

The Rape of Dina poses no shortage of interpretive challenges. Dina *goes out to see the daughters of the land*. Shechem, a prince of the land, a Hivite, *takes her and lies with her and forced her* (34:2). Afterwards, *his soul clings to her, he falls in love with her, and he speaks tenderly to her*. (34:3) Jacob reacts with silence (34:5). The brothers are enraged (34:7). Shechem begs his father, Hamor, to procure Dina for him as a wife (34:4). Seeking to negotiate with Jacob, Hamor instead encounters Jacob's sons, who state their pre-condition for Dina to marry Shechem: circumcision of all the Hivite males. Shechem eagerly complies, and after some clever persuasion by Hamor, the townsfolk follow suit so that they could in turn marry the women in Jacob's clan. Then:

וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי בְהִיוֹתָם כְּאָבִים וַיִּקְחוּ שְׁנֵי בְנֵי יַעֲקֹב שְׁמֹעוֹן וְלֵוִי אֶחָיו דִּינָה אִישׁ חֶרְבוֹ וַיָּבֵאוּ עַל הָעִיר בָּטַח וַיַּהֲרֹגוּ כָּל זָכָר. וְאֵת חָמוֹר וְאֵת שָׂכֶם בְּנוֹ הָרָגוּ לְפִי חֶרֶב וַיִּקְחוּ אֵת דִּינָה מִבֵּית שָׂכֶם וַיֵּצְאוּ.

It was on the third day, when they were still hurting, that two of Jacob's sons, Shim'on and Levi, Dina's full-brothers, took each man his sword, they came upon the city [feeling] secure, and killed all the males, and Hamor and Shechem his son they killed by the sword. Then they took Dina from Shechem's house and went off.

How do we interpret what happened? Let's read the verses closely. We observe that the proposal for the Hivite circumcision is made by all of Jacob's sons together, as a unit.

וַיַּעֲנוּ בְנֵי יַעֲקֹב אֶת שָׂכֶם וְאֵת חָמוֹר אָבִיו בְּמַרְמָה וַיְדַבְּרוּ אֲשֶׁר טָמְאָה אֵת דִּינָה אֶחָתָם.

Jacob's sons (ie. all of them) answered Shechem and Hamor his father with deceit; they spoke [thus] because he had defiled Dina their sister. (34:13)

What is their *deceit*? There is one other time the word *deceit* is used, and that is when Isaac replies to Esau after having been cheated out of the blessing:

כֹּא אֶחֱיָהּ בְּמַרְמָה וַיִּקַּח בְּרַכְתּוֹ.

Your brother came with deceit and took away your blessing. (27:35)

A similar use is when Jacob confronts Lavan the morning after his marriage, and having discovered that the woman he woke up next to was Leah, he said:

מָה זֹאת עָשִׂיתָ לִי הֲלֹא בְרַחֵל עֲבַדְתִּי עָמָד וְלָמָּה רַמִּיתָנִי.

What, now, have you done to me? Was it not for Rahel that I served you? Why have you deceived me? (29:25)

In both of those cases, deception involved concealing one's true identity: Jacob concealed his true identity by disguising himself as Esau. Lavan deceived Jacob by substituting Leah for Rachel. It would seem plausible here that the brothers, in speaking *deceitfully* to Hamor, are also intending to conceal their true identity from

Hamor. They present themselves as an "ordinary" clan while knowing that will eventually become a nation and take possession of the land promised to their grandfather Abraham. Here's what they say:

וַנְתַּנּוּ אֵת בְּנֹתֵינוּ לָכֶם וְאֵת בְּנֹתֵיכֶם נָקַח לָנוּ וַיִּשְׁבְּנוּ אֹתְכֶם וְהִיָּינוּ לָעַם אֶחָד.

