

*Shiur L'Yom Sh'lishi*¹

[Tuesday's Study]

READINGS:	<i>Torah Toldot:</i>	Genesis 26:1-14
	<i>Haftarah:</i>	Malachi 1:6-8
	<i>B'rit Chadasha:</i>	Romans 9:6-7

I will perform the oath which I swore to Avraham your father.
[Genesis 26:3]

Today's Meditation is Psalm 107:8-14;

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is Petition No. 3, *S'lach* [the Prayer for Forgiveness]

After the infamous 'Birthright transaction' between Ya'akov and Esav the attention of the Torah narrative turns back to Yitzchak. It is finally Yitzchak's hour to strut and fret on the stage of Torah. Except that Yitzchak really does not strut. And he most certainly does not fret.

Yitzchak is no flashy prima donna. He is just a simple, peaceful man – who happens to be a close friend and beloved protégé of the Creator of the Universe. Yitzchak seeks neither trouble nor attention from the people around him. He has no appetite for this world's drama, fortune, or fame. He is slow to anger, and even slower to form, much less express, an opinion. Yitzchak loves YHVH. He loves Rivkah. He loves Creation – especially Eretz Yisrael. He loves rascally Esav and cagy Ya'akov. And he loves life. As a result, when he smiles his face beams with light and shines with deep, inner joy. And he smiles a lot. And the world is better for it.

Thus far in life Yitzchak has walked with the Holy One in the ways and according to the patterns that his father and mother taught him. He has apparently done so quite faithfully. He has *honored his father and his mother*, and in doing so has *honored the Holy One*. Last week near the end of parsha ***Chayei Sarah*** we even saw Yitzchak lay down on an altar his father had built, surrender his neck to the slaughter knife his father wielded, then walk away unharmed. We then saw him walk out to a field and do something our English Bibles translate as *meditate*. We also saw him *take a woman he had never met before to wife – and love her, and become a faithful husband to her*.

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We saw Yitzchak *put aside his past history with and serious offenses against his older half-brother Yish'mael* at least long enough to *honorably and respectfully escort the bodily remains of their mutual father Avraham* to their final resting place.

Prior to parsha ***Toldot*** we saw just enough of Yitzchak to realize that he is a man of *peace*, a man of *virtue*, and a man of *honor*. But we still did not have a clue what makes him 'tick'. We still did not know what motivates him. We still did not know what frightens him. We still did not know for sure what captivates his heart and drives his will.

What Makes the Yitzchak In Us 'Tick'?

Then, in yesterday's aliyah the Master tapestry-designer started adding detail to the stitching of Yitzchak's story. The Holy One zoomed into Yitzchak's personal 'smaller story' and allowed us to see this man *weep bitter tears* over - and passionately petition Heaven concerning - his wife's barrenness.

Based upon our recent study of the Avraham chronicles we expected the Holy One to respond to these gut-wrenching prayers with a God-encounter – or at least an angelic visitation. But the Holy One did things a different way. He just answered the prayer - with a *double portion blessing*. Yitzchak *become the first father of twins* in the history of man. And when it was Rivkah instead of him who got the first God-encounter of this 2nd generation of Covenant-keepers Yitzchak did not seem to mind one bit.

As the twins he had fathered began to grow in very different directions the Holy One pulled back the curtains on Yitzchak's identity for us even more. We were given a *delightful – if not somewhat surprising - glimpse into Yitzchak's personal tastes and personality*. We learned that this man of honor, virtue, and peace had a *passion for outdoor things*, and *cherished the taste of wild game*. And quite to our disappointment we learned that, while he loved both of his sons, Yitzchak seemed to have far more interests in common with the ebullient, extroverted, flesh-driven hunter and outdoorsman Esav than he did with the contemplative, studious, introverted and sometimes downright reclusive Ya'akov.

Through experiencing these things with Yitzchak we have come to realize that he was not just some surreal character in a dusty old book, but was a *real person*. The Holy One wants us to see that Yitzchak had just as serious a set of mind-numbing, bone crunching *personal dramas* to deal with as we do. He did not live in an ivory tower or float through life on a cloud. He worked hard for his money. His blood ran red when he cut himself. His kids were far from perfect little angels. His

marriage had its ups and downs. And yet, through it all, despite it all, in the heat of it all, he has remained a man of honor, a man of virtue, and a man of peace. And as a result I suspect most of us have come to . . . well, to kind of *like the old fellow* whose name means ‘Laughter’.

Everything that we have experienced with and learned of Yitzchak so far however has been mere preparation for what we will experience in today’s aliyah. For in today’s aliyah we are finally going to get to see Yitzchak *al p’nei* [face to face] *with the Holy One*. Yitzchak, the 2nd generation Covenant Friend of the Holy One, is now primed and ready for a *lech lecha* kind of moment of his own.

Transitioning from Following in the Footsteps of Avraham to Sh’ma-ing the Voice of the Unseen Shepherd Himself

In order for Yitzchak’s role in the Covenant tapestry to move into the next phase the revelation that Yitzchak’s father Avraham received and taught to Yitzchak in his formative years is *going to have to become more to him than just words and rituals learned at his father’s knee*. He is going to have to have a much more personal and intimate relationship with the Holy One if he is going to grab life by the horns, assume his role in the covenant, and begin to fulfill his God-ordained destiny.

Yitzchak must learn, as Avraham learned, not just what it is like to *worship at an altar* and to *pour out his heart in prayer in a special time of need*, but also what it is like to live *al p’nei* [face to Face] with the Creator of the Universe. He must learn, as Avraham learned, to walk in fellowship with the Master of the World moment by moment, day by day, season after season, decade by decade, through the joys and sorrows, the thrills and trauma, the overwhelming stresses and the sometimes tedious boredom, of a myriad of *real life situations*.

