

*Shiur L'Yom Revi'i*¹

[Wednesday's Study]

READINGS: **Torah Toldot:** **Genesis 26:15-35**
 Haftarah: **Malachi 1:9-12**
 B'rit Chadasha: **Romans 9:8-9**

The herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Yitzchak's herdsmen
[Genesis 26:20]

Today's Meditation is Psalm 107:15-20.

This Week's Amidah prayer Focus is Petition # 3, *S'lach* [the Petition for Forgiveness]

V'chol-ha-be'erot – and all the wells ... *asher chafru avdei aviv* – that had been dug by his father's servants ... *bimei Avraham aviv* – in the days of Avraham, his father ... *sitnum Plishtim vayemale'um afar* - the Philistines plugged up and filled up with dirt. **Genesis 26:15.**

Welcome to the dangerous season of *Ph'lish'tim pogroms*. Here is the backstory: A famine drove Yitzchak and Rivkah from their newlywed settlement at *Be'er Lahoi Roi*. Although it seems they were planning on riding the famine out in Egypt, the first place they went was to Gaza, the capitol city of the Ph'lish'tim warlord Avimelech. While they were in the land of the Ph'lish'tim, the Holy One told Yitzchak: ***"Dwell [Hebrew verb 'gur', meaning to sojourn temporarily, as an alien] in this land, and I will be with you and bless you; for to you and your seed I will give all these lands, and I will perform the oath which I swore to Avraham your father."*** That is how Yitzchak and his little family came to be deployed in Ph'lish'tim territory. Their mission was to offer a strategic counterbalance to the particular toxic blend of *ra*, *shachat*, and *chamas* that the Ph'lish'tim people had adopted as 'normative behavior, much as Avraham and Sarah had offered the Kena'ani a strategic counterbalance to their particular blend of *ra*, *shachat*, and *chamas*. Alas, Yitzchak was new at the process. He was not as skilled at it as Avraham had been. He got a little too comfortable. He became a little too visible. He ceased being a humble, grateful minority sojourner, and treated Gaza and Gerar like home. He transitioned from *sojourning* [Hebrew verb *gur*], as instructed, to *settling* [Hebrew verb *yashav*]. See **Genesis 26:6**. He sowed – and harvested - grain there, which is something sojourners would never presume to do. He started getting prosperous – more prosperous than the average Ph'lishtine. As Torah puts it: *'... he became very prosperous; for he had possessions of flocks and possessions of herds and a great number of servants. So the Philistines envied/were jealous or and resentful toward him.'* Yitzchak tried – as many people of the covenant have since - to get too comfortable with and too close to/involved with the goyim. He began to

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walk in the blessing of the covenant too openly, too visibly, and too ... well ... *indelicately*. He is about to learn a hard but crucial lesson about interaction with the goyim: if the Kingdom's 'more excellent way' counterbalance strategy is not introduced and/or administered with extreme humility, grace, kindness, and delicacy, it will always lead to a backlash of increasingly violent pogroms.

Tread Carefully in the Fields of Ph'listia – and the Valley of Gerar

Ever thinking of others, Avraham had his servants dig wells throughout the desert for use by travelers, for shepherds making rounds with their flocks and herds, and for absolutely anyone else that was thirsty. Avraham thus left an open invitation to 'whoever is thirsty' to come to and drink from the river of life. This great *legacy of living water* offered hope to everyone from Hagar and Yish'mael, to Avimelech and Pichol, to the weary sojourners & outcasts from all tribes and tongues of the earth.

In today's aliyah, Torah tells us something shocking: out of sheer malice toward the budding Hebrew nation, the Philistines stopped up all those wells. They filled them with waste, garbage, and every kind of filth/uncleanness that they could think of. In so doing they closed off access to the river of life to those who needed it most - including themselves. They did not do this because the wells were a threat to them; they did this solely because the Hebrews were the ones who had come up with the idea - and had put in the hard labor - to dig them.

This sick mindset is exactly the mentality we deal with every day - in *Eretz Yisrael* and in every nation where Hebrews try to bring light, hope, and living water to those who need it most. This is hatred – and the pettiness, destructiveness, and folly that hatred always generates.

The Hate Epidemic

We always study the P'lish'tim pogroms around the ninth month – the month of 'Kislev'. This is the moon cycle of *Antiochus Epiphanes arising* – the spiritual darkness of which we counter in our homes with the joyful, life-affirming celebration of *Chanukah*². The month of Kislev is one of three times each year when the foul stench of Anti-Semitism fills the air³, challenges our *simchah*, our *shalom* and our *emunah*, and frontally assaults our hope, our love for the Holy One and our fellow man, our gratitude for the gift of life, and our hope for seeing the

² *Chanukah* (which simply means 'dedication') is what Yeshua's disciples called the 'Feast of Dedication' – the traditional observance flowing out of the Maccabee's story that inspired Yeshua to go to the Temple Jerusalem in winter [see John 10:22-39]. *Chanukah* is an annual eight-day season of radical rededication to the Holy One and His Covenant, in which we teach our children how to maintain our *simchah* and *shalom* – and double-down on *emunah*, *tikvah*, and *ahavah* - in the face of the onslaught of Anti-Semitism in our time even as we prepare our hearts, hearths, and households against the coming ascension of Anti-Messiah and his minions.

³ The other two times this foul spirit runs rampant each year are around *Purim* [in the twelfth month, Adar] and throughout the *Three Weeks between the Straits* [in the fourth and fifth months, Tammuz and Av].

Kingdom of Heaven come and the will of our Father in Heaven done on earth as it is in Heaven. The Holy One never promised us a rose garden. Messiah made it perfectly clear: *In this world you will have tribulation* [Heb. *tzarah* – i.e. *straits; sharing tight spaces with treacherous adversaries*]. **John 16:33**; see also **Matthew 24:21-22**. How can we prepare our hearts, our hearths, and our households for this great test of our faith? How can we get ourselves and our children ready for ‘*the Anti-Messiah’s-New-Word-Order-Persecution*’ and ‘*The-Nations’-Abomination-that-Causes-Desolation*’? We first need to make sure we – and they – are under no delusions about how our neighbors from the nations really feel about us and our calling as earthly ambassadors of the Creator’s Heavenly Kingdom.

