

Introduction to Parsha #6: Toldot¹

<i>Torah:</i>	Genesis 25:19 - 28:9
<i>Haftarah:</i>	Malachi 1:1 - 2:7
<i>B'rit Chadasha:</i>	Romans 9:1-28



“Deep inside the sons clashed violently with each other.”
[Genesis 25:22]

Shalom, and welcome to the study of the sixth of the 54 parshot of Torah. The sages of Israel long ago gave this parsha the name ***Toldot***. I refer to it as *the Parsha of Clashing Worldviews*. The sometimes violent *clashing of nascent nations, worldviews, and God-concepts* is a primary theme that we will find running like a crimson river throughout our text. And yet there is something more at work here than even that – something far more profound. Let me explain.

The Place of Parsha Toldot in the ‘Greater Story’ of Torah

As we have been discovering in these studies Torah is not by any means a cold, dead book of law. Torah is the very wisdom of the Creator of the Universe. It carries His life-force, power, and essential goodness in it. It is gloriously alive, stunningly beautiful, and full to the brim with living water stirred constantly by the brooding Presence of the *Ruach* of the Most High God.

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Neither is Torah a haphazard collection of ancient stories laced with spiritual overtones designed to educate our minds and train our children in matters of ethnicity, ethics, and/or morality. Instead Torah is *a beautiful tapestry of the Love Story of the Ages* – an absolutely stunning work of art thoughtfully designed and carefully knit together thread-by-thread by the Hand of the Most Passionate Lover Who Ever Lived over vast periods of what we humans know as time.

This rich tapestry of life we call Torah is, you see, intended to constitute the Master of All Things' wedding gift to His chosen Bride. He has already planned exactly when and how He is going to present it to His Chosen Bride under the Chuppah. And as He wove the stitches of Torah together He had a vision of you and me shining like the sun, clothed in white linen, and adorned with precious jewels. With this vision for our destiny and purpose in life in mind, He hummed as it were a song, and incorporated into the very fabric of the tapestry He planned to give us a lilting melody that only a Bride's ears can hear. This melody is nothing short of the *song of all songs* – the song to which the Bridegroom of Heaven and His Bride will *dance together* in this Age, then *reign together* in perfect harmony in the Messianic Age to come.

The Power of Torah to Renew the Mind and Transform the Life

Torah is designed to stir the human soul with both *visual* and *auditory* stimulation. We are to *gaze at it* in wonder. We are to *listen to it* – and talk about it, and meditate upon it - in awe. Why? Because the visual and auditory stimulation are engineered to have an amazing effect upon us. It is our Creator's Plan, you see, that through reading, meditating upon, talking about, and living according to Torah, day after day, parsha after parsha, year after year, we are supposed to gradually increase our capacity to *see*, to *hear*, to *envision*, to *marvel at*, to *embrace*, and to *intimately come to know* the Holy One's Glorious Plan of Revelation and Redemption for Mankind and Creation – and then, He knows, He will have won our hearts, and we will *come to love that Plan passionately* and voluntarily – even joyfully - *take up our pre-ordained place* in it, wherever it takes us, and whatever the cost.

The process requires us to walk with the Holy One through many potentially violent clashes with other worldviews. It requires us to stay calm and let Him lead us when our flesh would rather either, or draw a sword and charge or bolt and run. If and to the extent we embrace and surrender to it, Torah is brilliantly designed to teach us how to engage people and situations that challenge us – or threaten to seduce, marginalize, or destroy us - wisely. That is why regular, humble, awestruck Torah study is so *important*. It was to enlighten and empower us to overcome the world that the Master designed and strategically placed each letter, each word, each phrase, each sentence, and each paragraph of each story that makes up the tapestry of Torah. Each letter of Torah constitutes a note of the great redemption symphony of Heaven. Each

phrase of Torah constitutes a stitch in the great tapestry of deliverance from evil. Each story in the Torah constitutes a stanza of the ultimate Song of All Songs. Each parsha of Torah constitutes an act in the Great Drama He is causing to unfold before our eyes – and which He will eventually unveil to the eyes of all people and nations in the world.

Through the rich tapestry of Torah and its accompanying symphonic movements the Holy One intends to empower us to behold with our spiritual eyes and simultaneously hear with our spiritual ears, in perfect order and just the right sequence, every aspect of Himself and His Plan that we the reader – the objects of His skillful romancing - are ready to receive. Put another way, each section of Torah's Divinely-inspired narrative is meticulously designed to reveal no more - and no less - than our tender spirits are prepared to incorporate into our lives and release into our spheres of influence.

The Process of Renewal and Transformation Has Begun!

Hence in the parsha with which the Torah began the Holy One *introduced us to the concept and the mystery* of walking and talking with, and being led through life's experiences by, the Holy One. We saw Adam and Chava living in the Garden, walking and talking with the Holy One without fear or guilt or shame. We saw them partnering with Him in a grand enterprise. We then saw the Master Weaver stitch into the tapestry of Torah a series of narratives designed to *show us the stark contrast between the way of 'walking with the Holy One' on the one hand, and the way of those who walk in the counsel of the ungodly*, on the other hand.

