

ECHOES OF RASHI

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HIDING DINAH

וַיָּקָם בַּלַּיְלָה הוּא וַיִּקַּח אֶת שְׁתֵּי נָשָׁיו וְאֶת שְׁתֵּי שִׁפְחֹתָיו וְאֶת אַחַד עָשָׂר יְלָדָיו...
(ל"ב:כ"ג)

That same night he arose, and took his two wives, his two maidservants, and his eleven children....

רש"י: "וְאֶת אַחַד עָשָׂר יְלָדָיו" - וְדִינָה הֵיכָן הָיְתָה? נְתָנָהּ בְּתֵבָה וְנָעַל בְּפָנֶיהָ, שֶׁלֹּא יִתֵּן בָּהּ עֵשָׂו עֵינָיו, וּלְכָךְ נֶעֱנַשׁ יַעֲקֹב שֶׁמְּנָעָהּ מֵאָחִיו, שֶׁמָּא תַּחֲזִירֶנּוּ לַמּוּטָב, וְנָפְלָה בְּיַד שְׁכֶם (בראשית רבה):

"And his eleven children." – But where was Dinah? He placed her in a chest and locked her in so that Esav should not set his fancy upon her (desire to marry her). On this account Yaakov was punished – because he had kept her away from his brother when she might have led him back to the right path; she therefore fell into the power of Shechem.

When Yaakov meets Esav, how many children does he have? The Torah says eleven – *achad asar yeladav*. But in reality, he has twelve. Binyamin hasn't yet been born, but Dinah is already there. So why does the Torah describe him as having only eleven?

Rashi gives the well-known answer: Yaakov hid Dinah. He placed her in a box, out of sight, because he didn't want Esav to see her. Dinah was evidently striking, as the later episode with Shechem suggests, and Yaakov feared that Esav – who is already drawn after money, gifts, and whatever else he desires – would fix his attention on her as well. And Esav is not just impulsive; he is powerful. Yaakov is entering a dangerous encounter, and he chooses to remove the possibility entirely by keeping Dinah hidden.

This is a familiar Rashi, often taught from childhood. If there are things that trigger desire, then exposure matters. Repeated exposure can intensify desire, while limiting exposure helps restrain it. Yaakov understands that if Esav never sees Dinah, the desire never begins.

This translates into our own lives. We are not meeting Esav with four hundred men, but we deal with our own forms of *ta'avah*. Guarding what we look at, limiting exposure, is part of how people protect themselves.

Yet Rashi adds a surprising criticism of Yaakov: *u'lechach ne'enash Yaakov* – Yaakov is



punished for this. Later, Dinah becomes entangled in the episode with Shechem. And Rashi explains: *she'manah me'achiv, shema tachzirenu l'mutav* – Yaakov held her back from Esav, but perhaps she could have influenced him, perhaps she could have brought him back. And because that possibility was closed off, Dinah ends up falling into the hands of Shechem.

Yaakov's instinct to protect her was correct on one level, but incomplete on another.

Rashi leaves us with a difficult tension. People have to protect themselves. There are environments, people, and situations that can pull us in directions we don't want to go. Exposure is not neutral; it shapes you. That is the lesson of hiding Dinah.

Yet there are moments when people have the ability to influence others. They may be strong enough to influence others without surrendering their own commitments. Sometimes, avoiding that contact means missing an opportunity.

Should a person place himself in a setting that is less aligned with his values because he hopes to have an impact? Should he enter environments that are religiously or ideologically challenging in order to influence others?

The answer depends very much on where a person stands. If your identity is still forming, if your commitments are still taking shape, then placing yourself into a setting that challenges them can be risky. At that stage, you are more likely to be influenced than to influence. But as a person becomes more stable, more grounded, more confident in who he is, the calculation can change. Engaging with others can then become an opportunity.

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Rashi is forcing us to hold both approaches. Dinah was in need of protection, but we need to recognize what might be lost when we only protect rather than try to influence. There are times when the right move is to withdraw, to limit exposure, to guard yourself carefully. And there are times when a person has to step forward, to engage, to try to affect others.

The *avodah* is to recognize where you are, to be honest about your own strength, and to act accordingly.

400 WHO LEFT

וַיָּשָׁב בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא עֵשָׂו לְדַרְכּוֹ שֵׂעִירָה: (ל"ג:ט"ז)
So, Esav started back that day on his way to Seir.

