



ICJW Bea Zucker Online Bible Study Program

“The Five Books of Moses: Contemporary Issues and Classic Perspectives”

By Dr. Bonna Devora Haberman

Session 8: Parshat VaYishlach — Rape, Love & Land

Genesis 34

א וַתֵּצֵא דִינָה בִתְ-לֵאָה אֲשֶׁר יָלְדָה לְיַעֲקֹב לְרֵאוֹת בְּבִנוֹת הָאָרֶץ. ב וַיֵּרָא אֹתָהּ שָׁכֵם בֶּן-חַמּוֹר הַחִי נָשִׂיא הָאָרֶץ וַיִּקַּח אֹתָהּ וַיִּשְׁכַּב אִתָּהּ וַיַּעֲנֶה. ג וַתִּדְבַק נַפְשׁוֹ בְּדִינָה בִתְ-יַעֲקֹב ב וַיֵּאָהֵב אֶת-הַנְּעָר וַיְדַבֵּר עַל-לֵב הַנְּעָר. ד וַיֹּאמֶר שָׁכֵם אֶל-חַמּוֹר אָבִיו לֵאמֹר קַח-לִי אֶת-הַיְלָדָה הַזֹּאת לְאִשָּׁה. ה וַיַּעֲקֹב שָׁמַע כִּי טָמְא אֶת-דִּינָה בְתוֹ וּבָנָיו הָיוּ אֶת-מִקְנֵהוּ בַשָּׂדֶה וְהַחֲרַשׁ יַעֲקֹב עַד-בֹּאֵם. ו וַיֵּצֵא חַמּוֹר אָבִי-שָׁכֵם אֶל-יַעֲקֹב לְדַבֵּר אִתּוֹ. ז וּבְנֵי יַעֲקֹב בָּאוּ מִן-הַשָּׂדֶה כְּשָׁמְעוּ וַיִּתְעַצְבוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים וַיַּחֲרֹק לָהֶם מֵאֵד כִּי-נִבְלָה עֵשָׂה בְיִשְׂרָאֵל לְשָׁכֵם בִתְ-יַעֲקֹב וְכֵן לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה. ח וַיְדַבֵּר חַמּוֹר אִתּוֹ לֵאמֹר שָׁכֵם בְּנִי חֲשָׁקָה נַפְשׁוֹ בְּבִתְכֶם תָּנוּ נָא אִתָּהּ לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה. ט וְהִתְחַתְּנוּ אִתּוֹ בְּנֵי תִיכֶם תִּתְּנוּ-לָנוּ וְאֶת-בְּנֵי תִינוּ תִקְחוּ לָכֶם. י וְאֶתְנוּ תִשְׁבוּ וְהָאָרֶץ תִּהְיֶה לְפָנֵיכֶם שָׁבוּ וּסְחָרוּהָ וְהֶאֱחָזוּ בָהּ. יא וַיֹּאמֶר שָׁכֵם אֶל-אָבִיהָ וְאֶל-אֲחֵיהָ אֲמָצָא-חֵן בְּעֵינֵיכֶם וְאֲשֶׁר תִּאמְרוּ אֵלַי אֲתָן. יב הֲרָבוּ עָלַי מֵאֵד מִהֵרָ וּמִתָּן וְאֶתְנֶה כְּאֲשֶׁר תִּאמְרוּ אֵלַי וְתָנוּ-לִי אֶת-הַנְּעָר לְאִשָּׁה. יג וַיַּעֲנוּ בְנֵי-יַעֲקֹב אֶת-שָׁכֵם וְאֶת-חַמּוֹר אָבִיו בְּמִרְמָה וַיְדַבְּרוּ אֲשֶׁר טָמְא אֶת דִּינָה אֶחָתָם. יד וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲלֵיהֶם לֹא נוּכַל לַעֲשׂוֹת הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה לְתַת אֶחָתָנוּ לְאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר-לוֹ עָרְלָה כִּי-חֲרָפָה הוּא לָנוּ. טו אַךְ-בָּזֹאת נֹאֵת לָכֶם אִם תִּהְיוּ כְּמִנּוֹ לְהֵמֵל לָכֶם כָּל-זָכָר. טז וְנָתַנוּ אֶת-בְּנֵי תִינוּ לָכֶם וְאֶת-בְּנֵי תִיכֶם נִקַּח-לָנוּ וַיִּשְׁכְּנוּ אִתְּכֶם וְהִיָּינוּ לְעַם אֶחָד. יז וְאִם-לֹא