Thereafter, through the narratives of ***the Fall***, of ***the incident involving Kayin and Hevel***, and a brief but unforgettable reference to ***the life and sudden, mysterious disappearance of Enoch***, the Holy One not only firmly convinced us of the absolute superiority of the way of walking and talking with, and being led through life's experiences by, the Holy One; He also *birthed within our hearts an unquenchable longing to experience such things in our time, in real life-altering ways.*

Continuing on through the call of Noah, the Flood, the post-Flood Covenant, and the Tower of Babel, the Holy One taught us that not only is the way of walking and talking with and following the lead of the Holy One *vastly preferable to a life of going our own way and doing our own thing*. Walking and talking with and following in the paths and ways of our Creator, we learned, was greatly desirable *not only for our own personal fulfillment, but also for the achievement of the destiny and purpose for which we were given the breath of life*. We learned – if we were paying attention – that walking and talking with, and embracing the leading of, the Holy One is indeed ***the only way that leads to true life, and health and peace.***

We now know that Adam [before the Fall], Enoch, and Noach each walked and talked with, flowed in resonance with, and danced through life with the Holy One. The exact details of the nature and depth of the walk those people had with the Holy One was, of course, intentionally left sketchy. That ambiguity has served a Divine purpose: it has *whetted our appetite to know – and experience – well . . . more.*

The Holy One knows how to keep secrets. And He knows how to delay gratification in the human beings that He created in His own image in such a way as to stir up Holy hunger. He therefore intentionally did not reveal much at all to us in parshot *B'reshit* and *Noach* about what Adam's, Enoch's or Noach's walking with the Holy One lifestyle looked like in practical every day terms. His purpose in those narratives was, after all, neither to educate us out of embarrassing ignorance nor condemn us for our obvious hard-heartedness. What He was doing was *instigating in us* a Divine Curiosity – a deep spiritual sense of *wonder* and *deep longing* which He planned as part of His Grand Redemptive Design to create in us, nurture in us, and, in an appropriate season of time, fan into the flame of Divine Romance.

The Avraham Chronicles Up The Ante

Then the Holy One introduced the *Avraham Chronicles* – three sequential parshot in which the Holy One slowly and progressively drew back the curtain just a little bit more each time to give us a taste of what 'walking with' Him looks like in real time. The more we see of walking with the Holy One, the more we are fascinated by it. The more our spiritual ears hear of the enchanting melody the Master sings as He crafts these stunning images into the tapestry of Torah, the more our hearts leap within us.

The Avraham chronicles introduced us to the three-step Divine Dance Progression I call the '**God-encounter/Instructive Life experience/Follow-up God-encounter**' **Waltz**. This means that walking with the Holy One in real time always starts with Him presenting Himself to us and asking us to dance, then in us trying to follow His Lead but quickly missing the mark He sets for us by trying to do what He calls us to do according to our own ideas of what is good, then His returning to us to affirm us in the relationship but to refocus our activities according to *His Instructions* and *His timing* and *His methods* and *His vision* instead of our own.

The Holy One danced this three-step waltz with Avraham and Sarah over and over. And just about the time they started to get good at it, they . . . well they just **died**. The death of Avraham and Sarah did not by any means stop the dance of Divine Romance, however; it merely meant it was time for the Holy One to call forth a new dance partner.

Welcome to parsha *Toldot*. You see, Dear Reader, it is not just the parsha of the Clashing of Nations and Worldviews – it is also the parsha of the *Changing of Covenant Partners*.

The Transitional Epoch

The last three parshot we have studied were all about Avraham and Sarah and their Divinely choreographed set of ever-deepening covenant dealings with the Holy One. Over the course of those chronicles we learned a lot about some foundational aspects of walking and talking with, and following the leading of, the Holy One. We learned from the dance we saw the Holy One dance with Avraham and Sarah such foundational covenant truths as the *sh'ma* modality [i.e. listening, hearing, responding], the *bracha* [i.e. *blessing*/empowerment] mystery, the *emunah* [transformation through impregnation/impartation] disciplines, the *tzavah* [teaching, enjoining] protocols, and the exquisite freedom of the *akeida* [ultimate surrender of all for the sake of love for the Holy One] approach to life.

But as mind-blowing as these five elemental lessons of walking and talking with and being led through life by the Holy One are, they are intended by our Great King to serve only as the essential footings for the threshold pillars of, and as portals of entry into, the great Kingdom Edifice of living stones that the Holy One is building upon the earth.

The time has come to build upon the foundation the Holy One has laid for us. The Holy One has ordained, as part of the process of slowly building Divine Passion in His Betrothed Bride, that the first level of building the Holy One desires to do upon this great foundation must await the coming of age of the second generation of the covenant, namely Yitzchak and his beautiful young wife Rivkah.

Toldot is the ‘transitional’ parsha that forms a bridge between the era of Avraham and the era of first Yitzchak, then Ya’akov, then Yosef and his brothers. The Holy One will, you see, change dance partners three times in the next twenty-five chapters of Torah.

Introducing the Bridegroom-King’s Current Partners in the Dance

The key figures in the narrative of parsha *Toldot* will be the transitional characters of *Yitzchak* and *Rivkah*. Who are these people, you ask? We actually got to know Rivkah pretty well last week through the detail rich bride-selection chronicles of Genesis 24. This week it will be Yitzchak’s turn to take center stage. If we do not connect with Yitzchak this week though, we may never get to know him at all - for this parsha represents the bulk of Yitzchak's brief dance across Torah's stage.

This is Yitzchak's shining moment – his hour to be transformed into a functional covenant partner of the Creator of the Universe through perfectly timed God-encounters and Divinely ordained life experiences. But in reality it is not so much Yitzchak that we will be getting to know – it will be that particular manifestation of our Creator which He chooses to reveal as the '*God of Yitzchak*'.

We have met and walked through three *parshot* with the Holy One as the '*God of Avraham*'. We will, starting next week, begin a lengthy process of getting to know the Holy One as the '*God of Ya'akov*'. This week is the appointed time for us to get to know Him as the '*God of Yitzchak*' as well. Nevertheless, let us pause to consider and try to connect on a personal level with our ancestor Yitzchak.

***So Just Who Is Yitzchak . . .
and What Part Does He Play in our Spiritual Heritage?***

Avraham and Ya'akov are bold men of action about whom Torah goes on for chapter after glorious chapter. Through Torah's detailed narratives of Avraham and Ya'akov's magnificent adventures on planet earth, we are made to feel like we know not only the intimate details of these men's lives, but also, if it were possible, know how these men think. We get to know these men's strengths. We get to know their weaknesses. We can readily identify with both of them. Indeed, after studying Torah's narratives about them for a few years, most of us begin to feel an eternal bond with Avraham and Ya'akov. But *Yitzchak*? Who is he to us?

