# VAYISHLACH: Shimon, Levi and the Israeli Army

ABRAHAM AND ISAAC

At the beginning of Jewish history, when we were not yet a people or even a tribe, but merely a small nuclear family, a painful pattern repeated itself more than once: abuse. Our first two patriarchs, Abraham and Isaac, had to face existential threats when, due to drought and famine, they left their place of residence and became vulnerable refugees. When Abraham emigrated to Egypt, he knew that the locals might kill him in order to seize his wife Sarah. That is why he had to pretend she was his sister. Abraham had cut ties with his family in Haran; he did not belong to a powerful nation nor did he have a large extended family. There was no one who could defend him or avenge his blood if he was attacked. He was completely vulnerable. Abusable. The same thing happened in another city, Gerar, and it was repeated a generation later with Isaac. He too had to hide that Rivka was his wife. God intervened directly and protected our matriarchs.

Abuse, which in its extreme expression—taking women by force—had sentenced the generation of the flood to extinction, remained present. Apparently, Sodom and Gomorrah were not the only places where foreigners were abused: the complete lack of basic human rights for the poor and the refugee was the rule, not the exception.

Incidentally, in light of this terrible normalization of the abuse of the unprotected in that era, we can better appreciate the extraordinary revolution of the Tora, which commands not only not to abuse but to "love the foreigner," to actively care for the non-Jew—the ger toshab—who comes to seek refuge in our land. This mitsva constitutes a total inversion of the moral order of the ancient pagan world, where the law of the

jungle prevailed.

JACOB

In this week's Parasha we read about an episode that is not identical but very similar, which happened with Jacob. When our third patriarch and his family arrived in Shekhem, the powerful local prince took Dina, Jacob's daughter, carried her off, abused her, and held her by force.

Jacob did not react. He was obviously devastated but remained passive, like his father Isaac and his grandfather Abraham. Perhaps he was afraid to react because he knew the enemy had a numerical advantage. Or perhaps he thought that, just as had happened with his ancestors, direct Divine intervention was imminent. But there was no Divine intervention. God did not appear in dreams to Hamor or to his son to warn them not to touch Jacob's daughter.

Two of Jacob's sons, however, did react. They understood perfectly that the law of the fittest prevailed in the Middle East and that they could not survive if they showed weakness. It was also unrealistic to passively expect miracles. Ein somkhim al hanes: "miracles are not guaranteed." The rules of the game had changed—perhaps because now they were able to defend themselves.

Through a cleverly planned strategy, they deceived the aggressors, incapacitated them, attacked them by surprise, destroyed the city, and rescued their sister Dina.

Jacob, surprised by his sons' unprecedented military operation, reproached them for what they had done. He feared retaliation from the neighboring peoples, who were far more numerous than his family. But the military operation of Shimon and Levi produced an unexpected effect. The Tora states explicitly that a "Divine fear" (hittat Eloqim) took hold of the neighboring peoples and dissuaded them from attacking Jacob's sons. That supernatural, miraculous fear made the

locals feel that the Jews were unpredictable and that it was not wise to mess with them. God’s more subtle intervention manifested itself, but only once they had acted.

SHIMON AND LEVI

Abraham had a very small family: three people. Isaac, four. Neither of them could do without direct Divine intervention to rescue their wives; they simply did not have the minimum number of people required to do so.

Shimon and Levi, on the other hand, were fully aware that although the enemy possessed a numerical advantage, defeating them was possible. They had such strong self-esteem and emunah that they launched into combat even without the help of their other brothers, who remained waiting in the rear.

Shimon and Levi represent the new generation: a generation that does not surrender to abuse and uses intelligence to compensate for numerical disadvantage, defending itself with determination.

They did not wait passively for miracles; instead, they sought another type of Divine intervention—one that accompanies the military operation, not one that replaces it.

And in the long term, this became the normal modus operandi of Divine intervention in the fights of the people of Israel against their enemies. As the Tora states unambiguously (Devarim 20:4):

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HaShem will go with you (holekh imakhem) when you go out to fight against your enemies, and He will grant you victory.

Help comes once Israel defends itself, goes out to battle, and refuses to become a victim.

MEDINAT ISRAEL

It is impossible to ignore the parallel between what happened with Shimon and Levi and what is happening today in Medinat Israel.

Shimon and Levi represent a generational change: they are the brave young men who have lost the fear of confronting the enemy, who are no longer a defenseless minority, and who use not only their strength but also their Jewish intelligence to defeat those who seek our destruction.

A final reflection, somewhat interpretative:

Shimon represents among the tribes the least observant one, as we see in the Tora, especially in the episode of Bil'am.

Levi represents the opposite: it is the most observant tribe, the one that will give rise to the Kohanim who will serve in the Bet HaMiqdash, but when there is a war of survival (*milchemet mitsva*), they join the army. And Shimon and Levi are fighting together!

In post–October 7 Israel, a very significant social and cultural process is taking place: more and more young religious haredim, who study Tora, prepare themselves in academies or technological institutes with professional careers. And also, little by little, more of them are enlisting in the army, especially in special units where religious observance is stricter.

According to Shlomo Filber, a demographic analyst, although the haredi population today in Israel constitutes around 15%, its demographic growth is, B"H, the highest in the Western world, with more than six children per family (see here Filber's article).

According to Filber, the new Israeli army, in the coming years, will have at least 50% religious soldiers–dati leumi

and haredi. That is, it will be a modern version of the partnership between Shimon and Levi.

Like Jacob’s family, Israel is growing demographically in a miraculous way, and its army is preparing to incorporate thousands of young scholars of Tora who understand that they must defend their “families” and that Divine intervention will accompany them and grant them victory when they face their enemies.

The Israel Defense Forces in the immediate future will not only be “an army with more Jews,” but “an army with more Judaism.”