

IT'S THE EFFORT THAT COUNTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

"The servant ran to meet her and said, 'please let me drink a little water from your jug.'" [24:17]

Eliezer went to the city of Nachor, to Avraham's family, to find a wife for Yitzchak. He asked for an omen to indicate the right woman, and Rivka immediately came out.

Why did Eliezer run to meet her? Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki explains from the Medrash: because he saw that the water rose to greet her. She was so righteous that G-d performed a little miracle for her when she merely went out to draw water.

The Ramban, Nachmanides, looks for a source for this Medrash, and finds it several verses later. There, the verse (24:20) says that Rivka "drew" water from the well for Eliezer's camels. In verse 16, however, Rivka merely "went down to the spring, filled her jug, and ascended." Apparently, she did not need to draw the water the first time -- and the Medrash tells us that that is correct, she did not!

The Kedushas Levi asks: why was she required to draw water the second time? Why did the water not rise to greet her when she went to fill her jug for the camels?

His answer is fascinating. When she went to the well the first time, her intent was only to fill the jug for her own needs. The water then rose to greet her in order that she not trouble herself -- G-d made the world serve her.

The second time, however, her intent was to perform the mitzvah of bestowing kindness on another person. She was not drawing the water for her own needs, but rather in order to fulfill the will of her Creator. The performance of a mitzvah is a Holy act -- not something which Heaven would want to abbreviate. This is why the water did not rise the second time, because the effort and trouble which a person goes through in order to perform a mitzvah is tremendously valuable in the eyes of HaShem.

Recently, a member of our staff got married, and the wedding was in another city. Thanks to a sudden change in travel plans, I arrived in the city without having had the chance to prepare and change in advance. Fortunately, at the last minute, I was able to find a family friend to take me in.

Afterwards, I mentioned to my host that the reward for doing an act of kindness must surely depend not only upon the effort made by the one performing the act, but the benefit derived by the recipient. For him, the kindness was trivial -- a bit of soap, water, and the use of a towel. But for me, I would have definitely spent \$30 at Motel 6 if he hadn't been there to help.

He said that he arrived at the same conclusion after the birth of his youngest child. While his wife was in the hospital, the fact that a neighbor was willing to walk his son to school -- along with the neighbor's own child, meaning the additional effort was almost nothing -- made it possible for my friend to go to daven (pray) in the morning. Again, it cost the neighbor almost nothing, but was a tremendous favor to my friend.

At the same time, he said, we know that "according to the effort is the reward." And that is what we see from this week's parsha. HaShem did not want to make it easier for Rivka to do the mitzvah of giving water to Eliezer's camels, because it is the doing itself, the effort, that is so important.

Often we find ourselves thinking that a mitzvah is hard to do. We're making a mistake -- it's not supposed to be easy! "According to the effort is the reward," so we don't want all our mitzvos on a silver platter!