

## Bringing meaning to life

Parsha with Rabbi Benji Levy

BERESHIT

NOACH

LECH LECHA

VAYERA

CHAYEI SARA

TOLDOT

VAYETZEI

VAYISHLACH

VAYESHEV

MIKETZ

VAYIGASH

VAYECHI

# TOLDOT

## WELLS OF MEANING

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**When** famine strikes Israel yet again, Isaac is forced to flee to the land of the Philistines to find refuge, just like his father did previously:

**And Isaac dug anew the wells (*be'erot*) of water which they had dug in the days of Abraham his father and the Philistines had stopped up after Abraham's death; and he called them by the same names that his father had called them.<sup>1</sup>**

**The** Torah continues to describe the seemingly trivial incident of Isaac re-digging these wells in great detail as opposed to the many pits that were in the area. There is a significant distinction between a well (*be'er*) and a pit (*bor*) which may explain the attention given to these diggings.

**The** word *bor* consists of the two letters bet and reish alone, whereas in the word *be'er*, an additional aleph is embedded

between these two letters. This letter aleph is emblematic of the word *Elokim* (God); both as an abbreviation and in the numerical oneness that it denotes.

**This** distinction between the two words continues, when considering the practical difference between a pit and a well. A pit is a hole dug in the ground, serving as a container of sorts that must be filled with water from the outside. A well also serves as a container of water, however, it is dug until a natural supply of water is reached, allowing it to self-sustain.



**This** notion with regard to wells can also be understood in the symbolic sense. Just like Isaac exerted extensive effort in digging these pits until they became wells, so too, we should metaphorically dig wells of meaning in our own lives.<sup>2</sup> We should 'dig' through the layers of materialism and human complacency in order to uncover the abundance of spiritual wealth that resides beneath the surface.

Everywhere we dwell there is capacity to dig. In some places we need to dig deeper and in some places we need to take longer. In some places the digging is smooth and in others the diggers encounter obstacles. Ultimately, however, there is an opportunity to tap into a deep unlimited source in nearly every situation.

**Rav Kook** discusses a similar idea in the context of the pioneers that established the State of Israel.<sup>3</sup> He speaks of people doing backbreaking work, digging through the earth in search of fresh water. Eventually some people give up. They have worked hard and only see dirt rather than the fruits of their labour. Exhausted and disappointed, they put down their tools and leave. Other diggers are still hopeful that they will reach water. They 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 – filled with sand.

This discovery is shattering – after their hard work they realise that the water is not fit for drinking. They too despair and with acute disappointment, lay down their tools and give up. Some, with even deeper faith, continue the challenge. They understand that the muddied water is still water and a sign that they have nearly reached their destination – they just need to dig a little deeper. This group renew the digging with even greater energy and effort until they bypass the grit and sand and finally reach the pure flowing water.

**Rav Kook's** message, similar to that which we learn from Isaac in his re-digging of the closed-up wells, is that of faith. Even when life is difficult, even if the water lacks clarity, if we dig deep enough, we will always find meaning.

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**The Torah is often compared to water, because just as water nourishes our bodies, spirituality nourishes our souls.**

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Our generation seems thirstier than ever before and yet we often attempt to quench that thirst with dirty water from a pit and when that pit dries up, we have to fill it with something else from outside, rather than tapping into our spiritual source.

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**Ultimately, our basic mission in life is to metaphorically dig a well to achieve our greater mission in life.**

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### Parsha Fact:

**According to a midrash, Jacob and Esau were almost indistinguishable as children. The fact that they became such different adults underscores the importance of differentiated learning**

Though Abraham's wells lasted the duration of his lifetime, the Philistines came and filled them with sand when he died. Isaac comes along and re-digs them and reaches the same depth, tapping into the same limitless source that his father did. Though at first, it may be hard to see fruition when we try to delve into the depths of spirituality in our own lives, and though sometimes the pits we dig are temporarily filled in, ultimately, if we continue to dig deep enough, our efforts and our faith will culminate in wells of meaning.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Genesis 26:16-18

<sup>2</sup> Rabbi Yehuda Leib Alter, *Sfat Emet*, Parshat Toldot, 5631.

<sup>3</sup> Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, *Lechosif Ometz*, Ma'amarei Hare'iyabi.



### Next Week in Vayetzai

*During the mad bustle of everyday life, we are often blissfully unaware of anything other than the immediate needs of each individual moment. But flickering past us in our state of semi-oblivion are many potential moments of meaning, growth and opportunity. These missed moments can often lead to an acute sense of painful regret. Jacob's dream and the sudden realization of his missed opportunity, serve as a wake-up call to us all.*