

## My D'var Torah on Torah Portion Va-Yishlah

Welcome and shalom , I would like to thank you all for coming this morning to see me become a bat-mitzvah. I also like to thank Rabbi Yaron and Dmitry for helping me prepare for this special day in the limited time I had.

The torah portion we have just finished reading was parashat va-yishlah. It tells the story of Jacob and his brother Esau meeting up after many years. In the past, Jacob had tricked Esau into giving him his birthright in exchange for a meal, as well as cheating him out of the blessing of Issac . Many years have passed but Jacob still feared Esau so before they meet he tries to appease him with material items such as slaves and cattle. Eventually they meet and embrace and all problems and tensions between them melt away. Later, Jacob and Esau spilt their ways and became the founders of their own lands and started their own huge families.

Today I will be speaking about a story that is not well known, it hides in this torah portion and because it deals with some really bad things we usually don't talk about it. Today I want to talk about what happens when Jacob's sons - get revenge on all the men of the city Shechem after their Prince committed a huge and unforgivable sin against their sister, Jacob's daughter – Dina.

Today I will talk about a salient message in my torah portion: revenge,

Jacob's sons Simon and Levi got revenge on the men of the city of Shechem after their prince Shechem assaulted their sister Dinah.

The revenge was that they tricked them and then killed them all.

It is not an easy story to tell and it makes us ask the question - Is revenge good or bad?

Revenge is rooted in hatred and grudges. Revenge is taken on someone usually to get even or to make things fair. People find that unless they get revenge on someone who hurt them or has done them wrong, they continue to hold a grudge.

The Torah teaches that revenge is mostly wrong. At first the Torah does not tell us what Jacob thought of his sons actions, but later, we learn that Simeon and Levi were cursed by their father Jacob on his death bed. Just before he dies he tells them that because of their actions they brought embarrassment to him.

People can forgive but it's hard to forget what people did or how they made you feel. I know this because other people have hurt me very much in the past. I think that Revenge is unnecessary especially because people believe that they can come back with revenge and hurt their aggressor even more than they were hurt with a stronger blow. This is not the way to live. I believe that when you take revenge on someone, you are just as bad as that person who hurt you or has done you wrong. If you were hurt terribly, when you take revenge and do what they did to you, you're making them feel

the pain that you did, nobody wants to feel that way. If you didn't like it, neither would they. Knowing that, taking revenge will never really help you heal completely. Later, when you look back, you will see that if you took revenge you were really no better than the person who did wrong to you. You may even feel guilty for making them suffer the pain you did. However, if you forgive and don't take revenge you will look back and know you were the bigger person, a more open-minded person than your aggressor.

We need forgiveness and peace, not revenge. Before taking revenge, think of what bad things will happen and how much violence or emotional scarring will occur. Once it's done you can't take it back and it's hard to forget.

However many of you might be familiar with the teaching in the Torah that teaches us "An eye for an eye" which might seem at first to support revenge – doesn't it?

I don't think an eye for an eye means direct revenge, I think it means that though people want to take direct revenge and do exactly what was done to them to the person who did something bad to them. That is wrong, but people do need to give reasonable compensation to the person they wronged. In this case, a certain price for having taken out someone's eye. Maybe paying for treatments or operations to cure the physical pain.

Another issue that this Torah portion teaches us about is the question of being a bystander : "Is it okay to be a bystander? When you are in tough situations should you support the wrongdoer through silence or no reaction? Does this not make you just as bad as the bad guy, the antagonist? The people of Shechem supported Shechem, if not by silence, by assisting him in his crime of kidnap and harassment of Dinah. Shouldn't they have tried to stop him? This torah portion reminds us that people should not be bystanders, they need to stand up for a good cause.

A few years ago - I wanted to hold my own bake sale to help the earthquake relief efforts in Haiti and recently again in Japan.

When the school refused to help me organize it, I did it myself I wanted to help others and not be a bystander, but help them and make a positive difference in their lives.

What is the connection between not taking revenge and not being a bystander? It makes you a more understanding, more open-minded person. You make a difference in people's lives when you are not a bystander, and rather stand up and help someone. It could be a person dying in the street, a beggar desperate for money or food. a person who is being mistreated without choice, such as a very bullied kid at school. If you stand up for them and there are more people standing up for them than there are bullies, then they bullies are defeated.

If you save a life, change a life for the better, or even make a small and positive difference in someone's life, you will feel good that you did so, and so will the person you helped. They will be very grateful that you helped them.

The bottom line is "treat others as you would yourself." This is a hard concept for many to grasp, but is a very true and serious issue.

In conclusion, I would like to thank you mom and Dad, Grandma, Grandpa, and my wonderful brother max for organizing my Bat-Mitzvah. Also, for being supportive of me and taking care of me. Max, you always cheer me up when I am sad. You are kind and help me with my science homework. You are my best friend and I love you. Dad, you add music, humor, and other joys to my life. I enjoy working on foreign languages with you. Mom, thank you for helping me with my homework, cheering me up, being kind, and taking care of me. Thank you cousins Zachary, Lauren, Rina, Vijay, and Jacob for being here, and also to my Aunts, great aunts, uncles, great uncles, and everyone for coming the distance to see me become a bat- mitzvah.