

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

Vayishlach

Genesis 32:4-36:43

Week of December 7-13, 2003

"And Jacob sent messenger-angels before him to Esau his brother." Jacob is back in the Holy Land after a 20-year stay in Charan, where he has married, fathered 11 sons and a daughter, and has acquired herds of sheep and cattle and many other possessions.

Thirty-four years earlier, he had fled the wrath of Esau after stealing the blessings from their father. Now, he sends angels as messengers bearing conciliatory words to his brother. The messengers, however, return to report that Esau is "coming against you, and four hundred men are with him."

Commentary

AND JACOB SENT MESSENGER-ANGELS BEFORE HIM TO ESAU HIS BROTHER (32:4)

Actual angels.

(Rashi)

The Hebrew word malachim means both "messengers" and "angels" (an angel being a divine messenger). Thus, the verse "And Jacob sent malachim to Esau his brother" can be understood as a reference to human messengers as well. Hence Rashi's clarification that it means "actual angels".

Chassidic master Rabbi DovBer of Mezeritch sees a deeper meaning in Rashi's words: Jacob sent the "actuality" of his angels to Esau, but kept their higher spiritual essence with himself...

AND JACOB WAS GREATLY AFRAID, AND HE WAS DISTRESSED (32:8)

He was afraid that he might be killed, and distressed that he might kill.

(Midrash Rabbah)

IF ESAU COMES TO THE ONE CAMP, AND SMITES IT, THEN THE CAMP WHICH IS LEFT SHALL ESCAPE (32:9)

He prepared himself in three ways: he sent a gift, he prayed, and he made ready for war.

(Rashi)

I AM UNWORTHY OF THE LEAST OF ALL THE MERCIES, AND OF ALL THE TRUTH, WHICH YOU HAVE SHOWN YOUR SERVANT (32:11)

The meaning of this is that every kindness bestowed by G-d upon a person should cause him to be exceedingly humble. For a Divine kindness is an expression of "His right hand does embrace me"—G-d is literally bringing the person closer to Himself. And the closer a person is to G-d, the greater the humility this should evoke in him; for since "all before Him is as naught," the more "before Him" a person is, the more "as naught" does he perceive himself to be.

And Jacob was greatly afraid, and he was distressed. And he divided the people that were with him, and the flocks, and herds, and the camels, into two camps.

And he said: If Esau comes to the one camp, and smites it, then the camp which is left shall escape.

Then he prayed:

"O G-d of my father Abraham, and G-d of my father Isaac... I am unworthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which You have shown Your servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two camps.

"Deliver me, I entreat You, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, lest he come and smite me, the mother with the children..."

The third thing he did was to appease his brother by dis-

This is the manner of Jacob. The very opposite is the case in the contrasting realm of kelipah (evil). There, the greater the kindness shown a person, the more he grows in arrogance and self-satisfaction.

(Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi)

AND HE TOOK HIS TWO WIVES, AND HIS TWO HANDMAIDS, AND HIS ELEVEN SONS (32:23)

And where was Dinah? Jacob had placed her in a chest and locked her in, lest Esau set his eyes on her. For this, Jacob was punished in that Dinah fell into the hands of Shechem, for had he not withheld her from his brother, perhaps she would have brought him back to the proper path.

Said G-d to Jacob: "You wouldn't give her in marriage to a circumcised person; behold, she is now possessed by an uncircumcised one. You wouldn't give her in legitimate wedlock; behold, she is now taken in illegitimate fashion."

(Rashi; Midrash Rabbah)

AND JACOB REMAINED ALONE (32:25)

He remained for the sake of some small jars he had left behind. Hence [it is learned] that to the righteous their money is dearer than their body.

(Talmud, Chulin 91a)

This is because the righteous know that their material possessions contain "sparks of holiness" which are redeemed and elevated when the object or resource they inhabit is utilized to fulfill the Divine will. The righteous person sees these sparks of Divine potential as virtual extensions of his own soul, since he understands that the very fact that Divine Providence has caused them to come into his possession indicates that their redemption is integral to his mission in life.

(The Chassidic Masters)

AND A MAN WRESTLED WITH HIM (32:25)

This was the "prince" of Esau (the angel who embodies the).

(Midrash Rabbah; Rashi)

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patching a gift of

Two hundred she-goats and twenty he-goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams; thirty milk camels with their colts, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty she asses and ten foals.

