

## Parshat Toldot: Well's Weltanschauung

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles  
Summary by Channie Koplowitz-Stein

When Yitzchak faced famine in Israel, he went to the land of the *Plishtim*. Seeking water, Yitzchak digs up the wells his father Avraham dug which were stopped up by the Plishtim, naming them the same names Avraham gave. King Avimelech orders Yitzchak to leave and he moves off but continues to dig wells. The first two, *Aisek* and *Sitna*, become flash points for further quarrels with the Plishtim. Finally, with the third well, Yitzchak is left alone, and he calls this well *Rehovot*/spacious expanses. Yitzchak and Avimelech now reinstitute the treaty first written between Avimelech and Avraham. Avimelech and Yitzchak swear to maintain peace between them, and Yitzchak serves Avimelech a meal. In commemoration of this treaty, Yitzchak calls the place *Be'er Sheva*, the Well of the Oath.

This episode is described in such detail that we must find the deeper meaning. As the *Midrash* explained, the Plishtim rationalized that the wells presented a danger. With water so scarce, thieves might be attracted here, or an invading army might use these wells to sustain their army. It was a practical necessity to stop them up. But, as the Seforno points out, this was just a tactic to harm Yitzchak.

*Ma'aseh Rokem* quotes the Vilna Gaon that the Plishtim always wanted to usurp the land of *Bnei Yisroel*. Ownership is established by setting up a monarchy. The battles between *Bnei Yisroel* and Plishtim was at its core the battle of good against evil. Therefore, as soon as Avraham Avinu died, the Plishtim stopped up the wells, desiring to erase any influence Avraham and his morality may have had.

However, the Plishtim noticed that while Avraham resided with them, he brought blessing and when they stopped up the wells, these blessings stopped. That's when they

came to Yitzchak asking to make peace with him. This admission was, in essence, a confession that the land actually belonged to the *avot*, and therefore Yitzchak reinstituted the covenant between them.

When Avraham dug the wells, he named each one, incorporating the name of Hashem, writes *Haktav Vehakabalah*. *Talmido Beyodo* explains that in ancient times, the area around a well often served as the town square. Including God in its name would invariably bring people to an awareness of God. Further, Avraham probably also continued his acts of *chesed*, supplying people with water and food. These ad hoc kiruv centers closed with Avraham's death, and the Plishtim didn't want them to remain a source of socialization and further *kiruv*.

But Yitzchak wanted to continue his father's legacy. He starts by reopening his father's original wells and maintaining the names Avraham had given them. Yitzchak also started digging wells of his own. The *Plishtim* did not easily give in. They created laws obstructing Yitzchak's endeavors. Metaphorically, water represents Torah, and the *Plishtim* would not let Torah flow unimpeded. Rabbi Kram suggests that each of us has opportunities to quietly spread Torah principles to the public. For example, we can leave Jewish themed books or magazines in a doctor's waiting room.

*Shiurei Harav* explains that while Avraham's overriding quality was *chesed* and Yitzchak's was *gevurah*, each quality needed to be tempered by the other. Therefore, Avraham's tests involved overcoming his natural feelings of *chesed* to tap into an inner fortitude, most notably with Akeidat Yitzchak. On the other hand, Yitzchak's inner strength was tested with social interaction. Would he continue the

chesed of offering food and drink to people around his well? Would he also draw souls to Hashem through *chesed*?

Yanki Tauber writes, Avraham's journey took him outward, while Yitzchak's journey was inward, digging ever more deeply into his selfless core. When Avraham dug the wells, his pure and sacred love flowed from them and influenced the *Plishtim*. After his death, the *Plishtim* stopped up those wells, letting love run rampant without restraint. When Yitzchak re-dug those wells, he redeemed Avraham's legacy of love, a love that now was disciplined, flowing from the fear of Heaven. Rabbi Lopiansky explains, Yitzchak's mission was to dig out the mockery that the *Plishtim* used to stop up Avraham's messages and replace it with the absolute awe and knowledge of Hashem.

But there is a more profound understanding to the purpose of these wells, continues Rabbi Belsky. Before Hashem created the world itself, His presence hovered over the primordial waters. These wells are meant to connect us again to Hashem's presence, to dig down to the wellsprings below that conceal His presence. The water libations in the *Beit Hamikdash* connected us to these waters, and, when *Moshiach* comes, we will again be connected.

The struggle is not meant to depress us, but rather to bring us joy in the growth process, for Yitzchak itself means joyous laughter, writes Rabbi Kluger. Each of us, like our ancestor Yitzchak is a field and a mini *Beit Hamikdash*. We are tasked with working on connecting the waters from above to the waters below, to bring others to serve Hashem, and hasten the building of the third *Beit Hamikdash*, speedily, in our day.



## The Gift of Shabbos

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller-Gottlieb

The *mitzvah* of *Shabbat* is associated with *zecher l'yetziat Mitzrayim* and its message was that Hashem is constant and can change the forces of nature at will and cares about each individual. So too the message of *Shabbat* is that reality is only a reflection of Hashem putting us into this world so that we can make something of ourselves. It's about His creativity and willingness to be there for us. We stop our activities to make room for Him.

