

Dvar Torah for Parshat Toldot

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Based on Rebbe Nachman's Stories, The Seven Beggars/Hunchback

"There was a famine in the land...and so Yitzchak went...to Gerar...He sowed in that land and produced that year a hundred-fold" (Genesis 26:1, 12). Rashi (v. 12) asks why the location and year are emphasized. He answers, "Even though it was an unyielding land and a hard year, still Yitzchak was blessed.

Constriction breeds constriction. A small-mind breeds small-thinking. If you don't see enough room, or if you don't see enough opportunity, you're not going to try too hard, if at all. Rebbe Nachman talks about the hunchbacked beggar, a person who seems unable to carry much, but actually carries the entire world on his shoulders. This "beggar"—who, like all the others in the story, is actually a consummate giver—teaches us the lesson of the little that holds much. What is that? How can we access it?

The hunchback tells us that he brought a group of people to a tree that stands beyond space. The tree provides shelter and tranquility to every type of animal and bird. They all abide there in peace and harmony. To locate and arrive at the tree, the group must manifest the tree's characteristics: faith, reverence, humility (the roots) and honesty (the trunk). Only a person with a sufficient degree of each of these qualities can come to the tree. (Rebbe Nachman doesn't say so, but apparently animals and birds have these qualities built-in and can get there automatically!) Not all the members of the group guided by the hunchback had these qualities. Nonetheless, their mutual friendship ran very deep; those who had the required characteristics waited for the others to gain them. And then off they went.

The Jews throughout their history provide many good case

studies for producing a lot from a little. After “washing ashore” penniless in a strange place—a hard year, in a hard land—after any number of exiles and banishments, they manage to produce undreamed of success, hundred-fold fruits. So it seems that they had enough of the tree’s characteristics, and the unity, to pull through hard times. So do we.

The initial example of “little that holds much” is of an estate that produces more fruit than its land could possibly produce. That’s what we see in Parshat Toldot and in current headlines. But Rebbe Nachman said that economics very much depends on people’s thinking (Rebbe Nachman’s Wisdom #62). So let’s think positively, work together, develop whatever of the tree’s qualities we have and deliver the goods—and then some.

agutn Shabbos!
Shabbat Shalom!