

## A Weekly Byte... from Isralight

(Portion of Vayishlach)

*Small Tastings of Torah, Judaism and Spirituality*  
From **Rav Binny Freedman**

*Jebalya; anyone who has been there has no desire to go back. A nasty piece of real estate in the Gaza strip, Je'balya is a densely overpopulated refugee camp that is always waiting to explode. Which is exactly what happened back in 1987, when an Israeli truck driver ploughed into a crowd of Arabs, killing three and wounding many more.*

*The subsequent rioting that eventually spread all through Gaza, Judea and Samaria, has since become known as the 'Intifada', and in the spring of 88', on my first reserve duty after having completed my four and a half years of army service, we were right smack in the middle of it.*

*Every day was a different story, and to be honest, the Israeli Army was completely unprepared for this type of warfare. Put me in a tank, with my company spread out on either side in an open battlefield opposite Syrian armor, and at least I know what to do. But how do you deal with women and children throwing Molotov cocktails and heaving cinderblocks off of apartment buildings?*

*You never knew what was waiting for you around any given street corner, and you were as concerned about not ending up in military court for giving the wrong order as you were about ending up in a hospital for the same reason.*

*One morning, we were on a twelve-man patrol in the heart of Je'balya, trying to get through another day. We were maintaining day distances (about 40 feet between each man and the man behind him, to prevent anyone taking out an entire patrol with one volley or one grenade) in two columns of six men, traversing both sides of the street.*

*Each column had the responsibility to keep their eyes on the tops of the buildings on the other side of the street, as they would see something up there before the men directly below on the same side of the street would.*

*And most important, the two men at the rear of each column had to be constantly aware of what was behind them; they were responsible for the rear, and making sure no-one snuck up on us from behind, something that was too easy in a densely populated hostile civilian environment. The two men in front of them, (fifth in each column) were supposed to keep the rear guys in their constant sight, to make sure no soldier was suddenly 'whisked away' and kidnapped, something which had apparently been attempted a couple of times.*

*We practiced these scenarios all the time, and I constantly drilled the men on the importance of turning a full 360 degrees every few steps to be constantly aware of what was going on around them, especially in the crowds. Which is why, to this day, I am not sure what went wrong, but the only warning we got was the "Allah'hu Akbar" ("G-d is*

great”) scream yelled by the terrorist wielding an axe as he jumped on one of the men in the rear of the column.

No-one had any time to react, and as one of my men described it to me afterwards, all he saw was an axe swinging down with full force at the back of his buddy in the rear, and he was absolutely certain that Shmuel, a father of three children, was about to die.

At the last minute, Shmuel, who was carrying a ten liter Jerry can on his back, bent over forward to avoid the axe, and it embedded itself in the jerry can. As the water exploded in all directions, and this Arab terrorist attempted to pull the axe back out for another swing, he was quickly surrounded and overpowered by the soldiers on either side.

Standard operating procedure at the time was not to publicly arrest, handcuff, and blindfold a suspect in front of everyone on the street, for fear of starting a riot. So we took him to an alley off the street to tie his hands, blindfold him, and wait for the battalion vehicle that would come and take him off our hands.

There we were in an alley in the middle of the Gaza strip, with an Arab terrorist, blindfolded (so he wouldn't see details of the army base he was driven into for holding...) and with his hands tied behind his back, waiting....

And one of the guys, a long time veteran of the unit, just went nuts. He walked over to this terrorist, sitting on the ground and started screaming at him:

“Kill my buddy? Make his children orphans? Tell us whether we can live here? I'll show you what it means to kill an Israeli soldier...!”

And, before I could do anything, he raised his arm and brought his open palm down hard on the head of this Arab terrorist. And then, yelling, he raised his hand to do it again, and I grabbed his arm.

Now, don't misunderstand: I not only understood this soldier; I empathized with him. This Arab, sitting on the ground looking so innocent, had just tried to kill his best buddy with an axe. I was new to this unit (it was my first reserve duty), but these men had served together since before the Six-Day War. They had been fighting alongside one another back when for me it was a good year for milk. In fact, Shmuel had just become a grandfather a couple of days before, and we had all shared a 'Le'Chaim' together. And here was this Arab who had attempted to kill him; tried to make his children orphans, and subject his wife to an empty chair at the Shabbat table forever....

