

## Bnei Akiva Svivot 5780: Choveret Chinuchit

Question: Where did the pirate go in this week's parasha?

Answer: Gerarrrrr

*Parashat Toldot is all about Yitzchak's sojourns\* in Gerar, the land of the Philistines (according to some scholars, these aren't the same Philistines who later appear in Nach). But some of the events that occurred there sound a bit familiar...in fact, haven't we heard of Gerar before? Let's rewind a little bit to refresh our memory...*

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\*a sojourn means a temporary stay somewhere

### WEEK 7: Learning from History

#### Gerar Part 1

It's Parashat Vayera and everything is happening. In one Torah portion we have the angels visiting Avraham's tent, the destruction of Sedom, the birth of Yitzchak, the banishment of Hagar and Yishmael and Akeidat Yitzchak – with so much going on it's easy to miss the tale of diplomatic relations between Avraham and Avimelech, the king of Gerar.



Following the destruction of Sedom, Avraham travelled to Gerar. Concerned that he would be killed in order that the Philistines could steal his wife, Avraham claimed that Sara was his sister, and upon arrival, she was indeed whisked off to join the king's harem of concubines. As a punishment, God brought a plague on the house of Avimelech. Then He appeared to Avimelech in a dream and broke the news that Sara was in fact married, and that if she was not returned to her husband, Avimelech would face an unpleasant fate. Avimelech was offended. How was he to know that Sara was married when Avraham had lied? This seemed so unfair, surely he was the victim here!

*"Then Avimelech summoned Avraham and said to him, "What have you done to us? What wrong have I done that you should bring so great a guilt upon me and my kingdom? You have done to me things that ought not to be done. What, then," Avimelech demanded of Avraham, "was your purpose in doing this thing?" "I thought," said Avraham, "surely there is no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife." (Bereishit 20:9-11)*

Avimelech accepted Avraham's explanation and showered gifts upon him. In return, Avraham prayed on behalf of the house of Avimelech and the plague was cured!

## A Peace Treaty

That's the last we hear of Gerar until the end of the next perek, when Avimelech approached Avraham to beg that he should treat him well. It's unclear why he made this request – Avraham had never hurt him! Avraham agreed to this, but then reproached him as Avimelech's men had stolen a well of water from Avraham's men. Avimelech once again played the innocent victim, claiming he had no prior knowledge of the incident. Avraham then gave Avimelech seven ewes and made a covenant of peace with him.

We're getting a sense of Avimelech's character. He was the kind of leader who allowed his subjects to have "no fear of God" and to steal from others, who kidnapped women into his harem, and who took no responsibility for any wrongdoing. In short, not a great guy.

The Rashbam\* claims that Avraham was wrong to make a pact with Avimelech, as the Philistines' land had been promised to him and his descendents were supposed to kill its inhabitants, not have a peace treaty with them! He cites all of the punishments that Avraham and his offspring received as a result of this treaty: the command to sacrifice Yitzchak, the wars in which the Philistines defeated Am Yisrael, and the kidnapping of the ark by the Philistines in the time of the prophet Shmuel.



*"Who, me?"*

\*Rabbi Shmuel ben Meir, a biblical commentator in 12<sup>th</sup> century France who was Rashi's grandson

## Gerar Part 2

With all of that background, let's take a look at Yitzchak's relationship with Gerar in Parashat Toldot. Trying to escape a famine, Yitzchak went to Gerar. Concerned that he would be killed in order that the Philistines could steal his wife, Yitzchak claimed that Rivka was his sister – sounding familiar yet? Some time passed, until one day Avimelech happened to spot Yitzchak and Rivka 'playing' through a window and realised the truth. He confronted Yitzchak, protesting that it was Yitzchak's fault that he nearly brought guilt upon the Philistines.



Yitzchak achieved too much financial success for Avimelech's liking and was sent away from the king. He lived in Gerar for a while, and redug all of the wells that had been dug by his father and filled up by the Philistines. The Torah records a dispute between Yitzchak's men and Avimelech's men over a well dug by Yitzchak. Avimelech's men stole the well, and also a second well, and it was only after Yitzchak dug a third well that it was left alone. Some time later, Avimelech

approached him and asked to make a covenant of peace.

It seems that Avimelech hadn't changed at all since the time of Avraham. His land was still a place where a husband feared he could be put to death in order that his wife could be kidnapped, his people still had disputes over wells, he removed his business rivals, and he still played an innocent victim every time he was confronted with wrongdoing. Avimelech also proved himself unreliable – despite his treaty with Avraham, his men had filled up Avraham's wells and continued to steal from Yitzchak.

Rav Shlomo Riskin believes that Yitzchak made a fundamental error in reaching a peace agreement with Avimelech. Not only was he wrong to reach a deal with a bad person, and not only was he mistaken in making a peace treaty with a people who were the enemies of his descendents, he failed to learn from the past. For this, he was punished by his son Esav marrying two Hittite women. For the Aot, it was strictly forbidden to marry Canaanite and Hittite women. God's punishment fitted Yitzchak's crime – Yitzchak entered into a partnership that was forbidden, so his son entered into a relationship that was forbidden.

The Tanach is more than just a storybook. Sefer Bereishit deals more with stories than with laws, but these stories are there to teach us a moral lesson that is relevant for all time. We must not make the mistake of ignoring our history, as if we do so we are fated to repeat the mistakes of the past.



**"Those who don't study history are doomed to repeat it.  
Yet those who *do* study history are doomed to stand by  
helplessly while everyone else repeats it."**

## Questions to ponder

- Why did Avraham give Avimelech gifts when he refused to acknowledge the stolen well?
- Why did Yitzchak make a covenant with Avimelech when he knew that he was not reliable enough to keep it?

## Peula Ideas for Younger Years

### Games about repetition

- Copycat game
- I went to the market and bought...
- Chinese Whispers

### Games about stories

- Ladders
- Wishy-washy

### Peula Ideas for Older Years

#### Games about repetition

- Just A Minute
- Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves

### Games about stories

- Six -word story
- Give each chanich four words and make them tell a story using those words

For more game ideas head to:

<https://www.bneiakiva.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/ShabbatGames.pdf>

### Discussions

- Should Israel make treaties with leaders who are bad people if it might be useful for them to do so?
- What makes it difficult to learn from our mistakes?

