

*Shiur L'Yom Chamishi*¹

[Thursday's Study]

READINGS: ***Torah Vayishlach:*** Genesis 33:18 - 34:31
 Haftarah: Obadiah 15-18
 B'rit Chadasha: Matthew 26:40-41

A disgraceful thing ... a thing that ought not to be done.

[Genesis 34:7]

Today's Meditation is Psalm 59:14-17;

This Week's Featured Amidah prayer is Petition #5, *Rofei* [Healing]

Vayavo Ya'akov shalem ir Shechem – Then Ya'akov came peacefully to the city of Shechem. Genesis 33:18a.

Ya'akov has just survived his long-dreaded face-to face encounter with his estranged brother Esav. You would think his next move would be to 'take the big win' and head straight for his father's encampment at *Be'er-Sheva*. After all, the instruction he received from the Holy One before leaving Charan was: ***Shuv al-eretz avicha*** - Return to the land of your fathers ... ***ul'molad'teicha*** - and to your birthplace/family home ... ***v'ehyeh imad*** - and I will be with you." Genesis 31:3. Ya'akov entered the land of his fathers as soon as he crossed the Jordan River; but he was still a long way – at least 130 km as the crow flies – from his birthplace and family home. With his entourage, that journey might require two to three weeks of travel. So, after crossing the Jordan, he decided to take a break from traveling, and let his family rest for a few days near the river's West Bank. It was summer now, and that meant it was extremely hot in the Jordan Rift Valley; so, he and his sons built the family a crude house to stay in, and around it they threw up some temporary shelters to provide a little shade for the livestock to enjoy when they were not out grazing. He called that place 'Sukkot' [temporary shelters]. We will hear that name again, Beloved. (NOTE: It's kind of important!).

Suddenly Be'er-Sheva Can Wait? Is This a Good Idea?

After the first wave of summer heat passed, Ya'akov and family took up their travels again. Off they headed westward into the central highlands, to join up with the ancient road that would take them through *Beit-El*, *Salem* (later renamed 'Jerusalem'), *Beit-Lechem*, and *Hebron*, all the way down to *Be'er Sheva*. For reasons we are not told, when Ya'akov's entourage got to Shechem, they stopped, and seemed content to stay. Why? Why delay the long-awaited reunification with Yitzchak? How could they possibly want from the lawless, pagan, Kena'ani-cartel

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controlled ‘wild west’ city of Shechem? What voices was Ya’akov listening to that induced him to put his journey back to his father’s house ‘on hold’. Perhaps he was still having problems with mobility due to his recent hip dislocation. Perhaps Rachel’s pregnancy had progressed to a point at which travel has become difficult for her. Perhaps another heat wave had set in. Whatever, the reason, Ya’akov when he reached Shechem, Ya’akov was not content to merely stay a night or two and move on. He set up a full-bore sojourner’s camp outside the city. He bought a tract of land, and dug a well², Then he seemed to experience a major energy drain. He dallied. He lingered. He tarried. He flamed out. Sorry, Yitzchak – you will just have to wait a little bit longer to reunite with your prodigal son, and meet your daughters-in-law and grandchildren.

We have read the end of the story, so we want to shout out at Ya’akov across the centuries:

*Ya’akov Avinu – what are you doing?
Your father is waiting - remember?
Pull up those tent pegs, pack up your things, and get back on the road
toward Yitzchak’s encampment as fast as you can!
Whatever you do, get your family out of Shechem ... and do it FAST!
Look at innocent little Dinah – do you not realize
that she is not safe in a place – or among a people – like this!
Indeed, none of you are safe – or will ever be safe, at Shechem –
at least on this side of the Millennial Kingdom!
The place is a swirling cesspool of DARK ENERGY!!!!
The people who live there are consumed with hate, and lust, and greed, and rage.
They do not ‘play well’ with others –
and some of your high-strung, hot-headed sons are nowhere near ready
for the kind of trouble the locals can stir up for them!*

Alas, it is to no avail. Light - meet darkness; Darkness – say ‘hello’ to light.

Ya’akov has chosen to engage with the particular set of latitudes and longitudes that make up Shechem. So ... will he and his little band of pilgrims leave it better – or worse –for the engagement?

First Obstacle Course We Face In the Aliyah of Dark Energy: Shechem

Nestled between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim, about 34 miles (54 km) north of Jerusalem and 7 miles (10.5 km) southeast of Samaria, *Shechem*³ was a major

² See John 4:6 – and Ya’akov’s well was there.

³ *Shechem* is *shin, chet, mem sofit*, Strong’s Hebrew word #7927, pronounced *shuh-Khem*. Strong’s translates this word as back or shoulder.

Kena'ani stronghold. As you will recall, Shechem was the first place *Avram* set up camp upon arrival in the land. **Genesis 12:6**. Shechem will also be the place where Yeshua of Natzret will have his famous encounter with the 'woman at the well'. See **John 4**.

If Ya'akov had know what levels of dark energy were laying in wait for him and his family in Shechem, he would probably have by-passed this stop. But he did not know. He did not know the people of Shechem. He did not know his daughter Dinah. He did not know his sons. He did not even truly know himself. Torah tells us that Ya'akov arrived at Shechem "*shalem*" – *i.e.* in peace, whole, and fully functional and provided for. All that, however, was about to change.

Here is how Torah records Ya'akov's arrival:

V'yavo Ya'akov shalem ir Shechem asher b'ereetz Kena'an
Ya'akov entered the boundaries of Kena'an safely in the vicinity of Shechem,

b'vo'o miPadan Aram
having come from Padan Aram

v'yichan et-penei ha-ir
And he set up camp in view of the city.

Ya'akov/Yisrael is a new creation. He has been chosen, inspired, trained, and empowered to overcome. He naturally thinks therefore that he is ready to shine and be an atmosphere-changer. He thinks he is ready to live out the Holy One's righteousness *in full view of the people of the land*. Ah, if only his children were as prepared and ready for prime time as he is!

Notice how Ya'akov/Yisrael dealt with the pagans of Shechem. He did not *attack* them. But he also did not *join* them. He did not *hide from* them. He *came in peace* – and made his presence known. Everything he and his sons did was '*in view of the city*'. That kind of life – *in view of* but not *part of* the pagan culture - is *challenging* to say the least. The fainthearted need not apply.

An Instance of Impulse Buying?