And this was all on top of the incredible pressure of being on reserve duty and dealing with all the garbage of the Intifada, running after children throwing rocks and dodging bricks and Molotov cocktails, not to mention struggling with riots of hundreds of people including women and children, the old and the young, while ensuring the safety of Jewish civilians trying to drive their kids home from school, all in the middle of the Gaza strip.

So I understood what was challenging this guy; but not on my watch. Rules are rules, and if you lose sight of what you are fighting for, then what is the point? And the rules here couldn't be clearer: You can use whatever force is necessary to subdue a terrorist, even kill him if your life is in danger. But once he's captured and bound, the law protects him.

*So I grabbed this guy's arm, and a small argument ensued (remember, I was new to this unit, but in the end the responsibility for what might have happened would have been mine) but a couple of the guys backed me up, and everyone calmed down.*

*And twenty or so years later, you wonder, who was right?*

And somehow, you have to wonder, where is that axe-wielding terrorist today? Why do we follow rules of civilization with terrorists? Maybe we should play by *their* rules?

There is a desire for retribution, a need to ensure that what goes around comes around, and yet, we are better than that, aren't we?

This struggle, of course, is not a new phenomenon; Yaakov and his children were grappling with the same issues four thousand years ago, in this week's portion of *Vayishlach*.

*"Va'Tetzeh Dina Bat Leah Asher Yaldah Le'Yaakov, Liro't Bi'Vnot Ha'Aretz. "And Dinah, daughter of Leah who bore her for Yaakov, went out to see the daughters of the land." (Genesis 34:1)*

Dinah, the daughter of Leah and Yaakov, sets out for a day's outing. Shechem, the son of Chamor, (a local prince,) kidnaps and rapes her, and then (apparently) falls in love with her. (34:1-3)

So he asks his father (Chamor) to arrange for him to marry her, and Chamor indeed comes to negotiate a dowry with Yaakov. Of course, Yaakov's family is outraged (34: 4-7), and deeply saddened by what has befallen their sister.

Chamor, however, seemingly oblivious to how his son's behavior is being perceived, suggests a match. And not just Dinah and Chamor, but:

*"... And give her, please, to him (Shechem) as a wife. And marry us; give us your daughters, and we will give you ours, and dwell with us, and the land will be before you. Dwell in it and trade and take hold of it." (34: 8-10)*

Chamor is suggesting much more than just a marriage. This will be the glue around which our people's destinies will be bonded together in this land. Sounds wonderful, right? And what's so terrible? A wayward act, and an unfortunate episode, but let us turn this into something positive. This opportunity will forge a bond between us that will allow you to become as brothers with us. Indeed, one might have expected Chamor, who is clearly the local nobleman and a powerful man, to ignore the incident.

It would not have been surprising for Yaakov to have to come to Chamor to demand a punishment, or at least a payment, for the damage done to his daughter and the family name. After all, this is four thousand years ago, when a daughter was as good as the dowry she was worth, and now Dena was 'damaged goods' right?

Yet, Chamor seeks out Yaakov and offers not only peace, but also the chance to make it last. And in the process he also offers Yaakov and the brothers whatever they will ask, including a fortune in dowry. So at least Shechem seems to recognize he is wrong, and he

has come to Yaakov, seeking to make it right. And it is always better to settle out of court, no?

So now Yaakov and the family have a number of different options. But the one they choose seems to be way out of left field. Their issue is that Shechem and Chamor, and indeed the whole town are just not Jewish; they aren't circumcised. But if they will agree to be circumcised, then life will be wonderful, and their children can marry each other, and they can all live together forever. (34: 13-17) And this is the dream isn't it? We'll all live together and the Canaanites will become Jewish to boot!

And incredibly, Chamor and Shechem love this idea, (34:18-24) and immediately go back to their hometown and convince all the men to actually do this, and they all get circumcised! What does this really mean, that they all get circumcised? Essentially, as the Talmud (Yevamot 46a) makes clear, a man must be circumcised in order to convert to Judaism, so the entire town is converting to Judaism! What an incredible moment this must be for Yaakov, as he sees the unfolding of his grandfather Abraham's dream before his eyes. The world is finally seeing the light, and an entire Canaanite town is ready to join the Jewish fold.

