Introduction to Parsha #6: Toldot[1]

Torah:	**Genesis 25:19 - 28:9**
Haftarah:	**Malachi 1:1 - 2:7**
B'rit Chadasha:	**Romans 9:1-28**



The sons clashed violently with each other.
[Genesis 25:22]

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

V'eleh toldot Yitzchak ben-Avraham *– And these are the stories, accounts, generation-transcending narratives pertaining to Yitzchak, son of Avraham ....* **Genesis 25:19a.**

Torah's 6th parsha - *Toldot* - introduces us some of the toughest life challenges that our 2nd generation torchbearers - Yitzchak and Rivkah - faced and somehow overcame. In this parsha we watch the unlikely couple who never once even met before their wedding day try to forge a workable marriage relationship, deal with extended disappointment, struggle through a difficult pregnancy, establish a household, navigate multiple rounds of high-stakes family drama, survive an environmental calamity, and then start over from scratch in a new country, surrounded by perversion, hostility, and ever-more-violent anti-Semitic pogroms. They must shake their heads at times and ask incredulously, 'Is THIS what being 'chosen' and 'blessed' by the Holy One is supposed to look like?'

Are You Ready … Are You Ready for This?

What the Holy One called Avraham and his seed to do was/is provide a *critical strategic counterbalance* to the dark energy trifecta of *ra* [*i.e.* toxic narcissism; patterns

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of self-centered thought, speech, and action], *shachat* [*i.e.* lust & offense driven corruption], and *chamas* [*i.e.* violence, cruelty, outrage-compulsion, and frenzied desire for wealth, power, and vengeance] that otherwise would take over and destroy the earth ecosystem. Torah is the treatment plan; the sons and daughters of Israel are the credentialed staff; grace, kindness, love, wisdom, revelation, and disciplined self-denial are the prescribed medicines. Easy-peasy, right?

Alas the thing about counterbalances is that they must be added DELICATELY - without causing a violent reaction or pendulum swing. The thing about treatment is that it must be applied CONSISTENTLY. The thing about medicine is that it must be administered in PROPER DOSES, at PROPER INTERVALS, under PROPER CONDITIONS. And the thing about staff is that they are always more effective when they approach their assigned duties as HONEST and HUMBLE SERVANTS, not as easily offended judges, as deceitful manipulators, or as arrogant elites.

For those called to what the Avrahamic covenant path of counterbalance, the key is never to think too highly of oneself or one's culture; to always tread lightly; to always speak and act gracefully; to keep the focus on healing the land and the heart at all times; to always resist the temptation to indulge the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life; and to never think that in our job description to judge, punish, or re-educate the indoctrinated minds of the raging nations and vain imagination-driven peoples.

Illustrative case studies from the Torah this week:

1. Yitzchak's experience in Gerar, among the *Philish'tim* [KJV '*Philistines*'; called '*Palestinians*' in modern political diatribe]; and
2. Ya'akov's interactions with Esav.

The Place of Parsha Toldot in the 'Greater Story' of Torah

Torah is not a 'religious book'. It is not a haphazard compilation collection of ancient legends designed to educate our minds and train our children in matters of ethnicity, ethics, philosophy, ideology, religion, or morality. Torah is the introduction to man of the Creator's beauty, majesty, wisdom, might, and goodness - a work of art thoughtfully designed and carefully knit together by the Hand of the Most Passionate Lover Who Ever Lived. It is gloriously alive, stunningly beautiful, and full to the brim with living water stirred constantly by the brooding Presence of the Holy One's *Ruach*. It pulses with His Essential Goodness, His Creative Energy, His Delightful Personality, His Empowering Vocabulary, His Commitment to *asah Shalom*, and, most of all, His Unshakable Dedication to the good of *mankind as a species* and *Creation as an ecosystem*.