תִשְׁמְעוּ אֲלֵינוּ לְהֵמֹל וְלִקְחָנוּ אֶת-בְּתֹרְנוֹ וְהִלְכָנוּ. יח וַיִּיטְבוּ דְבָרֵיהֶם בְּעֵינֵי חַמּוֹר וּבְעֵינֵי שָׁכֵם בֶּן-חַמּוֹר. יט וְלֹא-אַחֵר הַנְּעָר לַעֲשׂוֹת הַדָּבָר כִּי חִפֵּץ בְּבִתְ-יַעֲקֹב וְהוּא נִכְבָּד מִכָּל בֵּית אָבִיו. כ וַיֵּבֵא חַמּוֹר וּשְׁכֵם בְּנוֹ אֶל-שַׁעַר עִירָם וַיְדַבְּרוּ אֶל-אֲנָשֵׁי עִירָם לֵאמֹר. כא הָאֲנָשִׁים הָאֵלֶּה שְׁלָמִים הֵם אֲתָנוּ וַיִּשְׁבוּ בְּאָרֶץ יִסְחָרוּ אִתָּהּ וְהָאָרֶץ הִנֵּה רְחֹב־יָדַיִם לְפָנֵיהֶם אֶת-בְּנֵי תָם נִקַּח-לָנוּ לְנָשִׁים וְאֶת-בְּנֵי תִינוּ נִתְּן לָהֶם. כב אַךְ-בָּזֹאת יֵאָתוּ לָנוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים לְשִׁבְתָּ אֲתָנוּ לְהִיּוֹת לָעַם אֶחָד בְּהֵמוֹל לָנוּ כָּל-זָכָר כְּאֲשֶׁר הֵם נֹמְלִים. כג מִקְנֵיהֶם וּקְנִיָּנָם וְכָל-בְּהֵמָתָם הֵלֹא לָנוּ הֵם אַךְ נֹאֵתָה לָהֶם וַיִּשְׁבוּ אֲתָנוּ. כד וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ אֶל-חַמּוֹר וְאֶל-שָׁכֵם בְּנוֹ כְּלִי-צְאִי שַׁעַר עִירוֹ וַיִּמְלוּ כָּל-זָכָר כָּל-צְאִי שַׁעַר עִירוֹ. כה וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי בְהִיּוֹתָם כֹּ אָבִים וַיִּקְחוּ שְׁנֵי-בְנֵי-יַעֲקֹב שָׁמְעוֹן וְלֵוִי אֲחֵי דִינָה אִישׁ חָרְבוּ וַיֵּבֵאוּ עִל-הָעִיר בְּטַח וַיַּהַרְגוּ כָּל-זָכָר. כו וְאֶת-חַמּוֹר וְאֶת-שָׁכֵם בְּנוֹ הָרְגוּ לְפִי-חָרֵב וַיִּקְחוּ אֶת-דִּינָה מִבֵּית שָׁכֵם וַיֵּצְאוּ. כז בְּנֵי יַעֲקֹב בָּאוּ עַל-הַחֲלָלִים וַיֵּבֵאוּ הָעִיר אֲשֶׁר טָמְאוּ אֲחוֹתָם. כח אֶת-צֹאֲנָם וְאֶת-בְּקָרָם וְאֶת-חֲמֹרֵיהֶם וְאֶת אֲשֶׁר-בְּעִיר וְאֶת-אֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׂדֶה לָקְחוּ. כט וְאֶת-כָּל-חֵילָם וְאֶת-כָּל-טָפְסָם וְאֶת-נְשֵׂיהֶם שָׁבוּ וַיֵּבֵאוּ וְאֶת כָּל-אֲשֶׁר בְּבֵיתָ. ל וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֶל-שָׁמְעוֹן וְאֶל-לֵוִי עֲכָרְתֶּם אִתִּי לְהַבְאִישֵׁנִי בִּי שֵׁב הָאָרֶץ בְּפָנֵעַי וּבְפָרְזִי וְאֲנִי מִתִּי מִסְפָּר וְנֶאֱסָפוּ עָלַי וְהִכּוּנִי וְנִשְׁמַדְתִּי אֲנִי וּבֵיתִי. לא וַיֹּאמְרוּ הַכְּזוֹנָה יַעֲשֶׂה אֶת-אֲחוֹתָנוּ.

¹ Now Dinah, the daughter whom Leah had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the daughters of the land. ² Shechem son of Hamor the Hivite, chief of the country, saw her, and took her and lay with her by force.