רש"י: "וַיָּשָׁב בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא עֵשָׂו לְדַרְכּוֹ" - עֵשָׂו לְבַדּוֹ, וְד' מֵאוֹת אִישׁ שֶׁהָלְכוּ עִמּוֹ נִשְׁמְטוּ מֵאֶצְלוֹ אֶחָד אֶחָד, וְהֵיכָן פָּרַע לָהֶם הַקָּבָ"ה? בִּימֵי דָוִד, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר כִּי אִם אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת אִישׁ נַעַר אֲשֶׁר רָכְבוּ עַל הַגְּמַלִּים (שמואל א ל) (בראשית רבה):
"Esav started back that day on his way." – Esav alone returned, but the four hundred men who had accompanied him slipped away from him, one by one. When did the Holy One, blessed be He, reward them for this? In the days of David, as it is said (Shmuel Alef 30:17, in reference to an attack which

he made upon the Amalekites, descendants of Esav): "[and there escaped not a man of them] save four hundred young men who rode upon camels."

After the encounter winds down, the Torah says: *vayashav bayom hahu Esav l'darko Se'irah*. Esav returns home. The description is surprisingly understated, considering the tension of their earlier encounter. Rashi, however, notices a discrepancy.

At the beginning of the parshah, Esav arrives with force – *arba me'os ish imo* – four hundred men, a sizable force prepared for confrontation. And now, when he leaves, the Torah describes him in the singular. What happened to all those men? Where did they go?

Rashi says they didn't disappear all at once. *Nishmetu mei'etzlo echad echad*. One by one, they slipped away. By the time Esav has begun his return, the camp has thinned out, until he is effectively alone.

The Midrash explains that this wasn't random. His men saw something in the encounter between their leader and his brother. They saw the *Shechinah* surrounding Yaakov. They understood, at least in some basic way, who Yaakov was and what this meeting represented. Their departure reflected a change in their attitude toward Yaakov.

Rashi then asks how they were rewarded. The reward came hundreds of years later, in the time of Dovid HaMelech, when Amalek attacks Tziklag and captures the city, taking the women, including Dovid's wives. Dovid pursues them, defeats them, and recovers what was taken. But the *pasuk* notes that four hundred Amalekim escape – *daled me'os ish asher rachvu al hagemalim*.

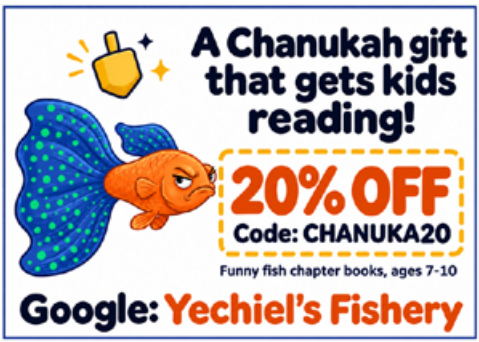
Those four hundred who got away, says Rashi, are connected to the four hundred who left Esav.

This raises an obvious problem. These are not the same people; the original four hundred are long gone by then. There is a gap of centuries. So it cannot be that this is straightforward *schar*, reward passed down in a simple, linear way. Perhaps the Midrash is tracing a historical pattern rather than describing a conventional reward.

Their departure demonstrated that even Esav's followers could reconsider their loyalties. They recognized what was happening and chose to withdraw. This moment establishes that being aligned with Esav is not an absolute, unbreakable identity for every individual within that world.

So, when we reach the story in Shmuel, and David fights Amalek, the presence of four hundred who escape is a continuation of that possibility. It reflects that not every individual within Amalek is fixed into that role in a way that erases all distinction.

On the one hand, Amalek as a force must be confronted. There is evil that has to be fought and, at times, eradicated. But on the other hand, the Torah is careful not to put every individual into that category without



exception.

Esav and Amalek represent enduring opposition to Yaakov and his descendants. But within that, there are individuals who are not locked in, who can still respond to what they see, and who can still step away.

THE MISSING REUNION

וַתָּמָת דְּבֹרָה מֵינֶקֶת רִבְקָה וַתִּקָּבֵר מִתַּחַת לְבֵית אֵל תַּחַת הָאַלּוֹן וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ אַלּוֹן בָּכוּת: (ל"ה:ח)

Devorah, Rivkah's nurse, died, and was buried under the oak below Beis El; so, it was named Alon Bachus.

