

Nature in the Parasha

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Parashat Toldot – Re-digging the Wells of Tradition

Parashat Toldot tells the story of Yitzchak. Yitzchak's life is linked deeply to the concept of wells from the time when Rivkah became his wife on account of her kindness at the well. Yitzchak was perpetually involved in re-digging his father's wells, removing the dirt and pebbles with which the Plishtim had blocked them. The Hebrew word for wells is בְּאֵרוֹת *b'erot*. I hope this word is familiar to you, as I chose to include it in the name for our Midrasha. Here at B'erot women from all over the world return to continue Yitzchak's work of re-digging the wells of tradition. We had to dig through a lot of dirt, pebbles and mud on our path in order to return to the authentic Torah way. The digging continues until we reach the "well of living waters" and connect with the very essence of our soul. Our full name is B'erot Bat Ayin, the latter part, which is the name of our village, means wellspring. Together B'erot Bat Ayin symbolizes the merging of the well, which needs to be dug from below, by our own efforts, to reach the depth, with the wellspring, which flows by itself, as a gift from Above. The aspect of בְּאֵרוֹת *b'erot* – the wells requires that we exert ourselves to dig deeply within our traditions and within ourselves, to discover the hidden Torah and bring it up to the surface. We use the plural form בְּאֵרוֹת *b'erot* – wells, rather than the singular בְּאֵר *b'er*, for just as all wells ultimately receive their water from one fountain, similarly, the Torah has seventy facets, all of which derive from the same Source.

Yitzchak's Wells in the Torah

"Yitzchak dug anew the wells of water, which had been dug in the days of Avraham his father; for the Pelishtim had stopped them up after the death of Avraham. He gave them the same names that his father had given them. When Yitzchak's servants dug in the valley, they found there a well of spring water. The herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Yitzchak's herdsmen, saying, 'the water is ours.' He called the name of the well Esek; because they contended with him. And when they dug another well, they disputed over that one also; so he named it Sitnah. He moved from there, and dug another well; and they did not quarrel over that one, so he called it Rechovot, saying, now Hashem has granted us ample space for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land" (*Bereishit* 26:18-22).

Digging the Wells of the Temple of Jerusalem

Why does Scripture speak in length about the matter of the well? According to the simple meaning, it does not honor Yitzchak to go into such detail about how his well digging. Only by digging below the surface of the story can we discover how the wells contain a secret matter about the future to come. The wellspring of living water alludes to the house of G-d, which the children of Yitzchak will build. This metaphor for the Temple, is also mentioned in the prophets, "Because they have forsaken Hashem, the fountain of living waters" (*Yirmeyahu* 17:13). The first well was called עֵשֶׂק *Esek* alluding to the first Temple, where the Babylonians הִתְעַשְׂקוּ *hitasku* – contended with us, waged many wars, and made us into several divisions, prior to destroying our Temple. The second well was called שִׁטְנָה *Sitnah* – hatred, a worse name than the first. This refers to the second Temple, which was called in the name of hatred,

as it states about it, "In the beginning of the kingdom of Ahasverus they wrote *שִׂטְנָה/Sitnah* – hatred against the inhabitants of Yehuda and Yerushalayim (*Ezra* 4:6). The nations were perpetually full of hatred for us until they finally destroyed the second Temple, and exiled us into a bitter exile. The third well, which Yitzchak called *רְחֹבֹת/Rechovot* – expansiveness, refers to the third Temple, may it be built speedily in our days! The building of the third and final Temple will take place without strife and contention. G-d will then expand *יָרְחִיב/yarchiv* our borders as it states regarding the future to come, "For Hashem, your G-d will expand your border, as He has sworn to your fathers..." (*Devarim* 19:8). It, moreover, states in regards to the third Temple "and the side chambers were expanded *וַיִּרְחַבָּהּ / v'rachava* as one circled higher and higher" (*Yechezkiel* 41:7), (Ramban). When there is peace and unity the space feels wider. Then we will be able to multiply more, while still feel as if we have more space (*Kli Yakar*). Today, sadly, we still suffer the tail end of the period of "*Sitnah* – hatred against the inhabitants of Yehuda and Yerushalayim." The Plishtim of our time, who bear a similar name, are certainly trying to block our wellspring on the Temple mount by stopping us from praying there with their unruly riots. May we continue to walk in Yitzchak's footsteps and have courage to remove their rubble, dirt and pebbles, with which they block our well!

