

Parshat Vayishlach

Like Mother, Like Daughter

Regarding the incident of the abduction of Dina, Rashi compares Dina’s outgoing nature to that of her mother Leah. This Sicha discusses the connection between the two characters, and conveys a deeper perspective at the differences between Leah and her sister Rochel.

In this week’s Torah portion, the Torah recounts how Dina, the daughter of Yaakov was seized by Shechem and was violated. Eventually, when her brothers Shimon and Levi find out, they retaliate by killing the entire city. The Torah relates:

Text 1

Now Dina—the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Yaakov—went out to look over the daughters of the land. Shechem, son of Chamor the Chivvite, the prince of the region, saw her; he took her, lay with her, and violated her.

Bereishis 34:1-2

This verse, however, is phrased in an interesting manner. When the Torah introduces Dina, it does so by describing, “Dina—the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Yaakov.”

The verse could have simply said, “Dina the daughter of...Yaakov,” as the Torah already related elsewhere¹ that Dina was Yaakov’s child. There seems to be no purpose in repeating it again.

Rashi comments on this, that there is specific significance in associating this incident concerning Dina to her mother Leah.

The extroversive nature of Dina which led her into trouble was a result of her being of a similar nature to her mother.

Text 2

And not the daughter of Yaakov? However, because of her going out she was called the daughter of Leah, since she [Leah] too, was in the habit of going out, as it is said: “And Leah came forth toward him [Yaakov]” (Bereishis, 30:16).

Rashi, ibid

Rashi says that that it was Leah’s behavior that led to this sorry affair.

This is troubling though: Why would Rashi elucidate the verse in a fashion that speaks unfavorably of Leah?

As a principle, the Torah attempts as much as possible, not to discuss the negative character traits of anyone—even of animals.²

This being the case, one should be particularly careful not to speak ill of a *tzadik*, regarding whom the verse states, “Remember a *tzadik* for blessing.”³

¹ Bereishis 30:21.

² Talmud, Bava Basra 123a.

³ Mishlei 10:7.

Rashi, however, seems to ignore this principle and explains the verse in a manner which places Leah in a negative light.

Not her fault

Now, one may be able to say that Rashi's intent is actually to mitigate Dina's fault and to an extent, excuse her outgoing nature.

Rashi essentially explains, that the reason that she ended up in trouble was by no fault of her own, but was rather the result of the nature she received from her mother. It was her mother's outgoing nature that led to the unfortunate event between Dina and Shechem and was not entirely her own fault.

This explanation is inconceivable though, as it is unfathomable that Rashi would defend Dina by offending Leah through shifting the blame onto her. Rather, there must be another explanation that Rashi speaks disparagingly of Leah.

There is another point that is troublesome in Rashi's explanation as well:

In Rashi's words, "because of her going out she was called the daughter of Leah, since she [Leah] too, was in the habit of going out," he seems to suggest that the outgoing nature of Leah was negative and therefore Dina is compared to her.

Leah's nature of outgoingness however, was not negative whatsoever. On the contrary, it was positive. The Torah tells us regarding the outgoing nature of Leah's:

Text 3

When Yaakov came from the field in the evening, and Leah came forth toward him, and she said, "You shall come to me, because I have hired you

with my son's *dudaim* (herbal flowers)," and he slept with her on that night.

Bereishis 30:16

Rashi explains there, that the reason that Leah was so persistent in her desire to be with her husband Yaakov—to the extent that she reserved this right through the sale of her son's flowers, and went out to the field to greet him—was because "she desired and was seeking means to increase the number of tribes."⁴ It was her noble wish to have more children that triggered her outgoing nature, and there was nothing negative about it.

Being that it Leah's character trait was positive, it is consequently probable to extrapolate that when Rashi attributes Dina's outgoing nature to her mother, it is not to convey that this calamity was Leah's *fault*, but is in order to deliver the *opposite* message.

Through associating Leah and her daughter Dina, Rashi was demonstrating that just as Leah was doing a positive deed through her going out to welcome Yaakov, so too, Dina's going out was positive as well.

Dina's Character

In order to appreciate the positive nature of Dina's extroverted personality, it is imperative to preface with another story that the Torah relates regarding Dina.

In the beginning of Parshat Vayishlach, the Torah tells of Yaakov's return to the land of Israel and his encounter with his brother Esav, after the many years Yaakov was away in Charan. When Yaakov is on his way to meet Esav, the verse tells us as follows:

⁴ Rashi, Bereishis 30:17.

