



GEULAS YISRAEL

RABBI MOSHE TARAGIN

RAM YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

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The Wells We Still Offer

Avraham was a revolutionary, roaming the length and breadth of the Land of Israel, proclaiming his daring vision of faith in Hashem and a life shaped by moral experience. Wherever he traveled, he built *mizbeichot* that functioned like open-air podiums—public platforms from which he shared his teachings. Over his lifetime, Avraham erected four such *mizbeichot*: two in the north, one in the south, and of course the fateful altar on Har HaMoriah at the moment of the Akeidah.

Yitzchak lived a different kind of life. He built only a single *mizbei'ach*—ironically, in the same region where Avraham had raised one of his four, in Be'er Sheva. His great mission was not putting up altars but the steady, unglamorous work of digging wells. He opened three new wells and reopened the many wells his father had dug, which the Plishtim had spitefully sealed.

FROM JOURNEY TO SETTLEMENT

Wells are iconic for Yitzchak because he is the first of the Avot to begin entrenching himself in the Land. Avraham lived as a wanderer, moving across the countryside in search of fresh pasture for his flocks whenever the grazing thinned. That nomadic rhythm enabled him to encounter many different people, but it also meant he never fully secured lasting ownership of the Land. He moved from mountain to mountain, from region to region, always on the “road,” never rooted in one place.

Yitzchak lives a far more settled life, never leaving Israel and spending most of his years around Gerar and nearby Be'er Sheva. In his effort to anchor our future in the Land, he cultivates fields and becomes a man of the soil rather than a wanderer drifting from mountaintop to mountaintop. His wells embody this shift. By digging deep into the earth, he begins to root our people—literally and figuratively—into the Land that will one day become our national home.

IDEAS TAKING ROOT

By digging wells, Yitzchak isn't only rooting us in the Land of Israel; he is also rooting the great ideas Avraham introduced. His physical work in the soil becomes a metaphor for a different kind of labor. Yitzchak begins the steady embedding of Avraham's ideals in our

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national memory. Every revolution endures only if the next generation can institutionalize its ideals. Yitzchak has no interest in reinventing the wheel. He uncovers the same wells his father had dug and restores their original names.

It takes steady character to take revolutionary ideas and anchor them in lasting practice. His wells symbolize not only anchoring us in the soil of Israel, but also anchoring Avraham's teachings in the consciousness of our people.

WELLS AND MIKHASH

However, the wells also carry a historical undertone. Their story unfolds precisely between two defining moments: Esav surrendering the bechora to Ya'akov and Rivka redirecting Yitzchak's berachot. When the narrative of the wells is framed by the transfer of berachot and the choice of bechor, it is clear that this episode bears deeper long-term symbolic weight. This symbolic layer becomes even clearer through the Ramban's interpretation.

The Ramban notes that Yitzchak's three great wells parallel the three Batei Mikdash that his descendants would one day bring into the world. A *mizbeiach* can elevate and inspire, but its impact is confined to the space around it.

A well functions differently. Its water spreads outward, sustaining fields and lives far beyond its edge. For that reason, a well—not a *mizbeiach*—becomes the symbol of the future Mikdash. The Mikdash was never meant to serve as a private sanctuary. Its influence flowed far beyond its courtyard, shaping people and cultures even at a distance.

Among the three Avot, Yitzchak expresses Jewish sovereignty and the golden era of national autonomy rooted in the Mikdash.

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Avraham was the trailblazer, and his story reflects the early formation of our identity—from the descent to Egypt through the rescue from Mitzrayim, the giving of the Torah, and the years in the desert. Yitzchak embodies the central stage of our past, the period of self-rule anchored in Yerushalayim and its sacred Mikdash. Ya'akov captures the final chapter—our long passage through exile, moving from place to place just as he himself traveled from region to region.

Yitzchak's three wells reflect the two Batei Mikdash our nation built during that golden era, and the future Beit HaMikdash we will yet deliver to history at its culmination. Each well carries its own name, and, as the Ramban explains, each one reflects the fate of a particular Mikdash—how it was received, the challenges it confronted, and





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the circumstances that brought it to an end. Taken together, the names offer a small, concentrated telling of the Mikdash's larger story.