Ya'akov/Yisrael does not wait for the Holy One to give him and his descendants the land. He decides to acquire by purchase – with money - a part of that which is – or will one day, in the Holy One's timing, be – his by PROMISE. He chose a field – perhaps the field where Avram had dwelt under the oaks of Moreh, and built an altar to the Holy One [see Genesis 12], and negotiated its purchase. The Holy One *did not intervene*. Ya'akov was *a steward* of all the Holy One had given him. He could spend the money and property he had acquired *as he wished*. And if he wanted to spend it on something that the Holy One was going to give him anyway – well, that might not be wise, but that was his business. He would learn to live by the *sh'ma*

approach – doing only what the Holy One directed him to do, instead of ‘impulse shopping’ – soon enough. Here is how Torah describes Ya’akov’s purchase of a field near Shechem.

V’yiken et-chelkat ha-sadeh asher natah-sham aholo

And he bought the piece of open land upon which he set up his tent

m’yad b’nei-Chamor avi Shechem b’me’ah ksitah

from the sons of Chamor, chief of Shechem for 100 ksitahs.

100 ksitahs ... for what? Why is Ya’akov purchasing from others for silver what has been promised to him as an inheritance by the Holy One?

If you will note, every piece of ground in Israel which the patriarchs purchased – the cave of Machpelah at Chevron, the field of Ya’akov at Shechem/Nablus, and the threshing floor of Onan [Temple Mount, Jerusalem] - has been destined to be the source of horrible fighting, bloodshed, and grief for our people. Perhaps we should have *kept our money*. Perhaps we should have let the Holy One give us that which He promised in His own way, in His own time. By trying to acquire the land on our own, perhaps we unknowingly gave the sellers a colorable right of redemption – a claim of right to reclaim the land – which would not have been theirs had title been taken from the Holy One instead of the Kena’ani.

Ya’akov’s First Mizbe’ach Experience

Ya’akov’s first recorded act on the land he purchased from the sons of Chamor near Shechem is to ‘erect’⁴ an altar [Hebrew *mizbeach*] there. This was not something the Holy One told him to do [compare the instructions given by the Holy One for the building of an altar at *Beit-El* which appear a little later]; it was just something Ya’akov wanted to do. The patriarch’s reasons are unstated. His blueprint is undisclosed. His material list is unknown. Absolutely all that Torah tells about the altar, and about what Ya’akov did relative to it, is the following cryptic sentence:

V’yatzev-sham mizbeach

And he produced [or extended?] an altar there,

vayikra-lo El Elohei Yisra'el

and called it God-is-Israel's-Lord

[Genesis 33:20]

Ya’akov is not the first patriarch to build an altar to the Holy One at Shechem. Avraham had built the very first altar to the Holy One in the Land there a century earlier, after the Holy One appeared to him and stunned him by saying: ***L’zar’acha eten et-ha-aretz hazot*** – i.e. *I will entrust this land to your seed*. Genesis 12:6. Was the altar Avraham built in that area, by the Oaks of Mamre, still standing? Did Ya’akov find

⁴ The actual Hebrew verb used is *natzav*, nun, tzade, veit, which means to *cause to stand erect*, or, metaphorically, to *put in place*.

it and restore that altar – or did he build a completely new one? Since the Holy One did not appear or speak to Ya’akov at Shechem as he had to Avraham, why did Ya’akov feel the urge to build an altar there anyway? No answers to these questions are provided by the inspired text. The only reason I ask them is to encourage the reader to consider his or her own ‘altar-building’ propensities and protocols.

Altar-building is an act of spiritual aggression – sort of like the raising or waving of a national flag, or the wearing of a red *M.A.G.A.* hat⁵, is in the natural. If the Holy One does not specifically tell someone to build an altar, why would someone do it? What exactly is the point of altar-building? What message does such a spiritually aggressive act send? What ‘shock waves’ does it create in the environment? And what should one expect the reaction of the local people who see or hear about the altar to be?

The same questions might be asked, in violent times such as these, about other spiritually aggressive actions people often take, such as:

1. Building and prominently ‘branding’ the headquarter buildings of religious institutions [i.e. synagogues, temples, churches, mosques, etc.];
2. Public display of religious-themed symbols [i.e. stars of David, menorahs, ‘ten commandment’ tablets, crosses, steeples, Christmas trees, manger scenes, Easter hams, minarets, crescents, etc.], whether on land, houses, buildings, vehicles or otherwise;
3. Wearing of religiously themed clothing and/or jewelry [i.e. tzit-tzit, kippahs, necklaces, bracelets or rings displaying crosses, crucifixes, the star of David, menorahs, etc.; or Tee-Shirts printed with, or tattoos containing, religious symbols or messages]; and
4. Social media messages and ‘memes’ with explicitly religious content; and
5. Discussion and/or debate of religious matters, or vocalized prayers, in public forums [i.e. coffee shops, stores, restaurants, shopping centers, parking lots, lines/ques, bus stops, vehicles of public transportation, schools, workplaces, government offices, etc.]

If we are going to commit any of these acts of spiritual aggression in today’s world – or build any kind of ‘altar’ that others will see or hear about - it is important that we do so only in *sh’ma*-response to a direct instruction from the Holy One in the

⁵ *M.A.G.A.* – or ‘Make America Great Again’ - is the much-maligned slogan used by Donald Trump to describe the substance of his 2016 campaign for President of the United States. The color red represents the political party under whose label the Trump Presidency and its *Make America Great Again* agenda was launched. The idea that America had ever been a place of excellence, and could be made such again by ordinary people doing extraordinary things – a call to reawaken personal and civic responsibility for the state and legacy of the nation - so infuriated the globalist left-wing mobs of America and Europe that the mere sight of the red hats worn by Trump supporters often resulted in acts of violent assault being committed against those who dared to wear them.

Torah, and only in compliance with His written directions. We must be responsible Kingdom ambassadors – not shameless, in-your-face religious hawkers and hustlers.

