



# MISHNAS CHAYIM

# משנת חיים

MISHNAH ON THE PARSHAH

פרשת וישלח תשס"ט 5769 Parshas Vayishlach

## THE REALITY AND THE HOPE

Many times in the past – and, unfortunately of late as well – the institution of *shechitah* has come under intense and intrusive scrutiny. Devout Jews are suddenly made to feel that they need to defend their activities to the court of public opinion as being sufficiently humane and ethical. Historically, such inspection campaigns have been spearheaded by a wide assortment of groups; among them have been the Polish government, the Nazis, and animal-rights activists.

It would be instructive for us to take a closer look at this latter group and scrutinize the ethical standards they have displayed in recent times. The results may prove to be quite revealing.

### TRUE COMPASSION

A telling example took place during the second Intifada launched by the evil terrorist Yasir Arafat (may his name be erased) around the turn of this century. Arafat unleashed his minions of bloodthirsty Arab kamikazes on the Jews of Eretz Yisrael. Homicidal terrorists saw it as their life's mission to cut down families who stopped for pizza or commuters on their way to work. Men, women, infants, and the elderly were all counted amongst what was an ever-mounting tally of victims, may Hashem avenge their blood.

There is a certain prominent animal-rights group that has been very involved in recent years in examining and ensuring the "humane treatment" of animals in slaughterhouses. For the greater part of the terror campaign, they were completely silent.

It happened one time that the terrorists – who channeled their energies toward developing new

and efficient methods of exterminating Jews – came up with an innovative method of executing their evil plans. In order to keep their victims unsuspecting, they attached an explosive device to a lone, traveling donkey. They then sent him on the road, where the device was detonated alongside a vehicle carrying Jewish occupants.

This event prompted the animal-rights group to take action; an innocent donkey had been killed! They immediately penned a letter to Arafat *harasha*, imploring him to "keep animals out of the conflict."

This is nothing short of incredible. Such are the moral principles of these people; they are not bothered by the wholesale slaughter of Jewish babies and expectant mothers, but they will not stand for the mistreatment of donkeys or cattle.

The truth of the matter is that this unfortunate, blatant disregard for Jewish life was already present at the beginning of our history.

### AVOIDING CRITIQUE

One of the dramatic events depicted in this week's *parshah* involves *b'nei Ya'akov's* stay in the city of Shechem. This episode is quite complex and intriguing and really requires intensive study to be properly understood. Here, we merely present a brief account of the basic highlights and focus on one specific aspect.

Ya'akov and his sons were extremely distressed about the fact that Shechem (the namesake of the city) had disgraced Dinah, the daughter of Ya'akov. This Shechem, the prince of the land, did not seem to know his boundaries; not only did he express no remorse, but he pleaded for permission to wed the girl.

לזכר ולעילוי נשמת  
הרה"ג ר' יעקב משה ב"ר ניסן שלמה זצ"ל

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of *יעקב בן דוד ע"ה*, a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of his neshamah.

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Ya'akov's sons knew exactly how to handle the situation and responded with an element of "cunning" (*Bereishis 34:13*). They told *b'nei Shechem* that the *b'nei Ya'akov* would agree to intermarry with the Canaanite people of Shechem on one condition: all males of the city would have to undergo the Jewish ritual of circumcision.

The eager Shechem quickly convinced his people to agree to the proposition, and they all circumcised themselves. Then, "On the third day, while (the townspeople were) languishing in pain, Shimon and Levi, the two sons of Ya'akov ... took their swords... They killed all of the males... and Shechem... They took Dinah (their sister)... and left" (*Ibid. 25, 26*).

What exactly was the "cunning" displayed by the sons of Ya'akov in their initial response to Shechem? The conventional wisdom seems to be that it refers to the intentional weakening of the

enemy. That is, they led the Shechemites into circumcision in order to render them weak and defenseless.

However, the *Kli Yakar* offers a novel approach; based on his commentary, it seems that a different calculation accounted for their "cunning." According to the *Kli Yakar*, the circumcision plan accomplished an important objective: it provided the brothers with a type of immunity, one that basically ensured that they need not fear reprisal from the surrounding nations. By circumcising themselves, the Shechemites had become – in the eyes of the world – like Jews. Shimon and Levi were well aware of the attitude of the nations. If they had killed members of some other tribe, it would cause an uproar. But when "Jews" were assassinated, quite frankly, no one was particularly interested. Now that the Shechemites looked Jewish, no one would protest their demise.

Unfortunately, we see that Jewish blood has been cheap from time immemorial. In fact, the concern goes quite far, as reflected in the Mishnah in *Avodah Zarah (2:1)*:

לא יתרחק אדם עמהו, מפני שחשודין על שפיכות דמים.

"A person should not seclude himself in the company of an idolater; he is susceptible to the perpetration of wanton murder."

History has proven time and again that such caution is warranted. What should be encouraging, though, is the fact that the ancient Egyptians, the Greeks, the Romans, the Inquisitors, the Cossacks, the Nazis – for all intents and purposes, are gone, while we are still here. "In every generation they rise up to annihilate us, but You save us from their hands" (*Pesach Haggadah*).

And so we pray that we should merit to witness the ultimate fulfillment of the verse: "So shall all of Your enemies disappear" (*Shoftim 5:31*).



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