

# Zera Shimshon

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## Chapter VII: Vavetzei (Gen. 28:10-32:3)

### Essay 18. One must avoid even the appearance of dishonesty

**מדרש** רבה "וענתה-בי צדקתי" אמר הקב"ה ליעקב אלה אומר "וענתה-בי צדקתי" וכו' סייד למחר בתה יוצאת ומתענה עב"ל. קשה מה חטא באומר "וענתה-בי צדקתי", והא בדין אמר שלא לקח מלבן כלום, ואף אם תאמר שלעין העולם הנה קצת רמאות במעשה המקלות, אף על פי כן מה ענו מעשה דינה לענון זה ואיך ירגיש בו יעקב שחטא לומר "וענתה-בי צדקתי".

**There is a Midrash Gen. Rabbah 73:9** on the verse where Jacob told his father-in-law, Laban: “In the future, when you go over my wages, **let my honesty answer [עֲנֵתָהּ] [anta] for me:** if there are among my goats any that are not speckled or spotted or any sheep that are not dark-colored, they got there by theft.”<sup>1</sup> The Midrash states: “**The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Jacob: You said, ‘let my honesty answer for me’ etc. By your life, in the future, your daughter will go out and be defiled [מִתְעַנֶּה] [mitana],** as it is stated: ‘Dinah, the daughter whom Leah had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the daughters of the land. Shechem son of Hamor the Hivite, chief of the country, saw her, and took her and lay with her and disgraced her [וַיַּעֲנֶהָ] [va 'ye'aneha]’ (Gen. 34:1–2).” The Midrash links the word “answer” from Gen. 30:33 to the word “disgraced her” from Gen. 34:2.

**A difficulty is how did [Jacob] sin by saying, “let my honesty answer for me,” for he was right saying that, as he did not take anything from Laban. Even if you’ll say that to the appearance of the world, he was a bit dishonest in the incident of the shoots of poplar that he peeled and set up in front of the goats, so that the goats would bring forward “streaked, speckled, and spotted young,”<sup>2</sup> nevertheless, what is the connection of the incident with Dinah to this incident? How should Jacob sense that he sinned by saying, “let my honesty answer for me”?** I.e., if we experience something bad, we are supposed to engage in introspection to see if we sinned in some way, and to correct our behavior. How would Jacob understand that there was a connection between his words to Laban and Shechem’s assault on Dinah?

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<sup>1</sup> Gen. 30:33.

<sup>2</sup> Gen. 30:37–39.

ויובן במה שקתב בעל עמודיה שבָּעָה שְׁלֵעִינִי הָרוּאִים וְהַשׁוֹמְעִים דִּינָה נִטְמָאָה כְּשֶׁנִּבְעָלָה לְשָׁכֶם, אֲבָל לְאוֹתָם שְׁנִכְנְסוּ בְּסוֹד ה' אֲדָרְבָּא נִטְהַרָה, שִׁשָּׂאב מִמְּנָה הַזִּוְהָמָא שְׁהִיתָה בָּהּ כְּדִכְתִּיב "וַיְהִי גְדַתָּה עָלָיו", וְעֵי"ש בְּאַרְךָ.

**This will be understood by what the author of *Amudeha Shiva* [“Seven Pillars”] wrote,<sup>3</sup> that in the eyes of those who saw and heard what happened, Dinah was defiled when she was taken by Shechem. But to those who entered into learning of the esoteric secret of G-d, i.e., Kabbalah, she was to the contrary purified by this incident, for [Shechem] drew from her the contamination that was within her [because of Adam’s sin]. This is as it is written, “And if a man lies with her, her menstrual separation applies to him; he shall be impure seven days, and any bedding on which he lies shall become impure,”<sup>4</sup> and see there at length.**

Zera Shimshon, Chapter VIII, Vayishlach, essay 12, gives more detail. *Amudeha Shiva* cites the Ari that Shechem, the son of Hamor the Hivite, was the original serpent that enticed Eve and infected her with moral contamination. He was called the Hivite [*ha'Chivi*] [הַחִיבִי] which is the language of *chivya* [חִיבְיָא], Aramaic for “snake.” Because of this incident with Eve, the holy souls became intermingled with the husks of impurity. Abraham’s father, Terah, had come upon his wife in the days of her menstrual impurity, and both of them were reincarnated to atone for their sin. Terah’s wife was reincarnated as Dinah. Note that the full spelling for *niddah*, menstrual impurity [נִידָ"ה], has the same letters as in the name Dinah [דִּינָה]. When Shechem fell upon Dinah, he drew from her all the moral contamination of menstrual impurity. One who heard of [their relationship] might have thought that Dinah was defiled, but to the contrary, she was purified, for he drew from her all of the moral contamination of the snake.

וּמַעֲתָה אִם הָיָה אוֹמֵר יַעֲקֹב "וְעִנְתָּה צְדָקָתִי", הָיָה מִשְׁמַע לְעֵינֵי הָעוֹלָם, וְאִז לֹא הָיָה יָכוֹל לַעֲשׂוֹת שׁוּם דְּבָר שֶׁנִּרְאָה רַמְאֹת כְּגוֹן הַמְקָלוֹת שֶׁעָשָׂה. אֲלָא אָמַר "וְעִנְתָּה-בִּי צְדָקָתִי" כְּלוֹמֵר אֵינִי מִקְפִּיד אֲלָא שְׂלֵא יְהִיָּה רַמְאֹת אֲצִלִּי, שְׂאִין אֲנִי גוֹנֵב כְּלוֹם מִשְׁלַל לְבֹן, אֲבָל אִם הָעוֹלָם יְהִי סְבוּרִים שְׂאֵנִי עוֹשֶׂה רַמְאֹת לֹא אֵיכֶפֶת לִי כִּלְל. וְקִימָא לֹן שְׂאָדָם צָרִיד לְצִאת יְדֵי הַבְּרִיּוֹת נְמִי כְּדִכְתִּיב "וְהִיָּתָם נִקְיִים מֵה' וּמִיִּשְׂרָאֵל", וּבִפְרָט אָדָם חָשׁוּב כְּיַעֲקֹב שִׁישׁ קֶצֶת חִילוּל ה' בְּדָבָר.

