

# Inwardness: The Path To Posterity

By Eli Touger

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## A Lasting Legacy

All of us want to be remembered. We want our lives to bring something lasting into the world. This is the message of *Parshas Toldos*: that a person can leave a legacy that will continue to thrive after his passing.

Our Rabbis offer two definitions of the word *Toldos*:

- a) Progeny,<sup>1</sup> this includes a person's biological children and his "spiritual children," i.e., individuals whom he has taught.<sup>2</sup> Both types of children perpetuate a person's influence.
- b) The chronicles of one's life and experiences.<sup>3</sup> When a person's life is filled with inner meaning, stories about his life provide inspiration for people in coming generations.

## A Fountain of Inner Strength

With whom does the Torah choose to associate the message of *Toldos*? Yitzchak.<sup>4</sup> Two things reflect the nature of Yitzchak's Divine service: a) unlike his father Avraham, he never left *Eretz Yisrael*,<sup>5</sup> and b) his efforts were focused on digging wells.<sup>6</sup>

Avraham spread G-dliness in the lands in which he sojourned. He "proclaimed... to the entire world... that there is one G-d and it is befitting to serve Him. He would travel from city to city and from country to country, gathering people and proclaiming [G-d's existence]."<sup>7</sup>

Yitzchak, by contrast, never traveled outside the Holy Land, and even within *Eretz Yisrael*, we do not find many stories of his efforts to reach out to others. His Divine service had an inward focus.

This is reflected in his preoccupation with digging wells. Digging a well involves removing layers of earth to uncover hidden sources of life-giving water. Spiritually, "digging" refers to the work of reaching one's G-dly core and tapping it as a source of inner strength. Each of us has a *neshamah* which is "an actual part of G-d,"<sup>8</sup> every entity is maintained by a G-dly spark. Yitzchak's goal was to activate these inner potentials, bring them to the surface and, use them to initiate positive change.

In this manner, the awareness of G-d becomes an integral part of one's life. It does not remain dependent on the teachings of others, but comes from one's own insight. This in turn enables one to realize the G-dliness present in every element of existence.

In this context, our Sages interpret<sup>9</sup> the verse,<sup>10</sup> “Dwell in this land,” as “Cause the Divine Presence to rest in this land” help the world manifest its G-dly core.

## Inwardness Which Leads Outward

This is surely a worthy path of Divine service, but why is it associated with the name *Toldos*, which means “progeny”? It would seem more appropriate to associate the concept of *Toldos* with the Divine service of Avraham, for he actively sought to communicate the awareness of G-d to others.

By naming this reading *Toldos*, our Rabbis underscore the fact that the inwardness of Yitzchak also produces “progeny.” Yitzchak’s Divine service and the positive influence it generated attracted the attention of others and motivated them to follow his guidance. In this vein, our Torah reading relates that Avimelech, king of the Philistines, and Phicol, his general, came to visit Yitzchak and told him: “We have seen that G-d is with you.”<sup>11</sup>

Yitzchak’s Divine service brought them to a recognition of G-d’s active presence in the world. Indeed, the awareness inspired by Yitzchak was more permanent than that generated by Avraham, for it came from the people themselves. Yitzchak’s internalized bond with G-d inspired the people around him to perceive G-d’s influence.<sup>12</sup>

## To Communicate to Our Children

In the most complete sense, our desire to be remembered is focused on our children. We want them to continue and further our principles and values. And here a difficulty arises: Yitzchak’s children were Esav and Yaakov. Yaakov indeed perpetuated and enhanced Yitzchak’s Divine service. Esav, however, rejected Yitzchak’s path entirely. Moreover, this difficulty is compounded by the fact that a major portion of the Torah reading concerns itself with Esav. Indeed, on the phrase “And these are the *toldos* of Yitzchak,” the *Midrash* states<sup>13</sup> that the word *toldos* refers specifically to Esav.

Although Esav’s conduct did not openly demonstrate that he was Yitzchak’s son, the connection nevertheless existed. This is reflected by our Sages’ statement<sup>14</sup> that Esav’s head was buried “in the bosom of Yitzchak his father.” Similarly, our Sages explain<sup>15</sup> that, in contrast to Yishmael, who is not considered an heir of Avraham, Esav is considered one of Yitzchak’s heirs. For the home of Esav’s soul, his head, contained powerful divine sparks associated with Yitzchak.