No Delusions

People who reject the Holy One’s invitation to walk in the *emunah, tikvah, v’ahavah* pathway spelled out in Torah tend to see our presence among them – if not our existence on the planet – as a threat to everything they hold dear. They project the deep spiritual darkness that resides in their hearts onto us. They indulge all kinds of vain imaginations concerning us. They convince themselves that we rule the world, control all its wealth, and are out to deprive them of the objects of their lust, their greed, their gluttony, their sentimentality, their arrogance, and their need to redefine all their oft and violent temper tantrums as expressions of ‘righteous indignation’ and/or ‘moral outrage’. At first they just try to stay as far away from us as they can - but ‘*ostracism phase*’ tends to escalate to ‘*persecution phase*’ pretty quickly. The hotheads among them start calling us vile names. Their instigators start accusing us of unspeakable crimes. They make up and publish blood libels about us. Their impressionable youth catch the Antiochus Epiphanes disease and run amok with it. They mock our aged. They bully our children. Eventually, if we stick around the area long enough, their public forum influencers will start to label us as alternatively as ‘privileged’ and ‘cursed’. Their educators start to rewrite historical narratives to make it seem we are to blame for everything they define as ‘evil’ or ‘unjust’ in the world. Next comes the ‘*subjugation phase*’. In this phase their warlords start making noises about relocating ‘our kind’ to ghettos. Their ruling councils pass laws and ordinances to limit our ability to earn a living, to travel freely, to observe the Holy One’s Sabbath and Appointed Times, and/or read, study, or talk about either the Torah or Messiah. If none of these methodologies of oppression deter us - which, of course, they do not - they rush headlong into the ‘*final solution phase*’. They gather in mobs to intimidate us. They throw rocks at us. They work each other into a frenzy of hate. They send out brainwashed youth to attack us with swords, clubs, knives, and firebombs. They poison our water sources and our food supplies. They ransack our dwellings. They set fire to our fields, pastures, vineyards and orchards – and, of course, our sacred texts and Torah scrolls. They set traps for our elderly and handicapped, and

savagely beat them in public places to send a message that they are coming for us all. They kidnap, torture, and lynch as many of our best and brightest as they can. And they insist that the rest of us be rounded up and shot like dogs – or driven into the sea. This is just who the nations are. This is just what the nations do. This is just their idea of ‘wokeness’ and ‘enlightenment’.

At any given stage of the foregoing process, the Holy One (*Blessed is He!*), may or may not choose to intervene. That is His business. For reasons we cannot and do not need to understand He chooses to allow some things that we think are outrageous and totally unacceptable, cruel and completely inhuman, to go forward. Witness the Egyptian Enslavement. Witness the siege and destruction of Jerusalem. Witness the looting of the Temple and desecration of the Holy of Holies. Witness the Babylonian Captivity. Witness the Roman Occupation. Witness the Holocaust. Witness the massacre at Munich. Witness the slaughter at Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh⁴. The Holy One sees the end from the beginning. He knows what is best – and what will ultimately bring about the greater good for humankind as a species and Creation as an ecosystem. Whether He chooses to step out of the unseen, eternal realm to intervene on our behalf at any given moment or not, therefore, we are never to give in to the nation’s brazen attempts at intimidation. We are never to become – much less behave like – either raging pagans, or haughty humanists, or self-righteous, religion-brainwashed fundamentalists. We are never to stop following Derech Adonai – the Way of the Holy One. We are never to stop trusting in – and waiting upon – our Bridegroom-King. No matter what it costs, we are never to stop yielding to the Creator’s Grand Plan. Even if it costs us our lives – or the lives of our children - we are never to abandon the great mission of *peace on earth, goodwill toward men* to which we are called. We are never to stop offering the people of the nations a more excellent way. We are never to stop showing compassion to the widow, the fatherless, the foreigner, and truly poor people whom the Holy One brings within our sphere of influence. We are never to stop remembering and proclaiming the holiness of the Sabbath and festivals. We are never to stop defining our diet, our thoughts and desires, our speech, and our behavior according to the great life-and-health instruction manual we call Torah. We are never to stop honoring our fathers, our mothers, and our heritage. We are never to surrender our joy or shalom. We are never to stop loving either our neighbors or our enemies. We are never stop being who we are obligated by the Covenant to be or doing what we are obligated by the Covenant to do. As the Hebrew children assigned to Nebuchadnezzar’s fiery

⁴ On Saturday, October 27, 2018, an anti-Semite named Robert Bowers went into the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh while Shabbat morning services were in progress. He opened fire, killing eleven people in the synagogue, making his attack the deadliest the American Jewish community has known to date.

furnace for failing to worship the image of the Beast said: ... *our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But even if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.* Daniel 3:17-18. Believe it or not, Beloved, that brings us right back to today's aliyah of Torah.

So ...What Does This Have to do With Parsha Toldot?

Before the mantra of civilization devolved into 'follow the money', it was 'follow the water'. Water is essential to all forms of life. Plants need water. Trees need water. Birds need water. Animals need water. And, of course, humans need water too. All the cellular and organic functions that make up our anatomy and physiology depend on water to function. Simply put, without water, men die. As one very real and physical aspect of the blessing he was called to bring to the land of Kena'an, therefore, everywhere Avraham went he dug water wells. He wanted to be sure that in the future, weary travelers and herdsmen like himself would have easy access to life-giving water. What a gift! What a blessing! So why would the Philistines – why would anyone - plug up these wells? Why would any human being in a dry and thirsty region like the Negev want to deny weary travelers and their animals access to the sweet elixir of life? Why would any human being be so selfish, so cruel, so ... *petty*? Ah, now we remember. Our last aliyah concluded: *Bayeqanei'u oto P'lishtim* – and the Philistines were consumed by intense hatred toward him. Genesis 26:14b. There we have it – the plugging up of wells was the irrational product of human hate. What a total waste of time, energy, and emotive capacity!

