

SEEING THROUGH THE COVER

by Rabbi Shlomo Jarcaig

Eliezer, our forefather Avraham's faithful servant, was dispatched to find a wife for his master's son, Yitzchak (Isaac). He decided to test the candidate to determine if she possessed the character needed by the one who would marry Yitzchak. "And he said, 'Hashem, G-d of my master Avraham...Let it be that the maiden to whom I shall say, "Please tip over your jug so I may drink," and who replies, "Drink, and I will even water your camels," her will you have designated for Your servant, for Yitzchak.'" (Beraishis/Genesis 24:12-14)

Bais HaLevi (biblical commentary of Rabbi Yosef Dov HaLevi Soloveitchik (1820-1892), Rosh HaYeshiva/Dean in Volozhin and later Rabbi of Slutzk and Brisk; considered one of the most brilliant Talmudists of the 19th century) explains that Eliezer's asking Rivka (Rebecca) for water not only tested her kindness to strangers, but also demonstrated her intelligence and sensitivity to the feelings of others. Not knowing Eliezer's hygiene or state of health, what would she do with the leftover water? If she took it home, that would indicate a lack of aptitude. If she would pour the water out onto the ground, surely the stranger would understand and be embarrassed. A sensitive, intelligent person would offer the remaining water to the animals. Rivka demonstrated an even grater level of kindness than expected by giving all of the animals drink until they were satiated.

When Eliezer determined that she was the desired candidate and offered a proposal of marriage, her family protested her imminent departure, seeking a delay. Asked what she desired, Rivka responded, "I will go" (24:58), upon which Rashi comments, "Of my own will, even if you do not agree." How could Rivka, who had just demonstrated her intelligence and sensitivity, so swiftly reject the security of family and home to marry Yitzchak, whom she had never met before? How was she so certain that he was the person with whom she wanted to spend the rest of her life, that he was of appropriate character to be her life's partner and to share in raising their children?

Rabbi Shlomo Morgenstern (Rosh HaYeshiva, Bais Medrash L'Torah of Skokie, Illinois) clarifies that much can be learned about a person from by how they view others. As Avraham's niece, Rivka knew that his family was wealthy and prestigious. The influence and impact of this family on world events was renowned. Ostensibly, Yitzchak could have married whom ever he wanted, but he did not pursue wealth or physical beauty, as many others in his situation would have done. Rather, he sought someone with kindness and sensitivity. If these were the traits Yitzchak valued, then she had no question that he was ideal for her.

It has been said that money can't buy happiness. G-d gives us the gifts of all things physical -

money, food, shelter, a body - as facilitators for our spiritual growth, as vehicles and utensils with which we foster our G-d consciousness. We use them for tzedaka (charity), for chesed (acts of kindness), for our own sustenance so we can perform other mitzvos (Divine commandments). Viewing the world through this prism, we strive to emulate our forbearers, who saw and valued others not for what they owned or how they looked, but for whom they truly were.

Have a Good Shabbos!

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