

READING
THE WOMEN
OF THE BIBLE



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Motherprayer

In the Wake of the Goddesses



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The Dinah Affair

PATRIARCHY is about control. The man in power, patriarch or king, can determine the destiny of those under his rule. In special cases, this authority carries with it power over life and death. In more ordinary circumstances, the power takes the form of controlling relationships of the "household" to the outside world. The king decides to go to war or forge an alliance; the patriarch decides with whom to arrange a treaty of marriage. Genesis 34 dramatically illustrates the relationship between "domestic affairs," control over household members, and "external affairs," boundary definition and the relationship with other groups. It involves the intricate connection between the relationship of a girl to her birth family and the relationship of that family to the outside, and between the relationships of individual families to each other and the destiny of the nation as a whole.

The story brings us straight to the action:

◇ Act I. (Gen. 34:1-5)

Part 1. *The daughter's disgrace* (Gen. 34:1-2)

Out went Dinah the daughter of Leah whom she bore to Jacob, to see the girls of the land.

Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, Prince of the Land, saw her.

He took her, and lay with her, and degraded her.

Every phrase of that deceptively simple first sentence is fraught with implications for biblical Israel. Dinah, who initiates the action, is identified by her position within her family: she is the daughter of Leah whom she bore to Jacob. Her mother is a full-status wife, freeborn and even from the home kin, not a slave woman with a "field promotion" to wife. As the story develops and as each aspect of Dinah's position in the family becomes an occasion for action, she is called "daughter of Jacob"

and "sister" of the brothers. Right from the outset, her identification as the daughter of Leah locates her securely within the family. It may also hint that the story will concern marriage in some fashion. Mothers in the ancient Near East were particularly involved in the marrying of their daughters and appear as the chief negotiators in the marriages of the goddesses Ninlil and Inanna. So too in the Bible, at least in the early days: Rivka ran to her mother's house to tell her about Abraham's servant's mission (Gen. 24:28), and then went as a bride into Isaac's mother's tent (Gen. 24:66).

At the moment, marriage is not on Dinah's mind. She is off to see the **girls of the land**. Dinah is not looking for trouble; she is not running away or seeking sexual adventure. On the other hand, she is not out performing a chore for her family, drawing water or shepherding flocks. She is acting on her own initiative, reaching beyond the family, opening the gates to a relationship that goes beyond the confines of her home. She has made a choice: she will go to meet the daughters of the land. The tellers of the story repeat the words the land several times, for the people of Israel have a very complicated attitude toward the peoples of the land. Its appearance here in the first sentence is a reminder of this and also a hint that matters will not go simply for Dinah. Meanwhile, seeking to establish connections with them, **Out went Dinah**.

Out went Dinah, the first words of the story, are the only ones in which Dinah acts as the subject of a verb, creator of her destiny. But what words! To a patriarch, "going out" can strike terror. It means leaving the family domain, leaving both the protection and the control of the head of the household. Even today people talk about the vulnerability of girls, their potential victimhood, as a reason that they should stay at home. But they do not often articulate the other side of the issue: when a woman in the patriarchal world goes out, she leaves her family vulnerable. If something bad happens to her, it not only causes her kin sorrow and loss, it also reflects poorly on the patriarch's ability to protect his family. If she does something of which her family or society might not approve, it is a sign that the father/husband cannot control his relatives. The family is dishonored and loses political and economic influence. The honor of the family and its ability to marry off its children advantageously depend on the honor of the father, and he whose daughter has not been chaste is in much the same situation as a man whose wife has committed adultery. Both men lose their honor by being unable to control their women. When women go out, their men become vulnerable to their behavior. A famous phrase in *The Wisdom of Ben Sira* re-

flects the fear and rigidity that this vulnerability induces: "Daughters are trouble, let there be no window, do not expose her to any male and let her not take counsel among women" (Ben Sira, 42:9-14).

Some cultures have carried their concern over this issue to the point of simply forbidding girls to leave home except under specific, strictly chaperoned occasions. Biblical and ancient Near Eastern societies were not that extreme and did not confine girls to the house. They had responsibilities, such as drawing water, which took them out into the public sphere, but one who left the house without a specific chore was viewed with suspicion and condemnation. The laws of Hammurabi demonstrate this attitude when they consider the case of a woman who wants a divorce. If the local court finds that the woman was a paragon and her husband a profligate, she gets her divorce and takes back her dowry; if, on the other hand, they find that her husband has been a proper spouse, and she has been a gadabout, then she is to be thrown into the river. The word for "gadabout," *wašitum* (literally "the woman who goes out"), has such a negative connotation that an Old Babylonian word list equates it with *harimtu*, "prostitute." Prostitutes walk the street. Their boundary-breaking divine patron Inanna/Ishtar walks about, and female demons roam the streets. But proper Babylonian women were not streetwalkers. Nor were biblical women: when Judah saw a woman sitting by the roadway, he immediately assumed that she was a prostitute. Attitudes do not change quickly. The great twelfth-century Jewish Bible commentator Rashi calls Dinah a "*yaš'arit*," the Hebrew equivalent of *wašitum*, "goer-outer," with the same connotation. The Renaissance Christian commentator Tyndale states, "Dinah goeth but forth alone, and how great myscheve and trouble followed." Calvin draws an explicit message from this story: "Fathers are taught to keep their daughters under narrow watch." The control of girls is only slowly disappearing in our own culture, and our languages still encode the same message: the word in Yiddish for prostitute, *nafqa*, is actually an Aramaic word meaning "goer-out"; the word "streetwalker" in English means the same. With all this cultural background, **Out went Dinah** is not an innocent statement. It carries a warning that something is going to happen. And what happens is a father's nightmare: Dinah, who went out to see the girls, is seen by a boy.

