

CLASS 29 - VAYEITZEI

by Rabbi Heshy Grossman

"And he saw, behold, a well in the field, and there were three flocks of sheep lying around it, for from that well the flocks drank, and there was a great stone upon the mouth of the well"

"And all the flocks gathered there, and they rolled the stone from the mouth of the well, and they gave the sheep to drink, and they returned the stone to the mouth of the well, to its place." (Breishis 29:2-3)

The Avos seem to have a special affinity for wells. Everywhere they go, they are followed by wells. It is the well that sparks a dispute with the Plishtim, and it is there that they meet their wives, together with whom they build a nation for the future.

The Be'er is a source of blessing, an everflowing spring of G-d's beneficent bounty. This Be'er follows the Bnai Yisrael as they escape from Egypt, and it is this fountain of Torah that travels with them throughout the desert.

Many men have tried to lift the stone that hides these sweet waters, but only Ya'akov Avinu succeeded in revealing its undiscovered depths.

1

The elders of Athens confront Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chanania and the wisdom of Jerusalem.

"They said to him: We have a well in the field, bring it in to the city. He brought bran and threw it before them. He said: weave me a rope from bran and I will bring it in....." (Bechoros 8b)

The Vilna Gaon explains:

"The idea is 'And he saw, behold, a well in the field..', meaning to say, a Be'er Mayim Chaim. As it says '....they have abandoned Me, the source of living waters, digging for themselves broken ditches that cannot contain the water.' (Yirmiah 2:13)and all has been given over to external [forces]. This is 'the field' - in the portion of 'the man of the field' [Esav]."

"And the survival of Israel, and their redemption, is only in the merit of the three Avos...."

"....'and there was a great stone upon the mouth of the well' - this is the obstacle stone, the evil inclination - 'and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh' (Yechezkel 36:36) ..."

Underneath the surface of our world, undetected by the human eye, is a blessing that sustains all

life. Physically, this is the water that nurtures all growth, and spiritually, it is the untapped well connecting heaven and earth.

The base of this well is Be'ersheva, the home of the Avos, resting place of the ladder that reaches to the stars. It is this path that Ya'akov takes to Charan, and with the holiness it reveals, he discovers the Bais HaMikdash, the wellspring of eternal life.

This road to redemption has taken an arduous detour, and the nations of the world gloatingly proclaim: 'the well is in the field' - the Jewish people have lost forever their portion in eternity.

Rebbi Yehoshua ben Chanania retorts: there is a great stone atop this well, the evil inclination that hinders man from drinking the pure waters. Only Ya'akov can pull away that stone, separating good from evil.

When that task is done, the world will drink from the crystal-clear truth that flows forever.

"B'Ever HaYarden, B'Eretz Mo'av, Ho'il Moshe Be'er Es HaTorah HaZos" (Devarim 1:5) - Be'er implies clarity and explanation, for it is the hidden truth beneath the world's external mask that resolves the problems of life.

2

"And Ya'akov said to them: My brothers, from where do you come?"

The deeds of the fathers are an omen for their children.

Ya'akov Avinu is doing more than looking for water.

He is digging for the future redemption.

"Rebbe Yosi bar Chanina explains the verse as reference to the exile: 'MeiCharan Anachnu' - MeiCharono Shel HaKadosh Baruch Hu Anu Borchim - we are running from the anger of G-d.....'And he said to them: do you know Lavan ben Nachor?' - Do you know He who is destined to cleanse your sins as white as snow?....."

"In whose merit? 'And behold, Rachel his daughter is coming with the sheep'. (Midrash Rabbah, 70:8)

The Torah describes an elaborate scene, taking place long ago at a faraway well. This is more than descriptive literature. Ya'akov sees a prophetic vision, a moment of insight into the life of a nation.

The stone sits perched atop the well, the many sins which keep us entrenched in a long and bitter exile. Three groups of shepherds stand in waiting; the three Avos and the three Regalim, three times a year when three groups of Jews ascend to the temple; Kohanim, Leviim, Yisrael.