The Holy One has a *plan* to make that happen. But I must warn you - you may not particularly *like* the plan. It is all a matter of *times* and *seasons*. The season that Yitzchak and his progeny are about to enter is not one most human beings are ever really prepared to navigate.

The Unwanted Challenges of Seasons of Transition

The world is constantly changing – and changing dramatically - before our very eyes. It should be as clear as the noses on our faces. Everyone should sense it. But alas, often men only see *what they want to see*. And very few people really want to see change. The tyranny of the familiar, of the ‘comfortable’, of the ‘known’ – these imprison us. And we stick our fingers in our ears, our hands over our eyes, and our heads in the sand . . . and the changes go right ahead and happen anyway.

When the obvious cannot be ignored any longer, those who cling to the familiar and the comfortable tend to go into panic mode and rail against the changes they see. They blame everything from the ‘*population explosion*’, to ‘*corporate greed*’, to ‘*global warming*’, to the *Monsanto/GMO conspiracy*, to *the liberal media*, to *racism*, to *one or more of the religions of the world*, to *this or that politician*, *public figure*, or *fad*, to *the arts*, to *freemasonry* to the *Illuminati*.

But these are merely *effects*, not *causes*. They are mere *signs* and *mileposts*. They are all simply bit-players in a drama written long ago in the Creator’s Great Book of Life. Like pawns, knights, bishops, and rooks on a chess board they can do absolutely nothing of themselves, but are totally dependent upon a Hand they cannot control to bring them into play and initiate a predetermined series of moves and counter-moves that give them a brief moment of seeming importance. When the game is over they will fade once again into inanimate oblivion. Absolutely no one will think of any of them – or the seemingly stunning moves they made on the great chessboard at their assigned moment– ever again. They are simply shadows providing the illusion of depth perception to those who choose to stare at the gathered curtains of the great stage on which the Holy One’s Grand Drama of appointed times and seasons while the real action is playing out on the stage itself.

Behold: A Season of Famine Draws Near!

Just as Yitzchak was coming into maturity in the land of the Patriarchs, the Holy One decreed a time of rapidly shifting atmospheres and drastically changing paradigms. To usher in this new era He called forth from Creation a season of *famine*.

The Holy One is not angry, and He is not in a mood for destruction. Nor is He *flying by the seat of His metaphorical pants* – He has a PLAN. And everything that unfolds does so pursuant to that PLAN. And while famine is most definitely not any human being’s idea of a ‘good sign’ for mankind, well . . . well, let’s just say that ***His Ways are not our Ways***.

Our Covenant Partner will, as usual, amaze us. He will actually find a way to bring forth *good* out of this season of famine. Just wait and see. But in the process He is going to reveal the distinction between those men and women of Covenant who will *gladly partner with Him in releasing both the famine and the blessing that it is ordained to bring on its heels* and those who will *just whine, complain, and kick against the pricks*. Torah tells us:

Vayehi ra'av b'aretz
There was a famine in the land,

milvad ha-ra'av ha-rishon asher hayah b'mei Avraham

aside from the first famine in the time of Abraham.

[Genesis 26:1(a)]

Yitzchak is, of course, oblivious to most of what the Holy One has in mind. But men do not have to understand what the Holy One is doing to partner with Him in doing it. They just have to respond to His leading, and *sh'ma* His Voice.

So as today's aliyah of Torah begins the Holy One is acting like a mother eagle ready to have her beloved eaglets get on with the next phase in their lives. Yitzchak cannot live in the comfortable 'nest' of *Be'er LaChoi Ro'ei* forever. But there is no way he is going to leave of his own volition.

It is time for the Holy One to begin the process of removing downy feathers from Yitzchak's "nest. He knows He is going to have to make Yitzchak's 'nest' so uncomfortable that his young eaglet will have no choice but to leave and try to fly. His chosen methodology to bring this to pass will be a sudden and inexplicable *famine in the land of milk and honey*.

Are We Seeing A Pattern Developing Here?

As indicated above, the famine that the Holy One sent in Yitzchak's days was not the first famine to hit the 'promised land'. When Avram migrated to Kena'an from Paddan-Aram the land of Kena'an was in the throes of a famine. Part of the reason for that earlier famine had to do with the Holy One wanting Avram to love the land for itself rather than for what it produced and to trust the Holy One for provision rather than to trust in his own strength and labor. Another part of the reason for that famine had to do with the Holy One getting the holy land ready to 'vomit' out the Kena'ani who had for generations been polluting it with unspeakable perversion and rivers of innocent blood.

Famine has a way of getting *everyone's attention*. Famine is, it seems, one of the Holy One's favorite protocols for Covenant-Partners-in-training. What famine is ***supposed to do*** is drive the sons and daughters of the Covenant to look for, find, and distribute the Hidden Manna of the Bridegroom of Heaven. But Covenant-Partners-in-training thus far have had to learn that lesson *the hard way*. Yitzchak will be no exception. Neither will his son Ya'akov. Neither will Ya'akov's sons. And alas, neither will many of us.

So it should come as no surprise to us that the Holy One called forth a second famine in the land during the generation of Yitzchak. He will send yet one more of course - the famous famine of the generation of Ya'akov that would result in

both the reunion of Yosef and his brothers and the captivity which the Holy One had prophesied to Avraham back in Genesis 15.

Divine Purposes Revealed in Times of Famine

The famine of Yitzchak's generation about which we read in today's aliyah, like the famines of Avram's generation and Ya'akov's generation, will serve multiple Divine purposes.

1. Bringing About a Dramatic Shift in the Demographics and the Balance of Political and Economic Power in the Region

First of all, the famine of Yitzchak's generation will constitute yet another phase in the Holy One's plan to prepare the land of Kena'an to vomit out the Kena'ani who are squatting there. As the Holy One used a famine in Avram's day to redistribute both the wealth and the centers of population of the Kena'ani to the area of S'dom and G'morrah [which He was already planning to judge], even so will the Holy One use the famine in Yitzchak's day to redistribute both the wealth and the centers of population of the Ph'lishtim to the area of Gerar. In this regard the famine will constitute a major part in the geopolitical, geo-economic drama by which the Holy One will change the flow of things in Kena'an in particular and in the world in general.