³ Being strongly drawn to Dinah daughter of Jacob, and in love with the young woman, he spoke to the young woman tenderly. ⁴ So Shechem said to his father Hamor, "Get me this girl as a spouse." ⁵ Jacob heard that he had defiled his daughter Dinah; but since his sons were in the field with his cattle, Jacob kept silent until they came home. ⁶ Then Shechem's father Hamor came out to Jacob to speak to him. ⁷ Meanwhile Jacob's sons, having heard the news, came in from the field. The men were distressed and very angry, because he had committed an outrage in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter — a thing not to be done.

⁸ And Hamor spoke with them, saying, "My son Shechem longs for your daughter. Please give her to him in marriage. ⁹ Intermarry with us: give your daughters to us, and take our daughters for yourselves: ¹⁰ You will dwell among us, and the land will be open before you; settle, move about, and acquire holdings in it." ¹¹ Then Shechem said to her father and brothers, "Do me this favor, and I will pay whatever you tell me. ¹² Ask of me a bride-price ever so high, as well as gifts, and I will pay what you tell me; only give me the young woman for a spouse."

¹³ Jacob's sons answered Shechem and his father Hamor — speaking with guile because he had defiled



ICJW Bea Zucker Online Bible Study Program

“The Five Books of Moses: Contemporary Issues and Classic Perspectives”

By Dr. Bonna Devora Haberman

their sister Dinah — ¹⁴ and said to them, "We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to a man who is uncircumcised, for that is a disgrace among us. ¹⁵ Only on this condition will we agree with you; that you will become like us in that every male among you is circumcised. ¹⁶ Then we will give our daughters to you and take your daughters to ourselves; and we will dwell among you and become as one kindred. ¹⁷ But if you will not listen to us and become circumcised, we will take our daughter and go."

¹⁸ Their words pleased Hamor and Hamor's son Shechem. ¹⁹ And the youth lost no time in doing the thing, for he wanted Jacob's daughter. Now he was the most respected in his father's house. ²⁰ So Hamor and his son Shechem went to the public place of their town and spoke to their fellow townsmen, saying, ²¹ "These people are our friends; let them settle in the land and move about in it, for the land is large enough for them; we will take their daughters to ourselves as wives and give our daughters to them. ²² But only on this condition will the men agree with us to dwell among us and be as one kindred: that all our males become circumcised as they are circumcised. ²³ Their cattle and substance and all their beasts will be ours, if we only agree to their terms, so that they will settle among us." ²⁴ All who went out of the gate of his town heeded Hamor and his son Shechem, and all males, all those who went out of the gate of his town, were circumcised.

²⁵ On the third day, when they were in pain, Simeon and Levi, two of Jacob's sons, brothers of Dinah, took each his sword, came upon the city unmolested, and slew all the males. ²⁶ They put Hamor and his son Shechem to the sword, took Dinah out of Shechem's house, and went away. ²⁷ The other sons of Jacob came upon the slain and plundered the town, because their sister had been defiled. ²⁸ They seized their flocks and herds and asses, all that was inside the town and outside; ²⁹ all their wealth, all their children, and their wives, all that was in the houses, they took as captives and booty. ³⁰ Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have brought trouble on me, making me odious among the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and the Perizzites; my men are few in number, so that if they unite against me and attack me, I and my house will be destroyed." ³¹ But they answered, "Should our sister be treated like a whore?"

Context

Dreading his reunion with Esav, Yakov humbles himself, sending offerings and blessings ahead, hoping to find favor. Before the encounter with the brother he fears, Yakov struggles with a divine being through a difficult night; he emerges with an injured hip and a new identity, Yisrael. He prepares to protect his family, dividing the women and children into two camps. Yakov approaches Esav bowing low before him, recognizing in Esav the divine face. They embrace and cry together. Parting again, Esav heads for Seir, and Yakov settles in Sukkot.

The son of the chief of Shechem rapes Dina, Leah's daughter, when she goes out to visit women in the land. This violation brings on a sequence of events that purport to seal a pact between the Shechemites and Yakov's tribe. The interactions culminate in the murder by Dina's brothers, Shimon and Levi, of all of the males of Shechem when they are recovering from their circumcision.

Rivka's nurse, Devora, dies. [This is thought to be a reference to Rivka's own death—for it is not



ICJW Bea Zucker Online Bible Study Program

“The Five Books of Moses: Contemporary Issues and Classic Perspectives”

By Dr. Bonna Devora Haberman

otherwise mentioned in the Torah.] Yakov travels to Beit-El on God's command where he purges his tribe of their idols. God promises him that he will multiply and inherit the land. As they journey toward Efrat, Rachel dies while giving birth to her second son, Binyamin.