TWO ERAS OF RESISTANCE

The first well Yitzchak dug was named *Esek*, born in conflict and endless strife. It mirrors the First Beit HaMikdash, which we were forced to defend against wave upon wave of hostility. Just as the Plishtim refused to grant Yitzchak the space to secure his water, the nations surrounding us in the First Mikdash era resisted us. From the start, the First Mikdash confronted a region unwilling to welcome the presence of Hashem into the world.

The second well, *Sitnah*, carries even darker overtones. Though the word literally suggests obstruction, it also hints at simmering hatred and deep antagonism. This name reflects the Second Beit HaMikdash—a house built amid resistance and marked early on by rising hostility toward Jews. In the opening chapters of Sefer Ezra, the Mikdash had already been authorized by Koresh, and we were slowly returning to our homeland. Yet enemies of Jewish settlement wrote letters of “sitnah” to the Persian king, urging him to halt our national restoration. Because they lived under the Persian Empire, our enemies could not attack us directly, but they could weaponize

Persian authority to suffocate our return and stall the rebuilding of the Mikdash.

The entire Second Temple era unfolded beneath this cloud of confrontation. Its launch was fraught, its history scarred by those who sought to undermine it, and its end brought us into a long and bitter exile. For this reason, Yitzchak's second well is called *Sitnah*—a name that suits a Mikdash built amid tension and resistance, and whose end led directly into our long, bitter galut.

SPACE AND PROSPERITY

The third and final well Yitzchak uncovers is named *Rechovot*. True to its name, it points toward the future Third Beit HaMikdash, a time marked by broad expansion. Our borders will widen, and our homeland will reach dimensions we have never yet known.

Yet the name holds a second layer: not only spaciousness, but flourishing. “We will be fruitful in the Land,” Yitzchak declares—hinting at the broader prosperity that these waters brought forth. So it will be in the future. The Third Mikdash will not merely enlarge the borders of Israel; it will enrich the entire world. A humanity that finally encounters Hashem and submits to His kingship will taste prosperity and stability. Through that encounter, the world will be steadier and more whole.

At first glance, these two currents—national expansion and universal prosperity—seem to run in different directions. One speaks of Israel's growth as a homeland; the other of humanity's uplift. Yet the two are inseparable. As we settle this Land and invite the presence of Hashem into history, the world is elevated with us. Through that encounter, all nations discover renewed vitality and enduring blessing.



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MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

It is unfortunate that Avimelech and the people of the Plishtim could not look past their jealousy. Yitzchak's wells were meant to bring benefit to the region, not to threaten anyone. Had they recognized his sincerity, they would have supported his efforts, and the entire area could have flourished. The waterways he opened might even have helped them withstand the devastating famines that struck a few generations later.

Instead, their resentment pushed them to sabotage their own future by blocking the wells. A similar irony surrounds the Batei Mikdash. Chazal teach that had the nations realized how vital the Mikdash was for the stability of the entire world, they would have protected it rather than attempting, again and again, to bring it down.

Avimelech could not move beyond his hostility toward Yitzchak to benefit from the water he offered. And throughout history, nations have similarly failed to see how much we hoped to strengthen their world—whether through the spiritual impact of the Batei Mikdash they destroyed or through the many ways we tried to build and sustain the societies around us.

MODERN ECHOES

This pattern has repeated itself in different forms throughout history.

About eight years ago, the city of Cape Town in South Africa faced a severe water shortage. The countdown to Day Zero, when the taps would be shut, approached. Israel was willing to offer water technology, but the authorities decided they could not take assistance and life-saving water options from the Jewish state. It was a scene taken straight out of Parshat Toldot.

A similar dynamic has surfaced again in

recent weeks.

During the past few weeks, Iran has faced a similar crisis, with severe water shortages threatening daily life in Tehran. We are ready to offer the people of Iran whatever water assistance we can—support that could genuinely save lives. But the regime is too consumed with its hatred of Jews and its plans against Israel to notice, let alone accept, our good intentions.

According to the Ramban, Yitzchak's wells symbolize the three Batei Mikdash. Yet they also point to something broader: our effort to carve out space for human betterment, and the repeated inability of those who despise us to benefit from what we offer, blinded by anger and jealousy.

Some patterns persist. It seems we will have to wait for the third Beit HaMikdash—*Rehovot* in the language of Yitzchak's third well—when Hashem's unmistakable presence will quiet hatred and allow the spiritual wellspring of the Mikdash to strengthen human flourishing. ■



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