



From the desk of
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עיר התורה שקרובה אליך

Office of the Rabbinate of Elad, Rosh HaAyin and Herzelia

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Parashat Chayei Sarah

One Must Invest Effort in Performing Mitzvot

Our *parasha* states (24:14), "And the girl to whom I will say, 'Please tip over your jug, and I will drink,' and she will respond, 'You should drink and I will also give your camels to drink,' she is the one You have designated for Your servant Yitzchak. Through her I will know that You did kindness with my master.'" The Torah then goes on to relate the episode of how Eliezer's prayers were immediately answered, and he found a wife for Yitzchak.

Questions:

- 1- Why did Eliezer request a sign for her to offer both him and his camels to drink? Would it not have been enough for Eliezer to request a drink and, if she would acquiesce, take it as a sign from Hashem that he had been successful? After all, she was young and he was older, and he was close enough to the spring that he could take water for himself without burdening her? Why would this not have been considered a sufficient sign?
- 2- Furthermore, we must ask why the Torah changes its expression, despite the fact that it is referring to the same action. In *pasuk* 16, the Torah states "*vatimalei kadah*, and she filled her jug," but in *pasuk* 20, it is written "*vatishav*, and she drew." However, the *pasuk* does not state, "and she filled." Why are there two different expressions used? Aren't they referring to the same action?

The Generation of *Teshuvah*, Repentance

Our generation has merited being a generation of repentance, one in which tens of thousands of Jews are seeking the truth and the path of the Torah. They are returning to their Creator, to bask under the Wings of the Divine Presence, each one coming from a different place – from the place where the Jewish spark inside of him was ignited. Many times I have asked by individuals who have repented, why it is that when they have begun to become more observant, they begin to have difficulties earning a living and in many other areas of life? They thought that once they repented, Hashem would assist them along their path and make their Divine service easier

for them. Yet why has the opposite occurred? The answer can be found in our *parashah*, which teaches us the Torah way and how Hashem interacts with mankind. Man's entire reward for observing the Torah and mitzvot depends upon the amount of exertion that he invests. "According to the effort is the reward," teach our Sages. Hashem is the one who gives man the abilities to perform mitzvot, and the main expression of man's dedication to mitzvot lies in the effort he exerts in performing them. Therefore, Hashem does not perform miracles to make mitzvah observance easier for an individual. Rather, the opposite is true – man is judged by how he overcomes difficulty and, nevertheless, performs the mitzvah. Therefore in order to judge the degree of man's repentance, and to see just how much he really wants to return, he experiences difficulties along his path. But if he, nevertheless, triumphs in the face of these difficulties, then Hashem will help him, because our Sages teach that "One who comes to be purified is assisted."

Kindness With Wisdom

The *Beit Halevi* explains that even though Eliezer asked for a sign, yet it was also done with a certain amount of wisdom. Eliezer wanted to discern if all of her character traits were outstanding, and if she acted intelligently. First, he wanted to see if she had a pleasant nature, demonstrated by the fact that she would be willing to kindly give a stranger water to drink. All the more so, considering the fact that there was no cup from which to drink from; rather, would have to drink from the jug itself, as Eliezer himself requested, "Let me drink a small amount of water from your jug." If she would not have a pleasant nature, she would not give him water. She may also refuse on the grounds that the water may become undrinkable due to his saliva, or due to the concern that his mouth was not free of disease and the like. Afterwards, he would discern what she did with the remaining water. If she would bring it into her house then that would be acting unintelligently, because perhaps his mouth really was unclean and some of his saliva **did** actually enter the water. Yet on the other hand, if she would pour out the water it would be quite humiliating to Eliezer, since she was pouring



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out water because he had drank from it. Therefore, the solution was for her to say to him, "And I will also give your camels to drink." This way he would know that she, indeed, had an outstanding nature, was intelligent, and acted with *derech eretz*, refined conduct, not wishing to slight another individual. Yet even if she would possess these three traits, it was, nevertheless, not proof that she was fit to be a member of the house of Avraham and Yitzchak. He therefore prayed to Hashem that the signs that he requested be fulfilled, and that she prove that she was the one who Hashem had designated to be a wife for Yitzchak. This is why Rivkah answered him, "ve gam legmalecha eshav, and I will also draw [water] for your camels," for she wished to avoid offending him, lest he think that pouring the water into the water trough was only because she did not wish to bring the water that he drank from into the house. She therefore said to him that the water was for the camels who could drink until they were satisfied. This way his dignity would be uncompromised. **Even though the Beit Halevi's answer answers the first question posed above, but it does not answer the second.**

The Water Rose to Towards Her

On *pasuk* 17, Rashi cites the teaching of our Sages that Eliezer ran towards her because he saw that the water rose to her. From where did our Sages know to derive this teaching? The Ramban explains that our Sages deduced this from the *pesukim*. For in *pasuk* 20 it states, "va'tishav le'chol gimalav, and she drew water for all his camels," implying that she needed to draw the water. Yet in *pasuk* 14 it states "va'taal, and it rose," which implies that she did not have to draw the water. From here they derive that the water rose towards Rivkah.