Torah is designed to stir the soul with both visual and auditory stimulation. We are not just to read it, or study it. Nor, Heaven forbid, are we ever to entertain the vain imagination that we – or anyone – could one day 'master' it. We are not even intended to understand it. We are supposed to be *captivated by it*. We are supposed to be *consumed with it*. We are supposed to get *caught up in it* – and *swept away by it*. We are to gaze at both its vastness and intricate workmanship, and *sigh in absolute wonder* – much like we would at the sights and sounds of a sunrise, a lightning storm, a roaring ocean, a mountain vista, a virgin forest, or an eagle in flight. We are to hum along with it as we go about our day. We are to talk about it in hushed tones of reverent delight as we sit in our homes - and also as we walk by the way. We are to meditate upon it as we lie down - and also as we rise up. Why? Because both the visual and auditory stimulation aspects of Torah are engineered to have an amazing effect upon us and, through us, upon the world. We are to be captivated by the glimpses into the Beauty Realm that Torah provides for us. We are to be caught up in its epic narratives as if they were *our own stories* – because, well ... they *are*. Through immersing ourselves in Torah we are to discover our true selves. We are to re-acquaint ourselves with our real, God-ordained identities, and come to grips with the Covenant into which we are called, the mission for which we have been commissioned, and the destiny for which we are destined.

It is our Creator's Plan, you see, that through reading, meditating upon, talking about, and living according to Torah, day after day, parsha after parsha, year after year, we are supposed to gradually increase our capacity to *see*, to *hear,* to *envision,* to *marvel at,* to *embrace,* and to *intimately come to know* the Holy One intimately – as a King, a Rabbi, and a Friend - and get gloriously caught up in His Glorious Plan of Revelation and Redemption for Mankind and Creation. When we approach Torah with that goal in mind, He knows, we will *come to love that Plan, take up our pre-ordained place* in it, and joyfully go wherever it takes us, no matter what the cost.

The Critical Role of 'the Antithesis'

The process requires us to *meet and understand our antithesis*[2]. Everyone has an antithesis, you see. Everyone needs one. Every Hevel therefore has a Kayin. Every king of Salem has a king of Sodom. Every Yitzchak has a Yish'mael. Every Ya'akov ha an Esav. An antithesis is a precious, though unwelcome, gift of the Creator – a gift designed to keep us *on alert*, at our post, and on our toes. An antithesis causes us to pray, to pursue a more meaningful relationship with the Holy One, and to dig deeper into the Torah. An antithesis motivates us to continually hone our skills, while

[2] In classic literature, a character's *antithesis* is his or her polar opposite, directly conflicting opponent, or *nemesis*; often the antithesis character presents a 'mirror image' contrast to the protagonist/hero character in the drama.

keeping both our fleshly appetites and our *fruit-of-the-tree-of-knowledge-of-good-and-evil infused pseudo-intellect* in check. The constant presence in our world of our antithesis teaches us to walk calmly and purposefully with the Holy One in all situations. It is only when we realize that we are always going to encounter pushback from antithetical worldviews that we truly recognize our need to stay at our post, on assigned task and let the Holy One lead us – even though our flesh would rather *scream,* or *complain,* or *draw a sword and charge,* or *respond to our antithesis adversary in kind,* or *bolt and run*. If and to the extent we embrace and surrender to its training protocols, Torah is brilliantly designed to teach us how to engage every person and situation that confronts us wisely – even that antithetical person or situation threatens to seduce, marginalize, or destroy us. That is why regular, humble, awestruck Torah study and meditation are so *important*. Studying, meditating on, and engaging with the mitzvot of Torah enlighten and empower us to overcome the challenges of life in a fallen world. The Holy One has strategically placed each Hebrew letter, each Hebrew word, each Hebrew phrase, each Hebrew sentence, and each Hebrew paragraph of each narrative that makes up the tapestry of Torah. Each letter, you see, constitutes a note of the great redemption symphony of Heaven. Each phrase constitutes a stitch in the great tapestry of deliverance from the death spiral of *ra*. Each Torah narrative constitutes a stanza of the ultimate Song of All Songs. Each parsha constitutes an act in the Great Drama that our Beloved Creator/Benefactor/Rabbi either causes or allows to unfold in our lives.

Through the rich tapestry of Torah and its accompanying symphonic movements the Holy One intends to empower us to behold every aspect of His Plan that we the reader are ready to receive. Through the real-life stories of the patriarchs and matriarchs He is training us to both listen for and discern His Voice *and* behold and walk in His Ways. He is skillful romancing us – never pushing too hard. Each section of Torah's Divinely inspired narrative is meticulously designed to reveal no more - and no less - than our tender spirits are prepared to incorporate into our lives and release into our spheres of influence.

The Process of Renewal and Transformation Has Begun!