The story is commonly called "The Rape of Dinah." But the story is not really about Dinah, who never speaks and essentially disappears from the narrative after the third verse. And it never tells us clearly that Shechem raped her. This story piles ambiguity upon enigma by "gap-

ping" (leaving unsaid) vital elements. The significance of the story depends on the way that readers fill in these gaps. If we assume that she was assaulted, then the story can and has been read and interpreted as a straightforward narrative of rape and revenge, a classic "morality tale," a dramatic illustration of society's desire to keep girls under surveillance. But the story says only: Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, Prince of the Land, took her, and lay with her, and degraded her. If we do not assume that he raped her, the story becomes a fascinating tale of love, honor, intrigue, and war.

How did Shechem approach her? The story never hints at what happened. Did he speak to her? Did she speak to him? Did he take her by force, or did he persuade her? Did he act like Prince Charming, or like an imperious monarch stating his demands? And what about her? Was she love-struck and happy, defiant and satisfied—or the victim of rape? We will not know how Dinah feels. Her feelings are not the story's concern; nor are the events that led up to the sex. Even her consent is not the issue, so the story does not make it absolutely clear whether she consented or not.

A later detail makes it most probable that Shechem did not rape Dinah. While describing the anger of Dinah's brothers, the narrator interjects a direct address to the readers, for he had done an outrage in Israel to sleep with the daughter of Jacob, and such should not be done. Such biblical asides are commentaries within the text, sermonic punch lines that underscore the social lessons the author wants the hearers to learn. The most famous such aside appears in the creation story. After Adam recognizes the newly created woman, the narrator adds the "lesson" of nuclear marriage, "Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife and they are one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). Adam's act in the Garden is the paradigm of how a man should behave; Shechem's act with Dinah is an example of what man should not do, and the narrator points it out: for he had done an outrage in Israel by lying with the daughter of Jacob, and such is not to be done. The narrator uses a somewhat anachronistic phrase, "in Israel." It fits, for Jacob is indeed called Israel, and the act was an outrage against him, but this story otherwise uses the name "Jacob" consistently. By using "Israel," the aside invites the readers to switch from a concentration on Jacob's problem to their own interests as people of Israel. Using the traditional vocabulary of biblical moral teachings (*nebalah*, "outrage") and its syntax ("should not be done"), this narratorial statement forcefully admonishes the readers that it is utterly wrong by lying with a daughter of Israel.

Nothing is said about forcible rape, for any sexual intercourse with a daughter is a moral outrage that may not be done.

The story focuses on the illicit aspect of Shechem's action: he degraded her. *'innah*, "degrade," is a key word in both the sacred history of Israel and in the story of Sarai and Hagar. It usually has nothing to do with sex, and means to treat people without regard to the proper treatment that their status requires. The one biblical law that is explicitly and unequivocally about rape (Deut. 22:25–26) uses the term "lie with by force"; the word *'innah* does not even appear. In the story of Tamar and Amnon, where the issue is forcible rape, *'innah* is augmented for clarity by the word "overpower" and by the order of the words, "he overpowered her, degraded her and lay with her" (2 Sam. 13:14). Word order counts. In rape, the word *'innah* comes before the words "lay with"; in other forms of illicit sexual intercourse, *'innah* comes after "lay with." There is a reason for this difference in word order. In rape, abuse starts the moment the rapist begins to use force, long before penetration. In other illicit sexual encounters, the act of intercourse may not be abusive. The sex may be sweet and romantic. But the *fact* that the man has intercourse with her degrades her, and so the word *'innah* comes after the words "lay with."

It seems strange that the Dinah story only hints that the act was consensual instead of making it clear. After all, from Dinah's point of view, there is a very big difference if she was willing or forced. Modern readers, particularly women readers, are extremely sensitive to this matter and outraged that Dinah's consent is not mentioned. But the biblical author views things differently. The story is told from the viewpoint of the family and society from which Dinah went out. From their perspective, an unmarried girl's consent does not make sex a permissible act. She has, after all, no right of consent.

