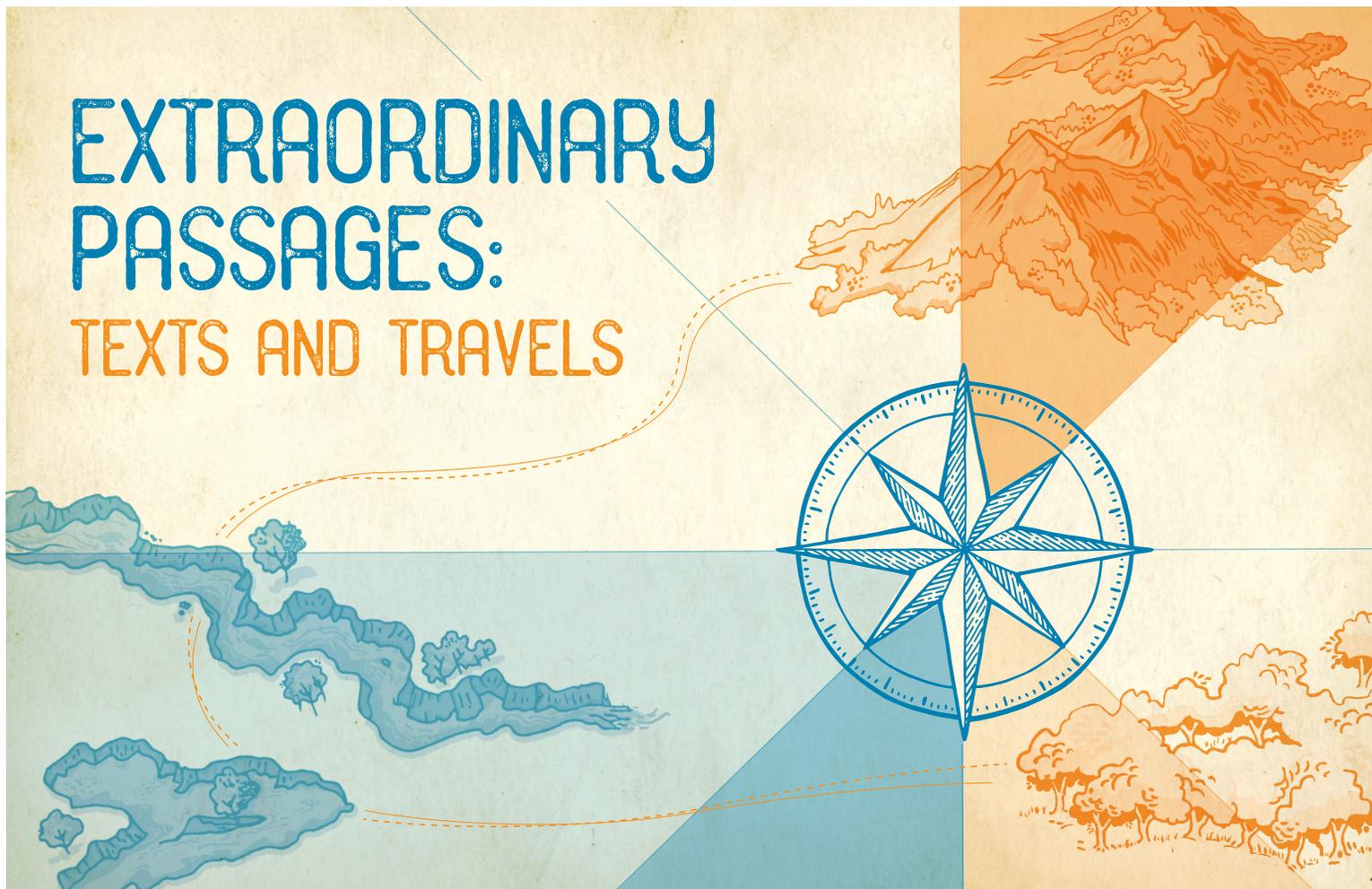


EXTRAORDINARY PASSAGES: TEXTS AND TRAVELS



Global Day of Jewish Learning: Curriculum



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www.theglobalday.org

A Project of the Aleph Society

By Aliza Sperling, with Danny Drachsler

Introduction (10 minutes)

Welcome to the Global Day of Jewish Learning!

Today we will follow along with the journeys of the three patriarchs — Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob — when they are given commands about where they should, or should not, travel. We will look at how the paths of these fathers and sons diverged and how they lived in relationship with the Land of Israel. The generations of the patriarchs and the course of their lives had an impact on both the immediate and the distant future; we will explore the meanings of their multi-generational saga.