Other than seminal fluid, what is Yitzchak's contribution to the heritage of the Holy One's covenant people? In comparison to Avraham and Ya'akov, you see, Yitzchak seems mysterious and aloof. It is therefore going to take a little effort on our part to get 'into' Yitzchak and begin to understand what makes him tick. I assure you however, whatever effort it takes it is *well worth it*. After all, there is a bit of Yitzchak, just as there is a bit of Avraham and a bit of Ya'akov, in all of us. The quest is not therefore just to get to know the historic figure Yitzchak – but is in actuality to get to know a little more about the Yitzchak in *ourselves*.

What is *the key* to understanding and connecting with Yitzchak the way we understand and connect with Avraham and Ya'akov? What is *the secret* to coming to grips with the Yitzchak in all of us the way we come to grips with the Avraham and the Ya'akov in all of us? I believe a large part of the answer to these questions is found in the first activity Torah shows Yitzchak engaging in this week. In the first few verses of parsha ***Toldot***, I believe, lies a secret hidden in plain view that explains the essence of Yitzchak's unique contribution to the heritage of the Holy One's covenant people.

The Desperate Cry of the Broken Heart

Rivkah, the bride Avraham procured for Yitzchak near the end of last week's parsha, turns out to be unable to conceive children. Twenty years of marriage pass with no sign of a baby – and no hint of fulfillment of the covenant the Holy One made of fruitfulness through Yitzchak. Torah tells us however that something happened at about the 20-year anniversary of Yitzchak and Rivkah's wedding that changed all that - miracle of miracles, Rivkah's womb was *supernaturally opened*.

Please note how Torah describes the circumstances under which this came about:

Vaye'etar Yitzchak l'Adonai l'nochach ishto
And Yitzchak pleaded with the Holy One for the sake of His wife,

ki akarah hi
*for she was **akarah***

vaye'ater lo Adonai v'tahar Rivkah ishto
And the Holy One granted his plea, and Rivkah conceived.
[Genesis 25:21]

The first picture we are given of Yitzchak this week is a picture of him engaging in an activity our English Bibles call 'pleading'. In the above English translation of Genesis 25:21(a), we read that Yitzchak '*pleaded with*' the Holy One. In the Revised Standard Version, the New American Standard Version, and the Complete Jewish Bible versions, we read that Yitzchak '*prayed to*' the Holy One.

In the Hebrew text of *Sefer B'reshit* the pertinent verb phrase our English Bibles translate as '*pleaded with*' the Holy One or '*prayed to*' the Holy One in this passage is *vaye'etar Yitzchak l'Adonai . . .* The verb root at the heart of this phrase is *atar*².

This is, interestingly enough, the first instance in Torah of this particular verb root. What Yitzchak did – what the Holy One responded to – is something we have not seen before in God-man relations. Adam did not *atar*. Neither did *Noach* or *Shem*. Even *Avraham avinu*, though he conversed with the Holy One on numerous occasions, is never said to have *atar-ed*. *Atar-ing*, it seems, is something our least known and most aloof patriarch – the enigmatic Yitzchak – actually pioneered.

Other than giving us his 'seed' – the seed of Messiah – teaching us to *atar* is Yitzchak's most important contribution to the world. We very much need, you see, to learn to *atar* the way Yitzchak did. We need to learn *atar-ing* from Yitzchak

² *Atar* is *ayin, tav, resh*. Strong's Hebrew word #6279, it is pronounced *aw-tar*'.

while we have the chance. Why? What is *atar*-ing, and why is it important to us? If you want to understand what it means to *atar*, you should probably understand that *atar* is the verb root which will be used in Exodus to describe what Moshe did [at Pharaoh's request] that resulted in the Holy One halting/bringing to an end the plagues of *swamp creatures/frogs*. Exodus 8:8 tells us that a frustrated Pharaoh ordered Moshe [Moses] to '*entreat [atar] the Holy One, that He may take away the frogs from me*' Pharaoh learned quickly the significance of *atar*-ing in communications between the Holy One and B'nei Yisrael. He would repeat the request to Moshe to *atar* twice more, in connection with the *hailstorm* [Exodus 9:28] and the *locust invasion* [Exodus 10:17].

As we have discussed previously, every Hebrew letter is also a pictograph, usually depicting in a visual form some action by man or God. Every Hebrew verb root, called a *shoresh*, generally consists of three Hebrew letters in sequence. Each *shoresh* acts therefore is actually something like a hieroglyphic mural. If the verb root is viewed Hebraically, its letters do not just tell us the sequence of sounds, but actually describe the essence of the verb visually, in motion-picture imagery.

What kind of entreaty or supplication or prayer does the Hebrew verb *atar* picture for us? The Hebraic word picture is that of a man's soul [*ayin*] focusing intently on the covenant sign [*tav*] until the king steps off his throne [*resh*] to take action on the man's behalf. Ah, that is the most important spiritual secret Yitzchak teaches us. The *atar* kind of entreaty that Yitzchak pioneered is, you see, the entreaty of *complete brokenness*. It is *the helpless cry of a contrite and humble spirit*. It is the kind of *desperate baring of one's soul before the Holy One in prayer* that David exhibited, and that more than anything else made the sweet Psalmist of Israel a '*man after the Holy One's own heart*'. See II Samuel 21:14, II Samuel 24:25. And it is, I believe, the foundation stone upon which Y'shua of Natzret built the deepest of all forms of entreaty – the *atar*-ing that poured forth from Y'shua in *Gat-sh'manei* [Gathsemene].

Atar-ing is not asking for what one wants from the Holy One. It is not a request for a blessing or a gift to make one's life easier. *Atar*-ing is what a covenant partner does when he has come to the end of himself, the end of his own strength, and the end of his own will, and cries out in desperation for the fulfillment of the *promises* made by his covenant partner.

