

Hashtag Vayishlach

JACOB'S wrestling with the angel, his reconciliation with his brother Esau and the bestowing of his new name Israel are the renowned themes of this week's parasha, Vayishlach. However, the parasha also includes a lesser-known story – the rape of Jacob's daughter, Dinah.

The story is complex. Dinah was Jacob and Leah's daughter and went to visit the women of Shechem (where Jacob had earlier pitched his tent and bought some land). Shechem, the local chieftain's son, "took her and lay with her and humbled her".

At first, while this is terrifying and horrific, it does not seem so complex – but reality has a way of complicating things. On the one hand, straight after this, Shechem "became deeply attached to Dinah, daughter of Jacob; he loved her and appealed to her emotions". So what began as an act of violent sexual assault is immediately



positioned as an expression of love.

On the other hand, the Torah does not shirk from the fact that Dinah was a victim of rape and did not consent to the initial act. The verb used to describe what the JPS chumash describes as "humbled", and the Artscroll describes as "violated", is *vayaneha*. In modern Hebrew this translates as torture. There is no doubt, especially given the subsequent reaction of her family (her own reaction is surprisingly unarticulated), that the act was both awful and non-consensual.

The story is particularly apt when we consider the contemporary #metoo movement that is challenging abuses of power in this and other ways. And how apt, also, is the reaction, locally and globally,

to the outrages many women and indeed some men suffer on a daily basis. This month we saw Google staff walking out of their offices throughout the world in response to what they deemed to be inadequate responses to inappropriate and violating sexual misconduct. In Hollywood there is a reckoning and in workplaces throughout the world there is change in the air.

So what was the reaction in Vayishlach?

Well the plot thickens first, before we see the reaction. Hamor (Shechem's father) asked Jacob for Dinah's hand in marriage for his son – and indeed for his entire people to intermarry with Jacob's. Such was Shechem's desire for the marriage (and either his love for Dinah, or his fear of the alternative) that he offered "whatever you tell me – I will give. Inflate exceedingly upon me the marriage settlement and gifts and I will give whatever you tell me."

The reaction of Jacob's family was to "deceitfully" consent to the marriage, on the condition that all of Shechem's men were circumcised. This was immediately agreed to and "on the third day, when they were in pain, two of Jacob's sons Simeon and Levi (Dinah's brothers) each took his sword and they came upon the city and killed every male ... all their wealth, all their children and wives they took captive". (Bereshit 34:25-29).

This act of mass murder, pillage and enslavement by Simeon and Levi was quite extreme – but in line with their personalities. Other sections of the Torah contextualise their inclinations. On his deathbed, for example, Jacob cursed Simeon and Levi's anger. Many generations later, after the incident of the Golden Calf, it was the tribe of Levi who killed the idolaters. Finally, under Joshua's leadership when the land of Israel

was settled, Simeon and Levi were allocated areas on different sides of the country so that they could not regroup to fight.

The rabbis have argued as to whether Simeon and Levi's response to the sexual assault of their sister was justified.

Regardless of whether the brothers' reaction was proportionate, the lessons for the #metoo era are clear. Firstly, inappropriate behaviour should always be challenged, and it should not just be challenged in private.

Secondly, crimes must never be swept under the carpet. Unlike in biblical times before Matan Torah (the receiving of the Torah), the vulnerable are now communally protected within a legal framework and the sanction is similarly legislated and (one hopes) proportionate.

Jeremy Stowe-Lindner is principal of Bialik College and a teacher of history and philosophy.