The Compelling Mystery of Patriarchal Altar-Building

Note what the text of Torah does NOT tell us about the altar Ya'akov 'erected' at Shechem. First of all, it does not tell us that Ya'akov slaughtered a single animal, or piled any quantity of grain, or burned any formula of incense, or poured any fragrant oil on the *altar* he erected there. Secondly, the text does not say he called any assemblies or meetings – for his family or anyone else - at or near this altar. Thirdly, the text gives us no suggestion he sang, or danced, or preached, or taught his children or anyone else to *sh'mar* the Way of the Holy One, or to *asah tzedekah u'mishpat*, around that altar. So ... what was the purpose of his act of spiritual aggression? What was he thinking? The only thing the text says Ya'akov did in relation to the 'altar' he built at Shechem was to speak over it a Hebrew '*shem*' – i.e. a defining prophetic message. The message Ya'akov chose was: '*El Elohei Yisra'el*' – i.e. '*God is Israel's God*'. This is interesting – even mysterious. Note that Ya'akov chose not to employ the Immaculate Tetragrammaton – i.e. the so-called 'sacred name'. Nor did he not follow the standard practice of his father and grandfather and refer to the Creator/Shepherd of his soul as '*El Shaddai*'⁶. Nor did he choose to call Him by the familiar label '*Elohei Avraham, Elohei Yitzchak, v'Elohai Ya'akov*'⁷ – i.e. *God of Avraham, God of Yitzchak, and God of Ya'akov*.

The word our English Bibles translate as *altar* in this verse is *mizbeach*⁸. A *mizbeach* is *not just any altar*. Pagan peoples build altars wherever they go. But they do not build *mizbeachs*. A *mizbeach*, you see, is a place of intimate communion with the Holy One, through union with Messiah. It is not a place of animal sacrifice after the manner of pagans, intended to 'buy off' the gods, and keep them from interfering in pagan lives. There is a vast difference between a pagan altar and a *mizbeach*. The verb root of *mizbeach* is *zabach*⁹. The spelling of this word - *zayin, beit, chet* - explains its true meaning. The *zayin* is the Hebraic symbol of *a sword or threshing implement* – particularly referencing the flaming sword brandished by the angel assigned by the Holy One to guard the pathway to the tree of life¹⁰. The *beit* is a Hebraic symbol of a house, household, or king's

⁶ See Exodus 6:3, where the Holy One told Moshe: "***I appeared to Avraham, to Yitzchak, and to Ya'akov, as El Shaddai, but by My Shem YHVH I was not known to them***"

⁷ See Exodus 3:15, where the Holy One told Moshe: "***Say the following to the children of Yisrael: The Holy One [literally, YHVH] the God of your fathers, Elohei Avraham, Elohei Yitzchak, v'Elohei Ya'akvo, has sent me to you.***"

⁸ *Mizbeach* is *mem, zayin, beit, chet*. Strong's Hebrew word #4196, it is pronounced *miz-bay'-akh*.

⁹ *Zabach* is *zayin, beit, chet*. It is Strong's Hebrew word #2076, pronounced *zaw-bakh*'.

¹⁰ See Genesis 3:24

dominion. The *chet* is the Hebraic symbol of the *chuppah* [bridal canopy] of Messiah. Adding a *mem* [the Hebrew consonant which makes the *m* sound, and which pictures a flowing wave of water] to this verb places it into continual, flowing motion. A *mizbeach*, therefore, is a place where the household of the Holy One desiring to partake of the fruit of the tree of life repeatedly submits to the flaming sword, dies symbolically [through a surrogate] and through the blood spilled in connection with that surrogate's death passes into the *chuppah* of Messiah. At that *chuppah*, of course, the fruit of the tree of life is the main course, made freely available to all.

A *mizbeach* is an eye-catching structure. Ya'akov did not do this deed behind closed doors. In full view of the *Chivi* [Hivites] of Shechem, Ya'akov made a *mizbeach* to the Holy One, and declared to everyone that the Holy One was – and would always be – *his God*. Ya'akov's declaration was a powerful one. He was declaring that although he is living in proximity to the Kena'ani, and trades with them, *he is not one of them*. He was declaring he will *never* be one of them. He was making the declaration “*As for me and my house, we will serve the Holy One!*” He was establishing what was known in Eastern Europe as a *shetl* – a village within a village – a self-contained Hebraic community located physically in, but not ‘of’, a village of *goyim* [gentiles].

The *mizbeach* Ya'akov built at Shechem is not the first *mizbeach* ever built by man, of course. Noach built one immediately after exiting the Teivah [Ark]. **Genesis 8:20**. As we have previously discussed, Avraham [then known as ‘Avram’], built one in this same location two generations previously. **Genesis 12:7**. Avram also built one at Hebron [**Genesis 13:18**] and on Moriyah¹¹. **Genesis 22:9**. Ya'akov's father Yitzchak had built a *mizbeach* at Be'er-sheva. **Genesis 26:25**. But this was Ya'akov's first *mizbeach*¹².

Ya'akov had of course previously set up a single stone, at *Beit-El* - the location where he had his first God-encounter¹³. He had, when he set up that stone, promised to return to that spot one day and build ‘the house of the Holy One’ on the site. That was to be one of the essential aspects of the covenant. It is incumbent upon everyone who enters into covenant with the Holy One to build his “house”, upon the rock of the revelation inherent in the *mizbeach*. That does not mean we are each to pick a site and build a temple [or church, or synagogue]. It means we are to make our hearts, our homes, and our lives, lives characterized by free-flowing *zabach*.

¹¹ The sages teach that Moriyah and the place Ya'akov called *Beit-El* are the same place.

¹² Ya'akov had, of course, previously set up a single stone, at Beit-El, in Genesis 28, and had promised to return to that spot and build ‘*the house of the Holy One*’.

¹³ See Genesis 28:10 ff.

We will soon see how comfortable Ya'akov is in his new Yisrael identity. Just about the time he and his family get comfortable *shtetling* alongside the Kena'anim in the area of Shechem, a major crisis of personal drama and social/ethnic interaction is going to unfold. Ya'akov and his family are about to see the 'other side' of Kena'ani culture – and the 'old man' flesh of their own easily resurrected Ya'akovian personas - at their very worst.

Darkness vs. Light: Who Is Winning The Energy War?

Ya'akov has both survived and overcome 20 years in Laban's world, a night of wrestling with an angelic being, and a confrontation with Esav and his 400-man army. Can he survive what is coming next? And if the answer to that question is yes, can he go *beyond surviving*, and actually overcome that challenge as well? Remember, the operative principle is not survival of the *fittest*, as the world believes – it is overcoming by the *chosen*.

