

Session 25

Tolodot – Learning to Listen a Syllable at a Time

22 November 2020

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mkdhNXBsRDI>

Shalom everybody. It is so good to see you all again this week. I just can't tell you what a blessing it is for all of us to gather here together. I love seeing all of your faces and the shy ones among you that don't turn your video on, I love seeing every guy sign in every week. It's just hard for me to wrap my mind around the fact that we have 35 countries that are represented in this fellowship. Like I don't know how the word spread across the world, but we keep gathering every week. We keep praying, we keep learning and more light is being broadcast to the world from Judea. It's like South Africa, and all over Europe and all over the United States. I know there are groups that are gathering. It's just a marvel and a wonder and I am just happy to be here. I'm honored to be here. It's just amazing.

So, I just want to take this opportunity to bring our global attention to a focus and aim and start off the fellowship with a prayer. So just a short prayer and it's amazing to think that like one prayer could go up all across the world at the same time. So Hashem, Master of the universe guide us in our lives, guide us in Your truth. There is so much deceit, fraud, fake news, and lies all around us. Please keep us on Your path. Help us walk in Your light. We've come here today to invite You into our lives. We're opening our hearts to Your living word and our prayer is that these sessions continue to guide us throughout the week. I carry the prayers of this fellowship from around the world to You in these sacred mountains. May our unity here in Judea bring honor to You and sanctify Your Name among the nations as the marvel, at this emerging fellowship and what it is and what it has become. A brotherhood and sisterhood of man under the fatherhood of God. A taste of what it will be like when Mashiach comes. Amen.

Okay. So, there is an ancient midrash that says, you know, before Mashiach comes, the world is going to be shaken like a rug. And only those who have built up their emunah muscles will be able to hang on. And I see that as guidance, not only for the Messianic era which is soon to be upon us, but anytime a flood comes. The stronger our mind, the more resilient our spirit, the better we will be able to navigate through the storm and recover from the crisis. And crisis is going to come. And so, when the Bible says that refuge is found in Zion, that's saying that people who turn to Jerusalem for guidance, who look toward Israel for leadership, and look for Biblical destiny to unfold in their lifetime, that realize that the center stage of redemption is the Land of Israel in Jerusalem, those people will find refuge. Because the world events, they're not chaotic, they're not random earthquakes, but they're waves taking our ark toward our final destination.

So, the Jewish people have been preparing for these days for more than 2,000 years. Some ways for more than 4,000 years. And it seems like now, we need to take those 2,000 years of

growth, of life lessons, of perspectives, of perseverance, of spiritual, psychological strength and share those gifts earned through the fires of the exile, with believers that are being called to Israel now. But that are currently scattered around the world. And so, in some ways, the stories of the Bible, they're like folded up inside us. They've shaped our lives, even if we're not familiar with them. And the more we understand those stories, the more we understand ourselves. The more we understand the world around us.

I mean, I had a conversation just the other day with a super secular person that was just totally ignorant of anything spiritual, of anything of the Torah, anything of the Bible, and you know, as we were talking, they were astounded at the similarities between the Biblical maps of Israel and the modern state of Israel. That these places, these cities, the borders themselves between Aram and Biblical Israel are the same as modern Israel. And he was stunned. He couldn't believe it. I'm like, listen my friend, you can't just detach the present from the past. The past is unfolded in our present and it will continue to propel us into the future.

And so, the Bible is the key to really understanding our roots. To understand where this tree has come from. And so, it's true in our personal lives, the more we understand our past, the more we can confront our past and how we arrived where we are in our lives today. But it's also true throughout generations. How did the Jewish people arrive where we are today? What happened to Christianity that brought modern Christianity to where it is today? Almost all of the answers can be found in our past. And that's another way of understanding the Torah and the prophets as prophecy. If we understand the stories at their core, we can learn timeless messages about life today. Even though these stories happened 4,000 years ago and seemingly have nothing to do with our world today, the prophetic wisdom is that those events that happened thousands of years ago are the most relevant for our lives right now. In fact, we can't really understand world events, we can't understand our own lives if we don't really understand the roots of where it all came from.

And so, to really bring that point home, how these ancient stories are indeed like blueprints for our modern lives today, I just want to invite Tehila to share what seems to be like a simple story that reveals an incredible truth about our life in Israel today, our struggle to restore this barren, forgotten Land into the Garden of Eden that it's promised to be, and of course in a way that only Tehila can. So Tehila, take it away.

Tehila

Hey guys, so last week I touched a little bit on the ideas of the well. How the well symbolizes walking in faith, combining our own human effort, but knowing that we can only be successful if Hashem puts the water there, if He blesses our efforts. And lo and behold, this week, we get more well stories that we even know what to do with. These stories are so cryptic. Jeremy and I are learning the Torah portion with our big kids in the evening after our little team going to bed. It's really helping us to see the stories with new eyes because we've read them so many

times. Sometimes you don't even notice how strange some of the Biblical stories can be when you read them for the first time. If you notice these are pretty much the only significant stories that we have about Yitzchak independently, here in chapter 26.

Up until now, we have stories about him as Avraham's son. Later we see him in the blessings that are really stories primarily about Yitzchak and Esav. The only actual story that we have here in chapter 26 is Yitzchak's interactions with the Philistines and digging these wells. So, there's just one really fundamental Jewish idea that we have in our traditions that say that the Genesis stories, the patriarch and matriarch stories are not just telling us their biographies. There's this idea called *ma'ase avot sima la'banim*, what happened to the fathers is going to happen to the children.

You know, if Hashem was just trying to give us a biography of what Yitzchak's life looked like, I would have had plenty, if He would have given me one verse, OK. He dug some well, right? I don't need all of these verses going on and on about the wells and there's so little about everything else. And you know, about his life's work, right? But since we have this really fundamental idea in our tradition that the stories in the Bible about the patriarchs are in some ways like a guide for us for our life, they were trailblazing a pattern that's going to repeat itself in all the future generations, the things that we struggle with, you know, are things that they already kind of dealt with.

