights Watch, says that "in countries where Islam is practiced, they're called honor killings, but dowry deaths and so-called crimes of passion have a similar dynamic in that the women are killed by male family members and the crimes are perceived as excusable or understandable." The practice, she said, "goes across cultures and across religions." In the few cases when public outcry around the world and international pressure were used, a woman's life was spared. But stories that capture the headlines do not begin to address the scope and range of the problem.

Another form that violence takes is sexual slavery and human trafficking, which even happens in Israel. According to a recent Knesset report, thousands of

women are illegally smuggled into Israel and sold into sexual slavery. These young women—typically in their early twenties—are raped, abused, incarcerated and threatened, "servicing" 15–25 clients over 14–18 hours a day, 7 days a week. The women become indentured slaves with an ever-growing debt to their owners. Israeli men from all walks of life pay approximately a million visits to brothels per month and the profits from this illicit activity are estimated at \$750 million annually. Sexual slavery and human trafficking remain a global problem, taking place in nearly every corner of the world. It is estimated that 600,000–800,000 people—mostly women and children—are trafficked across borders worldwide every year. (For ways to get information—and to get involved in this issue—please contact the Task Force on Human Trafficking through its Web site.)

We hear Dinah's silence as well in the challenges to reproductive rights happening right now in the United States. If Dinah were raped and became pregnant while living in South Dakota in 2007, she might not be able to get an abortion.

What happens to Dinah in the aftermath of her ordeal? We do not know. We never hear from her, just as we may never hear from the women and girls in our generation who are victims of violence and whose voices are not heard. But the legacy of Jacob as Israel, the one who wrestles, demands that we confront the shadowy parts of ourselves and our world—and not passively ignore these facts. The feminist educator Nelle Morton urged women to hear each other "into speech." Dinah's story challenges us to go even further and be also the voices for all of our sisters.

—Laura Geller

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# Voices

## Dinah

Ruth Fainlight

Genesis 34

Holding up my hands in warning,  
I want to call, "No! No! Don't do it!",  
to Shechem and Dinah, to Simeon and Levi,  
but most of all, to every able-bodied male  
of Hamor's tribe. "Don't consent, it's a trap."

Swollen tender flesh:

Shechem's, aching with lust and love  
(he told his father, "Get me this damsel to wife",  
he "spoke comfortingly unto the damsel");  
Dinah's broken maidenhead;  
Hamor's guards, weakened by pain,  
three days after circumcision.

That was the moment chosen to destroy them,  
spoil the city, take their flocks and herds,  
enslave their wives and little ones, while  
Dinah's brothers led her back to Jacob's tents,  
ancient honour satisfied.

Jacob chided his sons, fearful  
that Canaanites and Perizzites  
would now combine against him.

Not until he lay dying  
did he curse them for that wild vengeance.

Whether Dinah was saddened by  
Shechem's death is never mentioned.

"No, no, don't do it!",  
I want to call out,  
palms upward, heart pounding.  
"Choose another future!"  
But it's always too late or too soon.  
So much still must happen.  
The story has only started.

## from Dina's Own Story

Vanessa Ochs

Genesis 34

Dina tried to imagine having a story of her  
own to tell, of connections she had made that  
could widen their world. Her story would make  
her brothers lean forward with curiosity and jeal-  
ousy, their elbows on their knees, their faces lit  
orange by the fire.

What if it were she, and not her father, who  
had encountered angels of God ascending and  
descending a ladder? She would have learned  
the name of each angel. She would have held on  
to their wings, climbed on their backs, and fol-  
lowed them homeward—and then she'd recip-  
rocate, inviting them to her home. If she could  
only meet people outside her world, hear their  
languages, eat their foods, shop for red ribbon  
in their bazaars, wear their clothes, style her  
hair as they did. She would make a friend, who  
would reach for her hand.

## The Struggle

Amy K. Blank

Genesis 32:17-33

God: I am that which is not.  
Search and you shall find  
about your universe of thought  
only my shadow; grasp  
only to hold the measure of your grip.  
So am I God—therefore let go!

Jacob: I will not let you go.