רש"י: "וַתָּמָת דְּבֹרָה" - מָה עִנְיָן דְּבוֹרָה בְּבֵית יַעֲקֹב? אֶלָּא לְפִי שֶׁאָמְרָה רִבְקָה לְיַעֲקֹב וְשָׁלַחְתִּי וּלְקַחְתִּיךָ מִשָּׁם, שָׁלְחָה דְּבוֹרָה אֶצְלוֹ לְפַדַּן אֲרָם לָצֵאת מִשָּׁם, וּמֵתָה בַּדֶּרֶךְ; מִדִּבְרֵי רַבִּי מֹשֶׁה הַדַּרְשָׁן לְמַדְתִּיהָ:

"Devorah died." – How did Devorah come to be in Yaakov's house? But the explanation is: Because Rivkah had promised Yaakov (Bereishis 27:45): "then I will send and fetch you from there." She sent Devorah to him to Padan Aram to tell him to leave that place, and she died on the journey. I learned this from a comment of R. Moshe HaDarshan.

As Yaakov returns to Beis El, the Torah suddenly tells us: "*Vatamas Devorah meinekes Rivkah, vatikaveir mitachas l'Beis El tachas ha'alon, vayikra shemo Alon Bachus*." We are told that Rivkah's nurse, Devorah, has died. We have never met her before, and we are not told where she came from. She is buried under a tree, and the place is named for crying.

Devorah's sudden appearance raises several questions. Why is she traveling with Yaakov, and why does the Torah record her death?

Rashi fills in the gap. "*Ma inyan Devorah b'Beis Yaakov?*" What is Devorah doing in Yaakov's household? Rashi explains that Rivkah had promised Yaakov years earlier, when she sent him away, that she would call him back when it was safe. She would let him know when his brother Esav's anger had subsided. Now, decades later, she sends Devorah to bring him home. She travels toward Padan Aram, and somewhere along the way, she dies.

Even within Rashi, the details are not clear. Did Devorah reach Yaakov and help trigger his return, then travel back with him and die along the way? Or did she arrive after he had already left, and then try to catch up with him? The phrase *meisah baderech* leaves it uncertain. Where along the way?

The Devorah interlude points to a gap that has developed between Yaakov and his parents. Twenty years have passed. Over time, their separation has become more permanent. If Rivkah promised to call him back, she should be the one who comes to retrieve him. Instead, she sends someone else.

One could argue that Rivkah is too old to



travel. But that only sharpens the question. A nurse is not from a different generation. If Devorah can make the journey, why can't Rivkah? Rivkah does not meet Yaakov again – and the one she had sent to retrieve him does not complete the mission.

Rashi also explains that Yaakov learns of Rivkah's death at this point. *Nisbaser sham be'evel sheini, shehu gam le'imo shemeisa*. At that same moment, Yaakov is informed that Rivkah has also died. The mourning for Devorah merges with the mourning for his mother. That is why the place is called Alon Bachus, a double crying.

Rivkah's death is hidden in the text; her name is not mentioned at that point. Yaakov is mourning Devorah, burying Devorah, delivering a *hesped* for Devorah. Only then does he learn that his mother has also died. The Torah records Devorah's death openly while leaving Rivkah's death almost entirely unspoken.

This inversion reflects the distance that has formed between parent and child. Yaakov has been away for years, and now even his return does not fully restore that relationship. He does not get a chance to reconnect with his mother. He does not even experience her death directly.

Part of this is not his fault. He was forced to flee. He spent years in Lavan's house. But there is also a subtle critique. When Yaakov reenters Eretz Yisrael, there are two places he should go. First to Beis El, where he had his original nighttime encounter and pledged to return, then to Chevron, where his parents are waiting.

Instead, he settles in Shechem. He buys land. He builds. He becomes established. His parents are still alive, but he does not go to them for a long time. Esav has already moved on to Se'ir. No one appears to obstruct Yaakov's travel plans; the path home seems open. Yet he delays. He builds his own life. And by the time he returns, it is too late.

Textually, Yitzchak also disappears quickly. Even if, chronologically, he lives longer, the Torah does not dwell on any renewed relationship between father and son.

Sadly, both of Yaakov's parents are lost to him before there is any reunion. The Torah softens this by not stating it directly. It tells us about Devorah, his mother's agent and an important figure in his distant past. It only lets us discover Rivkah's death somewhere along the way. It presents Yitzchak's passing without focusing on the lost years.

But the underlying story is still there. A son returns after decades away, and the relationships he left behind are no longer intact. Some of that distance was unavoidable; some of it may reflect the choices he makes upon returning.

It is a quiet and painful thread running through the parshah: the cost of those years in exile, not only in what Yaakov endured, but in what he no longer has when he finally comes home. ■





Rabbi Moshe Taragin's latest sefer entitled: **Echoes of Rashi** is available at: taraginbooks.com.