

# Dinah / דינה

## Biblical Text

Last, (Leah) bore (Jacob) a daughter, and named her **Dinah** (Gen. 30:21)

And Jacob rose up that night, and took his two wives, and his two handmaids, and his eleven sons, and passed over the ford of Yabbok. (Gen. 32:22)

Now Dinah, the daughter whom Leah had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the daughters of the land.

וַיֵּרָא אֶתָּהּ שָׁכֶם בֶּן־חַמּוֹר הַחִוִּי נָשִׂיא הָאָרֶץ וַיִּקַּח אֶתָּהּ וַיִּשְׁכַּב אִתָּהּ וַיַּעֲנֶה:  
וַתִּדְבַק נַפְשׁוֹ בְּדִינָה בַת־יַעֲקֹב וַיֵּאָהֵב אֶת־הַנְּעָרָה וַיְדַבֵּר עִלְיָב הַנְּעָרָה:

Shechem son of Hamor the Hivite, chief of the country, saw her, and **took her and lay with her by force**. Being strongly drawn to Dinah daughter of Jacob, and in love with the maiden, he spoke to the maiden tenderly.  
– *Jewish Publication Society*

And Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, prince of the land, saw her and **took her and lay with her and debased her**. And his very self clung to Dinah daughter of Jacob, and he loved the young woman, and spoke to the young woman's heart. – *Robert Alter*

And Shechem, son of Hamor the Hivite, the chieftain of the land, saw her. **And he took her and lay with her and degraded her**. And his soul clung to Dinah, Jacob's daughter, and he loved the girl, and spoke to her heart.  
– *Richard Elliott Friedman*

And Shechem son of Hamor the Hivite, the prince of the land, saw her: **he took her and lay with her, forcing her**. But his emotions clung to Dinah, Yaakov's daughter - he loved the girl, and he spoke to the heart of the girl. – *Everett Fox*

And Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, the prince of the land, saw her; and **he took her, and lay with her, and humbled her**. And his soul did cleave unto Dinah the daughter of Jacob, and he loved the damsel, and spoke comfortingly unto the damsel.  
– *R. Samson Raphael Hirsch*

And Shechem son of Hamor the Hivite, the local prince, saw her; **he took her, lay her down, and raped her**. He was then captivated by Jacob's daughter Dinah and, falling in love with the young woman, spoke tenderly to the young woman.  
– *R. Tamara Cohn Eshkenazi*

So Shechem said to his father Hamor, "Get me this girl as a wife."  
Jacob heard that he had defiled his daughter Dinah; but since his sons were in the field with his cattle, Jacob kept silent until they came home. Then Shechem's father Hamor came out to Jacob to speak to him. Meanwhile Jacob's sons, having heard the news, came in from the field. The men were distressed and very angry, because he had committed an outrage in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter—a thing not to be done. Hamor now spoke with them, saying, "My son Shechem has set his heart on your daughter; pray give her to him to be his wife. Make marriages with us -- give us your daughters and you yourselves take our daughters. Live among us and the land is before you; settle and trade here and acquire us property here." "And Shechem said to [Dinah's] no father and brothers, "Let me but find favor in your sight, and I will give you whatever you ask; only give me the girl to be my wife!"

The sons of Jacob answered Shechem and his father Hamor deceptively, speaking thus because he had defiled their sister Dinah. They said to them, “We cannot do this thing, giving our sister to a man who has a foreskin, for this is a shame to us. Only on this condition will we consent to you: if you become like us by having every one of your males circumcised. Then we would give you our daughters and would take your daughters and settle among you and become one people. But if you do not listen to us and consent to be circumcised, we shall take our daughter and leave.”

Their words seemed good to Hamor and Hamor’s son Shechem, and the youth did not delay in doing this thing, for he yearned for Jacob’s daughter, and he was pre-eminent in his father’s household. So Hamor and his son Shechem went to the public place of their town and spoke to their fellow townsmen, saying, “These people are our friends; let them settle in the land and move about in it, for the land is large enough for them; we will take their daughters to ourselves as wives and give our daughters to them. But only on this condition will the men agree with us to dwell among us and be as one kindred: that all our males become circumcised as they are circumcised. Their cattle and substance and all their beasts will be ours, if we only agree to their terms, so that they will settle among us.” All who went out of the gate of his town heeded Hamor and his son Shechem, and all males, all those who went out of the gate of his town, were circumcised.

