Chomer Lidrush

Some ideas to turn your gears heading into Parshas Toldos.

Three Ways to Stand Among the Nations

Yitzchak achieves extraordinary success in Gerar, but his prosperity produces resentment: "*Vayekan'u oso Pelishtim*" (26:14). The Pelishtim stop up Avraham's wells, even though, as Rav Shimshon Refael Hirsch notes, they benefited everyone. Eventually Avimelech tells Yitzchak, "*Lech me'imanu ki atzamta mimenu me'od*" (26:16). Rav Hirsch sees in the three Avos three stages of Jewish life among the nations. Avraham was the respected *nesi Elokim*, Yitzchak the prosperous but envied outsider, and Yaakov the subservient stranger. These represent the progressive descent into *galus*.

Geulah, explains Rav Hirsch, follows the same path in reverse. Thus, "*V'zacharti es brisi Yaakov, v'af es brisi Yitzchak, v'af es brisi Avraham*" (Vayikra 26:42). Each *bris* represents a different challenge. *Bris Yitzchak* demands that we remain proudly Jewish despite the envy of others. Yitzchak reopens his father's wells, preserving their original names, and keeps digging despite opposition. Eventually Avimelech himself seeks peace, declaring, "*Ra'o ra'inu ki hayah Hashem imach*" (26:28). Yitzchak has moved from resentment toward the respect associated with Avraham.

For decades, American Jewry enjoyed something approaching *Bris Avraham*, accepted and respected as Jews. Since October 7, many feel closer to *Bris Yitzchak*, successful but increasingly resented. The temptation is either to minimize our Jewish distinctiveness or to withdraw from society, and Rav Hirsch rejects both. We must continue digging the wells of Torah, *mesorah* and *mitzvos* while contributing to the world around us. Our aspiration is to be respected not despite our Jewish identity but because of it, ultimately reaching Rechovos: "*Ki atah hirchiv Hashem lanu*" (26:22).