



# Likkutei Sichos

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All's Well That Ends Well

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## 1.

WHO'S WELL IS IT?

It says in *Zohar*:<sup>1</sup>

Three things stand as a testimony bearing witness: the well of Yitzchak, the lottery, and the stone of Yehoshua, etc. From where do we know that the well of Yitzchak {is included in these three}? It is written (in our *parshah*),<sup>2</sup> “In order that it be my witness, etc.”<sup>3</sup>

This is unclear. The phrase “in order that it be my witness” refers to the well which Avraham had dug, so why does the *Zohar* call it the “well of Yitzchak”?

*Ramaz*<sup>4</sup> answers this question and says that {even though} this phrase (“in order that it be my witness...”) was said by Avraham, nevertheless, the well (Avraham) dug was the well of Yitzchak.

However, this itself requires an explanation. How can we say that a well that was dug by Avraham is the well of Yitzchak?

## 2.

A WELL DUG TWICE

In his notes<sup>5</sup> written on the margin of his volume of the *Zohar*, my father addresses this question and writes: “

The well is associated with Yitzchak, even though the verse says it was Avraham's, because after Avraham died, the Philistines stopped up

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<sup>1</sup> *Zohar*, vol. 3, 284b.

<sup>2</sup> *Bereishis* 21:30.

<sup>3</sup> {The verse describes a peace treaty between Avimelech and Avraham. Rashi says that Avimelech's shepherds were contending that they had dug a certain well that Avraham had dug. They agreed among themselves that the well would belong to whomever the water would rise when he stood beside the well. The waters rose for Avraham.}

<sup>4</sup> {Rabbi Moshe ben Mordechai Zacuto, 17th century Kabbalist.}

<sup>5</sup> *Likkutei Levi Yitzchak, Haoros LeSefer HaZohar*, vol. 2, p. 460.

the wells that Avraham had dug, and {later} Yitzchak dug them anew, as it says,<sup>6</sup> “Yitzchak had again dug... and he gave them the same names that his father had given them.” Regarding this subject, examine *Torah Or* at the beginning of *parshas Toldos*. Therefore the wells are associated with Yitzchak.

The explanation of my father is seemingly the opposite of *Ramaz*. According to the commentary of *Ramaz*, “the well that [Avraham] had dug is the **well of Yitzchak**.” This implies that fundamentally, it is the well of Yitzchak, except it was Avraham who {first} dug them. According to my father, it is reversed. Essentially, it is the “well of Avraham” but since Yitzchak had to dig it up again, the verse associates the well with Yitzchak.

It is understood and obvious that according to a deeper understanding of well digging, both explanations are feasible and have a rationale. We need to understand the pivotal difference between them. Also, we need to clarify the reason my father did not explain it in the same vein as the *Ramaz* (notwithstanding that *Ramaz* is often cited in Chassidus) but instead chose to explain it differently (and in an opposite manner)?

My father hints at his reason in the reference he gives at the end of his commentary: “Regarding this matter, examine *Torah Or* at the beginning of *parshas Toldos*,” as will be explained forthwith.

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<sup>6</sup> *Bereishis* 26:18.

### 3.

#### TWO WAYS TO DIG

*Torah Or*<sup>7</sup> explains that Avraham personified the *avodah*<sup>8</sup> of *chesed*<sup>9</sup>, drawing down from Above to below.<sup>10</sup> The *avodah* of Yitzchak was one of *gevurah*,<sup>11</sup> elevating from below to Above.

Therefore, we find that about Avraham it says,<sup>12</sup> “Avraham who **loved** Me,” and regarding Yitzchak it says,<sup>13</sup> “And the **fear** of Yitzchak.” Because love derives from the attribute of *chesed* and fear (awe) is an outgrowth of the attribute of *gevurah*.