We really need to unpack this story of Yitzchak to understand it as a whole. So I want to suggest that this story is a really deep guide about what to expect in the Land of Israel because how does the story start? Yitzchak wants to go down to Egypt like his father did when there was a famine. Hashem says in chapter 26, verse 2, don't go to Egypt. Dwell in the Land. The word the Torah uses for dwell in verse 2 is *sha'kon b'eret*. *Sha'kon* is an interesting word because it has the connotation in Hebrew of *shakonah*, like a neighborhood, you know. A place that's inhabited. So, you know, inhabit the land, be in the land.

But the next verse says, *gur b'eret*, which also means live in the Land, so what does *sha'kon*, the first word Hashem uses here in verse 2 trying to teach us? If you actually look at the root of *shakon*, it's *shin, kaf, nun*, which means the Presence of Hashem, the *Shechina*. All right, so there's some sort of commandment here that's going to reveal, kind of hinting to us that this story is going to reveal secrets about settling the Land physically, but not only physically, also spiritually. How are we going to be able to bring Hashem's Presence into the Land?

So, when I look at this story, what's the most shocking to me is really verse 15. So, it turns out Avraham had dug a whole bunch of wells in the Gur Philistine area. Now, if you know a little bit about the map of Israel, you're talking about the southwestern part of Israel. It's hot, it's arid, it's barren, right? He's digging wells, he's making, you know, flourishing landscape. That's only good for everyone there, right? He's creating prosperity. Now what do they do? They don't

take the wells. They fill them up with sand. They fill them up with dirt. Now this doesn't make any logical sense, right? Why not just take them and use them? They actually destroy them.

Yitzchak doesn't freak out, he re-digs them, gives them the names that Avraham gave them and just keeps on digging more well. Now when I read these verses, it just reminded me so much about the disengagement 15 years ago which shockingly actually is in the same geographic area that this story takes place. And you know, the settlers of Gush Katif, they made these amazing communities, flourishing farms, business prosperity for Jews and Arab. They took a place, it was literally sand dunes and deserts and they were able to figure out ways to grow plants in salt water and in sand, places that people thought were totally not suited for growing. And when the Jews were kicked out, you have these amazing places that could have been used productively. But the first instinct was just to burn things down. I mean, the hate, you know it's like...it's engraved in my memory, these videos of just mobs of people coming into these empty places and just destroying, burning, like you could use it for something productive!

So, it's like Hashem is saying to us, this is not just happening to Yitzchak, you will come to the Land, be ready and people are going to see what you're doing, they're not going to like it. They're not going to just want to take it, they're going to want to destroy it. But what do you do? You're going to keep on digging.

You know, a few months ago, they had a program on Israeli TV about what the people of Gush Katif did after being kicked out. They had the most amazing projects. Like the people of Nitzarim, they were kicked out of their homes, the betrayal, the pain with everything they went and they made this new community called Bnei Nitzarim, with cutting-edge agriculture projects and just a beautiful flourishing community. They kept on going. It's like Hashem is giving us here the litmus test for what is going to happen.

Here's the Land. How do you know who Hashem wants this Land to go to? You watch their behavior. Is it destructive or is it productive? Are there going to be people building jobs, creating prosperity, technology, or are there going to be people who are destroying and terrorizing? And we see it happening, you know, in our own times. I mean for me and Jeremy, in our own little way, in our own small perspective, we had to deal with this on the farm. We started to build up the farm and then suddenly these NGOs and ...destroy this, give this Land to the Arabs. They didn't have a legal leg to stand on. We had aerial footage showing this place had been empty for decades, completely desolate. No one set foot here, but then, as soon as they saw someone trying to build something, make something beautiful, make it flourish, smoke comes out of their ears. They're so angry and they actually went to the court and asked for a demolition order. They just wanted to destroy. We had to make a conscious decision at that time, do we keep on building or maybe just wait and see how that court case goes and just, you know, not invest too much.

And you know, we had to follow this plan and just decided to keep on building. And you know, the most marvelous part of the story is, in the end, Yitzchak builds and builds and then what happens? The Philistines come and they ask to make peace and he makes the first peace treaty with them in the Bible. And you know, how long have the UN and you know Europe been telling us, if you just stop building, freeze building, don't build anything, then there's going to be peace. The Bible gives us a totally different path.

Yitzchak kept on building and kept on digging until finally they saw he's here to stay. There's no point of taking his wells anymore. He's just going to keep on digging new ones. At that point, when they saw Yitzchak's dedication, his tenacity, his persistence to keep on building up the infrastructure, the water, the agriculture, then they came to him for a peace deal. It's like Hashem saw that the very question that we would be grappling here in Israel was going to be this. And He gave us a map in these cryptic stories for what to do. Hashem is telling us what's going to happen. Read these stories, follow that example, be prepared.

But now, like I said in the beginning, Hashem doesn't only command Yitzchak to settle the land physically, He says, sha'kon, bring Hashem's Presence into the Land. All right, so there's also a spiritual dimension to this story. How do we live a godly life? How do we bring Hashem's Presence into the world? And Yitzchak also gives us an example for that in these stories. Look at his life's work. He starts by re-digging his father's wells. In the modern world, everyone tells you, you grow up, blaze your own path, be yourself, find yourself. He dedicates himself to digging into the achievements of the past, of his father. Finding new water in the old wells, right? Instead of just pushing his own way, he finds meaning in the ancient accomplishments, in the wisdom that came before him. Only after that, he goes out and digs his own new wells and makes his own accomplishments. But first he strengthens and edifies himself through all the accomplishments of Avram.

And you know, the Torah makes sure we don't miss it. Make sure that we don't miss this point by saying he called the wells by the same names. He could have said, look, I've done a lot of work. I'm going to call them, Yitzchak's well. No, no. He calls them the same names that Avraham called them. It would have been totally normal if he would have just said, you know, here's a name inspired by my life experiences. He calls them what Avraham called them. And the sages didn't miss the importance of that. They pointed out that Yitzchak is the only patriarch that doesn't have his name changed. If you notice, Avram became Avraham, Yaakov became Israel, only Yitzchak got to keep his name. It's as if by not caring about his own name, his own glory, Hashem preserves his name and his honor.

