

PRAYER

Eternal God, shepherd of every hope, source of strength, and wellspring of peace, we join with like-minded lovers of peace in the pursuit of peace.

You have made all of us one blood, and as you love us as one, so too, we must love all others as one – even those with whom we do not agree – with the embrace of understanding and the extended hand of friendship.

May we not grow weary in our efforts to fashion a world of peace for all Your children.

Illuminate the hearts and minds of those who lead us.

May we all be guided in the way of peace, especially when hatred and pride appear to be the most attractive, easy option.

We have received this good earth as a sacred trust to enjoy and share as members of one human family. Help us to keep that trust.

Save us, our compassionate God, from our folly by Your wisdom,

From our arrogance by Your forgiveness,

From our greed by Your generous bounty,

From our insecurity by Your healing power.

Grant us peace, O God of peace.

Teach us that justice and mercy can meet; that truth and peace can, once and for all, truly embrace. Amen!

Rabbi Stephen S. Pearce

THOUGHT FOR THE MOMENT OF SILENCE

Fear can keep us up all night long,
but faith makes one fine pillow.

Philip Gulley



December 10, 2011

יד כסלו תשע"ב

Parashat Vayishlach - Genesis 32:4-36:43 (וישלח)

Hertz – p 122

Stone – p 170

Haftarah – Obadiah 1:1-21 (עבדיה)

Hertz – p 137

Stone – p 1141

Kiddush hosted by
The Gordon Family

Rabbi Gordon's Talmud Class – 3:00 PM

Minchah - 4:10 PM

Shabbat Ends – 5:22 PM

On This Week's Torah Portion - וישלח

If you become like us letting every male among you become circumcised (34:15)

And it came to pass on the third day, when they were in pain, that two of Ya'akov's sons, Simon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, each took his sword and they came upon the city confidently. They killed every male, and Chamor and Shechem his son they killed at the point of the sword (34:25-6)

International human rights law nowadays declares collective punishment illegal and potentially a war crime. The Torah itself is ambivalent about the actions of Shimon and Levi; their father Ya'akov remonstrates with them at the time that a small band of people, not yet evolved into a great nation, can ill afford to destroy a city that presumably has local allies to avenge it. This is a practical issue, but later, on his deathbed and with the danger removed, Ya'akov still curses Shimon and Levi's anger that caused this great destruction.

The commentators struggle with the issue as well. Rambam, in a discussion of the seven Noachide laws, which are incumbent on everyone on earth, holds that all communities are responsible for establishing courts of justice and pursuing violators of the other six laws, including sexual immorality. Thus Shechem violated the laws against sexual immorality, but by failing to punish him the entire city became guilty of perversion of justice.

Ramban takes a more generalized approach. While he agrees that the failure of the people of the city to prosecute Shechem is improper, since it is not an *active* violation it is not punishable by death. He therefore posits that the Shechemites were guilty of the general idolatry, immorality and debauchery that characterized Canaanite society, and that in the future would cause the Canaanites to be driven out, almost in their entirety, by the progeny of Ya'akov and his sons. Perhaps this incident is another example of Ramban's thesis that "the actions of the Patriarchs are a symbol for their descendants."

The Maharal of Prague (in *Gur Aryeh*) takes a national approach. The budding Jewish nation was the victim of an aggressive act (the abduction of Dinah) and was entitled to wage a defensive war. The circumcision was a legitimate ploy to level the playing field between the relatively small number of Ya'akov's family group and the better-defended city. (For more details see the Artscroll Series *Bereishit*, pages 1480-1 [in volume 2].)

I think that these approaches all share a common feature. They recognize that a community has a collective existence that encompasses and transcends the existence of the individuals. Our Sages hint at this reality when they speak of "the angel of Rome/Persia/Babylonia/etc.," a being who represents each nation in the Heavenly court. Each of these "angels" has the characteristics of that nation, and argues for its interests. Tellingly, the only nation that does *not* have an angel watching over it is Israel; Israel is watched over directly by Gd.

