

City Of Shechem - Yosef's Reunion with His brothers
Parshas Vayeishev
by Rabbi Eliyahu Kirsh

In Bereishis Chapter 37 we read of the brothers selling Yosef into Mitzrayim. It is intriguing that the Torah tells us explicitly that the brothers were pasturing their sheep in Shechem and it was to this place that Yaakov sent Yosef to. We actually hear of Shechem in the previous parsha when Yaakov purchases the land there that he pitched his tents. So Yaakov already had a claim to this piece of land. In verse 14 Rashi tells us that Shechem was a place set aside for punishment. It was here that Dinah was abducted as we read about in the previous parsha. It was also here that the kingdom of Dovid Hamelech split. We are told in Melachim I 12:1 that Rechavam, King Shlomo's son came here to assert his throne after his father's death. From this assertion, the events that led to the breaking away of the northern tribes of Eretz Yisroel began. So there is a symbolism of Shechem with the breakup of the dynasty of Dovid Hamelech and a united Am Yisroel.

The Alshich also emphasizes the connection of all of these events. It was the place where Dinah was taken prisoner, the brothers killed all of the city's inhabitants and ultimately the major breakaway from the dynasty of Dovid took place here. However, we should not think that the place itself has some magic evil spell to it. My Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Dovid Feinstein, Shlita, explains that just as with people we say good things happen through a good party and the converse, the same idea applies to places. In other words, since an atrocious event such as Dinah's outrage took place there, it makes the place more likely in the future to be a place of punishment.

The Chizkuni, interestingly, adds the point that it was dangerous for Yosef and the brothers to be in this place since his brothers, Shimon and Levi, killed all of the city's inhabitants. The Ohr Hachayim explains that Yosef's mission was only till he reached Shechem. His father only sent him there because he knew with Ruach Hakodes that something bad would happen to Yosef and did not want him to pursue the task any further. Yosef, however, thought his father only mentioned Shechem as a point of reference of where he may find his brothers. Therefore, even when his brothers were not in Shechem, he continued on his mission. We see that ultimately Hashem's plan was fulfilled.

The Netziv points out in Bereishis 33:18 in Parshas Vayishlach that the city was only called Shechem after the city was built there. In Avraham's time,

the Torah refers to the place as *Makom Shechem*, the place of Shechem. This was to signify the city had not been built yet.

The Bais Aharon of Stohlin points out that Shechem also means gift. Yaakov used this expression when he was telling Yosef that he gave him *Shechem achad*, an additional gift to him personally over his brothers. With this thought in mind, perhaps we can understand Shechem in another way. At the very end of Sefer Yehoshua 24:32 we are told about Yosef's burial in Eretz Yisroel. After Am Yisroel has finally entered the Promised Land under the leadership of Yehoshua, the Navi makes sure we are told about Yosef's interment in the portion of land Yaakov specifically gave him as a gift. Was the gift just the piece of land? Perhaps it was much more. Shechem was the place where Yosef recited the words, 'I seek my brothers'. It is true that for a good portion of his life there was strife and tension. We even see that after Yaakov's death, Yosef had to reassure his brothers he would not take revenge. But in the end, Yosef's final resting place was the very place he stated how he wanted to be united with his brothers. Perhaps being buried there was the greatest gift of all.