Which kind of energy is most evident in your conversations and interactions with your fellow men? Is it *Light energy*, representing the humility, *shalom*, hope, joy, and gentleness that comes with being in the Presence of Mashiach? Or is it 'dark' energy, representing the exaltation of self and self-will that comes from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? Alas, no matter how much we are impacted by the former, it seems we are all at times severely attacked – and affected by - the latter as well. So how are you faring in the midst of mankind's most common kind of 'energy' crisis?

'Light' energy from the Presence of Messiah is incredibly wonderful. A part of the Covenant, 'Light' energy empowers us to keep humming songs of joy, thanksgiving, and praise in the midst of tests, trials, and tribulations. 'Light' energy enables us to stay calm and completely confident in God's Wisdom, Goodness, and Faithfulness to His Promises in the midst of the storms and shadowy valleys of life. 'Light' energy keeps us humble, gentle, and kind in the face of life's aggravations, provocations, and irritations, even as it keeps us *on target, on course, and on task* in the face of life's temptations, distractions, disappointments, and intimidations. Alas, we do not always flow in this 'Light' energy. We sometimes yield to the other kind of energy – energy from the 'dark' side. This 'other' kind of energy traffics in the *opposite of joy – i.e. discontent*. It traffics in the *opposite of thanksgiving – namely, complaint*. It traffics in the *opposite of praise – that is, accusation/blame*. Dark energy is easily recognizable by *the absence of calm – filling in the gaps in inner shalom with anger, offense, drama, worry, fear, anxiety, hype, emotionally-charged rhetoric, and frenzied activity*. Dark energy gets the upper hand every time we exhibit *pride instead of humility, coarse talk or behavior in place of gentleness, and/or nonchalance, boredom, disinterest, or disrespect in the place of kindness*.

Now is the time for us to look at ourselves. What manifestation of dark energy do you most often allow to *entice* you, to *play* you, and/or to *mock* you? What does it take to make you *jealous*? To ignite *lust*, or *greed*, or *pride* in you? To make you *start to worry*? To make you *sad*? To *wound your spirit*? What people, groups, ideas, or circumstances of this world do you allow to *upset* you? To *offend* you? To make you *angry*? To make you *afraid*? What does it take to set you off on a rant – or throw you into a pout? What provokes you to a hissy-fit? A pity-party? A binge? A panic? How much does it take to start a war of stares, of words, or of swords with you? What does it take to bring out your glares, your eyerolls, your insults, your claws and your fangs? What does it take to turn you into a *taker*? A *hater*? A *banshee*? A *basket case*? A *control-freak*? A *scrooge*? A *hypocrite*? A *sentimental fool*?

What fleeting, shallow pleasures of this world do you allow to *entice* you? To *seduce* you? To *misdirect your focus*? To *stimulate your flesh-appetites*? To *paralyze your passion for the Holy One, His Will, and His Ways*? To *capture your heart*? To *control your thoughts, emotions, and/or affections*? What kinds of irritations, temptations, and disappointments do you allow to *confuse your identity*? To *distract you from your mission*? To *endanger your family - and ultimately your destiny*? What exactly does it take to make you toss aside your *shalom*, your joy, your gratitude, your sense of childlike wonder and awe, and your delight in the Bridegroom-King and think negative, critical thoughts, speak negative, critical words, and engage in destructive behavior?

Whatever has these effects on you has the power to *enslave* you, *control* you, and *mock* you. You really need to hear this inconvenient bombshell of truth from someone. It is better that you hear this truth from a trustworthy and caring friend – *i.e.* the Torah – than from a policeman, or from a crusty old magistrate as he sets your bail, or from an attending physician who is treating you or a loved one in the ER, or from the psychiatrist who is prescribing you mood-altering medications, from a divorce lawyer who is billing you \$400.00 per hour, or from a jeering crowd outside your door demanding a pound of your flesh.

Bringing It Back to The Narrative of Vayishlach

Today's aliyah is the *story of a classic* power surge of dark energy taking over human lives and futures. This is therefore what I call '*the aliyah of dark energy advancement*'. Some of the people affected by a dark energy power surge in the verses we read today will be strangers to the Covenant without a clue that 'Light' energy even exists; others, unfortunately, will be children of the Covenant, who should know better. But alas, the sons and daughters of the Covenant – like the

strangers to the Covenant – are never going to see the onslaught of dark energy approaching. They will be too caught up in – and hypnotized by – the dark energy to even recognize, much less resist it. Do not repeat their mistake, Dear Reader. Do not let any of the dark energy pools of uncleanness this world contains sneak up on you unawares. Do not let anything steal your *shalom*, your *simchah*, or your innocence. These things are far too precious – and too important for the world – to give up for any dark energy high.

Setting the Stage

Twenty years previously, on the eve of Ya'akov's exile from the Land of Kena'an, the Holy One appeared to the young man that He had chosen to carry the torch of the Avrahamic Covenant into the future. The Creator appeared to Ya'akov in the form of a mind-blowing dream. In the course of that dream not only did the Holy One show young Ya'akov that the Heavens and earth were much closer and more intimately connected than he had ever imagined; He also spoke prophetically over the young patriarch-in-training the following words:

***Behold I will be with you, and I will watch over you everywhere you go,
and I will bring you back to this land ..."***

[Genesis 28:15]

Two decades later Ya'akov can testify that the Holy One has been faithful to perform every aspect of His Word. The three promises of Beit-El – the promises of *Divine With-ness*, of *Divine Protection*, and of *Divine Guidance* – have indeed become Ya'akov's life story. He now has more than promises – he has proof. He has more than a reason for hope – he has a testimony. The Holy One has indeed *been with* Ya'akov all through the dark years. He has indeed protected Ya'akov in the course of every one of the difficult encounters and dangerous passages of his life. Had the Holy One not been faithful to watch over him, Ya'akov would have been dead a long time ago. But hosts of angels have been all assigned to Ya'akov. They have ascended and descended around and upon him. Some of the angels he has seen; most, however, he never even knew were there until after they had done their work. And now, at long last, the Holy One has also performed the third promise of Beit-El – He has brought Ya'akov back to the land of Israel as promised. The Holy One has not done this for Ya'akov's sake, much less on account of Ya'akov's merit. The Holy One has done this for the same reason He does everything now, even today – i.e. to fulfill the terms of the Covenant He made with Avraham. That Covenant has been proven 100% real, and its promises 100% true.