Let's begin with the patriarch Abraham, and a promise God makes to him about his future descendants.

➤ **Read Text #1 aloud.**

Text #1: Genesis 15:12-16. English translation [**bold text**] and abridged commentary [plain text] by Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz in *The Steinsaltz Humash*, Koren Publishers Jerusalem.

וַיְהִי הַשְּׁמַיִם לְבוֹא וְתַרְדֵּמָה נִפְלְאָה עַל־אַבְרָם, וְהִנֵּה אֵימָה חֹשֶׁכָה גְדֹלָה נִפְלְאָה עָלָיו: וַיֹּאמֶר לְאַבְרָם יְדַע תְּדַע כִּי־גֵר אֶהְיֶה לְךָ בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא לְךָם, וְעַבְדֻם, וְעָנּוּ אֹתָם אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה: וְגַם אֶת־הַגּוֹי אֲשֶׁר יַעֲבֹדוּ דָן אֶנְכִי, וְאַחֲרָיֶכֶם יֵצְאוּ בְּרֶכֶשׁ גָּדוֹל: וְאַתָּה תָּבוֹא אֶל־אֲבֹתֶיךָ בְּשָׁלוֹם תִּקְבְּרָם בְּשֵׂיבָה טוֹבָה: וְדָוִר, רַב־יָעִי יָשׁוּבוּ הָאֵלֶּה כִּי לֹא־שָׁלֵם עוֹן הָאֱמֹרִי עַד־הַנֶּהָ:׃

12 It was when the sun was setting; a deep sleep fell upon Abram. And behold, a dread, a great darkness fell upon him. 13 He, God, said to Abram: Know that your descendants shall be strangers in a land that is not theirs. Your children will ultimately inherit the land, but their descendants shall not receive it immediately. Beforehand, they will be foreigners and nomads like you are. **And furthermore, they shall be enslaved to them,** the inhabitants of that foreign land; **and they shall oppress them for four hundred years. 14 And also that nation that they shall serve, I will judge. And afterwards they,** your children, **will emerge with great property.** 15 But these travails will not affect you personally, **and you** will not be exiled or suffer, but rather, **you shall go to your fathers,** you will die and be united with your ancestors **in peace,** and **you shall even be buried at a good old age. 16 And the fourth generation** of your descendants **shall return here** to inherit the promised land, **for the iniquity of the Emorite is not complete until then.**

➤ **Ask:**

1. What is God telling Abraham here about the future of his descendants? Is specific information given about his children and grandchildren?
2. Abraham is told that he himself won't experience this future. How do we understand this?
3. This text describes that the descendants will be strangers and oppressed, and that they will then return to the Land. What might be the value to Abraham and his family in having knowledge of both pieces of this journey?

The events God is referring to in this text, are known as the “Covenant Between the Parts”. This will come to fruition when Abraham's descendants become slaves in Egypt, are brought out with the Exodus, and then journey to return to the Land of Israel.

Part One: Isaac, the Stranger in His Own Land (15 minutes)

Text #1 foretells of Abraham's descendants being "strangers in a land that is not theirs". While the Torah describes the stories of Abraham and Jacob at great length, we are told less about Isaac. Much of Isaac's life was spent continuing the ways of Abraham; in fact many of the events in his life seem to mirror those of Abraham's story. However, unlike Abraham who left the Land of Canaan to journey to Egypt when there is a famine, Isaac is told that he may not go.

➤ Ask a participant to read Text #2 aloud.

Text #2: Genesis 26:1-6. English translation [bold text] and abridged commentary [plain text] by Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz in *The Steinsaltz Humash*, Koren Publishers Jerusalem.

ויהי רעב בארץ מלכבד הרעב הראשון אשר היה בימי אברהם ויגדף יצחק אל־אבימלך מלך־פלשתים גרר: ויגרא אליה' ויאמר אל־תרד מצרימה שכן בארץ אשר אמר אליה: גור בארץ הזאת ואתה ואתה עמך ואברכהך כי־לך ולזרעך את־כל־הארצת האל והקמתה את־השבועה אשר נשבעתי לאברהם אביה: והרביתי את־זרעך ככוכבי השמים ונתתי לזרעך את כל־הארצת האל והתברכו בזרעך כל גווי הארץ: יעקב אשר־שמע אברהם בקולי וישמר משמרת־י מצותי הקותי ותורתי: וישב יצחק בגרר:

