

## Parshas Chayei Sara

# The Successful Mission

*In Parshas Chayei Sara, the Torah recounts the story of Yitzchak’s marriage. Avraham charges his servant Eliezer with the mission of finding a suitable wife for his son.*

Avraham instructs Eliezer as follows:

### Text 1

“And I will adjure you by the Lord, the G-d of the heaven and the G-d of the earth that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose midst I dwell. But you shall go to my land and to my birthplace, and you shall take a wife for my son, for Yitzchak.” And the servant said to him, “Perhaps the woman will not wish to go after me to this land. Shall I return your son to the land from which you came?” And Avraham said to him, “Beware, lest you return my son back there. The Lord, G-d of the heavens, Who took me from my father's house and from the land of my birth, and Who spoke about me, and Who swore to me, saying, 'To your seed will I give this land,' He will send His angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there.”

*Bereishis 24:3-7*

The above account is then repeated a second time when Eliezer tells Besuel, Rivka’s father, the words of Avraham.

There is, however, a discrepancy between what Avraham told Eliezer and what Eliezer relays to Rivka’s family in the name of Avraham:

### Text 2

And [food] was set before him [Eliezer] to eat, but he said, "I will not eat until I have spoken my words." And he [Besuel] said, "Speak." And he said, "I am Avraham's servant. And the Lord blessed my master exceedingly, and he became great, and He gave him sheep and cattle, silver and gold, man servants and maid servants, camels and donkeys. And Sara, my master's wife, bore a son to my master after she had become old, and he gave him all that he possesses. And my master adjured me, saying, 'You shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I dwell. Instead, you must go to my father's house and to my family, and take a wife for my son.' And I said to my master, 'Perhaps the woman will not follow me?' And he said to me, 'The Lord, before Whom I walked, will send His angel with you and make your way prosper, and you shall take a wife for my son from my family and from my father's house.'”

*Bereishis 24:33-40*

While Avraham said, “The Lord...will send His angel *before* you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there,” Eliezer says, “The Lord...will send His angel *with you* and make your way prosper, and you shall take a wife...”

Why did Eliezer change the words that his master had actually said for other ones?

While it seems that this is merely a stylistic difference, this discrepancy changes the connotation of the dialogue.

This can be noted in Rashi's commentary in Parshas Noach. It is understood there, that there is a significant difference between the words "before" and "with."

Regarding the Torah's description of Noach and Avraham and the relationship that each *tzadik* respectively had with the Almighty, the Torah employs a different language by each.

Concerning Noach, the verse<sup>1</sup> says, "These are the generations of Noach—Noach was a righteous man, he was perfect in his generations; Noach walked *with* G-d." However, in regard to Avraham, the verse states<sup>2</sup>, "The Lord, *before* Whom I walked."

In one verse the word "with" is employed and in another, the word "before." Rashi explains the discrepancy as follows:

### Text 3

But concerning Avraham, Scripture says (Bereishis, 24:40): "[The Lord] before Whom I walked." Noach required [G-d's] support to uphold him [in righteousness], but Avraham strengthened himself and walked in his righteousness by himself.

*Rashi, Bereishis 6:9*

From the above, it is apparent that the difference between the words, "with" and "before" is not merely cosmetic, but changes the meaning of the verse.

Noach walked *with* G-d, as G-d was always there for him to lean on, while Avraham walked *before* Him, since G-d did not need to support him from falling.

According to the distinction that Rashi makes between these words in regard to Noach and Avraham, a similar contrast can be understood in relation to the language used by Avraham and Eliezer.

### With and before

In our context, the distinction between the word "with" used by Eliezer, and the word "before" employed by Avraham, about the manner which G-d will intercede in the success of the mission, can be understood simply: "With you" means *together* with you, while "before you" means *prior* to your actions.

Meaning, that when Eliezer expressed Avraham's words to Besuel as, "The Lord...will send His angel *with you*," he was indicating that G-d was going to be a "support to uphold him" in the work that Eliezer was to do *himself*. G-d wasn't doing the work *for* Eliezer, he was doing it *with* him.

However, the language that Avraham himself had said to Eliezer was, "He will send His angel *before you*." Connoting, that not only will the angel *help* in the work that Eliezer was to do in finding a spouse for Yitzchak, but that the angel will also *ensure* beforehand that he will succeed in this mission. Success was already guaranteed from the onset.