To the casual observer it might just look like Ya'akov/Yisrael is the epitome of a *survivor*. After all, in his most vulnerable days he somehow survived 9 months of warfare with his twin brother in Rivkah's womb. He was then subjected to and

survived without harm repeated anti-Semitic attacks and harassment by the *Ph'lishtim* [Philistines] during his youth. He then survived 20 years of exile, hard labor, and immersion in an idolatrous culture, in Charan. He survived 10 days of stalking and a dramatic attack by Laban and his sons on the hills of Gilead. After that Ya'akov survived - albeit with a limp - an all-night no-holds-barred wrestling match with a Divine Wrestler. Most recently, as we discovered in yesterday's aliyah, Yisrael/Ya'akov has survived potential extinction at the hands of Esav and a 400-man army. Esav the once-angry assassin has wept, hugged and kissed Yisrael/Ya'akov, accepted his gifts though he had no need of them, and gone back to his home in Seir in peace.

Wherein you may ask lies the secret to Ya'akov's ability to overcome obstacles and adversity? Wherein lies this secret for you and yours? Let's look deeper – and within – to see if we can find the answers.

The Secret of Facing, Overcoming, and Growing Stronger Through Challenges That Wilt Others

Ya'akov/Yisrael is more than a survivor – he is an *overcomer*. And if you are engrafted into the covenant the Holy One made with Ya'akov/Yisrael's grandfather Avraham, *you are called and empowered to be an overcomer, too!* Do not misunderstand me. The *overcomer characteristic* is not inbred or inherited. Neither is it the product of mental or physical toughness. Its source cannot be found in *training* or *discipline* or *doctrine* or *creed*. Despite what the “Rocky” film series would have you to believe, it has nothing whatever to do with the ‘*Eye of the Tiger*’. So from whence does the *overcomer characteristic* come? What exactly is our *secret of overcoming*? Our capacity for overcoming obstacles and adversity – all the way through Holocaust - is bestowed upon us as a *part of the covenant*. Yisrael/Ya'akov's ultimate overcoming of his genetic and learned flaws, his environmental constraints, dramatic interpersonal conflicts, as well as the ordinary obstacles and adversities of life – and our doing the same – is through the sheer force of the Will of, and pursuant to the strong right Hand of, the Holy One, the stronger partner [*i.e. the suzerain*] in the covenant Avraham cut *on all our behalves* in Genesis 15 and 17.

For a son of the Covenant – or his seed - not to ultimately overcome, you see, would mean that the Holy One's promises to Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov have not been fulfilled. And that cannot – is not ever going to – be the case. Let the world prattle on all it wants about its beloved so-called scientific principle of ‘survival of the *fittest*’. We know that is foolishness. The applicable principle always has never been the ‘survival of the *fittest*’; it has always been - and always will be - the ‘*overcoming lifestyle of the chosen*’.

You, like our ancestor Ya'akov, have been *chosen* to perpetuate the Covenant. You were *birthed from* and are *destined for* eternity. No matter what happens, therefore, *you will not only survive but overcome*. No matter what traumas you or I experience, what rejections you or I endure, what persecutions you or I suffer, what wounds you or I receive, and even what havoc you or I wreak upon ourselves or [Heaven forbid] upon others through folly or sin, we will emerge as *more than conquerors*. The Holy One will always pick up the tattered fragments of our lives, toss the scattered fragments of our lives, households, and families into His Divine Stewpot of destiny, stir them with love, add just the right spices from His Heavenly Pantry of forgiveness and healing and restoration, and somehow turn even the foulest of ingredients into a sweet-smelling, life-giving broth – a broth with which He will, in time, bless, nurture, and bring the hope of redemption to the world. That is *the outworking of the Covenant*. It is what Romans 8:28 – 39 is all about.

A Word of Caution

I suppose I should warn you however that as wonderful as this essential truth of Covenant life is, it is not without its controversy. You will inevitably cross paths in this life with some who lack intimate personal experience and history with Divine Covenant, and who will, not knowing any better, choose to become highly offended at this ‘overcoming of the chosen’ truth – and with you. Some – especially those who have come to trust in humanistic things like logic and reason, psychology, sociology and organized religion – will mistake the confidence you as a son or daughter of the Covenant acquire over time in the inevitability of the ‘*overcoming capacity of the chosen*’ principle as *arrogance*. Such people will always misinterpret the unshakeable inner peace that you as a son or daughter of the Covenant radiate as an *attitude of superiority*. But it is not a matter of arrogance, nor is it by any means a matter of *superiority*. It is simply the understanding that *as to whom much is given, much is required*. We are not, you see, chosen by the Holy One and engrafted into His Covenant with Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov because we did – or could ever do - anything to deserve it. We are in no regards better than other people. We are simply the humblest of pawns with which He has chosen to lead in the great Chess game of history. We live for Him and His glory, not for ourselves and our self interest. Our lives are therefore His to do with, use, direct, and if necessary destroy – as He wills, for His Covenant purposes. That means we neither *fear the wrath* of the peoples or the governments of the world, nor *crave their acceptance*. And that is to them the most offensive thing of all. They do not understand what it is to live for a King; they only know how to live for a creed, a cause, or a reward. They do not understand how we can resist putting our trust in the institutions, armies, economies, ideologies, philosophies, and theologies they have dreamt up with their fallen

minds. They do not understand how we can resist their claim to superiority of intellect, morality, vision, and culture. They are enraged that we do not accept at face value their personal or cultural definitions of ‘civil rights’ and ‘civic responsibilities’, of ‘fairness’ and inequality, of ‘good’ and ‘evil’, of ‘right’ and ‘wrong, of ‘justice’ and injustice, and/or of ‘morality’ and immorality.

We realize our God is bigger than those things and that our destiny and purpose in life lie light years beyond them. We therefore delight to embrace and live according to the Words of His Covenant. Those words are not a burden to us; they are freedom to be who we were created to be! And it is *those Words* that inspire – and empower - us to be overcomers.