Hence in its opening parsha, *B'reshit*, the Holy One *introduced us to His Beautiful dream of* walking and talking with mankind, as we co-labor with Him in the grand undertaking of developing the potential He had designed into the ecosystem we call 'Creation'. We saw Adam and Chava living and bearing much fruit in His Garden of Delight. We saw them walking and talking with the Holy One without fear or guilt or shame. We saw them partnering with Him in a grand enterprise. We then saw the Master Weaver stitch into the tapestry of Torah a series of narratives designed to *show us the stark contrast between the way of 'walking with the Holy One',* on the one hand, *and the way of those who walk in the counsel of the ungodly*, on the other hand.

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

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

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

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

The Avraham Chronicles Up The Ante

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

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

The Holy One danced this three-step waltz with Avraham and Sarah over and over. And just about the time they started to get good at it, they ... well they just *died*. The death of Avraham and Sarah did not by any means stop the dance of Divine Romance, however; it merely meant it was time for the Holy One to call forth a new dance partner. So, welcome to parsha *Toldot*. You see, Dear Reader, it is not just the parsha of the Clashing of Nations and Worldviews – it is also the parsha of the *Changing of Covenant Partners.*

The Transitional Epoch

The last three parshot we have studied were all about Avraham and Sarah and their Divinely choreographed set of ever-deepening covenant dealings with the Holy One. Over the course of those chronicles we learned a lot about some foundational aspects of walking and talking with, and following the leading of, the Holy One. We learned from the dance we saw the Holy One dance with Avraham and Sarah such foundational covenant truths as the *sh'ma* modality [*i.e.* listening, hearing, responding], the *bracha* [*i.e. blessing*/empowerment] mystery, the *emunah* [transformation through impregnation/impartation] disciplines, the *tzavah* [teaching, enjoining] protocols, and the exquisite freedom of the *akeida* [ultimate surrender of all for the sake of love for the Holy One] approach to life. As mind-blowing as these five elemental lessons of walking and talking with and being led through life by the Holy One are, however, they are intended by our Great King to serve only as the essential footings for the threshold pillars of, and as portals of entry into, the great Kingdom Edifice of living stones that the Holy One is building upon the earth. The time has come to build upon the foundation the Holy One has laid for us. The Holy One has ordained, as part of the process of slowly building Divine Passion in His Betrothed Bride, that the first level of building the Holy One desires to do upon this great foundation must await the coming of age of the second generation of the covenant, namely Yitzchak and his beautiful young wife Rivkah.

Toldot is the 'transitional' parsha that forms a bridge between the era of Avraham and the era of first Yitzchak, then Ya'akov, then Yosef and his brothers. The Holy

One will, you see, change dance partners three times in the next twenty-five chapters of Torah.

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

The key figures in the narrative of parsha *Toldot* will be the transitional characters of *Yitzchak* and *Rivkah*. Who are these people, you ask? We actually got to know Rivkah pretty well last week through the detail rich bride-selection chronicles of Genesis 24. This week it will be Yitzchak's turn to take center stage. If we do not connect with Yitzchak this week though, we may never get to know him at all - for this parsha represents the bulk of Yitzchak's brief dance across Torah's stage. This is Yitzchak's shining moment – his hour to be transformed into a functional covenant partner of the Creator of the Universe through perfectly timed God-encounters and Divinely ordained life experiences. But in reality it is not so much Yitzchak that we will be getting to know – it will be that particular manifestation of our Creator which He chooses to reveal as the '*God of Yitzchak'*.

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

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

Avraham and Ya'akov are bold men of action about whom Torah goes on for chapter after glorious chapter. Through Torah's detailed narratives of Avraham and Ya'akov's magnificent adventures on planet earth, we are made to feel like we know not only the intimate details of these men's lives, but also, if it were possible, know how these men think. We get to know these men's strengths. We get to know their weaknesses. We can readily identify with both of them. Indeed, after studying Torah's narratives about them for a few years, most of us begin to feel an eternal bond with Avraham and Ya'akov. But *Yitzchak*? Who is <u>he</u> to us? Other than seminal fluid, what is Yitzchak's contribution to the heritage of the Holy One's covenant people? In comparison to Avraham and Ya'akov, Yitzchak seems mysterious and aloof. It is therefore going to take a little effort on our part to get 'into' Yitzchak and begin to understand what makes him tick. I assure you however, whatever effort it takes it is *well worth it.* After all, there is a bit of Yitzchak, just as there is a bit of Avraham and a bit of Ya'akov, in all of us. The quest is not therefore just to get to know the historic figure Yitzchak – but is in actuality to get to know a little more about the Yitzchak in *ourselves*.