But something goes terribly wrong. Because on the third day after their circumcision (34:25-29), when the men are at their weakest, recovering from the operation, two of the brothers, Shimon and Levi come back and massacre the entire town. They kill all the men, and loot the city, essentially destroying everything.

And Yaakov, so it seems cannot believe it. An entire city, butchered while they lie, essentially, in their hospital beds. And the dream lies in tatters on the blood soaked Canaanite earth.

*“And Yaakov says to Shimon and Levi: You have polluted (“Achartem”) me, to make me odious amongst the dwellers of this land, amongst the Canaanite, and the Perizite, and I am few in number, and they will gather against me, and attack me, and destroy me and my house....”* (34: 30-31)

Yaakov is, so it seems, beside himself, and what might have been, finally, peace, has become war clouds on the horizon.

Indeed, at the end of his life, some twenty-five years later, Yaakov will remember this moment, and curse the brothers Shimon and Levi for this deed.

*“... Arur Apam Ki' Az...”* *“Cursed is their anger which is strong....”* (Genesis 49:6)

And yet, despite this terrible deed, Shimon and Levi are not excised from the family, and in fact their tribes become the spiritual leaders of the Jewish people. The tribe of Shimon produces the Roshei Yeshivot, or Torah leaders of the institutes of learning, and Levi is the tribe that will merit serving in the Temple. From this tribe will come the Kohanim, the priests, who also are the teachers and role models of the nation.

Indeed, Yaakov's reaction to this terrible deed is surprisingly calm. He *tells* them off (“Vayomer...” v. 30). There is no shouting, no anger, and no one is banished. One can almost hear Yaakov saying: “Hmmm... this is a mistake.”

A mistake? Just a couple of verses to denote Yaakov's disapproval and that is all? And even on his deathbed, Yaakov does not curse the brothers (Shimon and Levi), but only their *anger*, implying it wasn't the action that was the problem, just maybe the way they did it!

What is going on here? This entire story seems absurd.

Boy sees girl, rapes her, kidnaps her, falls in love with her, and asks dad to arrange the marriage. So rapist/ kidnapper's 'dad' meets girl (victim)'s dad and they negotiate a marriage arrangement, conditional to a mass circumcision. *Everyone* has to be a Jew. So the town all gets circumcised, but when they are too weak to fight back, victim's brothers come along and kill everybody. And victim's dad is ... annoyed?

Now, we must remember again, the context within which we are discussing this story. In order to be able to learn from the stories of the Torah, we have to view them as almost ordinary men and women, who, like us, had weaknesses and shortcomings. In fact, that is one of the things that are so wonderful about the Torah; it does not whitewash its heroes. The role models of the Jewish people did not walk on water, and were not born of Immaculate Conception; they were human beings, with flaws and mistakes.

That said, it is equally important to remember that at the end of the day, we are still talking about the tribes of Israel. These were giants on a spiritual and ethical level of human behavior we cannot even begin to comprehend. And while we must momentarily forget this, in order to relate these stories to our own state of affairs, we must always at the same time, remember of whom we speak.

One could write a book on the topics raised in this story alone, but we will confine this discussion to one question: what really, is at the root of the tension between Yaakov and his sons?

Perhaps the clue to this question lies with Dina. Where was Dina when all this was going on?

Only after the brothers lay waste to the entire city does the Torah tell us (34:26) "*...and they (the brothers) took Dina and left.*"

In other words, all the while Yaakov is negotiating with Shechem and Chamor, *Dina is still being held captive* in the Canaanite city!

Perhaps Yaakov and his sons simply represent two different approaches to a very challenging situation.

The chronology of the story here actually raises some interesting questions in their own right.

Yaakov hears that Dina has been '*defiled*'. Notice the Torah (verse 5) does *not* say she was raped. In fact, since Dina goes out on her own accord to 'check out' the local Canaanite women, she may well be in a social situation when Shechem spies her. And while Yaakov hears of all this, all the sons are still with the flocks in the field, so Yaakov says nothing, awaiting their return, and perhaps taking some time to think? This is no

simple matter, and much is at stake. An act like this could lead to war. Most fascinating is that Yaakov may not really know what has transpired. Was Dina forcibly taken and raped, or did “the party just go too far”?