Why was Yitzchak the only patriarch who could introduce us to the covenant activity Torah calls *atar*-ing? Perhaps it was because, of the patriarchs, only he had tasted the exquisite freedom of the *akeida* [ultimate surrender of all for the sake of love for the Holy One] approach to life. Only he had lain bound and helpless upon an

altar of stone while flames reached toward his body even as the cold steel of his father's flint knife pressed tightly against his throat. Or perhaps it was because only Yitzchak among the patriarchs would personally experienced what it meant for a supernaturally provided substitutionary atonement to be provided from Heaven to effectuate his redemption.

So a question is now on the Torah-study hall table: How are you coming along in the cultivation of the *atar*-ing discipline of the Covenant? Do you *atar*? Are you recognized in the courts of Heaven? Is your scent clearly discernible in the great bowl of the prayers of the saints that ascends to the Throne of the Holy One constantly³? Do you approach the Holy One with no agenda but a desperate hunger for His covenant to be fulfilled? Are you ready to press deeper in your *atar*-ing calling?

There will come a time in each of our lives, I suspect, when an *atar*-ing approach to the throne of the Holy One of Israel will be the only hope we have. I pray that when that time comes in your life you will not be unprepared, but will be ready, willing and able to flow in the heritage left you by the quiet, unassuming old fellow named Yitzchak. How can you prepare for such a time? Just imagine it was you instead of Yitzchak that lay bound and helpless on the altar of Moriyah, surrounded by ascending flames, with a flint knife pressed against the carotid artery of your neck.

Understanding the Deeper Shades of Meaning of the Hebrew Word Toldot

The parsha we study this week begins with the Hebrew phrase *v'eleh toldot Yitzchak ben-Avraham*. This is, I believe, an intentional parallel to the second parsha of Torah, parsha *Noach*, which also began with the words "*v'eleh toldot*".

The Hebrew word our English Bibles translate as 'account' in parsha *Noach* and as 'generations' in the opening lines of this week's parsha is *toldot*⁴. This is the feminine plural form of the noun *toldah*⁵. According to Strong's concordance this word can mean such varied things as *descendants, results, proceedings, generations, genealogies, begettings, account, and/or history*.

³ The reference is to Revelation 8:3-4, which read: "Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand."

⁴ Toldot is *tav, vav, lamed, dalet, tav*. It is pronounced *toe-led-oat*.

⁵ Toldah is *tav, vav, lamed, dalet, hey*. It is Strong's Hebrew word #8435.

Thinking like a Westerner in terms of English-language definitions is therefore of very little assistance in helping us understand the title of our parsha. So let's think Hebraically. The sages offer two definitions of the word **toldot**. Some say that the noun **toldot** refers to one's **progeny**. By this they mean that a person lives on, trans-generationally, primarily through the lives and *mitzvot* of his or her *biological children* and *spiritual children* - i.e. the individuals whom he has taught the ways of the Torah, and who thus perpetuate the person's influence.

Others say that the term **toldot** should also be deemed to refer to **the chronicles of one's life and experiences**. When a person's life is full of inner meaning, these sages say, even if he or she leaves no children [biological and spiritual] the mere accounts and chronicles of his life, and the long-lasting effects of his or her interactions with the Holy One and with the world, are so powerful that they yield inspiration and revelation for all who come after him or her.

Think of it. There is, as we all know, an eternal life prepared for us in another, spiritual world. But what the sages are suggesting is that in a very real Hebraic sense there is an eternal life prepared for us in the *present physical world* as well. We live on, in this world, say the sages, through our **toldot**. So let's look deeper into the Hebrew word. The Hebrew verb root from which the word **toldot** is derived is **yalad**⁶. That verb root means *to bear, to bring forth, to beget, to engender, or to travail*.

The Hebraic word picture the verb root **yalad** presents is that of *the Divine Hand* [**yod**], wielding the *cattle prod* [**lamed**], causing something to go through *a door or passageway or orifice* [**dalet**]. The first Biblical usage of the verb **yalad** is found in Genesis 3:16. There, the Holy One told Chava [Eve]:

***I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth.
In pain you will bring forth*** [Hebrew **yalad**] ***children***.

To get from the verb root **yalad** to the noun **toldot**, both a prefix and a suffix are added. The prefix is the Hebrew letter **tav** [t sound]. The suffix is the combination **cholem**⁷ - **tav** [sounding, in English, like the word 'oat']. Because of the rules of the Hebrew language, the addition of the **tav** prefix to a word beginning with a **yod** [y sound] causes the **yod** at the beginning of the word *to disappear*. This means that the driving force behind the matter being discussed is now covenant fulfillment

⁶ Yalad is **yod, lamed, dalet**. Strong's Hebrew word #3205, it is pronounced *yaw-lawd'*.

⁷ A **cholem** [a vowel marking found in the Masoretic text] is pronounced like the English vowel 'o' in its long form - i.e. as in the word 'go'. A suffix consisting of a **cholem** [usually with a **vav** underneath] followed by a **tav** is the standard form of plural ending for anything in the feminine gender. A suffix consisting of a **yod** followed by a **mem sofit**, on the other hand, is the standard form of plural ending for anything in the masculine gender.

[*tav*], rather than an independent action of the Holy One's Divine Hand [*yod*]. From a Hebraic standpoint, therefore, what the word ***toldot*** refers to is *the outworking of the covenant* – i.e. *the passages of a human being in covenant with the Holy One through the doorways the Holy One leads him or her into and out of*. Think of it this way: As a baby in the process of being born is propelled through the birth canal by an unseen but uncontrollable force prodding it along, so a man or woman in covenant with the Holy One is *propelled through a series of doorways in life* by the Holy One's unseen and largely uncontrollable prodding.

The message of the first line of our parsha - ***v'eleh toldot Yitzchak*** - is that Yitzchak's steps – his trials and tribulations, his God encounters – are ordained for him, and he is being *propelled toward* and *pushed through* them, by the sheer force of the covenant the Holy One made with his father Avraham. What am I *talking about*, you ask?

