
The Aura of Torah

*A Kabbalistic-Hasidic Commentary
to the Weekly Readings*

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[24] How to Love God

"Because he [Shechem] took delight in Jacob's daughter."

Genesis 34:19

CONTEXT

One day, while Jacob and his family are camped near the town of Shechem, his daughter, Dinah, goes out to visit friends. A young man from the town, also called Shechem, son of the town's chief, sees her, wants her, and sleeps with her. Is it rape or consensual? Whatever the case, it is an affront to the honor of Jacob and his family. Shechem loves Dinah. He delegates his father, Hamor, to ask Jacob for her hand in marriage. Jacob agrees, on condition that all the men of the town of Shechem are circumcised. Hamor and Shechem agree to the condition, and persuade their fellow townsmen to agree too. However, two of Dinah's brothers, Simeon and Levi, are very unhappy. In revenge for their sister's defilement, they attack Shechem, killing all the men while they are recovering from their operations. Jacob is very angry, and he leads his family to Bethel in a successful effort to avoid any reprisals. What does this horrific story have to teach us?

Hayyim of Kosov followed in the footsteps of his father and grandfather to become rabbi of the town of Kosov and leader of the Hasidic community there.

It says in the Midrash Rabbah:

"The Holy One loves Israel with three expressions of love: attachment, desire, and delight. Attachment: 'But you are attached to the Eternal your God' [Deuteronomy 4:4]. Desire: 'the Eternal did not desire you . . . because you were more in number than any people' [Deuteronomy 7:7]. Delight: 'And all nations shall call you happy; for you shall be a delightful land' [Malachi 3:12]."

From this passage we may learn how to serve the Blessed One with attachment, desire, and delight, and to give our soul for the Blessed One, like that wicked man [Shechem] gave his soul for his lust.

Hayyim ben Menachem Mendel of Kosov (1795–1844), *Torat Hayyim* [The Torah of life] (Ordea, Rumania: 1927), pp. 9–10

NOTE

In the Midrash Rabbah. *Bereshit Rabbah* 80:7. In the continuation not quoted here, the midrash goes on to demonstrate how the same qualities that characterize God's love for Israel are also present in Shechem's love for Dinah. Hayyim of Kosov, however, turns the midrash on its head. The distinguishing characteristics of God's love for Israel, he believes, are a recipe for the love we should have for God.

COMMENT

Under the name of ambition, Western society fosters lust: lust for power, lust for material goods, lust for sex without consequences. While ambition may be good if not turned into an idol, lust only destroys. It destroys the object of the lust and the one who lusts. And often others are destroyed in the process. But what would happen if we could apply that level of commitment and emotion that we use in support of our lust to the love God? The love of God should bring in its wake not fanaticism and intolerance, but humility and the acceptance of others. Ambition would then be directed toward real self-improvement and the benefit of all members of society and the earth itself.