The Counterproductive Ugliness of Offense, Malice, Prejudice, and Hate

Anger, indignation, offense, malice, prejudice, and hate are not exactly flattering passions, Beloved. They are, instead, proof of the weakness, pettiness, selfishness, and paranoia of every human vessel who indulges them. They testify to that vessel's utter and disconnection from his/her Creator, from his/her *b'tzelem Elohim* calling, from his/her purpose, and from his/her glorious destiny. Anger, indignation, malice, prejudice, and hate make a person ugly, toxic, useless. And they lead a person to do counterproductive, counter-intuitive things like plugging up wells of living water. Remember, not only does plugging a well deny access to water to others – it also denies access to water to the one who does the plugging – as well as all his/her loved ones and friends. That is the ultimate folly. That is why anyone who has sunk so low as to harbor anger, indignation, offense, malice, prejudice or hatred in his heart is much more to be pitied, and much more in need of forgiveness and intervention, than those who are the object of those negative emotions.

How, in the case of the Philistines, did all this counterproductive nonsense begin? What was at the root of it? Ah, Beloved, it began, as all human drama seems to begin, with *ra*⁵ – i.e. *self-absorption*. Self-absorption begat narcissism. Narcissism begat jealousy. Jealousy begat paranoia. Paranoia begat offense. Offense begat anger. Anger begat accusations. Accusations begat derogatory labeling. Derogatory labeling begat outrage. Outrage begat hate. Hate begat ... well, you can see where all this begetting is headed, can't you? It is an old, familiar story. Too old. Too familiar. And alas, as we discussed briefly in the opening paragraphs of this shiur, it is not by any means limited to the *Philistine culture*.

In the World You Will Have Tribulation

As we study today's aliyah we hopefully will begin to understand what the Ultimate Rabbi, Yeshua of Natzret, meant when He told those who came to Him: ***In the world you will have tribulation*** - i.e. *stress, pressure, oppression, affliction, and narrow straits*. ***But be of good cheer – I have overcome the world***. John 16:33. Perhaps we will also learn what Shaul meant when he said: ***Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse***. Romans 12:14. ***Repay no one evil for evil***. Romans 12:17. And ***do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good***. Romans 12:21. This is the essence of the Avrahamic Covenant and the Torah lifestyle. Reacting to other people's hate with hate, or to their persecution with outrage, is the definition of walking *in the flesh*. And as Shaul also said very clearly: ***those who are in the flesh cannot please God***. Romans 8:8.

Both 'tribulation' and 'evil' are to be regarded by us as facts of life. We are not here to fret over those things. While we necessarily lament the harm they cause to us, to our friends, to our species, and to the Holy One's Creation, our reason for being here is not here to wage war, or stage protests, or launch propaganda campaigns against them. What we are here to do pretty straight forward – what we are here to do is *sh'ma* the Voice of the Holy One, respond to His ***Lech Lecha*** call, *sh'mar* His '***Walk Before Me and Be Blameless***' Covenant, and walk through all seasons of life – including our appointed times of tribulation – calmly, joyfully, and fully trusting in the goodness of our King. We are here to learn, and then humbly teach others, how to live squarely in the crosshairs of those things, yet never allow either the tribulations we endure or the evil others around us do even distract us, much less define us. We are here to live beautiful, fruitful, well-lived lives that reflect His Attributes – not our culture's knee-jerk response to 'tribulation' and 'evil'. We are here to establish welcoming, peace-filled homes – 'lovely tents' that radiate His

⁵ *Ra* – often inartfully and unsatisfactorily translated into English as 'evil' - is the serpent-fueled negativity matrix of fleshly appetites [i.e. 'uncleanness in the lusts of their hearts'], counter-productive emotions [i.e. 'vile passions'], and pseudo-intellect [i.e. 'darkened understanding' springing from a 'debased mind'] that rushes in to fill the vacuum created in a human soul whenever that soul chooses to separate itself from the Holy One. See Romans 1:20-32.

love and His goodness. And we are here to form open, joyful, gentle communities – cities of refuge, as it were, that provide the world a faithful model of His Kingdom’s Courts. In so doing, we are to offer the world, including the multitudes who are perpetrating tribulation and evil, an alternative lifestyle – a clearly *more excellent way*.

Defining Tribulation As An Essential Covenant Crucible

We who have received the ***Lech Lecha*** calling of our Creator and entered into a ***Walk before Me and be blameless*** Covenant with Him are not on earth at such a time as this to ‘play the victim’ to any oppressor, any manipulator, any mocker, or any persecutor. We are not here to be morally outraged by, or to rail against, or make war upon, ‘evil’. Nor are we here to nurse personal, racial, or cultural wounds or offenses – or to seek sympathy or special treatment for ‘our side’. We are not to become jaded by the negativity, the hatred, or even the atrocities of those who choose to align themselves against us. Even less are we to judge the world’s oppressors, manipulators, mockers, or persecutors, or even respond to their treachery in kind. We are here to face the toughest challenges of life – and the worst fallen humanity can throw at us - head on, and overcome every challenge in humility, through emunah. We are here to show the world that it can be done, and how. We are here to inspire others, one by one, to seek our King, to love Him as we do, and to embrace and walk in His Wisdom and His Ways.

Right in the middle of *Toldot* something dark and sinister has quietly slithered onto the pages of Torah. In the long run, this new dark and sinister force will be more dangerous than the wrath of Esav. And I have some *bad news* for you, Dear Friend – when we start our study today we will find that the sinister force that entered our sacred text in the closing phrase of yesterday’s aliyah has not only *survived* the intervening hours, but has *morphed into an evil that will have a tremendous effect on the lives of virtually every descendant of Avraham*, in every generation. Indeed the very seeds of the Holocaust – as well as the horrors of the world’s final conflict – can all be traced back in large measure to the dark force we first encountered yesterday for the first time.

How on earth did a force that evil and that powerful manage to creep into our Torah reading yesterday without us even noticing? Hmmm. It deserves a closer look. Let us pause for a moment and read verses 12-14 of Genesis 26 again. Those verses tell us that *Yitzchak planted seed in that land, **vayimtza b’shanah hahi me’ah she’arim** – and the same reaped a hundredfold*. Why did this happen? Torah tells us that as well: ***vayeivaracheihu Adonai*** – *because he was blessed by the Holy One*.

