

א ביסל תורה!

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Was Killing All of שכם Really Justified?

By Theo Fraenkel '28

In פרשת וישלח, דינה, יעקב's daughter from לאה goes out to find friends in the land. However, שכם, who is the son of חמור, king of the חיונים, forces דינה to have relations with him and requests to marry her. חמור, offers יעקב a deal in which דינה marries שכם, and the families settle together and marry each other. יעקב's children respond deceitfully that they accept חמור's terms as long as all males under his jurisdiction become circumcised. חמור listens and forces everyone to get circumcised, but on the third day after, when the operation is most painful, שמעון and לוי kill all the males of שכם and redeem דינה who was still in captivity. One of the main questions in פרשת וישלח is how was it right for שמעון and לוי to kill the entire city of שכם, especially for something only the king and his son did? Also, how could they renege on the deal they had made?

One approach might be that שמעון and לוי actually made the wrong decision and were too violent. This would seem to fit with how יעקב at the end of his life calls them "כלי חמס" "instruments of cruelty" (בראשית). However, even though what they did may have gone too far, it makes sense that as children of יעקב they are generally rooted in righteousness.

As for שמעון and לוי reneging on the deal, a solution is to say that there was a problem with the pact, so it never came into effect. ספורנו points out that the townsmen that got circumcised had the wrong

intentions. They did so not in order to accept the tenets of monotheism, but because they were promised access to יעקב's wealth. Therefore, the city of שכם never fulfilled their end of the bargain and the entire deal is void. This solves the problem of שמעון and לוי's actions breaking the deal, but not of the morality of the whole situation.

So what was it that allowed for the whole city of שכם to be killed? As laid out by the רמב"ם (הלכות מלכים), under the Noahide Laws which every non-Jew is obligated to keep, is דינים, law and order. As Noahide Laws are enforceable by punishment of death, because the city of שכם did not bring שכם and חמור to justice for kidnapping and violating דינה, they are all liable. The רמב"ן rejects this explanation, as according to this explanation, שמעון and לוי would have done the right thing, so why would יעקב be upset with them? Additionally how can we expect that the general population stand up to their rulers? Rather, the רמב"ן says the people of שכם were idolaters and therefore breaking the Noahide Laws. However, it wasn't שמעון and לוי's responsibility to bring them to justice, therefore, יעקב was upset. This makes sense with ספורנו's interpretation as the people had not really abandoned their idolatrous ways and as such were circumcised in bad faith.

Rav Hirsch interestingly notes that this incident with שכם occurs directly after יעקב's encounter with עשו. Here we see a slight reversal in the traditional roles the two brothers play. עשו puts on his "קול יעקב" as his inner emotions and feelings stream out. שמעון and לוי

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exhibit עשו's sword while indiscriminately killing an entire city. Rav Hirsch emphasizes our need for balance between the two. Our תורה guides us on a path of peace which might draw us to totally abstain from war and violence. However, when the time is right and in proportionate measure we must stand up for the dignity of our people and not let ourselves be pushed around. We do this similar to the way שמעון and לוי stood up for the dignity of their family after being disrespected by שכם. As Jews, we emphasize the need for תמימות and peace through the תורה but also strength in the face of persecution.

Attaining Peace

By Menshi Trachtenberg '26

שלום, Peace, is what we all desire - within our families, community, and throughout the world. This value of peace is fundamental to Judaism and we see this all throughout the תנ"ך. But, if we look deeper into the texts, we can discover something fascinating. In פרשת וישלח, after years of separation and fear, יעקב finally reunites with his brother, עשו. We can see יעקב and עשו not only as brothers, but also as spiritual counterparts, each representing one side of our inner struggles. One fascinating aspect of this פרשה is the connection between the words שלום (peace) and עשו, which share the same גמטריה of 376. This simple fact carries profound meaning. What does it teach us about the nature of peace, and overcoming conflict?

There are some commentators that explain that this shared גמטריה defines שלום not as meaning the absence of conflict, but rather meaning the

transformation of conflict to something higher. The (נצח ישראל, פרק ד) מהר"ל explains that true peace is not when forces are removed, but rather when two opposite forces are harmonized and elevated. The תורה describes עשו as a, "אִישׁ יָדַע צֵיד אִישׁ שָׂדֶה" "a hunter and a man of the field" (בראשית כה:כז), representing energy, determination, and strength. A hunter must work hard for his food; if he fails, he goes hungry. יעקב, by contrast, is described as "אִישׁ תָּם" "the one who seeks truth, wisdom, humility and patience" (בראשית כה:כז).

The connecting גמטריה hints that peace is created not when one side destroys the other side, but when both the sides work together. Rav Soleveitchik explains this idea through his concept of Adam 1 and Adam 2 in The Lonely Man Of Faith: Adam 1, like עשו, has the mission to master the world: to create and to build. Adam 2, like יעקב, represents the spiritual, and reflective side, seeking meaning, humility, and closeness to G-d. True harmony and true peace comes when these two sides are integrated together.

Ultimately, we learn that the יעקב within us strives for growth, humility, wisdom, and patience, while the עשו within us strives for passion, strength, and powerful work ethic. True peace arrives when we bring together the two forces within ourselves.



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