What is *the key* to understanding and connecting with Yitzchak the way we understand and connect with Avraham and Ya'akov? What is *the secret* to coming to grips with the Yitzchak in all of us the way we come to grips with the Avraham

and the Ya'akov in all of us? I believe a large part of the answer to these questions is found in the first activity Torah shows Yitzchak engaging in this week. In the first few verses of *Toldot*, I believe, lies a secret hidden in plain view that explains the essence of Yitzchak's unique contribution to our heritage.

The Desperate Cry of the Broken Heart

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

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

ki akarah hi
for she was akarah

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

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

In the Hebrew text the pertinent verb phrase our English Bibles translate as '*pleaded with'* the Holy One or '*prayed to*' the Holy One in this passage is ***vaye'etar Yitzchak l'Adonai ...***. The verb root at the heart of this phrase is *atar*[3]. This is, interestingly enough, the first instance in Torah of this particular verb root. What Yitzchak did – what the Holy One responded to – is something we have not seen before in God-man relations. Adam did not *atar;* neither did *Noach* or *Shem*. Even *Avraham avinu,* though he conversed with the Holy One on numerous occasions, is never said to have *atar-ed. Atar*-ing, it seems, is something our least known and most aloof patriarch – the enigmatic Yitzchak – actually pioneered.

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

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

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

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

What kind of entreaty or supplication or prayer does the Hebrew verb *atar* picture for us? The Hebraic word picture is that of a man's soul [*ayin*] focusing intently on the covenant sign [*tav*] until the king steps off his throne [*resh*] to take action on the man's behalf. Ah, that is the most important spiritual secret Yitzchak teaches us. The *atar* kind of entreaty that Yitzchak pioneered is, you see, the entreaty of *complete brokenness*. It is *the helpless cry of a contrite and humble spirit*. It is the kind of *desperate baring of one's soul before the Holy One in prayer* that David exhibited, and that more than anything else made the sweet Psalmist of Israel a '*man after the Holy One's own heart'*. **See II Samuel 21:14, II Samuel 24:25.** And it is, I believe, the foundation stone upon which Yeshua of Natzret built the deepest of all forms of entreaty – the *atar*-ing that poured forth from Yeshua in *Gat-sh'manei* [Gethsemane]. *Atar*-ing is not asking for what one wants from the Holy One. It is not a request for a blessing or a gift to make one's life easier. *Atar*-ing is what a covenant partner does when he has come to the end of himself, the end of his own strength, and the end of his own will, and cries out in desperation for the fulfillment of the *promises* made by his covenant partner.

Why was Yitzchak the only patriarch who could introduce us to the covenant activity Torah calls *atar*-ing? Perhaps it was because, of the patriarchs, only he had tasted the exquisite freedom of the *akeida* [ultimate surrender of all for the sake of love for the Holy One] approach to life. Only he had lain bound and helpless upon an altar of stone while flames reached toward his body even as the cold steel of his father's flint knife pressed tightly against his throat. Or perhaps it was because

only Yitzchak among the patriarchs would personally experience what it meant for a supernaturally provided substitutionary atonement to be provided from Heaven to effectuate his redemption. So a question is now on the Torah-study hall table: How are you coming along in the cultivation of the *atar*-ing discipline of the Covenant? Do you *atar*? Are you recognized in the courts of Heaven? Is your scent clearly discernible in the great bowl of the prayers of the saints that ascends to the Throne of the Holy One constantly[4]? Do you approach the Holy One with no agenda but a desperate hunger for His covenant to be fulfilled? Are you ready to press deeper in your *atar*-ing calling? There will come a time in each of our lives, I suspect, when an *atar*-ing approach to the throne of the Holy One of Israel will be the only hope we have. I pray that when that time comes in your life you will not be unprepared, but will be ready, willing and able to flow in the heritage left you by the quiet, unassuming old fellow named Yitzchak. How can you prepare for such a time? Just imagine it was you instead of Yitzchak that lay bound and helpless on the altar of Moriyah, surrounded by ascending flames, with a flint knife pressed against the carotid artery of your neck.