The Darkest Form of Jealousy

When one family – or bloodline – is blessed by the Holy One and the people around that family or bloodline do not share in the blessing, one of two things is going to happen. The first thing that could happen is that the people on the outside of the blessing flow come to the ones who are receiving the blessing humbly and peaceably and seek to learn from them the secrets of the blessing flow. More frequently, however, the ones on the outside of the blessing flow exhibit a reaction on the polar opposite side of the spectrum. And so it was in Gerar. Torah tells us that when the *Ph'lishtim* of Gerar saw how the Holy One was blessing Yitzchak and his family *b'yeqanei'u oto Ph'lishtim* – *the Ph'lishtim envied/were jealous of him*. The word our English Bibles translate as “envied” or “were jealous of” in this line is a form of the Hebrew verb root *qana*. This verb pictures *conduct designed to provoke, or incite to anger, out of feelings of jealousy or envy*. In our modern English vernacular, considering the *source of*, the *target of*, and the *reason for*, the acts of provocation and incitement, we call this kind of malevolence *anti-Semitism*.

Yitzchak's father Avraham had not known this evil. It officially began during Yitzchak's ‘watch’. It *continues to the present*. Most students of Biblical prophecy believe it is destined to be the source of the world's final, determining conflict. So let us look at this evil force and try to come to grips with it. In what is it based? Think about it. Yitzchak moved into the land of the *Ph'lishtim* because there was a famine. That was okay to the *Ph'lishtim*. They did not hate him yet. After all, they were his superiors; he *needed them*. He was *subject to them*. He was dependent upon their good will, and was thus *no threat to them at all*. His predicament even made them *feel a little better about themselves*. But then Yitzchak did the unthinkable – he worked hard and prospered! Though Yitzchak was not even a farmer because all he has ever known is nomadic life with goats and sheep, he had the *audacity to plant grain* in the famine stricken *Ph'lishtim* soil.

How the *Ph'lishtim* must have snickered. And how they must have elbowed and winked at each other each day as they walked by his camp and saw this silly foreigner Yitzchak struggling to plow up the dry, dusty, desert sand. “What a *rookie* - a *tinhorn* - a *fool*” they must have thought.

The Mystery of the Material Aspect of the Blessing of the Covenant

But lo and behold, for no apparent reason, this *tinhorn's* crops grew like crazy - when *those of the Ph'lishtim* were pitiful. The *Ph'lishtim* reaped *rocks* and *dust* [after all, it is a time of famine] - while right “down the street” Yitzchak was reaping a *hundredfold* in his first year. What is more, even though Yitzchak spent his time working his fields instead of tending his animals, *his* flocks and herds nevertheless multiplied exponentially also. It was the blessing of *the wealth of Avraham's*

household. It was a sign of the faithfulness of the Holy One to His covenant with Avraham.

But the *Ph'lishtim* did not have any frame of reference through which to filter or interpret that. The idea simply did not fit anywhere in their framework of givens or their network of prior experiences. All the *Ph'lishtim* saw was that, though they knew the land in which they live like the back of their hand, they were experiencing horrible famine with no end in sight, while this *new kid in town*, this Yitzchak character, was getting downright rich right in front of their eyes. 100-fold return? That was absolutely *unheard of* in Gerar. Even in years of plenteous rain in that region a 40- to 50-fold return was generally deemed to be all that one could hope for from this soil. But now this Yitzchak had come in – in a year of dramatic famine, no less – and had broken every record. He has literally made the desert burst into bloom. Before his hand the dry dust of the famine-struck land had become a fruitful plain. And now he was prospering mightily ... while the *Ph'lishtim* were [in comparison at least] *suffering*. This, the *Ph'lishtim* decided, is *just not right*. Ah – the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil has its way in the human heart over and over and over again!

Here is a lesson, Dear Reader: Any time a human being focuses more upon what someone else has that he/she does not than on what the Holy One is doing in the earth the effect is that human being's life takes on the toxic character of the Serpent. Focus on what others have that you do not have is *death focus*. It is the product of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And if you eat of it you will surely die [i.e. separate yourself/cut yourself off from the source of life and blessing and *shalom*]⁶. And so it was with the *Ph'lishtim*. Seeing how rich Yitzchak was becoming, they did not ask what the Holy One was doing, or why he was so blessed. They embraced toxicity. They let evil thoughts run rampant through their minds. They let evil things pour forth from their mouths. They blamed Yitzchak – and his God - for their problems. They *envied* Yitzchak. They grew *jealous of his productivity*. They grew *furious at his prosperity*. They complained loudly among themselves that *what he* had should be theirs.

Wanting the Blessing Without Embracing the Covenant

But while the *Ph'lishtim* were extremely envious of the blessing they saw on Yitzchak's life they *did not want any part of the Covenant with the Creator of Heaven and Earth that constituted the fountain from which that blessing poured*. The *Ph'lishtim* had been more than happy to ***take from*** Yitzchak the Hebrew - *as*

⁶ That is why policies of socialism, communism and wealth redistribution, as well as class-warfare movements, though founded in what masquerades as lofty idealism and fly the false banners of 'fairness' and 'equality', inevitably lead to misery, violence, poverty, division, destruction, and death.

long as they were the ones prospering and he was the one suffering. When the tables turned however, they were unwilling to accept him as Divinely blessed. They would rather *suffer in lack and vent their rage through jealousy* than open their hearts to the Hebrew God, embrace the Avrahamic Covenant, and *receive* the blessings the Holy One had promised to release through Avraham and his seed.

Like so many today the Ph'lishtim of Yitzchak's day wanted *their world* - their lives, their ways, their attitudes, their values, and their worldview all to *stay just like they were*. And so they called acts of violence toward the Hebrew in their midst 'justice'. They called words of hatred toward the Hebrew in their midst 'truth'. And they began to call Yitzchak's presence in their midst an 'illegal occupation' of the territory they themselves had taken over by force from the descendants of Kena'an. The *Ph'lishtim* labeled every evil thing they experienced – every single consequence of the venom of the spiritual disease of rage they had passionately embraced - 'the fault of the Hebrew'.

Attacking the Chosen - Stopping Up the Wellsprings of Life

So what face does this malevolent force called anti-Semitism wear in today's aliyah? What *pogrom* or *jihad* or *campaign of terror* is unleashed against Yitzchak when the insidious power of Ph'lishtim jealousy/envy was aroused? There was *an escalating spiral of violence* - as always. I told you at the beginning that this would be the *parsha of Violent Clashes of Opposing Worldviews*.