People in Covenant With the Holy One Are 'Guided Missiles' On Target Toward A Spiritual Destiny

When the Holy One spoke over Avraham He spoke *creatively* [i.e. with carefully-chosen words infused with the power to make that which was said happen] and *prophetically* [i.e. with a *Divine Blueprint* and *timetable* built in to His Words]. In light of the force of that covenant the most significant factor in Yitzchak's life would never be his own will, or his own goodness, his own wisdom, his 'good deeds', or his environment – it would be the *covenant words* the Holy One spoke over Avraham.

If we are engrafted into the covenant the Holy One made with Avraham it is the same with us - *the covenant words the Holy One spoke over Avraham and his spiritual progeny control and determine our lives as well*. That is because as Yeshayahu [Isaiah] spoke on the Holy One's behalf:

***“As the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish,
so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,
so is My Word that goes forth from My Mouth:
it will not return to Me empty, but will accomplish what I desire
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”***

[Isaiah 55:10-11]

It cannot be otherwise. That is the prophetic, creative, reality-shaping power of the Words of the Holy One's Mouth. At every crossroads and at the threshold of every doorway we encounter may the covenant the Holy One made with Avraham prod us through – in the direction and for the purposes and in the timing the Holy One determined long ago.

What about ‘free choice’, you ask? Free choice is still there even for those in – and engrafted into – the covenant. But the *ultimate effect/end result* of free choice choices made by those under the covenant is not determined by the chooser, but by the Word of the Holy One. The free choices we exercise merely color in the details of the Divine Blueprint. That is what is meant by Shaul’s famous comment in Romans 8:28 that **‘the Holy One works all things together for good for those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose.’**

Choices we make may have *immediate* consequences, *delayed* consequences, or *eternal* consequences. Those consequences may be pleasant or unpleasant, pleasurable or painful, depending upon the circumstances. But the *ultimate effect/end result* of the choices made by those in the covenant – even the ‘bad’ choices or foolish choices - is both ‘good’, and is according to ‘His purpose’.

In other words, by virtue of the covenant of the Holy One when the generations to come reflect back upon our lives they will say of the days we lived upon the earth: ***v'eleh toldot Yitzchak ben Avraham*** – *these are the covenant outworkings of Yitzchak, son of Avraham.*

A Parsha Toldot Travelogue

What will this parsha *teach us*? Where will it *take us*? What does it *foretell for us*? What are these *covenant outworkings* going to look like? Let’s take a *whirlwind tour* around the parsha, shall we?

Act 1: Behold, the Newlyweds!

As the curtain for parsha ***Toldot*** opens we find Yitzchak and Rivkah living as newlyweds near Hebron. In the opening aliyah we will learn that for the first 20 years of her married life Rivkah, like her kinswoman Sarah, is unable to conceive children. We then see Yitzchak praying for her, and see the Holy One respond to his prayers powerfully. She will not only become pregnant – she will become pregnant with *twins*.

Act 2: Trouble Stirring in Rivkah’s Womb

We learn quickly, however, that Rivkah’s pregnancy – like that of Sarah - is anything but ordinary. The two children in her womb are not exactly a ‘double blessing’. They are two whirling dervishes, struggling violently within her womb, each one seeking to wrestle from the other the position of supremacy.

Driven to the point of despair by the war raging within her, Rivkah seeks and receives a God-encounter. The Holy One reveals to Rivkah that the suffering she is experiencing is a *microcosmic prelude to a worldwide conflict* that will rage

between the two great nations which will issue forth from these twins, Rome (from the one which will be born first) and Yisrael (from the one who will be born second).

Act 3: The Birth of the Bible's First Set of Twins

When the blessed day of delivery comes Rivkah and Yitzchak find themselves with two very different man-children. One is hairy and reddish in coloring. To him they give the name **Esav** [Esau]. The second, born grasping the heel of the other, is smooth-skinned and lighter of complexion. To him they give the name **Ya'akov** [Jacob].

Act 4: Different Aptitudes, Clashing Worldviews, and Diverging God-concepts

Esav and Ya'akov carry their *in utero* struggles forward into the physical realm. Unable to cooperate on anything, they maintain an uneasy state of peace by utilizing classical avoidance techniques - they adopt vastly different approaches to life that keep them separated most of the time. Esav directs all energies and talents into outdoor things, becoming a great hunter and warrior. Ya'akov, on the other hand, stays out of Esav's way by hanging around the tents of his mother and father, focuses his aptitude and interests on matters of business, and becomes a shrewd negotiator and manager.

One day – some of the sages of Israel say that it was the day Avraham died, others say it was the anniversary of the sixth day of creation, the day the Holy One formed and breathed life into Adam - Esav comes in from the field hungry and demands of Ya'akov some of the food he is cooking. Ya'akov obliges - *on the condition that Esav, technically the firstborn, sell to Ya'akov all his rights as the firstborn son in exchange for the food*. Esav is interested only in that which brings him instant gratification – like the watered-down red bean soup he sees simmering in Ya'akov's kettle - and is not particularly enamored of things of long-range (in particular, *trans-generational*) value like a **b'chorah** [birthright]; hence, he gladly agrees, and the deal is struck.

Act 5: Famine in the Land . . . and Yitzchak's First God-Encounter

The saga of the interactions between Esav and Ya'akov is then interrupted by a lengthy narrative pertaining to a famine in the land. At first, when the famine threatens his livelihood and his family's well being, Yitzchak is tempted to follow in his father Avraham's footsteps, and travel to Egypt in search of food. This leads to Yitzchak's first God-encounter, in the course of which the Holy One tells Yitzchak not to leave the land of Israel as he is contemplating, but to go instead to the lands in the Western part of Kena'an, alongside the Mediterranean Sea, which were then occupied by the Ph'lishtim [Philistines].