So this both a spiritual and physical guidebook for us in the world, right? When we dig into, when we want to build our path, Hashem is saying our true honor is to reach back into the Torah and reach back into the traditions and find meaning in our everyday life. Right? That's the base that's going to allow us to continue to bring Hashem's Presence into the world. As my

dear friend said, sometimes you need to lose yourself in order to find yourself. So, I think that through these stories that seem just at first glance to be, you know, very odd and you know, very odd and insignificant stories about well digging, we can really find a wealth of guidance for our lives. And in doing so, ironically, we're actually re-digging those wells that Hashem put in the Torah to find their deeper meaning.

Hope that resonates with you guys. Love to hear back from you about it and where that meets you in your lives. So have a great week everyone. Take it easy. Bye. 15:45

Jeremy

You guys are so lucky. You guys are so lucky that you get to have Tehila as your teacher. You can just WhatsApp her, you get to email her, she's amazing. She's such a good teacher, she's so insightful, she's like a genius. I've read that story of the wells and I never connected it, ever, to what's happening in Israel, to what's happening on our farm. That we need to have the persistence and the tenacity. You knew, like we live in the mountains of Zif. You know, the mountains of King David. That's where King David became a leader, that's where he gathered his men. I mean the whole area really has been untouched since Israel left this Land two thousand years ago. You know, I grew up as a young boy in Atlanta, Georgia, and when I heard about the Biblical stories, they seemed like legends and bedtime stories.

But you come to Israel and you see the caves of King David, you see the water spring that he drank from. The Tanakh becomes three-dimensional. It's in living color. But it's so much more than that. Because as the stories come to life, we come to life as well. It's like a life connected to Israel is a life connected to the source of being, to the hub around which all world events center. And when you live your life aligned with Israel, your life is endowed with a special life force. Realizing that you're a part of this great move throughout many generations and your life all of a sudden has a meaning much greater than yourself.

And so, I just want to bring in back up here and of course I'm going hand the microphone over to Ari Abramowitz here who's going to just share some Living Torah directly from the mountains of Judea, just once again, making it real and making it now. And then we'll take it on from here. So Ari, take it away.

Ari

Shalom my friends. As I've told you before, I struggle with these Torah portions because they're so extraordinarily rich and packed with secrets and depth and beauty. And while I know that it's true for each portion of the Torah, for every word of the Torah and really for every letter of the Torah, these stories are the foundation stories of the Jewish people and of monotheism and really the foundation stories for all of mankind. And so, I wish I could have at least a month to swim through the rich waters of these portions, but we'll just have to make do with the time we're allotted.

So while there's so many subjects I wanted to zoom into, on a deeper level, I wanted to zoom out, because of the unique point we are in Jewish history and the special role our families are playing in the unfolding of Jewish destiny out here on the Judean frontier. So, to illustrate the point I want to make, I want to share a story that happened when I first came out to these mountains to live in 2016. I was living in this little cottage right here behind me. In Hebrew it's called a tzimmer, that our partnership built together. Now due to my life journey and the fact I was single and without a family, I was the only one that could move into this small one-room cottage, suspended on a mountain nearly two kilometers away from my closest neighbor.

So, for the first few weeks of the winter, I didn't even have electricity. Now most of the settlements in Judea and Samaria have some sort of security fence surrounding them for the obvious reason, to protect them from terrorist infiltration. But since we came out here, we've almost always been living on the wire, and we had to decide what we're going to do with our very limited resources. Were we going to build fences and security systems? Or were we going to plant trees and build? And so, we unanimously agreed that it's one thing to take the Jew out of the ghetto, it's another thing to take the ghetto out of the Jew. And we were going to plant trees and we're going to build. And we're going to put our faith not in flimsy fences and closed-circuit cameras, but in the God of Israel where it belongs.

And plus, when you build walls and fences, you may be keeping others out, but you're also keeping yourself in. And so, when we moved out here, we opened up these breathtaking beautiful and holy mountains, not only to Jews in the surrounding villages, most of which have never been out here, but to Jews throughout the world, Jews throughout Israel, and really nations all around the world. We opened this place up to the world. Before we came out here, that settlement was the southeastern tip of Judea and we have expanded it to what it was in Biblical times to the Land that God gave us.

Now additionally, after serving in the Israeli army and living in the Middle East for nearly 17 years, I knew that a single guy with a crazy dog and a gun isn't exactly the most enticing target for terrorists. And so, when it came down to it, I simply didn't feel fear. The first five years I was out here, I felt no fear at all. I haven't felt fear since I've been here. I didn't even put these bars on my windows until I was engaged and I had to be a little bit more cautious. But when I moved in, all the partners sat down to discuss security. And my partner Yoshi said, it's important that the Arabs in the area think that I'm crazy. That them thinking I'm nuts would be a valuable deterrent. So, after living here for only a few weeks, I walked out onto my balcony right here, and I look out...this house wasn't here...and I saw three Arab shepherds with all their sheep right in front of my house.

Now as you can imagine, knowing me as you do, my initial impulse is to say (in Arabic), good morning, and let the sheep graze, even on our property, right in front of my house, because it's

part of my nature of just welcoming guests. But I knew that unfortunately it's not that simple. That they could be doing reconnaissance to see what our weaknesses are, what our vulnerabilities are, and they would see such a thing as a sign of weakness. And within no time, our farm would be flooded with shepherds and we simply don't know who's a shepherd and who's a terrorist there to harm us.

And also, just as we don't take our sheep into the middle of their villages without being invited, they should afford us the same respect. Because ultimately, that's the real language in these parts – it's respect. We're not living in the Middle West, we're living here in the Middle East and things are different here. And you have to understand who your neighbors are and what their values are. And so, I stood on my mirpeset, my balcony, and I saw these three Arab shepherds and I screamed on the top of my lungs (Arabic yelling) and I waved for them to come to me, which means, I go to Hebrew university, one day is an apple, one day is a pickle, you're a liar and you're just totally crazy non-sequiturs, followed by a maniacal laugh for them to come towards me.

Now, I have to admit, when I did that, I felt a little bit like King David when he was fleeing from Saul in the 21st chapter of the book of Samuel. And he went to the Philistines and he acted like a crazy person to make them think he wasn't the great warrior David, who famously slew Goliath. So that's what I felt like, and so they looked at me like, whoa, this isn't exactly in Jihadist playbook. Who is this lunatic? And so they sort of went back down, they turned, went the other way, they rerouted themselves in the other direction. But then they returned further down the valley closer to our vineyards. And when I was on the way there to figure out what to do, the Spirit came over me that, wow, I'm dealing with the same Philistine shepherds that Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov dealt with in the same mountains, in the same Land, and in the same place. This is how things are supposed to be right now. And I felt part of the same chain that we encounter in this Torah portion with Isaac digging up the same wells that his father, Avraham dug which the Philistines spitefully stopped up. Isaac dug them up again and gave them the same names that his father did, carrying the Abrahamic torch forward from generation to generation.

