

Walk through the Parsha

with **Rabbi David Walk**



All's Well that Ends Well

To-I'dot

Did you ever hear the joke about the farmer who dug three holes on his property, and whenever he talked to his neighbors he always began, 'Well, well, well.'?

That terrible old joke almost seems like a reference to this week's Torah reading. Yitzchak digs three wells to replace those dug by his father - and ours - Avraham. Initially, the well excavation enterprise doesn't go so well, and that's the issue we must dig into.

Yitzchak dug anew the wells which had been dug in the days of his father Avraham and which the Philistines had stopped up after Avraham's death; and he gave them the same names that his father had given them (B'reishit 26:18). Then these wells are again stopped up by the neighbors from the area we now call the Gaza Strip. The two new - but ultimately failed - attempts are called ESEK (strife) and SITNA (animosity). Eventually, Yitzchak digs a third well

under unclear, different circumstances. This well is allowed to flourish and is called RECHOVOT (wide, comfortable spaces). What is going on here? What can we learn from all of these activities?

The Ramban actually throws up his hands and claims that there is no reasonable (MO'IL) literal meaning (P'SHAT) to these verses. So, he claims that these waterworks are a metaphoric harbinger of the Jewish future. The wells represent the Temples to be built in Yerushalayim. There will be two failures (586 BCE & 70 CE) before the heir to the throne of King David will build the third, permanent House of God. The analogy works because Temples provide our spiritual needs just like wells sustain our physical requirements.

However, in our modern age, contemporary rabbinic authorities have addressed these issues with new perspectives. Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook saw Yitzchak's efforts echoed in the pioneering spirit of the nascent YISHUV here in the Holy Land. He wrote: People are doing backbreaking work in search of fresh water. Eventually some will throw in the towel. Exhausted and disappointed, they put down their tools and depart.

Other diggers have faith that the work is not in vain, and eventually they reach a trickle of water. The excitement is immense! But then they see that the water is dirty and not fit for drinking. They, too, despair and give up. Some, though, continue the challenge. They understand that the muddied water is still water and a sign that they have nearly reached their destination. This group renews the digging with even greater energy and effort until they bypass the grit and sand, and finally reach the pure flowing water (L'hosif Ometz, Ma'amarei Hare'iyah).

After reading Rav Kook's account, is it any surprise that the motto of the city of Rishon L'tziyon (founded 1882) is: MATZANU MAYIM (We have found water)! The need for water in Eretz Yisrael is such an historically crucial issue that it is no surprise that the Torah discusses the issue extensively. It is the behavior of the natives in this area called Nachal Gerar (present day Nachal Azza) which is so curious.

Why do they stop up these critically important water sources? And why do they later come to their senses and allow the third well to survive? The normative approach to this issue is that the locals were jealous of Yitzchak and his success, and they

preferred to drive him away than to share in the prosperity he generated. This self-destructive behavior definitely has analogies to our modern situation. In this approach, they don't bother the third well because Yitzchak has moved further away (towards Be'er Sheva) to excavate it.

Even though the digging of wells isn't exactly rocket science, one of the most interesting comments about the incident was made by Ari Sacher, who actually is a rocket scientist. He is a frequent speaker for Mizrachi and AIPAC and he outlined his view of this situation:

Why do they agree to give Yitzchak possession of the third well? One might answer that Yitzchak dug his third well far away from Gerar. Indeed, the Torah tells us, "He moved away from there to dig another well." However, I believe that the acquiescence of the Philistines was the result of something else. The first two wells are dug by "Yitzchak's servants". The third well was dug by Yitzchak himself. If you want to impose your will on someone else, you must do the imposing. Indirect negotiations will only weaken your position. But doesn't the Torah say that Yitzchak "moved away" before he dug the third well? Not exactly. "Moving away" is the translation on

chabad.org of the Hebrew VAYATEIK MISHAM. Rav Shimshon Rafael Hirsch offers a completely different angle. He explains VAYATEIK as "To move an object by great force, either unexpectedly, unnaturally, or illegally." It seems clear that Yitzchak had to move the Philistines and their antagonism. He did this by not backing down, by digging yet a third well. And he did this with his own hands.

When you put together the ideas of Rav Kook and Dr. Sacher, a fascinating picture emerges. The previously obscure narrative becomes a description of current events! And there are clear instructions for us, which cannot be ignored. We must be as persistent and stubborn as Yitzchak Avinu in our efforts to maintain our historic patrimony here in Eretz Yisrael. Baruch Hashem, we are AM K'SHEI OREF, the 'stiff-necked nation'!

The other takeaway is that even though it is wonderful to have friends and allies (Thank God for the USA), the heavy lifting must be done with our own hands. Nation-building is exhausting and often dirty work. But our heritage and patrimony are worth it. We can never forget to periodically stop and appreciate what we have accomplished. We are so privileged to

have personally participated in the ending of the millenia of GALUT! Pity so many have passed on this Z'CHUT, this merit!

When we put down our shovels and rifles, we can then dream about the vision of the Ramban. From our neighborhoods in southern Yerushalayim, it's easy to fantasize about moving a few building cranes to the Temple Mount and initiate the Third House of God. B'MEHEIRA V'YAMEINU, please, God, very soon! 🙏