Volition and Virginity

In biblical Israel, as in many other societies, the right of consent to a proposal for sex or marriage belonged to the girl's father. It was he who "giveth this woman in marriage," as the English-language wedding ceremony phrases it. The father determined who and when a girl should marry, and she was expected to demonstrate her allegiance to him by remaining a virgin until her marriage. Biblical Hebrew encodes the cultural expectation that unmarried girls be virgins in the word *betulah*, which can mean "virgin" and can also refer to any girl of marriageable

age. The term may mean "virgin" in Levit. 21:14, which states that the High Priest cannot marry a widow, divorcee, profane woman, or prostitute; he can marry only a *betulah* from his people. On the other hand, the word refers to a young bride rather than a virgin in Joel 1:8, "like a *betulah* wearing sackcloth for the husband of her youth." The common pairing of *bahâr* and *betulah* means "young man/men and woman/women," and says nothing about their physical characteristics or sexual experience. When sexual inexperience counts, the Bible has to add the phrase "who has not known a man." The ambiguity and variation of the term shows that Israel expected young girls to be virgins, and so viewed all young girls as presumptive virgins. Likewise, the Greek word *parthenos* encodes the same cultural assumption and means both "young girl" and "virgin," and until very recently, the English "maiden" also carried both meanings.

Life does not always conform to social expectation. Girls who have indeed "not known a man" are prized trophies: Lot stresses the desirability of his daughters by announcing their virginal state. Virginity was so prized in Greece that the word *sophrosyne*, "right action," which refers to cautious moderation for men, means absolute chastity for girls. Virginity was also prized in Mesopotamia, where the laws of Lipit-Ishtar (§13) provide that "if a man claims that another man's virgin daughter has had sexual relations but it is proven that she has not had sexual relations, he shall weigh and deliver to shekels of silver."

Western culture has attributed such moral and social importance to the biological *virginitas intacta*, the "intact virgin" with the unruptured hymen, that we take such emphasis for granted. We rarely ask "why?" Why should society care that its young women be virgins at marriage? What harm do premarital sexual relations create in society? If the question is asked at all, it is often answered with an a priori assumption that men want their wives to be virgins so that they can be sure any babies are theirs. But that desire, if true, does not demand bridal virginity. Societies could have a convention that any baby born during the first nine months after the marriage belongs to the bride's family—after all, in an agrarian society, there is economic value in the labor of children. Or societies could have a rule such as Sparta is reputed to have had, wherein biological fatherhood was immaterial and only sociological fatherhood (who raised the child) counted.

A second common "explanation" for prizing virginity is that men want the "property" that they acquire to be new and unused. This also doesn't make sense. When sexual pleasure is a concern, experience

might help. Delight in a "tight cunt" is ephemeral; only the first time affords the dubious pleasure of opening and penetrating. Women rarely want their bridegrooms to be virgins, and when they do, it is because the culturally transmitted ideological value of "purity" has outweighed the advantages of an experienced lover. Men who want their brides to be virgins may be influenced by their own culture's supervaluation of virginity, particularly female virginity. The advantage of nonvirginal brides is readily apparent. Since one of the main purposes of marriage is the production of children, a society could have a convention that a girl who has already become pregnant—indeed has already birthed a living baby—has demonstrated that she is fertile and therefore has increased her worth. There are a few societies that do not place stock in a girl's premarital chastity, but very few.

Several noteworthy attempts by anthropologists to explain the virginity ideal have not fully solved this puzzle. Some have concentrated on the well-known modern Mediterranean obsession with female chastity without realizing that the same valuation of virginity existed pre-Aristotle, pre-Bible, and around the globe.

There may be psychological elements in the attachment of culture to the virginity of daughters. Even though father-daughter incest is universally prohibited, this "Prime Rule" is all too often broken. The rule itself is evidence of the attraction that girls may feel for their fathers and that their fathers may feel toward them. The culturally decreed necessity to suppress this attraction, the guilt that feeling may generate and the denial and guilt caused by transgression, all may combine to generate an atmosphere of suspicion and jealousy and a determination to control the sexuality that cannot be enjoyed. This adds an edge to the proprietary sense of paternal rights over all children that has also been part of the social fabric.

Chastity and Control

There is a strong connection between chastity codes and the guarding of girls. Maintaining the girl's virginity is the prerogative and the duty of the male members of the family. Girls are carefully guarded and infractions seriously punished, and the chastity of the girl becomes an indicator of the social worth of the family and the men in it. "Real men" have the strength and cunning to protect their women; men whose female relatives have been defiled are judged to lack these qualities. The family becomes vulnerable when a girl hits puberty. Men of a family may trust

one another as they join together to safeguard their women, but they will view other men with suspicion as potential seducers or rapists who would drive away legitimate suitors and make evident the father's inability to control his own daughter. A seducer or rapist shames a girl's father into lowering her bride-price. The father's solution is to limit his daughter's freedom and make examples of one who trespasses. Guarding her not only "protects" her against seduction and against accusations of promiscuity, it protects the family against the damage she might do to its standing.

Protocols of Propriety

One way of guarding daughters is to keep them indoors, an option chosen in Athens and to some extent in later Europe. In the ancient Near East, where girls were not so restricted, both laws and narratives deal with the possibility that a man might meet a girl in the street and sleep with her. The proper protocol demands that the man (or his father) approach the girl's parents, and possibly first her mother. A love poem from ancient Sumer demonstrates the way things should happen. The goddess Inanna relates that she was playing in the street before her house when Dumuzi approached her, put his arm around her shoulders, and invited her to come away with him. She answered, "Let me go that I may go home. What stories would I tell my mother?" Dumuzi has an answer: he will teach her the "stories women tell." She should tell her mother that she spent her time listening to music in the square with a girlfriend. "With this story," he says, "confront your mother; as for us—let us be dallying in the moonlight." Inanna is not persuaded, and convinces Dumuzi that he must court her properly by coming to see her mother, Ningal. And so he does, and they are engaged to be married.