Just as Ya'akov and Esav clashed throughout the time they shared the womb of Rivkah so now there is a violent clash between Yitzchak's household and the Ph'lishtim as they share the Western regions of central Kena'an. First, according to verse 15 of our text it all began with *acts of sabotage* – out of pure spite the Ph'lishtim stopped up the wells which Yitzchak was using, and which his father Avraham had dug. We'll *fix him!* (they must have thought). Notice that they did not strike all the wells that Yitzchak might try to use - but only at those which Yitzchak's father had passed down to Yitzchak (those which were part of Yitzchak's covenant-based inheritance). When this first step or harassment didn't succeed the Ph'lishtim got their government involved - and for perhaps the first time a Hebrew was expelled from a country. See verse 16. This, of course, would happen numerous times over history – in England, in France, in Spain, in Portugal, in Nazi Germany, and on and on. Alas, it is a typical response *of* those who do not want God to interfere in their way of life *to* the blessing of God on His people - a blessing He offers to everyone, but ON HIS TERMS).

Being expelled from one nation's borders did not end the anti-Semitism. Wherever Yitzchak went, it seems, the blessing of God upon his life excited the animosity of

his neighbors. When Yitzchak tried to find a place to settle in the valley of Gerar, the local herdsmen first polluted, then claimed as their own, every well that Yitzchak or his servants dug.

Another God-ordained Life Experience to Deal With!

So, in the face of all this hostility, what was Yitzchak to do? How would he respond to his new status as **the target of intense hatred** and the **victim of continually escalating acts of violence**? How are we to respond to similar provocation today? Ah, that is the secret message of today's aliyah of Torah.

Keep in mind that when the Holy One told Yitzchak not to go down to Egypt, but to sojourn in the lands of Ph'lishtia for a while, He *knew full well* what the residents of those areas would do to Yitzchak. I suspect that was one of the main reasons He wanted Yitzchak to stay there - *so that this early form of anti-Semitism could be unleashed, and Yitzchak could learn – and teach all his descendants – how to deal with it.* Many years later our great Master and Rabbi taught us:

***Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you
and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake.
Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven,
for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.***

[Matthew 5:11-12]

What were the secrets learned by 'the prophets who were before us' to which Y'shua was referring? And from what source did 'the prophets who were before us' learn such things? Ah, Dear Reader, these are things we need to know. Can our ancestor Yitzchak help us in this regard?

One of our stated goals for this week is to *connect with* our ancestor Yitzchak, and learn what made him 'tick'. So what can we learn from Yitzchak on the issue of dealing with anti-Semitic activity? Or, if you prefer, what can we learn from Yitzchak on the issue of *coping with – and overcoming - persecution.*

Dealing With Persecution the Kingdom/Covenant Way

Let us consider first what Yitzchak did not do in response to the virulent but non-violent persecution he faced in Gerar. First of all, Yitzchak did not *get offended* and *play the role of the self-righteous victim.* He did not try to fight a war of religion, ideology, political theory, or moralizing/social justice rhetoric. He did not fight negative emotions with negative emotions. It appears that Yitzchak knew better than to expect – much less request – anyone of the *powers-that-be* of either the secular or religious world in which he lived to side with him or come to his aid in any meaningful manner.

Secondly, note that Yitzchak did not *respond in kind*. He did not curse or accuse the *Ph'lish'tim*. He did not retaliate. He did not defend himself. He did not even *resist*. What on earth is up with that? Could Yitzchak perhaps have been modeling the kind of 'turn the other cheek' approach to conflict that Yeshua would later teach to Yitzchak's descendants? Of course, those who have studied history know that the Master's 'turn the other cheek' teachings were announced not to a sovereign nation experiencing the blessing of God, but to *subjects of the Roman empire who were very clearly under the judgment of the Holy One* for the sins of assimilation, hypocrisy, and sectarianism. If, you see, as Yeshua knew, the Jewish people of the time period in question were facing Roman rule because of *the Holy One's judgment*, it made no sense to resist or fight back against Rome. In that context, Rome was actually the Holy One's *assigned agent of judgment* – so to fight back against Rome would mean to take up arms against Heaven. If Israel had been sovereign, and if Torah had been the prevailing code, however, Yeshua's 'turn the other cheek' teaching would clearly have made no sense.

Similarly, since Yitzchak was merely a sojourner in a land controlled by others *it made no sense for him to assert property rights that he could not enforce* through the legal system. Hence, he assessed the situation and, realizing he had nothing of lasting value to gain from a fight under the circumstances with which he was confronted, he packed up and moved on to another place. I do not believe that means that Yitzchak was a pacifist. I believe it means he was a *pragmatist* – that he had the wisdom to know what battles are [a] *winnable* and/or [b] *worth fighting for the sake of Heaven* ... and what battles are *neither*. I am not by any means justifying or excusing the actions of the anti-Semites of the world. Nor am I suggesting that they be appeased. I am simply saying that the point of today's aliyah – and our mission on planet earth - is neither to condemn nor confront anti-Semites. I believe, you see, that they *condemn themselves*. The Covenant the Holy One made with Avraham has as one of its essential tenets that He will not only bless those who bless us – He will *curse those who curse us*. If they want to curse us, that is their choice. Our Covenant calling is to keep doing whatever we are doing, and not get distracted by those who curse us. If we follow our ancestor Yitzchak's example we will not respond *tit-for-tat* to the angry rants of angry people – whether they call themselves Palestinians, Jihadists, or skinheads. If we follow Yitzchak's example we will not respond by crying 'fowl' to all who will listen. If we follow in Yitzchak's footsteps we will not respond by wallowing in self-pity, or by whining to the world about how bad we are being treated, or by seeking either resolutions from the UN or military action by the US on our behalf. If we walk with the Holy One as Yitzchak did and follow the pathway established by our ancestor Yitzchak, we will take a walk and meditate [in Hebrew *suwach*]. We will then plead with the Holy One for the people who are barren [in Hebrew, *atar*], determine what the Holy

One is calling for us to do, and then, whatever that happens to be, we will *just do it*. As we discussed in the introductory study this week that is the main thing that defines the *Yitzchak Identity*. That said, I believe Yitzchak's response to this particular persecution taught us at least two more things we should always be prepared to do.