Just this morning, my wife, Shayna, handed me this form to go and renew my guy license. My gun license! Do you know how many thousands of years Jews were helpless, at the whim and mercy of nations that didn't know the first thing about mercy? And now we're back in our Land, protected by the first Jewish army since the times of King David, living in a country in which I can have a gun to defend myself and my family. It feels like a modern manifestation of the ancient blessing. The words that Isaac said to Jacob, when he went to receive his blessing dressed as Esau. Isaac felt his hairy arms and he felt Esau. And he heard his voice and he heard Jacob and he said those prophetic words that have echoed throughout the generations – hakol, kol Ya'acov v'hayadim ya'de Esav. The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau.

Esau was a warrior, his blessing was descriptive. He would always be living by the sword, which was not only descriptive of his future, but of his life at the time. And now, when you come to the land, when you come to the hill of Judea, you go into yeshivas, into the places of learning, exuding the sweet music of Torah study. And you look in the doors and you see young scholars pouring over the holy words of the Torah. When you speak with them, you get the sense of gentle kindness, of love, but they have the hands of Esau, weapons of war, M16's slung over their shoulders. Yet despite the hands of Esau, the voice of Jacob is stronger than ever within them.

I remember during one of the last defensive wars in Gaza, when the daily barrage of missiles aimed at the Jewish kindergartens became simply too much to bear. There was an incursion into Gaza and one of these young Torah scholars found himself in the house of a terrorist which they took over. And they were waiting for further instructions. His rabbi told the story, that he received a call from this young man from the home of the terrorists with a halachic question. A question of Jewish law. He said that his phone was losing battery and he wanted to know whether it was permitted to charge his phone in an outlet in this terrorist home in Gaza, or whether that would be stealing. You understand, he wasn't concerned at the moment, he wasn't concerned for his life, but whether he would be violating God's law of theft, even from a terrorist enclave in Gaza.

That my friends, is the voice of Jacob. Despite carrying weapons and fighting with the hands of Esau, we're back in our Land, finally, after thousands of years of praying and suffering and yearning in the exile, to finally come home. And now, we are home. And we're re-digging the wells of our forefathers in the Land God promised us and promised them.

As you know, I end every message with a blessing and if there's any Torah portion which conveys the overwhelming power of blessings, it's this one, in which Isaac's blessing powerfully influences the entire course of world history. And so, I want to bless all of you and bless all of us that Hashem should continue guiding all of us in our own ways to authentically reconnect to our roots, to the Torah, to the Bible, to Him, and to each other. That God should continue bringing us back to the Land of Israel. And even if we must pick up weapons and fight with the hands of Esau, that our deepest truth, our deepest voice, the voice of Jacob continues to grow stronger and stronger, shining a light of love and healing to a fractured world, bringing the ultimate redemption for which we've been praying since the beginning of time. Amen.

Shalom, my beloved friends. Back to you, Jeremy.

Jeremy

Amen. So beautiful, I mean, I feel like whatever Ari says, that it's just, it is the expression that the Torah was never meant to be a religion. It was a guide, it is a guide to a relationship, a covenant, a living people, a living land, a living word, a living God. And that's how we need to

learn together. That's how we need to pray together. And that's the way to see the world with Messiah eyes.

It's like, you know, when we go into these stories now, we see that none of the fathers and mothers in the Torah had an easy life. None of them were perfect, they were all very human. And in their human stories, they were preserved, they were told over and preserved because their lives were living lessons for us. It's like a smart man learns from his own mistakes. But anyone can do that. A wise man learns from the mistakes of others.

And in some ways, it's unlike almost any other religious literature. The stories of the Hebrew Bible, they don't paint our heroes as perfect, but rather they highlight their failures to help guide future generations that we don't need to make the mistakes that they made. That we can finally learn and grow from their falls. And you know, the heroes of Israel, in their mistakes, in their pain, in their joy, in their...they learned. They grew, their minds became consistent. Their hearts dependable. In some ways, they were ideas that they lived out, that they were exploring. And then, they were recorded. They lived out this idea that they were exploring and then it was recorded down and then it was learned and experienced again and again throughout Jewish history until the truth of their life lessons were integrated into a holistic world view of how to live in the world in a relationship with God.

And so, the Torah has layers upon layers of meaning and some of them are psychological, some prophetic, some teach us about the struggles between nations, some teach us about the struggles we have inside ourselves. But these Torah portions are so foundational. They are the founding fathers of the nations of Israel. They're the founding fathers of western civilization as we know it. So, we have to understand what did these men and women stand for? What were they teaching us through their lives? I mean they had different missions, they had different personalities. They brought different ways of being into the world, different ways of relating to the world to help us guide us on our journeys through this world.

And so, the fundamental claim of the Torah is that we can live in a relationship with the Creator and through the creation itself, live a guided life. And each patriarch took their relationship and lived it out differently. They had a different guiding idea, a guiding attribute that led them in their lives. In order to really understand these stories on a deeper level, you have to understand the ideas that each patriarch represented.

So today, I want to look at these stories, and I want to look at the fathers and mothers of Israel, not only as people, but as ideas that manifested a particular way of relating to God and relating to the world. Their lives expressed that relationship and, in some ways, their lives really paved the path for all of us today.

And so, let's begin with Avraham. Abraham is defined as chesed, which is usually translated as loving kindness. But I think a better way to understand that Hebrew word, is that Abraham was the ultimate proactive believer. His faith empowers, it gives him courage to go beyond himself, to go out into the unknown. His belief fires him up and he feels called to share that fire of Torah with everyone around him. He's a warrior for justice and when he sees injustice, he feels called to action, in either going out to war, or going out to argue with God to set things right, to right the wrongs of the world. You know, he first sets out on a journey, lech lecha, he leaves his father's house, leaves his land, ventures out into the unknown. He gathers students around him. He escapes down to Egypt, he goes out to war to save Lot. He's called to sacrifice his son, he doesn't hesitate. He's ready to do the unthinkable. The very next morning, he's already up with the sunrise.