1 There was a famine in the land, besides the first famine that was during the days of Abraham. Isaac went to Avimelech, king of the Philistines, to Gerar. **2** The Lord appeared to him, and said: Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land that I will tell you. **3** Reside in this land, and I will be with you, and I will bless you; for I will give all these lands to you and to your descendants, and I will keep the oath that I took to Abraham your father. You belong to this land, and it belongs to you and your descendants, and therefore you must stay here and live here. **4** And I will multiply your descendants like the stars of the heavens, and I will give to your descendants all these lands; and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed through your descendants. **5** However, your right to the land is not due exclusively to your own merit; rather, it originated because Abraham heeded My voice, and kept My commission, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws. **6** Isaac lived in Gerar. Since he was prohibited from leaving for Egypt, Isaac remained in Gerar.

➤ Ask:

1. Why doesn't God allow Isaac to leave the Land of Israel?
2. The text says there was a famine in the time of Abraham, and there is a famine now in the time of Isaac. Are there any other references to Abraham in this text? How might his father's experiences have shaped how Isaac thought about leaving the Land?

God appears to Isaac to tell him that he may not leave, and that God will bless him despite the famine. However, it is not clear why it was so important for Isaac to remain in the Land of Israel. Let's look at two different explanations, the first from the Sforno and the second from the Malbim. The Sforno, Ovadia ben Jacob Sforno (c.1475-1550), was an Italian rabbi, commentator, philosopher and physician. He is noted for mixing new interpretations with comments from earlier rabbis, while remaining faithful to the original texts. The Malbim, Meir Leibush ben Yehiel Michel Wisser, was a 19th century scholar and commentator and the chief rabbi of Bucharest.

➤ Ask participants to read Texts #3 and #4 together in *chavruta*.

Chavruta is partnered learning. Learning with a friend or two allows you to share ideas and insights with one another as you read and discuss texts together.

Text #3: Sforno. Commentary on Genesis 26:3.

כי לך ולזרעך אתן והקימותי את השבועה. והטעם שאמרתי שתגור בארץ הזאת ובה אטיב לך הוא כי כבר נשבעתי לאברהם לתת לו ולזרעו את הארץ הזאת ולפיכך בהיותך גר בה תהיה נשיא אלקים בתוכה ותקנה בה חזקה להורישה לזרעך:

“I will assign all these lands to you and to your heirs, fulfilling the oath that I swore to your father Abraham:”

And the reason that I told you to dwell in this land and by doing so I will do good with you, is because I have already sworn to Abraham to give this land to him and his descendants, and therefore when you dwell in it you will be a prince of God in it, and you will acquire a presumption of ownership to bequeath it to your children.

Text #4: Malbim. Commentary on Genesis 26:3.

גור בארץ הזאת. הגרות שנתחייבת יהיה בארץ הזאת, כי הגרות יהיה או ע"י טלטול ממקום למקום, או ע"י מה שמחשיב עצמו כגר בארץ אף שיושב במקום אחד קבוע, ותוכל לקיים גרות גם בארץ הזאת.

Dwell (*Gur*) in this land: The condition of being a stranger (*ger*) that you were bound to be [in the Covenant Between the Parts] will take place in this land, for one can be a stranger either by going from place to place, or by considering oneself to be a stranger even if he remains in one permanent place, and so you can fulfill the condition of being a stranger also in this land.

➤ Ask in *chavruta*:

1. According to the Sforno, how is Isaac's dwelling in the land a necessary piece of God's fulfilling His promise to Abraham?
2. According to Malbim, how can Isaac be a stranger in the Land of Israel?
3. What are some of the attitudes and orientations of a stranger/a person on a journey? How could Isaac adopt those attitudes, even without journeying physically?

➤ Bring the group back together and ask some *chavruta* pairs to share their responses.

Part Two: Jacob goes to Egypt (15 minutes)

Jacob's life is very different from that of his father Isaac. In particular, while Isaac never leaves the Land of Israel, Jacob spends a good deal of time away from the Land. When Jacob receives the news that his long-lost son Joseph is alive and the viceroy of Egypt, he must decide whether to stay and be the leader of his sons and his tribe, or journey to visit his youngest son in a distant place.

➤ Read text #5 aloud.