How NOT to React to or Try to Deal With Antithesis and Opposition

In telling us the stories of Ya'akov and Esav, and showing us how the vast differences in the personalities, priorities, and worldviews of those two fraternal twins served the Divine purpose of bringing out first the worst but ultimately the best in each other, the narrative teaches us important lessons of what it means to 'walk with the Holy One' in real time. Why does the Benevolent Creator regularly expose us to contrary, unpleasant, blustery, lusty, and sometimes downright dangerous persons – *i.e.* people like Kayin, Nimrod, Yish'mael, Esav, Laban, Pharaoh, Amalek, Korach, Datan, Sichon, Og, Bila'am, Goliath, Nebuchadnezzar, Haman, Antiochus Epiphanes, Cicero, Tiberius, Claudius, Hadrian, Constantine, Mohammed, Pius, Chmielnicki, Hitler, Stalin … and so on and so forth until Anti-Messiah? It is an essential part of our 'special forces' training. If we are going to serve effectively in our assigned roles as agents of Divine redemption, we cannot be weak, soft, lazy, thin-skilled or easily provoked. We cannot live in an ivory tower. We cannot shy away from challenges. We cannot hide from *conflict,* from *friction*, or from *danger.* We cannot wallow in victimization, judgmentalism, cynicism, indignation, or outrage. We must learn not to over-react to bad behavior – or ranting, or threats of violence; we must be ready, willing and able, in season and out, to calmly, patiently de-escalate situations of overwrought emotion and to defuse ticking time-bombs and out-of-control ideology. We cannot expect to live in a utopian society where everybody sees every situation through the same lens, thinks and feels the same way, agrees on politics, religion,

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

priorities, and methodology, gives unconditional love, and speaks nothing but what we want to hear. We cannot even expect that we ourselves will see things - or do things - 'right' 100% of the time. We must learn to deal with challenges, suffer insults and indignities, patiently watch for and wait for opportunities, and learn not to let either guilt over our own mistakes or the bad attitudes, words, reactions, or behaviors of our others take us out of the 'game'.

A Parsha Toldot Travelogue

Toldot consists of a series of stories of real people dealing with real life challenges. The Holy One has caused these stories to be included in Torah so that in every generation all who aspire to walk with God in the Way, as the patriarchs did, can learn the *hard but necessary lessons of life*. I therefore at times describe *Toldot* as the *parsha of Training Up A New Generation of Partners in the Covenant.*

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

Act 1: Behold, the Newlyweds!

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

Act 2: Trouble Stirring in Rivkah's Womb

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

Driven to the point of despair by the war raging within her, Rivkah seeks and receives a God-encounter. The Holy One reveals to Rivkah that the suffering she is experiencing is a *microcosmic prelude to a worldwide conflict* that will rage between the two great nations which will issue forth from these twins, Rome (from the one which will be born first) and Yisrael (from the one who will be born second).

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

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

smooth-skinned and lighter of complexion. To him they give the name ***Ya'akov*** [Jacob].

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

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

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

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

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

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

Eventually Avimelech saw Yitzchak and Rivkah together and realized that he had been misled concerning their relationship. Inexplicably [other than by Divine

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

Act 6: Yitzchak and Rivkah Face Pogroms and Weather Persecution

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

The fields and crops which Yitzchak had cultivated having been confiscated, and having been expelled from his home, the patriarch returned to the nomadic life of his father. He took with him from the land of the Ph'lishtim whatever sheep and goats he could drive before him, and set off in traditional nomadic style, retracing his father's journeys through the land of Kena'an. As his father had done, he roamed from place to place in search of pastureland and water. When in remote areas without oases, he sought out and re-opened the wells that his father Avraham had dug, but which the Ph'lishtim had backfilled. Each time Yitzchak's servants dug a new well, however, the Ph'lishtim came behind him and claimed it as theirs. Wherever Yitzchak and family went, strife and controversy seemed to follow them, prodding them to move again.

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

Act 7: Yitzchak's Second God-Encounter

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

After this God-encounter however things did not immediately appear to get much better. Immediately Avimelech came out to Yitzchak's camp with a show of force.

When he arrived, however, he got the stunning revelation that – as the Holy One had promised in connection with the Second God-encounter described above, *the Holy One was with Yitzchak*. Avimelech decided, therefore, rather than to make a war on the patriarchal household that he could not win due to Yitzchak's Divine source of protection, to seek instead an advantageous peace treaty.