The midrash says that Abraham's tent was open on all four sides, constantly ready to receive any visitor. And so, Abraham was a pioneer. He traveled the Land consistently expanding his borders. He dug up new wells around the Land of Israel and those wells also represent like breaking new ground, discovering new understandings. He saw himself as a beacon of light and acted in every possible way to spread that light. And so, the founding father of all believers in the world, Abraham, was chesed, a proactive believer.

On the other hand now, we have Isaac. Isaac is usually defined in Hebrew by the attribute of g'vorah, which is usually translated as strength. But I think a better way to understand that is Isaac represents strength through surrender. Last session we spoke about the balance of living, putting forth our best effort, pushing ourselves to the limit and knowing when to surrender to the will of God and allowing the world to unfold with emunah that His will will be done and all we need to do is align ourselves with His good, with His ways, and have the inner strength to surrender.

So, Abraham represents action, Isaac represents surrender. It's like two polars of the spectrum, of what it means to live as a believer in the world. I mean in Isaac's life, obviously the most prominent surrender moment was when he demonstrated in the akeida. He bound himself up, he allowed himself to be laid down on an altar. The knife is drawn, he doesn't try to change, he doesn't try to force his way out or talk his way out. He just accepts reality for what it is and lives in full trust that everything will work out as the way it's meant to work out. And as Avraham had to muster up the courage to leave his father's house to walk to Israel, Isaac was born in the Land of Israel. He never left. In fact, he wanted to leave for Egypt and when famine strikes the Land, Isaac looks to go and God says, no. That's not your way. You stay in the Land of Israel. His path wasn't in voyage, but in acceptance. He doesn't break any new grounds, he re-digs the wells that Avraham already originally dug. There's no innovation, there's no breakthrough, it's just uncovering what's already there. It's like he never goes out to war. Not only does he not go out to war, Philistines attack him, cover up his well and instead of standing up for himself, he like just kind of flows.

It's like, ok, they're here. They're bothering you. All right. I'll just go to the next well, and then he goes and they do it again. It's the same thing, the same well. He's like ok, he doesn't fight. He's just ok. That's reality. Ok, so passive, it's like just surfing the waves of life. It's not going this way...just like water. Just no effort...just effortless effort. Just going through life in total surrender to reality. He rides the waves of life, where they take him, in total trust that he's going to arrive where he needs to go.

And I guess just accepting reality as it is takes inner strength, because we all want to change things. We want to do things, but he never forces his will upon the world. He lived his entire life in complete surrender. Isaac didn't even choose his own wife. He prayed and allowed reality to work its way out and deliver his wife to him. Abraham had countless students, Isaac, the midrash said, only had one student, Jacob. Isaac loved Esau, and you can see that. He saw Esau as the next potential leader. I mean, God had called Isaac to a very passive relationship, a relationship of surrender to teach us what that means.

Esau's ability to lead, to hunt, a man of action, a man of the field. That was really attractive to Isaac. He's like, oh, this could be a great continuation for me. That'll be a great counterbalance. Isaac perhaps thought that in order to really build a nation, surrender and passivity, that was not going to work. Esau would be a perfect counterbalance to what he represented in the world.

But as soon as Jacob steals the blessing, Jacob comes back to Isaac before he flees from Esau and you would imagine they would have an awkward moment. You would imagine like, hi, Isaac. And about yesterday, you came with animal skins on your arm and dressed up like your brother and you lied directly to my face about being Esau. I mean, I gave you a blessing I was planning on giving to your brother. That was weird, we should really talk that out. That conversation never happens. I find that unbelievable. Like he goes the very next day and he's about to escape and that conversation, the awkwardness...it's just not there. Jacob comes into the room and you would expect the Torah to tell us the story of Isaac saying, why did you lie to me? But instead, the Torah once again displays Isaac's relationship with reality.

Isaac is such a master of surrender at this late stage in his life. As soon as the blessing went forth, he recognized reality for what it was. That was the will of God. And immediately let go of his expectations of his desires of what he thought it should be. Let go and let God. Isaac was the ultimate, living example of surrender.

Now imagine Jacob. Jacob is here. He's got two mentors. Abraham was alive when Jacob was born still. He has Abraham and Isaac. He has the most proactive spiritual leader in the Bible. I mean, how is he meant to live? He's got, on the other hand, the most passive leader here. I mean, how is Jacob now supposed to raise a nation? Is he supposed to deal with them in passivity? Proactivity? What's he going to do? His grandfather, I mean, religious leaders are

known for praying, for being passive, for trusting in God, for helping the poor. But Abraham did all of that while defeating multiple kings in war. It's like...whoa, that's a different kind of spiritual leader. But on the other hand, his father is just like so passive in an absolute mode of surrender. His faith almost immobilized him from action.

And, so, what is Jacob going to do? Because he sees success in Isaac's life. I mean, even though Isaac was passive, Isaac was incredibly successful. He by far had the best life of any of the patriarchs. He didn't really live through any wars. He didn't allow himself to go to war, he was just surrendering to God's will and living kind of in the palm of God wherever God would take him. He was a farmer, that's huge. I mean, he achieved what no other father was able to do. All the other fathers were shepherds. He restored a relationship with the Land in the Land of Israel. He grew up in the Land of Israel. He became a farmer. He planted in the Land and was blessed with a hundred-fold crop. Isaac in the Land of Israel, somehow, was able to undo the curse of Adam. Instead of thorns and thistles, Isaac planted and got a hundred-fold for his work.