Alone at Night

That night, Jacob transfers his family across the ford of Yabbok, yet mysteriously remains behind alone on the other side, where "a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day."

And when he saw that he did not prevail against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was put out of joint, as he

wrestled with him.

And [the stranger] said: "Let me go, for the day breaks." And he said: "I will not let you go, unless you bless me."

And he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." And he said, "Your name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel; for you have contended with G-d and with men, and have prevailed."

The Embrace

The sun had risen when the two brothers meet. Jacob's family is arrayed behind him: the two "handmaids," Bilhah and Zilpah, with their four children; Leah and her six sons; and bringing up the rear, Rachel with Jacob's youngest, the six-year-old Joseph.

And Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him; and they wept.

And [Esau] lifted up his eyes, and saw the women and the children; and said, "Who are those with you?" And he said, "The children which G-d has

Commentary

AND WHEN HE SAW THAT HE DID NOT PREVAIL AGAINST HIM, HE TOUCHED THE HOLLOW OF HIS THIGH (32:26)

Jacob's struggle with Esau's angel represents the physical suffering of galut. When the angel of Esau injured Jacob's hip-joint, he injured his righteous descendants. In the words of the Midrash, "This is the generation of the shmad"—the cruel tortures inflicted by the Romans in Mishnaic times (1st and 2nd century ce) in their effort to eradicate the faith of Israel.

There were other generations in which the same and worse was done to us. We suffered all this and persevered, as alluded to by the verse, "And Jacob arrived."

(Nachmanides)

AND HE SAID: "LET ME GO, FOR THE DAY BREAKS" (32:27)

Said Jacob to him: "Are you a thief or a gambler, that you are afraid of the morning?" Said he: "I am an angel, and from the day that I was created my time to sing praises to G-d has not come until now."

(Talmud, Chulin 91b)

AND [JACOB] BOWED HIMSELF TO THE GROUND SEVEN TIMES, UNTIL HE CAME NEAR TO HIS BROTHER... THEN THE HANDMAIDENS CAME NEAR, THEY AND THEIR CHILDREN, AND THEY BOWED THEMSELVES. AND LEAH ALSO WITH HER CHILDREN CAME NEAR, AND BOWED THEMSELVES; AND AFTER CAME JOSEPH NEAR AND RACHEL, AND THEY BOWED THEMSELVES (33:3-7)

When Mordechai refused to bow to Haman, they said to him: "You're going to get us all killed! How dare you go against the decree of the king?"

Said Mordechai: "I am a Jew."

Said they to him: "Did not [our] forefathers bow to his forefather?"

Replied Mordechai: "I am descendant of Benjamin, who was in his mother's womb at that time. Just as my forefather did not bow, so, too, I shall not kneel nor bow."

(Midrash)

AND ESAU RAN TO MEET HIM, AND EMBRACED HIM, AND FELL ON HIS NECK, AND KISSED HIM (33:4)

In the Torah, the word *vayishakeihu* ("and he kissed him") is dotted on top, implying that this was an exception to the rule. Said Rabbi Yanai: This is to tell us that he did not intend to kiss him, but to bite him; but Jacob's throat turned to marble and broke the evil one's teeth.

(Midrash Rabbah)

What was different about this kiss? Our Sages debate this. There are those who say that it implies that Esau did not kiss Jacob with all his heart. Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai says: It is a well known law that . Here, the kiss was an exception in that he did kiss him with all his heart.

(Rashi)

AND I WILL LEAD ON SLOWLY... UNTIL I COME TO MY LORD TO SE'IR (33:14)

Said Rabbi Abbahu: We have searched the whole of Scriptures and do not find that Jacob ever went to Esau to the mountain of Se'ir. Is it then possible that Jacob, the truthful, should deceive him? But when would he come to him? In the Messianic Era, when "the saviors shall ascend Mount Zion to judge the mountain of Esau" (Obadiah 1:21).

(Midrash Rabbah)

HE BUILT FOR HIMSELF A HOUSE, AND MADE SHEDS FOR HIS CATTLE (33:17)

For "himself" — for his true self and his true priorities — Jacob constructed a "home"; for "his cattle" — his material possessions and other periph-

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graciously given your servant."

Esau protests that the gift which Jacob sent is really not necessary: "I have much, my brother; keep what you have to yourself." But Jacob insists: "Take, I pray you, my blessing that is brought to you; because G-d has dealt graciously with me, and I have all [I need]."