The Words of the Holy One, you see, carry ‘Light’ energy. In the ‘Light’ energy they carry is all the necessary power for fulfillment. Initially it is only visible in seed form. That is where we – and our sh’ma-responsiveness – come in. What do you do with seed? You find good soil, and plant it! So, our first task is to provide the seed of Light energy we discover in His Words in a garden of suitable soil. What does that mean? That means we choose not to think, talk, react, or behave like the majority of people in the world live. We choose not to eat what they eat. We choose not to demean ourselves with their perversions. We choose not to swoon over what makes them swoon, or to lust after what makes them lust. We choose not to want what they want or prioritize what they prioritize. We choose not to love what they love or to hate what they hate. We choose not to be offended or wounded by what offends or wounds them. We choose not be seduced by what seduces them, to be deceived by what deceives them, or to be outraged by what outrages them. We choose never to tremble – much less cower - before that which intimidates them. We choose not to absorb any of their surges of dark energy.

Those spiritual realities do not make us particularly easy for the world to love. But that is perfectly okay. It really does not matter if the world loves *us* – what matters is that they are brought face-to-Face with our Stronger Covenant Partner, and get a chance to deal with Him and be dealt with by Him as He wills.

Ya’akov - Do You Know Where Your Daughter Is Going – And Who Is Watching – and Wanting - Her?

Do you remember the daughter Leah bore to Ya’akov – the last of Leah’s children? Her name was *Dinah*¹⁴. Torah does not specifically tell us her age at the time of the events about which we will read in today’s aliyah, but she certainly cannot have been more than ten or twelve. Chapter 34 of the book of Genesis is about her darkest moment – the day she left the safety of the *shtetl*, and drastically changed

¹⁴ Dinah is *dalet, yod, nun, hey*, Strong’s Hebrew word #1783, pronounced *dee-naw*’.

the world.

Dinah is the feminine form of the word *dan*, meaning *he judges*. What she, a mere little girl, *thought* she was going to do on the fateful day about which we read was to skip merrily out of the *shtetl* and have a fine time, as little girls do, exploring the Kena'ani side of Shechem, seeing new things, meeting new people, and maybe finding someone new and exciting to play with. This simple, innocent act of a little girl was, however, destined to change the course of history. What she was about to do was to live out her name – she was going to bring judgment on Shechem. She was going to prove the city and its inhabitants were ripe for judgment – that its perversion was so pervasive that it could not continue to exist. In fostering her personal tragedy, you see, Shechem was about to condemn itself, and bring about its own destruction. If this seems a little far-fetched to you, let's pause a few moments to put everything back into perspective. First, remember what the Holy One has been in the process of doing since Genesis 12. He is preparing to bring judgment on the Kena'ani, and cause the land they occupy – including the area around Shechem - to '*vomit*' *them out*, because of their perverse lifestyles – especially in the area of sexuality. He has warned them repeatedly [Torah records these warnings in the form of two famines, the invasion of the kings of the north, and the awesome events surrounding the destruction of S'dom and G'morrah], has placed righteous men whose lives shone as a 'light to the goyim' in their midst [i.e. *Melki-tzedek*, Avraham, and Yitzchak], and has given them every opportunity to turn to Him – all to no avail.

The Holy One is now preparing, through Ya'akov, a nation who will dispossess the Kena'ani, and will live out in this most-important and visible crossroads of the ancient world - the Holy One's *righteousness* [Torah] instead of Kena'ani *perversion*. All nations will thereby see the drastic difference between the Holy One's ways and the ways of the world, and will be able to choose – life and peace, or death and destruction.

Into this Divine Plan skips an innocent but somewhat precocious little girl – a little girl named Dinah. Let's pick up the Torah account:

V'tetze Dinah bat-Leah asher yaldah l'Ya'akov

Leah's daughter Dinah, whom she had borne to Ya'akov

lir'ot bivnot ha-aretz

went out to visit some of the local girls

Vayar otah Shechem ben-Chamor ha-Chivi nesi ha-aretz

She was seen by Shechem, son of the chief of the region, Chamor the Hivite

V'yikach otah vayishkav otah vaye'aneha

He seduced her, slept with her, and [then] raped her.

Torah does not sugarcoat it for us. There it is, *in black and white*. Stuff happens. Stuff happens even to members of the Covenant household. Stuff happens even to innocent children.

What has Shechem Done – And How Should Men of the Covenant Respond?

What did Shechem do? He just did *what perverse men do*. He saw a little girl of another nationality skipping along innocently, and something inside his soul malfunctioned and short-circuited his conscience. He gave in to dark energy.

Was Shechem driven to this despicable act by unclean spirits? Was he acting out subconsciously because he himself was abused as a child? Was he angry at the female gender because of rejections and ridicule and bullying? Was he just a spoiled, arrogant, lustful little prince who had always gotten what he wanted and never been held accountable for anything? Perhaps – not that it matters now. Torah does not tell us why he was like he was and did what he did. But whatever the reason, Shechem was apparently not being kept busy enough with productive endeavors. He was idle – and idleness always leads to bad things. First comes boredom; then comes voyeurism; then comes bad behavior. Shechem was looking for some voyeuristic entertainment – preferably something exotic, from the *dark realm*. He was in the mood to try something new and exciting. He was ready to spread his wings – and live large and dangerous. He let his eyes wander – and that is pretty much always a prelude to trouble of one kind or another. That is when his eyes fell on innocent-eyed little immigrant girl, Dinah.

Shechem invaded – and violated - Dinah with his eyes. She was the perfect victim. She was young. She was of a different race. She was vulnerable. She had the intoxicating glow of innocence all over her. She was bathed in the light of purity. And the darkness in Shechem saw it – and longed to put out the light. ‘*Why not?*’ he told himself. She was easy prey. She was alone. She was defenseless. He could take her easily if he wanted. His fallen nature insisted she was his for the taking. His culture said he should want her. His Kena’ani upbringing said he should do whatever he wanted her – indeed, that he deserved to have her, and that she deserved any pain or humiliation his pleasure-taking might inflict upon her. He could shake it off, of course. He had not reached the point of no return. He could resist the urges he was feeling. He could just turn and walk away. But he didn’t. As the self-centered, perverse side of his imagination ran rampant he let his fleshly desires, curiosity, and appetite for a momentary thrill ravage Dinah in places and ways no little girl should be touched. And then the dark energy of lust consumed Shechem completely. His feet and hands, his capacities for speech, and all his other members rushed in to gratify his curiosity and indulge his ravenous appetite.

He surrendered completely to the basest desires and perversions of a fallen man's heart. Alas, the heart is deceitful above all things, Dear Reader.