Rediscovering the Well of Living Waters Within

Yitzchak's work was to dig wells in order to reveal the living waters that exists under the ground, and to raise it up. The goal is not to make waters flow into the wells from another source; but only to reveal the living waters, which is found within the wells themselves. For in truth these wells retain by themselves the living waters, yet, they are covered up by dirt, mud and pebbles. When we remove these, the living waters is revealed. It was Yitzchak's spiritual work to remove all the veils of the physical world, and transform it into a vessel for Divinity and raise it up from below to above. This is compared to the living waters themselves that rise up from below (Rabbi Menachem Mendel Shneerson). In *EmunaHealing*, as well, the goal is to remove all the blocks that block the Divine essence of each person and in this way allow it to shine from his inside out. Through meditation and *hitbodedut* we have the opportunity to remove the dirt, mud and pebbles blocking our souls and raise up the Divine spark within. The metaphor of digging wells also applies to the process of *teshuvah* (return to the Torah path). When I became a *ba'alat teshuva* 34 years ago, I experienced how every new Torah idea that I learned seemed so familiar as if I had known it before. It reverberated a *Deja Vu*, and that is how I knew that it was true. I was relearning something that was already part of myself. It knew it even before I was born. It was buried deeply within my being, and covered up by my secular upbringing, the Western culture and my own inclination to separate myself from G-d. The pebbles and mud that blocked the living waters in addition to the natural covering of dirt represent the obstacles in our path trying to divert and prevent us from reconnecting to our Divine source. Yitzchak's dealing with the negative forces attempting to prevent his holy work of digging paved the way for us to be able to overcome the deterrents that attempt to sidetrack us. Yitzchak teaches us never to give up! Although the herdsmen of Avimelech chased Yitzchak's herdsmen away and shut up the wells, Yitzchak was not discouraged but continued to dig the wells – separating and raising the sparks from their shells until he reached Rechovot.

The Dirt, Pebbles and Mud Blocking our Way

When we begin to learn and grow in the living waters of Torah, numerous obstacles arise. The same thing happens when people try to make Aliyah to Israel. During daily meditation or *hitbodedut* it may be helpful to ask about the obstacles that come in our way of our learning and growing. Sometimes it's different people pulling us in various directions away from the living waters. It could be the need for an education or a promotion in our career. Financial security and making extra money is always a big draw. Sometimes it is trying to fit into the popular opinion of the world that diverts us from the path, worrying about what others might think of us etc. Many young women coming to Israel to learn and grow in Torah are called back home by worried parents who want their daughters to be close to them and out of the imminent danger of the 'war-zone' of Israel. We need to pray that G-d helps open the gate so that we will be able to continue digging down deep in spite of all the obstacles.

The Well as a Vessel for the Deepest Bond

The wells remain to be re-dug. Their profound and mysterious waters call us to delve into them – To dig deeply within ourselves and within the sources. Their waters are nourishing to satiate our thirst, and life giving, to sustain us, bestowing us with our basic need. Water never comes alone. It is a substance wherein each drop cleaves to the other. In Hebrew the word מַיִם/*mayim* – water is always plural. Through water you can bind two substances together. It is, therefore, not surprising that it was at the well that Avraham made a covenant with Avimelech (*Bereishit* 21:27), and it was at the well that Ya'acov and Rachel, Moshe and Tziporah met and made the covenant of marriage. So many of the Biblical characters met their soul mate at the well, because the well symbolizes the woman who also is very deep and mysterious (Maharal). The well contains deep waters. In order to make it available, you have to draw out the waters from within the depth of the well. This process can be compared to the process of marriage. When two soul mates merge to become one, it is like two halves becoming whole, for they both draw out the hidden potential within each other. The well is a receptacle for water, which symbolizes Torah. Intellectual Torah learning is not complete. In order to really make a commitment to Torah life one needs to create a כֵּלִי/*keli* – receptacle – a home in which Torah can flourish. Marriage is a well that enables couples actualize Torah to its fullest.

The Multifaceted Well of Women's Torah

Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin is called in the name of the wells that Yitzchak dug. B'erot is a multifaceted well in which our students may dig deeper without being limited to one outlook or approach. Instead, we encourage each student to express Torah in her own personal way, always remaining connected to the foundation of Torah as put forward by the Sages of Israel. The well, where many of the biblical heroes met their soul mates is also a symbol of fertility in Judaism. We aspire to nourish and encourage our students to plant their roots in the fertile soil of Torah and of the Land, and to blossom, and multiply expressing their hidden talents in the world. Our practical goal is to help prepare them to meet their soul mates as they proceed along their life's path as women of valor.