Yitzchak *sh'ma*'s the Holy One's instructions and *heads West*, to a portion of Eretz Kena'an occupied under the dominion of the Ph'lishtim king known as Avimelech. Like his father Avraham, Yitzchak feared for his safety in such a world, and chose to introduce his beautiful wife, who Godless men would kill him for in an instant, as his sister. This resulted in Avimelech welcoming him into his domain and actually providing land for Yitzchak to live on - in exchange for Rivkah's becoming part of his harem.

Eventually Avimelech saw Yitzchak and Rivkah together and realized that he had been misled concerning their relationship. Inexplicably [other than by Divine protection], however, rather than have the two of them killed Avimelech issued a decree that declared them 'untouchables'. This actually worked to Yitzchak and Rivkah's advantage, in that they were able to live the *sh'ma* lifestyle they had learned from Avraham without the interference of the Ph'lishtim. They actually experienced a 'golden age' of sorts while sojourning in Ph'lishtia, as Yitzchak miraculously harvested a hundred times what he planted – even in a time of famine - because of the Holy One's blessing upon his life. *These are the covenant outworkings*

Act 6: Yitzchak and Rivkah Face Persecution

Yitzchak thereby became extremely wealthy – at the same time the *Ph'lishtim* were suffering from the famine – and this was more than the Ph'lishtim could stomach. They therefore expelled Yitzchak, Rivkah and family from the land where they had taken up residence – and, of course, confiscated the bulk of Yitzchak's wealth.

The fields and crops which Yitzchak had cultivated having been confiscated, and having been expelled from his home, the patriarch returned to the nomadic life of his father. He took with him from the land of the Ph'lishtim whatever sheep and goats he could drive before him, and set off in traditional nomadic style, retracing his father's journeys through the land of Kena'an. As his father had done, he roamed from place to place in search of pastureland and water. When in remote areas without oases, he sought out and re-opened the wells that his father Avraham had dug, but which the Ph'lishtim had back-filled.

We will see that each time Yitzchak's servants dug a new well, however, the Ph'lishtim came behind him and claimed it as theirs. Wherever Yitzchak and family went, strife and controversy seemed to follow them, prodding them to move again.

Finally Yitzchak and family journeyed far enough into the inhospitable desert wasteland that they found a place no one else wanted. There, when Yitzchak's servants dug a well, no one came to challenge their rights to the water; hence, Yitzchak and the patriarchal family experienced the first real period of peace they had known since their expulsion by Avimelech.

Act 7: Yitzchak's Second God-Encounter

It was at this point that Yitzchak had his second God-encounter. The Holy One *blessed* Yitzchak, told him not to fear, *assured him that He was "with" him*, would *continue to bless him*, and would, as he promised Avraham, *multiply his seed*. *These are the covenant outworkings . . .*

After this God-encounter however things did not immediately appear to get much better. Immediately Avimelech came out to Yitzchak's camp with a show of force. When he arrived, however, he got the stunning revelation that – as the Holy One had promised in connection with the Second God-encounter described above, *the Holy One was with Yitzchak*. Avimelech decided, therefore, rather than to make a war on the patriarchal household that he could not win due to Yitzchak's Divine source of protection, to seek instead an advantageous peace treaty.

Act 8: Yitzchak's Blessing

Years passed. Yitzchak grew old. His eyesight began to fail him. He determined that it is time to bestow his paternal blessing [the *b'racha*] upon his firstborn, Esav. He instructed Esav to go out and kill some wild game, dress it, and prepare a feast for the two of them, at the conclusion of which Yitzchak would bestow his blessing [*b'racha*].

Rivkah however overheard the discussion and was not pleased. While Esav was gone in search of wild game, she told Ya'akov, whom she favored and wanted to receive the paternal blessing instead of Esav, to kill a goat, the meat of which she would season like wild game the way Yitzchak liked it. She then helped Ya'akov dress up in Esav's clothing, and told him to take the specially prepared food to his father, pretend to be Esav, and thereby trick Yitzchak into giving him whatever blessing [*b'racha*] Yitzchak intended to give Esav.

The plan was successful. Yitzchak takes the food given him by Ya'akov, then pronounces over Ya'akov the blessing he intended to give Esav. Esav, unaware of what has taken place, returns and announces to his father that he is back, has the food Yitzchak requested, and is ready to receive his blessing. Yitzchak trembles violently upon realizing what has happened. Esav gets very angry, and vows to kill Ya'akov as soon as Yitzchak passes away.

Act 9: Ya'akov's Exile Begins

For Ya'akov's safety Rivkah and Yitzchak send Ya'akov away to live with *Lavan*, Rivkah's brother, in Paddan-Aram, until things settle down.

Act 10: Esav Marries Yish'mael's Daughter

Esav then takes another wife, a daughter of Yishma'el, who makes life even more miserable for Yitzchak and Rivkah. And that prepares us for the transition to the next parsha, the seventh of Torah, parsha *Vayetze*. In *Vayetze* the focus of Torah's narrative will shift to the travels and travails of Yitzchak's youngest son Ya'akov.

Introducing the Covenant Concepts Of Birthright [B'chorah] and Blessing [B'racha]

The primary focus of this week's parsha is basically going to be on two closely related things: something which in English we have come to call a 'birthright' [Hebrew *b'chorah*] and something which in English we have come to call a 'blessing' [Hebrew *b'racha*]. If we do not understand what these things are, and the difference between them, we will never understand the parsha.

A *b'racha*, or 'blessing', is a purely physical matter. It is the substance of that stuff which a father can bequeath to his son or daughter, and consists solely of things in and of this physical world – rights of possession and/or inheritance of lands, rights with respect to flocks and herds, gold and silver, and the like.

A *b'chorah*, or 'birthright', on the other hand is something that is not subject to the will of a person's father or mother. The term *b'chorah* is a legal term from the ancient jurisprudence of covenant interpretation and enforcement. A perpetual covenant [in Hebrew, *b'rit olam*], you see, necessarily must make provision for something the law calls 'succession'. The right of a successor to the original covenant partner to be placed in the stead of the original covenant partner when the original covenant partner dies [called the *right of succession*] is called the *b'chorah*. The *b'chorah* is a matter of Divine Choice, not human will. Unlike the *b'racha*, the right of succession to the covenant does not necessarily go to the firstborn⁸.

