

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

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Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS VAYISHLACH

Rejection Frustration

And Timnah was a concubine of Elifaz, son of Eisav, and she bore to Elifaz Amalek (36:12).

The Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 99b) relates that Timnah, who eventually became a wife to Elifaz son of Eisav, was of royal lineage. Rashi (36:12) explains that this verse is written in order to teach us the greatness of Avraham in that people went to great lengths to be connected to his children. Timnah was the daughter of kings and she rejected her royal lineage in order to marry into the family of Avraham *Avinu*.

The Gemara explains that Timnah originally wanted to convert and marry into the house of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov but was repeatedly turned away. Undeterred, she declared, "it is preferable to be a handmaiden to this nation than to be a noblewoman in any other nation." She therefore became a concubine to Elifaz, son of Eisav, who was from the house of Avraham and Yitzchak, and nephew to Yaakov. Ultimately, her union with Elifaz led to the birth of Amalek. The Gemara (ad loc) seems to make a stunning criticism of the *Avos*; "Why did she give birth to Amalek who caused such suffering to the Jewish people? Because they should not have rejected her."

The commentaries struggle to explain why the *Avos* rejected Timnah; some say because she herself, according to a prior Gemara, was an illegitimate child (See *Rif* in *Ein Yaakov*). Some say because Timnah's conversion was primarily motivated by her desire to marry into the family of the *Avos*, and it is forbidden to accept converts solely on their desire for marriage (*Yalkut Hameiri*).

Yet it is still difficult to fathom how someone who professed such admiration of the *Avos* could birth a child that would grow up to be the archenemy of the Jewish people. In addition, Elifaz, who was the father of Amalek, was "raised on the lap of Yitzchak," which was why he refused to do his father's bidding and kill Yaakov (*Vayeitzei* 29:11). How is it possible that a mother who gave up everything to connect with the Jewish people and a father who is the best of Eisav's children would beget a child who is the ultimate enemy of the Jewish people and constantly seeks their destruction?

Rashi (*Sanhedrin* 99b) explains that the mistake of the *Avos* was that they "pushed her (Timnah) away from the (sheltering embrace) of the *Shechina* when they really should have converted her." In other words, even though they didn't want her to marry into the family they should not have rejected her desire to be connected to Hashem.

This concept is key: The most basic element of humanity is the need to connect. This is what drives the search for love and the search for a relationship with a "higher power." Elementally, everyone wants and desires to "belong." This is the basis for being a part of a community, a club, or a certain clique. It is critical to the development of mankind because being connected as individuals allows for a much greater whole. This strength is expressed on the "Great Seal of the United States": **E Pluribus Unum – out of**



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many, one. In other words, the strength of the country stems from diversity becoming a unified entity.

This foundation of mankind, acceptance and connection, is vital to our emotional well-being. The flip side of course, being rejected, is devastating to our emotional well-being. Rejection leads to intense surges in anger and aggression. In 2001, the Surgeon General of the U.S. issued a report stating that rejection was a greater risk for adolescent violence than drugs, poverty, or gang membership.

This is why ideals that are often nearly identical in their source, once they have rejected one another (such as the Shiite and Sunni varieties of Islam) become mortal enemies – constantly trying to wipe each other out. The very existence of the other is a constant and debilitating reminder of the original rejection. The *Avos'* rejection of Timnah was so devastating to her that it far overwhelmed any appreciation she had for them. As Rashi points out, the *Avos* should have at least encouraged her to be connected to Hashem, as this would have seemingly mitigated part of the rejection. They did not and therefore her only child, Amalek, made it his life's mission to avenge that rejection and repay the *Avos* for the pain caused to his mother.

It's Business and Personal

And Yaakov became very frightened and it distressed him [...] (32:8).

Upon hearing the news that his brother Eisav was marching towards him with an army, Yaakov became both frightened and distressed. Rashi (ad loc) explains that Yaakov was frightened because he worried that he may be killed, and it distressed him that he may come to killing others.

This seems difficult to understand. The Gemara (*Brachos* 58b) obligates one to launch a preemptive strike when one's life is in danger; "If someone is coming to kill you, anticipate him and kill him first." In other words, Yaakov was obligated to kill those who were coming to kill him and his family. So why would he be bothered that he may have to kill his potential assassins?

In *Parshas Vayechi*, when Yaakov Avinu is giving his children a final message, we find that he harshly criticizes Shimon and Levi for killing the people of Shechem and their king, Chamor (49:6 – see Rashi's comments there). Yet, according to Maimonides (*Mishneh Torah, Melachim* 9:14), they were just in wiping out the city. If that is true, then what was Yaakov criticizing?

If we read the *possuk* carefully we see what spurred Yaakov to condemn their actions: "*In their rage they killed [...]*" Yaakov is criticizing the fact that they murdered the entire city out of anger. It is true that Shimon and Levi acted properly in attacking the city of Shechem. But their attitude was wrong. A Jew has to understand that

even though sometimes he has to take drastic measures, for example putting someone to death, he still has to feel remorse for his actions.

This is why Yaakov was distressed at the prospect of killing Eisav or those in his army. One is never supposed to be comfortable with murder, even if the situation warrants it and there is no other option. This has been the Jewish legacy for thousands of years, and even to this day the Israeli army's policy is to be hyper vigilant about civilian lives. They maintain this policy even when it creates an elevated risk to their own soldiers. That is because Jews understand that life – all life – is precious.

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