

Breaking the Chains

Drash on parsha 8; Vayishlach

By MMin Kevin Phipps (aka Oriyan)

*"My son Sh'khem's heart is set on your daughter. Please give her to him as his wife; and intermarry with us: give your daughters to us, and take our daughters for yourselves. You will live with us, and the land will be available to you – you'll live, do business and acquire possessions here."
[B' resheet/Genesis 34:8-10]*

This story of Dinah and her defilement, as we will call it, is one of those disturbing stories in the Bible, which is even more disturbing in light of our current culture. To us, we can't believe the audacity in a man who defiles a woman and then tries to marry her, and then his family backs him up on the idea! Rather than apologizing for Sh'khem's behavior, they see it as an opportunity to form an alliance through intermarriages with the household of Ya'akov.

They said to them, "We can't do it, because it would be a disgrace to give our sister to someone who hasn't been circumcised. [B' resheet 34:14]

Here we see one of the tactics of HaSatan. When a sin is committed, he will use that sin to justify another sin. It is like David's adultery with Bat'sheva, which led to the murder of her husband, Uriah. HaSatan will try to get you to believe that if you commit one sin, you might as well commit another which is maybe just a little worse. He will try to get you to believe that since you have sinned, God hates you, so it doesn't matter what you do. Thus sin adds to sin, sin gradually leads to greater sin, and sin bounces back and forth between people, each justifying their sin by someone else's sin.

But Yeshua went to the Mount of Olives. At daybreak, he appeared again in the Temple Court, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. The Torah-teachers and the P'rushim brought in a woman who had been caught committing adultery and made her stand in the center of the group. Then they said to him, "Rabbi, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in our Torah, Moshe commanded that such a woman be stoned to death. What do you say about it?" They said this to trap him, so that they might have ground for bringing charges against him; but Yeshua bent down and began writing in the dust with his finger. When they kept questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "The one of you who is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." Then he bent down and wrote in the dust again. On hearing this, they began to leave, one by one, the older ones first, until he was left alone, with the woman still there. Standing up, Yeshua said to her, "Where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, sir." Yeshua said, "Neither do I condemn you. Now go, and don't sin any more." [Yochanan/John 8:1-11]

There is no indication that the accusations were false, so this woman had committed adultery. She was guilty, but apparently, Yeshua knew something from Torah which the men there had not thought of, and which perhaps involved them, which made it so they could not stone her without incurring guilt, or further guilt upon themselves. They were not seeking justice, they were using the woman's sin to justify killing her with motives that did not show a Torah pursuant life. In this way, they were adding sin to sin. Where not all killing is murder, and thus prohibited in Torah, capital punishment is reserved only for certain situations as a last resort. The desire ought to be reconciliation and repentance, not death. By showing her mercy, He stopped the chain of sin started by her sin. Her sin may have been linked to other sin as well. Perhaps her mother was an adulteress. Perhaps she had been divorced. Whatever the cause, Yeshua was able to break the chain.

Not only did He break the chain as far as her accusers were concerned, but He hopefully broke the chain with her own sin as well. She could have been stoned for her sin, but was spared by Yeshua's mercy. He tells her, however, to go and sin no more. He did not want her to think that just because He got her off the hook once, she was free to keep living the way she did. Mercy and grace ought to lead to repentance, not further sin.

For when people have once been enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift, become sharers in the Ruach HaKodesh, and tasted the goodness of God's Word and the powers of the `olam haba – and then have fallen away – it is impossible to renew them so that they turn from their sin, as long as for themselves they keep executing the Son of God on the stake all over again and keep holding him up to public contempt. [Hebrews 6:4-6]

Yeshua died on the cross for our sin, which is defined as transgression of Torah. So if our disobedience to God put Yeshua on the cross, why would we continue to do that which put Him there in the first place? He saved us from sin, not so that we could continue to live in sin, but could escape the death that results from sin. In so doing we are free to live life as a slave to righteousness, rather than sin.