Never Quit! Never Surrender!

First of all, Yitzchak taught us that *we don't quit*. We suffer if we must, and we die if it comes down to that, but we *never surrender*. We wave only one standard – the standard of the Kingdom of Heaven – and that standard *is not* and *will never be* a white flag of surrender. We do not for one moment, whatever the provocation, let our enemies make us give up being who we were created to be, living as we were created to live, and doing what we were created to do. We do not *give in* and *try to fit in with everyone else* hoping they'll quit hating on us so much, blaming us for all their problems, slandering us, blowing up our babies, and cutting off our heads. We do not give up our Covenant-calling. We do not give up our love of and devotion to the Holy One and His Ways. We do not quit reading, studying, and adjusting our lives to the wonderful Torah.

We do not quit commemorating the 7th-day Sabbath, the Covenant sign of our special relationship with the Creator of the Universe. We do not stop counting our days and planning our lives according to the calendar our Covenant Partner in Heaven has given us to mark the times and seasons. We do not change the definition of 'food' the Holy One has given to us to make it conform with the insatiable appetite of our lawless neighbors for the flesh of the swine, the carcasses of the bottom-feeders of the lakes and seas, or the pungent flavor of the garbage disposals and predators of the earth. We do not stop praying. We do not stop walking in the fear of the Holy One, or loving Him with all our heart and all our soul and all our strength, or teaching our children the way of the Holy One, to make/build a culture and atmosphere of *tzedekah* [KJV 'righteousness'] and *mishpat* [KJV 'justice'].

If there is no recourse from the persecution of the anti-Semites of the world in the legal system of the land in which we live, and the Holy One does not call us to war, we *pack up everything we have and move rather than surrender*. We leave behind the "stuff" of life, private property, personal friends, and whatever else it takes rather than surrender who we are and the wonderful inheritance the Holy One has prepared for us. And, as we take our leave, we cling tighter than ever to our God and the heritage He has given us.

We can do without 'stuff'. We can do without everything that any king or person or culture that hates our God or rejects His ways can offer, but we cannot quit

begin who we are. We cannot abandon our God, or His ways, or His Plan, for any bowl of porridge the world around us offers to sell us for our birthright.

Understand, Dear Reader, that those who surrender, compromise, assimilate, and stay behind lose much - much more than we who move on with the Holy One, looking for the land He has promised us, ever will!

Speak Creative, Prophetic Words!

Secondly, we learn from Yitzchak to *release the Holy One's creative Word each time an Anti-Semite inflicts his wounds.* When the Gerarian herdsmen took over the Avrahamic/Yitzchakian wells Yitzchak responded by doing a strange thing as he withdrew - he gave the wells a Hebrew "*name*". The first well Yitzchak named in this manner was "*Esek*". This means "*contention*" or "*strife*". He then named the second well "*Sitnah*", meaning *adversary/opponent/enemy*. This name is derived from the same verb root from which is drawn the name/title *Satan*.

Why would Yitzchak name these wells even as he was abandoning them and moving on? Because to a Hebrew the act of *naming* something is a release of the Holy One's creative Word. In Genesis 2:19 we are told that Adam's first task, the first step toward taking dominion over the earth as the Holy One had instructed him, was to *name* – actually describe the essence, attributes, characteristics and purposes of - all creatures of the earth. This he did in conjunction and cooperation with the Holy One. Adam didn't just say the first thing which popped into his head - as he studied each creature, he and the Holy One discussed it, and when he had learned from the Holy One the essence and purpose of the creature, he expressed that essence in a name. The very act of naming something, is, therefore - or at least should be - an act of interaction and cooperation with God - of recognition of Him as sovereign, and as the source of the namer's understanding of the thing named.

Naming should follow, and flow out of, the *suwach*-ing and *atar*-ing lifestyle we learned from Yitzchak. By naming the wells he abandoned Yitzchak acknowledged that those wells belonged, and were being abandoned by him, ***not*** to the anti-Semitic herdsmen of Gerar but to the Holy One alone. Yitzchak was surrendering the wells to the Holy One, trusting Him to preserve the water in them for whomever He chose to give them. And this was *not a problem* for Yitzchak - after all, the Holy One had promised that He would give all the land on which those wells were located - to Yitzchak's descendants. Yitzchak's giving of Hebrew names to these wells as he withdrew was therefore an act of faith – an expression of confident assurance that the Holy One would indeed do all He had promised.

And note what Yitzchak named the wells. Torah tells us “*he gave them the same names his father had given them.*” **Genesis 26:18.** Yitzchak was not claiming a new and improved revelation or covenant. He was not on a crusade. The wells he opened he was not opening in his own name or for his own glory. Nowhere in all the land he traveled was there ever a well called “Yitzchak’s” well. Yitzchak, you see, knew where the water came from. Everything good in his life flowed not from his own efforts – but from the covenant the Holy One had made with Avraham. And Yitzchak was ‘okay’ with that. Are you, Dear Reader?

Developing Intimacy With the Creator of Heaven and Earth: Yitzchak’s Second God-encounter

The response of Yitzchak to the harassment and hatred of the people around him was a necessary part of his development of intimacy with the Holy One. And, likewise, it is a necessary part of ours. May we learn the lessons of Yitzchak’s walk with the Holy One and not surrender to outrage, anger, resentment, and hatred. May we never lower ourselves to become like those who know not God just because others do us wrong.

Of course, the Holy One did not in any regard leave Yitzchak alone during this time. The Holy One was there with Yitzchak all along. He was with him as the Ph’lishtim plugged the wells of Avraham. He was with him as Avimelech issued the decree expelling him from his country. And he was with him each time the herdsmen of Gerar attacked and stole that which rightfully belonged to him and to his descendants. But although the Holy One was *present with* Yitzchak [quietly, invisibly, undetected] all along He did not *manifest His Presence* until Yitzchak had successfully completed “the test”. At that point, the Holy One appeared to Yitzchak again - the second “God encounter” of Yitzchak’s life. And this is what the Creator of the Universe said to Avraham’s son:

Anochi Elohei Avraham avicha

I am the God of your father Avraham.

al-tira ki-iteicha anochi

Do not be afraid, for I am with you;

uverachticha v’hirbeyti et-zar’acha

I will bless you and will increase the number of your descendants

ba’avur Avraham avdi

for the sake of my servant Avraham.