Reaching Mamre, Yitzchak dies. Yakov and Esav bury their father together. Esav marries Canaanite women, and produces many offspring, clans of Edom. They settle in Seir in order to give each brother room for his wealth and herds.

The parasha concludes with a list of the reign and death of a sequence of seven kings of Edom [to whom Kabbalistic literature attributes mystical significance].

Explorations

Commenting on the verse about the rape, Rashi explains the reason why the Torah refers to Dina as the daughter of Leah, and not the daughter of Yakov. Leah is the “going-out” type, a negative judgment implying that women ought to stay at home where they belong. There, he presumes, women are safer. Going out, the comment implies, invites the rape; Dina's own action brings on the violation. The midrash makes a comparison with Leah going out to the field to intercept Yakov to take him to her tent for the night, presumably for love-making (Ber. 30:16). Does the commentary imply that Dina was similarly looking for sex?

These comments seem to express attitudes common throughout human cultures that blame women for rape, for dressing or acting provocatively. Men cannot be expected to control themselves when exposed to the temptation that women present. According to these views, women's presence “outside”, in the public domain is itself a provocation. These comments attribute a brutal nature to men, an unruly willingness to use violence against women to fulfill their spontaneous sexual impulses.

Given the brevity of the text, it is worth inquiring more deeply into the passage; do the Torah and the commentary necessarily intend these views? In some versions, Rashi quotes a verse from the prophet Ezekiel:

["Behold, everyone who uses proverbs will use this proverb about you: 'Like mother, like daughter.'" \(Ezekiel 16:34\)](#)

The prophet refers to the Jewish people as the member of an extended family whose disloyalty and treachery he describes in this and many chapters. The most noted offense here is the woman's rejection of her spouse and children, typical of the women in her family. According to Ezekiel, the daughter Israel brings destruction upon herself through her misdeeds—in response, God “pays her back for her conduct” (Ez. 16:49). The prophetic chapter portrays the male divine as jealously possessive of His female mate. He demands loyalty and commitment; she rejects these demands and betrays him.

This male-female dynamic seems to indicate male vulnerability and fear of rejection. The male spouse seeks to control the woman, to confine her. Rebelling against these pressures to obey his will and fulfill his expectations, the woman Israel behaves with extreme independence, defying the possessiveness of her partner. Compared with Leah who *goes out* to greet her spouse, and to entice him to love, in Ezekiel's version, Israel *goes out* to abandon her spouse for sex with other partners.



ICJW Bea Zucker Online Bible Study Program

“The Five Books of Moses: Contemporary Issues and Classic Perspectives”

By Dr. Bonna Devora Haberman

Rashi suggests that Dina is like her mother Leah, and like Israel—a disobedient daughter. Ezekiel expresses the rejection that God feels on account of Israel's faithlessness. As a result, God punishes Israel and destroys Jerusalem. Like Dina, Israel is an independent, yet vulnerable woman in the public domain. This insecurity is a prominent Jewish experience during centuries of exile. Rashi and the commentators identify themselves with the female spouse; like Dina, Israel's volition subjects her to violation and abuse.

The Hebrew prophets often describe a divine-human drama of rejection and embrace—once the people, Israel, suffer God's wrath, He restores His attitude of mercy. After the violence purges fury, the male spouse turns to love. An abuser often follows violence with loving statements that appear to indicate remorse. Domestic violence counsellors describe the “normal period” between violent episodes, “Your abuser does everything he can to regain control and keep you in the relationship. He may act as if nothing has happened, or he may turn on the charm. This peaceful honeymoon phase may give you hope that your abusive partner has really changed this time” ([source](#)). Following the rape of Dina, the narrator relates one of the passionate statements of love in the Hebrew bible,

“And his soul cleaved to Dinah the daughter of Yaakov, and he loved the young woman and he spoke to the heart of the young woman.” (Ber. 34:3)

Without relating at all to the rape, Hamor, on behalf of his son Shechem, professes his son's desire for Dina to her father and brothers in terms of marriage,

“My son Shechem longs for your daughter. Please give her to him in marriage.” (Ber. 34:9)

Shechem substantiates his desire by promising to fulfill any financial conditions the family might set,

“Do me this favor, and I will pay whatever you tell me. Ask of me a bride-price ever so high, as well as gifts, and I will pay what you tell me; only give me the young woman for a spouse.” (Ber. 34: 11-12)

On behalf of Shechem, his father Hamor offers a very concrete proposal to Yakov and his sons,

“And you will marry us – you will give us your daughters and you can take for yourselves our daughters. And you will live with us; and the land will be before you – dwell in it, and trade in it, and acquire possessions in it.” (Genesis 34: 8-10)

Hamor speaks of integrating the two peoples. Women are the currency for the intermingling. The trading and sharing of daughters conflates with the trading and sharing of land; each tribe will possess and trade in land and women. Women are the object of men's conversation, objects to be exchanged, discussed as possessions in the same manner as men possess land.