Another Sumerian myth, "The Marriage of Sud," also demonstrates the proper protocol. In this tale, the god Enlil is taken with the young goddess Sud. He goes to her mother, Nunbarshegunu, to negotiate a marriage, and Nunbarshegunu accepts his offer to make Sud his queen and let her rule alongside him. Sud is then renamed Ninlil as a token of her new status and goes to marry Enlil.

Breaching the protocols of propriety threatens the entire system until the situation can be rectified. Ancient Near Eastern laws provide for ordinary financial procedures. In Israel the seducer of a virgin must pay the *môhar habbetlôt*, the normal bride-price for young girls even if her father refuses to allow him to marry her (Exod. 22:16); in Assyria, the

payment is triple the value. But yet another Sumerian myth, "Enlil and Ninlil," shows that matters were not always so easily resolved. This myth is another version of the mating of these two gods, very different from the "Marriage of Sud." In this tale, Ninlil goes to the banks of the holy canal and Enlil accosts her: "Let me make love with you . . . let me kiss you!" She demurs, "If my mother learned about it, she would slap my hand; if my father learned about it, he would grab hold of me." But Enlil pursues the matter, sleeps with her, and inseminates her with the moon god Su'en. When Enlil comes through the town square, the court of the fifty great gods and the seven deciding gods try him and decree, "The sex offender Enlil will leave the town." Enlil is banished. Ninlil loves him, and indeed follows him, but he is cast out nonetheless. The story never says he rapes her, and her willingness to follow him is not the reaction of a rape victim. Nevertheless, his act is too dangerous to the social order to allow him to live in civil society.

Inanna insists that her suitor go to her mother. Ninlil and Dinah do not. But regardless of the willingness of the maidens, the suitors had no right to sleep with them. Even if Dinah was willing, even if she was the aggressor, it would not matter: Shechem is a ravisher. To use the terminology of Roman law, Shechem's act was not *stuprum per vim*, "wrongful intercourse by force," but it was certainly *stuprum*, "wrongful intercourse." In America, below a certain "age of consent" (which varies by state), a girl's willingness is legally meaningless, and intercourse with her can be prosecuted as statutory rape. In ancient times, no unmarried girl or woman, at any age, had the right of consent, and a married woman could not consent to anyone other than her husband. Only widows, divorcees, and prostitutes had any control over their own sexuality. To sleep with a girl before acquiring the consent of her parents was to treat her as if no one was responsible for her sexuality, no one was guarding it, and no one controlled it. A young girl with sexual autonomy could be only a prostitute. As Dinah's brothers say in their defense, "Shall our sister be treated as a prostitute?"

As modern readers, we often feel outrage that Dinah's will is not consulted, her voice not heard. In our society, after all, girls have some amount of control over their destiny, though we often forget how recently such phrases as "Who gives this girl in marriage?" and "asking for your daughter's hand" lost their legal import. The right of fathers to decide their daughter's marital destiny was an unquestioned prerogative, even in the United States, until well within living memory. Anxiety toward a girl's emergent sexuality and outrage at her unlicensed exercise

of it still lurk in the parental psyche and the political arena. And when we factor in Dinah's age (she is called a *yaldah*, a little girl), then even today's explicit belief in a girl's self-determination begins to shatter—does a girl of twelve have the right to unregulated sexual freedom? Or are there situations when a girl should be controlled by laws of statutory rape? In the ancient world, there was no “age of consent.”

Dinah and Dishonor

Genesis 34 is written from the point of view of the family. Dinah has brought disaster on them. Her consent would not change this; on the contrary, from the family's perspective, matters might even be worse if she had consented than if she had been raped. When a girl is raped, the rapist brings shame on the family. But if she is a willing participant, the shame is compounded. The man has shown the weakness of the family's boundaries, and the girl has revealed its inability to control itself internally. “Out of control,” she brings dishonor to her father. In some cultures, such as Saudi Arabia, a father can kill her for this. In the “Law of the Slandered Bride,” in Deuteronomy (22:13–21), the father cannot kill his daughter. But if she is found guilty, she will be stoned at the entrance to her father's tent “because she was faithless to her father's house.” The word used for “be faithless,” *zanah*, describes the action of a nonvirgin daughter, an adulterous wife, and an unfaithful Israel. All of these were required to demonstrate absolute fidelity: Israel to God, a wife or concubine to her husband, a daughter to her father.

But the deed has been done, and what will come next?

Part 2. An offer of reparation (Gen. 34:3–5)

His heart cleaved to Dinah the daughter of Jacob; he loved the girl and spoke to her heart.

Shechem said to Hamor his father thus: “Get me this girl for my wife.”

Jacob heard that he had defiled his daughter.

His sons were with the flocks in the field and Jacob was silent until they would come.

