

There are parts of the Torah that are beautiful and inspiring and there are other parts that will challenge us and we find incredibly problematic. One such section of Torah is found this week, as we read the story of the “Ravaging/Rape of Dinah.” For those who understand the encounter between Shechem and Dinah as a rape, that is certainly a painful text to read. For those who interpret the encounter between Shechem and Dinah as not a rape, the future slaughtering of all of the men of the city by Dinah’s brothers becomes a very problematic response. Either way, the reading of this section will challenge all who encounter it.

For most of our lives, rabbis and others will have chosen to focus on other parts of the portion whether because it wasn’t age appropriate to address it or because it is so hard to read. My stance, however, is that we specifically have to read it because it’s hard and because we will struggle with it. All of Torah is still Torah and must be studied deeply and reckoned with. We must push back when we disagree or find new meanings in a text that doesn’t fully work for us. But the only way to do that is by reading it and forcing ourselves to engage with its problematic nature.

Just as we must look at the parts that are hard, problematic, and those with which we struggle, we must do the same in our world as well. Those problems exist whether we choose to look at them or not. But it is only by engaging with them that we can fix them.

May we never shy away from challenging texts and challenging realities and may we have the strength to do what is hard to repair them on this Shabbat and moving forward.