[Genesis 26:24]

Why at this critical juncture, after Yitzchak has successfully navigated through a horrible “mine field” his father never had to deal with, does the Holy One make a point to remind Yitzchak of Avraham, and of the covenant He made with Avraham?

Consider the following. In parsha *Vayera*, when the Holy One was explaining why He was willing to reveal to Avraham the approaching fate of S'dom and G'morrah, He said:

*Avraham will surely become a great and powerful nation,
and all nations on earth will be blessed through him.
For I have chosen him,
so that he will teach his children and his household after him
to keep [Hebrew sh'mar, meaning to guard, to treasure,
to highly esteem and to carefully watch over and observe]
the way [Hebrew derech, meaning path, lifestyle, footsteps] of the Holy One
by doing/making/building [a society exuding] tzedakah and mishpat,
so that the Holy One may bring about for Avraham what He has promised him.
[Genesis 18:18-19]*

The Holy One thus explained that the purpose for which He called Avraham the Hebrew (and all other Hebrews) to “cross over” from death to life was:

*so that [they] will teach [their] children and [their] household after [them],
to sh'mar the derech of the Holy One,
by doing/making/building [a society exuding] tzedakah and mishpat*

The question is this: whatever Avraham accomplished in his life - obtaining wealth, rescuing Lot, and becoming a “prince in the land” of Israel, highly respected by the Ph'lishtim and the Kena'anim - *did he do “the one thing” for which he was specifically called and chosen - did he “teach his children ... to sh'mar the derech of the Holy One - by doing/building (not just by “believing”) ...?* Yes, we discover in today's aliyah, he did.

So What About Us?

And so the question becomes *what about us?* Are we children of the promise of Avraham? Whatever else we accomplish, our essential purpose in life - the reason we have been called out of darkness - is no different than the call of Avraham. There are many life experiences that are within the Holy One's will for us - but there is *one principal and over-riding destiny*, which is the barometer by which we are to tell if a man or woman (and let's focus on ourselves, and not others) is truly walking as a child of Avraham.

The defining factor is not what doctrines one professes [i.e. his or her ‘doctrinal statement’ or ‘creed’] nor what ministries one heads, nor even what miracles one performs. It is not what positions one holds - be they secular or religious. What really matters is not what amount of time one spends in public worship, nor is it what amount of passion one releases in private prayer. What determines whether one has fulfilled his or her destiny is not how many religious meetings one attends or leads, or even how many “souls” one wins. The ultimate barometer of a person's

participation in the covenant of Avraham is simply this: whether that person teaches his or her children and household to *sh'mar* [to guard, to treasure, to highly esteem and to carefully watch over and observe] the *derech* [the footsteps, pathway, and lifestyle] of the Holy One - by **doing what is right and just**. The latter is what it means to “cross over” - to be a Hebrew.

Being a child of Avraham according to the Promise means to teach your children to *cross over* as well. And all who *cross over* will *stand apart*. And *that* is the idea. Avraham was a *good teacher*. Just as importantly, Yitzchak was a *good student*. Go thou, and do likewise.

Questions For Today's Study

1. Today's passage focuses on some of the trials and difficulties Yitzchak and Rivkah experienced in their lives. The first set of trials/difficulties had to do with a dispute with neighbors brought about by envy; the second set of trials/difficulties revolved around a *wayward son*.

[A] When had the Ph'lishtim [Philistines] stopped up the wells that Avraham's servants had dug?

[B] What purpose does a well serve?

[C] What reason could the Ph'lishtim have had for stopping up wells?

[D] To whom did the stopped-up wells belong?

[E] In Strong's Concordance and Gesenius' Lexicon look up the words translated as “quarrel” and “enmity” in verses 20 and 21. Write the Hebrew words and their definitions.

[F] How did Yitzchak deal with the quarreling and enmity of the Ph'lishtim?

[G] What did Yitzchak call the third well that his servants dug.

[H] In Strong's and Gesenius look up the name Yitzchak gave to the third well, and write the Hebrew word and its definitions.

2. Upon reaching *Be'er-Sheva* Yitzchak had a second dramatic and life-changing encounter with the Holy One. This was the second God-encounter of Yitzchak's life. Here is how Torah describes it:

He went up from there to Be'er-Sheva.
The Holy One appeared to him the same night, and said,
“I am the God of Avraham your father. Don't be afraid,
for I am with you, and will bless you, and multiply your seed
for my servant Avraham's sake.”

He built an altar there,
and called on the name of the Holy One, and pitched his tent there.
Yitzchak's servants dug a well.

[Genesis 26:23-25]

[A] Take out a sheet of paper and write on it the words the Holy One spoke to Yitzchak [in Hebrew and in English]. List separately each promise contained in those words, and identify the operative Hebrew verb contained in each promise.

[B] How does this word differ from the word spoken by at the time of the first encounter [see Genesis 26:2-4]?

[C] What do you think was the Holy One's purpose in this second encounter?

[D] What four things did Yitzchak do after this encounter? From this passage, at least, in what order would you rank Yitzchak's priorities, using the following list: "business", "home life", "worship", and "prayer".

3. Immediately after Yitzchak settled in Be'er-Sheva, Avimelech brought his military commander and army out to meet with the Hebrew. Rather than have a confrontation over what had been done to him, Yitzchak chose to make a covenant with Avimelech. Some believe this covenant is *prophetic* of the end-time covenant that Yitzchak's descendants will enter into with the Evil One. Read the text carefully and see if you can see any modern or prophetic parallels.

*Then Avimelech went to him from Gerar, and Achuzat his friend,
and Pikhol the captain of his host.*

*Yitzchak said to them, "Why have you come to me, since you hate me,
and have sent me away from you?"*

They said, "We saw plainly that the Holy One was with you.