The story hastens to assure the reader of Shechem's true feelings by using special phrases with precise technical meanings. His heart cleaved. *Dabaq* is the very word used in Genesis 2, “and shall cleave to his wife.” *Dabaq* describes the love of husband for wife (Gen. 2:24), of Ruth

for Naomi (Ruth 1:14), of Israel for God (Deut. 4:4 et al.; Ps. 63:9), and of God for Israel (Jer. 13:11). In all these contexts, *dabaq* emphasizes the permanence of the attachment. Shechem is not fickle, and his love is not transitory. And so “he spoke to her heart,” *dibber 'el libbaha*. This is another special term, which appears only eight times in the Bible. Always, the one “speaking to the heart” has a superior position: Joseph the ruler “speaks to the heart of” his brothers (Gen. 50:21); the Levite to his concubine (Judg. 19:3); Boaz to Ruth the gleaner (Ruth 2:13); God the husband to Israel as wife (Hos. 2:16); kings to their people (2 Sam. 19:8; 2 Chron. 30:22 and 32:6); and the people to Jerusalem (Isa. 40:2). The superior offers loving assurance to his upset, insecure, or alienated partner that he will rectify the other's insecure or alienated status. Eight times, the passages imply that “speaking to the heart” is successful; the positive response of the other party is not even recorded.

The choice of verbs suggests a poignant scene. Dinah is worried and insecure, with good reason. She has broken protocols and realizes, belatedly, what this might entail. Shechem reassures her: everything will be all right, they will be forgiven for “jumping the gun,” and their fathers will arrange for them to be married. He lovingly offers commitment, and she stays with him, not because she has been kidnapped or is a captive but because he “spoke to her heart.” But the problem will not be easily resolved. Shechem has “done her wrong.” He may not have forced her, but the very fact that he has slept with her means that he has degraded her and her family.

But Shechem wants to rectify the situation by asking his father to offer to arrange a marriage. Done right, this should restore the honor of Dinah and her family. But before Dinah or Shechem or Hamor goes to speak to Jacob, Jacob hears that Shechem has defiled his daughter Dinah. People are talking. The deed has become known, and Jacob has been publicly dishonored. Their offense has escalated into scandal.

Jacob decides to keep quiet until his sons come home. This has puzzled many readers, who contrast it with David's fury over Amnon's rape of Tamar, or with Jacob's inconsolable wailing when confronted with Joseph's bloody coat. If Jacob had heard that Dinah had been raped, perhaps he would have been furious. But he has heard only that Shechem has slept with Dinah. Jacob is in a predicament. He must figure out the best way to vindicate himself and restore the honor this deed has destroyed. And so he waits for his sons.

The involvement of the brothers might seem surprising: it is Jacob, after all, to whom Dinah owed her fidelity, and the word “daughter”

echoes through the lines. Jacob heard that he had defiled his daughter Dinah; Shechem committed an outrage by lying with the daughter of Jacob. Nevertheless, if the honor of the family is impugned, the sons will suffer. It will be harder for them to protect their interests if society at large considers them unable to safeguard their domestic territory. Moreover, if the family's status falls, they will have a harder time obtaining wives, will have to pay a greater bride-price, and may not be able to marry into high-status families. A girl's chastity is important to her brothers, and it is often they who avenge the "dishonor of their sister" by killing the girl's lover; in contemporary Arab societies, they are likely to kill the girl herself. The brother may not even be conscious of the damage his sister's act can do to his future, but he is aware that the culture considers his own honor at stake, and that he must avenge her violation to restore his violated honor.

The honor of a family may be restored in two ways. One rests with the girl's lover, who can demonstrate that he and his family intend no dishonor to the girl's family by offering a very large bride-price. The other rests with the girl's kinsmen, who can conduct a reprisal raid to show that the men can protect their boundaries and that outsiders encroach upon their territory, property, or personnel at the risk of their own lives. Both methods are represented in the Dinah story: Shechem offers the former, the brothers demand the latter. The scene is set for confrontation and negotiation.

◇ Act II. (*Gen. 34:6-34*)

Part 1. A princely proposal (*Gen. 34:6-12*)

Out came Hamor, the father of Shechem, to Jacob to speak to him.

Jacob's sons came from the field as they heard.

The men were sad and very angry, for he had done an outrage in Israel by lying with the daughter of Jacob, and such is not to be done.

Hamor spoke to them thus: "Shechem, my son—his soul desires your daughter. Please give her to him as a wife. Inter-marry with us: give us your daughters and take our daughters for yourselves. And live with us. The land will be before you. Settle down or travel about, and take possession of it."

Shechem said to her father and her brothers, "Let me find favor in your eyes and whatever you tell me, I will give."

The Dinah Affair

Shechem knows he must restore Jacob's honor. Normally, as the son of a chief, he would find it easy to acquire a wife. But since he has violated procedure and dishonored the family, he is willing to pay any bride-price that Jacob demands. Negotiations begin when Hamor makes his (from his point of view) magnanimous offer, "Intermarry with us; give us your daughters and take our daughters for yourselves, and live with us." He is giving Jacob equivalent status with himself and offering a permanent alliance. To him the personal is indeed political; the marriage of Dinah and Shechem can be a paradigm for the relationship between the peoples, and the first step toward continual intermarriage. This is a most generous offer, and could have stood as a solid offer of marriage. The very eager Shechem, however, shows the same impulsiveness in this "negotiation" that he showed by sleeping with Dinah prematurely. Before Jacob can reply, the young prince rushes in to offer any bride-price Jacob might stipulate, and additional gifts. No demand will be too high. The combined effect of alliance and high bride-price will demonstrate the esteem in which the king's family holds Jacob's family, and thus restore Jacob's honor.