Text #5: Genesis 46:1-5. English translation [**bold text**] and abridged commentary [plain text] by Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz in *The Steinsaltz Humash*, Koren Publishers Jerusalem

ויסע ישראל וכל-אשר-לו וזבא בארצה שבע וזבח זבחים לאלקי אביו יצחק. ויאמר אלקים לישראל במראת הלילה ויאמר יעקב ויאמר הנני. ויאמר אלקי הקל אלקי אביד אל-תירא מרדה מצרמה פי-לגוי גדול אשימה שם. אנכי ארד עמה מצרמה ואנכי אעלה גם-עלה ויוסף ישית ידו על-עיניך. ונקם יעקב מבאר שבע וישאו בני-ישראל את-יעקב אביהם ואת-טפם ואת-נשיהם בעגלות אשר-שלה פרעה לשאת אתו.

1 Israel and everything that he had traveled. He likely departed from Hebron, where he lived, and he came to **Beersheba**, which was located in the south, on the road to Egypt. Apparently, he specifically chose to pass this important landmark, where both Abraham and Isaac had constructed altars, just as he had on his initial journey to Haran (28:10). **And there he slaughtered offerings to the God of his father Isaac.** **2 God spoke to Israel in the visions of the night and said: Jacob, Jacob; and he said: Here I am.** **3 He said: I am the God, the God of your father; do not fear to go down to Egypt, as I will make you a great nation there.** **4 I will go down with you to Egypt and I will also take you up again.** You will merit seeing your beloved son, and furthermore, **Joseph shall place his hand over your eyes**, as he will care for you when you die. **5 Jacob arose from Beersheba.** It was easier for him to leave the land of Canaan with God's approval and His promise to accompany him to a foreign land. **And the sons of Israel conveyed Jacob their father, and their children, and their wives, in the wagons that Pharaoh had sent to convey him.**

➤ Complete this chart as a group.

	Abraham (Genesis 15:12-16)	Isaac (Genesis 26:1-6)	Jacob (Genesis 46:1-5)
Does God tell him to stay or leave?			
What does God say will happen to his children/ descendants?			
Are there references to his ancestors? If so, what is the context?			
What other aspects of the messages strike you?			

➤ Ask:

1. What are some reasons why Jacob would have been so conflicted about going to Egypt?
2. How does Jacob's message from God compare to that given to his father and to his grandfather?
3. Why do you think the text emphasizes that it is the God of Isaac who is telling Jacob to go? Does following in someone's path always mean that you pursue goals in the same way?

Unlike Isaac, who is told to remain in the Land, Jacob is told to go down to Egypt. This descent to Egypt marks the beginning of the slavery and oppression described in the Covenant Between the Parts (Text #1). Aside from worrying about whether he was allowed to leave the Land, Jacob may also have known about the prophecy given to Abraham, and hesitated to bring this fate upon his descendants. In the following commentary, The Malbim offers an explanation for why Jacob needed to go down to Egypt.

Text #6: Malbim. Commentary on Genesis 46:3.

והוא מאמרנו בטעם גלות מצרים כי הוצרכו ישראל לרדת מצרימה אשר היה כור הברזל למען כהתוך כסף בתוך כור יותכו בעיניו ההוא ויצרפו ויתלבנו . . . ועל כן הוצרך יהיו שם כי שם תהיה הכנת היותם גוי גדול כמדובר:

ועל . . . למה לא השלים יעקב הגרות בארץ כיצחק ויונה שקט על שמריו ובגולה לא ילך כי אם זרעו אחרי מות אביהם אמר אליו אנכי ארד עמך כו' לו' אם אינך הולך עם זרעך הלא תאבד תקות גאולת בניך חלילה כי ישקעו בטומאת מצרים ואין מקומם ע"כ צריך שכינה עמהם מחופפת עליהם כנשר יעיר קנו על גוזליו ירחף בל תשלוט בהם טומאת מצרים.

And this is what we have said as to the reason for the Exile in Egypt, for Israel needed to go down to Egypt which was a fiery furnace, so that like silver is pressed in the furnace, they will be pressed with suffering, and will be refined and whitened...and therefore they needed to be there, as preparation for being a “great nation.”

And concerning the question as to why Jacob could not be a “stranger” living in the Land as Isaac did, and rest quietly “settled on his lees” [an expression meaning “undisturbed”] (see Jeremiah 48:11), and not enter the Exile, and rather have his children go down to Egypt after he died — God said to him, “I will descend with you.” If you do not go with your children, the hope of your children’s redemption may be lost for they will sink into the impurities of Egypt and it is not their place. They need the Divine Presence with them protecting them as an “eagle stirs up its nest and hovers over its young” (Deuteronomy 32:11) so that the impurities of Egypt will not dominate them.

