



Torah Thoughts from the YIGC Community

Shimon and Dinah: A Permitted Marriage?

Alan Schabes

Bereishis chapter 46 lists those who accompanied Yaakov to Mitzrayim. Included in this list, among the children of Shimon, is *Shaul ben haCanaanit* – Shaul, the son of the Canaanite woman. Rashi comments on this unusual name and states that he was the child of Dinah, conceived when she was violated by Shechem (a Canaanite). Rashi explains that when Shimon and Levi killed the male population of Shechem (Bereishis 34:25), Dinah refused to leave until Shimon promised to marry her.

The Rambam in Hilchos Melachim 9:5 states that a *ben Noach* is prohibited from marrying his maternal sister. If that is the case, how could Shimon have married Dinah when both were Leah's children?

The Targum Yonasan on Bereishis 30:21 gives a fascinating explanation. He says that Rachel and Leah were pregnant at the same time: Rachel with a girl, and Leah with her seventh boy. Leah perceived this and was troubled by the prospect of Rachel being the mother of a fewer number of *shevatim* than either Bilha or Zilpa. She davened on Rachel's behalf, and a miraculous inter-utero transfer occurred: the female fetus was transferred to Leah, and the male fetus was transferred to Rachel. This female fetus was Dinah. Therefore, Dinah was not really Shimon's maternal sister, and so Shimon – under his classification as a *ben Noach* – was permitted to marry her.

Rabbi Yisroel Reisman, the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva Torah Vodaas, offers another explanation. He quotes the Maharal, who says that the *Avos* accepted the Torah upon themselves and were subject to the principle that *ger shenitgayer k'katan shenolad dami*: a convert is compared to a newborn. When someone converts, he or she is no

longer considered to be a blood relative to his or her previous relations. In fact, if a biological brother and sister convert, according to Torah law they are permitted to marry each other. Under this halacha, Yaakov married two sisters; Amram married his paternal aunt, Yocheved; Yehuda performed *yibum* with his daughter-in-law, Tamar; and Shimon married his sister, Dinah.

However, the Maharal raises a question. When the Torah was given, Bnei Yisrael became forbidden to marry their relatives. If they were considered to be in the category of a *ger*, then how did they even *have* relatives?

The Maharal offers a brilliant answer. The *Avos*, and Yaakov's twelve sons, chose to accept all of the Torah. As a result, they were included in the category of a *ger shenitgayer* and considered to be unrelated to their previous relatives. However, when Bnei Yisrael accepted the Torah at Har Sinai, they had no desire – as it states in Shabbos 88a, "he turned the mountain over above them..." Since their acceptance of the Torah was forced, under this explanation, Bnei Yisrael at Har Sinai did *not* have the status of a *ger shenitgayer* – so they had relatives!

Rabbi Reisman points out that the Maharal's analysis helps us understand two *halachot*: first, when a pregnant woman converts, her immersion in the *mikvah* counts for her child as well; second, the child born after the conversion is halachically considered to be her child. According to the distinction articulated by the Maharal, we can easily understand these laws. A fetus in utero is not converting willingly. Therefore: (1) he is not halachically a *ger shenitgayer*; and as a result, (2) he is considered to be the child of his birth mother.

Why Haman Was Hanged, Or, From Hefner to Hughes

Rabbi Moshe Berger

Why did Achashverosh hang Haman?

Many, perhaps most, people would immediately respond to the foregoing question: Haman was hanged because Esther revealed to the king that he had issued a decree of genocide against her people. This may be correct, but perhaps the answer is more complicated.

