

On Digging – Parshat Toldot

Digging as Prayer, Revealing Inner Wisdom, Listening

1) *And Yitzchak entreated (ye'etar) YHVH on behalf of his wife...and YHVH granted-his-entreaty (ye'ater)* (Gen. 25:21): Rabbi Levi said: It is like a son of a king who was digging (*choter*) through to his father to receive a liter of gold from him, and thus one was digging from inside and the other from outside – for in Arabic “digging”/*chatirta* is read as “entreat”/*atirta*. (Bereshit Rabbah 63:5)

2) *Yitzchak dug anew the wells that had been dug during Abraham's days* (Gen. 26:18): In the matter of the digging of the wells, my revered father, Rabbi Abraham of Suchtchov, spoke in connection to Proverbs 20:5: “*The designs of a person's heart are deep waters, but a person of understanding can draw them out.*” There actually are deep waters but they are hidden and concealed in the depths of the earth. A person of understanding is someone who knows this and removes whatever conceals them and then draws them to up to the surface. In the same way, there is also actually great wisdom in a person's mind and heart. One needs only remove the clay that covers it and hides it. This is the real meaning of the digging of the wells: it is a hint and metaphor for the lifework and influence of Isaac. For him the vulgar clay was not enough to conceal the holy wisdom in the heart of Israel. (*Shem Mi'Shmuel, in Itturei Torah*)

3) My grandfather and teacher used to say this about the wells the patriarchs dug. Everywhere there is a hidden point of God. We only have to remove the external covering in order to reveal that innermost point, which is called *be'er mayim chayim*/well of living water (Gen. 26:19). On weekdays this well is called *esek*/bickering or *sitnah*/animosity (Gen. 26:20-21). But on Shabbat it is called ***rechovot***/expansiveness (Gen. 26:22). But Scripture says: “*Wisdom cries out in public; in the streets/rechovot she sounds her voice*” (Proverbs 1:20). The sound of Torah is always there to arouse the hearts of Israel. We have only to turn our ears...Scripture also says, “*If you hear, hear My voice*” (Ex. 19:5), as well as “*Because Avraham heard My voice*” (Gen 26:5). The divine voice is always present. It comes from the ten utterances by which the world was created and the Ten Commandments by which God gave the power of God's words to all of Creation. On Shabbat, Israel testify that the world and all its fullness belong to God. Then the divine voice is awakened; it is easy to hear that voice on the holy Shabbat. “*In the rechovot [the expanse of Shabbat] she sounds her voice.*” (*Sefat Emet*)

Digging into the Past

4) TO BE FULLY HUMAN is to be connected to our lineage, to experience the presence of our ancestors within us. We receive the blessing of lineage by embracing the ancestors who live inside of us; we offer them our compassion and courage, we receive the merit of their efforts, and we learn from their mistakes. Through our love their power is freed, their wounds are healed. (continued...)

Through the story of *Toldot* we learn to access our lineage. In his time, Abraham accomplished the great work of digging deep wells of spiritual sustenance, but by Isaac's time, the wells had become obstructed. Isaac lost access to the wealth of his lineage. In re-digging the stopped up wells of his father Abraham, Isaac finds that the process is neither simple nor easy. In fact he digs three wells before achieving success - connection with the source.

EACH WELL HAS A NAME that describes a marker on the journey towards deep connection.

ESEK - "CONTENTION"

SITNAH - "ENMITY"

REHOVOT - "SPACIOUSNESS"

FIRST WE DIG the well of *ESEK*/CONTENTION. We scrabble in a rocky argument with our inheritance, rubbing up against its hard edges, fighting its constrictions, and opening to its contradictions.

THEN WE DIG the well of *SITNA*/ENMITY. There we taste the contradictions of the tradition within us. When we come to know the suffering and struggles of our ancestors and the whole human family who have stood against one another, we cry out, "*Im Keyn, Lama Zeh Anochi?*" (If life is like this...[with so much suffering]...Why am I?)

AT THIS POINT, the very moment of birthing, we dig the well of *REHOVOT*/SPACIOUSNESS. The well of our ancestors becomes a fountain connecting the dark depths of our human story with the wide skies of awareness.

IN THE STORY of *Toldot* we learn of the tragedy of deception between brothers that results from the narrow belief in the scarcity of blessing. Our family is torn apart because of the conviction that only one of Isaac's sons can receive his blessing.

This system of limiting blessing and creating hierarchy is born of the belief that love and blessing are finite, that there are winners and losers. This idea is drawn from the well of CONTENTION.

When I deceive my brother or attempt to steal the blessing from my sister, I am drawing on the well of ENMITY (whose waters are poison) which will only drive me to greater thirst.

From the well of SPACIOUSNESS comes the wisdom that our fates are bound up with one another. Your loss, your suffering is also mine, and true blessing is shared. At the well of spaciousness I slake my thirst with the knowledge that the source of blessing knows no bounds, and that we are capable of accessing that blessing directly.

(Rabbi Shefa Gold, *Torah Journeys*)