

## Parshat Toldot 5779

At the beginning of chapter **כ"י** Yitzchak faced a famine, in similar circumstances to his father Avraham. Whilst his father had taken steps to move to Egypt during the famine in the earlier generation, Hashem appeared to Yitzchak and told him not to leave Eretz Yisrael. He reassured Yitzchak that He will look after him and his children....*because Avraham listened to my voice, to my Mitzvot, my Chukim and by laws.*

Many of the commentaries on this verse discuss what mitzvot our forefathers kept. Some learn that the kept the torah in its entirety including the Oral law (Rashi).

Ramban, famously, is troubled by this explanation because there are a number of stories of the Avot which seem at odds with Torah law, perhaps most obviously Yaakov marrying two sisters.

Ramban therefore suggests that the Avot kept the Torah, but only in Eretz Yisrael.

The Sefas Emes, based upon the Zohar, suggests that the Torah was not given until Har Sinai, but the Avot were able to look at the world and determine for themselves all of the mitzvot using their own intuition. He explains that this is why the Avot were always digging wells, because the word for a well in Hebrew "Be'er" also means "to explain", so when they were digging wells they were actually explaining the world and discovering the Torah.

The Gemara in erubin, quoted by the Ramban on our parsha tells us that not only did the Avot keep the written Torah, but also the Oral Torah. It was specifically Yaacov who instituted the concept of eruv *techumin*, which allows one to go out further than the standard 2000 amot from the town on Shabbat. If one makes an eruv techumin by placing some food before Shabbat at the outer limit, then they can walk a further 2000 amot from the eruv.

There is another Gemara in Yuma (28b) which tells us that Avraham instituted the concept of eruv *tavshilin*, which, as we know, allows us to cook on yom tov for shabbat whereas normally we are not allowed to prepare from yom tov for the next day.

The Meshech Chochma explains that these two types of erubin were instituted by the Avot who had characteristics which correlated to each eruv. Avraham's overwhelming middah was chesed and he went out day and night, or waited at the crossroads to welcome guests, even if they had no connection to Judaism, so that he might bring them closer to Torah. He therefore instituted the eruv tavshilin which has its basis in that we can overcook on yom tov in case guests come. It would have been so painful for

Avraham not to have enough to feed his guests on the following day, that he instituted an eruv that allowed such preparation.

Yaakov however took a different approach and always kept himself and his family segregated. He was worried about the risks of external influences and insisted on creating boundaries when amongst societies which had different standards from his own. For example, Yaakov is described in the Torah as a "Yoshev Ohalim", someone who stays in his tent; and when he went to Egypt, he asked to live separately in Goshen. The Torah itself in Devarim (ל"ג כ"ח) also describes Yaakov as one who dwells in isolation. He therefore instituted eruv techumin which teaches us that we should always make boundaries for ourselves and although we integrate in the society around us, we still need to keep our own traditions protected.

This idea helps to explain a midrash in Beraishit Rabba (11:7) which tells us that Avraham was given Eretz Yisrael, as it says **קום התהלך בארץ לארצה ולרחבה**. Yitzchak in this week's sedra is told similarly (26:3) **אֶתְּן אֶת כָּל הָאֲרָצוֹת הָאֵל** that I will give you all this land (Israel). However Yaakov is promised not only Eretz Yisrael, but limitless land in all directions, **וּפְרִצְתָּ יָמָה וּקְדָמָה צְפוּנָה וּנְגֻבָה**.

Along the same lines as the Meshech Chochma, we can suggest that only Yaacov who disciplined himself to create self-made boundaries, was rewarded with limitless land. We actually say this exact idea in zemiros, **נְחַלְתָּ יַעֲקֹב יִירָשׁ בְּלֵי מְצָרִים נְחֵלָה**, that Yaacov's inheritance is without borders, because wherever he went, the first thing he did was set up self-made boundaries.

So we have these two approaches; Avraham who goes all out to integrate with others but his right to land is only within Eretz Yisrael, or Yaakov who is able to settle further afield but manages to keep himself somewhat separated.

However our own tefila is to combine these two approaches, which is to maintain spiritual boundaries, but within Eretz Yisrael. We say in shabbos mincha davening, that

- when Hashem's name is one at the time of moshiah ie **אתה אחד ושמיך אחד**, that
- Yaakov too will be able to come back to Eretz Yisrael, **יעקב ובניו ינוחו בו** (Yaakov and his sons will rest in it i.e. in Israel) and
- nevertheless, we will keep our own identity as one unified nation, in Eretz Yisrael, **גוי אחד בארץ**.

Based on the writings of Rav Yitzchok Isaac Prag, Dayan on the bedatz in Yerusholyaim.