

THE TRUE HERITAGE OF ISRAEL

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The name of this week's parsha - Toldot - is taken from the opening verse of the parsha - these are the toldot, the offspring and generations of Yitzchak. It is therefore understandable that the parsha should be named and remembered as the parsha of Toldot since that it is the key operative word. However, there is an exactly similar series of words that begin parshat Noach - these are the toldot of Noach. Yet that Torah parsha is not Toldot but rather it is named for Noach.

For the sake of consistency either our parsha should be named for Yitzchak or the parsha of Noach should be called Toldot as well. Even the naming of the parshiyot of the Torah teaches us important lessons about life and history.

Both Noach and Yitzchak had righteous offspring. Noach had Shem and Yitzchak had Yaakov. Both also had offspring that were less than righteous. Noach had Ham and Canaan, and Yitzchak had Eisav as a son. Yet there was a fundamental difference between Noach and Yitzchak.

Yitzchak possessed a heritage to transmit to Yaakov. The blessings that he bestowed upon his son were those that he had received from his father Avraham. It is heritage, family and national memory and traditions that create toldot, a continuity and connection to generational bonding and unity.

Noach was without such a background - he was a righteous individual, but still only an individual, who did not see himself in the role of being a nation builder. He did not possess a father who imbued him with a sense of tradition, family and nationhood. Avraham on the other hand was described by God, so to speak, as someone who would create a nation after him that would follow God's ways and commandments.

It was this heritage that Yitzchak received. He was also engaged not only in creating individuals as was Noach but rather in raising toldot - national eternal generations - that would continue the heritage and holy tradition that he had received from his father. Thus Yitzchak's parsha is named Toldot while Noach's parsha remains only on his name alone.

The Torah itself emphasizes this point by immediately describing Yitzchak as being the son of Avraham whereas in the parsha of Noach, the name of the father of Noach no longer appears. The Jewish people as a whole has toldot even as individual Jews may or may not be so blessed.

The toldot of the Jewish people are based upon shared memory and historical experience, Torah knowledge and observance, a sense of mission and a strong national identity. The thread of

idealism, of helping others, of goodness and compassion - in short, the blessings of our father Avraham, run through the Jewish story of the ages.

We often think that material goods and wealth are the stuff of human inheritances. But that is a false reading of life's truths. It is the ideals and beliefs and traditions of holiness and Godly service that are the true heritage of Israel and guarantee that the people of Israel will always have toldot.

Shabat shalom,

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Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com