Consider the account in Esther Chapter 7:

1 So the king and Haman came to drink with Queen Esther. 2 And the king said to Esther also on the second day during the wine feast, "What is your petition, Queen Esther, and it shall be given to you. And what is your request, even up to half the kingdom, and it shall be granted." 3 Queen Esther replied and said, "If I have found favor in your eyes, O king, and if it pleases the king, may my life be given me in my

petition and my people in my request. 4 For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish; now had we been sold for slaves and bondswomen, I would have kept silent, for the adversary has no consideration for the king's loss." 5 And King Achashverosh said, and he said to Queen Esther, "Who is this and where he, who has dared to do this?" 6 And Esther said, "An adversary and an enemy, this evil Haman!" And Haman became terrified before the king and the queen. 7 And the king arose in his fury from the wine feast to the orchard garden, and Haman stood to beg for his life of Queen Esther, for he saw that evil was determined against him by the king. 8 Then the king returned from the orchard garden to the house of the wine feast, and Haman was falling on the

couch upon which Esther was, and the king said, "Will you even assault the queen with me in the house?" The word came out of the king's mouth, and they covered Haman's face. 9 Then said Charvonah, one of the chamberlains before the king, "Also, behold the gallows that Haman made for Mordechai, who spoke well for the king, standing in Haman's house, fifty cubits high!" And the king said, "Hang him on it!" 10 And they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordechai, and the king's anger abated.

In verse 7, although Esther informs Achashverosh that Haman had ordered her murder and the genocide of her people, the king does not summarily order Haman's execution. Instead, he escapes to his orchard garden. Although he knows full well that Haman must be executed (assuming Haman was reading his body language correctly), he nevertheless does not follow through with ordering the execution at that time. When he returns from the orchard garden, he misinterprets Haman's pleading with Esther as an attempt to "assault" (murder? rape?) the queen – yet something still prevents the king from ordering Haman's execution. Only when Charvonah informs Achashverosh that Haman had been planning to order Mordechai's execution does he immediately, without any further hesitation, order Haman to be hanged. Why the initial reluctance, and what changed at the end?

I suggest that the king is initially unable to execute Haman because Haman, from the time the king made him viceroy until this moment, has served as the king's alter-ego. In Chapter One of the Megillah, Achashverosh presents as the paradigmatic "party animal" – unguarded and carefree as he indulges, drinking heavily, in two extensive orgiastic events. A veritable Hugh Heffner! After the assassination attempt by his two trusted security guards, however, he transforms radically – into a Howard Hughes-esque recluse, trusting no one and ordering that anyone who approaches his palace entrance will be summarily executed (unless he chooses to pardon that person with the golden scepter).

At the same time, Achashverosh elevates Haman and decrees that all the king's servants-at-the-gate must bow down to him. Note that this command of obeisance is directed primarily, if not exclusively, at the King's local servants (and not at the citizenry-at-large), because those servants who had been closest to him and most trusted were precisely the ones who had attempted to murder him. Obsessing, therefore, upon his need for self-preservation, he withdraws into seclusion and appoints Haman to represent his new image vis-a-vis the external world: an intimidating pit bull who will terrorize everyone close, and thus (hopefully) thwart the machinations of all other potential assassins.

Traumatized by the assassination attempt, Achashverosh must have constantly wondered whether Bigsan and Teresh had acted independently, as a lone duo, or whether they had been the designated hit men in a plot conceived and organized by another or others. If the latter were the case, then "someone out there" would still have the king's assassination on his agenda! Who could that person be? Who is realistically in the position to successfully usurp his throne? As long as Achashverosh views Haman as an alter-ego-extension-of-himself, he is psychologically incapable of suspecting him of having masterminded the Bigsan-Teresh plot. However, when Charvonah informs the king that Haman *is about to execute the very person who had rescued him from that plot*, the king concludes that Haman himself must have been its architect. Haman is thus immediately transformed, in Achashverosh's mind, from the position of alter-ego into that of his attempted assassin; Achashverosh therefore summarily neutralizes him.

The irony here, of course, is that Haman had *not* masterminded the Bigsan-Teresh plot! He plans to kill Mordechai, at the advice of his wife and his servants, because of Mordechai's persistent refusal to honor him. The King of Kings – as well as His Chosen People – understand very well why Haman's life was forfeit; the all-too-mortal king who orders his execution, however, remains, typically, clueless.

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from their children

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in commemoration of the *yarzeit* of father

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