## WRESTLING WITH ANGELS

**LILITH THE REBEL COMMENTS:** How tempting it is to pass over, with a sigh of relief and a swift backward glance, the episode of Jacob wrestling with the angel! After all, what business do we women have doing hand-to-hand combat with supernatural beings? Could anything be more ridiculous than to imagine Leah or Rachel going to the mat with God? But the truth is that they do! They tussle with the Angel of Death over each child they bear. In the end, Rachel gives up her life in the struggle, but her newborn son emerges with a new name. And like their husband, Jacob's wives come out of their sacred travails wounded where the angel wrenched the hollow of their thighs.

**MIRIAM THE PROPHET INTERJECTS:** And what of all of us who have never given birth, who cradle a hollow within ourselves all our lives? Who will change our name from Barren One to Mother? And if we choose not to bear children, to whom shall we bequeath our names?

## PLAYING FAVORITES

**OUR DAUGHTERS ASK:** When Jacob goes to meet Esau and sees his brother approaching with four hundred men, he divides up his family so they don't make a single target. In the vanguard, he puts his concubines, Bilhah and Zilpah, and their children; next come Leah and hers. Rachel and Joseph he positions last, behind all the others. Imagine how the other three wives and the ten older sons reacted to Jacob's cheapening of their worth. No wonder Rachel's older son becomes a source of bitterness for them all!

## DINAH'S SILENCE

**OUR DAUGHTERS ASK:** Why are we told so little about poor Dinah? Nothing more than that she goes "OUT TO VISIT THE DAUGHTERS OF THE LAND" (34:1), that she's desired and raped by Shechem, and that she's later rescued by her brothers through treachery and brutality. Why are we not told her feelings, her words, her reactions to everything that happens because of her?

**DINAH ANSWERS:** Because from the moment of my birth, I was fated to remain silent. In fact, in the entire Torah, I never speak a single word. When

## 8. VAYISHLAKH:

## Power Struggles

(GENESIS 32:4-36:43)

**TORAH TEACHES:** After twenty years in exile, Jacob returns home. Still fearful of Esau's revenge, he sends ahead of him gifts of livestock to placate his brother.

That night, after his family and his herds have crossed the river Jabbok, Jacob struggles with a divine being and wrests from him a new name, *Israel* (Israel)—"one-who-wrestles-with-God." Because Jacob is wounded in the thigh as a result of this encounter, Jews have ever since refrained from eating the thigh muscle of kosher animals.

Then, in anticipation of seeing his brother, Jacob divides his large family into two camps and goes to meet Esau, who greets him with a tearful embrace. Jacob introduces Esau to his family and presents gifts. Esau returns to his home in Seir; Jacob and his family settle near Shechem.

One day, Dinah goes out to visit the women of the land. Shechem, son of the local chieftain Hamor, rapes her and then asks his father to obtain her for him as a wife. When Hamor and Shechem come to Jacob and his sons with their request, Jacob's sons consent, but only on the condition that Hamor and Shechem and their people circumcise themselves. They agree, but when the men of Shechem are still weak from their wounds, Simeon and Levi attack the town and slaughter all the men. Then the other brothers come and plunder the town, taking among the spoils the women and children. Jacob accuses his sons of causing trouble for him by their actions.

Jacob moves to Bethel and builds an altar there. Then Rebecca's servant Deborah dies and is buried. God blesses Jacob with a promise of many descendants, kings among them, and with the land of Canaan.

Rachel then gives birth to a second son, whom she calls *Ben-oni*, "son of my suffering," but Jacob renames him *Benjamin*, "son of my right hand." Rachel dies in childbirth and is buried near Bethlehem.

Jacob then comes to his father, Isaac, in Hebron. Isaac dies at age 180 and is buried by Jacob and Esau.

Esau has five sons by Canaanite wives, and their many descendants become the kings and clans of the land of Edom.

I was born, my name, unlike my brothers', was announced without interpretation. When I was raped, my cries went unrecorded. When my brothers negotiated with Hamor for my hand, my wishes were not considered. And when my father, Jacob, bestowed his blessings upon his children, I received none. That was why I visited the Canaanite women. Utterly invisible at home, I craved attention and went out looking for it. Only too late did I learn that neglect is not the only injury a woman can suffer.

