

In this week's Parsha we read the tale of Eliezer's mission to discover a suitable mate for his master's son, Yitzchak. The Torah tells us that he traveled to Avraham's distant family in Charan and it is there that he found Rivkah, our matriarch. How did Eliezer know that Rivkah would be compatible with Yitzchak? The Torah describes how Eliezer arrived at the well thirsty and tired from his long journey and it was Rivkah who ran out to greet him and offer him water. Impressed by her incredible kindness and compassion, Eliezer knew that he had met Yitzchak's future wife. Immediately he introduced himself and showered her with the gifts that he had brought from his master's house. Amongst the gifts that he brought for her, the Torah tells us that he brought her "A golden ring of half a shekel weight, and two bracelets for her hands of ten shekels weight of gold." Rashi explains that the gifts were not chosen haphazardly; rather they each contained deep religious significance. The ring of half shekel weight was an allusion to the half shekel that each Jew would donate for the Temple funds as part of the annual Jewish census. The two bracelets were an allusion to the two tablets that Moses would bring down to Mt. Sinai generations later and are at the very core of our Torah study. Finally, the ten shekel weight of the bracelets represents the Ten Commandments. Although Rashi's interpretation poignantly reflect the religious significance of Eliezer choice of gifts, was there a specific message he was trying to impart to Rivkah, or was it a just a potpourri of Jewish symbols?

The Maharal (Rabbi Yehuah Aryeh Lowy, 1520-1609) explains that our tradition (Pirkei Avot 1, 2) teaches us that the world stands on three legs: Torah, Avodah (service), and Gemilut Chassidim (acts of kindness). Rivkah had already displayed the third and final leg as she was the paradigm for compassion and kindness. Eliezer had experienced her legendary kindness first-hand when he so desperately needed a drink moments earlier. He now offered her gifts that expressed the remaining legs that the world rests upon. The half shekel ring that represents the half shekel donation that each Jew gave to the Temple is representative of the leg of Avodah - service, as the monies collected were used to provide for sacrifices and other Temple services. Of course, the Ten Commandments and the two tablets represent the final pillar of the world, Torah study. However, what was Eliezer really telling Rivkah? Why would he need to hint to the three pillars of the world at this particular moment?

The Gerrer Rebbe explains that Eliezer was intimating to Rivkah a valuable and profound lesson in life. While there are three fundamental tenets to the world, only the pillars of kindness can be achieved completely on his own. Torah study requires a Torah education or at least access to Torah information. Without those opportunities obviously Torah study is not a possibility. Similarly, Avodah, worship and service require opportunities and knowledge. Without access to prayer or sacrifices during the Temple period, Avodah would be near impossible. Yet, the pillar of kindness does not require any special education or privileged opportunities; it requires sensitivity, commitment, and a dedication to put others before one's self. Kindness to others is not taught nor learnt, it is engendered and accomplished.

Perhaps Eliezer recognized that Rivkah felt unprepared or undeserved to marry Yitzchak because she figuratively stood on only one leg, she only demonstrated a proficiency in kindness, but had no knowledge of Tefillah and Torah. Given Rivkah's family and upbringing this was to be expected, however, it still might have left Rivkah feeling despondent and imperfect. Eliezer's gifts were meant to assuage Rivkah's feelings of inadequacy. He was suggesting to her that when one works hard to become a considerate and kind person then ultimately G-D will help and provide opportunities to find success in Torah study and religious service as well. Just as he was gifting to her these symbols of Torah study and religious worship, so too would G-D facilitate her actual growth in Torah study and religious worship. Eliezer's message to Rivkah was as much a message to her as it is to us. If we try to our hardest to succeed in the areas that success is available to us, G-D will help us to succeed in other areas as well. G-D does not demand or even expect excellence in all areas, rather effort in all areas. When we have done the very best we can, G-D often insures that our intended results come to fruition.

***Shabbat Shalom,
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