On the third day, when they were in the greatest pain, the two sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah’s brothers, each took his sword; they went undisturbed into the city and killed every male. And they also killed Hamor and his son Shechem by the sword; then, taking Dina from Shechem’s house, they left. Jacob’s [other] sons went over the slain and plundered the city, whose inhabitants had defiled their sister, taking their sheep, their cattle, and their donkeys, and all that was in the city and in the countryside. And all their wealth, their little ones, and their wives, and all that was in the houses, they seized as captives and and as spoil.

Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, “You have made trouble for me by making me odious to the land’s inhabitants, the Canaanites and the Perizzites. Since I am few in number, they will gather themselves against me and strike at me, and I and my household will be destroyed.”

But they answered, “Should our sister be treated like a *zonah*?”

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These are the sons of Leah, which she bore to Jacob in Padan Aram, and Dinah his daughter. All the souls of his sons and daughters numbered thirty-three. (Gen. 34:1-31; 46:15)

## Questions for Reflection:

1. Why do you think there is so little agreement among the translations of the act between Shechem and Dinah? Which translation do you feel most authentically characterizes what happens?
2. What does the text suggest about who is to blame for what happens to Dinah? Which pieces of the text help to prove it?
3. This text appears in the Tanakh “sandwiched” between the stories of Jacob’s wrestling match with the angel and the covenantal moment between God and Jacob at Beit-El, then the death of Rachel. What significance does this hold, if any?
4. Dinah does not speak throughout this entire ordeal. What, if anything, does this say about her role in the larger story? What “lines” would you give her?

## Classical Midrash

**AND AFTERWARDS LEAH BORE JACOB A DAUGHTER AND NAMED HER DINAH.** What does “and afterwards” mean? Rav said: After Leah passed *judgment* (דין) on herself, saying, “Twelve tribes are destined to issue from Jacob — six have issued from me and four from the handmaids, that makes ten...if this child which is expected from me is a male, my sister Rachel will not even be like one of the handmaids!” Immediately, the child in the womb was changed to a daughter; as it is said, “And she called her name Dinah דינה [judgment]”!

-B. Talmud, B'rachot 60a

**THAT SAME NIGHT [JACOB] AROSE...TAKING HIS ELEVEN SONS...**But where was Dinah? He placed her in a chest and locked her in. He said, this wicked one has a wandering eye; let him not see her and take her from me...Had you married her to [Esau] she would not have sinned. You didn't want her to marry one who is circumcised? She married an uncircumcised one! You didn't want her to marry legally? She married illegitimately! As it says, (Gen 32:24) And Dinah, daughter of Leah, went out.

- B'reisheet Rabba 76:9

**DINAH, THE DAUGHTER OF LEAH** — Was she not also Jacob's daughter? Indeed, but Scripture associates her name with that of her mother. Just because she “went out” she is called Leah's daughter, since she, too, was fond “of going out” as it is said (Gen. 30:16) “and Leah went out to meet him.” With an allusion to her they formulated the proverb: “Like mother, like daughter.”

-Midrash Tanchuma

According to Rashi the word וישכב describes normal intercourse, whereas the word ויענה describes a more deviant method of sexual intercourse. Ibn Ezra understands the word ויענה as describing the pain involved in her having intercourse as she had been a virgin. Nachmanides writes that there is no need for all these explanations, seeing that any intercourse in which the woman is being raped is described in the Bible as עינוי, i.e. that is the meaning of the word ויעניה. In this instance, intercourse by mutual consent appears to have preceded the rape.

-Tur HaAroch, 14<sup>th</sup> c. Spain

**AND DINAH...WENT OUT** The Torah does not bring this phrase to criticize Dinah as a “self-exposing daughter of a self-exposer; like mother, like daughter” as Rashi ז"ל has. Leah was a modest woman, to the point that Jacob did not see anything until the moment he came to her. And the “Leah went out” really means that she went out just to the door of her tent and she went out joyfully and with holy intent to greet her husband Yaakov and from that came the birth of Yissachar, the tribe of modest Torah teachers. The intent was not for anything bad, as the text says “daughters of the town” and not sons of the town. Dinah had no sisters, being the only maiden in the house and so she went out to see how the girls of the town dressed and used jewelry...The text describes that Shechem was “the son of Hamor the Hivite, the prince of the land” to make sure that we understand that being the prince of the land he used force, and had no fear of those who were with Dinah or of the sons of Yaakov.