So come with me to Se'ir; says Esau. But Jacob stalls:

*"My lord knows that the children are tender, and the flocks and suckling herds are a care for me;**and if they should over drive them one day, all the flocks will die.**"Let my lord, I pray you, go on ahead before his servant; and I will lead on slowly, according to the pace of the cattle that goes before me and the children, until I come to my lord to Se'ir."*

But Jacob never does get to Se'ir. He stays a while in Sukkot, where he "built for himself a house, and made sheds for his cattle." He then settles near the city of Shechem, where he purchases a plot of land for 100 kesitah.

The Rape of Dinah*And Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she bore to Jacob, went out to see the daughters of the land.**Shechem, the son of Chamor the Hivvite, prince of the country, saw her and abducted her, and lay***Commentary**

eral elements of his life — he sufficed with a minimal "shed."

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

A chassid of Rabbi Sholom DovBer of Lubavitch (1860-1920) opened a plant for the manufacture of galoshes. Soon his every waking hour and thought was completely occupied in his new and flourishing business.

Said the Rebbe to him: "I've seen people put their feet into galoshes; but a head in galoshes...?"

JACOB ARRIVED, WHOLE, IN THE CITY OF SHECHEM (33:18)

Whole in body, for he was healed of his limp. Whole in wealth, for he sustained no loss as a result of the gift [he dispatched to Esau]. Whole in his Torah, for he forgot nothing of his learning in the house of Laban.

*(Talmud; Rashi)***AND HE BOUGHT THE PIECE OF LAND... FOR A HUNDRED KESITAH (33:19)**

This is one of the three places regarding which the nations of the world cannot accuse Israel and say, "You have stolen them." The three places are: the Cave of Machpeilah, the site of the Holy Temple, and the tomb of Joseph at Shechem. The cave of Machpeilah, as it is written (Genesis 23:16): "And Abraham weighed to Ephron the silver"; The Temple: "So David gave to Ornan for the place six hundred shekels of gold" (I Chronicles 21:25). And Joseph's tomb: "And [Jacob] bought the piece of land for a hundred kesitah."

*(Midrash Rabbah)***AND DINAH THE DAUGHTER OF LEAH... WENT OUT TO SEE THE DAUGHTERS OF THE LAND (34:1)**

Because of her going out, she is called "the daughter of Leah." For Leah, too, was an "outgoer," as it is written, "And Leah went out to greet him" (Genesis 30:16). Regarding her it has been said, "Like mother, like daughter."

*(Rashi)***AND JACOB HELD HIS PEACE UNTIL THEY CAME (34:5)**

Thus it is written, "But a man of wisdom holds his peace" (Proverbs 11:12).

*(Midrash Rabbah)***AND EVERY MALE WAS CIRCUMCISED, ALL THAT WENT OUT OF THE GATE OF [SHECHEM] (34:24)**

When any one of them entered the city laden with his wares they said to him, "Come and be circumcised," while he would reply, "Shechem is marrying her and Magbai must be circumcised!!"

*(Midrash Rabbah)***SIMON AND LEVI, DINAH'S BROTHERS (34:25)**

Was she then the sister of these two only, and not the sister of all Jacob's sons? But she is called by their name because they risked their lives for her sake.

*(Mechilta)***EACH MAN HIS SWORD (34:25)**

Our Sages calculate that the younger of the two, Levi, was exactly thirteen years old at the time. The fact that the Torah refers to him as a "man" is thus one of the sources that 13 is the age at which the Jewish male attains the age of manhood and daat (intellectual maturity), rendering him a bar mitzvah, one who is bound by the commandments.

On the face of it, this seems a rather inappropriate context in which to convey the law of bar mitzvah. Simon and Levi's act seems the very antithesis of daat. Indeed, Jacob denounced their deed as irrational, irresponsible and of questionable legitimacy under Torah law. Yet this is the event that the Torah chooses to teach us the age of reason, maturity, responsibility and commitment to the fulfillment of the mitzvot!

But as Simon and Levi replied to Jacob, the situation that prompted their action did not allow them the luxury of rational consideration of its consequences. The integrity of Israel was at stake, and the brothers of Dinah could give no thought to their own person-not to the jeopardy of their phys-

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*with her, and defiled her.**And his soul was drawn to Dinah the daughter of Jacob; and he loved the girl, and spoke kindly to the girl.**And Shechem spoke to his father Chamor, saying, "Get me this child for a wife."*

Chamor went to speak with Jacob. "The soul of my son Shechem," said he, "longs for your daughter; pray, give

her him to wife."