<sup>1</sup> Bereishis 6:9

<sup>2</sup> Bereishis 24:40

## The fulfilment of Avraham's words

Avraham told Eliezer that his success would already be ensured from the onset, without any difficulties on Eliezer's end.

Indeed, this is what happened in Eliezer's mission, as can be clearly seen from the Torah's account of Eliezer's undertaking.

After Eliezer had arrived at his destination of Aram Naharaim, the following occurs:

### Text 4

And he made the camels kneel outside the city beside the well of water, at eventide, at the time the maidens go out to draw water. And he said, "O Lord, the G-d of my master Avraham, please cause to happen to me today, and perform loving kindness with my master, Avraham. Behold, I am standing by the water fountain, and the daughters of the people of the city are coming out to draw water. And it will be, [that] the maiden to whom I will say, 'Lower your pitcher and I will drink,' and she will say, 'Drink, and I will also water your camels,' her have You designated for Your servant, for Yitzchak, and through her may I know that You have performed loving kindness with my master." Now he had not yet finished speaking, and behold, Rivka came out, who had been born to Besuel the son of Milcah, the wife of Nachor, Avraham's brother, and her pitcher was on her shoulder.

*Bereishis 24:11-15*

The first instance where G-d's assistance is recognizable, is seen at the moment of Rivka's entry. Before Eliezer even finishes his prayers, Rivka already appears before him.

While one might assume that Eliezer was indeed a participant in causing Rivka to come to the well, as Rivka's arrival was in answer to his prayers—which is expressive of his participation—this is not the case.

From the verse's statement that, "he had not yet finished speaking, and behold, Rivka came out," it is indicative that Rivka's coming out was not as a *result* of his prayers<sup>3</sup>, but had been predestined to occur beforehand.

Indeed, for Rivka to have arrived at the scene before Eliezer finished his short prayer, G-d must have implanted into her mind the idea to set out to the well *before* Eliezer even began praying.

The reason that Eliezer needed to pray, and that Rivka's entry was subsequent to his prayers—though her arrival had already been ensured—was only so that *Eliezer* would recognize which girl the Almighty had sent.

Once Eliezer had made a sign in his prayers as to know who the proper girl would be, it became easy for *him* to spot the fitting bride for Yitzchak. His prayers though did not cause the actual event to come about.

Later on in the saga, after Eliezer meets Rivka's family and asks permission for the marriage to take place, Rivka's father Besuel attempts to resist to the match.

In immediate response, the angel of G-d sent to ensure that Rivka return with Eliezer, exterminated him.

<sup>3</sup> See Bereishis Rabba 60:4, which says that Eliezer was answered in his prayers. However, the

explanation of this *Sicha* follows the *simple* meaning of the verses.

This event can be observed in the course of the conversation between Rivka's family and Eliezer:

Originally, Besuel was part of the conversation, even admitting that this match was ordained by G-d, as he states<sup>4</sup>, "The matter has emanated from the Lord. We cannot speak to you either bad or good."

When the consent was finally given however, we see that Besuel was absent. The verse tells us:

### Text 5

And her brother and her mother said, "Let the maiden stay with us a year or ten [months]; afterwards she will go."

*Bereishis 24:55*

Rashi comments on the peculiarity that "her brother and mother" had made the statement and that her father, Besuel, was nowhere to be found. He explains:

### Text 6

And where was Besuel? He wanted to stop [Rivka's marriage]; so an angel came and slew him<sup>5</sup>.

*Rashi, ibid.*

G-d does not let anything get in the way of the match and executes Besuel when he attempts to stop it.

<sup>4</sup> Bereishis 24:50.

<sup>5</sup> Rashi's source is from Bereishis Rabbah 60:12.

Another example of G-d's direct involvement, is found when Eliezer asks Rivka to return with him. She immediately responds in the affirmative.

### Text 7

"Do not delay me, since the Lord has made my way prosper. Send me away, and I will go to my master." And they said, "Let us call the maiden and ask her." And they summoned Rivka, and they said to her, "Will you go with this man?" And she said, "I will go."

*Bereishis 24:56-57*

Rivka immediately acquiesced to journey with a man that she had met only a few moments before.

Why would a girl of three years old leave her parents' house against their wishes,<sup>6</sup> with a man that she had just met and knew nothing about?!

This is inexplicable unless understood as a G-dly interference—one which caused her to agree to the match without any cajoling on Eliezer's part.

### Why did Eliezer change his words?

If Avraham's words had such deliberate meaning, describing G-d's direct involvement in the mission—as expressed in the above-mentioned instances—why did Eliezer change those words? Why, when recounting Avraham's instructions at Rivka's home, did he say something that Avraham had not actually told him?

