

# It's A Women's World

*The recent corona-crisis has highlighted the success of women leaders. This week's parsha too, has an interesting message about feminine power.*

## How Women Handled It

Recently, several studies have shown that countries led by women have navigated the coronavirus crisis more successfully than countries led by men. The pandemic passed through their countries with less deaths, less infections, and less ICU patients.

One possible explanation is that male leaders are more inclined to preserve the economy, while female leaders are more inclined to protect the health of their citizens. Therefore, countries led by women were quicker to take steps which mitigated the spread of the disease.

But there is more to it.

A few days ago, an Israeli study was published where they analyzed speeches of ten state leaders, five men and five women. It turns out that the women were much more honest and forthright than their male counterparts. Their body language was different as well. The men spoke aggressively with intimidating gestures. They sought to gain compliance with threats and warnings. Some seemed inclined to purposely foster anxiety. Meanwhile, the women were more relaxed. They spoke calmly, in an assuring and empathetic way. They were

optimistic. Their general message was: let's work together, and we will manage to overcome this crisis.

In earlier times, women leaders always tried to emulate men. They felt a need to prove that they were as tough and intimidating as their counterparts. This may be the first time that women leaders approached their job in an openly feminine way, and it has turned out to be a resounding success.

Another important point is that this crisis hit the entire world, not only specific countries, so we have a unique opportunity to compare the leadership of the women versus the men. And in this round of the contest, they are clearly the winners.

Perhaps that is why we rely so much on women in our lives. The education of children lies almost entirely in the hands of women. The stability of our homes depends on women. The behavior of the men and children is important as well, but at the end of the day, it all comes back to the women.

## **The City-wide Bris**

In this week's parsha, we read a painful story about a young woman, Dina, the daughter of Yaakov. However, if we take a deeper look at the story, we will realize something amazing: we will see just how much power this young woman wielded.

Yaakov had just returned from Charan. He had met his brother Eisav, hugged him, kissed him, and made amends. He now proceeded to the town of Shechem, where he purchased a plot of land from Chamor, the local prince, and settled down. Finally, after the hardships of life in Lavan's house in Charan, he would

have some peace and quiet.

Then, the Torah says, Dina went out to see the local girls. During her excursion, she was noticed by Shechem, the son of the local prince, and he abducted her and assaulted her. Falling in love with her, he decided that he wanted to marry her and tried to persuade her to agree.

“If you marry me, you will own the entire city and all its surrounding fields,” Rashi says he told her. You’ll be rich!

Yaakov was horrified to hear what had happened, but he contained himself until his sons returned from the fields. When they heard about the incident, they were infuriated.

Soon enough, Chamor and Shechem arrived at their home to ask for Dina’s hand in marriage. They said they were willing to do whatever it takes to unite with Yaakov’s family. They would do whatever Yaakov and his family requested.

Yaakov’s sons replied that their family custom was to circumcise their sons. If they wanted to marry into Yaakov’s family, they would need to circumcise themselves.

Circumcision wasn’t just a procedure. It carried greater meaning. Avraham and his sons were the only people in the world who circumcised themselves, and they did so as part of their belief in one G-d. It was the only physical expression of their connection to G-d. That is why Yaakov’s sons suggested that the people of Shechem circumcise themselves.

Chamor and Shechem agreed. They even persuaded all the

people of their town to circumcise themselves as well. It is amazing nobody opposed or revolted; the Torah says that everyone immediately underwent the bris.

On the third day, as all the men were bedridden with pain, Shimon and Levi spread out through the city and killed them all. They entered Chamor's home, where Dinah was being held captive and brought her home.

## **Dina's Sway**

This story is not a happy one. Yet the Rebbe, as always looked for the good in the story.

What exactly happened here?

Granted, Shechem agreed to circumcise himself to marry Dina. That is understandable. Men in love will go to great lengths to earn the trust of the subjects of their love.

Chamor, his father, agreed to the circumcision as well. That is less reasonable, but still, as Torah says, Shechem was the apple of his father's eye, the most prominent person in the entire family. So Chamor agreed to do it for his son's sake. Parents go to great lengths for their children.

But why did the people of the city agree? A bris for an older person is no laughing matter. In our own community, we have members who did a bris later in life, and they can testify that it was a very painful endeavor. Yet the Torah doesn't record any objections. Why did the townspeople agree?

Let's go back to the beginning of the story to understand.

The Torah tells us that Dinah went out to “see” the local girls. She didn’t go to hang out with them, the Rebbe says. She went out to teach them about G-dliness.

Dina grew up in Yaakov’s household. She knew that her family’s mission was to spread the word of G-d. So when she arrived in a new place, she immediately went out to influence the local girls.

Being Yaakov’s daughter and Avraham’s great-granddaughter, it is no surprise that she was so charismatic. She became the talk of town and everyone loved Dinah, her family and what they represented. Shechem, the spoiled prince fell in love with her and this led to the abduction.

When the sons of Yaakov told Chamor and Shechem that the way to join the ‘club,’ is by circumcision, the whole town was ready to join - just to become connected to the family of Avraham our forefather. Dinah had accomplished her mission.

Now we can understand a comment of Rashi a bit earlier in the Parsha.

When Yaakov prepared for his meeting with Eisav, the Torah describes how he took his wives and eleven children over the river.

Rashi asks the obvious question: Where was Dinah? Rashi answers that Yaakov hid her in a chest, fearing that Eisav would fancy her beauty. But he was punished for doing so, Rashi says. Had he allowed Eisav to marry her, she would have influenced him to mend his ways. Because Yaakov withheld her from Eisav,

he was punished with the Shechem incident.

How did Rashi know that Dinah held such a sway over people? Perhaps he derived this fact from the story of Shechem, where an entire city was willing to undergo circumcision just to become part of Dina's club.

In a sense, the Rebbe said, Dina's objective was actually fulfilled. The people of Shechem all circumcised themselves, essentially becoming converts into Avraham's family. (See Lekutei Sichos vol. 35 Vayishlach 3).

## **Don't Be A Man**

What lesson can we take from this story?

A well-known rule is, "Don't argue with success." This recent crisis has proved that people aren't swayed by threats and intimidation. They respond specifically to positive overtures. They appreciate optimism and sensitivity for the hardships they are experiencing. When they are reached out to with empathy, the success is far greater.

If we want to influence our family or friends, we need to put aside our 'masculinity.' We need to take a deep look at the person we are engaging and try to feel empathy for the experience they are going through. Only then will we be able to bring them home.

Good Shabbos!