Indeed, says the Hivvite prince, this can be the start of a most productive cooperation between our peoples: "Make marriages with us; give your daughters to us, and take our daughters to you. And you shall dwell with us; and the land shall be before you; dwell and trade in it, and take possession of it."

Jacob's sons, who have in the meantime returned from the field, are greatly distressed and angered. Determined to avenge their sister's honor, they replied to Chamor's offer with cunning:

*"We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to one that is uncircumcised; for that would be a disgrace to us.**"But in this will we consent to you: If you will be as we are, that every male of you be circumcised. Then will we give our daughters to you, and we*

Commentary

ical lives, nor to the jeopardy of their spiritual selves by the violence and impropriety of their deed. In the end, their instinctive reaction, coming from the deepest place in their souls—deeper than reason, deeper than all self-consideration—was validated; G-d condoned their deed and came to their assistance.

This is the message which the Torah wishes to convey when establishing the age of reason and the obligation of mitzvot. Rare is the person who is called upon to act as did Simon and Levi. This is not the norm; indeed, the norm forbids it. But the essence of their deed should permeate our rational lives. Our every mitzvah should be saturated with the self-sacrifice and depth of commitment that motivated the brothers of Dinah.

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

AND THEY TOOK DINAH OUT OF SHECHEM'S HOUSE, AND WENT OUT (34:26)

They dragged her out... For at first she refused to go with them, saying, "And I, whither shall I carry my shame?" (II Sam. 13:13), until Simon swore that he would marry her.

(Midrash Rabbah)

There are those who say that Job lived in the times of Jacob, and that he married Dinah, the daughter of Jacob.

(Talmud, Bava Batra 15b)

AND DEBORAH, REBECCA'S NURSE DIED (35:8)

What was Deborah doing with Jacob? Since Rebecca had said to Jacob, "And I will send and take you from there" (Genesis 27:45), she sent Deborah to summon him from Charan, and Deborah died on the road.

(Rashi)

AND RACHEL DIED, AND WAS BURIED IN THE WAY TO EFRAT, WHICH IS BETHLEHEM (35:19)

What was Jacob's reason for burying Rachel at the roadside? Jacob foresaw that the exiles from Jerusalem would pass that way, therefore he buried her

there so that she might pray for mercy for them. Thus it is written (Jeremiah 31:15): "A voice is heard in Ramah... Rachel weeping for her children..."

(Midrash Rabbah)

AND IT CAME TO PASS, WHEN ISRAEL DWELT IN THAT LAND, THAT REUBEN WENT AND LAY WITH BILHAH HIS FATHER'S CONCUBINE, AND ISRAEL HEARD OF IT; AND THE SONS OF JACOB WERE TWELVE (35:22)

Whoever maintains that Reuben literally sinned is simply making an error. For the Torah immediately states, "and the sons of Jacob were twelve," teaching that they were all equally righteous. How, then, do I interpret, "and he lay with Bilhah his father's concubine"? It means that he relocated his father's bed, for which the Torah faults him as if he had lain with his father's wife.

(Talmud, Shabbat 55a)

In what way did Reuben violate his father's bed? When Rachel died, Jacob took his bed, which always stood in Rachel's tent, and placed it in Bilhah's tent. Reuben resented his mother's humiliation. Said he: "If my mother's sister was a rival to my mother, shall the handmaid of my mother's sister be a rival to my mother?" Thereupon he arose and removed Jacob's bed.

(Rashi)

AND TIMNA WAS CONCUBINE TO ELIFAZ, ESAU'S SON; AND SHE BORE TO ELIFAZ AMALEK (36:12)

Manasseh the son of Hezekiah examined Biblical narratives to prove them worthless. Thus he jeered: Had Moses nothing better to write than, "And Lotan's sister was Timna... And Timna was concubine to Elifaz"?

What, indeed, is the Torah's purpose in writing, "And Lotan's sister was Timna"?

Timna was a royal princess, as it is written (Genesis 36:29), "Duke Lotan." Desiring to become a proselyte, she went to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but they did not accept her. So she went and became a concubine to Elifaz the son of Esau, saying, "I had rather be a servant to this people than a mistress of another nation." From her was descended Amalek who afflicted Israel. Why so? Because they should not have repulsed her.

(Talmud, Sanhedrin 99b)

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will take your daughters to us, and we will dwell with you, and we will become one people.

"However, if you will not hearken to us, to be circumcised, then will we take our daughter, and we will be gone."