Text 4

And he arose during that night, and he took his two wives and his two maidservants and his eleven children, and he crossed the ford of [the] Yabok.

Bereishis 32:23

The verse only enumerates eleven of his children and omits Dina. Rashi elaborates:

Text 5

But where was Dina? He put her into a chest and locked her in, so that Esav should not set eyes on her. Therefore, Yaakov was punished for withholding her from his brother, [because had he married her,] perhaps she would change him over for the better—and she fell into the hand of Shechem.

Rashi, ibid

This is perplexing. Rashi implies that *in truth* Yaakov should have let his only daughter marry Esav, and for this reason he was later punished by having her eventually fall into the hands of Shechem. Why would Yaakov ever let his daughter wed the wicked Esav, for the mere *chance* that she might change him?

For what reason did Yaakov's failure to give Dina to Esav as a wife receive a consequence so harsh as the event that transpired between Dina and Shechem?

We must therefore say that

- 1) Dina's temperament was such, that there was a *great likelihood* that she would influence Esav to change his ways.

- 2) Transforming an evil person into a good one has such importance, that it would have been worth it for Dina to marry him, even if there would be no way of *assuring* that she could change him.

It is for this reason that Yaakov was punished. For, had Dina married Esav, her captivating personality would have transformed him into a good person.

Now that it is understood that Dina possessed such a charismatic personality, one which could enable her to transform even the likes of the wicked Esav, it is understood that this was also the reason that Dina went out—to transform the girls of the land for the better. She did not go out with the girls of the land merely for recreation, but to teach them the Torah values that she had imbued in her father's home.

This is why Rashi relates that this nature came from Leah's personality. This was not a degradation of Leah, but it was to her praise. For, just as Leah's nature of going out was a positive trait, so too it was with her daughter Dina. The positive extroverted nature that Dina possessed was inherited from her mother Leah.

The comparison

Seemingly, however, there can be no comparison Leah's excursion and that of her daughter Dina.

The reason that Leah went out was to greet Yaakov and bring him into her tent. Leah wanted to bear more children in order to increase the number of the existing tribes, and her exploit was therefore towards that end.

Dina, on the other hand, went out with the objective of transforming the Chivvite women into individuals who were to be connected to G-d.

What is the connection between Dina’s outgoing nature, and her ability to transform the likes of Esav and the Chivvite women, to the outgoing nature of her mother, which was for the sole purpose of increasing the tribes?

On the contrary, whereas Dina apparently had a charismatic and outgoing personality, with a desire to bring people who were distant from G-d closer, Leah’s personality was clearly not so.

The Torah tells us of the contrast between Leah and her sister Rochel:

Text 6

Leah's eyes were tender, but Rochel had beautiful features and a beautiful complexion.

Bereishis 29:17

Rashi⁵ explains the description of Leah having tender eyes as follows:

Text 7

Because she expected to fall into Esav’s lot, and she wept. For everyone was saying, “Rivka has two sons, and Lavan has two daughters. The older [daughter] for the older [son], and the younger [daughter] for the younger [son].”

Rashi, Ibid

Leah did not want to marry Esav and convert him into a G-dly person. She was content with marrying a *tzadik* the likes of Yaakov.

We see then, that although Dina possessed the desire to transform those around her to a life of holiness, her mother, in contrast, did not.

What then is the comparison between Dina and her mother Leah?

The father of the Jewish people

Of our three patriarchs—Avraham Yitzchak and Yaakov—there is a special connection between the Jewish people and Yaakov.

The reason for this bond is because Yaakov was the only one of the patriarchs who was a father exclusively to the Jewish people. Avraham fathered another son, Yishmael and Yitzchak fathered Esav.

It is due to this, that concerning Yaakov it states⁶, that all the Jewish souls of all the generations are included in his soul, and that for all eternity the Jewish people are called by his name—“*Am Yisroel*.” (“The People of Israel,” i.e. Yaakov.)

Though all of the characteristics of the Jewish people are included in Yaakov’s soul in a general manner, their *specific* attributes are revealed through the various traits of the twelve tribes.

Being that Rochel and Leah mothered the tribes, it is understood that differences amongst the tribes were inherited through from their respective mothers. Rochel and Leah each had distinct personalities and these differences were passed down to their children.