This famine will not a mere natural phenomenon, nor the bi-product of global warming. It will constitute instead an episode of Divine Intervention, one more small step in the direction of the fulfillment of the Holy One's covenant promise to Avraham that He would give the land of the Kena'ani to Avraham's descendants.

2. Building Deeper Levels of Trust In the Sons and Daughters of the Covenant

Secondly and simultaneously, this famine was designed to bring balance and perspective to the lives and faith-walks of Yitzchak and Rivkah. This famine would be used as a tool by the Holy One to build maturity in the Covenant couple's relationships *with each other*, in their relationships with the people groups they were placed on earth to influence, and, most importantly, in their relationships with the Holy One.

The Holy One could easily have supernaturally accomplished the redistribution of wealth and population – indeed the vomiting of the Kena'ani out of the land – without the famine. But before the famine the Covenant family was simply not ready to receive what the Holy One had in mind to give. The Holy One *designed the famine* to work a necessary change in the private, personal lives of His little band of chosen ones.

The Eagle Begins to Stir the Nest

Have you ever noticed that prior to the famine Torah does not describe Yitzchak and Rivkah as having a single recorded interaction with anyone outside their little oasis beside the supernatural spring of *Be'er LaChoi Ro'ei*? It appears that before the famine about which we read in today's aliyah Yitzchak and Rivkah lived lives of almost total isolation. They dwelt in their own private little *oasis* and interacted only with like-minded folks – primarily their two sons.

Yitzchak and Rivkah were – at least in the early days – the ultimate '*hidden*' people. They were like the proverbial *lamp hidden under a bushel*. Do not misunderstand me here. I am not criticizing our ancestors for their hidden-ness. In fact I believe that the 'hidden-ness' they enjoyed for the first 20 years or so of their marriage was the good, pleasing and perfect will of the Holy One for them during that season. But *seasons change*. The hidden-ness through which Yitzchak and Rivkah were protected during the first 20 or so years of their union was not the Holy One's will for them forever. Avraham and Sarah had been very 'public' people – a people who left a lot of impressive 'footprints' on the world as they danced their lover's dance with the Holy One across Torah's stage. Highly visible emissaries of the Holy One. They had exerted amazing amounts of influence upon the world around them, and had seemed to leave a large and very noticeable 'footprint' wherever their travels led them. The most powerful people in the world had come to know Avraham and Sarah well – and to recognize that as a result of Avraham and Sarah's presence in their world neither they and their kingdoms would ever be the same.

That has not happened yet for Yitzchak and Rivkah. Heretofore Yitzchak and Rivkah's lives had been on the exact opposite end of the social impact continuum from Avraham and Sarah. But it is tough to be a '*light to the nations*', *much less* a fountain of blessing unto all peoples, when you live secret, secluded lives. Hence the Holy One is about to bring the 'hidden-ness' season of life to an abrupt end for Yitzchak and Rivkah.

The famine will be the catalyst for this transition. The onset of famine will make the peaceful land around *Be'er LaChai Ro'ei*, where Yitzchak had been living with his family, uninhabitable - at least for a man with flocks and herds, a wife, and two strapping young boys to support. The supernatural well the angel of YHVH dug for Yish'mael a generation ago has seemingly run dry. And so, no longer can the covenant family stay cloistered in their comfortable little oasis. Their bellies are going to demand that they get out of the nest and scrounge for

food. And that means the couple who has been hidden away in the wilderness for decades has to go out where there are *people*.

Where would Yitzchak go? And what would he do to make sure bread was put on the table for his wife and little ones? Avraham was no longer there to make Yitzchak's decisions for him. Now the decision of what to do and where to go was Yitzchak's and his alone.

As the curtain of Torah opens today it looks like the second generation Covenant-Partner-in-training is reacting to the famine much like his father did. He is running to the courts of a pagan king, hoping that king will provide shelter and fodder for the herds and flocks he inherited from Avraham and provision for him, his wife, and his children until the famine lifts. Famine has a way of tempting good people to do desperate things like that. But for a son or daughter of the Covenant, such desperate actions never work out the way one thinks. Close association with the pagan world and its ways never does.

***Pick Your Poison Carefully –
To Which of the Potentates of This World Will You Run for Shelter?***

Here is how Torah describes Yitzchak's actions upon leaving *Be'er LaChoi Ro'ei*.

Vayelech Yitzchak el-Avimelech melech-Ph'lishtim Gerarah

And Isaac went to Avimelech king of the Philistines in Gerar.

[Genesis 26:1(b)]

Yitzchak set out tentatively, traveling first to the nearby land of the Ph'lishtim², in Gerar³, where his father had gone when the toxic fall-out from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah drove him Westward. As you will recall, Avraham had made a covenant of peace with Avimelech, the Ph'lishtim king in Genesis 21:22-33.

² Genesis 10 identifies the Ph'lishtim [i.e., *Philistines*] as descendants of Cham [Ham]. Torah tells us first that “*The sons of Cham were Cush, Mitzrayim, Put, and Kena'an*”, and then tells us that “*Mitzrayim begot . . . Casluhim, from whom came the Philistines and Caphtorim*”. The Philistines occupied the area along the Mediterranean coastal strip of southwestern Kena'an, including five major cities - Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron, and Gath.

³ It is unclear whether the Biblical reference to ***Gerar*** [*gimel, resh, resh*] is intended as a reference to a specific ancient *city* or is merely a general reference to the Western Negev region to the northwest of Beersheba – the area over which Avimelech presided as warlord. Despite being an area of very limited rainfall, this part of the Negev manages to produce significant quantities of citrus fruit, green onions, cabbage, lettuce, cotton and sunflowers because fifteen to twenty feet below the surface of the area a layer of clay forms an underground water reservoir which traps water which gravity draws from the hills around Hebron (thirty miles or so to the north). The wells which Avraham and Yitzchak dug while living in this area tapped this underground water resource, and allowed them to sustain life and crops even in dry seasons when surface water dried up.