<sup>6</sup> See Rashi *ad loc* that she said she would go even if they did not consent.

The reason though, is fairly simple. Saying that his success was guaranteed from the outset would not be something that would be befitting to tell Besuel, when asking for his consent to the match.

Were Besuel to have been told that his opinion did not really matter, and that the match would take place regardless of whether he was interested (as actually happened), he would have dismissed the entire conversation from the onset, as Eliezer would essentially be telling him that he does not need his input!

Eliezer therefore finessed Avraham's words to make them palatable for Besuel to ingest. Instead of telling Besuel, "He will send His angel *before* you," which would render Besuel irrelevant in the discussion of sending his daughter, he told him, "The Lord...will send His angel *with* you."

The connotation implied that though G-d's assistance would definitely be present, it wasn't a done deal from the start, and Besuel's input was necessary.

### Changing the order

Based on the understanding of the above, we can appreciate a second dissimilarity in Eliezer's dialogue with Besuel to the way the event occurred:

Eliezer tells Besuel<sup>7</sup>, "And I asked her, and I said, 'Whose daughter are you?' And she replied, 'The daughter of Besuel the son of Nachor, whom Milcah bore to him.' And I placed the nose ring on her nose and the bracelets on her hands."

Instead of recounting the true order of these occurrences—where Eliezer had actually first given Rivka the many gifts, and only afterwards

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<sup>7</sup> Bereishis 24:47.

asked her about her lineage<sup>8</sup>—he instead first tells Besuel that he asked Rivka about who she was, and then that he gave her the jewelry.

Eliezer had given Rivka the jewelry before he asked about her identity, being that he was certain that the Almighty assured the success of his mission from the onset, and that having fit the qualifications of his sign, she was indeed the destined bride.

However, when he repeated this to Besuel, he did not wish to tell him that he was already assured success, and therefore rearranged the sequence of the events.

### True success

Though Eliezer may not have overtly expressed the success that Avraham had guaranteed him, he did manage to embed in his account, words that alluded to this assurance.

### Text 8

And I said to my master, "Perhaps the woman will not follow me?" And he said to me, "The Lord, before Whom I walked, will send His angel with you and make your way *prosper*, and you shall take a wife for my son from my family and from my father's house..." So I came today to the fountain, and I said, "O Lord, G-d of my master Avraham, if You desire to prosper my way upon which I am going."

*Bereishis 24:40-42*

Eliezer did not only change the words "before you" to "with you," he also added that G-d would

<sup>8</sup> Bereishis 24:22-23.

help him *prosper*—words that had not been in Avraham’s original statement.

Eliezer said these words since he himself believed that true *success* is when the Almighty completes *all* the work for the individual, without any exertion on his part.

Therefore, instead of informing Besuel outright that G-d had sent His angel *before* him, he said that G-d promised that he would prosper. Through telling Besuel that G-d would help him *prosper*, he was insinuating his ensured success without saying so in a way that would be disruptive to his mission.

### True success

The word “prosper” is found later on in the book of Bereishis, in the language that the Torah uses when describing the success of Yosef in Egypt.

### Text 9

The Lord was with Yosef, and he was a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master. And his master saw that the Lord was with him, and whatever he [Yosef] did, the Lord made prosper in his hand.

*Bereishis 39:2-3*

When the verse expresses Yosef’s success, it stresses multiple times that the prosperity came from the Holy One, blessed be He.

Yosef’s success in all that he did was not because of *his* own work, but it was G-d who was there

<sup>9</sup> Bereishis 24:5.

for him the entire time, assuring that all his actions would be fruitful.

In both Eliezer’s and Yosef’s situations, the guaranteed success by the Almighty, is expressed in the same manner.

In both of these scenarios the Almighty caused them to *prosper* and succeed without needing to put in usual efforts of their own.

Therefore, by expressing to Besuel that he was promised success, Eliezer was essentially saying the exact same thing as Avraham—that the fulfillment of the mission was already guaranteed from the onset.

### Being Sure

According to the above explanation, we can also explain a perplexing detail in Avraham’s words.

When Eliezer asks Avraham<sup>9</sup>, “Perhaps the woman will not wish to go after me to this land,” Avraham tells him<sup>10</sup>, “The Lord, G-d of the heavens...He will send His angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there.”