Chamor and Shechem fall for the ploy, and convince the entire town to circumcise themselves.

And it came to pass on the third day, when they were ailing, that two of the sons of Jacob, Simon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, took each man his sword, and came upon the city unresisted, and slew all the males.

And they slew Chamor and Shechem his son with the edge of the sword; and they took Dinah out of Shechem's house, and went out.

The sons of Jacob came upon the slain, and plundered the city, because they had defiled their sister.

Jacob was displeased by their action:

And Jacob said to Simon and Levi: "You have sulked me, making me odious among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzi; and I being few in number, they shall gather themselves together against me, and slay me. And I shall be destroyed, I and my household."

To which they replied:

"Could we have allowed our sister to be made a harlot?!"

The Death of Rachel

News reaches Jacob that Deborah, his mother's nurse, has died. A number of the commentaries see this as an allusion that Rebecca, too, passed away at this time.

G-d appears to Jacob and reiterates the name change given him by the mysterious stranger with whom he had

wrestled all night: "Your name shall not be called any more Jacob, but Israel shall be your name."

G-d then blesses him:

Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall come out of your loins.

And the land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac, to you I will give it, and to your seed after you will I give the land.

Jacob has now been in the Holy Land for nearly two years, making his way southward toward Hebron, where his father lived. He was nearly there when tragedy struck:

There was but a little way to come to Efrat, when Rachel gave birth, and she had a difficult labor...

And it came to pass as her soul was departing—for she died—that she called [the child's] name Ben-Oni ("son of my grief"); but his father called him Benjamin ("son of the right").

And Rachel died, and was buried in the way to Efrat, which is Bethlehem. And Jacob set a monument upon her grave; that is the monument of Rachel's grave to this day.

The Torah then mentions Reuben's sin in "violating his father's marriage bed." (The verse writes that "Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine." But our sages are unanimous in that this is not to be understood in the literal sense, but in the figurative sense of Reuben's interference in his father's marital life).

At long last Jacob reaches Hebron, and is reunited with his father. At this point the Torah also notes that Isaac died at the age of 180 years, and was buried by "Esau and Jacob his sons." (Chronologically, this places the death of Isaac 22 years hence, long after the events of the next Parshah; indeed, in Genesis 37:3 we find Isaac weeping with Jacob over the apparent loss of Joseph).

The Clan of Esau

Vayishlach concludes with a detailed account of Esau's world: the names of his wives, children and grandchildren; the chieftains of his clan, which developed into the nation of Edom; and the family histories of the people of Se'ir among whom Esau's family settled and intermarried.

It also lists eight kings who "reigned in Edom, before there reigned any king over the children of Israel."

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FROM THE CHASSIDIC MASTERS

THE COSMIC TWINS

Our sages tell us that before G-d created our world, He created an “earlier” state of existence — the world of *Tohu* (“Chaos”). But this was a world of “much light and scant vessels”; as a result, the vessels burst and the light escaped. G-d then created “our” world — the world of *Tikkun* (“Correction”), constructed with “broad containers and scant light” that allow it to function and endure.

“Light” is the Kabbalistic term for an emanation of Divine energy; “containers” (*kelim*) are the Divine forces that channel, define, and focus the “light”. A soul, for example, is a “light”, while a body is a “vessel”. A “world”, whether physical or spiritual, consists of lights deriving from the Divine power to reveal and bestow, and vessels deriving from the Divine power to define and delimit.)

There was a reason for this “debacle.” G-d desired that our “correct” world should be built upon the ruins of *Tohu*, so that we should delve beneath its surface to unearth the “sparks of holiness” that are the residue of this primordial world, tap their potent potential, and, ultimately, integrate the two realities, capturing the immense light of *Tohu* in the broad vessels of *Tikkun*.

The Kabbalists see Esau and Jacob as the embodiment of the cosmic twinship of *Tohu* and *Tikkun*.

Esau is the raw, untamed energy of *Tohu*. He is a destructive force, because he lacks the discipline and control that would channel this energy in a useful, constructive way. But he is also a very powerful force — far more powerful than the constricted and defined energies that animate Jacob’s correct and orderly world. The challenge, as we said, is to bring together the cosmic twins in a way that exploits the best of both worlds: to marry the immense energy of *Tohu* with the focus and control of *Tikkun*.

The struggle to achieve this synergy is the life-history of the biblical twins, and the essence of human history as a whole. Esau and Jacob emerge from the same womb (where they were already fighting), and the rest of their lives is defined by the effort to bring them back together.