Question on the Words of the Sages

It is seemingly baffling – the water rose towards the righteous *tzaddaket*, so that she would not have to exert herself in drawing the water. Yet we know that every camel drinks an exorbitant amount of water. This is so that it will be able to survive its trips in the desert. Ten camels certainly had to have a lot of water drawn for them. This must have demanded much exertion on Rivkah's part. Yet we do not find that the water rose up for her when she gave the camels water to drink. Why not?

The Main Reward for a Mitzvah is Earned For the Exertion

According to what was explained above, the *Kedushat Levi* adds that since Rivkah's original intention was to draw water for the needs of her household, therefore the water rose towards her without exertion on her behalf. Yet the second time, when her intention was to perform the mitzvah of bestowing *chessed* by giving Eliezer's camels water, it did not rise towards her. This is because the main reward earned for a mitzvah is for the effort that is vested in it. Therefore a miracle was not wrought for her so that she would be able to toil in the performance of a mitzvah. [So is explained in the *sefer Oznaim LeTorah*.]

Explanation of Eliezer's Request

Perhaps according to this, we can understand Eliezer's prayer. Eliezer prayed that whichever girl would respond, "Drink, and also to your camels I will give, she is the one that You designated." We already asked above why an act of *chessed* that she would perform for him would not be sufficient. Why was there a need to also give water to the camels? However, according to what we explained it is well-understood. Eliezer understood that the woman who would be fitting for Yitzchak would certainly be a *tzaddaket* who would merit having miracles performed for her. He knew that if he would request water for himself, it would not be a total act of kindness on her part, because the water had risen towards her since her intention was to draw water for herself. It would therefore not be difficult to perform the *chessed*. However, if she says that she will also give his camels, then she will certainly not see a miracle wrought for her, since it is necessary for one to toil in the performance of a mitzvah. This would truly indicate that she was a genuine *ba'alat chessed*.

Toiling in the Performance of a Mitzvah

Similarly, we find that Yitzchak said to Esav, "Please take your gear; your bow and arrow, and go out to the field and trap game for me." This must be understood, for Esav was in possession of the special garments that were worn by Adam Harishon. These garments drew animals to him, and they fell on their own. Why then, did he need hunting gear? *Rabbeinu Efraim*, in his commentary on the Torah, writes, "He



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[-Yaakov] wanted to educate him [Esav] in mitzvot, so that the blessings would rest upon him." In other words, a mitzvah must be performed with exertion.

The Chida, Citing a Teaching of the Arizal

The Arizal's teaching regarding the lofty status of the sweat which results from the performance of a mitzvah in general and in honoring the Torah in particular, is well known. This is as *Maran HaChida* wrote in his *sefer Morah Ba'etzba* (ot 204) on the topic of investing much effort in the kneading and baking of the Pesach matzot, writing that it is a great rectification of man's sins. The same thing applies to the effort exerted in the performance of all other mitzvot, especially the mitzvah of *hachnassat sefer Torah*, celebrating over the dedication of a new *sefer Torah* to a *beit ha'kneset*. The merit of this mitzvah will certainly protect him and his family, and he will merit the crown of the Torah, and the Torah will not cease being studied by all his ensuing generations. For this is both a great exertion and also a tremendously joyous occasion which coincide, and it is on a very high level. Measure for measure, just as he loves the Torah and joyously toils and exerts himself in this love, so too, will the merit of the Torah protect and stand by the side of his descendants forever.

Why Did Yaakov Not Experience *Kefitzat Haderech*, a Miraculous Shortening of His Journey?

"And he feared, and he said, 'How awesome is this place; it is none other than the house of G-d and the gate to Heaven'" (*Bereishit* 28:17). Rashi asks why Heaven did not stop Yaakov when he passed the site of the *Beit Hamikdash*. He answers that if Yaakov did not think to pray in the place where his fathers had prayed, should Heaven have stopped him? He had travelled to Charan, as our Sages state, but when he reached Charan he asked himself, "Is it possible that I passed the place where my fathers prayed, and I did not pray there? He decided to return there and journeyed until Beit Kel. Once he arrived at Beit Kel the ground miraculously contracted for him." We must understand, why was the journey not miraculously shortened for Yaakov when he went to Charan? Why was it only shortened when he went to Beit Kel?

The answer is that on his way to Charan, Yaakov Avinu was fulfilling the mitzvah of honoring his father

and mother, whose instructions he was adhering to by travelling to Charan. Traveling there was the actual mitzvah; therefore, if the journey would have been miraculously shortened, he would not have fulfilled it. On the other hand, his return from Beit Kel was not an actual mitzvah; rather, it was the preparation for the mitzvah of praying. Therefore, the miraculous shortening of the way would not detract anything from his action.

Words of Mussar

We have seen that the level of Torah and mitzvot observance is measured by the amount of effort and exertion that is invested in the mitzvah, but not when they happen on their own or by way of miracles. Rather, according to the effort is the reward, and the more difficult it is to fulfill the mitzvah, the greater his reward is. As it states in *Avot De'Rebbi Natan*, that one mitzvah performed with suffering is worth more than 100 performed without suffering. Additionally, when a person performs an act of *chessed*, it should be done wisely, so that he does not slight his friend's honor; rather, he should think how to perform the mitzvah of *tzedakah* and *chessed* in an respectable fashion.

Shabbat Shalom,
Rav Mordechai Malka