Perhaps that covenant of peace would still be honored, Yitzchak may have mused. It seemed worth a shot. But alas, Yitzchak is about to find out that close association with pagan kings and their minions always comes with an exorbitant, outrageous price tag. In fact, close association with pagan kings and their minions always tends to cost a person the very thing he or she values most in the world.

In this case, what close association with the pagan king of Gerar will cost Yitzchak will be Rivkah, the wife whom Yitzchak loves. As it was with Avram in Egypt, who had his beloved Sarai taken into the harem of Pharaoh, so it will be with Yitzchak and his beloved wife Rivkah in Gerar. There is no free lunch in the pagan world. The kings of this world - and the minions who serve them – are *takers* and *taskmasters, not givers*. The only place you can find manna is by running into the arms of the King of Heaven.

A Life-Changing God-Encounter Coming Right Up!

When the famine persisted Yitzchak apparently saw himself as having only two choices - settling in Gerar among the rather unpleasant Ph'lishtim, or doing as his father Avraham did and ride out the famine in Egypt, where the waters of the Nile provided good pasture even in the toughest of times.

It is in the hard decisions and tough choices of life that *mature relationships with the Almighty* are forged. So as our aliyah of Torah opens today Yitzchak and his family are trudging through the hot, dusty desert toward Gerar. Mercifully, into that potentially dire situation is about to step none other than the Holy One Himself - the God who keeps His covenant even with those who sleep in the dust. Torah tells us that the Holy One 'appeared' [*vayera*] to Yitzchak – and that Yitzchak's life was changed forever. In the course of this God-encounter the Holy One said to Yitzchak:

al-tered Mitzraymah

'Do not go down to Egypt.

shechon b'aretz asher omar eleycha

Remain undisturbed in the land that I shall designate to you.

Gur b'aretz hazot

Remain an immigrant in this land

v'eheyeh imecha v'avaracheka

I will be with you and bless you,

ki-lecha ul'zar'acha eten et-kol-ha-aratzot ha'El

since it will be to you and your offspring that I will give all these lands.

vaha-kimoti et-ha-sh'vuah asher nishbati l'Avraham avicha

I will thus keep the oath that I made to your Avraham your father.

V'hirbeyti et-zar'acha kechochevei ha-shamayim

I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars of the sky,

v'natati l'zar'acha et kol-ha-aratzot ha'El

and I will grant them all these lands.

v'hitbarachu v'zar'acha kol goyei ha-aretz

All the nations on earth shall be blessed through your descendants.

Ekev asher-shama Avraham b'koli

All this is because Abraham sh'ma-ed My voice,

Vayish'mor mish'marti mitzvotai chukotai v'torotai

and kept My charge, My commandments, My decrees, and My laws.'

[Genesis 26:2-5]

Receive these Words into your own spirit, Dear Reader. Study them. Meditate on them. Wrestle with them. These words, you see, define your destiny and your purpose in life just as much as they defined the destiny and purpose in life of our ancestor Yitzchak.

In the first recorded “God encounter” of Yitzchak’s life the Holy One gives to Yitzchak personally - not vicariously through his father or his wife - instructions on *what to do*, on *where to go*, and, even more importantly, *of what his destiny consists*. Here are the main points of what the Holy One said to Yitzchak:

1.

“Do not go down into Egypt;

2.

Sojourn for awhile in the land I will teach you about.

3.

I will be with you,

4.

and [I] will bless you;

5.

Unto you and unto your seed I will give all these lands,

6.

and I will perform all the covenant promises that I made unto your father;

7.

I will make your seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and

8.

[I] will give unto your seed all these lands;

9.

And in your seed shall all the peoples of the earth be blessed;

10.

*I will do this BECAUSE Avraham sh'ma'd my voice, and sh'mar-ed my mismeret⁴
my mitzvot⁵, my chukim⁶, and my torot⁷.*

These Divine Words will become the *aseret ha-dibrot* [Ten Words/Commandments] of Yitzchak's life. They will – over a lifetime – transform him.

The “Time-Release” Factor

The aforementioned 10 words the Holy One spoke over Yitzchak are full of the exact same creative and prophetic power possessed by the 10 Divine proclamations of Creation Week, from the ‘*Yehi ohr* [Light BE!]’ proclamation of Genesis 1:3 to the “*V’yevarech Elohim et-yom ha-shvi’i v’yekadesh oto* [and God blessed the seventh day and He made it holy]’ proclamation of Genesis 2:3. They will therefore not by any means return to the Holy One ‘void’. They will *accomplish their Divine purpose*. And they will most assuredly *have their Divinely intended effect*.

It is important to understand however, that the creative and prophetic effects of these Divine proclamations, unlike those of Creation week, will appear *gradually* instead of immediately. The Holy One's words are like ‘*time release*’ capsules – their power is released, and they accomplish the purposes for which they are sent into the world – over time, according to a pre-ordained Divine timetable.

Yitzchak does not therefore immediately become a spiritual superman just because he has had a God-encounter. On the surface of things he probably did not appear to have changed much at all. As we are about to find out, he will still make many wrong choices along the way. He will not by any means walk in sinless perfection. Neither did the Holy One require sinless perfection of his father or mother, of course. And neither does the Holy One require sinless perfection from you or I do. Sinless perfection has never been a requirement of any covenant the Holy One has ever made with man. Sin always has consequences, of course – but

⁴ I.e. the things the Holy One entrusted to Avraham as a trustee or steward.

⁵ I.e. the specific instructions the Holy One had given to Avraham concerning what conduct is and is not covenant-consistent.