➤ Ask:

1. Why couldn't Jacob experience himself as a stranger in the Land of Canaan, as Isaac did?
2. Why was Jacob needed in Egypt?
3. In what ways did Jacob follow the path that came before him? In what ways did he break from it?
4. Look back at Text #1. How does the promise made there and what we just read in Malbim help shape these generations of descendants into the Jewish people?

In each patriarchs case, God promises that He will “make you a great nation” or “multiply your descendants like the stars in the heavens”. The reward — the eventual destination for the generations of this family — is to be a great nation that begins with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Whether they are told to go or stay, the patriarchs obey God and the reward for these generations of obedience is that Jacob becomes “Israel” and the father of the Jewish People — the Children of Israel.

Part Three: Journey Through Generations (12 minutes)

Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz helps us look closer at the three generations of fathers and sons, and how the lives and accomplishments of each father pushed their sons in different directions. Rabbi Steinsaltz encourages us to look beyond the local events of the stories themselves, and to consider the characters and their actions as archetypes both for families and for Jewish history. One of the leading scholars of this century, Rabbi Steinsaltz is best known for his commentaries on the Bible and Talmud, and for his work on Jewish mysticism.

► **Read Text #7 aloud.**

Text #7: Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz. "Isaac: The Second Generation", *Biblical Images*.

...Isaac was passive; he was acted upon by others and had little or no scope for initiative. His actions were muffled and vague, as though in response to the actions of others. Altogether his personality was like an echo - not clear of definite in itself. He gave the impression of being a non-entity, one who was always known as the son of his father or as the father of his son.

This apparently was Isaac's essential problem: to find his own place in a world dominated by the genius of his father. He did the only thing left for him to do: he carried on.

...Hence, one does not ascribe to the second generation the same glorious qualities that capture the imagination. The son's task is to hold steady and not create. Or as the Bible story puts it, they have to dig again the wells that the fathers dug before them and that have become blocked up. The father digs wells and creates new facts; time, enemies, and habit gradually fill these wells with silt. It is the son's task to go back and dig the wells again, to release the living waters and let them flow as they will.

Isaac's task, therefore, even if lacking in splendor or legendary exploits, is of utmost value and significance. And the statement "These are the generations of Isaac...Abraham begat Isaac" contains the deeper meaning that, although Abraham and Isaac may be worlds apart and Abraham towers over Isaac both in personality and in the magnitude of his actions, they are nonetheless together as one - Isaac not only justifying Abraham, but establishing him forever. Thus, Isaac's achievement amounts to more than a mere contribution. By virtue of Isaac, Abraham is made what he is.

This passivity was expressed in every part of his being: he remained always a tent dweller...Even when he prayed for his sons and for the future, it was his wife Rebecca who was the manipulator.

On that occasion, when he blessed his son [Jacob], we are given to understand that in his heart he seemed to prefer Esau, the son who was conspicuously the very opposite of himself...This preference of the fond father could well point to certain contradictions - or at least inner conflicts - in Isaac, which may ultimately have complemented each other. The story of the blessing throws this preference into sharp relief. The man who had always been passive and conservative retained in the core of his being a profound love for the son who was all that he, the father, was not.

The conclusion to the blessing incident seems, therefore, to have a clear meaning. It was Jacob who had to succeed Isaac...Isaac could not see the potential of his tent-dweller son Jacob, who seemed to be no more than a copy of himself.

Of course, Isaac's inference was incorrect. He was simply unable to see beyond the immediate facts of the situation. The very initiative shown by Jacob in trying to get the blessing for himself is proof that he was not a copy of his inactive father. It is the clue to the essence of Jacob: he who will fight fiercely to gain only those ends he considers important.

As such, Jacob was the one who made it possible for something new to take place. He was the keeper of traditions who was also an innovator.

➤ Ask:

1. Rabbi Steinsaltz points out how these characters are archetypes, where Isaac is “the second generations.” Do you recognize any of these archetypes from your own experience? What makes them familiar to you? What makes them different to you?
2. What do you think is the relationship between the personalities of the first, second, and third generations of these archetypes? Rabbi Steinsaltz shows that some traits may skip a generation and others may always appear. Do you agree or disagree? Why?
3. The essay says, “The father digs wells...it is the son's task to go back and dig the wells again.” How might the behaviors of the first generation affect the second and third generations?

