



Parshat Toldot

For the week ending 4 Kislev 5760
12 & 13 November 1999

Overview

After 20 years of marriage, Yitzchak’s prayers are answered and Rivka conceives twins. The pregnancy is extremely painful. Hashem reveals to Rivka that the suffering is a microcosmic prelude to the world-wide conflict that will rage between the two great nations descended from these twins — Rome and Israel. Esav is born, and then Yaakov holding on to Esav’s heel. They grow, and Esav becomes a hunter, a man of the physical world, whereas Yaakov sits in the tents of Torah developing his soul. On the day of their grandfather Avraham’s funeral, Yaakov is cooking lentils, the traditional mourner’s meal. Esav rushes in, ravenous from a hard day’s hunting, and sells his birthright (and its concomitant spiritual responsibilities) for a bowl of lentils, demonstrating his unworthiness for the position of firstborn. A famine strikes Canaan and Yitzchak thinks to escape to Egypt; but Hashem tells him that because he was bound as a sacrifice, he has become holy and must remain in the Holy Land. He relocates to Gerar in the land of the Plishtim, where, to protect Rivka, he has to say she is his sister. The Plishtim grow jealous of Yitzchak when he becomes immensely wealthy, and Avimelech the king asks him to leave. Yitzchak re-digs three wells dug by his father, prophetically alluding to the three future Temples. Avimelech, seeing that Yitzchak is blessed by G-d, makes a treaty with him. When Yitzchak senses his end approaching, he summons Esav to give him his blessings. Rivka, acting on a prophetic command that the blessings must go to Yaakov, arranges for Yaakov to impersonate Esav and receive the blessings. When Esav in frustration reveals to his father that Yaakov has bought the birthright, Yitzchak realizes that the birthright has been bestowed correctly on Yaakov and confirms the blessings he has given Yaakov. Esav vows to kill Yaakov, so Rivka sends Yaakov to her brother Lavan where he may find a suitable wife.

Insights

THE SEVENTH WELL

“Yitzchak’s servants came and reported to him regarding the well they had dug, saying, ‘We found water!’ And he called it Shiva (Seven)...” (Bereishet 26:32)”

Of the three patriarchs of the Jewish People, Yitzchak must be the most enigmatic. The Torah depicts Yitzchak in a passive role: Things are done to him rather than him doing things. In his youth, he is brought up by his father Avraham as an offering. In his old age, he is tricked by his son Yaakov into giving him the blessing of the firstborn. He is the only patriarch who never leaves the Land of Israel. Practically the only time that Torah describes him in an active role is when he digs wells. What is the significance of digging wells?

Most of the time, we live in a world of unreality, unaware negligently or willfully of what life is really about. We live on a superficial plane. Once in a while, reality confronts us. A birth. A death. A narrow escape. Yom Kippur. Something happens to rouse us from our sleepwalking.

Inside of all of us there is a place of serenity, of truth. The seventh well. A place that we don’t make contact with very often; a place which is the deepest well of our being. The seventh well. Just like Shabbat is the seventh day, the deepest root of time, so inside us all is the seventh well, the deepest root of the soul.

Avraham’s tent was open to the world. He was the master of going out to people and bringing them close to G-d. The master of outreach. Yitzchak was the master of in-reach. He plumbed the depths of the soul, paving the way for all who would follow.

Sources: *The Seventh Well* - Rabbi Menachem Nissel

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THE DEAL

Yaakov's destiny has been formed. His descendants must uphold the entire Torah — all 613 *mitzvot*. They must live their lives as G-d's holy nation, subjugating their own will to that of their Creator. This is an opportunity to reach the most sublime spiritual heights, but opportunity is always accompanied by responsibility. "Become my holy nation," says G-d, "and all of the reward of this world and the next world will be yours; deviate from this path and I will 'turn away My face' from you."

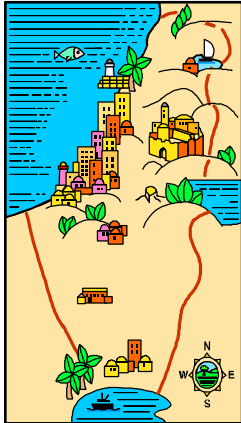
The prophet Malachi relates this message to the Jewish people. It is precisely because G-d loves you that He has given you this deal. Opportunity and responsibility — there are great rewards for you to earn but only if you answer to your calling.

JUST WORDS?

The Torah is replete with lessons about the power of speech. Indeed, many of the *mitzvot* are performed solely by speaking. For example, the Torah commands a person to make a declaration of thanks when bringing the first fruits to the Temple. This declaration is a separate *mitzvah* with equal status to the actual "action-*mitzvah*" of bringing the fruit to the Temple. We tend to think that actions speak louder than words, but in reality the mouth is the loudspeaker of the mind. The mouth expresses a person's deepest thoughts and feelings. Therefore, words are often just as powerful as actions. The prophet Malachi warns parents and community leaders that a few derisive words about the Temple service pollute the minds of the young and impressionable.

LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael



EILAT

This, the name of the most southerly settlement in Israel, appears several times in *Tanach*. It is mentioned (*Devarim 2:8*) as one of the stations of Israel's journey from Egypt to *Eretz Yisrael*. It appears again as a geographical designation for the adjoining port of Etzion Gever where King Solomon's navy carried on commerce with a neighboring country (*Melachim I 9:26*) and again in connection with King Yehoshafat's ill-fated attempt to send ships to Ophir for gold (*Melachim I 22:49*).

Modern Eilat serves as the country's Red Sea port and has developed into a town with permanent residents. Its main claim to fame, however, is as a popular tourist attraction both for Israelis and visitors from abroad.