

Toledot. תולדות

Source Sheet by Dina Becker

Genesis 26:18-22

Fox Translation:

(18) Yitzhak again dug up the wells of water which had been dug in the days of Avraham his father, the Philistines having stopped them up after Avraham's death, and he called them by the names, the same names, by which his father had called them.
(19) Yitzhak's servants also dug in the wadi, and found there a well of living water.

*wadi=an often dry river bed
living water=fresh water*

Sefat Emet, Genesis, Toldot 30:3

1901 [*Translation adapted from A. Green, The Language of Truth, pp.38-39*]. Regarding the wells the patriarchs dug: the word *be'er* (well) is to be read as in: "Moshe set about to explain (*be'er*) this teaching" (Deut. 1:5). In the same way, even before the Torah was received, the patriarchs explained/"welled" the wisdom of Creation, since everything was created through Torah and for G-d's glory.

We have to contemplate all of Creation in order to understand the Creator's purpose. Abraham our Father explained/"welled" how to derive the love of G-d from all of Creation. He showed us how to look upon the kindnesses and goodness of the Creator, whose goodness and glory fill the world.

בראשית כ"ו:י"ח-כ"ב

(יח) וַיִּשָׁב יִצְחָק וַיַּחְפְּרוּ אֶת־בְּאֵרֹת הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר חָפְרוּ בְיַמֵּי אַבְרָהָם אֲבִיו וַיִּסְתְּמוּם פְּלִשְׁתִּים אַחֲרָי מֹת אַבְרָהָם וַיִּקְרָא לָהֶן שְׁמוֹת כַּשֵּׁמֶת אֲשֶׁר־קָרָא לָהֶן אָבִיו: (יט) וַיַּחְפְּרוּ עַבְדֵי־יִצְחָק בְּנַחַל וַיִּמְצְאוּ־שָׁם בְּאֵר מַיִם חַיִּים:

שפת אמת, בראשית, תולדות ל'ג'

(ג) בענין הבארות שחפרו האבות: באר הוא כמו 'הואיל משה באר את התורה' (דברים א,ה). כמו כן, קודם קבלת התורה היו האבות מבארים חכמת הבריאה, שהכל בתורה נברא, 'ולכבודי בראתי' (ישעיה מ'ג,ז).

וצריך האדם להתבונן בכל הבריאה להבין כוונת הבורא יתברך שמו. ואברהם אבינו ע"ה ביאר איך לבוא מכל הבריאה לאהבת הבורא, ולהסתכל בחסדים וטובות הבורא, שכבודו וגדלו וטובו מלא עולם.

In the same way, Isaac explained/"welled" how to attain the fear of G-d from all of Creation. All this was before the Torah was given. This is "the well dug by princes" (Num. 21:18), which is followed by "a gift from the wilderness." Then the Torah, which explains the true meaning of all Creation, was given. But this can be acquired only as a gift.

As for Jacob, it says of him: "You give truth unto Jacob" (Mic. 7:20). The well/ meaning came upon him of its own accord, as it says: "He looked, and there was a well"(Gen 29:2)

Art Green's comment:

Torah comes to us from above, brought down from the mountaintop, given from the highest heavens. But what of the Torah that our patriarchs knew before that Torah was Given! Their Torah flowed from a well, water deep within the earth. We have here a key metaphor for understanding the Torah that comes from within, rather than from above or beyond. Religion today would do best to seek out and cultivate this internal metaphor, knowing full well, of course that both "above" and "within" are meant in nonliteral ways. Here the Sefat Emet reminds us--as he does so frequently in other ways--that the first Torah to be discovered is that which lies within. The need to contemplate all of Creation in order to learn G-d's purpose is one that we could well affirm today.

Deuteronomy 1:5

Fox Translation: (5) In [the country] across the Jordan, in the land of Moav, Moshe set about to explain (*be'er*) this Instruction, saying

Isaiah 43:7

(7) Every one that is called by My name, and whom I have created for My glory, I have formed him, yea, I have made him.