⁶ I.e. the unexplained directions/commands the Holy One had given to Avraham.

⁷ I.e. the instructions the Holy One had given Avraham for all aspects of living to help him “hit the target” of fulfillment of Divine purpose and will for his life.

every Covenant the Holy One makes always provides a way *for sin to be atoned for* and *for 'in-flight corrections' to be made*.

What is important therefore is not sinlessness, but that in the midst of his human weakness and failings Yitzchak will let the Voice and the Words of the Holy One *pierce his soul and his spirit*, and be *permanently engraved upon his heart*. In so doing Yitzchak will demonstrate that he has both *his father's ears* and *his father's heart*. And thus he will receive and pass on to the next generation both his father's *intimacy with the Creator* of Heaven and earth and *the most blessed of all inheritances*.

Beloved, in each of your lives may you personally hear the voice of the Holy One - and *sh'ma!* And may what you *sh'mar* [i.e. treasure, guard, highly esteem, and carefully keep watch over and observe] be that which the Holy One has spoken - and not mere philosophy, tradition, or religion learned from someone a substantial portion of whose diet comes from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

***The Kinds of Lives We are to Called to Live When Surrounded
by a Secular Society With A Violently Different Worldview
Than Our Covenant-Centered Way of Life***

The remainder of today's aliyah deals with two God-ordained life experiences of Yitzchak's life which immediately follow and which were ordained by the Holy One to drive home to Yitzchak [and to us all] the point made by the Holy One in the God-encounter just described. The Holy One has just told Yitzchak to sojourn in the land in which he found himself [that part of Kena'an known as Gerar, then occupied by the Ph'lishtim], *and* that if he does so the Holy One will '***be with***' him and will '***bless***' him. The Holy One is about to *prove the point* – despite no great degree of faith or righteousness on Yitzchak's part.

From Which Tree Have the People Around You Been Eating?

The first lesson Yitzchak and all of us seeking to live a *sh'ma* lifestyle have to learn is that the secular society around us - the society to which we are called to be a 'blessing' - lives by *totally different rules* and looks at life from a *totally different perspective* than do people who have a covenant with the Holy One. The secular society around us, be it Ph'lishtim or American or Canadian or African or Asian or European in culture, you see, seeks its sustenance not from the fruit of *the tree of life*, but from the fruit of *the tree of the knowledge of good and evil*.

In any contact with secular society therefore we like Yitzchak must learn that we will encounter both the *evil* and the *good* – the perverse and the moral. Sometimes we will find that these opposite ends of the spectrum exist *in the same person(s)*.

Paranoia, schizophrenia, and double standards [or, more precisely, *multiple constantly shifting standards of moral relativity*] are diseases that afflict every person – or society - who makes the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil a regular part of his or her diet. That is just the way the world is, Beloved. Adam and Chava ate the fruit. And intimate knowledge of and interaction with good and evil – in varying degrees we cannot always control – is the result.

What are the characteristics of people – or a society – which lives by the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? What are the symptoms of such slow spiritual ‘food poisoning’?

The First Fruits of that ‘Other Tree’

First of all, people who eat of that tree’s fruit regularly are ***always skeptical of or hostile toward the Holy One***. Like Adam and Chava after they ingested the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the Garden the first thing people who ingest this tree’s fruit today tend to do is *hide from the Holy One* – or even deny that He exists. Why do they do this? Because they are addicted to the ‘high’ they get from both that which they see as ‘**good**’ [usually in the form of *social activism, political reform, philanthropy, random deeds of kindness, and/or public ‘ministry’*] and from that which are ‘**evil**’ [i.e. any perversion of the Divine purpose for any person, for any thing, or for any aspect of Creation].

They know, you see, that if they submit their lives to the Holy One – or even *acknowledge* Him – they will have to accept the idea that they are *accountable to Him* for their actions. They choose instead, even in the midst of trying to appear ‘good’ in their own eyes and in the eyes of the world, to *stand in the way of sinners*.

The Second Harvest from the Fruit of the ‘Other Tree’

Secondly, people who regularly eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil are easily recognizable when they open their mouths because ***they are always critical of other people***. Just like Adam and Chava blamed everyone but themselves for what had happened after they ingested the fruit, so all who follow their diet follow their self-righteous system of denial of any responsibility, adopting an attitude of victimization, and insisting on external blame-redistribution.

Considering themselves ‘good’ they look for and convince themselves they find ‘evil’ *outside of themselves*. They are therefore never content to look at any one else and see good. To the contrary, they stare intently at everyone else until they see [or at least *imagine they see*] some flaw or blemish or spot - anything they can characterize as ‘evil’. They then choose to sit – alas to get comfortable and bask - *in the seat of the scornful*.

The Third Harvest from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil

Thirdly, people who regularly ingest the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil are under – and tend to spread like a contagious disease to everyone and everything around them – a ‘curse’. Just as Adam and Chava received a curse [i.e., *a restriction on their enjoyment of their lives and the purpose of their Creation*] after eating of the fruit, so it is with all who follow their example. This does not mean that all who do so are all poor, or sick, or short-lived – it just means that they can never really *enjoy*, or *be satisfied with*, or *bless the Holy One for* anything – whether it be *provision* [or even wealth], or *health* [or even superior strength, beauty or athleticism], or, for that matter, *the breath of life*. They choose to walk in *the counsel of the unGodly*.

These are the characteristics of people who we will encounter in secular society. Most of them do not – and do not have any *desire to - know* the Holy One. There is some ‘good’ in the worst of them and there is some ‘evil’ in the best of them.

Our purpose is not to judge – or condemn – the evil in secular people. We want to – are Divinely called to - ‘be a blessing’ to the people of the secular world. But we most definitely need to make sure we *understand what we are dealing with*. We need to have no illusions that the secular world is a ‘nice’ place, waiting with baited breath to receive the blessing we have been called to give.

