

## מאמרי תורה – Torah Talk



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Parashat Chayei Sarah  
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פרשת חיי שרה  
כ"ב בחשוון תשע"ח

Torah Reading: *Bereshit* (Genesis) 23:1-25:18

Following the death of Sarah, Avraham purchases a burial plot and sends his servant, Eliezer, to find a wife for Yitzchak. Eliezer finds Rivka and brings her to Yitzchak to become his wife.

As we know, Eliezer creates a test for determining the future wife for Yitzchak. Says the text (24:12-14):

יב ויאמר ה' אלהי אדני אברהם, הקרה נא לפני היום; ועשה חסד, עם אדני אברהם. יג הנה אנכי נצב, על-עין המים; ובנות אנשי העיר, יצאת לשאב מים. יד והיה הנערה, אשר אליה הטי-נא כדך ואשתה, ואמרה שתה, וגם-גמליך אשקה--אתה הכחת, לעבדך ליצחק, ובה אדע, כי-עשית חסד עם-אדני.

**12** And he said: 'Hashem, the God of my master Abraham, send me, please, good speed this day, and show kindness to my master Avraham.  
**13** Behold, I stand by the fountain of water; and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water. **14** So let it come to pass, that the young woman to whom I shall say: Let down your pitcher, please, that I may drink; and she shall say: Drink, and I will give your camels drink also; let the same be she that you have appointed for your servant, even for Yitzchak; and thereby shall I know that You have shown kindness to my master.'

This test is more comprehensive than it first appears. We are told that the purpose is to determine the woman's kindness. But there is more to it than that, and the key is in the camels.

When we think about it, it makes no sense for Eliezer to have taken camels on his journey to Aram Nahara'im. Camels are "the ships of the desert." Why take them across the mountains on the west bank of the Jordan and trek with them through the forests of northern Canaan into Mesopotamia? This would have been the logical route for Eliezer to take to Aram Nahara'im, and it doesn't involve crossing deserts. We learn from chapter 24, verse 35, that Avraham also owned donkeys, which could have made the trip more easily: "וְה' בֵרַךְ אֶת־אֲדֹנָי מְאֹד וַיִּגְדַּל וַיִּתְנַלְמוּ – And Hashem has blessed my master greatly; and he has become great; and Hashem has given him flocks and herds, and silver and gold, and man-servants and maid-servants, and camels and donkeys."

Taking the camels was a stroke of genius on Eliezer's part. Unlike donkeys, camels can ingest up to 20 gallons of water in one shot. Eliezer had 10 camels with him, which meant an outlay of about 200 gallons of water. So if a woman offered to water Eliezer's camels, she was not just doing a small kindness of sharing a bit more water for the animals, but rather committing to a huge kindness that involved many, many extra trips to the well with "her pitcher on her shoulder."

Rivka's providing water for the camels also demonstrated her faith in God. The climate of the Levant is seasonal. Rains that fall in the winter are gathered in wells and cisterns and must last through the summer until the rains begin again the following winter. Two hundred gallons of water was a huge amount of such a precious commodity to give away. Rivka must have had faith that the well would be refilled or she would not have spent so much water on a stranger's animals.

The text itself highlights the presence of the camels, as the words גמל – *gamal* (camel) and גמלים – *gemalim* (camels) are used no fewer than 17 times in chapter 24, the chapter which describes the interaction between Eliezer and Rivka. Many of those times, the word seems extraneous. This pattern is referred to among Torah scholars as a מילה מנחה – *milah manchah* (guide word), which can lead the reader toward a line of thinking not immediately evident from a superficial reading of the text.

Who would have thought that the camels were so pivotal to the story of Eliezer and Rivka?

Shabbat Shalom.

For Discussion:

- What other reasons can you think of that Eliezer might have used camels as the means of transportation?
- Look at chapter 24. What words other than “kind” and “faithful” would you use to describe Rivka?
- The other named characters in the chapter are Avraham, Eliezer, Lavan, and Yitzchak. What characteristics would you assign to each of them based on the text?