And the text goes on to say, like Rashi explains, that he lay with her in the usual fashion and afflicted her in an unusual fashion, and how can one describe his doing such a disgrace? Ibn Ezra explains that in Dinah being a virgin, Shechem is doing three things - seizing her by force while she was passing through the market, forcing her in the natural way and in the unnatural

way. This is to teach that even if Shechem wanted to have relations with her due to his wanting her as a wife, one cannot do this by force. The second comes to teach that he destroyed her virginity. And why is it explaining that he afflicted her? To explain that she did not go by her own will, but he hoped that it would be by her being forced and end by her wanting it.

-R. Isaac Abarbanel, 15<sup>th</sup> c. Portugal

## Contemporary Midrash

...Word order counts. In rape, the word *'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."

- Tikvah Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible*

**OUR DAUGHTERS ASK:** Does Shechem really fall in love with Dinah at first sight? He doesn't seem the type!

**DINAH ANSWERS:** You're right! Read the story carefully and note the order of events: Shechem, son of Hamor (whose name means "ass"), first *saw* me, then *took* me, and then *lay* with me *by force*. Only after these actions did he feel "STRONGLY DRAWN" to me and "IN LOVE WITH THE MAIDEN." And only then did he finally *speak* "TO THE MAIDEN TENDERLY" and ask that his father "GET ME THIS GIRL AS A WIFE" (34:2-4).

**OUR MOTHERS COMMENT:** How clearly the Torah understands the nature of rape! As we have reaffirmed in our own time, sexual violation is an act of violence, not desire. Shechem is driven not by *animal* instincts but by *human* aggression and appetite, the lust to possess, not to mate. It is first a lust of the eye, and only later of the heart.

-Ellen Frankel, *Five Books of Miriam*

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 reels. 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 latter 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, sermon punch lines that underscore the social lessons the author wants the hearers to learn.

-Tikvah Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible*

Dinah tried to imagine having a story of her own to tell, of connections she had made that could widen their world. Her story would make her brothers lean forward with curiosity and jealousy, their elbows on their knees, their faces lit orange by the fire. What if it were she, and not her father, who had encountered angels of God ascending and descending a ladder? She would have learned the name of each angel. She would have held on to their wings, climbed on their backs, and followed them homeward – and then she'd reciprocate, inviting them to

her home. If she could only meet people outside her world, hear their languages, eat their foods, shop for red ribbon in their bazaars, wear their clothes, style her hair as they did. She would make a friend, who would reach for her hand...

- Vanessa Ochs, *Dinah's Own Story*

Dinah is mentioned only once more in Torah, among Jacob's descendants in Gen. 46:15. What became of her? In B'reisheet Rabbah R. Huna puts into Dinah's mouth the words of Tamar – King David's daughter who was raped by her half-brother Amnon: "Where will I carry my shame? (II Samuel 13:13); he suggests that Dinah agreed to leave Shechem's house only after her brother Simeon promised to marry her himself. Thus, based on her involvement with Shechem, Dinah is identified as the otherwise unnamed "Canaanite Woman" who was the mother of Simeon's son Saul (Gen. 46:10). It was also taught that when she died, Simeon buried her in Canaan. Another tradition...is that Dinah became the [otherwise unnamed] wife of Job. Some versions of this tradition view Dinah's subsequent marriage to a non-Israelite (namely, Job) as part of Jacob's punishment for having withheld her from Esau. Alternatively, Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer 38 states that Dinah became pregnant when raped by Shechem and had a daughter. Afraid of the shame that ... this child would bring on their community, Dinah's brothers sought to kill the infant. Jacob, however, put an amulet with the name of God around the girl's neck and sent her away; she was taken by the archangel Michael to Egypt, where she was adopted by a childless Egyptian priest and raised as his daughter, Asenat, who eventually married Joseph...Joseph was exceedingly handsome, and when he went out women would throw jewelry to attract his notice. Asenat tossed her amulet and when Joseph saw it, he realized their relationship and married her.

- Gail Labovitz, *The Torah: A Women's Commentary*

What happens to Dinah in the aftermath of her ordeal? We do not know. We never hear from her, just as we may never hear from the women and girls in our generation who are victims of violence and whose voices are not heard....The feminist educator Nelle Morton urged women to hear each other "into speech." Dinah's story challenges us to go even further and be also the voices for all of our sisters.

– Rabbi Laura Geller, *The Torah: A Women's Commentary*

