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Toldos: Unearthing the Water

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“And Isaac loved Esav because [his] game was in his mouth, but Rebecca loved Jacob (Bereishis 25:28).”

Things don't always go according to plan. We have dreams and aspirations for ourselves and our children, but life is filled with twists and turns. Children don't always follow in the footsteps of their parents and often make different choices and create for themselves a distinct life path. With all of this, the job of a parent is to love and appreciate their child for who the child is and not for whom the parents want them to be. And so, the Torah tells us that Yitzchak loved Esav. But why? What was “loveable” about Esav? We must assume that Yitzchak and Rivka each loved both of their children, yet each had a unique relationship with a particular child. Rivka's connection with Yaakov was understandable. Yaakov was holy and genuine; he was the clear heir to the Abrahamic legacy. He was a source of wonderful and ongoing *nachas*. But what was the nature of the connection between Yitzchak and Esav? It would appear they were worlds apart, yet Yitzchak had this incredible love for his first-born son. What does this mean? What is the message?

Of all our Patriarchs, we know the least about Yitzchak. While we are told of the *Akeyda* (*binding of Yitzchak*) and Yitzchak's willingness to offer himself upon the altar of God, this event is really looked at through the lens of Avraham's selfless dedication to God. What do we know about Yitzchak? He dug wells.

And Isaac went away from there, and he encamped in the valley of Gerar and dwelt there. And Isaac again dug the wells of water which they had dug in the days of his father, Abraham, and the Philistines had stopped them up after Abraham's death; and he gave them names like the names that his father had given them. And Isaac's servants dug in the valley, and they found there a well of living waters. And the shepherds of Gerar quarreled with Isaac's shepherds, saying, "The water is ours"; so he named the well Esek, because they had contended with him. And they dug another well, and they quarreled about it also; so he named it Sitnah. And he moved away from there, and he dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it; so he named it Rehoboth, and he said, "For now the Lord has made room for us, and we will be fruitful in the land (Genesis 26:17-22)."

Why does the Torah need to focus on Yitzchak's well-digging activities? The Lubavitcher Rebbe provides an incredible insight. To benefit from the beautiful and sustaining, subterranean waters you must be willing to dig. You must take out your shovel, bend your back and take away shovelful of dirt after shovelful of dirt until you find the refreshing, translucent waters. This is a metaphor for the self. We each possess a beautiful wellspring of holiness and spiritual beauty. However, often this holiness is obscured by layers of “dirt.” There is the dirt of bad decisions, there is the dirt of negative life-experiences, there is the dirt of failure and set-backs. All this dirt sits on top of my well and covers my inner waters. We must find the courage to dig, to haul away the earth through changing and adjusting certain behaviors and habits. This was the great strength of Yitzchak, he was the well-digger. He was the one who was able to dig through the layers of dirt and find the beautiful waters of holiness in himself and in others. When the world looked at Esav, they saw one thing – dirt. Yitzchak saw the dirt which covered his son, but he also saw the beautiful waters of holiness which were surging beneath the layer upon layer of thick dirt. He loved his son because he was able to see the waters and not just the dirt.

We must become well-diggers and utilize this skill in all our life-relationships. We need to love our children for who they are and not for who we want them to be. Even if our children get covered in dirt, we must appreciate that the waters still run deep and are ever-present. We must strive to see the good in others and recognize that even when people hurt us, there is still good within that individual. We must try to focus on the water and not the dirt. We must look for the water within ourselves. We cannot define ourselves by the dirt of our indiscretions or misdeeds. We must remember that no matter how much dirt we have piled on ourselves, the inner waters never dry up. They are always present, waiting to be discovered.