



Yeshivat Ma'alot
Parashat Toldot
Rav Yehoshua Weitzman shlit"a

ישיבת מעלות
 פרשת תולדות
 הרב יהושע ויצמן שליט"א

Drawing from the Well

Sometimes we find that the p'shat, or the simple understanding of the Torah, leads us to a much deeper understanding of what is written. Such is the case in this week's Parasha. The Torah¹ tells of how Yitzchak Avineu had to dig the wells that his father Avraham dug, because they were filled up by the Plishtim. The Ramban² points out that the Torah goes to great lengths to tell the story of the wells, a story which does not necessarily bring great honor to Yitzchak. Yet he says that contained within this story is a deeper, hidden message about the future of Am Yisrael. The wells are a metaphor to the Beit Hamikdash that will be built by the offspring of Yitzchak.

The Ramban understood this story to be an allusion to the future, yet is that the only message that we can learn from it? The Sfat Emet³ brings in the name of his grandfather the Chiddushei Harim that story of the wells comes to show how one needs to dig to find holiness and light that his buried within physicality, just as one digs a deep well underground in order to find water. The Shem Mishmuel⁴, the second Sochatchover Rebbe, writes in the name of his father that the digging of a well is a metaphor to man's Avodat Hashem. Just as man removes dirt from the ground to uncover water, so too man must remove the density that surrounds his heart in order to truly serve Hashem.

The Torah tells us what became of the wells that Avraham Avineu dug. "And all the wells his father's servants dug during the days of his father Avraham, the Plishtim sealed them and filled them with dirt." Rabbeinu Bechaye⁵ comments that the wells that Avraham dug allude to the converts that he converted in his lifetime. Those converts reverted back to their previous ways once Avraham died and Yitzchak brought them back to the way of Hashem, as alluded to in the second digging of the wells. It can be explained that the wells symbolize the ideals that are hidden within reality, within everyday life. We as humans come in contact with a reality that is covered in many layers, similar to the way water is covered by layers of earth. We must know and internalize that below the surface of our mundane reality resides spiritual worlds and ideas. We must dig deep to find them, and uncover them for the world to see.

¹ Bereshit 26, 18

² Bereshit 26, 20

³ Sfat Emet, Toldot 5632 (1871)

⁴ Shem Mishmuel, Toldot 5771 (1910)

⁵ Rabbeinu Bechaye, Toldot

For example, during the generation of the founding of Medinat Yisrael, the idea of Jewish nationalism spread like wildfire, lighting the hearts of people with a love both for Eretz Yisrael and Am Yisrael. Yet in our generation it appears many times that these "wells" have been clogged and all the things which we built based on those ideals have reverted back to their previous state. Our task today is to once again dig these wells and reveal these ideas to Am Yisrael. We must return these ideals to their proper place within our national existence.

Yitzchak firstly dug Avraham's wells in order to uplift them and return them to their proper place, as the pasuk says⁶: "and he called them names like the names that his father called." Yitzchak did not change what Avraham did, rather it served as a foundation for him. Yet these wells were not enough for Yitzchak and he continued to dig his own. He revealed to the world ideals that were appropriate for his day and age, spiritual foundations for his generation. The theme of wells appears many times throughout the stories of the Avot. Wherever they were, they revealed the ideals that were appropriate for that time and place. The Midrash Gadol says⁷: "Praiseworthy are the tzadikim, for wherever they go they dig wells and give water to the people. Why do they do this? In order to give life to all." So too we must refortify ourselves with the values of our past and work to reveal the ideals of the present in order to give life to all.

⁶ Bereshit 26, 18

⁷ Midrash Gadol, Bereshit 26, 25