But the conflict is too deep, too vast, to be

resolved in one lifetime — even a lifetime as rich, tragic and glorious as Jacob’s 147 years. The forces of *Tohu* are too expansive, too hungry for life, to submit to the rigors of *Tikkun*; and the vessels of *Tikkun* are too focused, too structured, to embrace the passions of *Tohu*.

Some very serious attempts are made. Isaac endeavors to create a partnership between his two sons by bequeathing the spiritual legacy of Abraham to Jacob and granting the material blessings of earth to Esau. But Rebecca intervenes: Esau is still too raw, too unformed, to be entrusted with this role. If he is granted the “dew of heaven and the fat of the land” there’ll be another explosion.

Had Esau been allowed to marry his predestined soulmate, Leah, as Jacob married Rachel, the brothers (now brothers-in-law, as well) would have shared in the founding of the nation of Israel. But Leah wept her eyes out at the prospect, and Jacob ended up with both wives (as he had ended up with both blessings) and all twelve tribes.

Upon his return from Charan, Jacob seems ready to take the big step: he dispatches angels and gifts to Esau and initiates a reunion. But on the night before the fateful meeting, Jacob encounters the spirit of Esau, and, instead of embracing, man and angel wrestle all night. Jacob, again, emerges as the victor, and exacts a concession from Esau’s angel that the blessings—all of them—and the name “Israel” are rightfully and exclusively the younger brother’s.

The next morning, the brothers meet in the flesh, but their long-awaited reunion is an anti-climax: both know that the true encounter has already taken place, resulting in yet another battle and victory rather than a union and integration. Jacob locks his daughter, Dinah, in a chest to prevent her marriage to Esau, eliminating the chance that the daughter will take on the task which her mother had refused (with the result, say our sages, that Jacob loses her not to his twin brother but to a Canaanite prince). Jacob and Esau embrace and kiss, but only superficially; Esau extends a half-hearted invitation for a joint life together, but Jacob drags his feet. The brothers meet again only at their father’s funeral, and then in death, when Esau’s head (but only his head) finds its resting place in the lap of Isaac in the Cave of Machpeilah on the day that Jacob is laid to rest in the same burial place.

So the quest to unite *Tohu* and *Tikkun* extends

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beyond their lifetimes, to the nations of Israel and Edom. The eight kings which “reigned in Edom, before there reigned any king over the children of Israel” are the volatile forces of Tohu, while the people of Israel proceed to Sinai where they are entrusted with the 613 commandments that serve as the vessels for *tikkun olam*, the correction and civilization of the world. The conflict rages on in the battles between Judah and Rome, between spirit and matter, between law and lust, to be resolved only when the struggles of humanity culminate in the day when “the saviors shall ascend Mount Zion to judge the mountain of Esau.”

FACING REALITY

Sometimes it all seems so hopeless.

Half the world goes to sleep hungry. Today’s news may bring one “regional conflict” to the forefront of our attention, even as the other dozen wars rage on, with one group of human beings hacking off the limbs, burning down the villages or pulverizing the shopping centers of group B. And if you’re fortunate enough to live in a more civilized part of the world, you can observe the more civilized forms of man’s cruelty to man, as people break each other’s hearts and trample everything good in themselves underfoot in the rampage for money, power and “self-realization.”

You want to do something, but it all seems so hopeless. You can feed a hungry child, yet millions more remain hungry. For every kind word you speak, so many nasty, hurtful, antagonistic words are spoken all over the world. For every good deed you do, so many evil deeds are committed. What can you possibly hope to achieve?

Jacob was nobody’s fool. He may have been “a guileless man” (Genesis 25:27), but he could muster enough guile to wrest the birthright and the blessings from Esau and to best the conniving Laban at his own game. He knew how to talk his way out of an assassination attempt, build a fortune from scratch and wrestle with an angel. One can safely say that he knew the world in which he lived.

And the world in which he lived was not a pretty

place. 3,500 years ago, people were sacrificing their children to Molech, and war and pillage were commonplace features of everyday life. Yet Jacob believed that very world to be on the threshold of the Messianic Era!

In the 33rd chapter of Genesis, the Torah describes Jacob’s encounter with Esau. Many years earlier, Jacob had fled to Charan because his brother wished to kill him; now he returns, believing that Esau is ready for a reconciliation. The brothers meet, they even hug and kiss, but Jacob realizes that the day has not yet come in which the sons of Isaac can live together in harmony. So he says to his brother: “Please, go on ahead. I will follow slowly, according to the pace of the work before me and the pace of the children, until I will come to my lord to Seir.”

