

# ARE WE 'ON THE LIST'?

*by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann*

Eliezer, faithful servant of Avraham, is sent on a mission; to find a kallah (bride) for Yitzchok. She must fill the void left by the death of Sarah.

He asks for a sign from Heaven. "Hashem, G-d of my master Avraham, please arrange it for me today, and do kindness with my master Avraham... Let it be that the maiden to whom I say, 'Please tip your jug and I will drink,' and she says, 'Drink, and I will water your camels as well,' let her be the designated (kallah) of Yitzchok." (24:12-14)

Just after he finishes praying his wishes are seemingly answered. Rivkah arrives at the well. She fills her jug, and Eliezer asks her for a drink. She gives him to drink, and waters his camels as well. It seems like a done deal. Yet Eliezer still seems unsure. "The man marvelled at her; he silently reflected, wondering whether Hashem would make his journey successful or not. (21)"

When she finishes, he takes bracelets and rings and gives them to her. Rashi understands these are a form of betrothal. He questions why Eliezer would betroth her before verifying that she was Avraham's relative (this had been a stipulation)? He answers that at this point Eliezer was already sure; his sign had come true. But the Torah seems to say otherwise: "He silently reflected, wondering whether Hashem would make his journey successful or not." Indeed, Ralbag differs with Rashi and contends that the jewellery was merely payment for her kindness, albeit a generous one.

After verifying that she is indeed family, Eliezer then asks her if they have room for him to stay a night. She replies, "We even have plenty of straw and feed, as well as place to lodge!" "So the man (Eliezer) bowed down and prostrated himself to Hashem. He said, 'Blessed is Hashem, G-d of my master Avraham, Who has not withheld His kindness and truth from my master...' (25-27)

This passage (coupled with the fact that Eliezer was still 'wondering') seem to clearly indicate that for some reason, Eliezer abandoned his original sign and was waiting for something else. What? If it was only to verify her family, he should have bowed and thanked Hashem as soon as that point had been clarified. It is only after she offers him lodging and feed for his animals that he seems ready. Why did the conditions change, and what was it that finally convinced him to close the deal?

The holy Rebbe, R' Ber of Radoshitz zt"l was one of the great disciples of the Maggid of Koznitz zt"l. He later became a leader in his own right. During his years in Koznitz, there was a friend, R' Hersh, with whom he was especially close. It was thus with great pleasure that many years later, R' Hersh suddenly arrived in Radoshitz for an unexpected visit. After catching up on times passed, R' Hersh

got to the point: "Baruch Hashem, my oldest daughter is engaged to be married. However, I have not the means to pay for her wedding, let alone cover her dowry. The holy Rebbe, the Maggid, has given me a letter; he asks anyone who can to help me."

R' Ber couldn't help noticing the tear glistening in his friend's eye. It saddened him to see R' Hersh, a man of great distinction, brought to wandering from town to town asking for handouts. Yet what was he to do? R' Ber himself subsisted on a minimal budget.

"My dear friend, were it that I had any spare money, I would not withhold from you my last coin. Alas, I have not even one coin to give you. Furthermore, everyone here knows me and my situation—I deserve no great honour, and am not given any. If I were to go around collecting for you, they would give me small change at best. I feel it is best that you collect yourself; your manner bears witness to your great stature. There is a wealthy man in Radoshitz, and I pray he will give you generously..."

R' Hersh hid his disappointment. "Okay, thanks all the same. I guess your name doesn't appear on the list! Peace to you." And with that he left.

"My name doesn't appear on the list?" R' Ber wondered. "What list? What did he mean?" He tried to get his friend's comment out of his mind, but his thoughts kept returning to it. He put on his coat, and started running after R' Hersh. He caught up with him a few minutes later.

"R' Hersh—stop! I must ask you: What list were you talking about?"

"Oh," he said, "when I approached the holy Maggid, and he gave me my letter, I said, 'Rebbe, I've never done this before—I don't know how to ask people for money!' The Rebbe told me, 'R' Hersh, don't worry. Each town you arrive in, someone will approach you and help you collect. You will not have to beg for yourself.' 'But why would someone want to suffer the shame of begging on my behalf—who am I to deserve such treatment?' I asked. 'Don't worry,' the Maggid told me. 'Hashem has a list. On His list it's already written down exactly who will help you in each town. All you have to do is go...'

"When I came to Radoshitz, I thought to myself, 'Whose name could be on Hashem's list?' I could think of no-one here more worthy than you, so I was sure you were on the list. That's why I came to you. When you weren't able to help me, I figured you weren't on Hashem's list. Perhaps that wealthy man you told me about, maybe he's the one..."

R' Ber was obviously affected by his words. "Tell me—how much do you need?"

"Four hundred gulden."

"Come, let's see what happens." R' Ber took his letter and began walking through the marketplace. Seeing a familiar face, he approached a merchant and, showing him the letter, he asked if he could help his friend. "R' Ber, you've arrived at a most opportune moment. I just completed a very profitable deal—today I made 4,000 gulden. Take 400 gulden—it's my tithe!"

R' Ber was taken aback. After thanking the merchant, he sat down on a bench with his friend. His eyes filled with tears. "I guess I was on Hashem's list after all—but I almost lost my chance!"

Or HaChaim ha-kadosh writes that this was Eliezer's approach. "Hashem, G-d of my master Avraham, please arrange it for me today..." He knew, writes the Or HaChaim, that Avraham's prayers would be answered. He asked only that he should have the merit to have this crucial shidduch come about through his efforts. (Mayan HaShavua)

Often we think that when we do mitzvos we're somehow doing Hashem a favour. Especially when we help others, we feel we've filled some void. Of course we realize that Hashem doesn't need our mitzvos in any way, but still we feel smug for having done the right thing, and helped out when there was no one else to help.

From this story we see that the true approach is precisely the opposite. A mitzvah is an opportunity. Someone is going to chap (grab) it. Hashem doesn't need you to do it; He has plenty of other ways to get things accomplished. But if you like, you can grab the chance and get your name on His list.

When someone comes to our door and asks for a donation, especially if we gave generously, we expect some form of gratitude. In fact, we should thank him profusely for giving us the opportunity to do such a great mitzvah.

This was very clear to Eliezer. He had no doubt learned it from his master, Avraham. It was thus a quality which he looked for in Yitzchok's kallah—not only that she do mitzvos and kindness, but that she appreciate them as a treasure, rather than a burden or an obligation. His 'sign' that she was such a person was that when asked to do some kindness, she would respond by offering more than she had been asked for. Only one who truly treasures mitzvos gives even more than requested.

When he asked her for a drink, she gave him, but she did not offer his camels. Although she ultimately give them as well, he was still not convinced; perhaps she noticed they were thirsty, and only then thought of giving them to drink.

He continued to wait. Only after he asked to stay the night, and she responded by offering long-term lodging, as well as feeding his camels— both things he never asked for—did he know she was the one. She knew the secret of 'the list,' and she wanted her name there. Only then did Eliezer bow to Hashem.

It is told that there was a period of three months during which the holy R' Zusia of Anipoli zt"l had no means to earn a living and was literally starving. There was no one around that had the merit to chap the mitzvah, so Hashem arranged he should be fed in a miraculous fashion. Let us never smugly think, "It's lucky I was around to do the mitzvah," but rather, "How lucky I am to have had this opportunity! My name was on The List!"

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