### SHECHEM

OUR DAUGHTERS ASK: Does Shechem really fall in love with Dinah at first sight? He doesn't seem the type!

DINAH ANSWERS: You're right! Read the story carefully and note the order of events: Shechem, son of Hamor (whose name means "ass"), first *saw* me, then *took* me, and then *lay* with me *by force*. Only after these actions did he feel "STRONGLY DRAWN" to me and "IN LOVE WITH THE MAIDEN." And only then did he finally *speak* "TO THE MAIDEN TENDERLY" and ask that his father "GET ME THIS GIRL AS A WIFE" (34:2-4).

OUR MOTHERS COMMENT: How clearly the Torah understands the nature of rape! As we have reaffirmed in our own time, sexual violation is an act of *violence*, not *desire*. Shechem is driven not by *animal* instincts but by *human* aggression and appetite, the lust to possess, not to mate. It is first a lust of the eye, and only later of the heart.

HAGAR THE STRANGER RETORTS: How easy it is to regard foreigners as jackasses! This story is nothing more than an anti-Canaanite libel, justifying Israelite possession of other peoples' lands!

HULDAH THE PREACHER COUNTERS: No, Jacob himself later condemns his two sons for attacking Shechem. He even dispossesses them in his will, as it is written: "CURSED BE THEIR ANGER SO FIERCE, AND THEIR WRATH SO RELENTLESS. I WILL DIVIDE THEM IN JACOB, SCATTER THEM IN ISRAEL" (49:7).

DINAH THE WOUNDED ONE CRIES: Of what consolation is any of this to me!

### DINAH'S STATUS WITHIN THE FAMILY

DINAH EXPLAINS: Relations in my family were very complicated, especially for me. Of Jacob's eleven sons, six were my full brothers; five my half-

brothers. Of Jacob's four wives, one was my mother; three my stepmothers. I was the only daughter, the only sister, the only woman of the next generation. In this story, my genealogy and family position changed depending upon what happened to me. When I first went out to visit the neighboring women, I was identified as *Leah's daughter*. But when Shechem raped me, I became *Jacob's*. When my brothers heard of my violation, they were "DISTRESSED AND VERY ANGRY, BECAUSE [Shechem] HAD COMMITTED AN OUTRAGE IN ISRAEL BY LYING WITH JACOB'S DAUGHTER—A THING NOT TO BE DONE" (34:7). And when my brothers took revenge on my violators, it was Simeon and Levi, "TWO OF JACOB'S SONS, BROTHERS OF DINAH" (34:25), who carried it out in their role as my older brothers.

I was only a status symbol, a place marker in this process—much in the same way that a zero, although nothing itself, adds value to numbers or diminishes them.

### HAMOR

OUR DAUGHTERS ASK: Why does Shechem's father, Hamor, speak with Dinah's brothers instead of with her father?

HAGAR THE STRANGER ANSWERS: Hamor, the shrewd chieftain of Shechem, chooses to present his proposition to Dinah's brothers because they are the ones who will eventually need to marry wives from among "THE DAUGHTERS OF THE LAND." Jacob, on the other hand, who's married one of his own, might not prove as sympathetic to his proposal.

SARAH THE ANCIENT ONE OBSERVES: And so it begins—the endless negotiation of social boundaries between Israel and the nations. Until this moment, boundary disputes have had to do with land—Abraham, and then Isaac, bargaining with Abimelekh about water rights. And previously when social boundaries were crossed, it was a matter of marrying *out*—Ishmael taking a wife from among Hagar's people; Esau from among the neighboring Hittites as well as from Ishmael's family.

OUR MOTHERS BREAK IN: But here the neighbors are trying to marry *in*, an early version of the classic melting pot: "MY SON SHECHEM LONGS FOR YOUR DAUGHTER. PLEASE GIVE HER TO HIM IN MARRIAGE. INTERMARRY WITH US: GIVE YOUR DAUGHTERS TO US, AND TAKE OUR DAUGHTERS FOR YOURSELVES" (34:8-9). Then, as now, such melting was easier said than done.