Esau goes, but Jacob never does make it to his brother’s mountain kingdom; he settles in Hebron and, more than thirty years later, moves to Egypt where he spends the final seventeen years of his life. So when, asks the Midrash, will Jacob make good on his promise to come to Se’ir? In the days of Moshiach, when, as the prophet Obadiah prophesies, “The saviors will ascend the mountain of Zion to judge the mountain of Esau.”

In other words, Jacob initiated his encounter with Esau only because he believed that the Messianic Era was at hand. Had Esau been ready for a true reconciliation, this, in Jacob’s view, would have ushered in the state of divine goodness and perfection that is the purpose and end-goal of G-d’s creation.

There is a lesson in this, says the Lubavitcher Rebbe, to each and every one of us. Jacob knew that his particular mission in life was to actualize the enormous positive potential locked within his externally wicked brother. He also knew that the moment he achieved this, the entire world would be transformed for the better.

If you want to create a nuclear explosion, all you need to do is split a single atom. That will set in motion a chain-reaction in billions of other atoms and transform the face of the earth over an area of many square miles.

In the same way, we have each been allotted our own “portion of the world” — the material resources we possess, the talents and capabilities with which we have been endowed, the circle of family members, friends and colleagues whom we interact with

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and influence. Transforming the nature of reality in our own slice of the world will transform the nature of reality in the entirety of G-d's creation.

Yes, feeding that one child will mitigate the hunger of every hungry child in the world. Saying that one kind word will soften every insult uttered on the face of the earth. Doing that one good deed will nullify all the evil in the universe. Because the world is one, and you are the world.

Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, www.therebbe.org; adapted by Yanki Tauber, editor@chabadonline.com

OUTGOING WOMAN

And Dinah, the daughter of Leah, whom she bore to Jacob, went out to see the daughters of the land. And Shechem the son of Chamor the Hivite, prince of the land, saw her; and he abducted her...

Genesis 34:1-2

In the thirty-fourth chapter of Genesis we read of Dinah's abduction, her brothers' cunning plot to disable the people of Shechem, her rescue, and the destruction of the city.

Our sages note that in the opening verse of its account the Torah introduces Dinah as *Leah's* child. She is not referred to as "the daughter of Jacob", or "the daughter of Jacob and Leah," or even as "the daughter of Leah and Jacob", but as "the daughter of Leah, whom she bore to Jacob." Rashi explains:

Because of her going out, she is called "the daughter of Leah." For [Leah], too, was an 'out-goer', as it is written, "And Leah went out to greet him" (Genesis 30:16). Regarding her it has been said, "Like mother, like daughter."

At first glance, this seems an indictment of Leah's and Dinah's behavior. The hallmark of the Jewish woman is her *tzniut*, the modesty in dress and demeanor expressed by the verse (Psalms 45:14), "The entire glory of the king's daughter is within." A Jewish girl, Rashi seems to be saying, has no business going out to visit with the daughters of a pagan land; when she does, she is not acting as a daughter of Jacob but like her mother, who is known to have, on occasion, embarked on outings of her own. For the king's daughter to leave her inner sanctum is to

expose herself to all sorts of negative encounters, as Dinah's case tragically demonstrates.¹

This, however, cannot be Rashi's intention, for it runs contrary to what he writes in his commentary on a previous verse. A few chapters back, where Jacob is preparing for his encounter with his wicked brother Esau, we read:

And [Jacob] took his two wives, his two handmaidens, and his eleven sons, and he crossed the ford of Yabbok (Genesis 32:23).

Asks Rashi: What about his daughter?

Where was Dinah? Jacob had placed her in a chest and locked her in, lest Esau set his eyes on her. For this, Jacob was punished, for had he not withheld her from his brother, perhaps she would have brought [Esau] back to the proper path. [The punishment was] that she fell into the hands of Shechem.

In other words, it was Jacob's isolation of Dinah, not Dinah's and Leah's outgoingness, that was the cause of Dinah's misfortune. Dinah should *not* have been hidden from Esau. Her encounter with the big, bad world should not have been avoided; indeed, it should have been welcomed. Jacob feared that she would be corrupted by her wicked uncle; he should have realized that, with her firm moral grounding and unassailable integrity, she was far more likely to influence Esau for the better.