It is for this reason that it was specifically the matriarchs who named the tribes. Being that each name was expressive of the tribe’s specific identity, and these characteristics were developed through their mothers, it was therefore Rochel and Leah who assigned the fitting name to each of their children.

⁵ Based on Talmud, Bava Basra 123a.

⁶ Tanya, Iggeres Hakodesh, Epistle 6.

Two ways of serving G-d

Yet, although there are twelve tribes with twelve variant ways of serving the Almighty, these modes of service in general fall under two classifications: *tzadikim* and *ba'alei teshuvah* (lit., those who return to G-d).

The tribes that had the innate qualities of *tzadikim* were the children of Rochel and the tribes that had the nature of *ba'alei teshuvah*, were the children of Leah.

The manner in which a *tzadik* serves G-d is through completely immersing in holiness, by means of his fulfillment of Torah and *mitzvos*. His entire identity is submerged in G-dliness and spirituality, and he in no way relates to the mundane world which surrounds him.

The *ba'al teshuvah* however, focuses on transforming the negative into good and the mundane into holiness. The *ba'al teshuvah* can be a person who has never sinned, yet he is still referred to as a *ba'al teshuvah*. His mode of service in its critical form, is not about rectifying *sin* per say, but about transforming a world devoid of G-dliness into a world that is permeated with it.

Rochel and Leah

Rochel and Leah respectively, personified the traits of the *tzadik* and the *ba'al teshuvah*.

These differences in their characters are expressed in the above-mentioned verse, "Leah's eyes were tender, but Rochel had beautiful features and a beautiful complexion."

Leah's tender eyes were due to her constant weeping—weeping being connected with the idea of *teshuva*—personifies this character. The *ba'al teshuvah*, whose focus is to transform negativity, must be embittered about the presence of negativity in the world. This

bitterness serves as a catalyst that drives the *ba'al teshuvah* to therefore transform the bad into good.

Rochel's features in contrast, are described as entirely beautiful—both in general figure and in facial complexion. This is the trait of a *tzadik*, who is perfect in all areas, without possessing any blemish. The *tzadik* has nothing to rectify, as he lives in a world of complete spirituality and G-dliness.

We see that Yaakov also had the primary service of a *tzadik*—being described⁷ as "an innocent man, dwelling in tents." Yaakov's natural character trait was to be completely immersed in the study of Torah and in holiness.

Yaakov mainly remained within the parameters of purity rather than going to the *outside*, to transform the mundane into holiness. He personified the *tzadik* and was therefore attracted to the *tzadik* persona as well.

Due to the similar characters that he shared with Rochel, he had an affinity for her more so than for Leah—as the Torah tells us,⁸ "And Yaakov loved Rochel."

This is the inner meaning of the previously explained idea concerning the tears of Leah. People were saying, "Rivka has two sons, and Lavan has two daughters. The older [daughter] for the older [son], and the younger [daughter] for the younger [son]." It wasn't merely what people said, but it was indeed apropos for Leah to have married Esav.

Leah, with her nature of a *ba'al teshuvah*, whose Divine service involved transforming the mundane of the outside world into holiness, was truly meant to marry Esav and change him for the better.

⁷ Bereishis 25:27.

⁸ Bereishis 29:18.

Rochel, on the other hand, being the *tzadik*, was more suitable for Yaakov. Both shared the divine service of *tzadikim*, and were therefore the perfect match.

Their children

As mentioned, just as Rochel and Leah personified the attributes of a *tzadik* and a *ba'al teshuvah*, so too did these character traits appear to their respective children.

The Zohar⁹ explains, that it was because of these differences that the base of the altar was placed in the portion of land given to the tribe of Binyamin (Rochel's son), and not in the inheritance of the tribe of Yehudah (Leah's son).

Yehudah, together with the other children of Leah, participated in the selling of Yosef into slavery. Even though the brothers eventually did *teshuvah*, returning themselves to G-d, they did not hold the same status of *tzadikim* as Rochel's children, Yosef and Binyamin did.

It was necessary that the base of the altar only rest in the property of a *tzadik*, and therefore it was placed in Binyamin's lot.

We see then, that Rochel's children—Yosef and Binyamin—each personified the trait of the *tzadik*, whereas the children of Leah embodied the characteristics of the *ba'al teshuvah*.

With this deeper understanding, Rashi's comparison of Dina's extroverted tendencies to that of her mother Leah can be appreciated.

