דרכים בפרשה

תולדות

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וישב יצחק ויחפר את בארת המים אשר חפרו בימי אברהם אביו ויסתמום פלשתים אחרי מות אברהם ויקרא להן שמות כשמות אשר קרא להן אביו

Yitzchak returned and dug again the wells of water that had been dug in the days of his father Avraham, which the Plishtim had filled in after Avraham's death. He gave them the same names that his father had given them.

There is something interesting about Yitzchak Avinu's avodah. While Avraham was known for spreading the knowledge of HaShem throughout the world, Yitzchak is associated with something quite different: digging wells. The Torah spends a surprising amount of time describing these wells, the arguments with the Plishtim, and Yitzchak's repeated attempts to find water. What was so special about digging wells?

The Baal HaTanya (Torah Ohr) explains that Avraham and Yitzchak had two different, but connected, forms of avodah. Avraham's avodah was to bring kedushah down into the world, to introduce the light of HaShem into a world that had become distant from Him. Yitzchak's avodah was to uncover the kedushah that was already hidden within the world. So Avraham had laid the foundation, and Yitzchak built upon it.

We live in a world that is so quick to throw out the old and start over. What previous generations worked so hard to build can quickly be dismissed as outdated or irrelevant, or even seen as "offensive". But Yitzchak didn't look at what Avraham had built and see something that needed replacing. He saw something valuable that needed to be uncovered and brought further.

And that is exactly what the Plishtim did. Avraham had dug wells, but after his passing, they tried getting rid of them by filling them with dirt. The water was still there. The wells had not lost their value. Someone had simply covered them over.

Yitzchak could have decided that those wells belonged to the past and that it was time to move on. Instead, he reopened them. He understood that what his father had accomplished did not need to be replaced. It needed to be uncovered.

The seforim hakedoshim explain that this is the very nature of digging a well. A person doesn't create the water. The water is already there, deep underground. His job is to remove the layers of earth covering it. But knowing that the water is there doesn't mean it will come flowing out on its own. It takes real work to dig through the dirt and reach it.

And Yitzchak certainly had his share of dirt to deal with! He dug, the Plishtim argued, and he moved on and dug again. His first two wells were called Esek and Sitnah, reflecting the arguments and opposition he encountered. But he didn't give up. Eventually he reached Rechovos, where there was finally room to expand.

The Ramban explains that these three wells allude to the three Batei HaMikdash. The first two were associated with struggle and opposition, while Rechovos represents the third Beis HaMikdash, which will stand לעתיד לבוא without that opposition. There is a progression here. We don't get to Rechovos by pretending Esek and Sitnah never happened. We get there by continuing to dig, even when the earlier efforts are met with resistance.

(The Sfas Emes (Toldos, תרל"א) connects the first two wells, Esek and Sitnah, to the struggles of the weekdays, and Rechovos to Shabbos, when the inner light concealed during the week becomes more revealed. ויש להאריך בזה, ואין כאן מקומו להאריך.)

Perhaps this is also what it means to "liros tov". It is easy to see what is on the surface: the dirt, the disappointment, the shortcomings, the things that didn't work out. It takes a different kind of vision to look beyond what is immediately visible and search for the good that may still be there.

That applies to the generations before us, to the people around us, and even to ourselves. We shouldn't be so quick to dismiss what someone has built, or to define a person by the one thing that bothers us. Once we've put someone in a negative box, we seem to find a way to fit everything he does into it! The good may not always be obvious. It may take patience and effort to uncover it. But not seeing it right away doesn't mean it isn't there.

Avraham dug the wells. The Plishtim covered them. Yitzchak saw their value, uncovered them, and dug further.

That is the kind of vision Yitzchak teaches us: not to look only at what is on the surface, but to see the good that is already there, and have the patience to bring it out. **Good Shabbos, מרדכי ע. אפפעל**