

Like all of the parashiot in Sefer Bereshit, Vayishlach is so full of stories that some, like the story of Dinah, Jakob's only daughter, are sometimes overlooked. However, its messages still ring true today, and we would do well to revisit it. After parting with Esau, Jakob settles with his family on the outskirts of Shechem. When Dinah goes out to see the girls of the city, she is accosted by the king's son Schechem, and raped. The wording is exact: He saw her, he took her, he lay with her, and he violated – *vayianah* her (34:7). Among many other things including to answer, the verb ענה means to afflict, humble, abuse, torture. Afterward, Shechem is madly in love with Dinah and asks his father to take her for him as a wife. Jakob hears what happened but remains silent until his sons return from the field. The sons are furious and hatch a nefarious plot, proposing a merger with the people of Shechem on the condition that the men are circumcised. On the third day after their circumcision, when they are in pain, Shimeon and Levi kill all the males, plunder the city, capture the women and children, and leave with Dinah. Now it is Jakob's turn to be furious, an anger that he carries to his deathbed. But it is hardly about Dinah. She, like so many other women, is a silent pawn in a power struggle among ego-driven men. The Torah tells us little about Dinah. She is the daughter of Leah, born following the birth of her 5th and 6th sons in the aftermath of the argument with Rachel over the *dudaim*. The name Dinah is the feminine form of the word for justice. But she never knows justice, her existence is simply its product. One midrash tells us that the name has to do with Leah's consideration for her sister, who is still childless. Knowing the prophesy that Jakob is to father 12 sons, Leah "judges" herself, and prays for a girl, so that Rachel can bear more than one son. In the Torah, Dinah herself never speaks. She is not even mentioned among Jakob's children in the encounter with Esau. Midrash Genesis Rabbah 76:9 cites this very fact as the reason for the events that follow. Afraid that Esau would see Dinah and take her from him, Jakob locks her in a box. HaShem says, "You prevented kindness from your brother and as a result you suffered. Because had she married Esau, she would not have been raped." In other midrashim, Leah, as the elder daughter of Laban, was to have married Esau, but her prayers and tears saved her from that fate. Whereas Leah chooses, Dinah has no choice. The midrashim argue that both women had the moral strength to be a positive influence on Esau, but the opportunity was twice lost. Although this Midrash sees Jakob as culpable, Dinah is still the one who bears the brunt of his actions. Midrash Genesis Rabbah 80 notes that although they were encamped outside of Shechem, Dinah goes out, rather than in. Citing Ezekiel 16:44 ("Like mother, like daughter."), they imply that she was just like her mother, who, coming out to meet Jakob after receiving the *dudaim* (30:16), "came out adorned like a harlot." In other words, she is ultimately responsible for being raped. We are still fighting this battle today, even in so-called "modern, civilized" countries. Like Lot's daughters, whom Lot offers to the mob to protect his guests, and so many other women, Dinah never acts, she is acted upon. Of course it is understandable that this small group does not want to antagonize the people among whom they are living. Jakob spends 20 years under the yoke of his exploitative uncle Laban, he is silent when hearing of Dinah's rape, and when Shimeon and Levi wreak their havoc in Shechem he is understandably only worried about how the local people will react, since war with them would likely destroy them all. Shimeon and Levi, who have the last word in this story, seem to be more concerned about their own reputation than about Dinah herself, but on a more positive note, perhaps their rhetorical question is actually intended as a rebuke to their father. However we choose to read it, "Should our sister be treated like a prostitute?" is an open question. Underlying all of this is the oppression of women and girls, which back then was part of the culture, but today, despite herculean efforts to counter it, still remains a pernicious blight on our society. Since time immemorial women have been treated as objects to be bartered, sequestered, abused, raped, and silenced. Passing from the house of her father to the house of her husband, the woman has been expected to be compliant, and when she is not, she is blamed no matter what the circumstance. Today this usually prevails only in fundamentalist cultures, but other forms of oppression and violence still exist right here behind the closed doors of our own privileged societies. Old patterns are exceedingly hard to break. The Me Too Movement has done much to call attention to and right the wrongs of a myriad of injustices, but there is still a long road ahead. Reputations and careers of powerful people are threatened, and variations on this theme abound, with no end in sight. Unfortunately, excesses and false claims within this movement have been detrimental to the cause and especially in the USA, the backlash is being felt today. As we see from the reactions of Shimeon and Levi as well as from attempts today to control women's lives, violence breeds violence in a spiral of escalation that if allowed to continue, eventually destroys that which it wishes to protect. Two wrongs do not make a right. It is upon us all to seek constructive ways to put an end to the many-faceted violence against women and girls. We can start by giving them a voice. In our world, *din* implies hearing all sides with an open mind and the will to balance *gevurah* (judgement) with *chesed* (kindness). The laws set forth in our Torah lead the way, but it is up to us to interpret them wisely so that true justice will prevail for everyone.