

## **Parashat Toldot - Abraham and Isaac**

We began the study of these sources with a story from that morning's Sun Sentinel, in which the strange and scary narrative of Mark Spradley, a homeless man, encountered Michael Mazza, who was the subject of a massive manhunt as a result of his having recently murdered Deputy Paul Rein. Spradley didn't know the man he picked up, and thought he was helping, was the wanted man. Entering a pawn shop and seeing Mazza's picture on television, he notified the pawn shop's owner, who proceeded to call 911, resulting in Mazza's arrest. The pawn shop owner as of that time was attempting to claim the Crimestoppers posted \$25000 reward. Public outcry, such as it has been, has demanded the reward money be given to Spradley. As of the moment, \$2500 has been promised to Spradley from a different organization, and the Crimestoppers money is still under discussion. In the meantime, we shouldn't lose sight of the dedicated service and terrible tragedy of the death of Deputy Rein, whose funeral takes place today (Tuesday, November 13, 2007) at Star of David in North Lauderdale.

Links to the Saturday stories and the promise of the \$2500 reward can be found below:

<http://www.sun-sentinel.com/services/newspaper/printedition/local/sfl-flbSpradley1110pnnov10,0,3230897.story>

<http://www.sun-sentinel.com/services/newspaper/printedition/local/sfl-flbroward1110pnnov10,0,7667832.story>

<http://www.sun-sentinel.com/news/local/palmbeach/sfl-flpn3bdig1111pnnov11,0,2698706.story>

### Midrash ha-Gadol (Bereishit 26:1)

"Note that all that happened to Avraham, happened [also] to Yitzchak...The identity of Avraham's wife was questioned, and likewise the identity of Yitzchak's wife...Avraham eventually had a son, and Yitzchak also eventually had children. Avraham had a righteous son and a wicked son, and likewise Yitzchak. In Avraham's time there was a famine, and likewise in the time of Yitzchak, as it is written: 'There was a famine in the land.'"

### Childlessness

"Avram said: 'Lord God, what shall You give me – for I go childless, and the steward of my household is Eliezer of Damesek.' And Avram said: 'Indeed, You have given me no seed, and behold – the one who is of my house will inherit me.'

The word of God came to him, saying: 'It is not this one who will inherit you, but rather the one who will come forth from your bowels – he will inherit you.'" (15:2-4)

"Yitzchak pleaded to God for his wife, for she was barren..." (25:21)

God accepted his plea, and Rivka, his wife, conceived." (ibid.)

### Famine

"There was a famine in the land, and Avram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land." (12:10)

"God appeared to him and said: Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I will tell you. Sojourn in this land and I will be with you, and I will bless you, for to you and to your descendants I will give all of these lands...(26:2-3)

#### Wife As Sister

"And he sojourned in Gerar. And Avraham said of Sara, his wife: 'She is my sister...'" (20:1-2)

"The local people asked about his wife, and he said: 'She is my sister,' for he feared to say, 'my wife'...." (26:7)

#### "Troublesome" Children

God said to Avraham: 'Let it not be bad in your eyes over the boy and over your maidservant; all that Sara tells you – listen to her voice, for your seed will be called through Yitzchak.'" (21:12)

"Yitzchak loved Esav, for the hunt was in his mouth." (25:28)

#### Place Naming:

Hence that place was called Beer-sheba, for there the two of them [Abraham and Abimelech] swore an oath. [21:31]

[Isaac] named it Shibah; therefore the name of the city is Beer-sheba to this day. (26:30)

Rabbi Menasseh ben Israel, 1632, After working his way through a number of possible responses, R. Menasseh gets to his bottom line: "Abraham only gave the name to the place and site where he found the well, but Isaac gave it to the whole city . . . which reconciles the verses." Isaac, in other words, actually did something distinct and original. He received what his father left behind and he built on it!

At the end of the discussion we linked the texts back to the example from the news. The bottom-line: while it is true that Yitzchak took some of the actions of his father even further, and did so in a good and constructive way, the 'merit of Abraham' is that he was able to meet the challenges of his life and world without having the benefit of a good role model. He was a true spiritual pioneer, and gets the lion's share of the accolades for having lived his life in accordance with what God demanded of him. Every generation is responsible to add to the conversation – but Abraham was the first person to participate in the dialogue. Similarly, Mr. Spradley did most of the work and 'heavy lifting' – and deserves whatever reward money was designated for catching the perpetrator of the murder of a public servant. It would be hard to imagine that this is not how this part of the story will end, but as of this writing, we will have to 'wait and see'.