Conclusion (8 minutes)

➤ Ask a participant to read Text #8 aloud.

Text #8: Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz. “Why Study Biblical Characters?” Global Day video class.

Abraham is an archetype and, in a way, so is his son and so is his grandson. Some people may recognize them only as characters in a story; others may understand them only as archetypes, while not thinking about them as people at all. There is a phrase: *Maaseh Avot Siman L'Banim*. [Ramban, Commentary on Genesis 12:6]. It means: The deeds of the fathers are signs or path-makers for the children. Those who proceed first — in any venture — make movements and, willingly or unwillingly, we follow them. They break the path. It is true in anything — science, for instance, or behavior, for example. Sometimes the same behavior continues down the line for 10 generations. The same things repeat — the good things as well as the bad. The first in every field — or the most influential in every field — create something of a path. A path is something that people will follow, even unknowingly. The actions of Abraham and his descendants become, if not a symbol [then] something that is compelling, enticing people to follow.

➤ Ask:

1. Look back at Text #1 (the Covenant Between the Parts). How is the covenant carried forward through Jewish history?
2. Rabbi Steinsaltz states that “the same things repeat — the good things as well as the bad.” What can we learn about our own behavior and the future by learning about these archetypes?

Introduction

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12 It was when the sun was setting; a deep sleep fell upon Abram. And behold, a dread, a great darkness fell upon him. **13** He, God, said to Abram: Know that your descendants shall be strangers in a land that is not theirs. Your children will ultimately inherit the land, but their descendants shall not receive it immediately. Beforehand, they will be foreigners and nomads like you are. **And furthermore, they shall be enslaved to them,** the inhabitants of that foreign land; **and they shall oppress them for four hundred years.** **14** And also that nation that they shall serve, I will judge. **And afterwards they,** your children, will emerge with great property. **15** But these travails will not affect you personally, **and you** will not be exiled or suffer, but rather, **you shall go to your fathers,** you will die and be united with your ancestors **in peace,** and **you shall even be buried at a good old age.** **16** And the fourth generation of your descendants shall return here to inherit the promised land, for the iniquity of the Emorite is not complete until then.

Part One: Isaac, the Stranger in His Own Land

Text #2: Genesis 26:1-6. English translation [**bold text**] and abridged commentary [plain text] by Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz in *The Steinsaltz Humash*, Koren Publishers Jerusalem.

וַיְהִי רָעַב בְּאֶרֶץ מִלְכַּל הָרְעֵב הַרְאִשׁוֹן אֲשֶׁר הָיָה בִּימֵי אַבְרָהָם וַיֵּלֶךְ יִצְחָק אֶל-אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ מֶלֶךְ-פְּלִשְׁתִּים גְּרָרָה: וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו ה' וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו הִנֵּה שָׁכַן בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אָמַר אֵלָיךְ: גּוֹר בְּאֶרֶץ הַזֹּאת וְאַתָּה וְאַהֲרֵי עִמָּךְ וְאַבְרָהָם כִּי-לֶךְ וּלְרַעְדֶּךָ אִתּוֹ אֶת-כָּל-הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת וְהִקְמַתִי אֶת-הַשְּׁבִעָה אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי לְאַבְרָהָם אָבִיךָ: וְהָרַבִּיתִי אֶת-יְרַעְדֶּךָ כְּכֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְנָתַתִּי לְרַעְדֶּךָ אֶת כָּל-הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת וְהִתְבָּרְכוּ בְּרַעְדֶּךָ כָּל-גּוֹי הָאָרֶץ: יִקָּב אֲשֶׁר-שָׁמַע אַבְרָהָם בְּקוֹלִי וַיִּשְׁמַר מִשְׁמֵרַתִּי מִצְוֹתַי חֲקוֹתַי וְתוֹרֹתַי: וַיָּשָׁב יִצְחָק בְּגָרָר:

1 There was a famine in the land, besides the first famine that was during the days of Abraham. Isaac went to Avimelekh, king of the Philistines, to Gerar. **2** The Lord appeared to him, and said: Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land that I will tell you. **3** Reside in this land, and I will be with you, and I will bless you; for I will give all these lands to you and to your descendants, and I will keep the oath that I took to Abraham your father. You belong to this land, and it belongs to you and your descendants, and therefore you must stay here and live here. **4** And I will multiply your descendants like the stars of the heavens, and I will give to your descendants all these lands; and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed through your descendants. **5** However, your right to the land is not due exclusively to your own merit; rather, it originated because Abraham heeded My voice, and kept My commission, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws. **6** Isaac lived in Gerar. Since he was prohibited from leaving for Egypt, Isaac remained in Gerar.

