

Geulas Yisrael #77- Toldot

A Friend Turned Foe

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Something had changed. Yitzchak had every reason to expect that Avimelech, the king of the Philistim and his father's close ally would continue his support. Avimelech had befriended Avraham, hosted him, and had even formed strategic alliances with him. They were so close that Chazal even place Avimelech as one of the dignitaries attending Yitzchak's second birthday party, in celebration of his weaning. The relationship between Avraham and Avimelech started out contentiously, but ultimately blossomed into a long-lasting friendship.

Yet, something changed, and Avimelech's attitude toward Yitzchak soured. His men were jealous of Yitzchak's success, constantly harassing Yitzchak by wrecking his wells. This relentless squabbling frustrated Yitzchak, who only secures peace and quiet after five attempts to excavate wells. What went wrong with this relationship? How did a close friend suddenly snub Avraham's child and spurn his legacy?

Embracing Avraham's revolution

Avraham revolutionized the world's religious consciousness by depicting one G-d, responsible for all creation, who also cared for human welfare. His ideas were roundly embraced, in particular by Avimelech, a coastal king who first met Avraham under strained conditions.

Initially, this monarch had hosted Avraham, but immediately fell ill, due to his attempted rape of Sarah. As Avraham prayed for the ailing king's recovery, Avimelech witnessed, firsthand, the power of tefillah, while also discovering that Hashem was compassionate rather than vengeful. Avraham was invited to remain in Avimelech's kingdom indefinitely, allowing his revolutionary values to continue their spread.

Eventually, this friendship developed into a full-blown treaty.

Acknowledging that **אלקים עמך בכל אשר אתה עושה**, that Hashem managed Avraham's affairs, Avimelech craved to be part of Avraham's divinely supervised world. He eagerly signed treaties with this man of G-d and was happy to continue "hosting" him in their joint city aptly

named Be'er Sheva, for the reciprocal oaths which braced their peace treaty.

Avraham shuttles back and forth between his friend Mamre near Chevron and his ally Avimelech along the coast who welcomed him - as long as he didn't legally purchase land in Israel.

Jewish expansionism

By the time Yitzchak digs his wells, Avraham had already acquired his first parcel of land in Israel, and the dynamics of the relationship begin to change. As long as Avraham was an itinerant preacher roaming the countryside and spreading his religious gospel, Avimelech was magnanimous. Once Avraham and his children settle the chosen land, Avimelech turns hostile. Yitzchak's digging and entrenchment provokes Avimelech's anger and incites aggressive efforts to blunt Jewish expansionism. It is one thing to be inspired by Avraham's ideas, but quite another to allow the chosen people to settle in the land of Hashem.

The dual narrative

The modern world has embraced the Jewish nation and its religious and cultural influence upon society. We are the founders of monotheism, and, thankfully, much of the modern religious world has adopted our fundamental belief in a non-physical, unitary and exclusive G-d.

In addition to our religious impact, we have also driven human progress. Hashem cares for His creatures and especially for his masterpiece known as *homo sapien*. The advance of the human condition is the will of Hashem, and therefore, for a Jew, progress is driven by a religious impulse. Religiously inspired to improve and enhance our world, we have spearheaded human advance in science, technology, culture, economics, psychology, politics, and social welfare. Humanity has eagerly embraced the Jewish people, conferring upon us close to 25% of the Nobel prizes awarded over the past century. After thousands of years of disparagement and vilification, we have been showered with broad admiration. This is part of the road to redemption.

Though our "influence" has been embraced, our desire to return to our homeland has been resisted. Subconsciously, humanity realizes that Israel is the land of G-d, the epicenter of history, and the terminus of

redemption. Knowing this, any Jewish efforts to settle their ancient homeland must be blunted. When Jews return to Israel the world trembles with a redemptive shudder and rises to combat this history-altering event.

This dual and conflicting narrative began in the days of Avimelech and Yitzchak. Our ideas and values are warmly adopted but our desire to live in our land is hotly contested. History shows us its patterns.

When miracles fade

There is a second reason that Avimelech supported Avraham but opposed Yitzchak. Avraham's dramatic arrival in Israel was accompanied by commotion and by historical shifts. In the aftermath of Avraham's arrival in Israel, a major famine occurred, a world war erupted, and five large cities were decimated in a fiery flash. Additionally, this man of heaven drew heavenly angels into the region. It was evident that history was in flux and that this man of G-d was the root cause of all the excitement and spectacle. In this atmosphere of supernaturalism, granting residence to Avraham was a no-brainer. The locals of Chevron recognize that Avraham is a נשיא אלקים אתה בתוכינו or a prince of G-d, and grant his purchase. Avimelech, having personally witnessed divine intervention, reads the tea leaves, and concedes space for the man of G-d. Amidst the fanfare of Avraham's career, it was obvious that this discoverer of G-d deserved a presence in the land of G-d.

A generation later the drama had worn off and life returned to normal. Yitzchak's "boring" life contained no overt miracles, no wars, and no angels, as the world settled back into its normal routine. Yitzchak lives a sedentary life in his homestead at Gerar, barely traveling and never departing the land. Under these pedestrian conditions, divine destiny was less obvious, and the local residents became more stingy about granting land to outsiders. In the absence of supernatural miracles natural opposition to our presence surges and our settlement of Israel becomes more complicated than it was for the man of G-d who arrived in this land escorted by angels.

Historical tumult and historical stability

In 1948 the world was also in flux. Within 30 years, two bloody world wars were fought, maps were drawn and redrawn, monarchies fell, communism arose, and we suffered an unimaginable genocidal nightmare. These events disclosed a palpable divine presence and an unspoken sense of historical shift. The planet was, once again, inhabited by angels and devils and the world responded by granting the descendants of Avraham a return ticket to their homeland. On a rational plane, the UN vote was driven by diplomatic, political and regional considerations. However, subconsciously, events were driven by the prevailing sense that Hashem had descended into history. Sometimes His presence is overt and other times it is felt subliminally. In the historical moment of 1948, Hashem's presence compelled a UN majority supporting Jewish return to Israel.

In the past 70 years history has steadied, becoming far less tumultuous and turbulent. Even though intermittent violence flares, wars have been largely regional and limited to particular areas. The world, at least on the surface, has become more politically and economically stable than it was during the tempestuous first half of the 20th century. In our more stable reality, it is more difficult to detect the divine presence or to perceive the changing tides of history, and therefore the world is less amicable about "*making way*" for the people of G-d returning to the land of G-d.

Settlement of Israel appears to have become bogged down in politics diplomacy, boycotts and aggressive opposition. The Avimelech syndrome has returned. Countries, that in the past were favorable to us have now turned against us. This isn't new. Avimelech is alive. Jewish history cycles through patterns. What happened before will happen again. This is the final cycle. And we know how it all ends.