Interestingly, *before* the brothers come back from the field, Chamor goes out to speak with Yaakov, (34:5-8) and it appears from the verses that he is actually already there when the brothers arrive. The brothers are outraged that Dina has been defiled by a Canaanite, and again, (verse 7) it does not say Dina was raped, it merely says she was defiled because a Canaanite *lay* with her.

In fact, there is only one word in the Torah that implies she was raped (verse 2): “... *And he took her, and lay with her Va’ye’aneha*’.” This may mean, as many suggest, and he defiled her, or inflicted upon her (a rape).

But, as we have suggested in the past, *Inui* has different meanings. It can mean affliction, as in “Lechem **Oni**”, the *bread of affliction* (Matzah), which we ate in Egypt the place of our affliction, or “*Ve’**Initem** Et Nafshoteichem*”, “*And you shall afflict your souls*”, (referring to the things we desist from on Yom Kippur, such as eating and drinking).

But **Inui** can also mean song, or joy, such as “*Lechem She’**Onim** Alav Hallel*”, “The bread over which we **sing** the Hallel (prayers of praise and thanksgiving), or “*Ve’**Anita**’ Ve’Amarta*” (Devarim 25), “*And you shall sing and you shall say*”, (referring to the gratitude ceremony of the first fruits in the Temple).

Indeed, even the phrase concerning Yom Kippur, “*Ve’**Initem** Et Nafshoteichem*”, could also mean: ‘*And you shall cause your souls to sing*’!

In which case our verse of *Va’ye’aneha*, might really mean, and he pleased her!

Indeed, what if this is Yaakov’s struggle? What if he is trying to understand what really happened here? Was Dina taken, and raped, or did she meet a Canaanite boy, and doesn’t really want to come home at all?! After all, why did she go to the Canaanite pub in the first place? And what if it’s not just Shechem who wants to marry Dina, and has fallen in love with her; what if Dina also wants to be with Shechem?

And at this point, the issue is not what really happened, the issue is what Yaakov *thinks* might have happened, and how to choose the correct reaction.

Indeed, **Rashi** on this same word, *Va’ye’aneha*, says that he (Shechem) came to her “in an unnatural fashion”. And the **Torah Temimah** asks why he (and generally in rabbinic commentary here) does not simply explain that she was raped? And his answer, based on the **Midrash Rabbah** here (on verse 26: “*And they took Dinah from the house of Shechem and left.*”) says Dinah did not want to leave Shechem’s home; they had to drag her out!

And if this is so, then the case here is not rape at all; it is the question of intermarriage!

What do you do when a nice Jewish girl wants to marry a Canaanite?

Which would explain why Yaakov wants to see if they will agree to be circumcised, because the question is, are you willing to take our tradition upon you? Our daughters will only marry Jews.

The brothers, on the other hand, may have a very different view of things: What if she was raped? How can we even be talking with these people when they are holding our sister against her will in their village? Of what value is any treaty we sign, when they took our sister, violated her, and are holding her hostage in their camp? Indeed, even if we go to Shechem's palace and see Dina, how can we know what the implications of this horrible experience will be? It is not unknown for hostages to defend their terrorist abductors; it is a survival mechanism, and who knows how Dina has been influenced.

The conversation Chamor has with his people is very telling:

*“With this will they consent to dwell with us, to be one nation, if we will circumcise... Their cattle and possessions and all their animals will be for us. Let us consent to them, and they will dwell with us.” (34: 22-23)*

Just which nation will be one? And what do all the possessions of the very wealthy Yaakov have to do with a decision to convert? Conversion to Judaism is meant to be the embracing of an ideal, and a system of beliefs, not a chance to make money.

Maybe what the brothers are seeing here is a lot more than just what might become of their sister; maybe they perceive that what is at stake here is a lot more than that.

What will happen to the Jewish people, when they are all living with and marrying the Canaanites, who never really want to be Jews, they are perhaps just biding their time until they can end this nonsensical idea of an unseen G-d and an objective ethic. Maybe, once the Jews are fattened by Canaanite women, and sleeping in their tents next door, it will be a lot easier to finish them off. And maybe they won't even have to finish us off, because we will end up doing it ourselves, just like we are today, in almost every Jewish population center in the world.

