

kol chovevei TORAH

PARSHA PONDERINGS

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Kol Chovevei Torah is a publication of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School. YCT's mission is to professionally train open Orthodox rabbis who will lead the Jewish community and shape its spiritual and intellectual character in consonance with modern and open Orthodox values and commitments.

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Upcoming Events:

Pre-Hanukkah
Lecture
Dec. 11, 2007
7:30pm, NYC
Rabbi Nathaniel
Helfgot on
"Exploring the
Halalakhic, Historical
and Spiritual Connec-
tions Between Hanuk-
kah and Sukkot"

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Connecting our Toldot
By Rabbi Yonah Berman

"And these are the *toldot* of Yitzchak, son of Avraham, Avraham fathered Yitzchak."

Readers of this very first verse of our Parshah are often puzzled, and rightfully so. "Why," they ask, "does the Torah tell us that the *toldot* (usually translated as "offspring") of Yitzchak are that his father was Avraham? Would it not make more sense for the Torah to immediately tell us that the *toldot* of Yitzchak were Esav and Yaa-kov?!"

In order to address this query, we must challenge the generally used definition of *toldot*. As we stated above, *toldot* is often translated as "offspring." Yet this definition is hardly perfect. The first time the word is used is during the second account of creation (Bereishit 2:4), when the Torah describes the *toldot* of the heaven and earth upon their creation by God. Clearly, the non-living heaven and earth cannot have "offspring." Therefore, I would propose what others, including Rabbi Menachem Leibtag, have suggested before me. Namely, that the word *toldot* actually refers to one's "results." In other words, sometimes *toldot* can indeed be one's physical offspring, but sometimes *toldot* can also be one's legacy in the world.

Let us now re-confront the opening of our Parsha. Although Yitzchak's children are definitely to be counted among his *toldot* – and their births and lives will be discussed in the following verses – we can only understand Yitzchak's life if we understand where he came from. Professor Nehama Leibowitz and others have shown that so much of Yitzchak's life is about his repeating of his father Avraham's actions. He lies about his relationship with his wife in order to save his life, he digs wells in the same places that Avra-

ham did, and whether he realizes it or not, his wife is definitely in control of much of the household's affairs.

Yitzchak's life is very much a continuation of Avraham's and in order to understand his *toldot*, we must appreciate the strong father-son connection that existed between our first two patriarchs. Thus, the Torah tells us, Yitzchak's *toldot* are to be defined by his relationship with that which came before him. Once we realize the strength and gravity of this connection, we can begin to explore the rest of Yitzchak's life.

Parshat Toldot provides us with an amazing opportunity – to consider our own *toldot*. Where have we come from, and where are we going? What are our spiritual roots, and what do we hope our spiritual legacies will be? Are we living lives that are working to further connect ourselves and those around us and with our roots? Are we helping our children to see the relevance and excitement that are at the center of Judaism? And are we helping them to see the connection that Judaism provides for each generation to connect with those before it, and those which are to follow?

As we read of Yitzchak's Toldot – his connections with those who came before him and those who will follow, let us appreciate what it means to be spiritually connected Jews – always looking to the past for guidance, while working to inspire a better future for ourselves, for Am Yisrael and for the entire world.

This Dvar Torah is dedicated to missing Israel soldiers Gilad Shalit, Ehud Goldwasser and Eldad Regev. May they be speedily returned to their families.

Rabbi Yonah Berman is an alumnus of YCT Rabbinical School and Assistant Rabbi at Congregation Shaar Hashomayim in Montreal.