Avraham instructs Eliezer, “You shall take a wife,” guaranteeing that he would be successful. This though is not understood:

How did Avraham know from the onset that there definitely would be a woman willing to return with Eliezer to marry Yitzchak?

According to the above explanation of G-d’s ensured success through His angel however, this too becomes clear.

In the same manner in which the angel’s intervention ensures that the individual’s own efforts are not necessary or taken into account,

<sup>10</sup> Bereishis 24:6.

and that success is guaranteed, the same too is with free choice.

In the case of G-d's comprehensive assurance of success, there is nothing that a person can or cannot do to interfere with the pre-destined G-dly plan.

G-d had ensured that there would be a girl that would return with Eliezer and marry Yitzchak.

Though the concept of free choice continued to exist, in the quest of finding a proper wife for Yitzchak, G-d ensured that there would be a girl worthy and willing to make the journey back<sup>11</sup>.

### Speaking is better

We can now explain the following statement Rashi make concerning Eliezer's portion in this mission.

From the fact that this episode was recorded twice in the Torah—once when the story actually took place, and the second when Eliezer recounted it—the following observation was made:

#### Text 10

Rabbi Acha said: "The conversation of the servants of the Patriarchs is more beloved before the Omnipresent than the Torah of their sons, for the section dealing with Eliezer is repeated in the Torah, whereas many fundamentals of the Torah were given only through allusions."

*Rashi, Bereishis 24:42*<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> I.e. each specific girl was able to choose not to return with him, but there would be one girl who would. See Rambam, Laws of Teshuvah 6:5 concerning the decision of the Egyptians to enslave

When it comes to the children—the Jewish people--G-d leaves free choice in their hands.

However, concerning Eliezer, a Canaanite servant, he was given the ability to succeed in a way that superseded choice.

In this aspect, Eliezer's greatness is deemed as higher than that of the sons, as G-d intervened in a way that He usually does not—ensuring his success before his mission even began.

In order for G-d to intercede in a manner which transcends a person's own efforts, as can be seen in the story of Eliezer, there are two prerequisites:

- 1) A person needs to be like "the *servants* of the Patriarchs." His entire identity needs to be defined as a servant of his Master.
- 2) A person must pray to G-d. He cannot rely on his own abilities, but must depend solely on the Almighty, just as Eliezer did.

We see this expressed in the quote, "The *conversation* of the *servants* of the Patriarchs is more beloved before the Omnipresent than the Torah of their sons." "Conversation" in this context means prayer.

G-d dealt with Eliezer in this awesome manner, because he was a servant who had no personal identity of his own, and because he prayed to him.

The connection between the terms "conversation" (as mentioned in the above

the Jewish people, and why they were punished, though the exile of the Jewish people in the hands of the Egyptians was predestined.

<sup>12</sup> Based on Bereishis Rabba 60:8.

quote) and “prayer” can be seen from the following verse regarding Yitzchak:

### **Text 11**

Yitzchak instituted the afternoon *tefilah* (prayer), as it says, “And Yitzchak went out to converse in the field at evening,” and “converse” means only prayer, as it says<sup>13</sup>, “A prayer of the afflicted when he swoons and pours forth his conversation before the Lord.”

*Talmud 26b*

The Talmud tells us that conversing means prayer. Eliezer’s success in his mission was guaranteed because he relied completely on the Almighty.

When a person realizes that he cannot rely on his own abilities and prays to G-d, he becomes a conduit to receive G-dly assistance directly, through which he can succeed in a fashion that is leaps and bounds beyond what he can attain through his own abilities.

### **The lesson**

Although there is a distinction between Eliezer and the Jewish people in the matter of free choice in general—in which Eliezer was able to reach a level of guaranteed success, whereas the Jewish people need to put in efforts through their own accord—from the fact that this story is part of Torah, it is understood that there is a lesson for us as well.

This story demonstrates that “children” too, can reach the level of “servants.”

When a person is complete nullified to G-d and merely acts as the agent to fulfill His mission, like a servant, praying to the Almighty for success in

his mission in making this world a dwelling place for the Almighty, he receives blessings of success in the same manner as Avraham promised to Eliezer: “He will send His angel before you” and “make your way prosper.”

He will be successful in the ultimate mission of the Holy One, blessed by He, in taking the Jewish people as a bride for Almighty with the coming of *Moshiach*.

*(Based on Likutei Sichos 25, reworked by Rabbi Dovid Markel. To see other projects and to partner in our work, visit: [www.Neirot.com](http://www.Neirot.com).)*

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<sup>13</sup> Tehillim 102:1.