## BARGAINING FOR DAMAGED GOODS

OUR DAUGHTERS ASK: Why does Shechem's father, Hamor, need to ask for Dinah's hand when she's already been raped by his son? Hasn't the horse already been stolen from the barn? So why does he say to Dinah's brothers: "ASK OF ME A BRIDE-PRICE" (34:12)?

DINAH ANSWERS: Hamor was offering compensation to set things right. But to my brothers, he was no more than a horse thief. They recognized that honor stolen can never be recouped: Hamor's proposed payment transformed rape into prostitution. The only compensation they would accept was vengeance. But neither act could compensate me for what I had lost.

## JACOB IN RETREAT

OUR DAUGHTERS ASK: Why does Jacob keep silent when he hears about his only daughter's rape? Why doesn't he participate in the negotiations between Hamor and Dinah's brothers or in the destruction of Shechem? Why is his involvement confined to a single gripe to his sons: "YOU HAVE BROUGHT TROUBLE ON ME, MAKING ME ODISIOUS AMONG THE INHABITANTS OF THE LAND" (34:30). And even here he's complaining not about Dinah's welfare but only about his own: "IF [the Canaanites] UNITE AGAINST ME AND ATTACK ME, I AND MY HOUSE WILL BE DESTROYED" (34:30). As Dinah's father, why isn't he enraged like her brothers about her dishonor? And when his sons criticize him for his indifference, protesting "SHOULD OUR SISTER BE TREATED AS A WHORE?" (34:31), he doesn't answer their challenge.

MOTHER RACHEL REPLIES: To understand Jacob's complacent response to his daughter's rape, we need to look to his past. After his dark encounter with the angel on the banks of the Jabbok, he was never quite the same. He had been traumatized by this experience, just as his father, Isaac, had been under Abraham's upraised knife. From that moment on, Jacob withdrew from the larger compass of the family drama, restricting his concerns to me and my two sons—and to God. So withdrawn was he that his oldest son, Reuben, even dared to sleep with his concubine Bilhah in an obvious play for his father's power. Out of this vacuum emerged the rivalries of the next generation.

## DEBORAH, REBECCA'S NURSE

OUR DAUGHTERS ASK: Why does the Torah mention the death and burial of Deborah, Rebecca's childhood nurse (35:8)? After all, we know nothing at all about her life—only that she leaves Paddan-Aram with Rebecca and later dies in Bethel. So why are we told about her death, even that she's buried under an oak named from then on Allon-bacut—literally, the Oak of Weeping?

BERURIAH THE SCHOLAR ANSWERS: Deborah is the only servant in the Torah whose death and burial receive notice. Not even Abraham's chief servant Eliezer, who arranges for Rebecca's marriage to his master's heir; nor Bilhah and Zilpah, who bear four of Rebecca's grandsons, merit such recognition. In fact, even Rebecca's own death goes unremarked; only later, at Jacob's death, are we told of his mother's burial in the family cave of Makhpelah.

REBECCA EXPLAINS: That Deborah's death is not only noted but even commemorated with a living memorial shows just how beloved she was to our family. Her service spanned eighty years: the twenty years of my barrenness, the forty years when both of my twins were at home, and the twenty long years of Jacob's exile. With her death, we all had plenty of reasons to mourn.

## THE DEATH OF RACHEL

OUR DAUGHTERS ASK: Why does Rachel name her second son *Ben-oni*, "son of my suffering" (35:18)? Isn't this the son she so ardently prayed for?

THE RABBIS ANSWER: Rachel's inauspicious choice of a name is a dying woman's act of grief and desperation.

OUR MOTHERS SUGGEST: In giving her baby an unlucky name, Rachel was acknowledging the power of the evil eye—her sister Leah's jealousy—and hoping finally to deceive that covetous gaze to protect her baby from harm.

BERURIAH THE SCHOLAR OFFERS A DIFFERENT REPLY: We can find within her choice of names the fulfillment of several ironies embedded in the story: For though Rachel once demanded that Jacob give her children or death, she here receives them both. She names her firstborn son *Joseph*, meaning "may God add another son," not calculating the high cost her request might exact of her. And Jacob unwittingly compounds these curses by swearing to his father-in-law Laban that whoever has stolen Laban's idols merits death.