

PARSHAS TOLDOS: BUILD - AND NEVER DESTROY

by Rabbi Yaakov Horowitz

Fully ten pesukim of this week's parsha are dedicated to relating the saga of the wells of Yitzchak. The Torah relates how Yitzchak revisited the wells that his father, Avraham, had used when he lived in that area. When he saw that the Philistim had filled the wells with earth, Yitzchak instructed his workers to restore them.

The Torah then relates that an additional series of three wells was dug in the area of Gerar. The first two wells became a source of dispute with the local residents and Yitzchak was forced to abandon them. The third well was dug and its refreshing waters were enjoyed by Yitzchak and his family members without any acrimony. Yitzchak gave the wells names that reflected the events surrounding them. The first and second wells were named 'Esek' (translated as contention) and 'Sitna' (enmity) respectively, conjuring images of dispute. The third, however, was named 'Rechovos' (spaciousness), with its name denoting the peace that comes with open areas and uncontested living space.

Powerful Symbolism

Clearly, there is deep symbolic meaning in the discussion of these wells as the Torah devoted precious lines to discuss the events surrounding the ups and downs of Yitzchak's search for life-sustaining water.

The Ramban offers a commentary that sheds light into these meaningful events. Quoting a pasuk in Yirmiyahu (17:13), he maintains that a water producing well, which symbolizes physical nourishment, represents the spirituality that emanated from the Beis Hamikdash. Thus, the wells represent the three Botei Mikdash - past and future. The first Beis Hasmikdash as well as the second were quarreled over and ultimately destroyed. However, the third one, may it speedily be built, will be deemed "Rechovos" and last forever as we will live in unending peace.

The Kli Yakar adds to the insight of the Ramban. He maintains that a careful reading of these pesukim reveal that in the instance of the first well, the shepherds were the ones arguing, while the general term noted in the argument of the second well seems to indicate that all involved parties were in disagreement.

The Kli Yakar suggests that in the instance of the first Beis Hamikdash the kings (the shepherds, or leaders) were the ones initiating the conflict, as the Jews became divided into two kingdoms, Yehudah and Yisroel, shortly after the death of Shlomo Hamelech. The dispute and the acrimony

caused in the wake of this clash led to the destruction of the first Beis Hamikdash. The second Beis Hamikdash was destroyed due to sinas chinam (baseless acrimony amongst Jews). In this case, the dispute was more widespread, as the masses became embroiled in senseless arguments. This discord is in sharp contrast to the third Beis Hamikdash, where people will live in tranquility in open spaces.

Avoiding Acrimony... And Developing Ahavas Yisroel

I would like to suggest that there is additional symbolism in the fact that the disputes involved the destruction of these wells. Plunder in the battlefield has always been a sad fact of the human experience almost since the creation of this world. Warring tribes and countries invaded weaker neighbors and walked off with their spoils. In the individual plane as well, this occurred throughout time, as stronger people attacked those unable to defend themselves and unjustly took their possessions. However, in these instances, there was at least a significant motive for these actions - the acquisition of wealth.

In the case of the destruction of these wells, no such intention was evident (although Rashi does offer an explanation for these actions). All one sees is the senseless destruction of hundreds of man-hours of effort in a matter of moments - with little or no gain for the one recklessly wielding the shovel. The sad events surrounding the blocking of Yitzchak's wells seem to be the perfect metaphor for the baseless and fruitless hatred that destroyed our precious Beis Hamikdash and sent us into the harsh reality of galus for nearly two thousand years ... and counting.

It is so difficult to build and so easy to destroy. And ultimately those who destroy others eventually destroy themselves as well.

The World Trade Center took thousands of people many years to build. Nineteen people were able to destroy it in a few hours.

It takes only a moment to deeply hurt someone's feelings. And sometimes it can take a very long time to undo the hurt we may cause, purposely or even inadvertently - sometimes even to the ones closest to us.

This seemingly trivial incident of the wells of Yitzchak carries a powerful and eternal lesson. Build and never destroy. Support and never hurt. Live with middos tovos, tolerance and understanding - and help bring the 'Rechovos' of the third Beis Hamikdash.

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Rabbi Horowitz is the founder and dean of Yeshiva Darchei Noam in Monsey, NY, as well as the founder and Program Director of Agudath Israel's Project Y.E.S. (Youth Enrichment Services), which helps at-risk teens and their parents. He is a popular lecturer on teaching and parenting topics in

communities around the world, and is the author of several best-selling parenting tape and CD sets. For more information on Rabbi Horowitz's parenting tapes, visit <http://www.rabbihorowitz.com/> or call 845-352-7100 X 133.