Text #3: Sforno. Commentary on Genesis 26:3.

כי לך ולזרעך אתן והקימותי את השבועה. והטעם שאמרתי שתגור בארץ הזאת ובוה איטיב לך הוא כי כבר נשבעתי לאברהם לתת לו ולזרעו את הארץ הזאת ולפיכך בהיותך גר בה תהיה נשיא אלקים בתוכה ותקנה בה חזקה להורישה לזרעך:

“I will assign all these lands to you and to your heirs, fulfilling the oath that I swore to your father Abraham:”
And the reason that I told you to dwell in this land and by doing so I will do good with you, is because I have already sworn to Abraham to give this land to him and his descendants, and therefore when you dwell in it you will be a prince of God in it, and you will acquire a presumption of ownership to bequeath it to your children.

Text #4: Malbim. Commentary on Genesis 26:3.

גור בארץ הזאת. הגרות שנתחייבת יהיה בארץ הזאת, כי הגרות יהיה או ע"י טלטול ממקום למקום, או ע"י מה שמחשיב עצמו כגר בארץ אף שיושב במקום אחד קבוע, ותוכל לקיים גרות גם בארץ הזאת.

Dwell (Gur) in this land: The condition of being a stranger (*ger*) that you were bound to be [in the Covenant Between the Parts] will take place in this land, for one can be a stranger either by going from place to place, or by considering oneself to be a stranger even if s/he remains in one permanent place, and so you can fulfill the condition of being a stranger also in this land.

Part Two: Jacob goes to Egypt

Text #5: Genesis 46:1-5. English translation [bold text] and abridged commentary [plain text] by Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz in The Steinsaltz Humash, Koren Publishers Jerusalem.

ויסע ישראל וכל-אשר-לו ויבא פארה שבע ויזבח זבחים לאלקי אביו יצחק. ויאמר אלקים לישראל במראת הלילה ויאמר יעקב ויאמר הנני. ויאמר אנכי הקל אלקי אביך אל-תירא מרדה מצרימה פי-לגוי גדול אשימה שם. אנכי ארד עמך מצרימה ואנכי אעלה גם-עלה ויוסף ישית ידו על-עיניך. ויקם יעקב מבאר שבע וישאו בני-ישראל את-יעקב אביהם ואת-טפם ואת-נשיהם בעגלות אשר-שלח פרעה לשאת אתו.

1 Israel and everything that he had traveled. He likely departed from Hebron, where he lived, **and he came to Beersheba**, which was located in the south, on the road to Egypt. Apparently, he specifically chose to pass this important landmark, where both Abraham and Isaac had constructed altars, just as he had on his initial journey to Haran (28:10). **And there he slaughtered offerings to the God of his father Isaac.** **2 God spoke to Israel in the visions of the night and said: Jacob, Jacob; and he said: Here I am.** **3 He said: I am the God, the God of your father; do not fear to go down to Egypt, as I will make you a great nation there.** **4 I will go down with you to Egypt and I will also take you up again.** You will merit seeing your beloved son, **and furthermore, Joseph shall place his hand over your eyes**, as he will care for you when you die. **5 Jacob arose from Beersheba.** It was easier for him to leave the land of Canaan with God's approval and His promise to accompany him to a foreign land. **And the sons of Israel conveyed Jacob their father, and their children, and their wives, in the wagons that Pharaoh had sent to convey him.**

Text #6: Malbim. Commentary on Genesis 46:3.

והוא מאמרנו בטעם גלות מצרים כי הוצרכו ישראל לרדת מצרימה אשר היה כור הברזל למען כהתוך כסף בתוך כור יותכו בעיניו ההוא ויצרפו ויתלבנו ועל כן הוצרך יהיו שם כי שם תהיה הכנת היותם גוי גדול כמדובר:

ועל . . . למה לא השלים יעקב הגרות בארץ כיצחק ויונה שקט על שמריו ובגולה לא ילך כי אם זרעו אחרי מות אביהם אמר אליו אנכי ארד עמך כו' לו' אם אינך הולך עם זרעך הלא תאבד תקות גאולת בניך חלילה כי ישקעו בטומאת מצרים ואין מקומם ע"כ צריך שכינה עמהם מחופפת עליהם כנשר יעיר קנו על גוזליו ירחף בל תשלוט בהם טומאת מצרים .