We know that different countries have a different "feel" to them. Anyone who has crossed the border between the US and Canada surely notices the difference between the two countries (this is of course obvious when one crosses into Québec, but visit Niagara Falls, Ontario if you don't believe it). It is more obvious when there is a language difference, but even when there is not, there is a behavior difference and a way of thinking and speaking difference that all adds up to a different "vibe" if you will. People are socialized to hold different perceptions of reality and to react to stimuli differently. Much of the misunderstanding between nations comes from an insensitivity to such cultural differences.

Just as a human being is made of cells, organized into tissue, organs, systems and ultimately an organism, so a society is made up of individual humans, families, extended families, communities, cities, nations. And just as the coordinated, collective activity of the cells, organs, etc. of an individual gives rise to that individual's consciousness, so the organized activity of the individuals, communities, etc. of a society give rise to the collective consciousness of that society. And just as the individual's consciousness can either grow and evolve into higher levels of perception and organization, so can the society's collective consciousness evolve, or otherwise.

The Torah tells us in no uncertain terms what awaits us when our society chooses the "otherwise" – all kinds of calamities, culminating in exile and disintegration, are the result of prioritizing material pleasure over anchoring ourselves in the spiritual basis of life and living a spiritual existence in the material world. The Flood and the Tower of Babel are incidents that indicate this, but I believe that the incident with Dinah is the first shot of the "culture war" if you will, between a society dedicated to grabbing whatever appears to offer immediate sensual gratification, and another society for which the values of modesty and restraint as a method for achieving spiritual distinction are primary. These two kinds of society are fundamentally incompatible, as the saying goes: "He who hoots with the owls at night cannot soar with the eagles in the morning!" The collective consciousness of Shechem and the collective consciousness of Ya'akov and his family/nation cannot coexist; one must drive the other out. So it is on the societal level, and so it is on the individual level. Each of us, descendants of Ya'akov, have an internal drive towards the spiritual perfection that our forefather achieved. We also have our physical urges. The question that we must wrestle with every day is, which drive are we going to allow to prevail?

Shabbat shalom, Rafi Rabinoff

UPCOMING EVENTS

Sunday, December 11 **SPECIAL EVENT: Presentation by Benyamin Tsedaka, a leader of the Samaritan community in Cholon, Israel.** The Samaritans traced their lineage to the Israelite people and regard the Jews as having gone in a different direction. Don't miss this once-in-a-lifetime presentation with slideshow, 9:45 AM.

Sunday, December 11 **Stitch 'N Schmooze, 10:00 AM.**

Sunday Dec 11 Used Jewish Book Sale—cookbooks, books on Israel, children's books, etc. Brodsky Library, call 314-442-3720 for hours.

Monday, December 12 **Deadline for submission of articles, etc. for January Newsletter.** Please email to Marian at tradcong@sbcglobal.net.

Tuesday, December 13 **Deadline for submission of ads/greetings/personal photos for our 2012 Membership Directory.** Please help make this a great fundraiser!

Tuesday, December 13 Family Hanukkah Party for ages 3-9 & parents/grandparents. Stories, puppets, crafts & treats. Brodsky Library, 6:45 PM. RSVP by 11/12, 314-442-3720.

Motzei Shabbat Dec. 17 **Youth Bowling Night**, Tropicana Lanes, 7960 Clayton Rd. For 7th grade & under, meet at the bowling alley @7:00 PM. \$4/game per person, \$3.25 shoe rental so bring money for 2 games + shoes. The bowling alley **MUST HAVE A COUNT OF PARTICIPANTS BY Thursday, 12/15**, call 314-576-5230 if your child(ren) will be attending.

December 22-January 4 Office closed for vacation.

Motzei Shabbat, January 7 **Family Game Night, 7:30 PM.** Bring your family, your friends, your board games; play games, schmooze & nosh, plus ping-pong tournament. \$5/person, *advance payment required by Thurs Jan. 5.*

Sunday, January 15 **2nd Annual Anna's Soup Kitchen, 5:30-7:00 PM.** Soups 'n sides, \$12/person, \$48 family max (kids under 5 eat free). Carry-out available, \$3 additional /person. *Advance reservations required by Fri. Jan 6.*

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DAILY SERVICE TIMES

Sunday morning – 9:00 AM Monday-Friday mornings – 7:00 AM
Monday-Thursday evenings – 6:30 PM Friday evening – 5:45 PM