

# ELIEZER'S TRUE ODYSSEY

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

## Friday Night:

*He (Lavan) told him (Eliezer), "Come in blessed one of G-d; why stand outside? I have cleared the house, and a place for the camels." (Bereishis 24:31)*

Poor Eliezer. The Midrash tells us that it had been his hope and dream that his own daughter would become the wife of his beloved master, Avraham. However, he could never be so bold as to even make such a request, knowing that he had descended from the cursed family line of Canaan, and Avraham was a descendant of the blessed family line of Shem.

So, loyal to his master to the very end, Eliezer embarked on his sacred mission to find a wife for Yitzchak from the family of Besuel. However, unbeknownst to Eliezer himself at the time, he was actually embarking on a path to personal freedom and a departure from the world of curse to that of blessing.

How did it happen? The Arizal explains:

Originally, Eliezer the servant of Avraham was included in the curse of Canaan, but entered the side of the 'blessed' when Lavan told him, "Come in blessed of G-d" (Bereishis 24:31), as Chazal explain (Bereishis Rabbah 60). Since Lavan merited this level, he was able to take him out of the category of being cursed. Therefore, he (Lavan) also became rectified, and reincarnated into Naval HaCarmelli, the two of whom were the reincarnation of Bilaam. This is what Chazal meant when they said on the posuk, "For the conductor on the death of Laben (lamed-bais-nun)" (Tehillim 9:1), that it refers to Naval. (Shaar HaGilgulim, Chapter 36)

In fact, this helps us to understand something that the rabbis have also questioned. As Rashi points out, the Forefathers were so important to G-d that even the conversations of their servants were worth mentioning and even repeating, as we see in this week's parshah. However, according to the Arizal, even their connection to the Forefathers may not have been enough to be included in the very holy Torah. Continues the Arizal:

"Had the blessing of Lavan not worked for Eliezer, then, he would not have been included in G-d's Torah of truth. This is why Chazal are compelled to say that he went out from being cursed."

However, the most amazing part of Eliezer's transformation from cursed to blessed is what it

allowed him to become, eventually:

"Thus, Lavan caused Eliezer to become rectified, and as a result, he (Eliezer) reincarnated into Caleiv ben Yefuneh."

And, the allusion to this future "promotion" is alluded to in a posuk from this week's parshah:

"This is why he is called 'ben Yefuneh,' that is, 'the son of Lavan', as it says, 'I have cleared (p'nisi) the house . . .' (Bereishis 24:31) - for Eliezer. For, he thought that since he entered him into the side of being blessed, he rectified him and that he would reincarnate into Caleiv through his blessing. After all, Caleiv was the son of Chetzron, and not the son of 'Yefuneh,' as Chazal question. Therefore, they interpret it to mean that he was 'ben sh'pinah' that is, 'free' from the advice of the spies."

In simpler terms, Caleiv's father's name was not "Yefuneh," but "Chetzron." Chazal explain that the meaning of the switch was to indicate that Caleiv did not buy into the plan of the spies. However, the Arizal is saying that though that is true, it is, on a deeper level, a hint to how the soul of Eliezer the Canaanite became Caleiv the heroic Jew. That is, it happened through Lavan when he blessed him and cleared the house for him, making Eliezer, in a spiritual sense, a son of Lavan.

Who would have thought that the "evil" Lavan could have such a positive effect on Jewish history? Then again, he was the grandfather of all twelve tribes of the Jewish people.

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## Shabbos Day:

*Yitzchak brought her (Rivkah) into the tent of Sarah his mother. He married Rivkah and loved her, and found consolation from his mother's [death]. (Bereishis 24:67)*

Knowing the above information also helps to explain something else later in history. Caleiv was one of the twelve spies that left to spy Eretz Yisroel in advance of the arrival of the Jewish people. Only he and Yehoshua spoke differently than the rest of the other ten spies and voted to accept the gift of Eretz Yisroel, for which he was rewarded with the extra territory of Chevron.

To protect Yehoshua from the plan of the spies, the Midrash teaches, Moshe added the letter yud to Hoshea's name to make it "Yehoshua." However, Caleiv was left to his own devices to counteract the pressure of the ten spies to speak badly about Eretz Yisroel. Thus, says the Midrash, he first headed for Chevron and the place of burial of Avraham, where he prostrated himself and invoked the great Forefather's help.

We don't need an additional reason to know why Caleiv went there; invoking divine assistance is often made easier when going through great tzaddikim of the past. Nevertheless, the Arizal adds the following insight, which makes understanding Caleiv's actions simpler.