I imagine Shechem initially disguising his intentions toward Dinah by putting on a pleasant mask of friendliness and genuine interest. I suspect he seduced her rather easily. She was, after all, innocent and unsuspecting.

Once Shechem got the helpless little girl alone he forced himself on her. He used her in the most selfish and despicable ways imaginable. Giving in totally to wanderlust and to bloodlust as much as sexual lust he proceeded to inflict wave after wave of horrible pain, terror, and shame on the little girl. He used a precious covenant daughter of the Most High as an inanimate object. He robbed her of the most elemental aspect of her humanity – her free will. He polluted her soul with his uncleanness. He violated not only her body and soul but her identity. She had not been put on the earth for this. She had a unique purpose and mission and destiny. He totally disregarded – indeed never even considered – any of these. He treated the little girl who caught his eye not as some fellow man's precious daughter, the apple of her father's and mother's and kinsman's eye, but as a piece of meat. He injected her with dark energy. In so doing Shechem committed not only a crime; he committed an act of war. He declared war on Dinah. He declared war on her father and mother. He declared war on each of her brothers. And most importantly, he declared war on the Holy One, Who loved her far more, and cherished her childlike innocence, than any of these mere mortal humans.

Shechem took what he wanted – and he could not give it back. He could not make *shalam*. He could not restore what he took. He thereby *sealed his own fate*. The only questions left to be answered after Shechem took Dinah for a conquest and ravaged her to his heart's delight were [1] *from what source his judgment would come*, and [2] *who all would share/play a part in it*.

What Did You Think Would Be the Fruit of This, Shechem?

Would Shechem's judgment come *from his own father and his own people*, who had the chance to prosecute and punish him as a kidnapper, rapist and child molester? No, his father sought to perpetuate and legitimate his son's abuse of Dinah by arranging to call their forced union a 'marriage'. The people of Shechem apparently saw nothing wrong with what Shechem did. They wanted only to acquire little Hebrew girls of their own with whom to do the same thing – as well as to acquire all Ya'akov's possessions. As the men who came to the gate of the city to discuss how to handle the situation, told Chamor, the local warlord: *These men are friendly toward us. They live on the land and support themselves profitably from it. The land has more than ample room for them. We will marry*

their daughters, and give them ours Won't their livestock, their possessions, and all their animals eventually be ours? Just let us agree to their condition and live with them.'

Note that not one of the men of Shechem *voiced a protest*. Not one of them noted or pointed out *the absurdity of it all*. Not one Shechemite considered it in the least unnatural that a man would surrender his daughter willingly to a known rapist. No, Dear Reader, the people of Shechem do not do any of these things. Dark energy had enveloped them. It had seared their consciences. It had numbed their hearts. They chose to see no evil, hear no evil, and speak no evil. They chose to *embrace* evil in their bosoms. And so, predictably, they bought into the plan to acquire *girls and goods* from the father and brothers of the rape victim hook, line and sinker. In so doing they *earned for themselves the right to share in the judgment which Shechem deserves*. They all became *co-conspirators* and *accomplices after the fact*. How, I wonder, did they think this was going to turn out?

Meet the Prototypical Vigilante Vengeance-Takers Among Us!

This will not, however, be another S'dom and G'morrah judgment from on High. There will be no lengthy outcry. There will be no patient modeling of righteous ways. There will be no opportunity given to make *t'shuvah* and restitution. There will be no intercession for the righteous. There will be no angelic visitation. There will be no fire from Heaven. There will be no brimstone. The executioner of Shechem will come in human form, in the name of the 'avenger of blood'. He is a most unworthy, unholy, indiscriminating judge, jury, and executioner all wrapped up in one. He is self-righteous and hypocritical. He is an idol-worshipper, because he idolizes and chases the blood lust of human vengeance. He is a rebel, choosing the ways of the human mind and the desires of human flesh over the spiritual ways and the will of the Holy One. Beware the vengeance-preacher and the vengeance-taker. Both are every bit as polluted and perverted by the powers of darkness as Shechem was. Dark energy is dark energy – in pagans or in sons of the Covenant.

Sh'mon and Levi – full-blood brothers of Dinah along with Reuven, Yehudah will let outrage – and a false sense of moral superiority - distract them from their mission as carriers of the glory of the Bridegroom-King, bearers of Light, and messengers of Shalom. They will give in to dark energy. They will concoct a plan to *take the vengeance that belongs only to the Holy One into their own hands*. They will put on the helmet of outrage, the shield of self-righteousness, and the dark garb of judges, juries, and executioners. Here is how Torah records their actions:

V'yehi v'yom ha-sh'lishi biheyotam ko'avim

On the third day, when [the people] were in agony,

vayikchu shnei-v'nei Ya'akov Shimon v'Levi achei Dinah

two of Ya'akov's sons, Sh'mon and Levi, Dinah's brothers,

ish charbo v'yavo'u al ha-ir

took up their swords and they went to the city

b'tach vayahargu kol-zachar

without arousing suspicion, and they killed every male.

V'et Chamor v'et Shechem beno hargu lefi-charev

They also killed Chamor and his son Shechem by the sword,

vayikchu et-Dinah mibeyt Shechem vayetzei'u

and took Dinah from Shechem's house. Then they left.

B'nei Ya'akov ba'u al ha-chalalim

Ya'akov's sons came upon the dead,

v'yavozu ha-ir asher time'u ahotam

and plundered the city that had defiled their sister.

Vayomeru ha-chezonah ya'aseh et-achoteinu

And they said: 'Should he have been allowed to treat our sister like a prostitute?'

Ya'akov was now eating of the fruit of the tree of life. Though wounded deeply on a personal level, he had grown enough that he wanted to talk about things like forgiveness, conflict resolution, appropriate boundaries of future interaction, and finding a way to make some good come out of a situation that had happened and thus could not be undone. Ya'akov's sons on the other hand had eaten the fruit of *the tree of the knowledge of good and evil*. All they wanted to talk about was the 'evil' they had seen with their eyes. And all they wanted to do was make sure that as many people as possible in the town of Shechem died on account of it.

Let's see – 'Light' energy is calm, gentle, kind, and confident in the Covenant faithfulness and goodness of the Holy One. 'Dark' energy is anger, offense, worry, accusation, blame, judgmentalism, coarse speech and conduct, and a thirst for violent vengeance. So ... which side of the discussion would you have been on?