B'chorah has to do with the *method or protocol for determining who will take over the covenant rights and responsibilities of a deceased or otherwise displaced covenant partner*. Because *b'chorah* consists primarily of spiritual, rather than

⁸ The *b'chorah* did not therefore go to Yish'mael, the firstborn of Avraham, but to Yitzchak. Similarly, the *b'chorah* did not go to Rueven, the firstborn of Ya'akov, but to Y'hudah [and, in some sense, to Yosef]. The same can be said concerning David, who was not the firstborn of Yesha [Jesse], yet received the *b'chorah*, and of Shlomo, who was not the firstborn of David, yet received the *b'chorah*.

physical, essence, it must ultimately be determined, accepted, and approved by *the remaining partner in the covenant relationship*. If the remaining covenant partner does not determine, accept, and approve a successor, the covenant is over.

Let's use the *b'rit olam* between the Holy One and Avraham [spelled out in Genesis 15 and 17] as our example for studying out the distinction between *b'racha* [blessing] and *b'chorah* [birthright]. We all know that Avraham was blessed of the Holy One. He was, in fact, very, very rich. He had herds, flocks, and extensive water and pasturage rights in the land of Kena'an. He had gold and silver galore, and personal possessions beyond counting. Some of this he gave to Yish'mael, and some to the sons born to Keturah after Sarah's death, but most of this he gave [via *b'racha*] to Yitzchak. We also all know that Avraham had a covenant with God – a perpetual covenant, the purpose of which was that all the nations of the earth would be blessed, and the primary parts of which were that:

[a] The Holy One would give Avraham numerous descendants [progeny];

[b] The Holy One would give the land of the Kena'ani Avraham's descendants as a perpetual possession;

[c] Avraham would teach his children and his household after him to follow the ways of the Holy One, and do righteousness and justice,

[d] Avraham would circumcise every male child born in his household on the 8th day of the child's life;

The *b'chorah* [birthright] – the rights to succession under this covenant - was something *the Holy One*, not Avraham, had to decide. The same held true for Yitzchak. *The Holy One*, not Yitzchak, had the right to make the choice as to which of Yitzchak's sons would be chosen to succeed Avraham and Yitzchak as His partner in this covenant. The Holy One made that choice *before the boys were ever born*.

The Holy One had ordained before the twins were born that Ya'akov would be the one who would succeed Yitzchak as His partner in connection with the covenant by which all the peoples of the earth were to be blessed. If, therefore, there was *naiveté* practiced in relation to the 'sale' of the *b'chorah* [birthright] by Esav to Ya'akov, the *naiveté* was not on the part of Esav, but on the part of Ya'akov. Ya'akov therefore bargained for, and purchased from, Esav something that was already his, and could be neither bought nor sold. Esav did not own the *b'chorah*. It had never been and would never be his. He knew that. He had no illusions about it.

Esav did not in fact even want the *b'chorah*, because it would require him to 1. *Know and be known intimately by the Creator of the Universe*, and 2. *teach his*

children and his household after him to follow the ways of the Holy One, and do righteousness and justice'. Esav wanted none of any of that. Esav just wanted the tangible goods his father could bequeath to him. And as it turned out he was not to receive that either. But more on that later in the week.

A Brief Look at Haftarah Toldot Malachi 1:1 – 2:7

The *haftarah* reading for this week is taken from the opening lines of the book containing the prophecies compiled under the name - or perhaps title - ***Malachi*** [Malachi], meaning 'My Messenger'. This book is commonly believed to contain the last prophetic messages from the Holy One prior to the so-called *Inter-Biblical period*. If that is true the book not only constitutes the last warning from the Holy One concerning the coming invasion of Israel by the Hellenists of Syria which will transform the culture, the economy, and the political and religious environment of the Holy One's 'Kingdom Beachhead on Earth'. Out of that Hellenistic movement – with its strong push for conformity to the values and humanistic worldview of the Greco-Roman age - will flow the momentous events described in the Books of the Maccabees. The abomination that causes desolation will appear for the first time. And that will, of course, set the stage for the initial appearance of the Messiah in His Land.

Here is how the book called 'Malachi' begins:

An oracle: the word of the Holy One to Yisra'el by Malachi.
"I have loved you," says the Holy One. Yet you say, "How have you loved us?"

"Wasn't Esav Ya`akov's brother?" says the Holy One. "Yet I loved Ya`akov; but Esav I hated, and made his mountains a desolation, and gave his heritage to the jackals of the wilderness."

Whereas Edom says, "We are beaten down, but we will return and build the waste places."
This is what the Holy One of Hosts says: "They shall build, but I will throw down; and men will call them 'The Wicked Land,' even the people against whom the Holy One shows wrath forever."

Your eyes will see, and you will say, "The Holy One is great – even beyond the border of Yisra'el!"⁹

⁹ The prophetic messages in the book bearing the name *Malachi* will consist of:

[1] a charge against Israel of insensitivity to and taking for granted the love and blessing which the Holy One had so richly bestowed upon it [Malachi 1:1-5];

[2] a lengthy reproof and 'final warning' to the priesthood of the sons of Aharon [1:6 – 2:9];

[3] an indictment of Israel as a nation who has left its 'first love', and married foreigners – both physically and spiritually [2:10-16]

[4] a prophecy of the coming of the Messiah and His forerunners [2:17 – 3:6]

Many in the Israel of Malachi's day –especially among those who should have been Israel's spiritual leaders, the *Kohanim* [Priests] - had come to resemble Esav a whole lot more than they resembled their forefather Ya'akov.