Enraged that the honor of their sister and family has been defiled, and that the rape is being ignored, Dinah's brothers Shimon and Levi request that the Shechemites circumcise themselves in order to intermarry with Yaakov's family. They impose a genital wound, perhaps alluding to the rape.



ICJW Bea Zucker Online Bible Study Program

“The Five Books of Moses: Contemporary Issues and Classic Perspectives”

By Dr. Bonna Devora Haberman

It is not possible to know whether Shimon and Levi reject the proposal to trade in women—they reject the proposal altogether. The text states that they murder to avenge the rape. Nonetheless, in the exclusion of Dina, and through their brutality, they perpetuate Dina’s role as a silent victim of abuse and paternalistic decision-making, and extend the violence.

Questions for Discussion

While Shimon and Levi’s bloodletting is odious, and there is no process of law, this Torah story is opposite to many notions of honor killing. In many societies, the father and/or brothers murder the woman victim to protect the family’s honor. Here the crime of rape is treated with extreme seriousness, as a capital crime. While Yaakov and his sons both perceive Shechem’s crime as a defilement of Dinah and a dishonor to the family, Shimon and Levi avenge the dishonor brought to their sister and family by killing the male members of the community that committed the crime. How do you view the treatment of Dina’s rape in relation to honor and justice?

Today, in some societies, a family’s honor still depends on the “chastity” of daughters. In what subtle ways do our communities continue to consider a woman’s sexual behavior to affect her status and honor? and her family’s? How are our attitudes different concerning boys and men? Ought there to be any difference in the way we relate to male and female sexual behavior? Explain.

The story about Dina and Shechem opens the opportunity to explore ideas about love and marriage in the context of violation.

- Is Shechem’s love for Dinah real? What are your criteria?
- Shechem refers to Dinah as a *yaldah*, a girl (Bereishit 34:4). Does this indicate that he views her as a child? What does this imply about his feelings for her and their potential future relationship?
- Dinah does not respond. Does or ought she to accept Shechem’s reformed feelings?

The text is silent, never informing us of Dinah’s response to any part of the incident. In our zeal to prosecute abusers and violators, we often neglect to listen to the voices of victims and empower them to speak out and act on their own behalf. How can we better disable potential abuse and support and empower potential and actual victims?

Study Links

See Phyllis Chesler’s feminist commentary on the events in our parasha [here](#).

When we consider what factors generate the contemporary threat to women’s safety in the public realm, Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon propose the link between pornography and sexual violence. See Dworkin, [click](#) and their co-authored [anti-pornography civil-rights ordinance](#).

Learn how your community can initiate [Take Back the Night](#) to re-claim the public domain as safe space for women, to “shatter the silence and stop the violence.”



ICJW Bea Zucker Online Bible Study Program

“The Five Books of Moses: Contemporary Issues and Classic Perspectives”

By Dr. Bonna Devora Haberman

Sexual violence in Jewish communities throughout the world and in Israel has only relatively recently begun to be addressed. See [this](#) bibliography of sources.

The extent and prevalence of “honor” killing in our world cannot be fully known, for many societies still protect a male prerogative to deal with his “family” affairs, and hide the evidence. This [organization](#) of Muslims against honor killing documents incidents and proposes to reveal the dishonor of the act.

Summary of Issues

Interpreting the rape of Dina suggests how societies throughout generations enforce the attitude that women's proper place is in the home. Harassment, threatened, and actual violence discipline women to conform to structures of power, and reinforce the risks of *going out*.

Methods & Observations

Commentaries often do not reveal the subtle issues that underlie what appear to be stark and simple statements. In this case, Rashi's condemnations of Leah and Dina do not reveal the tacit identification between the vulnerable woman and the vulnerable people of Israel. By checking the proof text—the verse that Rashi cites from Ezekiel in its fuller context, we interpret another possible intention. Rashi might allude to the threatening world outside, and the need for more humane behavior in relation to the Jewish people, and, we might extrapolate, all vulnerable people.

Contact

Please address queries and comments to
Dr. Bonna Devora Haberman - bonnadevora@gmail.com