Based on the difference between the *avodah* of Avraham and of Yitzchak, the *Alter Rebbe* explains (in *Torah Or*<sup>14</sup>) why the wells that Avraham originally dug were stopped up by the Philistines, and only after Yitzchak uncovered them again, did they endure. {The reason is} because (the *kelipah*<sup>15</sup>) of the Philistines can only oppose holy {activities and influence of} *chesed* but not *gevurah*.

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<sup>7</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>8</sup> {Divine service.}

<sup>9</sup> {*Chesed* translates as kindness. The *avodah* (service) of *chesed* in Chassidus is associated with serving Hashem with love and joy.}

<sup>10</sup> {Chassidus explains that there are two primary ways of connecting this world with Hashem: “From above to below” and “from below to above.” In *Likkutei Dibburim*, vol. 1, p. 300ff (English translation), the Previous Rebbe explains the difference between the two approaches. The top down approach is more effective in revealing sublime levels of G-dliness. Avraham who personified this approach was famous for providing food to travellers and educating them about Hashem. The bottom-up approach complements the aforementioned because it entails a more intense, inward and transformative approach. Yitzchak, who personified this approach, was famous for digging wells, uncovering the living waters.}

<sup>11</sup> {*Gevurah* translates as strength, and the *avodah* (service) of *gevurah* in Chassidus is associated with restraint and severity, and serving Hashem out of fear and awe.}

<sup>12</sup> *Yeshayahu* 41:8.

<sup>13</sup> *Bereishis* 31:42.

<sup>14</sup> Loc. cit; explained at length in *Toras Chaim*, the beginning of *parshas Toldos*.

<sup>15</sup> {*Kelipah*, lit., “a shell,” refers to negative spiritual forces. The term refers to anything that conceals, and thus opposes G-dliness, just as a shell or a peel conceals the fruit within. *Kelipah* is often used to refer to evil or impurity.}

## 4.

### TOO MUCH LOVE

To explain:<sup>16</sup> “**Philistines**,” פלשתים, is etymologically related to “*mavoi hamefulas*, מבוי המפולש” (an alleyway that is *open* {or *perforated*} on both sides).<sup>17</sup> This is why our Sages say,<sup>18</sup> “The Philistines were scoffers”<sup>19</sup> because scoffing is triggered “when the heart is too open, when it is perforated from all sides.”

The digging of wells by Avraham was indicative of his *avodah* with an **expansiveness** stemming from the attribute of *chesed* of holiness. This is an expression of love, delight, and joy in G-dliness “with a greater intensity than can be contained.” This gave an opportunity for the **Philistines** to stop them up because such unrestrained *kedushah*<sup>20</sup> leaves room for the “**Philistines**,” the unrestrained energy of the other side, which opposes *kedushah*, to **derive nurture**.

[The external {negative} forces are not able to derive nurture and oppose {*kedushah*} when the quality of Avraham is revealed openly in the soul of a person, when a person is in a state of loving and delighting in the revelation of G-dly light. Only when the G-dly light and delight is in a concealed state is it possible for the person who is in an unrestrained state and an open heart to lead to unholy jesting and jubilation.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> See *Likkutei Torah, Devarim 5a; Toras Chaim, parshas Toldos*, 143c ff.

<sup>17</sup> {The *Talmud (Eruvin 6a ff.)* refers to the laws of constructing an enclosure for an alleyway on Shabbos which would allow for those living attached to the alley to be able to carry articles from their houses to the alley and back. What is important to note here is that the Hebrew word for “open” is cognate to the word for “Philistine.”}

<sup>18</sup> *Avodah Zarah 19:1*.

<sup>19</sup> {The *Talmud* says that Avraham did not live among the Philistines, because they were scoffers who engaged in jest and buffoonery}

<sup>20</sup> {Holiness.}

<sup>21</sup> {When through meditating during prayer, one reaches a state of connection and “revelation” of G-dly light, which causes him to feel a great expansiveness of joy and pleasure in G-d, a person has to be careful that after prayer, when this G-dly light and experience fades, his feelings of unrestrained love and joy should not be misappropriated and abused by his animal soul, which may channel those feelings into unholy expressions of unrestrained joy in physical matters.}

This is emphasized by the verse,<sup>22</sup> “the Philistines stopped them up {the wells} **after Avraham had died.**” Only after the holy love leaves a person (“Avraham died”) and what remains is only the disposition of an open heart, is there room for the Philistines to become oppositional (“the Philistines stopped them up”).