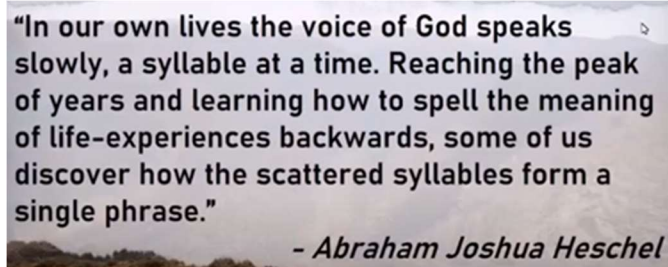
So, there's obviously tremendous power and blessing in knowing when to surrender and knowing when to let go and let God. But what path is Jacob meant to walk? Who is he meant to model his life after? Abraham or Isaac? And so I'm going to give away the answer right now, because I have a far more important message for this session that I want to get to. Jacob is represented by the idea, by the attribute in Hebrew called *tiferet*, which is usually translated as splendor. And that's probably best to be understood as the fusion of both. The fusion of living with proactivity and with surrender. Knowing when and living in balance.

And so, there's action, there's surrender. Jacob represents the fusion of both of those. At the beginning, he knows how to sit. He's quiet, he's in his tent, he's learning, he's praying. When he needs to leave, he's ready to go off and work for Laban. He's ready to go. So that synthesis will become the backbone of how Israel is meant to live in the world. It's actually the backbone of how every believer is meant to relate to God in the world. Sometimes we live in surrender. Sometimes we live in action. How do we know? That would be quite splendid. It's called splendor. Man, if we could figure out that balance, that would be amazing.

And so, here we have the key. There's one foundation that the entire enterprise is built upon. But for that we have to delve deeper into the story of Jacob. Because the answer that Jacob gets is revealed. As we reveal it, we're really revealing it to ourselves. And when we discover the key to living, the balance of action and surrender through Jacob's life, we learn even a greater story of how God communicates to us in our lives. Because he communicates to us the same way that he communicates to Jacob.

So, Abraham Joshua Heschel, you know, a mentor of mine, was such an incredible student of the Bible, that he was able to articulate these deep ideas rooted in the teachings of the

prophets in poetry like no one else that I've ever found. Here's what he says about God communication:

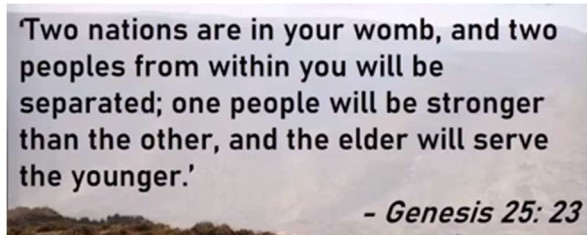


"In our own lives the voice of God speaks slowly, a syllable at a time. Reaching the peak of years and learning how to spell the meaning of life-experiences backwards, some of us discover how the scattered syllables form a single phrase."
- Abraham Joshua Heschel

And so, to understand Jacob's life lessons, we have to see the whole story in context and then throughout Jacob's life God is speaking to him in syllables. He's guiding him toward the path that opens up the path for every believer. So, to understand Jacob's life lesson, we have to see his whole life and in order to do that, we have to go a little bit ahead of this week's portion. But they're all really one. And so, this is how we're going to see that God speaks in syllables throughout our lives.

So, in this week's Torah portion, Jacob lies and he steals the blessing from Esav. It's not pretty. Esav, when he realized what happened, says, Isaac, Abba, do you have any blessings left for me at all? And then Esav bursts out crying, it's like Isaac when he realizes what happens, he's like seized with massive angst and sadness. It's like, you don't see these emotions displayed in almost any of the other stories in the Torah. And here it makes you want to cry, you feel so bad, like, Jacob, what a traitor. It's like why did he do that? It's like, what is going on this story?

And so, on one hand, we want to defend Jacob. It's like Scripture tells us that he was tamim, that he was righteous, he was pure, he was wholehearted. He spent most of his time humbly learning, praying in his tent. His mother Rivka was one of those directed by God. She was a prophetess in her own right. And told Jacob, listen Jacob, you are the chosen one. The Torah tells us, while she was pregnant, she had a direct message from God. In Genesis 25 it says:



'Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the elder will serve the younger.'
- Genesis 25: 23

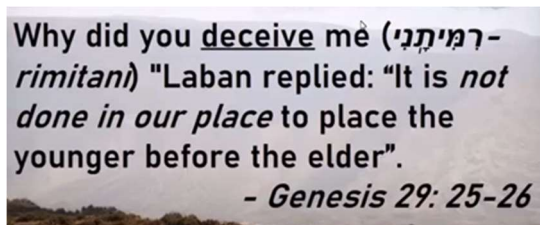
It's like, listen, you came out. Second. You're the younger one. I know what needs to be done here. Isaac is about to give out a blessing. Go get it. And so Rivka saw the children grow up. Esav wasn't cut to lead the spiritual revolution. I mean, he was really a man about immediate

gratification. His name, Esav, actually means, already done. He was like ready-made, like fast food, Western civilization. That's a whole other Torah, but he just, he married Canaanite women, he drove his parents crazy. He sold the birthright for a bowl of soup. I mean Scripture says, he ate, he drank, he rose, he left, and he despised the birthright. I mean, come on, no one who despises his birthright can be trusted with guarding the covenant of eternity.

And so, Jacob and Rebeka, they were doing what they saw was right. And so, when he first talked to Jacob, he said, just give me the food. I'm going to die anyway. Esav, like what do I need these blessings for. It's like in some ways, like Esav represented Rome in the famous Roman idiom, eat, drink, and be married for tomorrow we will die, was actually first uttered by Esav. Even though, in some ways, Esav represents Europe and represents Rome, and represents like that world view. It's encoded right there in the Bible. That cannot be who represents the covenant of Abraham.

And so, Jacob, maybe surrendering to his mother's wishes, trying to learn from Isaac, flowing with reality as it manifested before him, acts upon what she tells him to do, feeling like he's being directed by prophecy, honoring his mother, his mother's intuition, honoring God, Himself. But what happened here? Jacob broke the moral code to accomplish that goal. He betrayed his father's trust. He took something that didn't belong to him. He caused both his brother and his father serious anguish. And Jacob's story continues to unfold from his deceit. His life takes a turn and it only gets bad.