But the sons of Jacob are in no mood to accept this peaceful resolution.

Part 2. A deceitful deal (*Gen. 34:13-19*)

Jacob's sons answered Shechem and his father Hamor with deceit. They spoke because he had defiled their sister Dinah.

They said to them, "We cannot do this, give our sister to a man who has a foreskin, for that is a disgrace to us. But in this way it may be agreeable for you. If you will be like us, circumcising all your males, then we will give our daughters to you and take your daughters to ourselves, and we will be with you and be like one people. If you will not listen to us by circumcising, we will take our daughter and leave."

Their words seemed fine to Hamor and Shechem son of Hamor.

The boy didn't delay to do the act, for he wanted the daughter of Jacob.

And he was the most honored of all of his father's house.

The brothers know that their own marriages remain to be worked out, and it is not clear whom they are to marry. Jacob and his father married their kin, the family of Laban. But there is no reason for Jacob's sons

to go back to Mesopotamia for wives, for Jacob has cut his ties with his ancestral family. He has also separated from his own brother Esau, and has come to Shechem with no attachments other than to his own children. His children will have to marry outside the family. But exogamous marriage presents a real dilemma for a group wanting to maintain its own identity. By admitting an outside partner, the family opens itself to new blood and new customs, and forms allegiances with other groups. Through the marriage of Shechem and Dinah, the fate of individuals becomes a national issue. Hamor offers to become "one people"; the brothers demand that the Shechemites become more like Israel by adopting their custom of circumcision.

But the brothers' counteroffer is a lie. They are angry. They feel that their honor as men who can protect and control their women has been impugned. Shechem has defiled their sister Dinah. This is why they take over the negotiations, which would normally be conducted with Dinah's father. The brothers need to restore their own honor, upon which their virility depends. In their anger, they need to react violently. To do so, they are willing to denigrate an important component of their identity, circumcision, and to sacrifice a significant cultural value that is in itself part of the honor code: keeping their word reached in negotiation. They have no intention of giving Dinah to Shechem.

Not knowing that the brothers are lying, Shechem and Hamor agree to the terms. Shechem acts in his characteristic "act now, think later" fashion, and doesn't delay to be circumcised. He really wants Dinah. He is paying a very high price, though it might not have seemed quite as bizarre to Shechem and his family as it does to us today. Circumcision was and still is widely practiced as a puberty ritual, and many cultures still require it before marriage. In the ancient Near East, the Egyptian upper class was circumcised. Shechem is quite willing to cut off his foreskin in order to have Dinah. The narrator adds a final point to this negotiation: *he was the most honored of all of his father's house*. Shechem is not a nobody. He is not even just a prince. He is the most honored and respected prince. His agreement to marriage and to the brothers' terms restores the honor of Jacob's house.

Part 3. Ratification (Gen. 34:20-24)

Hamor and his son Shechem came to the gate of their city and spoke to the men of their city thus: "These people are at peace with us and they live in the land and travel around it. The land is very broad before them. Let us take their daughters

ters for wives and give them our daughters. But only with this will the men come to us to live with us and be one people: if every male of us is circumcised as they are circumcised. Their cattle and possessions and all their animals—wouldn't they be ours? Let us accommodate them and they will live with us."

All those who go out the gate of his city listened to Hamor and his son Shechem.

And all those who go out the gate of the city were circumcised.

Hamor links the marriage of Dinah and Shechem to the marriage of the city and Israel. He offered to make their union a paradigm of further marriages between their groups, and the brothers spoke in the same terms. They are on the verge of becoming "one people," which is a diplomatic term meaning total peace and lack of restrictions between them. But Hamor is no despot. He is not going to "circumcise by the sword." He goes back to convince his people to ratify the agreement he negotiated. He speaks to the adult male townspeople. The women, the ones who are to be given in marriage, are not consulted; their fate will be determined by their fathers.

Hamor needs to convince the townsmen to agree to circumcision. But why should they? They are being asked to adopt a marker of identity that is not theirs: why should they do so? Unlike Shechem, they are not overwhelmed by love of Dinah. Hamor and Shechem have to show them that joining with Israel will be to their advantage. So they concentrate on the economic benefits of compliance. We have no reason to suspect that Shechem's protestations of love for Dinah were only a sham to mask his desire for Israel's property. The story emphasizes that he really loved and wanted her, and his offer of marriage was not economically motivated. On the other hand, Hamor's act of linking their union with a national treaty may have involved economic considerations. The Shechemites would gain a pastoral partner, a market for their agricultural and urban products, and a steady supplier of meat, wool, leather, and other pastoral products. Israel would gain a place to settle and a chance to hold land. Abraham had acquired only the Cave of Machpelah, but Israel could now get real fields. Letters from the city of Mari (ca. 1700 B.C.E.) reveal such a relationship between pastoral tribes and the urban population. This type of symbiosis also has a social advantage: it enlarges the choice of marital partners for both groups. This could be especially advantageous for Israel, which has no connections outside the

immediate family of Jacob, and needs wives to marry its sons. The advantage of this marriage to Dinah's brothers is so obvious that Hamor has no reason to suspect their offer. At the same time, their demand of the circumcision of a group with which they may have symbiosis could have seemed a fair price to pay for the benefits of connection. The people ratified the negotiated agreement and circumcised themselves, and the matter should have ended there.

