

***AND DINAH THE DAUGHTER OF LEAH WENT OUT:
THE MEANING OF YATZ'ANIT IN RASHI'S COMMENTARY***

GILAD J. GEVARYAHU

On the verse *and Dinah the daughter of Leah went out* (Gen. 34:1), Rashi says:

The daughter of Leah, and not the daughter of Jacob; because of her *yetzi'ata* [going out], she is called the daughter of Leah for she too was a *yatz'anit*. As it is said "and Leah went out towards him" (and on her they coined the parable like mother like daughter).¹

Why does Rashi quote this seemingly uncomplimentary midrash classifying Dinah and Leah both as *yatz'aniyot*? And furthermore, how does Rashi understand the term *yatz'anit*? Does he understand it to mean someone who is merely restless, or does he understand it to mean a woman who is leaving her home unaccompanied, thereby risking a sexual encounter?

Rashi uses the term *yatz'anit* only twice in his commentary on the Torah, once in this verse, and once in his commentary on Genesis 1:28. That verse reads: *And God blessed them; and God said to them 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill up the land and conquer it.'* Rashi says of *and conquer it*:

The word "and conquer it" is written without the letter *vav*² to teach you that the male conquers the female so that she will not be a *yatz'anit*. Furthermore, it comes to teach you that the man who conquers is commanded to be fruitful and multiply, as opposed to the woman.

Rashi uses the term *yatz'anit* in this context to mean a lack of restraint. As the entire verse is dealing with procreation, this term is also given a sexual connotation. Therefore, this commentary implies that it is imperative for the husband or family to restrain the female from becoming a *yatz'anit*, and having sexual relationships with other men. Rashi's source for this is *Bereshit Rabba*

Gilad J. Gevaryahu lives in Merion Station, Pennsylvania. He has written previously for Jewish Bible Quarterly, and for Beit Miqra, Judaism, and other publications. Chaim Gevaryahu, the grandson of the late Haim Gevaryahu, who founded Jewish Bible Quarterly, helped to render this article into English.

(8:12), which says:

. . . "and conquer it" [without the letter "vav" in the Hebrew] the man conquers his wife so that she will not go out to the market, for every woman who goes to the market is destined to meet with an accident. How do we know this? From Dinah as it is written *and Dinah went out*, and in the end she is met with an accident as it is says *And Shechem saw her*.

From this it is clear that according to Rashi the term *yatz'anit* means a woman who goes out to the market unprotected and might accidentally end up in an extramarital sexual relationship. However, she clearly is not labeled as a prostitute. I disagree with Ruhama Weiss, who translates "*yatz'anit bat yatz'anit*" as "*zona bat zona* [prostitute the daughter of a prostitute]."³ Weiss believes that Hazal (and Rashi) understood *yatz'anit* to mean a prostitute, which is its modern Hebrew meaning. But this is far from what Hazal and Rashi meant it to be.

Now that we understand what Rashi meant by *yatz'anit*, we arrive at a new question: What drove Rashi to use this specific midrashic interpretation here? Bereshit Rabba contains two midrashim which elucidate this facet of Leah's character. The first midrash states: "Everybody was mocking her and telling her 'this Leah, her inner and her outer [personality] are not the same' – she looks as if she is righteous but she is not. If she would have been righteous, she would not have deceived her sister" (71:2). The second midrash is on the verse, *And Jacob came from the field in the evening, and Leah went out to meet him, and said 'You must come in to me; for I have surely hired you with my son's mandrakes.'* *And he lay with her that night* (Gen. 30:16). The midrash in Bereshit Rabba (80:1) comments: *and Leah went out to meet him*, she went to meet him adorned like a prostitute. Therefore it says also *and Dinah the daughter of Leah went out* (Gen. 34:1).

Rashi needs to confront several midrashim that are uncomplimentary to Leah. He is forced to say that Leah had a part both in her wedding-day switch with Rachel and in the misbehavior of her daughter Dinah. Rashi feels that he needs to convey the message that children do as their parents do. As it says in the Talmud (Sukah 56b): "The words of a child in the market come either from his father or his mother," or "The deeds of the parents are a guide to their children." Hazal were not comfortable with Leah's aggressive behavior in buying a night's

sleep with her husband, and went as far as comparing it to harlotry.

Rashi and his contemporaries found no issue with depicting the Matriarchs as they were depicted by Hazal, both good and bad. It is only in our generation, where many over-emphasize the perfection of our forefathers and foremothers to the point of veneration, that these comments of Rashi become problematic.

Among three translations of this Rashi commentary:

1. M. Rosenbaum and A.M. Silberman translate *yatz'anit* by the phrase "and she also was a *yatz'anit*" as "was fond of going out."⁴
2. Abraham Ben Isaiah and Benjamin Sharfman (*The Pentateuch with Rashi commentary*) translates it as "one who goes out."⁵
3. Yisrael Isser Zvi Herczeg (Artscroll) translates it as "one who would go out."⁶

These translations neutralize Rashi's meaning of the word *yatz'anit*. But when this very same word appears in the context of *Be fruitful and multiply*, they all correctly translate it as "gadabout." A "gadabout" is defined as one who runs wild, or one whose behavior is uncontrolled. The translators of Rashi did not want to blemish the character of Leah, and therefore toned down their translations of *yatz'anit*, and in the process lost its intended meaning. These translators have whitewashed Leah, making Rashi's comment meaningless. Ruhama Weiss is equally incorrect, in going to the other extreme by interpreting Hazal's word *yatz'anit* to mean "a harlot."

NOTES

1. While it is conceivable that the material contained within the parentheses is post-Rashi, it was included in the critical editions of Berliner and Chavel because it appears in early manuscripts.
2. The word "*Vekhibshuha*" appears without the letter "vav" as if it is male and singular. This anomaly serves as the basis for this midrash.
3. "*Yatz'anit Bat Yatz'anit – The Fear and the Fantasy*" [Hebrew], *Yediot Aharonot*, November 16, 2007.
4. M. Rosenbaum and A.M. Silberman, *The Pentateuch with Targum Onkelos, Haphtarot, Prayers for Sabbath and Rashi's Commentary* (London: Shapiro Vallentine, 1946).
5. Abraham Ben Isaiah and Benjamin Sharfman, *The Pentateuch with Rashi's Commentary: a Linear Translation Into English* (Brooklyn: S.S.& R. Publishing, 1949).
6. Yisrael Herczeg *The Torah with Rashi's Commentary, Translated, Annotated and Elucidated* (New York: Artscroll, 1995).

1
2
4
5
6