So remember what you received and heard, and obey it, and turn from your sin! For if you don't wake up, I will come like a thief; and you don't know at what moment I will come upon you. [Revelation 3:3]

If you are already in debt, it doesn't make sense to say, "Well, I'm already in debt, so I'd might as well buy this new car. Debt is debt." In some ways debt is debt, but there is a big difference between \$5,000 in debt and \$50,000 in debt. There will be a day when we will each have to make an accounting for everything we did and did not do. Even if our eternity is secure through our faith in Messiah, our sins will matter. One lie does not justify two. Adultery does not justify murder. Failing at one command does not justify failing at them all. Whether we have committed one sin or one million, there

is never an excuse for adding more. Sure we are human and will sin, but that doesn't mean we continue in sin, knowing what we are doing is sin.

*So then, anyone who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it is committing a sin.
[Ya'akov/James 4:17]*

If you go skiing, you probably know there is a good chance you will fall. Does that mean you try to fall? No, unless you enjoy the embarrassment and potential injury that results, or in my case, that is how you stop. Anyone who participates in a race knows there is a chance they will not win, yet they do everything to try. If they lose, they learn from the experience, they continue to train, and try harder to win next time.

So then, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us, too, put aside every impediment – that is, the sin which easily hampers our forward movement – and keep running with endurance in the contest set before us, [Messianic Jews/Hebrews 12:1]

In our relationship with God, our focus is in doing all we can to live in the light as He is in the light. We pursue God, His Kingdom, and His righteousness as much as we can. We cannot achieve holiness on our own power, for we need the Spirit for that, but it is always our goal. When we go on a journey, our focus is on reaching our destination. Anything which keeps us from our goal becomes unimportant and a burden, regardless of how enjoyable or valuable they were previously.

In a world where we are surrounded by sin, God's people have to make the choice to pursue righteousness. We cannot let Ha Satan get us to justify sin with sin, and get caught up in a cycle which ends in death.

*... if the wicked person restores pledged property and returns what he stole, so that he lives by the laws that give life and does not commit evil deeds; then he will live, he will not die.
[Yezech'kel/Ezekiel 33:15]*

You might think it is too late or too difficult to make the choices that put your life on the road to righteousness. It just takes choosing this day whom you will put your trust. The Holy Spirit is with us to give us the guidance and strength to stand up against the Adversary and uphold God's ways.

We have another example of breaking the chain of sin in our parsha, with the story of Ya'akov returning home to his brother, who he had wronged so much years earlier. Surely Esav would be angry and seek to have revenge for the stolen birthright and blessing.

Ya'akov raised his eyes and looked out; and there was `Esav coming, and four hundred men with him. So Ya'akov divided the children between Le'ah, Rachel and the two slave-girls, putting the slave-girls and their children first, Le'ah and her children second, and Rachel and Yosef last. Then he himself passed on ahead of them and prostrated himself on the ground seven

times before approaching his brother. `Esav ran to meet him, hugged him, threw his arms around his neck and kissed him; and they wept. [B'reshet 33:1-4]

What is ironic is that Ya'akov, the chosen one of God is the one living in fear of his brother, rather than trusting in God. Esav, the one "hated" by God is the one who shows forgiveness. In one way or another, God did a work in his heart to enable him to forgive his brother, and thus break the chain of sin between them. If this had not happened, the results could have been devastating, not only for Ya'akov and his family, but the whole history of Isra'el. Here again, we see how our choices can effect much more than we may think. With this story of forgiveness in mind, let me bring you back to the New Covenant.

But God demonstrates his own love for us in that the Messiah died on our behalf while we were still sinners. [Romans 5:8]

After we have wronged God, if we come to Him in repentance and humility, He is faithful to forgive us from sin, and bring us to Himself as a son or daughter of the King. Thus, God also breaks the chain of sin, by doing what was in His power to take us out of our sin and into His Kingdom. He could have left us to our own ways which lead to death, but by his grace he saved us instead.

Whether a prodigal son or pompous brother, when the chain of sin is broken, there is a responsibility to respond in like kind. As God forgives us, we forgive others. As we experience love, we give love back.

Also, don't take seriously every word spoken, such as when you hear your servant speaking badly of you; because often, as you yourself know, you have spoken badly of others. [Kohelet/Ecclesiastes 7:21-22]

One of the keys to being able to break chains of sin which involve other people is to know that we are not perfect either. It is likely that as others have sinned against us, we have sinned against others. We must seek God's face and focus on His Word to have the humility and the wisdom necessary to do what is right at the right times to people who need it the most. The effects of our righteous deeds will go far beyond what we know.