For this reason, Yitzchak desired to give his blessing to Esav rather than to Yaakov. As a father, Yitzchak was constantly struggling to motivate Esav to live up to his spiritual potential, and he thought that granting these blessings to him would further this purpose.<sup>16</sup>

The pattern which G-d invested in the world, however, is that Esav will not uncover his spiritual potential independently. Instead, it is Yaakov and his descendants whose Divine service reveal this resource. This is reflected in the labors of the Jewish people in the present exile, identified as “the exile of Edom (Esav)” to uncover the spiritual potential which Esav possesses.<sup>17</sup>

The final consummation of these efforts will come in the Era of the Redemption, when “deliverers will go up to Mount Zion to judge the mountain of Esav, and the sovereignty will be G-d’s.”<sup>18</sup> At that time, the powerful spiritual energies which Esav possesses will surface and be given appropriate expression.

## A Source of Light for All Mankind

Our Sages relate<sup>19</sup> that in the Era of the Redemption, Jews will praise Yitzchak, telling him: “You are our Patriarch.” For in that era, the inward thrust of Yitzchak will permeate all existence. “The occupation of the entire world will be solely to know G-d. The Jews will be great sages and will know the hidden matters, attaining an understanding of their Creator to the [full] extent of mortal expression.”<sup>20</sup>

Although all Jews will then live in *Eretz Yisrael*, they will as their ancestor Yitzchak did influence mankind as a whole, motivating all to seek G-dly knowledge. “And it shall come to pass in the end of days that the mountain of G-d’s house will be established on the top of the mountains.... and all the nations shall flow unto it. Many people shall say: ‘Come let us ascend the mountain of G-d... and He will teach us of His ways.’”<sup>21</sup> May this take place in the immediate future.

### FOOTNOTES

1. *Rashi, Genesis 25:19.*
2. See *Sanhedrin 19b, Rashi, Numbers 3:1.*
3. *Seforno, loc. cit.*
4. This is borne out by the fact that both *Parshas Noach* and *Parshas Toldos* begin with the words: *Eleh toldos*, “These are the chronicles of....” Nevertheless, *Parshas Noach* is given that name because the lessons it teaches center on the concepts of satisfaction and repose (see the essay entitled “Genuine Satisfaction: Noach’s Legacy”). By contrast, *Parshas Toldos*, which focuses on the chronicles of Yitzchak’s life, communicates the importance of creating a posterity.
5. See *Genesis 26:2-3*, and *Rashi’s* commentary. See also *Bereishis Rabbah 64:3.*
6. *Genesis 26:18ff.*
7. *Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Avodas Kochavim 1:2*, based on *Sotah 10a, Bereishis Rabbah*, the conclusion of sec. 54.
8. *Tanya*, ch. 2.
9. *Bereishis Rabbah 64:3.*
10. *Genesis 26:2.*
11. *Ibid.* :28.
12. In this way, Yitzchak’s “progeny” resembled him as children resemble a father.
13. *Shmos Rabbah 30:3.*
14. *Targum Yonason, Genesis 50:13. Toras Chayim 89d* cites this statement in the name of the *Zohar*. See also similar quotes in *Sotah 13a, Pirkei d’Rabbi Eliezer*, ch. 39.
15. *Kiddushin 18a.*

16. This provides every parent with a lesson in relating to children, even if, *r'n*, their conduct like Esav's is lacking. A parent should never give up, and should continue trying to develop his child's inner potential forever. Since "all Jews are responsible for one another" (*Shavuos* 39a), this lesson applies not only to our children, but with regard to every member of the Jewish nation. We must, to quote the *Mishnah* (*Avos* 1:12): "Love the created beings and bring them close to the Torah."

17. Examples of the realization of Esav's spiritual potential can be seen in the converts from among his descendants: the prophet Ovadiah, Onkelos, and Rabbi Meir (*Torah Or, Toldos* 20c).

18. *Ovadiah* 1:21.

19. *Shabbos* 89b.

20. *Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Melachim* 12:5.

21. *Isaiah* 2:2-3.

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