

Parshat Chayei Sarah 5781

Eliezer's speech to Rivka's family possesses immense depth of wisdom. Detailed analysis is highly rewarding. The highlights selected below provide an introduction.

Declining hospitality until explaining the purpose of his visit was not merely keeping clear of distractions. Nor was it solely based on avoiding becoming obligated to his hosts for their welcome. Here was a man with a life-important mission. (It was in fact more than one life; but the future of the Jewish people). Yet, as urgent as it was to explain the purpose of his journey, immediately to reveal the importance of his mission would leave him vulnerable to ransoming tactics, so greater subtlety was called for.

His opening words "Eved Avraham anochi" introduce himself. The message implies: "There is a truly great person in this world – you have all heard about him. I come as his representative. Hence, what I have to say commands respect".

He proceeds to mention Hashem again and again. Hashem blessed Avraham with great wealth; Hashem will send His angel to make the journey successful; I prayed to Hashem at the well; it is Hashem Who will designate the appropriate wife for Yitzchak; when Rivkah met the precise qualities I had prayed for, I bowed to Hashem and blessed Hashem. This repetition of the involvement of Hashem forces the impression – on even the household of Betuel and Lavan – of the omnipotence of the Almighty and His directing Eliezer's path. And how successful is he? His words hit home. Lavan and Betuel reply: "MeiHashem yotza hadavar!" ["This emanated from Hashem!"]

Appreciating the type of people with whom he is dealing, Eliezer appeals to their life priorities. The first information he provides is his master has been blessed great wealth; to emphasise the point, he gives details.

By referring to Sarah having borne a son after she was old, he hints that there is something very special about this son. He then points to Yitzchak as the sole inheritor of Avraham's fortune. Eliezer's step by step build up towards his objective demonstrates his hishtadlut to win over any resistance from his hosts.

Now is the optimum moment to share the true purpose of his visit; to find a wife from his master's family. To emphasise the focus, he reports this was made the subject of an oath. It is not simply a "perhaps"; or a "hopefully".

At this stage, he recounts his prayer to Hashem for a girl who would go beyond his request for a drink, by additionally offering water for the camels. He continues that, even before he finished praying, Rivka arrived at the well and he tells how her words

replicated his prayer. Explaining how a prayer was answered so immediately and so accurately could not fail to have a profound impact.

Next, Eliezer changes the order of events. At the well, he recognised Hashem's hashgacha pratit and at once gave the jewellery to Rivka, even before asking her identity. Dealing with Betuel and Lavan, he realised that, in their limited appreciation of the way Hashem runs the world, this might potentially be regarded as naïve. So, he first mentions enquiring her identity, and only once he finds she is from Avraham's father's household, does he report giving over the jewellery.

His final point of request for Rivka's hand on behalf of Yitzchak is carefully prefaced with "Now if you intend kindness and truth with my master" then "tell me [you agree to the match]". He is putting them in the position of accepting (or denying) a role of kindness and truth. What a way to conclude his proposal!

Eliezer knew that whatever he did could only succeed if it was the will of Hashem. He recognised that Hashem governs everything; but man must do his own hishtadlut. The example was followed many generations later by Nachshon ben Aminodav (who led the way into the sea; although the waters only split after he was almost submerged).

Describing the words alone misses an essential dimension. Learning, practising and being an exemplar of Torah, involves something far deeper. Eliezer's demeanour followed what he had experienced in the home of Avraham avinu. A Torah lifestyle involves the sense of awe and kedusha derived from drawing closer to the Almighty. Someone whose every action reflects this inner realisation, stands out. Rabbi Immanuel Bernstein (in "The Call of Sinai") quotes the Ramchal: "The power of Torah is solely a product of the fact that Hashem has attached His exalted Influence to it, so that through speaking and thinking about it, that lofty Influence may be drawn onto the person. Without this, it would be no different from addressing any branch of wisdom."

The impression upon his listeners was not simply the intellectual or emotional effect of the words used; it was this closeness to Hashem (learned from Avraham) which paved the way for his message. Here was a key part of Eliezer's hishtadlut.

Eliezer's example teaches that: yes – you must utilise all your persuasive powers; yes – you must attune your message to your audience; and yes – you must present yourself with all the credits at your disposal. Most of all, when pursuing your objectives, keep in mind that you are serving Hashem. But the fundamental element of acknowledging the overall role of the Almighty in running the affairs of mankind underlies all that we might hope to achieve.

This weeks Parsha

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