*We said, 'Let there now be an oath between us, even between us and you,
and let us make a covenant with you, that you will do us no harm,
as we have not touched you, and as we have done to you nothing but good,
and have sent you away in shalom.' You are now the blessed of the Holy One."*

He made them a feast, and they ate and drink.

They rose up some time in the morning, and swore one to another.

Yitzchak sent them away, and they departed from him in shalom.

[A] What were the terms of the treaty Yitzchak made with the Ph'lishtim?

[B] Did the Ph'lishtim truthfully describe the history of enmity leading to the treaty? List the inaccuracies in the way Avimelech described the history leading up to the treaty.

[C] What did the Ph'lishtim agree to as part of this peace treaty?

[D] Go back to Genesis 21 and read verses 22-34. What differences do you see in the treaty made by Avraham and Avimelech at Be'er-Sheva from the treaty made by Yitzchak and Avimelech at Be'er-Sheva?

4. Looking back over chapter 26, in what ways can you see Yitzchak claiming the 'birthright' of the son of Avraham?

5. What was the source of Yitzchak's trouble with *Esav* [Esau] the wayward son? Why was this a problem?

6. In today's Haftarah reading the Holy One's messenger Malachi prophesies to the priests of his day who did not honor the Holy One either as sons nor reverence him as servants, yet continue the ritual of public worship for their own purposes. What the Holy One says in reply may shock some of you. He does not pull any punches. Read it for yourselves.

*Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors,
that you might not kindle fire on my altar in vain!
I have no pleasure in you," says the Holy One of hosts,
neither will I accept an offering at your hand.*

*For from the rising of the sun even to the going down of the same
my name will be great among the nations,
and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering:
for my name is great among the nations," says the Holy One of Hosts.
But you profane it, in that you say, 'The Holy One's table is polluted,
and its fruit, even its food, is contemptible.'*

[A] What according to the prophetic words of Malachi does the Holy One say He wishes someone would do concerning the religious meetings that were going on? Why?

[B] Our text says that the Holy One has no "pleasure" in the ministry of the priests of the time of Malachi. In Strong's Concordance and Gesenius' Lexicon look up the word our English Bibles translate as "pleasure" [It is Strong's Hebrew word #2656, transliterated as *chephetz*, and pronounced *khay'-fetz*]. Write the word in Hebrew letters, with vowel markings. Then search out the verb root of this word, and describe the Hebraic word picture it presents.

[C] Our text also distinguishes the way the Holy One is (or will be) revered by "the nations" verses the way He is dishonored by the kohanim (priests). In Strong's and Gesenius, look up the word our English Bibles translate as "nations" [It is Strong's Hebrew word # 1471, transliterated as *goy*, and pronounced *go'-ee*]. Write this word in Hebrew letters, with vowel markings. Then search out the verb root of this word, and describe the Hebraic word picture it presents.

[D] Based upon what you discovered in regard to the preceding question and in the context of the passage we are studying, do you think that "the nations" means "Gentiles" [i.e. non-Jews]? Or is it merely a term distinguishing the faithful remnant of Avraham's descendants from the members of the unfaithful order of priests?

[E] What do you think it means that the priests considered "the Holy One's table" to be "polluted", and His "fruit" to be "contemptible"? If you have a study partner, engage in a yeshiva-type discussion of this issue, and share your questions and insights.

7. In today's reading in the letter to the Romans Shaul distinguishes between "**children of/after the flesh**" on the one hand and "**children of/after the promise**" on the other hand. The reason this distinction has to be made is because the birth of Yitzchak, who inherited and passed on Avraham's characteristics and inheritance, was not *natural* [according to the "*flesh*"], but *supernatural* [according to the *promise*]. The point is this: What the Holy One *gave* by the promise, He *preserves*, and *passes down*, from generation to generation, by the Promise – not by the *flesh*. Each generation of natural children in the lineage of Avraham through Yitzchak has an "opt out" option (*theirs*, not the Holy One's).

Esav chose – and thousands like him in later centuries have chosen, and are still choosing - to "opt out" in favor of porridge, pork chops, peer pressure, and political correctness. Birthright rejected, abandoned, forsaken.

It should also be pointed out that, just as every generation of natural children have an "opt out" option, each generation of *strangers* to the covenant has an "opt in" option. Whether one be a natural descendant of Yitzchak or a foreigner, the key is making a proper response to the *promise* and the Promissor – not the genes or chromosomes of the flesh. As Shaul puts it in today's aliyah:

*... it is not the **children of the flesh** who are children of the Holy One,
but the **children of the promise** are counted as a seed.
For this is a word of promise, "At the appointed time I will come,
and Sarah will have a son."*

[A] What is it according to Shaul that makes one a true son of Avraham, for purposes of the Divine Inheritance?

[B] There are some words in these two verses that have significant Hebraic meanings. Look up the Hebrew words our English Bibles translate as "*children*", "*flesh*", "*promise*", and "*seed*" [for purposes of this exercise, ignore the Greek words] in Gesenius' Lexicon. If you have a Richard's or Vine's Expository Dictionary of Bible Words you may wish to consult such a source as well. Write the Hebrew words you have found, then search the verb roots of these words out in Gesenius. Finally, write, for each of the words, a description of the Hebraic word picture it presents. If you have study partners available, have a "yeshiva" discussion on the meaning and application of the B'rit Chadasha verses written above, and what they mean to you.

[C] The last phrase of today's B'rit Chadasha reading is a quote from Genesis. From what chapter and verse does this quotation come?

[D] Describe the Biblical *context* from which the quotation is taken – that is, what was going on when those words were said, who said them, to whom were they said, and why did the speaker say them?

*May your life be blessed by the Holy One,
and may the obstacles and hatred you encounter as the result of that blessing
draw you deeper into the loving arms of God.*

The Rabbi's son

Meditation for Today's Study

Psalm 107:15-20

*Let them praise the Holy One for his lovingkindness,
For his wonderful works to the children of men!
For he has broken the gates of brass, and cut through bars of iron.
Fools are afflicted because of their disobedience, and because of their iniquities.
Their soul abhors all kinds of food. They draw near to the gates of death.
Then they cry to the Holy One in their trouble,
He saves them out of their distresses. He sends his word,
and He heals them, and delivers them from their graves.*