When we left *Mitzrayim*, we experienced the miracle of *kriat Yam Suf* and then Amalek attacked. They wanted to prove their strength and in the interim they pulled us down. The *Sefas Emes* says the *tikun* took place when Yitro, who was considered a distinguished leader, came to the desert. He heard about the miracles, recognized the omnipotence of Hashem and became a Jew. In that way, he was able to recreate the balance that Amalek had destroyed. Without that we couldn't have received the 10 commandments. The *luchot* were given on *Shabbat* to convey the message that Hashem created the world for

every Jew. The Kotzker Rebbe used to say - Every person should know that where they are standing is the holiest place, this moment is the holiest moment and they are the holiest person. We need *Shabbat* to bring that home to us.

On *Shabbat* two things happen, we let go of our desire to control and make room for Hashem through the *mitzvot* of the day. It says, "*Ner Hashem nishmat adam*- Hashem's candle is the human soul." He created everything for the sake of man so that he could ascend and bring light down into this world. On *Shabbat* we tap into that power. The custom is to light two candles representing *zocheh* and *shomer*. We have to remember that *Shabbat* isn't just time out, but a way to remind us that our reality is really Hashem expressing His will and love for us.

The two candles parallel *binah* and *malchut*. *Binah* is the ability to focus in on the wisdom of Hashem's world and His encompassing presence. *Malchut* is surrendering control and accepting Hashem's kingship. It's not about

giving up something to keep *Shabbat* but rather taking what He gives us and acknowledging it, so that the world we live in has meaning.

We're involved in a war against a nation on the opposite spectrum. Their cruelty, their inability to see the soul as Hashem's flame, as every life being precious and every moment having meaning, is absolute. Where did this come from? Eisav had an agenda, not only to have control over the world physically, but to create ideologies. So, he married Yishmael's daughter. This means that in our last exile we have the aggressive controlling conquest-oriented nature of Eisav combined with the beastly nature of Yishmael. Our weapon against this is lighting *Shabbat* candles. We rise above this by recognizing that Hashem created the world for a purpose. We use *binah* to look at reality and ask ourselves- Who shall I be and who shall I let reality make me? Keeping *Shabbat* with *simcha* and *malchut* is giving Hashem primacy in our lives. In this merit, may we be *zocheh* to *Mashiach* and the *yom shekulo Shabbat*.

## Tehillim 128 A Life Well Lived

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Dr. Esther Shkop

Mizmor 128 is one of the *shir hamaalot* that was recited on the 15 steps leading up to the azarah. At each landing, the *leviim* would sing one chapter. "A song of ascents. Praiseworthy is every man who fears the Lord, who walks in His ways." *Ashrei* connotes a sense of contentment or a laudable great achievement which is how one who fears Hashem is portrayed. Moshe Rabbeinu, prior to his death, gave us an understanding of what this might mean. "Now Israel what is it that Hashem...asks of you to fear Hashem... to go in all his ways, to love Him and serve Him...for your own good." *L'yirah et Hashem* is to live in His presence. To be in awe of Hashem is to want to be like Him, to know that I was created in His image and to emulate His *middot*. Loving Hashem is also expressed in the manner in which we reach out to another Jew and empathize with him and try to help him, expecting nothing in return.

"If you eat the toil of your hands, you are praiseworthy, and it is good for you." Some

say the word *ki* can mean *achen*-indeed. You will indeed see the fruits of your labor. Others explain this verse- How happy and good it is never to need to rely on another human's largesse and to be your own provider. Some say *ki* can be translated as *rak*-only. Work only enough so that you have enough to live on, don't accumulate wealth for others. This connects to the next verse. "Your wife will be as a fruitful vine in the innermost parts of your house; your sons will be like olive shoots around your table." A *bustan* was a vine that would grow on a trellis that would provide not only fruit, but beautiful greenery and shade from the hot sun. To some this evokes the image of a wife who shelters and protects the home. She is modest, at the corner of her home.

Olive trees give off shoots from its roots that grow as a circle around the big mother olive tree. Eventually the farmer transplants them a bit farther. But they begin to grow near the mother. The home is seen as that mother tree from which the saplings get their initial

nourishment until they can be sent off. Olives produce oil that we use to illuminate our homes and represent wisdom and aesthetic beauty. *Yitzhar* goes to the next level, it's not just bread, but bread dipped in oil which makes it richer and more flavorful. The center of man's joy is the primacy of the nuclear family, of eating the fruits of your own labor and sharing it with your wife and children around your table. This is seen as the ultimate achievement and perhaps the greatest gift that can be given to someone who fears Hashem. The ability to provide for yourself, to have a family around your own table is not to be taken for granted. It doesn't depend on your efforts. It's a *bracha* from Hashem.

The Meiri says the purpose of this *mizmor* is to teach us this- that without divine assistance all of a person's efforts are in vain. One who fears Hashem and tries to earn his livelihood with his own hands and devotes his free moments to *avodat Hashem*, will enjoy blessing.