Act 8: Yitzchak's Blessing

Years passed. Yitzchak grew old. His eyesight began to fail him. He determined that it is time to bestow his paternal blessing [the ***b'racha***] upon his firstborn, Esav. He instructed Esav to go out and kill some wild game, dress it, and prepare a feast for the two of them, at the conclusion of which Yitzchak would bestow his blessing [***b'racha***]. Rivkah however overheard the discussion and was not pleased. While Esav was gone in search of wild game, she told Ya'akov, whom she favored and wanted to receive the paternal blessing instead of Esav, to kill a goat, the meat of which she would season like wild game the way Yitzchak liked it. She then helped Ya'akov dress up in Esav's clothing, and told him to take the specially prepared food to his father, pretend to be Esav, and thereby trick Yitzchak into giving him whatever blessing [***b'racha***] Yitzchak intended to give Esav.

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

Act 9: Ya'akov's Exile Begins

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

Act 10: Esav Marries Yish'mael's Daughter

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

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

The *haftarah* is taken from a set of prophesies compiled under the name - or perhaps title - *Malachi* [Malachi], meaning '*My Messenger'*. This book is commonly believed to contain the last prophetic messages from the Holy One prior to the so-

called *Inter-Biblical period*. If that is true the book not only constitutes the last warning from the Holy One concerning the coming invasion of Israel by the Hellenists of Syria which will transform the culture, the economy, and the political and religious environment of the Holy One's 'Kingdom Beachhead on Earth'. Out of that Hellenistic movement – with its strong push for conformity to the values and humanistic worldview of the Greco-Roman age - will flow the momentous events described in the Books of the Maccabees. The abomination that causes desolation will appear for the first time. And that will, of course, set the stage for the initial appearance of the Messiah in His Land.

Here is how the book called 'Malachi' begins:

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

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

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

Your eyes will see, and you will say, "The Holy One is great –
even beyond the border of Yisra'el![5]***"***

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

Even worse, many in the Israel of Malachi's day were going to, like Esav, 'despise' the *b'chorah* [birthright], and sell same for the equivalent of a bowl of

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[5] The prophetic messages in the book bearing the name *Malachi* will consist of:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

watered-down red beans. Many in the day referenced in *Malachi's* oracles had forgotten, or were taking for granted and would soon forget, the tremendous blessings that the Holy One had given them. They had lost the ability to understand, much less appreciate and appropriate, the Holy One's covenant love. Their hearts had gradually become very, very hard toward the Holy One. Their love was lukewarm, and would soon be cold. They no longer trembled at the Holy One's Words. They no longer delighted in the Holy One's Presence on the Sabbaths and Appointed Festivals. They no longer cherished the Holy One's covenant, much less valued the Holy One's ways. Though called to receive and walk in the *b'chorah* of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov, many of Malachi's era did not honor either the Holy One's Name, their forefather's memories, or their special calling as successors to the covenant.

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

And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple,
*Even the Messenger of the covenant, i*n whom you delight.
Behold, He is coming, s*ays the Holy One of hosts.*
"But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears?
For He is like a refiner's fire and like launderers' soap.
He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver;
He will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver,
That they may make to the Holy One an approach of righteousness.
* * *
... to you who fear My name The Sun of Righteousness will arise
with healing in His wings; and you will go out and grow fat like stall-fed calves.
You will trample the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet
On the day that I do this," *says the Holy One of hosts.*
Remember the Torah of Moshe, My servant,
which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments.
[Malachi 4:2]

A Corresponding Message From the Apostolic Writings

Romans 9:1-28

This week's readings from the B'rit Chadasha are taken from the letter Shaul wrote to those in Rome who held fast to both *the covenant of Torah* and to *the Messiah* Who was, who is, and who will always be that covenant's embodiment.

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

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

"The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob;
For this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins."
[Romans 11:25-27]

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

I have great sorrow and unceasing pain in my heart!
For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Messiah for my brothers' sake,
my relatives according to the flesh, who are Yisraelites; whose is the adoption, the glory,
the covenants, the giving of the Torah, the service, and the promises;
of whom are the fathers, and from whom is Messiah as concerning the flesh,
who is over all, God, blessed forever. Amein.
[Romans 9:1-5]

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

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

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

The Rabbi's son

Amidah Prayer Focus for the Week

The 3rd Petition: ***S'lach*** - *Forgiveness*

S'lach lanu Avinu, ki chata'einu
Forgive us, Our Father, for we have sinned

m'chal lanu, Malkeinu, ki fasha'einu
Pardon us, Our King, for we have done wrong

ki m'chel v'slach Atah
Pardon and forgive

Baruch Atah Adonai chanun ha-marve l'sloach
Blessed are You, O Holy One, Who graciously forgives