The Philistines, however, did not stop up the wells of Yitzchak, because Yitzchak’s digging of wells was emblematic of serving Hashem with awe and fear of *kedushah*. Therefore, the Philistines, who personified the “opposing side” of the **chesed** of *kedushah*, could not stop up the wells of Yitzchak which were emblematic of **gevurah** of *kedushah*. This powerlessness was because “any attribute on the ‘opposing side’ is able to oppose only its *corresponding* attribute in *kedushah*.”<sup>23</sup>

## 5.

### LOVE NEEDS FEAR

Not only were the Philistines unable to stop up the wells of Yitzchak, but moreover, they could not stop up the wells of Avraham after Yitzchak had redug them, despite being {symbolic of his *avodah* of} *chessed* {whose efforts the Philistines could normally have thwarted after Avraham’s passing}.

The reason is as follows:

The emotion of love is connected with a feeling of self [“there is somebody who loves”].<sup>24</sup> Fear, on the other hand (and *kabbalas ol*)<sup>25</sup> is

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<sup>22</sup> {*Bereishis* 26:18.}

<sup>23</sup> *Likkutei Torah*, loc cit.

<sup>24</sup> {שׂ מִי שְׂאוֹהֶב} connotes love that is not entirely selfless, as the one who loves is described as a שׂ — an (independent) entity.}

<sup>25</sup> {Lit., “accepting the yoke (of the Kingdom of Heaven),” connoting an unequivocal commitment to Hashem, predicated not on a person’s own desire or understanding, but rather on his selfless submission to Hashem.}

associated with *bittul*<sup>26</sup> (of one's self).<sup>27</sup> Therefore, when the *avodah* of a Jew stems from only out of love and joy, which means he has a feeling of self, albeit stemming from *kedushah*, it can lead to simple egotism. From the expansive state of *kedushah* in which he stands during prayer, he can fall into the expansiveness of *kelipah*: scoffing and frivolity. However, when the *avodah* also is motivated by awe of Hashem and *kabbalas ol*, he is in a state of *bittul* and selflessness. This *bittul* prevents any negative forces from usurping energy even from the expansive love and joy.

Now we can understand why the Philistines were able to stop up the wells that Avraham had dug, but were powerless to do so again after Yitzchak had redug them. When the wells of Avraham (which represent the *avodah* of love and joy) is connected with Yitzchak's digging (a state of *bittul* based on fear and *kabbalas ol*), it is not possible for the negative forces to channel any energy from them, and therefore,<sup>28</sup> "they {the waters of the wells dug by Yitzchak} never again ceased to flow."

## 6.

### FEAR IS EVERLASTING

According to the above explanation, it is understood that although the wells dug by Avraham were plugged up by the Philistines, and Yitzchok redug them **anew**, nevertheless, fundamentally, these wells were — even afterward — attributed to **Avraham**, whose mode of *avodah* was love and joy. The accomplishment of Yitzchak (fear and *kabbalas ol*) was {only} in order to safeguard the continuity of the love and joy.

Therefore, my father explains that the reason why the *Zohar* uses the expression "the well of Yitzchak" is [not because the well itself belonged to Yitzchak, as *Ramaz* maintains: it was "the well of Avraham." Rather, it is]

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<sup>26</sup> {*Bittul* connotes self-nullification, humility, and the negation of ego.}

<sup>27</sup> {*Bittul bemetzius* (lit., "existential nullification") constitutes the consummate form of *bittul* whereby one loses all sense of independent existence.} *Torah Or* 114d; *Biurei Zohar* 81a; et. al.