And here we learned this concept in the Torah called measure for measure. Mida kaneged mida. Jacob experiences for the first time, a correction from God. He broke the moral code, that was something that he maybe had good intentions, but now he's going to be corrected measure for measure for what he did. And so, Jacob had to leave home for more than 22 years. In fear of his life. And then he suffers an almost identical deceit practiced against him by Laban that substitutes Leah for Rachel. The Hebrew phrase, it's like the phrase in Hebrew it creates like a hyperlink. Lost in translation in the English, to teach us the parallel, the measure for measure, so that we wouldn't miss it. When Jacob cries out to Laban in Genesis 29:25-26:



**Why did you deceive me (רמיתני - rimitani) "Laban replied: "It is *not done in our place* to place the younger before the elder".
- Genesis 29: 25-26**

In Genesis 27, Isaac is talking to Esav and he says, your brother came in deceit, in mirma, and took your blessing from me. And so, the same word is used both times. Like he deceived in identities, and he gets the same deceit in identities right back on him. Not only the act of

changing their clothes, switching their identity but even Laban's words. It's like, it's a punishment measure for measure. It's like the deceit is the same deceit. Laban says, we don't do it in our place what you have done in yours. And in case we missed this message, encoded in the text, the midrash tells us the story the morning after when Jacob wakes up and realizes that he married Leah and not Rachel. He asked Leah, like why did you answer me when I called you, Rachel? And Leah says, I learned from the best. I learned from you who called yourself another name to your father. It's like, wow, so he's now getting blow back from reality. He saw what had happened, he's like, wow, I deceived, but not only that. Look what happens here.

Laban's deception brought grief to the rest of Jacob's life. There was Leah and Rachel. Hatred between their brothers and their children. Jacob was deceived again, this time by his sons when they brought him Joseph's blood-stained robe, the clothes of deceit. Again, another deception. A father and his child using the same clothes. The result was that Jacob was deprived, his most beloved son, Joseph for 22 years, the same amount of years that he had to leave Jacob for.

And so, it's like measure for measure, he's getting a huge correction here. He's getting a huge life lesson. Like asked by Pharaoh, how old he was, Jacob replied, few and evil had been my years in life. I mean, he had a hard life after that mistake. He's the only figure in the Torah to make that remark. Like, man, my life's just been really hard. It's hard to read the text as like a precise statement of the principle of measure for measure. You know, you just see it right there. But, as you have done to others, so others will do unto you. The deception brought all concerned great grief, and this persisted into the next generation.

So, in essence, Isaac fully understood the nature of his two sons. He loved Esau. He wasn't blind to him, to the fact that Jacob would be the heir of the covenant of Abraham. So Isaac prepared two sets of blessings. One for Esau and one for Jacob. He blessed Esau in Genesis 27:28 with the gifts he felt would be appropriate for Esau. They revolve around like wealth and power. That's what he says, may God give you the heaven's dew and the earth's richness, an abundance of grain and new wine.

There he's giving Esau wealth. Many nations will serve you and peoples bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers and may the sons of your mother bow down to you. That's power. Those are not the covenant of Abraham. The covenantal blessing of Abraham had to do with land and with children. It's the blessing that Isaac gives Jacob before he left home. Look at Genesis 28:3-4:

"May He give you and your descendants the blessing given to Abraham, so that you may take possession of the land where you now reside as a foreigner, the land God gave to Abraham".

- Genesis 28: 3-4

So, he gives the blessing of Abraham to Jacob. Jacob was always going to get the blessing of Abraham. Children in the Land. That was the blessing intended all the time. There was no need for deceit in disguise. Jacob's lie, his manipulation, he like manipulated the fabric of reality and then reality snapped back on him. And Jacob eventually came to understand all this and perhaps when he's in his wrestling match with the angel, the night before, he sees like, wait a minute. What happened here in that meeting? And we really can't understand unless we really realize that Jacob is giving back Esau the blessings that he wrongly took. I mean, he gives him massive gifts, sheep, cattle, livestock. That represented the heavens dew and the earth's riches. He gave him his wealth.

And the fact that Jacob bowed down seven times to Esav on his way to fulfilling his words, may the sons of your mother bow down to you. That was the power. He's like, Esau, I didn't mean to. I really had good intentions, I'm giving it back. It's as if Jacob was trying to give the blessings back that he wrongfully took. He even says so explicitly in the verse in Genesis 33:11:

"Please accept my blessing (*birkati* - ברכתי) that was brought to you, for God has been gracious to me and I have everything."

- Genesis 33: 11

I have all that I need. Now I just want to bring the blessing to you. It's like Jacob made a mistake, a forgivable one, an understandable one, but it was a mistake, nonetheless. The blessing that Isaac was about to give Esau, was not the blessing of Abraham. He intended to give Esau a blessing appropriate to him, just like God gave a special blessing to Ishmael, appropriate for him. Jacob's failure wasn't in confusing the different kind of blessings. Really anyone could have made that mistake. That was an honest mistake. The mark of Jacob's pure heart was that he recognized his mistakes and made amends with Esav. His mistake, he received measure for measure. What was that mistake? His deceit and his lie. And that he had to learn at the end of his life.

Look at Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, who is the chief Rabbi of England, who just passed away a couple of weeks ago. So this is what he said:

That is how the moral life is. We learn by making mistakes. We live life forward, but we understand it only looking back. Only then do we see the wrong turns we inadvertently made. This discovery is sometimes our greatest moment of moral truth.

- Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Looking back at his life, Jacob saw, man, I really made a mistake here. But the mistake wasn't just in giving the blessing, because he gave the blessings back. The name Jacob literally means heal. It means like the heel of our foot. It also means consequence. It's telling us that as the children of Jacob, the children of Israel, as believers in the God of Jacob, we learn from the consequences. We learn when we look back toward our heel behind us. Only in delay can we discern the path forward. Look at Jacob's name. Jacob's Ya'acov literally means heel. The same word means consequence.

Jacob - *Ya'akov* - יעקב
Heel - *Ekev* - עקב
Consequence - *Ekev* - עקב
Delay - *Ekuv* - עיקוב

And the same word means delay. It's like only in delay can we really understand what God is trying to teach us. And so, now you can really understand and read Abraham Joshua Heschel's words and really understand what he's talking about. Let's put it up on the screen one more time.

"In our own lives the voice of God speaks slowly, a syllable at a time. Reaching the peak of years and learning how to spell the meaning of life-experiences backwards, some of us discover how the scattered syllables form a single phrase."