Interestingly enough, here, too, there is a mother-daughter connection. The Torah (in Genesis 29:17) tells us that "Leah's eyes were weak." Rashi explains that they were weak from weeping:

She wept over the thought that she would fall to the lot of Esau. For everyone was saying: Rebecca has two sons and Laban has two daughters; the elder son (Esau) is destined for the elder daughter (Leah), and the younger son (Jacob) for the younger daughter (Rachel).

This was more than common speculation; according to the Midrash, these were matches ordained in heaven. But Leah's tearful prayers changed the heavenly decree, and both sisters were married to the righteous younger son. But it was Leah who was Esau's potential soulmate. If she herself felt unequal to the challenge of dealing with his wickedness, her daughter and spiritual heir, Dinah, could have served as the instrument of Esau's redemption.

This is the deeper significance of the adage, "like mother, like daughter," quoted by Rashi. Our chil-

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dren inherit not only our actual traits but also our unrealized potentials. Physically, a brown-eyed mother may transmit to her child the potential for blue eyes inherited from *her* mother but dormant in her genes. Spiritually, a parent may impart to a child the ability to achieve what, for the parent, is no more than a subtle potential buried in the deepest recesses of his or her soul.

So Dinah's going out to make the acquaintance of the daughters of the land was fully in keeping with her and her mother's unique gifts. Her exposure to an alien environment would not have adversely affected her Jewish femininity, her King's daughter's inner glory. On the contrary: she was born to the role of the outgoing Jewish woman who serves as a source of enlightenment to her surroundings without compromising her modesty and innerness. Rather, it was Jacob's attempt to closet her that invited disaster. In going out to "the daughters of the land," Dinah was truly the daughter of Leah — in the positive sense. She was not the daughter of Jacob, for Jacob had hesitated to put her outgoing nature to its intended use.²

Within Without

Therein lies a message to women of all generations:

The Torah sees man and woman as having been imparted by their Creator with distinct characteristics and roles. Man is a , charged to confront and transform a resistant, often hostile, world. To this end, he has been supplied with an extroverted and aggressive nature, a nature he is to apply constructively in the war of life — the war to combat the negative without and to redeem the positive elements and opportunities held captive in the most spiritually desolate corners of G-d's creation.

Woman is his diametric opposite. Her intrinsic nature is non-confrontational, introverted, modest. For while man battles the demons without, woman cultivates the purity within. She is the mainstay of the home, nurturer and educator of the family, guardian of all that is holy in G-d's world. The entire glory of the king's daughter is within.

But within does not necessarily mean indoors. The woman, too, has a role that extends beyond the home, extends also to the most alien of daughters

and the most pagan of lands. A woman who has been blessed with the aptitude and talent to influence her sisters, can, and must, be an "out-goer", periodically leaving her haven of holiness to reach out to those who have lost grounding and direction in their lives.

And when she does, she need not, and must not, assume the warrior stance of the man. Confrontation and conquest is not the only way to deal with the outside world - there is also a feminine way, a gentle, modest and compassionate way to extract goodness from the evil that rages without. Confrontation is often necessary, but it is also often ineffective and even detrimental. Even the fiercest of battles needs the feminine touch of the outgoing woman.

NOTES:

1. Indeed, it is in this negative light that the Midrash Rabbah (Bereishit 80:1) compares the going out of mother and daughter. But Rashi's selective quoting of this Midrash, as well as his earlier words on Genesis 32:23 (quoted in this essay) and 30:17 (see next note) imply an entirely different perspective on the matter.

2. This explains the connection between Leah's going out to greet Jacob cited by Rashi and Dinah's foray to the pagan daughters of Canaan. Leah, the Torah tells us, had just purchased Rachel's conjugal rights with Jacob in return for the mandrakes her son, Reuben, had picked in the field. When Jacob came home that evening, "Leah went out to greet him, and said: You shall come to me, for I have hired you with my son's mandrakes" (Genesis 30:16). At first glance, Leah's behavior (like Dinah's) seems unbefitting the modesty of the Jewish woman; but Rashi, in his commentary on the following verse, considers the Torah's recounting of the incident to be in praise of Leah, lauding the fact that "she desired and sought to increase the tribes [of Israel]." In other words, while Leah's ability to positively influence others was not actualized by her in her personal life (as evidenced by her reluctance to marry Esau), she devoted her life to mothering the sons and daughter who would realize her innately outgoing nature.

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