

Re-digging the Wells

By

Rabbi Edward L. Nydle/ B'nai Avraham

*18 And Yitschak dug again the wells¹ of water which they had dug in the days of Avraham his father, for the Philistines had stopped them up after the death of Avraham. And he called them by the names which his father had called them. **Bereshith 26:18***

And he returned, Yitzchak, and he reopened wells of the water that they dug in days of Avraham (literal translation of the Hebrew)

וַיֵּשֶׁב יִצְחָק וַיַּחְפֹּר אֶת־בְּאֵרֵת הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר חָפְרוּ בְיַמֵּי אַבְרָהָם

Va'yashov Yitschak va'yachpor et be'erot ha'mayim asher chafru biymeit Avraham-(transliteration of the Hebrew)

According to Hebraic thought, there is a dynamic reciprocity between life and Scripture. This is demonstrated in the metaphor of the concept of the well or *be'er* (בְּעַר) ² found in Scripture. The Hebrews (*Ivrim*), being shepherds, were concerned with digging and maintaining wells to supply fresh water for their flocks and herds. The ancient well was a meeting place where people gathered to hold conversations, share news, and engage in trade and various business. It was also a place where many of the patriarchs of the faith met their soul mate or *bashert*.

However, when the Torah is speaking of wells, it is not referring only to physical wells of water, but it is referring to the deep inner spring of spiritual wisdom (*chokmah*) – the unconscious that wells up from the very depths of our soul or being. This wisdom allows us to plumb the depths of the hidden mysteries of the Torah and of life itself. The Hebrew word for well, *be'er* can also be used to imply clarification of a hidden meaning that we find in the course of our study of the Scripture. Like Avraham, our father, we too must dig wells and reopen the waters of sacred Scripture to find meaning in our lives. Torah study is linked to the process of

¹ The three wells here may symbolize the three Temples, the two which were destroyed, and the eternal one yet to be built. The first well was called Esek (contention) and alludes to the first Temple. This well can also allude to the Babylonians who oppressed the house of Judah. The second was named Sitnah (enmity) and alludes to the second Temple. Some rabbis say this well alludes to Haman, the great accuser of the Jews during the Persian domination. This word is also related to the word Satan or accuser. The third well was called Rehoboth (spaciousness) and speaks of the future Temple when all strife and enmity will be things of the past. Some teach this refers to Greece who forbid the women to mikveh in order to stop them from procreating. The fourth well, Shibah, refers to Edom /Rome (the present domination).

² Be'er has a Gematria of 203. When we take it to its lowest value we have 5. There are 5 books of Torah (Moshe).

renewal, in which we must re-dig the ancient wells time and time again, each time finding new meaning, nourishment, and life for our soul through the wisdom YHWH grants us in our studies.

According to Torah, Avraham was the first to open the wells of living waters. Out of respect for his father, Yitschak had to reopen or re-dig the very same wells that his father had dug in his life. Each generation must reopen the well of living waters, the Torah.

Be'er in Hebrew is rich in meaning for us today. According to the “*Dictionary of the Torah*” it means:

- *Be'er-expound*- “To dig, engrave, make distinct; to elucidate, to reveal in detail; to harmonize/bring together/the concepts/of the mind/a well, cistern, or pit (even as these both capture and reveal, making distinct the essence of natural water’s flow and cycles); a house/for the principles/of knowledge/a wellspring of HaShem..”
- 5 *Beyond the Yarden, in the land of Mo'av, Mosheh undertook to declare this Torah, saying. Devarim 1:5*
- 8 “And you shall write all the Words of this Torah on the stones – plainly and well.” Devarim 27:8

Thus we can conclude the following meaning of a well for us today.

Living by the well (*be'er*) requires that we always be aware of the constant flow of the *Ruach* (spirit) that emerges from deep within each of us. We must learn to tune our spiritual ears to the wisdom of the mysteries of the human soul and the Torah. As we study the Torah and seek this living relationship with spirit, our studies will extend far beyond the *beit midrash* (house of study) that we attend and will become part of our daily lives. To live by the well means to allow the separation between our daily lives and the sacred space or dimension to disappear, so the divine life force that permeates everything that is created may be revealed to us. We must dig deep, far beneath the surface, to see the light of Torah in every situation that we face each day. Every place has hidden sparks of life. The well symbolizes the hidden point of divinity in all things. We must learn to open the covering to reveal the secrets hidden within.

- *AND ISAAC DIGGED AGAIN THE WELLS, ETC. R. Eleazar said: ‘In digging these wells Isaac acted fittingly, for he discerned from his knowledge of the mysteries of Wisdom that in this way he could attach himself more firmly to his faith. Abraham likewise made a point of digging a well of water. Jacob found the well already prepared for him, and he sat down by it. Thus they all looked for a well and strove through it to preserve their faith pure and undiminished. And nowadays Israel hold fast to the well through the symbolism of the precepts of the Torah, as when each day every Israelite performs the precept of the fringes in which he envelops himself, and of the phylacteries which he puts on his head and on his arm. All these have a deep symbolism, since Elohim is found in the man who crowns himself with the phylacteries and envelops himself in the fringes. Hence, whoever does not envelop himself in*

the latter, nor crown himself with the former each day to invigorate himself in faith, makes it appear as though faith does not dwell within him, and fear of his Master has departed from him, and so his prayer is not as it should be. Hence our ancestors strengthened themselves in the true faith in digging the well, symbolic of the supernal well, which is the abode of the mystery of perfect faith.' **Zohar Vol.1, pg.141**

Torah study is about the intersecting point of our lives and the life of the Creator. We discern the meaning of all existence as a mirror of the Divine. As the Creator looked into the Torah in order to learn how to create the world, we look into the Torah in order to awaken our soul and find the path back to YHWH, the Elohim of Yisrael.