

Walk through the Parsha

with **Rabbi David Walk**



TO-L'DOT

What Are YOU Looking At?

Avraham Avinu was a phenomenon. He moved to Eretz Yisrael and became a Prince of God in his new home. He converted masses, met with monarchs and was the deciding factor in a world war. He was a very hard act to follow. Yitzchak, his son and heir, never tried. Yitzchak marched to the beat of his own drummer, and that drum was muted.

We are not the only observers to notice this marked difference. They both encountered the same adversary. Perhaps, Yitzchak's encounter was with the offspring of that person. Since they have the same name, we'll just call them both Avimelech, King of the P'lishtim.

This ruler of Gaza had similar encounters with both of them, but with marked differences. Even though they both claimed that their wives were their sisters, the reactions were different. With Avraham after the encounter, Avimelech gave extensive gifts (sheep and cattle and slaves). No such goodies for Yitzchak.

With Yitzchak the story gets complicated, because he remains nearby and tries to renew the area of settlement which Avraham had inhabited. When he re-digs wells of Avraham, the servants of Avimelech cause trouble each time. Yitzchak quietly but firmly persevered and became prosperous in spite of the tension.

So, Avimelech, at this point, approaches Yitzchak with an offer: We now see that God was with you. We propose that there be a formal agreement between us and that we draw up a treaty with you (B'reishit 26:28).

In other words, we'd like to make a deal with you because God's on your side. However, for most commentaries the central issue is the wording of this offer. Avimelech says RA'O RA'INO (we have seen, seen). Earlier, in the Avraham treaty, Avimelech just states that God is with him.

Rashi claims that the double 'seen' was about both Avraham and Yitzchak, even though there is no 'seen' in the Avraham narrative.

Chizkuni explains that the double 'seen' is because the Philistines noticed twice that God was blessing Yitzchak. The first was the ME'AH SHE'ARIM (one hundred fold) harvest he reaped (26:12). Then, the fact that every well he dug produced water.

BTW the Jerusalem neighborhood called ME'AH SHE'ARIM was dedicated during the week of Parshat Toldot in 1874, and there were, initially, 100 shareholders.

But, I think that the real meaning of RA'O RA'INU is 'we had to look twice to see your amazing connection to God'. As the Mei Shilo'ach pointed out:

That is, with you I must have a different kind of perception than what we saw with your forefathers - since your attribute is the opposite, one must look with greater depth. As my father OBM said in the name of Rabbi Bunim of Peshischa: In the case of Avraham, one could perceive things at first glance; but with Yitzchak, one had to look more deeply. Therefore it is written, 'We have indeed seen' - indicating a deeper level of seeing.

In other words, to see the greatness of Avraham was child's play, but to see the amazing strength and power of Yitzchak required a double take.

Isn't this true of many things in life?

Please, allow me a sports analogy. There are athletes whose prowess just jumps off the playing surface and everyone immediately shouts, "Wow! He's AMAZIN'!" Then, sometimes there's a workman-like athlete who relatively quietly gets the job done everyday, but then one day you look

up their statistics and say, 'Hmmm, he (or she) was really great.'

The same is true in regular life. There are wonderful and amazing people all around us, and we often don't know. There were people in my community in Connecticut who made sure every Jew in the local hospital had a Shabbat package every week, or visited a local nursing home every week. There were no awards or plaques for these people, but they were giants, like Yitzchak.

How can we get ourselves to notice the Yitzchaks in our midst, so that we can appreciate and, then, emulate them?

There's an interesting quote in the introduction to Likutei Moharan (the collection of Divrei Torah of Rebbe Nachman):

When in Eretz Yisrael, Rebbe Nachman became aware of wonders which were hidden from all living creatures, also 'we saw that God was with him'. Thus, the teachings which Rebbe Nachman revealed after having been in Eretz Yisrael immeasurably eclipsed those that he revealed before his journey; despite the fact that even previously his holy lessons had tremendously enlightened the world.

Cool! AVIRA D'ARA'A MACHKIM (the very air of Eretz Yisrael enlightens us)! During Rebbe Nachman's few

months in Tzfat he became aware of things he never noticed in Eastern Europe. So, come to Eretz Yisrael, become more observant (in two ways)!

But I'm going to make another suggestion: Say POKEI'ACH IVRIM with greater KAVANA (intention)! Every AM we traditionally recite the morning blessings and one of them is POKEI'ACH IVRIM; 'Who opens the eyes of the blind' or 'Who gives insight to those who don't notice'. What does that mean?

The quote comes from a Psalm we say every day: God restores sight to the blind; God makes those who are bent stand straight; God loves the righteous (T'hilim 146:8).

The Radak points out that although the verse may refer to God healing someone from an eye ailment, it really means: those blinded by extreme distress, as suffering is likened to darkness and salvation to light, as it is said about exile, 'We grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if we had no eyes; we stumble at noonday as in the night' (Yeshayahu 59:10).

In other words, we're begging God to help us see through the veil of the mundane and annoying stuff around us to notice the many great things in our orbit. Especially, I would add, in the people who inhabit our world.

Look beyond the superficial, and find goodness and even greatness in those around us.

Please, allow the verse in our Parsha and this important morning blessing to assist us to appreciate the marvelous people all around us. Look for the heirs of Yitzchak HaTzadik in our midst. 