**From now, if Jacob said, “let my honesty answer,” omitting the word בִּי [*bi*] [“for me”], that would have meant his honesty would be acknowledged in the eyes of the entire world. He would not be able to do anything that even appeared dishonest, such as the incident of using the shoots. Rather, he said, “let my honesty answer for me,” as if to say, I am only strict that I not be dishonest in my own mind, that I am satisfied for myself that I will not steal anything that belongs to Laban. But if the world will be of the opinion that I am acting in a dishonest fashion, it doesn’t bother me at all what they think.**

**We hold that “a man must appear justified before people just as he must appear justified before the Omnipresent, and it is written, ‘And you shall be guiltless before the L-rd and before Israel’ (Num. 32:22).”<sup>5</sup> This is especially so for a man who is important, such as Jacob, as if he were to appear dishonest, there would be a bit of desecration of G-d’s Name in the matter.**

<sup>3</sup> Bezalel ben Shlomo, from Kobryn and later Slutzk (1640–91), *Amudeha Shiva* (Lublin 1666; Prague 1674).

<sup>4</sup> Lev. 15:24.

<sup>5</sup> Mishnah Shekalim 3:4.

ומשום הכי ארע לו מעשה דינה, שלעניני העולם היתה הרפה גדולה על יעקב פדכתיב "כִּי־נִבְלָה עֲשָׂה בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל", בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל דִּנְקָא, אָבֵל לֹא לְמִי שְׂיִוְדַע הָאָמֶת, וְזֶהוּ מִדָּה כְּנִגְדַּד מִדָּה שֶׁהוּא לֹא חָשַׁב כְּלוּם לַעֲזוֹ הַבְּרִיּוֹת וּמִשׁוּם הַכִּי נִעְנַשׁ לְפִי סִבְרָתוֹ, דְּבָלָאוּ הַכִּי לֹא הֵיךְ רָאוּי שְׂיִבּוֹא לַעֲזוֹ כְּזֶה לִיַעֲקֹב בְּמַעֲשֵׂה דִינָה. וְאַף אִם פִּיצוּל הַמַּקְלוֹת עֲשָׂה בְּהִיתָר דְּבִמְקוֹם פְּסִידָא, עֲבִיד אִינִישׁ דִּינָא לְנַפְשִׁיהּ. וּמִכָּל שְׂכָן לְהַצִּיל שְׂכָרוֹ, מִכָּל מְקוֹם לֹא הֵיךְ לוֹ לְהַתְפָּאָר עַל זֶה, רַק אֲדַרְבָּא לְהוֹכִיחַ וּלְגַלוֹת לַעֲיִן כָּל הָעוֹלָם שֶׁהַטַּעַם שֶׁעָשָׂה זֶה הִרְמָאוֹת לְלַבָּן מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהֵיךְ מוֹכְרָח לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ כְּדִי לְהַצִּיל אֶת שְׁלוֹ. וְעַיִן עוֹד לְקַמְן בְּסִדְרַ הַבָּא עַל הַפְּסוּק "וַיִּקְרָא־לוֹ אֵל אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל".

**Because of this, the incident with Dinah happened to him, which in the eyes of the world was a great disgrace to Jacob, as it is written, “because he had committed an outrage in Israel by lying with Jacob’s daughter.”<sup>6</sup> It specifically says “in Israel,” meaning to the general public, but not to one who knows the truth, i.e., who understands the Kabbalistic explanation given above.**

As explained above, the incident was actually beneficial to her, but Jacob nevertheless suffered from the public’s misunderstanding. **This was a measure-for-measure punishment for Jacob, for he didn’t think anything of the negative outlook of humanity that would be directed his way. Because of this, he was punished according to his own way of thinking,** as he would now suffer public embarrassment. **If this were not so,** that he was punished for having said, “let my honesty answer for me,” **it would not have been appropriate for the negative outlook such as this incident with Dinah to have come upon Jacob.**

**Even if the peeling of the shoots of poplar had been done with permission, for “where [there would be] a loss [involved if no immediate action is taken], a person may take justice into his own [hands],”<sup>7</sup> and even more so, to save his wages from being stolen by Laban, nevertheless he should not have been haughty about it,** to imply that he didn’t care about public opinion. **Rather, to the contrary, he should have proved and to revealed to the eyes of the entire world that the reason that he acted in a shrewd manner toward Laban was because he was compelled to do so in order to save what was his.**

**See further below in the following parasha, Vayishlach, essay 12, on the verse, “He set up an altar there, and called it El, G-d of Israel.”<sup>8</sup> [This refers to what was explained above, regarding what the *Amudeha Shiva* brings from the Ari about the incident with Dinah and Shechem.]**

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<sup>6</sup> Gen. 34:7.

<sup>7</sup> Bava Kamma 27b.

<sup>8</sup> Gen. 33:20.