It is *a jungle out there* in Gerar - and in every other secular village in which we who are in covenant with the Holy One may ever find ourselves. The sooner we acknowledge that fact, and get over it, the better off we will be. It was *true for Yitzchak*, and it is *true for us*.

An Instructive Example

Let me give you an example of what I am talking about. It is an example that Yitzchak would have understood perfectly. Here it is. Imagine a man has a beautiful wife or an attractive teen-age daughter, and takes her to a restaurant or shopping mall [or for that matter a function sponsored by a respected school, social organization, charitable group, church or synagogue]. No matter how modestly and

tastefully the lovely wife or daughter is dressed and how innocently she behaves herself, the reality is that some of the men/boys she will encounter there will look upon her the way – well, let's just say the way Chava looked upon the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil just before she picked it and took the first bite. And if no one is looking, and they get half a chance – well, let's just remember what happened to Ya'akov's daughter Dinah and Lot's daughters on the last night before S'dom was destroyed, and leave it at that.

That does not mean these men or boys live lives of perversion or are motivated solely – or even primarily - by perverse desires. Some in each context mentioned probably *do* and probably *are*; others – hopefully the majority - definitely *do not* and definitely *are not*. Men are by the Holy One's design *attracted to that which is lovely to look upon*. If any of these men let their baser instincts govern them, there is no telling what evil thing they will do – to the wife and daughter – and to you.

On the other hand, more than likely most if not all of the men you encounter there will *harness their baser instincts* and *behave more or less as gentlemen*. They may hold the door for you and the wife/daughter. They may engage them – or even you - in casual discussion. They may even impress you with talk of spiritual things and/or 'family values'. That does not mean they can be trusted. That does not mean you can let your guard down. That does not by any stretch of the imagination mean that you – or your wife and daughter – are safe. No, *not by any means*.

If this is the reality in modern-day America – a more or less civilized society - consider what it was like in ancient times. Consider what Yitzchak had to contend with. As long as he and Rivkah stayed in their own little world at *Be'er LaChoi Ro'ei* he was more or less insulated from the evil that lies in the heart of his fellow man. But as we have discussed, that period of isolation is now officially over – at least for now. The Holy One has plunged Yitzchak and family into *reality 101*. Here is how Torah describes what happened the first day of Yitzchak's enrollment in that course:

Yitzchak settled in Gerar. The men of the place asked him about his wife. He said, "She is my sister," for he was afraid to say, "My wife," lest, he thought, the men of the place might kill me for Rivkah, because she was beautiful to look on.

[Genesis 26:6-8]

We, like Yitzchak, must sooner or later deal with the stark realities of *life among the Ph'lishtim*. While we must always look for the 'good' in the people and societies we come into contact with, we must continually be as *wise as serpents*, and *harmless as doves* in our interactions. *Idealism* can prove harmful to our

health. *Naiveté* can prove lethal to our wives' and childrens' virtue. And *assimilation* can prove fatal to our opportunity to participate in the mission to which we are called.

Toto . . . I Don't Think We're in Kansas Anymore!

Ph'lishtia, you see, was a *very, very sick society*. And here is a **news flash** - so is *your town*, Dear Reader. So is your *local shopping mall*. So is your *local public school system*. So is your *local grocery store*. So is the *local gymnasium*. So is the *local theater*. So is the *local bistro or coffee shop*. So is the *local college or university*. So is the *athletic field*, the *theatre*, and the *workplace*. And for that matter so is every *local religious institution*, whatever its name or affiliation, and whatever may be written on either the marquee out front or on the doctrinal statement posted in its pastor's study or on its website.

You have **every reason** to fear for your wife's/daughter's/son's virtue, and for your life, each time you enter – nay, each time you so much as drive by - such places. I do not say that to frighten you, or to insult any organization or person out there. I say this simply to **wake you up to the reality of the world in which we live**. I say this because I believe that every time you emerge from your *oasis of hidden-ness*, as you eventually must, you need to be aware that in the flash of an eye any of the rather ordinary-looking people around you can *turn on you*, can *cave in to their baser instincts*, and both *say about you and do to you and to your love ones unthinkably horrible and perverse things*. And I believe you need to be fully cognizant and accepting of the fact that there is very little – if anything - you can do to stop them.

Okay. Point driven home. So *what do we do about it?* While we can – and should – exercise wisdom in how we interact with this perverse world, we cannot – must not if we are to fulfill the Divine Calling – avoid contact with it entirely. That is why we have been told in no uncertain terms by Messiah that we are to '*wise as serpents, harmless as doves*'.

When and to the extent possible [which it wasn't for Yitzchak and may not be for us], contacts with non-family members – and even non-Torah submissive family members - should be approached carefully, and then monitored very, very closely. This is **not paranoia**, and it is **not a game**. Lives and destinies are at stake. We are not at *Beer LaChoi Ro'ei* – or on the family farm in Kansas with good old Auntie Em - any more.

Yitzchak Resorts to a Familiar ‘Little White Lie’

Understanding the gravity of the situation he and his family faced, Yitzchak resorted to falsehood. When asked by the Ph’lishtim men about that gorgeous young thing he had with him he realized that his beloved wife Rivkah was, partially because of her beauty but mostly because of the depravity of the culture, going to be the object of other men’s lust as long as they remained in this society. He knew he couldn’t stop it. He knew he couldn’t run away. He just hoped to survive. So, pressed for an answer that could mean life or death to him, Yitzchak decided to tell a ‘little white lie’. He decided to make up a story about the beautiful Rivkah being his sister. He decided not to mention the fact that she was his wife.

Why did Yitzchak do this? It seems pretty obvious that *fear is what motivated him*. Please don’t judge Yitzchak too harshly for that. Avraham did the same thing. I dare say that each of us has at one time or another done far worse.

Yitzchak will soon learn, of course, that fear is not the kind of motivator that accomplishes a lasting peace. Only love can do that. But *love is an art - an art that has to be learned from a Master*. And Yitzchak is still in *art school*. And so, Dear Reader, are we all.