<sup>28</sup> *Torah Or*, 17c.

because it was only “**associated** with Yitzchak,” since the *avodah* of Avraham was **perpetuated** through the *avodah* of Yitzchak.

## 7.

### UNDERSTANDING THE RAMAZ

A Chassidic explanation of the above-mentioned commentary of *Ramaz* is as follows:

The idea of well digging (**in general**) refers to an *avodah* performed “below to above”<sup>29</sup> which derives from the *gevurah* of Yitzchak as explained in several places.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, *Ramaz* explains that the well is accredited chiefly to Yitzchak (“the well of Yitzchak”) whose approach was *gevurah*, except that the well also had benefited from the input of Avraham, the approach of *chesed*.<sup>31</sup>

To add: The *Zohar* {quoted at the beginning of this *sichah*} only speaks about the well as a “testimony,” and does not discuss the well itself. Therefore, *Zohar* refers to it as “the well of Yitzchak.” This is because the purpose of a “testimony” is the “**establishment**,” קיום, of that which is being testified about, (the testimony of witnesses squash any challenges about the matter), and the **perpetuation**, קיום, of the “well” was achieved through Yitzchak, as explained above.

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<sup>29</sup> {The concept of digging wells is revealing the water which is inherently hidden in the earth by removing the earth and stone which cover it over (in contrast to pouring water from elsewhere into a pit in the ground). This reflects the divine service of “below to above,” which reveals the inherent G-dliness embedded in Creation itself by removing the “earth and stones,” i.e., the concealment of coarse physicality. This is in contrast to the service of revealing G-dliness from “above to below” (which is similar to bringing water from elsewhere and pouring it into a pit in the ground). See the sources mentioned in footnote 22 of the original, and *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 15, p. 195.}

<sup>30</sup> *Torah Or*, p. 17c.; *Toras Chaim*, parshas Toldos, pp. 142d-143a.

<sup>31</sup> {This will be explained in the beg. of sec. 8.}



## 8.

### FIRST COMES FEAR

To apply this idea to the {practical} service of a person: a Jew must serve Hashem with awe and *bittul*. Nonetheless, because of the tremendous virtue of joy, one must also incorporate a joyful disposition (but the joy needs to be obscured).<sup>32</sup>

{However,} *Torah Or* (at the beginning of *parshas Toldos*)<sup>33</sup> explains that Yitzchak's wells (i.e., the wells that Avraham had dug first) never ceased flowing. This proves that the novel accomplishment of Yitzchak (the mode of *gevurah*) was to **perpetuate** the wells of **Avraham** {who personifies} the *avodah* of love and joy.

This means that the *avodah* is performed in the mode of love (and joy), as the *Zohar* says,<sup>34</sup> “No *avodah* matches the *avodah* that is out of love.” It is only that “for the joy {derived from love}<sup>35</sup> to endure... it must be preceded by the fear {of G-d}<sup>36</sup> and the acceptance of the yoke of Heaven.<sup>37</sup>

-Based on a talk delivered on Shabbos *parshas Vayelech* 5735 (1974)

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<sup>32</sup> {This mode of divine service corresponds to the opinion of *Ramaz*. The primary focus is placed on *bittul* (analogous to the wells which are primarily identified with Yitzchak who personifies *gevurah* and *bittul*). As a secondary element, however, joy must also be incorporated into one's divine service (just as the wells are in a secondary way, also associated with Avraham).}

<sup>33</sup> {*Torah Or*, 17c.}

<sup>34</sup> See *Zohar*, vol. 2, 55b.; vol. 3, 267a.

<sup>35</sup> {Supplemented from the cited source.}

<sup>36</sup> *Torah Or*, p. 61d.

<sup>37</sup> {This mode of divine service corresponds to the opinion of the Rebbe's father. The main focus is love (just as the wells are identified primarily with Avraham). As a foundational element, however, *bittul* must also be incorporated into one's divine service (just as the wells are also associated subsidiarily with Yitzchak).}