And this is what we have said as to the reason for the Exile in Egypt, for Israel needed to go down to Egypt which was a fiery furnace, so that like silver is pressed in the furnace, they will be pressed with suffering, and will be refined and...whitened and therefore they needed to be there, as preparation for being a "great nation."

And concerning the question as to why Jacob could not be a "stranger" living in the Land as Isaac did, and rest quietly "settled on his lees" [an expression meaning "undisturbed"] (see Jeremiah 48:11), and not enter the Exile, and rather have his children go down to Egypt after he died — God said to him, "I will descend with you." If you do not go with your children, the hope of your children's redemption may be lost for they will sink into the impurities of Egypt and it is not their place. They need the Divine Presence with them protecting them as an "eagle stirs up its nest and hovers over its young" (Deuteronomy 32:11) so that the impurities of Egypt will not dominate them.

Part Three: Journey Through Generations

Text #7: Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz. "Isaac: The Second Generation", *Biblical Images*.

...Isaac was passive; he was acted upon by others and had little or no scope for initiative. His actions were muffled and vague, as though in response to the actions of others. Altogether his personality was like an echo - not clear or definite in itself. He gave the impression of being a non-entity, one who was always known as the son of his father or as the father of his son. This apparently was Isaac's essential problem: to find his own place in a world dominated by the genius of his father. He did the only thing left for him to do: he carried on.

...Hence, one does not ascribe to the second generation the same glorious qualities that capture the imagination. The son's task is to hold steady and not create. Or as the Bible story puts it, they have to dig again the wells that the fathers dug before them and that have become blocked up. The father digs wells and creates new facts; time, enemies, and habit gradually fill these wells with silt. It is the son's task to go back and dig the wells again, to release the living waters and let them flow as they will.

Isaac's task, therefore, even if lacking in splendor or legendary exploits, is of utmost value and significance. And the statement "These are the generations of Isaac...Abraham begat Isaac" contains the deeper meaning that, although Abraham and Isaac may be worlds apart and Abraham towers over Isaac both in personality and in the magnitude of his actions, they are nonetheless together as one — Isaac not only justifying Abraham, but establishing him forever. Thus, Isaac's achievement amounts to more than a mere contribution. By virtue of Isaac, Abraham is made what he is.

This passivity was expressed in every part of his being: he remained always a tent dweller...Even when he prayed for his sons and for the future, it was his wife Rebecca who was the manipulator.

On that occasion, when he blessed his son [Jacob], we are given to understand that in his heart he seemed to prefer Esau, the son who was conspicuously the very opposite of himself...This preference of the fond father could well point to certain contradictions — or at least inner conflicts — in Isaac, which may ultimately have complemented each other. The story of the blessing throws this preference into sharp relief. The man who had always been passive and conservative retained in the core of his being a profound love for the son who was all that he, the father, was not.

The conclusion to the blessing incident seems, therefore, to have a clear meaning. It was Jacob who had to succeed Isaac...

Isaac could not see the potential of his tent-dweller son Jacob, who seemed to be no more than a copy of himself. Of course, Isaac's inference was incorrect. He was simply unable to see beyond the immediate facts of the situation. The very initiative shown by Jacob in trying to get the blessing for himself is proof that he was not a copy of his inactive father. It is the clue to the essence of Jacob: he who will fight fiercely to gain only those ends he considers important.

As such, Jacob was the one who made it possible for something new to take place. He was the keeper of traditions who was also an innovator.

Conclusion

Text #8: Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz. "Why Study Biblical Characters?" Global Day video class.

Abraham is an archetype and, in a way, so is his son and so is his grandson. Some people may recognize them only as characters in a story; others may understand them only as archetypes, while not thinking about them as people at all. There is a phrase: *Maaseh Avot Siman L'Banim*. [Ramban, Commentary on Genesis 12:6]. It means: The deeds of the fathers are signs or path-makers for the children. Those who proceed first — in any venture — make movements and, willingly or unwillingly, we follow them. They break the path. It is true in anything — science, for instance, or behavior, for example. Sometimes the same behavior continues down the line for 10 generations. The same things repeat — the good things as well as the bad. The first in every field — or the most influential in every field — create something of a path. A path is something that people will follow, even unknowingly. The actions of Abraham and his descendants become, if not a symbol [then] something that is compelling, enticing people to follow.



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