"And he said to them: but the day is still great, now is not the time to gather in the sheep, give the sheep to drink, and go out and graze."

In other words - "But, the day of redemption is here, today, if only we hearken to His voice. Give the sheep to drink from the waters of Torah."

"We cannot", they answer, "so long as the stone still sits atop the well."

And still we wait - for Rachel, pillar of the home, as she stands in the field, crying for her children.

"Kol B'Ramah Nishma, Nehi Bechi Tamrurim, Rachel Mevakah Al Baneiha" - "A voice is heard upon high, a wail of bitter crying, Rachel weeps for her children, refusing to be comforted, for they are gone." (Yirmiyah, 31:14)

"He was still speaking with them, and Rachel arrived with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherd"

Rachel goes out to the field, and there she stays.

Ya'akov greets her and weeps, for he now sees that they cannot be buried together. Enshrined on the road, she will remain with her children, out in the field, suffering along with them the bitter exile of Ish Sadeh - Esav, man of the field.

"So says Hashem, hold back your voice from crying, and your eyes from tears, for there is reward for your actions, says the Lord, and they will return from the land of the enemy." (ibid. v. 15)

3

Our Parsha is the scene of a dramatic transformation, a sharp turnaround in the life of Ya'akov Avinu.

Ish Yoshev Ohalim - the man who dwelled in the tents, living a tranquil life of Torah, suddenly runs for his life, in the attempt to escape his murderous brother.

From the frying pan, straight into the fire.

From this moment on, Ya'akov knows no peace. He struggles to overcome the wiles of Lavan, and overcomes the clutches of evil, from one misfortune to the next.

It is the stolen blessing that marks this change. Ya'akov has acquired the portion of Esav - man of the field.

Man must serve G-d in two ways if he is to return to the Garden of Eden.

He must eat from the Etz HaDa'as - toiling in the tents of Torah, digging hard to uncover the hidden truths of a world that has gone astray.

And now - he must till the field of weed and stone, repairing the damage of the Etz HaDa'as, separating the good and evil, wending his way through the difficult road of trial and tribulation.

It is this stone that still lies above the Be'er. Every Jew needs to dig a well.

The Torah encourages us to toil - "Yagati U'Matzasi" - after months of concerted effort, man

discovers the blessing that has been there all along.

It is the very act of striving, the exertion of sweat and pain, that is transformed into a blessing of inestimable gain.

Every man needs to struggle - but the question is: to what purpose?

The Plishtim also dig. They descend upon the sea, working to recover the harvest of fame and fortune, the physical bounty of Olam HaZeh.

But the children of Ya'akov yearn for more - to uncover the well the Plishtim stuffed up, a Mekor Mayim Chaim.

"And all the flocks gathered there, V'Galalu Es HaEven - and they rolled the stone from the mouth of the well, and they gave the sheep to drink, and they returned the stone to the mouth of the well, to its place."

The shepherds of Charan can also remove the stone - but only for a short while.

Ya'akov takes this trick one step further.

"And when Ya'akov saw Rachel the daughter of Lavan, his mother's brother, and the sheep of Lavan, his mother's brother, and Ya'akov approached, VaYagel Es HaEven - and he uncovered the stone from the mouth of the well...."

Ya'akov reveals this: it is the stone itself that hides life's true blessing.

He takes Esav's world, a world of evil and harm, a world that knows both Tov and Ra, and conquers it as well.

He sees Rachel - and sees the years of sadness and pain, the long and harsh exile, the loneliness of a desperate mother as she cries for her forgotten children.

Ya'akov Avinu reveals the true depth of this secret well: it is the agony itself that ultimately begets true comfort - the fury before the calm. The longing for redemption is man's greatest guarantee that the yearning for his Creator still churns.

He sees her tears as they melt the stone that lies above the well, softening the heart of stone preventing man from partaking of its sweet waters.

He puts this stone above his head, as he rests upon the mountain.

It is upon this stone that he builds the Holy Temple - a well that never rests.

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