But remember, we already know that the brothers' offer was a lie.

◇ Act III. (*Gen. 34:25-31*)

Part 1. *Vengeful violence* (*Gen. 34:25-29*)

It happened on the third day, while they were in pain.

Two sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, took each his sword.

They came upon the city lying securely and killed all the males. Hamor and Shechem his son they killed by the sword.

They took Dinah from the house of Shechem and went out.

The sons of Jacob came upon the corpses and despoiled the city that had defiled their sister.

Their sheep and cattle and asses, which were in the city and the fields, they took.

Their staff and their children and their wives they took captive, and they plundered what was in their homes.

Simeon and Levi attack the town in a classic revenge raid. It was easy: the men were debilitated from the circumcision and, not expecting trouble, had posted no guards. Dinah's brothers killed all the males, even Shechem and Hamor. Then **They took Dinah from the house of Shechem and went out.** Dinah has never come home. We are full of questions. Was Dinah still in the palace because she wanted to be Shechem's wife? Or because Shechem and Hamor insisted on keeping her there? What was Dinah's reaction to the raid? Did she consider herself rescued or kidnapped by her brothers? The story never tells us, just as it never told us how or why she slept with Shechem. Such matters are as irrelevant to the storyteller as they were to the brothers. Dinah's destiny cannot be allowed to rest in her hands. The brothers reestablish the control over her that they lost when she slept with Shechem.

The raid accomplishes two purposes at once: it teaches daughters that they cannot push the envelope of their own self-determination, and

it reaches the Shechemites (and others) that they cannot violate Israel's boundaries. Their next act underscores this second lesson: The sons of Jacob despoiled and plundered the city. Who did the plundering? Most likely Simeon and Levi themselves despoiled the city, but it may be that the other brothers came and plundered after Simeon and Levi killed the males. The sons of Jacob killed the "perpetrators" (in their eyes) and then collectively punished the whole city, for they defiled Dinah their sister. The brothers' act and the storyteller's "they defiled" both underscore the same message: the city is liable for the actions of its rulers. For ancient audiences, this was nothing new. Wars were always fought because rulers offended one another or their gods. Moreover, if the brothers had killed only Hamor and Shechem, the townspeople would have been obligated to avenge their death by attacking Israel. The brothers' raid must be a full-scale punitive war, in which they take for themselves all the wealth of Shechem.

Part 2. *The horns of the dilemma* (*Gen. 34:30-31*)

Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have brought trouble upon me, making me stink to all the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and the Perizzites.

"I am few in number, and they may gather against me and strike me and I will be destroyed, I and my house."

They said, "Shall we treat our sister as a whore?"

Jacob, who has not said a word heretofore, now speaks. He let his sons take over the negotiations, for their future was most immediately endangered by Dinah and Shechem. And he had no objection to the brothers' demand for circumcision. The higher the bride-price, after all, the higher Jacob's status. But he apparently did not know that the proposal was a ploy, and he is dismayed by their actions. They have sacrificed their reputation as honest men, and his along with theirs, and this may make the other peoples hate him and may lead to his destruction.

It is easy to see why Jacob reacts the way he does. Throughout his life he preferred to compromise, maneuver, and accommodate rather than initiate confrontation. The mature head of the household, moreover, has the responsibility to counsel prudence and compromise even while hotheaded young men advocate war. He must tend to both the honor and the safety of the family. In their rush to restore the honor that Dinah's actions have endangered, the brothers have brought a new type of

dishonor upon themselves. Their violence and their untrustworthy word have made it unlikely that others would wish to risk a treaty with them. The result can be war.

The brothers have only one answer, "Shall he treat our sister as a whore?" A whore is literally "up for grabs." One can deal directly with her, for she has no guardians, no protectors. The brothers want to make sure that everyone knows they are real men who can protect their own.

Did the brothers do wrong by attacking the town? Jacob points to an essential characteristic of Israelite history—Israel is small, few in number, and surrounded by those who could destroy her. If she makes herself hateful, she might disappear. Next to this rational reckoning, the brother's response sounds immature and rash. And yet the brothers' response also conveys a philosophy of protection: if people know that we will violently avenge wrongs that are done to us, then they will hesitate to attack us. Which is the best strategy for survival, accommodation or deterrence? The argument could be lifted out of today's headlines.