Shechem in Our Rearview Mirror

Thus ended the brief, tragic, sojourn of Yisrael/Ya'akov in the area of Shechem. Our beloved patriarch must now abandon the tract of land he has purchased, leave behind the *mizbeach* he has built, and flee for his life for a third time. *Next time* will he and his sons will do it the Holy One's way? Will we? *Next time* will the sons of Yisrael/Ya'akov *sh'ma* the Holy One and do as the Holy One directs rather than acting presumptuously? Will you? Will I? Next time maybe – just maybe - the testimony of the Way of the Holy One our Divine Bridegroom in Heaven has entrusted to the sons and daughters of the Covenant will stand against the storm

and inspire the world instead of burning up like so much wood, hay, and stubble in an inferno of self-righteous judgment fueled by hatred and offense? That, Dear Reader, is up to us.

Questions Concerning Today's Study

1. Let's begin our study with a few basic questions:

[A] Get out your Bible Atlas and look up the location of the land which today's *psukim* say was purchased by Ya'akov. Who occupies that land now?

[B] As stated in the opening sentence above, our fathers are recorded as purchasing three parcels of ground in Eretz Yisrael. Can you recall what other two parcels were purchased, who purchased them, and what the price was?

[C] What was the first thing Ya'akov did when he purchased this parcel of land?

[D] In Strong's, look up the word translated "altar" in the last verse of chapter 33. Write the Hebrew word and its meaning.

[E] What did Ya'akov call the altar? Was this idolatry? Did this constitute taking the Holy One's name 'in vain'? Did it constitute the setting up of a 'graven image'?

[F] Look back at Ya'akov's 'vow' taken at Bayit-El [Bethel] - Genesis 28:20-21. What conditions did Ya'akov put on his vow (what did the Holy One have to do to make the vow operate)? What did Ya'akov promise to do if the Holy One did all these things?

[G] Compare the Hebrew word translated "in peace" in 28:21 with the Hebrew word translated "to Shalem" [KJV] in 33:18. Write the Hebrew words and their meaning.

[H] Looking solely at verse 1 of chapter 34, what mistake of Ya'akov, Dinah and Ya'akov's son led to Dinah's abduction by Shechem? Explain. What do you think are appropriate guiding principles for interactions with nonbelieving persons on 'their turf'?

[I] How old do you think Dinah was at the time of these events? [**Hint:** Ya'akov spent 20 years working for Laban, and Jewish historians say he spent 18 months in Sukkot. Dinah was born sometime while Ya'akov was working for Laban - and was not one of the oldest].

[J] What did Ya'akov's sons do wrong in handling the situation?

[K] Which sons of Ya'akov did the killing? Were their actions justified? How would you have suggested they handle the situation?

[L] Which sons of Ya'akov did the plundering? For this were they praised or reprimanded? How would you have suggested they handle the situation created by the brothers who did the killing?

[M] Ya'akov came to Shechem 'intact' or 'whole', 'complete', 'secure' and 'at peace'. How did he leave?

2. In today's reading from the Haftarah we see the Holy One, through the prophet **Ovadi-yah**, expound on what awaits Israel's enemies on **Yom Adonai** - the "Day of the Holy One".

Ki-karov yom Adonai al-kol ha-goyim

For the day of the Holy One is near upon all the nations.

ka'asher asita ye'aseh lach

As you have done, so it will be done to you;

gemulcha yashuv b'roshecha

your deeds will return on your own head.

Ki ka'asher shtitem al-har kodshi

For as you have drunk upon My holy mountain,

yishtu chol ha-goyim tamid

so all the nations will drink continually;

v'shatu vela'u v'hayu k'lo hayu

indeed, they will drink, and swallow down, and will be as though they had not been.

Uv'har Tziyon tihyeh fleytah

But upon Mount Zion there will be those who escape,

V'hayah kodesh v'yarshu beyt Ya'akov et morasheyhem

and it will be holy and the house of Ya'akov will possess their own inheritance.

V'hayah veyt Ya'akov esh uveyt Yosef lehavah

The house of Ya'akov will be a fire, and the house of Yosef of flame,

uveyt Esav lekash v'dalku vahem va'achalum

and the house of Esau stubble. They will set them ablaze, and consume them;

v'lo-yihyeh sarid l'veyt Esav ki Adonai diber

there will be no survivor of the house of Esau, for the Holy One has spoken.

[A] What does Ovadiyah say about the timing of the Day of the Holy One?

[B] What principles will the Holy One use in judging the nations?

[C] In Strong's' look up the word translated as "heathen" in verse 15 [KJV].

Write the Hebrew word and its meaning.

[D] What two things does the prophet say will happen on Mount Tzion in the Day of the Holy One?

[E] What two things does the prophet say the 'house of Ya'akov' will do on the Day of the Holy One?

[F] What three things does the prophet say will happen to the 'house of Esav' on the day of the Holy One?

3. In today's reading from the Apostolic account of Mattityahu we find the Master returning to His *talmidim* on His Dark Night of the Soul to find them sleeping.

*He came to the talmidim, and found them sleeping, and He said to Kefa,
"What, couldn't you watch with me for one hour? Watch and pray,
that you don't enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."*

[Matthew 26:40-41]

[A] To which of the sleeping disciples does the Master speak?

[B] What did Yeshua say was the reason He wanted the *talmidim* to 'watch' and 'pray'? Review your notes from Tuesday regarding those words.

May we eat freely from the tree of life at the wedding banquet of Messiah.

The Rabbi's son

Meditation for Today's Study

Psalm 59:14-17

*At evening let them return. Let them howl like a dog, and go around the city.
They will wander up and down for food, and wait all night
if they aren't satisfied. But I will sing of Your strength.
Yes, I will sing aloud of Your lovingkindness [Hebrew, *chesed*] in the morning.
For You have been my high tower –
a refuge in the day of my distress.
To You, my strength, I will sing praises.
For God is my high tower¹⁵, the God of my mercy [Hebrew, *chesed*]*

¹⁵ The Hebrew word translated here as 'high tower' [KJV, defense] is *misgav*, *mem*, *shin*, *gimel*, *beit*, Strong's Hebrew word #4869, pronounced *mis-gawb'*. The verb root is *sagab*, *shin*, *gimel*, *beit*, Strong's #H 7682, pronounced *saw-gawb'*.