Oh What A Tangled Web We Weave . . .

Yitzchak’s fear-motivated approach did not, of course, solve his problem for very long. All it really did was to occupy his energies with defensive, cover-up strategies. And that, it turns out, just compounded the problem. He didn’t deal with the reality – he tried to manufacture his own. It is a temptation for all of us. But how, you may ask, could anyone have been expected to *deal with* such a horrible reality as Yitzchak faced? That, Dear Reader, is *a very good question*. If I have engendered in you that question by that fact alone this study has accomplished its purpose. I hope you will find the answer. It will not come from a book - or, for that matter, from a Rabbi’s son Torah study. Answers to questions like that, you see, have to come from the Almighty. But here are some thoughts you might keep in mind as you petition Heaven for the answer you seek.

First of all, do you remember the first promise the Holy One’s made to Yitzchak in the God-encounter we studied earlier in today’s aliyah? The first promise the Holy One made was that He would be ‘*with*’ Yitzchak wherever he went.

What did this ‘with-ness’ promise mean? It did not mean that Yitzchak could be assured Rivkah would not be raped. It did not mean that Yitzchak and/or his

young sons would not be brutally murdered. There are never any such assurances. Ask Ya'akov [remember what happened to his daughter Dinah at Shechem?]. Ask the survivors of the Holocaust, or the relatives of those who died on 9/11. But what the Holy One's promise did mean was that whatever happened the Holy One would be there to *turn it into good*. And that is all the assurance we can hope for – and all we really need.

Secondly, keep in mind that the 'little lie' Yitzchak told took away from Yitzchak, temporarily at least, the ability to 'be a blessing' – a light to the nations. After all, who in their right mind would want the kind of 'light' he had to offer? His 'yes' was less than 'yes'. His 'no' was less than 'no'. And he thereby became engulfed in murky shadows. No one in Gerar 'punched his lights out' as Yitzchak feared would happen. What happened instead was much, much worse - *he punched his lights out himself*.

Caught Red-Handed!

And so to reactivate his light Yitzchak's soul needed some rough polishing. The Holy One always disciplines those in covenant with Him. This time He decided to use the most unlikely of sources to do the 'buffing' on Yitzchak's spots and wrinkles. Enter a very angry, offended, and self-righteous Avimelech.

*It happened when he had been there a long time,
that Avimelech king of the Ph'lishtim looked out at a window, and saw,
and, behold, Yitzchak was caressing Rivkah, his wife.*

*Avimelech called Yitzchak, and said, "**Behold, surely she is your wife.***

Why did you say, 'She is my sister?'"

*Yitzchak said to him, "**Because I said, 'Lest I die because of her.'**"*

*Avimelech said, "**What is this you have done to us?
One of the people might easily have lain with your wife,
and you would have brought guilt on us!"***

*Did you catch the last sentence of Avimelech's self-righteous rebuke? "One of the people **might easily have lain with your wife** . . .", he said. He acknowledged that his society placed no value whatever on sexual purity. He knew full well and admitted that his people would rape a pretty woman like Rivkah in a heartbeat. Exactly what Yitzchak feared most could indeed **easily** have happened.*

Interestingly, however, even among a society of admitted rapists there was a moral standard that condemned *adultery* – by *others*, of course. It should not surprise us. Our society, as well, winks at some sexual sins but vehemently condemns others. Welcome to the world of double standards.

The Suffocating Embrace of the Secular State

And so when the rebuke was completed, Avimelech decided to do a strange thing – he decided to ‘protect’ Yitzchak and Rivkah. He wrapped his powerful tentacles around Yitzchak and Rivkah and made them virtual ‘wards of the State’:

*Avimelech charged all the people, saying,
"He who touches this man or his wife will surely be put to death."*

What meaneth *this*? Do not ever get too excited about any politician’s decree or pledge of ‘protection’ Beloved. It does not mean what you think it does. Keep in mind the famous blessing of the Czar recommended by the rabbi of Anatevka in the play ‘**Fiddler on the Roof**’. When asked if there was a proper blessing for the Tzar the rabbi nodded affirmatively, winked, and replied: “*May the Lord bless and keep the Tzar . . . far, far away from us!*”

By reason of Avimelech’s ‘protection’ decree Yitzchak would soon have to learn to deal with something that should have scared the liver out of him - *the embrace of the secular government*. The embrace of government is a *tantalizing* embrace – but one that comes at a great price, one to which are tied many strings, and one which, unlike the covenant of the Holy One, tends to *evaporate into thin air* at the drop of a hat.

That kind of ‘*protection*’ we neither need nor should desire. We will see soon enough – in tomorrow’s aliyah as a matter of fact - just how deceiving a decree/pledge it is.

Yitzchak *sowed a lie* into Gerar – and he is about to reap a harvest of the same from it. But before we get to that we will see the Holy One making good on his promise to ‘bless’ Yitzchak. The Holy One blessed Yitzchak in abundance that made everyone in the region of Gerar sit up and take notice. The Holy One blessed Yitzchak so much and so profusely that he *became an object of awe and envy*. He blessed Yitzchak not on account of Yitzchak’s righteousness but *despite his unrighteousness*. He blessed Yitzchak simply because of the covenant the Holy One made with Avraham, and because blessing Yitzchak despite his obvious unrighteousness furthered the Holy One’s eternal plan for the redemption of mankind.

You see, Dear Reader, the Holy One has it all *under control*. He does not wring His hands over either the mistakes of His people, or the evil of those who refuse to acknowledge Him.

May You Prosper in All Things and Be In Health Just as Your Soul Prospers

Today's aliyah ends with the Holy One absolutely blessing Yitzchak's sandals off. In the midst of famine, this shepherder from the desert tries his hand at, of all things, *row cropping*! Everybody must have laughed at the greenhorn. But look what happened!