Numbers 21:17-18

Fox Translation: (17) Then Israel sang this song: Spring up, O well, sing-in-chorus to it (18) —the well that was dug out by princes! —that was excavated by people's nobles! —with scepter! —with their rods! Now from the wilderness—to Mattana;

וכמו כן יצחק ביאר איך לבוא ליראת ה' מכל הבריאה. וכל זה היה קודם התורה. 'חפרוה שרים' (במדבר כ"א, י"ח). ואחר כך 'וממדבר מתנה'. שניתנה התורה שהיא מבארת טעם האמת של כל הבריאה. וזה אין יכול להשיג רק במתנה.

ויעקב שכתוב בו 'תתן אמת ליעקב' (מיכה ז, כ). נודמנה הבאר אליו מעצמה כמו שכתוב 'וירא והנה באר' (בר' כ"ט, ב):

דברים א'ה'

(ה) בְּעֵבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן בְּאֶרֶץ מוֹאָב הוֹאֵיל מִשֶּׁה בְּאֵר אֶת־הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת לְאֹמֶר:

ישעיהו מ"ג:ז'

(ז) כֹּל הַנִּקְרָא בְּשִׁמִּי וְלִכְבוֹדִי בְּרָאֹתַי יִצְרָתַי אֶפְעָשִׂיתִיו:

במדבר כ"א:י"ז-י"ח

(יז) אָז יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת עָלֶי בְּאֵר עֲנוּלָה: (יח) בְּאֵר חֲפְרוּהָ שָׂרִים פְּרוּהָ נְדִיבֵי הָעָם בְּמַחֲקָק בְּמִשְׁעֲנַתֶּם וּמִמְדָּבָר מִתְּנָה:

Micah 7:20

(20) You will keep faith with Jacob, loyalty to Abraham, as You promised on oath to our fathers in days gone by.

מיכה ז'כ'

(כ) תִּתֵּן אֱמֶת לְיַעֲקֹב חֶסֶד לְאַבְרָהָם אֲשֶׁר־נִשְׁבַּעְתָּ לְאַבְתְּנֵינוּ מִיְמֵי קָדָם:

Genesis 29:2

Fox Translation: (2) He looked around him, and there: a well in the field, and there were three herds of sheep crouching near it, for from that well they used to give the herds to drink. Now the stone on the mouth of the well was large,

בראשית כ"ט:ב'

(ב) וַיֵּרָא וְהִנֵּה בְּאֵר בְּשָׂדֶה וְהִנֵּה־שָׁם שְׁלֹשָׁה עֲדָרֵי־צֹאן רֹבְצִים עָלֶיהָ כִּי מִן־הַבְּאֵר הָהוּא יִשְׁקוּ הָעֲדָרִים וְהָאֶבֶן גְּדֹלָה עַל־פִּי הַבְּאֵר:

Exerpt from the Velveteen Rabbi (R. Rachel Barenblat) on Toldot, 2020:

...In this week's portion we read that Isaac re-plumbed the wells that his father had dug. On the surface, that verse is about literally re-digging wells, which are pretty necessary in a desert climate! But on a metaphorical level, this verse reminds me how sometimes the wells of spirit and hope stop flowing.

When that happens, our job is to forgive ourselves for feeling tapped-out... and then to dig into those wells again, to open those channels so they can receive flow again. Here's what I take from this week's parsha: the spiritual work of opening channels for the flow of hope and faith isn't a one-time thing.

So if you feel lately as though your spiritual well has run dry, you're not alone. Join me in taking inspiration from Isaac, who went back to the old wells and dug away the silt and rocks so they could flow again. The wells of Torah and spiritual practice still flow, but we might need to open them up again.

Because this isn't a short-term crisis... We can't rely on surge capacity. We need to build deeper capacity in ourselves and in the systems that support us and our communities.

So here's my prayer. May we find that those old wells of tradition and practice, when we tend them carefully and give them our attention, open up again to nourish and sustain us in every way. Starting right now, with a measure of Shabbat sweetness, Shabbat hope, and Shabbat rest. Shabbat Shalom.