Then we will give you our daughters, and your daughters we will take for ourselves, and we will settle among you, so that we become a single people. (34:16)

Every word of this is a lie. Dina is the only daughter. There are no other daughters! But Hamor doesn't know that. Do the brothers have the authority to negotiate this in the first place? No. This is their father's prerogative. Do they really want to marry the Hivite women? Based on family traditions, probably not.¹ But they definitely know one thing: they will never *become a single people* with the Hivites. Not going to happen. Their deceit is that they are pretending to be something that they are not: a clan with whom you can negotiate and intermarry. In this reading, the circumcision proposal is not a ruse to weaken them in order to slaughter them easily; the brothers thought the Hivites would actually *decline* this proposal, because circumcision would have been too much to ask for (and too humiliating) and that way the brothers would get Dina back. But unexpectedly, Shechem and the whole town agreed. Now what? *it came to pass, on the third day.* For three days the men of Shechem recover from their circumcision while in the field below, the sons of Jacob are figuring out what they are going to do. They know they can't fulfill the deal because they have no women to offer as wives for the Hivites, and furthermore, they have no intention of intermarrying with them. More importantly, their sister, Dina, has been raped and taken captive and they want her back. *while they were still hurting.*

The medical interpretation is very tempting: post-surgical inflammation peaks 2-4 days after surgery. That would have rendered them extremely vulnerable on day 3. But the literary interpretation is more compelling: in the Torah, everything of consequence happens on the third day.² But then it goes on to say: *two of Jacob's sons, Shim'on and Levi, the brothers of Dina, took each man his sword.* (34:25). Two brothers. Not eleven. What does that suggest? It suggests that Shimon and Levi broke away from the group and acted on their own without consulting or getting approval from the others. They took matters into their own hands. *Are we just going to sit here and wait to see what happens? We have no women to give them, and we have no intention of being one people with them. What are we doing here? Every day*

¹ But Judah in the end marries a Canaanite, and most likely, the others did as well.

² Abraham sees Moriah, on the third day, (22:4). Lavan is told of Jacob's escape, on the third day

(31:22). The dreams of the butler and the baker are realized on the third day (40:20). And the revelation at Sinai happens on the third day after their encampment there (Exod. 19:16). And there are plenty of other examples.

that goes by Dina faces more danger. Now examine carefully how the text describes them. Why does the Torah call them **בְּנֵי יַעֲקֹב -Jacob's sons**? And why does it also call them **אֶחָי דִּינָה -Dina's brothers**? Why all the specificity? Couldn't it have just said Shimon and Levi? No. These two identifiers point us to the heart of the story. By identifying them as **בְּנֵי יַעֲקֹב -Jacob's sons**, the text is stressing that they are acting as with the loyalty and conviction that *we would have expected* from the sons of Jacob and even from Jacob himself!³ They are advancing on the city of Shechem in Jacob's name, even if Jacob is not even aware of it, and even if the rescue operation was against his will. And by identifying them as **אֶחָי דִּינָה -Dina's brothers**, the text is stressing the sibling bond that they have with Dina and hints to a level of loyalty to her that possibly surpasses Jacob's. Recall that at the beginning of the story, Dina is identified as **דִּינָה לְאָה -Dina daughter of Leah** (34:1). But Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah and resided in Rachel's tent. The Leah children, Reuben, Shimon, Levi, Yehuda, Issachar, Zebulun, and Dina, reside with Leah and had no sustained contact with their father. The rest of the children are spread out among their respective mothers. We can only imagine the tension and resentment that existed among them. The point is that Shimon and Levi **are full brothers to Dina**, and they are enraged by her defilement by Shechem. In their minds she is a hostage who has been raped and has been kept for an indeterminate period of time against her will. **וַיָּבֹאוּ עָלֶיהָ וַיְהַרְגוּ כָּל זָכָר [feeling] secure, and killed all the males** (34:25). Here's the next verse: **וְאֵת חָמוֹר וְאֵת שָׂכָם בְּנוֹ הָרָגוּ לְפִי הָרֶב וַיִּקְחוּ אֶת דִּינָה מִבֵּית שָׂכָם וַיֵּצְאוּ וַיִּקְחוּ אֶת דִּינָה מִבֵּית שָׂכָם וַיֵּצְאוּ -and Hamor and Shechem his son they killed by the sword. Then they took Dina from Shechem's house and went off** (34:26). What was the purpose of their mission? Was it vengeance or rescue? Go back and read the verses closely. It sounds like the narrator is describing a rescue mission! Just for the sake of comparison, here's an excerpt from the Wikipedia entry on the Entebbe rescue:

As they approached the terminal, two Ugandan sentries, aware that Idi Amin had recently purchased a white Mercedes, ordered the vehicles to stop. The first commandos shot the sentries using silenced pistols. This was against the plan and against the orders – the Ugandans were to be ignored, as they were believed not to be likely to open fire at this stage. An Israeli commando in one of the following Land Rovers opened fire with an unsuppressed rifle. Fearing the hijackers would be alerted prematurely, the assault team quickly approached the terminal.

At Entebbe, the mission was to rescue the hostages of the hijacked Air France plane. The IDF commandos knew they would have to kill the terrorists in order to rescue the hostages. What happened in the city of Shechem? The sons of Jacob believed that Dina was being held hostage after being raped by Shechem. Jacob, who was more interested



in not harming his status with his neighbors, did nothing. The brothers though, were enraged at the moral deprecation of the Hivites who wanted to paper over the rape by "marrying" the rape-

victim against her will. Moreover, the Hivites proposed intermarriage so that they would be able to rehabilitate themselves with a new political arrangement, whereby the clans would intermarry and live together happily ever after. The brothers deliberated. But Shimon and Levi decided that they had to act now to rescue their hostage sister, Dina. They suddenly realized that they also even had a tactical advantage now because the men *were still in pain*. They broke into the city, and as they made their way to the house of Shechem to rescue Dina, they probably encountered resistance from the locals who, while in pain, still would have wanted to protect their ruler and his son. Like the IDF commandos, Shimon and Levi killed them and reached the house. In the ensuing clash, they killed Hamor and Shechem and rescued Dina. Every reader is free to interpret this however they like, but the narrator seems to be framing this *as a rescue mission* not as a case of vengeance.⁴ The text does not speak at all about vengeance. Rather, it clearly states what happened: **וַיִּקְחוּ אֶת דִּינָה מִבֵּית שָׂכָם וַיֵּצְאוּ -they took Dina from the house of Shechem and went off**. Why does it say that? Because that is precisely what they wanted to accomplish! A hostage-rescue! One more literary point: The story opens with (a) **וַיֵּצֵא -she went out** and (b) **וַיִּקַּח -he (Shechem) took her**. It closes with (b) **וַיִּקְחוּ אֶת דִּינָה -they took Dina**, (a) **וַיֵּצְאוּ -and they went out** (34:26). This chiasmic (ab:ba) structure neatly frames this as a rescue story. Some readers tend to see Shimon and Levi's actions as motivated by impulsivity and rage. But upon reading this closely, and in light of our recent re-acquaintance with evil (in Hamas' murder, rape, and hostage-taking) it makes total sense to interpret Shimon and Levi's actions as motivated by intense sibling loyalty and an urgent desire to rescue their hostage sister. While Jacob was concerned about his own reputation, Shimon and Levi were more concerned about their sister's life. The other brothers deliberated, but ultimately, they decided that they weren't going to risk their lives to rescue her. When Jacob castigates Shimon and Levi for what they did, the Torah gives them the last word: **הֲכִינָה אֶת אֲחוֹתֵינוּ יַעֲשֶׂה אֵת -Should our sister then be treated like a whore?** (34:31). *No one else was going to do it. We had to do it. That was our obligation to her, and to every member of our household. It is basic to who we are. We will never abandon her to that awful fate. She is our sister!*

This Parasha Sheet is sponsored by Lisa and Hazzan Mike Weis to commemorate the 1st Yahrzeit of his father, Byron Weis z"l.

³Yonatan Grossman, Yaakov, Sipura shel Mishpaha, p. 426. And compare his reaction to Dina's abduction to the way he reacts when Joseph is lost.

⁴ Grossman, p.428.

