

THE VALUE OF HIS PARKING PLACE

by Rabbi Label Lam

And the servant said to him, "Perhaps (OOLAI) the woman will not wish to go after me to this land. Shall I return your son to the land from which you came?" (Breishis 24:5)

And he (Lavan) said, "Come, you who are blessed of HASHEM. Why should you stand outside, when I have cleared the house, and a place for the camels?" ... And he (Eliezer) said, "A servant of Avraham, am I". (Breishis 24:31-34) And I said to my master, 'Perhaps (OOLAI- spelled Alli) the woman will not follow me?' (Breishis 24:39)

Perhaps the woman will not follow me: It [the word אֲלַי(perhaps)] is written [without a "vav" and may be read] אֵלַי(to me). Eliezer had a daughter, and he was looking for a pretext so that Avraham would tell him, to turn to him, to marry off his daughter to him (Yitzchok). Avraham said to him, "My son is blessed, and you are cursed [Eliezer was a descendant of Canaan who had been cursed by Noah], and an accursed one cannot unite with a blessed one." (Rashi)

Perhaps the woman will not follow me: It [the word אֲלַי(perhaps)] is written [without a "vav" and may be read] אֵלַי(to me). Eliezer had a daughter, and he was looking for a pretext so that Abraham would tell him, to turn to him, to marry off his daughter to him (Isaac). Abraham said to him, "My son is blessed, and you are cursed [Eliezer was a descendant of Canaan who had been cursed by Noah], and an accursed one cannot unite with a blessed one."

Let us piece together as simply as possible the tidbits of conversation recorded here. Eliezer, the servant of Avraham, whose name is not mentioned in the entire portion, is about to be sent on a sacred mission to find a wife for his master's son Yitzchok. Before he goes he is sworn to bring back the proper mate, because Yitzchok, for whatever reason cannot go there, to a foreign land. Eliezer asks a practical question, "And what if the woman will not wish to go after me to this land?" No problem so far.

Later when Eliezer is recounting the whole story of his mission to Lavan and the family of Rivka so that they will be willing to send her with confidence, he recalls the dialogue he had with Avraham and he repeats almost word for word the same exchange, "And what if the woman will not wish to go after me to this land?" Here's the first evidence of a problem. In the spelling of the word for "with me" -OOLAI, it is spelled without a vuv rendering the pronunciation (according to the written appearance) ALLI- to me. Our sages detect here that Eliezer had a conflict as it is explained in Rashi

above. He had a daughter he felt would be a suitable match for Yitzchok, but Avraham quieted that thought with a blunt remark. "Blessed does bond with cursed!" It's not a good match.

Now a great question, not my own. The Sefas Emes asks why Eliezer betrays his internal conflict here, in the retelling part. Why is that not mentioned at the address of the original conversation with Avraham? Why is it mentioned here, in his repetition of the episode? He answers profoundly. Something happened in between. Eliezer was the living definition of loyalty.

His entire identity was subsumed to Abraham. Since he was from a cursed origin, and he was to be a servant, he elected to serve the most blessed individual of his day, Avraham. That was his greatness. If he couldn't draw spiritual waters from the source himself, then he could assist those who had greatest access to the fountains of spirituality. He was blocked from that direct connection, which is a state of being cursed, and he correctly recognized it and nobly accepted it.

However, when Lavan welcomed him, "Come, you who are blessed of HASHEM!" - a giant test was aroused within him. Now it seems he is being recognized as being blessed. "Maybe something has changed! Maybe now my daughter is a valid match!" Just then he arrested himself and responded immediately, "A servant of Avraham, am I!" "That is the source of my even being identified as blessed." In his later recollection he reveals this fault line of his wavering loyalty that he eventually overcame. Maybe... in a hopeful way the girl won't come with! There was no test initially! It only woke up with Lavan's praise, referring to him as blessed of HASHEM!

This is the nature of the test of success. How many different versions of the same joke are there? The fellow in desperation pledges increasingly larger sums of charity if HASHEM will only help him find a parking place. When he finds a parking place, he looks up to Heaven and brazenly declares, "G-d I already found a parking spot by myself!" Eliezer, Boruch HASHEM, had the wisdom to appreciate **the value of his parking place**. DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and Torah.org.