Dinah's story ends with her "going out" from Shechem's house. We have no idea what happens to her next. But Israel's story is just beginning. Jacob's instinct that their household can expect attack from the surrounding peoples may be right. In the very next chapter, the Israelites leave Shechem to go to Bethel to rededicate themselves to the God who appeared to Jacob as he left Israel. As they travel, "divine dread [comes over] the cities around them and they do not pursue the sons of Jacob" (Gen. 35:5). Why would they have wanted to pursue them, if not in retaliation for the raid on Shechem, and because the raid has made them consider Israel a dangerous, aggressive group? But they did nothing. What is this "divine dread"? Is it a special dispensation from God to keep Israel safe despite the animosity that the raid aroused? Or is the "divine dread" a result of the raid? Perhaps the brothers' actions have intimidated the local people into leaving them alone. The story doesn't tell.

Jacob maintains his opposition to Simeon and Levi's attack on Shechem. On his deathbed, he once again castigates them for their cruel slaughter and curses their fierce wrath. As a result of their action, Jacob declares, "I will divide them in Jacob, scatter them in Israel" (Gen. 49:5-7). The editors of the book of Genesis also disapprove, placing this story in a line of stories that show the inability of first Reuben and then Simeon and Levi to be the prime heir of Jacob, leaving only Judah and Joseph to contest for that position. History confirms Jacob's deathbed prediction, for the tribes of Simeon and Levi did not acquire and maintain land in Israel. Simeon entirely disappeared, the worst possible disas-

ter of loss of land and lineage. But Levi became cultic functionaries who served God and Israel for their livelihood, and one could argue whether the fate of Levi was as disastrous as that of Simeon. Levi has no land, and to be an officiant at the cult may be economically precarious. But it is a prestigious role, and one wonders whether Levi is punished or rewarded for his zealotness.

The Dinah affair raises the questions of honor and self-defense with high drama, but leaves them unanswered. Who is right—Jacob, who will negotiate the return of his honor, or Simeon and Levi, who fight for it? And the ambiguities do not stop there. Jacob's stated objection is to the brothers' bloodiness. Would he have approved (and should we approve) if the brothers had simply refused the Shechemites' plans for merger, not on the grounds that "they" had defiled Dinah but on grounds similar to Jacob's objection to militancy—that the peoples were many and Israel small and they were afraid that Israel could be destroyed by absorption? Or if they presented a Deuteronomistic-type philosophy that foreigners could contaminate Israel's culture? Would the story—the characters, the author, or the readers—approve if the brothers had openly refused to allow Dinah to marry Shechem, a refusal that could have resulted in the same type of war but without the advantage of a surprise raid? On the other side, what if the brothers' offer had been sincere? Would their proposal to merge with the Shechemites after they circumcised themselves have been acceptable if it had been an honest one? If they had merged with a people much larger than they, even if the others joined them by becoming circumcised, could they have remained distinct? And what about allegiance to the God of Israel? The brothers have not demanded, and the Shechemites have not suggested, any formal statement of allegiance. The circumcision is presented not as the prime symbol of Israel's covenant with God but simply as a marker of the in-marrying group.

The story of Dinah and Shechem highlights the dilemma of any small group trying to survive. If it is militant, it courts destruction. But if its boundaries are too permeable, it might be loved to death. The distinctiveness of Israel was and is placed at risk every time it comes into close amicable contact with other peoples. But the price of isolation may be eternal enmity and warfare, a price contrary to Israel's own self-understanding as a nation of peace. Should Israel welcome those of her neighbors in the land who wished to be absorbed, like Gibeonites in the period of the conquest and like Samaritans in the Assyrian period? And during those periods in which Israel had military strength—under David and Solomon and later under the Hasmoneans—should conquered

nations become part of the people of Israel? And should they be formally converted? After the biblical period, the Dinah story continued to be the means by which these discussions took place, and the story was retold often in Hellenistic literature with different variations and permutations.

The questions of boundary protection and boundary definition pre-occupy Israel throughout its existence. Like the family of Jacob, Israel dwells apart. This national dilemma plays itself out on a national scene when kingdoms confront one another in war and peace. But it is also ever present on a personal level, whenever a girl goes out to visit the daughters of the land.

To the Barricades Views Against the Other

THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY has no doubt about how to treat the Other: at arm's length! The Other, to Deuteronomy, is a perennial occasion for temptation:

◆ Make No Covenant (Deut. 7:1-6)

When YHWH your God brings you to the land which you are going to inherit,

And He dislodges many peoples before you, the Hittite, the Gishite, the Amorite, the Canaanite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite,

Seven nations greater and mightier than you,

And He gives them into your hand,

You shall strike them, and completely destroy them.

You shall make no covenant with them, nor show mercy to them.

You shall not make marriages with them; your daughter you shall not give to his son, nor his daughter shall you take to your son.

For he will turn your son from after me

And they will worship other gods.

YHWH will be very angry with you and destroy you quickly.

Rather, this is what you should do to them: you should tear down their altars, break their worship-pillars, uproot their tree-symbols, and burn their statues in fire.

For you are a holy people to YHWH your God.

You, YHWH has chosen to be his people, a treasure-people from among all the peoples on earth.

The people of Canaan should be avoided. Even better, they should be destroyed. This is urgent, because if the other nations entice Israel to