

# NEVER LOSE HOPE

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

*"And all of the wells which the servants of his father dug during Avraham's lifetime, the Pelishtim had blocked and filled with earth... And Yitzchak settled, and he dug the wells of water which were dug during Avraham's lifetime, which the Pelishtim had blocked, and he called them names according to the names which his father had called them. The servants of Yitzchak dug in the valley, and they found there a well of fresh water. And the shepherds of Gerar argued with the shepherds of Yitzchak, saying 'the water belongs to us,' and he called the well 'Esek' because they engaged with him [about it]. And they dug another well, and they argued about it as well, and he called its name 'Sitna.' And he uprooted himself from there, and he dug another well, and there was no argument about it, and he called its name 'Rehovot,' and he said 'for now G-d has made space for us, and we may flourish in the land.' [26:16, 18-22]*

As we see, the Torah pays considerable attention to Yitzchak's efforts to find a space where he and his entire camp could settle, to find a well to sustain them, and to live peacefully without conflict. Our Sages discuss many reasons why the Torah went into such detail concerning the digging of the wells in particular, beginning with those which his father had originally opened.

According to the Chafetz Chaim, Rabbi Yisrael Mayer Kagan, we learn a very straightforward lesson in persistence from Yitzchak. He explains that when a person begins any job, whether in business or in spiritual matters, one must know to not let his or her hands "grow weak" and fail to complete that which he has started. Even if there are great obstacles, one must persevere in order to succeed, and not lose hope even when the going is difficult. If Yitzchak dug a well and did not find water, then he dug another. If people started arguing with him about ownership of the water, then he dug yet another. Thus he eventually succeeded, and found a well where he could live without conflict.

Rabbi Hanoach Teller, scholar and aptly-named weaver of tales, includes the following story in his book of travels, taxis and cabbies, "Hey, Taxi!"

Rabbi "Arthur Moskowitz" took the position of Executive Director of the yeshiva "Darchei Torah," only to discover that the yeshiva teetered on the edge of bankruptcy. They had been living on loans, and now their bank was calling in the outstanding debt. Rabbi Moskowitz needed to raise \$100,000 in six months for the yeshiva to survive. He tried and tried, and with five weeks left to raise fully 60% of the funds, called up a wealthy past supporter hoping for a loan or gift in order to prevent the yeshiva from closing down.

Unfortunately, poor Rabbi Moskowitz made a wrong turn on his trip, when he left the highway to find a rest stop. He wound up finding no gas stations, but only the memorial home of "Bnai Zion" Cemetery -- which was in the middle of a funeral!

What could he do? He was already going to be 30 minutes late, and the call of nature was growing ever louder. He went in, signed the guest book with his name and address, used the facilities, stayed a few minutes to pay his respects, and was good and late to his appointment. Whether that made a difference is unclear -- one way or the other, he emerged with a check for only \$1000, accompanied by an offer to consider further help within a couple of months. For the yeshiva, unfortunately, that would be several months too late.

Somehow Rabbi Moskowitz raised another \$20,000, but the bank decided it could not offer no extension. With just a week or two left to go, it seemed as if all was lost, and the yeshiva was going to have to close its doors.

That was the day a check arrived for over \$50,000.

Rabbi Moskowitz, it seems, had entered Bnai Zion Cemetery during the funeral of an extremely wealthy man with, in his opinion, extremely unhelpful children who had neglected him during his declining years. He therefore decided to divide his fortune equally among all those who attended his funeral. The Rabbi may have been in for five minutes, but he was there, and that's what counted in the will. Thus the yeshiva was saved -- Rabbi Moskowitz had completed his task, after all.

Especially in spiritual matters, says the Chafetz Chaim, it is crucial to go forward, make your best effort, and not lose hope. If a person finds little success in Torah study, or difficulty performing a mitzvah, he or she should not abandon it, but continue. Success will come in its own time -- and perhaps from a very unexpected direction!