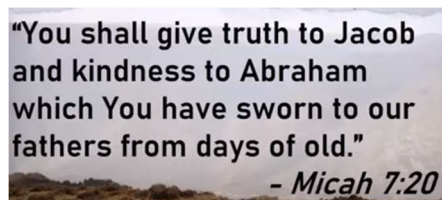
- Abraham Joshua Heschel

So Jacob was dealing with how to concretize the spiritual path for all believers, for all generations. When to take action, when to surrender to the will of God. In his life, he learned the lesson over years of exile in Laban's house with the suffering of his children. The consequence of his action, in syllables he learned there is one foundational pillar upon which all service stands. And that's truth. Jacob learned that the hard way. Abraham lies to Pharaoh about Sarah as being his sister. Isaac lies to Avimelech the same way, lying that Rivka was his sister. It's not clear that Jacob fully understood how much he was missing the mark when he lied to Isaac. It's like, is lying so bad here? Maybe not. It's not like defined yet. And what he

was doing, he needed to make sure the blessing of Abraham was to be protected. What he learned though, is that you can't protect the covenant of Abraham because the pillar upon which the covenant of Abraham is based, the pillar of Jacob is truth.

Once he lied, his wife lied, his children lied, Joseph was lost. Absolute chaos. Wait a minute. Lying cannot fit within the order of God's world. That's why the final attribute given to Jacob is truth. Truth becomes his blessing and what Jacob is known for most, throughout his failure, Jacob descends into the valley of humility, to climb the heights of character. But only years later was Jacob to understand that his message, his attribute, his idea that he was to pass on to future generations was the principle of truth.

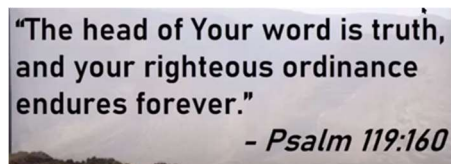
Look at the prophet Micah 7:20:



**"You shall give truth to Jacob
and kindness to Abraham
which You have sworn to our
fathers from days of old."
- Micah 7:20**

Jacob was given truth. He grew to represent truth, fixing his mistake, he was transformed from Yaakov which means crooked to Yisrael which means straight. In being straight, you're honest. In his lies, he learned the pain of not being truthful. Jacob is the backbone of the people of Israel. And he left us with his life's lesson. It's a legacy of truth. How are we supposed to live in this world? Should we push forward, should we surrender? How can you know if you're not truthful? Maybe you're surrendering now because you're scared. Maybe you're pushing forward now because you're arrogant. The only way to live balanced and in an honest relationship with God – truth has to be key. You have to be honest with the world around you.

But even more than that, you need to be honest with yourself. You can't be true to yourself if you're accustomed to lying. If you want to fully express the latent potential you have inside and bring forth your best self into the world, that can only be done in truth. How can you speak to the world, act in the world, from the core of your being, aligned with God? Only from a place of truth. That's why King David teaches us in Psalm 119:160:



**"The head of Your word is truth,
and your righteous ordinance
endures forever."
- Psalm 119:160**

Rosh Devarcha emet. Every translation misses this. The head, the top, the lead principle is truth. The Talmud says the seal of God is truth. King David teaches us:

**“Lead me in Your truth and
teach me, for You are the God
of my salvation.”**

- Psalm 25:5

There is a truth in the world and if you follow the truth that has been revealed to you, then you're within the seal and even when evil arises, lies, tries to distort reality. Sometimes the world will reject the entire concept of truth. I mean in post-modern thought, there's no truth. There are just different narratives. There's no good, there's no evil. Social media today is censoring so many voices. News outlets straight up lie and pollute our minds with fake news. Every media outlet in the world is watching the voter fraud in America, lies and deceit being covered up by more lies and deceit. It's not a coincidence that we're learning the foundational lesson of truth from Jacob in the Torah, as all this is happening right now in the world. Keep your hearts open to the living word of God and your eyes toward Jerusalem. Because everything that we read in the Torah manifests in the world around us.

That's why God calls Jerusalem the city of truth. Because there's a truth in the world and if you live by the truth revealed to you in your life, and you stay truthful to that truth, and you keep your aim toward the good, what you need to accomplish your vision will materialize before your life.

Lead me in your truth because you are the God of my salvation. If you start to lie, to cheat, to lie, to yourself, to lie to others, the world will get very complicated. With your wife, with your children, with your co-workers. You want to get twisted, you want to get difficult, the world is hard enough, but now you started lying. You are going to be swimming upstream. Deceit and fraud are a form of corruption, but really, you're only corrupting your own life. You want to surrender? You want to push forward? If you're lying to yourself, you don't stand a chance. That's why the head principle of His word is truth. This has nothing to do with religion or denominations or self-inflicted titles. This is a life of a believer. How to live a guided life, how to live a life in balance, in harmony, in relationship with being. Truth is the lead principle. When we do that, without even trying, we elevate our lives toward that good.

And as we walk in the light, we bring light to everyone around us. Our commitment to truth, straightens things out. It undoes the crookedness in our lives and the lives of people around us. And self-respect, it's produced by inner triumphs, not external ones. The more we can like endure the internal temptation, the more inner respect we earn. It's easy to lie, it's hard to say the truth. But in truth lies the blessing of Abraham.

So, no matter how hard scientists try to reduce everything to deterministic brain chemistry, or some kind of human herd instinct that can be captured in big data, the most essential parts of life are individual responsibility, our moral choice. Whether you're to be brave or cowardly,

compassionate or heartless, faithful or treacherous. Virtue and character are the essence of good living and they're founded upon honesty. They're founded upon truth.

And so, friends, with all the chaos that's going around us now, God sealed Noah in his ark after the family closed the door. The seal of God is truth. And so may we be blessed to walk in this world with character and integrity, virtue and nobility. May we carry God's Name with honor as we live as an example of what could be. Of who we can be in faith, but to keep our hearts open because the truth God speaks to us, sometimes can only be heard in syllables throughout time, throughout our lives. And each event giving us a glimpse into the higher meaning, into the lessons that we need for our lives.

So, this week, I'm going to be spending a lot of time in the mountains, writing and praying. And so, I want you to know, feel free to send me your prayers. There is nothing that I would rather do this week than pray for our fellowship. So, stay strong and courageous, my friends and know that you are blessed from Zion.

Aaronic blessing

Shalom my friends.