Indeed, Leah did have this potential and essential nature of transforming the sinful nature of an individual into good, as expressed in her destiny to marry Esav, and as seen by her act of going out to greet Yaakov.

However, being that this quality of serving the Almighty in the manner of a *ba'al teshuvah*

existed in a more dormant manner within Leah, she did not actualize her potential.

Her children, though, expressed this nature in a stronger manner than she did; the tribes, in their effort of *teshuvah* after selling Yosef, and Dina, with her desire to have a positive effect on her surroundings.

This extroverted quality, coupled with the trait of transforming the negative to the positive, was inherited by Dina and accentuated in her character. Dina was able to transform the Chivvite women and would have been successful in transforming Esav into a righteous individual.

Dina's Success

Though going out to the Chivvite women ultimately resulted in misfortune for Dina, this was merely in order to serve as a consequence for Yaakov—as Rashi mentions above¹⁰—and not as a result of any misdeed on Dina's part.

Dina's actions in and of themselves were pure, and she intended to venture out to the women of the city, in order to have a positive influence on them and encourage them to follow the ways of G-d.

Furthermore it can be said, that these efforts ultimately had a positive effect, and the people of Shechem were indeed changed over for the better on some level.

After Dina was taken by Shechem, her brothers Shimon and Levi came to avenge the honor of Yaakov's family. Before slaying the males, they made a treaty with the people of the city, requiring all the males to receive a *bris milah* (circumcision). The Torah tells relates,

⁹ 1:259a.

¹⁰ Text 5

Text 8

And all those coming out of the gate of his city listened to Chamor and his son Shechem, and every male, all who went out of the gate of his city, became circumcised.

Bereishis 34:24

Dina, was indeed successful in converting an entire city to the Judaism of the time as the circumcision deemed them as authentic converts¹¹.

Though in the end the males of Shechem were killed by Shimon and Levi for their sin of protecting Shechem, for that short period of time they actually entered into a covenant with Avraham's family and became Jewish according to the standard of the time.

This elevated status of becoming more connected to G-dliness was fulfilled with the Chivite women as well, being that they were brought as captives to Yaakov's family at the conclusion of the incident. By means of becoming maids in the house of Yaakov, they learned from the ways of Torah and were expected to follow them as well.

We therefore find that the women, whom Dina originally sought out to affect, were, in reality, joined to the family of Yaakov—as they became maidservants in his house.

Dina's work in transforming the people around her was not for naught and her deeds had great impact on the city.

Dina did nothing wrong in going out to affect the Chivite people. On the contrary, it was only good. She learned this trait from her mother, who like her, also used her nature as an extrovert

for the positive. It was only because of her father's actions that the story ended in calamity.

The lesson

This story serves as a lesson for all Jewish women.

The glory and crown of Jewish women and girls is the trait inwardness. Indeed, this is their main role, serving as the foundation of the Jewish home. They are primarily to use their innate abilities to transform their homes into a bastion of peace and holiness, rather than focus on transforming the outside world.

However, those who are graced with the special qualities and ability to also have a positive influence on those outside, should use these talents to help reach out to their fellow Jewish sisters who are wandering, and are as of yet, not aware of the beauty of Torah and *mitzvos*.

Their going out should of course be fulfilled in a refined and modest manner, with their female quality of,¹² "the entire glory of the princess is within," being recognized. Nevertheless, they should go out with modesty and affect the world around them through bringing Jewish women closer to the Almighty.

Furthermore, women potentially can have a greater effect than men in drawing others close to Judaism, through their softer and more welcoming nature. Their pleasant and nurturing qualities are a stronger asset in bringing people closer G-dliness than the more argumentative nature of men. The impact that women can have through encouraging their fellow in a pleasant and peaceful manner, creates a more lasting and deeper impression.

Since the Almighty gave these natural traits to women, it is clear that they should utilize them

¹¹ Klei Yakar 34:25.

¹² Tehillim 45:14.

to the utmost—not only within their homes, but to their fellow sisters outside the home as well.

May we have the strength to spread Torah and *mitzvos* to all of those around us, and usher in the ultimate revelation of G-dliness!

(Based on Likutei Sichos 35, Vayishlach 3 pg. 150ff. Reworked by Rabbi Dovid Markel. To see other projects and to partner in our work, see: www.Neirot.com.)