*Yitzchak sowed in that land, and reaped in the same year
one hundred times what he planted. The Holy One blessed him.
The man grew great, and grew more and more until he became very great.
He had possessions of flocks, possessions of herds, and a great household.*

Ah, and then came the next Divinely orchestrated life experience the Holy One had in store for Yitzchak and family. We will study it in more detail in tomorrow's aliyah. For now let's just recognize that it is inevitable and must be dealt with. Here is Reality-check #2: *And the Ph'lishtim envied him*. If it hasn't happened to you yet, Dear Reader, it will. Better ask the Holy One now how you are supposed to deal with it.

Questions for Today's Study

1. Today's passage from parsha ***Toldot*** begins with a *famine* [In Hebrew, the word is *ra'av*] in the area around Be'er-sheva, where Yitzchak [Isaac] was living. The Holy One often begins his intimate dealings with His people in one form of *hunger* or another. When famine struck the Negev during Avraham's life, Avraham's response had been to go down to Egypt [Genesis 12:10]. This however is something the Holy One instructs Yitzchak not to do.

[A] Where did Yitzchak go instead of Egypt?

[B] Yitzchak encounters the Holy One and learns what the "birthright" of his father Avraham consists of. List the aspects of that birthright that are mentioned in verses 2-4;

[C] In verse 5, the Holy One tells Yitzchak why He is going to bestow upon Yitzchak and his descendants the things that make up the birthright - it is because of Avraham's walk with Him! What things does the Holy One say Avraham did?

[D] In Strong's and Gesenius, look up the words translated "voice", "commandments", "statutes" and "laws" in verse 5. Write each Hebrew word and describe the Hebraic word picture each presents.

2. The King of the people in whose land Yitzchak and Rivkah dwelt during the famine was named (or titled) *Avimelech* (meaning 'the fatherly king').

[A] Over what ethnic group was Avimelech king?

[B] Did Avimelech and his people have a history of dealing with the family of Avraham? Explain. [Hint: See Genesis 20:1-18]

[C] What can you gather from today's verses of Torah was the spiritual condition of Avimelech's people? Was Yitzchak's perspective of their spiritual condition correct? Explain.

[D] What command did Avimelech give his people concerning Yitzchak and Rivkah once he found out who they were? Do you think his people's previous experience with Avram and Sarai had any effect on this? Explain.

[E] How does Torah say Yitzchak fared during his stay in the land of Avimelech's people? Why do you think this occurred?

3. In today's Haftarah reading from Malachi the Holy One speaks to the anointed **kohanim** [priests] of Israel. The kohanim - *spiritual leaders* - living at the time Malachi prophesied were unfaithful shepherds. They claimed special privileges and status as "sons" of God, and as "servants" of God you see. But *their hearts*, it seems, were far from the Holy One. So the Holy One exercises some "tough love", upbraiding the spiritual leaders of the day. The Holy One speaks to them about true sons and servants, and what the *proper attitude* of true *sons* is to their fathers, and what the *proper attitude* of true *servants* is to their master. Heed His words!

A son honors his father, and a servant his master.

If I am a father, then where is my honor?

And if I am a master, where is the respect due me?

Says the Holy One of Hosts to you, Kohanim, who despise my name.

You say, 'How have we despised your name?' You offer polluted bread on my altar.

You say, 'How have we polluted you?'

In that you say, 'The Holy One's table contemptible.'

When you offer the blind for sacrifice, isn't that evil?

And when you offer the lame and sick, isn't that evil?

Present it now to your governor!

Will he be pleased with you? Or will he accept your person?"

says the Holy One of Hosts.

[Malachi 1:6-8]

[A] Were the priests of Malachi's time behaving like "sons" of the Holy One?

[B] What does a son do for his father that the priests of the time did not do for the Holy One?

[C] Were the priests of the time even behaving like servants of the Holy One?

[D] What does a servant do for his master that the priests of Malachi's time were not doing for the Holy One?

[E] How had the priests of the time “*despised the Holy One’s name*”?

[F] Which of the Holy One’s Torah teachings/instructions had the priests violated?

4. In today’s reading from the apostolic Scriptures Shaul of Tarsus continues speaking about *his people* - the natural descendants of Avraham. He indicates that out of the whole of Avraham’s physical lineage [which, after all, includes the descendants of Yishmael and Midyan as well as the descendants of Yitzchak] only a remnant – those born through Yitzchak - resemble Avraham sufficiently to carry even recognize, much less appreciate and walk according to, his covenant with the Holy One.

*But it is not as though the word of God has come to nothing.
For they are not **all Yisra'el** that are **of Yisra'el**.
Neither, because they are Avraham's seed, are they all children.
But, "**In Yitzchak will your seed be called.**"*

[A] Shaul says that not all of the children sired by Avraham were ever heirs to the birthright. What is he talking about in verses 6-7?

[B] Using the language of Malachi, how are true “sons” and ‘servants’ determined?

*May you find the stores of supernatural manna
that the Holy One has hidden in the world and in your heart –
to sustain you and allow you to sustain others
during the season of famine coming upon the earth.
May your eyes be open to what the Holy One is doing - and not doing - in this season,
to how the principalities of the second heaven are attempting to distract, divide, and frighten us,
and to how our appetites and attitudes as well as speech and behavior patterns
need to be transformed to access and release the Hidden Manna.*

The Rabbi’s son

Meditation for Today’s Study

Psalm 107:8-14

*Let them praise the Holy One for his lovingkindness,
For his wonderful works to the children of men!
For he satisfies the longing soul. He fills the hungry soul with good.*

*Some sat in darkness and in the shadow of death, being bound in affliction and iron,
Because they rebelled against the words of God, and condemned the counsel of Ha-Elyon.*

*Therefore he brought down their heart with labor.
They fell down, and there was none to help.*

*Then they cried to the Holy One in their trouble, and he saved them out of their distresses.
He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and broke their bonds in sunder.*