There are no shots being fired in Vancouver today, but eighty percent of the Jewish population has decided to choose love over heritage; in the world today, the children of Yaakov are disappearing, and without any shots being fired.

And again, the question is not whether the brothers are right; the question is, did they think this might be the case?

And when you take a step back, (or take a closer look at the text), it really is not clear at all which of these two perceptions is correct, which is exactly the point.

What do you do, when so much is at stake, and it just isn't clear! Life doesn't always spell out the answers, and sometimes, you look at reality, and it could go either way.

*I remember back in the spring of 82', after the Camp David accords were signed with Egypt, and the time came to implement them. This meant dismantling all the Jewish towns in the Northern Sinai, down to the last Jewish citizen. The Egyptians refused to budge on this issue: the price for peace was a Sinai, which was 'Juden-rein', completely empty of*

*Jews. And so, my older brother, then in the 202nd Airborne (Tzanchanim), was ordered down as part of his unit to 'evacuate' the townspeople of Yamit, a Jewish town in the Northern Sinai. It was an incredibly difficult experience for him; this was the first time Israeli soldiers were given orders to do that, which, until then would have been the job of the police. However, with the vast numbers of people coming down to the Sinai to oppose the evacuation (which they believed would be a watershed event), the police were simply not up to the task, so the army was called in. At one point my brother ran into an old friend of his and was forced to carry him out of a shelter crying....*

*But Menachem Begin, the Israeli prime Minister of the day, had made a treaty with Egypt, and Israel's reputation was at stake. Whether the treaty was a wise decision will be the subject of debate for a long time to come, but the State of Israel had to live up to its commitments. Those in the towns and villages, however, were also of a legitimate opinion, because you can't just give up a piece of the land of Israel, and destroy Jewish homes, without a struggle. Within the boundaries of the law, at the very least, it should not come cheap.*

Maybe this was the struggle of Yaakov and his sons.

Yaakov had made a treaty with the Canaanites, rightly or wrongly, and the name of Israel hung in the balance. But Shimon and Levi's point was that it shouldn't come cheap. If we are negotiating while our sister is being held in Shechem's palace (because after all, why didn't Chamor come with Dina to speak with Yaakov?), then something is wrong. And if we sit quietly today, our way of life will disappear tomorrow. And the Torah doesn't make it clear here, because life isn't clear, and this is the struggle we should experience all the time in a multitude of situations.

We have to remain open to all the possibilities, but we also have to be sure we are seeing the reality around us.

Four thousand years later, Shechem and Chamor are still holding Dina hostage, and the future lies in the balance. And we still somehow struggle, with the dream of finding a real partner for peace, and the reality of those who are before us.

Maybe the State of Israel, responsible to hold up the name and reputation of the Jewish people needs sometimes to be willing to sit and talk. But Shimon and Levi, with the facts on the ground, need to be sure we do not pay a price too steep for that negotiation.

And isn't it powerful that Yaakov curses not the actions of his sons, but their anger, which in the end is the greatest danger.

In this day and age, when our enemy attacks, we need to find the strength to consider, to think, and to decide how to respond, and we need to take great care that anger does not engulf us, because it is so hard after all we have given and all that they have done, not to be filled with anger. Yet that is our challenge, because if we are filled only with anger, then they have won.

At the same time, we must take care not to spend so much time at the table, that the battle is lost. At the end of the day, Chamor does come to talk; and Yaakov listens. But there comes a time when a person loses the right to talk; when their words ring hollow when

held against their deeds. And you cannot negotiate without someone to talk to. Sometimes, it is not words that will bring peace, but actions.

The Torah does not always make it so clear, and in truth, it is not difficult to see in this and many other stories in the Torah that which we really want to see. If nothing else, the Torah is as relevant and crucial to who we are and where we are headed, as it was when we first received it over three thousand years ago.

May Hashem bless those who are entrusted with the awesome responsibility of making these crucial decisions, with the wisdom and strength to find the path to peace, with all the difficult and painful decisions it may entail.

Shabbat Shalom,

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