Even worse, many in the Israel of Malachi's day were going to, like Esav, 'despise' the *b'chorah* [birthright], and sell same for the equivalent of a bowl of watered-down red beans. Many in the day referenced in *Malachi's* oracles had forgotten, or were taking for granted and would soon forget, the tremendous blessings that the Holy One had given them. They had lost the ability to understand, much less appreciate and appropriate, the Holy One's covenant love. Their hearts had gradually become very, very hard toward the Holy One. Their love was lukewarm, and would soon be cold. They no longer trembled at the Holy One's Words. They no longer delighted in the Holy One's Presence on the Sabbaths and Appointed Festivals. They no longer cherished the Holy One's covenant, much less valued the Holy One's ways.

Though called to receive and walk in the *b'chorah* of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov, many of Malachi's era did not honor either the Holy One's Name, their forefather's memories, or their special calling as successors to the covenant.

As we read the first part of Malachi's book this week I suggest you look for clues in the text that explain the reason the Holy One surrendered the land of Israel to be over-run by the Hellenists, allowed the rise to power of the madman Antiochus Epiphanes, and permitted that madman to persecute the Holy One's people. Search also for clues that explain the miracle of *Chanukah*, the victory of the Maccabees, and the eventual near-fatal secularism and sectarianism of the chosen people that led to a Roman takeover.

Search for clues in the text of this week's haftarah to the reason for the coming of the Redeemer, Messiah Himself. Of Him, Malachi will say:

*And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple,
Even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight.
Behold, He is coming, says the Holy One of hosts.*

[5] a reproof for failure to acknowledge the Holy One as the provider of all material wealth by setting aside the tithes called for by the Torah for the purposes Torah directed [3:7-12]

[6] a promise/warning to separate out the godly from the ungodly at the present time, and in the future judgment [3:13 – 4:3];

[7] an exhortation to return to the Torah and the *sh'ma* lifestyle [4:4 - 4:6]. In this connection, Mal'akhi will give voice to the following prophetic declaration of the Holy One:

*“Remember the Torah of Moshe, My servant,
With Which I enjoined him at Horev [Sinai] for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments.*

***"But who can endure the day of His coming?
And who can stand when He appears?
For He is like a refiner's fire and like launderers' soap.
He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver;
He will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver,
That they may make to the Holy One an approach of righteousness.***

* * *

***. . . to you who fear My name
The Sun of Righteousness will arise with healing in His wings;
and you will go out and grow fat like stall-fed calves.
You will trample the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet
On the day that I do this," says the Holy One of hosts.
Remember the Torah of Moshe, My servant,
which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments.***

[Malachi 4:2]

A Corresponding Message From the Apostolic Writings

Romans 9:1-28

This week's readings from the B'rit Chadasha are taken from the letter written by Shaul of Tarsus to those in Rome – the home turf of the superpower of the age – who held fast to both *the covenant of Torah* and to *the Messiah* Who was – who is – and who will always be – that covenant's perfect embodiment.

By the time we jump into Shaul's letter his marvelous message concerning the mystery of Messianic salvation has already proceeded through 8 chapters, each of which have been both eloquent and inspiring. In the ninth, tenth, and eleventh chapters, Shaul is going to focus our attention on yet another level and aspect of the mystery – a level and aspect with which non-Jewish people [even those who claim Y'shua of Natzret as their redeemer] struggle mightily, and therefore choose to neither comprehend nor accept – *the mystery of the Messianic salvation of all Israel*.

For the messages of Shaul that we will read this week concerning Yitzchak's *toldot* will culminate in the following declaration:

***I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery,
lest you should be wise in your own opinion,
that blindness in part has happened to Israel
until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.
And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written:***

***"The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob;
For this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins."***

[Romans 11:25-27]

But we are getting ahead of ourselves. Let's start at the beginning, not the end. Shaul begins the passage that will culminate with his stunning declaration that '*all Israel will be saved*' with the following uncharacteristic emotional outburst:

*I have great sorrow and unceasing pain in my heart!
For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Messiah for my brothers' sake,
my relatives according to the flesh, who are Yisraelites; whose is the adoption, the glory,
the covenants, the giving of the Torah, the service, and the promises;
of whom are the fathers, and from whom is Messiah as concerning the flesh,
who is over all, God, blessed forever. Amen.*

[Romans 9:1-5]

What led Shaul to this totally uncharacteristic emotional outburst? As I stated at the outset of this introductory shiur this week is the *parsha of clashing*. The apostolic writings continue this theme. Shaul of Tarsus will deal with the violent *clashing of nations, worldviews, and God-concepts* that occurs in connection with relations between the *descendants of Ya'akov*, on the one hand, and the descendants of Esav on the other. For Shaul will explain his message in Chapter 11 of Romans, saying to the 'gentiles' concerning Jewish people who refused to accept Messiah when he came in the flesh: "*Concerning the gospel [they are] enemies for your sake, but concerning the election [they are] beloved for the sake of the fathers. For the gifts and the calling of God [are] irrevocable.* **Romans 11:28-29.**

Just as Ya'akov and Esav clashed violently in Rivkah's womb today the Jewish people and the gentile nations of the world clash violently in *worldview and God-concept*. But behold – Scripture shows us a *mystery*. This clashing is all *an integral and necessary part of the redemptive plan of the Holy One, Creator of Heaven and Earth*.

*May our hearts be pricked, and our spirits renewed, this week,
As we re-connect with the heritage of covenant outworkings left to us by our forefather Yitzchak.*

The Rabbi's son

Amidah Prayer Focus for the Week

The 3rd Petition: S'lach - Forgiveness

S'lach lanu Avinu, ki chata'einu

[Forgive us, Our Father, for we have sinned]

m'chal lanu, Malkeinu, ki fasha'einu

[Pardon us, Our King, for we have done wrong]

ki m'chel v'slach Atah

[Pardon and forgive]

Baruch Atah Adonai chanun ha-marve l'sloach

[Blessed are You, O Holy One, Who graciously forgives]