Since Caleiv was also from Eliezer the servant of Avraham, he went to Chevron, as Chazal say: He went and prostrated himself on the burial spot of the Forefathers (Sotah 34b). For, Avraham is the leader, and he was his servant, so therefore he went to him specifically. (Shaar HaGilgulim, Chapter 36)

In other words, whether Caleiv was aware of it or not, he had an inner drive to "return" to Chevron and seek out his master from a previous life. It was the Eliezer within Caleiv that drove him back to that ancient site at a time that he needed help the most to remain attached to the Land given to and loved by his master, Avraham Avinu.

Perhaps that is also why he is called "Caleiv," which is spelled with the same letters as "kelev," which means "dog." One of the main POSITIVE characteristics of a dog is that he loves to run ahead of his master, but not too far ahead. In fact, his loyalty to and dependency on his master forces him to often look back behind him to see where his master is. True to this trait, the soul of Eliezer "ran" ahead to the future, but looked back to his master of the past for direction and security.

It is interesting to note that the yud that became attached to Yehoshua's name came from Eliezer's master's wife, Sarah Imeinu. Even though both Yehoshua and Caleiv had different sources of spiritual strength to withstand the test of the spies, in the end, they both came from the same home, that of Avraham and Sarah.

When it comes to that particular yud, which had once been attached to Sarah's name before it was changed from "Sarai" to "Sarah," it was more than just a symbol of the World-to-Come. As we see from this week's parshah, three weekly miracles revealed the spiritual greatness of Sarah Imeinu: the blessing of the challah, the Shabbos candles that burned continuously on their own from week to week, and the special cloud that enveloped her tent (Rashi, Bereishis 24:67) - all of which occurred for Rivkah once she entered her deceased mother-in-law's tent.

In other words, Sarah's life was a miniature Gan Aiden, and she herself was a tikun for Chava's original mistake. She lived in a somewhat perfected state, which explains her deep attachment to the Holy Land. When Moshe handed over the yud from Sarah's name to become part of Yehoshua's name, he imbued him with that quality as well.

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## **SEUDAH SHLISHIS:**

*Avraham was an elder, well on in years.* (Bereishis 24:1)

The yeshivah, many might think, is a new convention. However, the idea of young men going off to some central hall to spend their days learning the Torah and the Talmud is not new at all. In fact, the Talmud writes:

Avraham Avinu was an elder sitting in the yeshivah. (Yoma 28b)

And the proof, says the Talmud? The above verse:

Avraham was an elder, well on in years. (Bereishis 24:1)

In fact, the Talmud concludes, Avraham fulfilled all the mitzvos including the rabbinical ordinance of *eruvei tavshillin* - the law of setting aside food for Shabbos in advance of the Yom Tov that precedes it, to permit preparation for Shabbos on that Yom Tov.

Of course, this begs the question: How did Avraham know what the rabbis were going to decree in the future? It is already remarkable enough that Avraham knew about the Torah mitzvos hundreds of years in advance of Mt. Sinai, but rabbinical decrees over 1,000 years in advance of their need?

The answer to this question is also an important insight into mitzvos and rabbinical decrees themselves. Simply put, mitzvos are a response to the needs of creation, that is, what creation "needs" to allow man to become a partner with G-d in bringing creation to fulfillment of the original intention for its existence. They are not the "icing" on the cake, so-to-speak, and the extraneous additions to the main element. They ARE the main element, custom-designed by G-d to tap into man's G-dly abilities to spiritually elevate creation.

With people, the more sensitive one is to another person and his or her nature, the more one can surmise what that person needs to achieve stability and completion. Likewise with creation, the more spiritually sensitive one becomes to creation, partly through experience but mostly through Torah, the more one is able to work out on his own what creation needs to achieve perfection, and what he works out will resemble Torah.

So why did G-d have to give the Torah in the end? Because man, as usual, began to work on solutions for creation without first understanding the true nature of the problem, and thus, his assessment of the needs of creation missed the mark, greatly. The Torah is an objective standard against which we measure our vision of creation and its goals.

It is amazing how, even today, you meet people who have come to live by certain principles of Torah long before they even knew what Torah had to say, principles that are not usually so obvious to the masses around the world. Each of these people share one common trait: sensitive to the world around them and respectful of their opportunity of life. In their own small and personal way, they are the Avraham Avinus of history.

However, not enough people are this way, and there are many who are already familiar with Torah who lack sufficient spiritual sensitivity to even use the Torah's mitzvos properly, to fully accomplish the goals of creation. Thus, the rabbis "extended" the mitzvos to make it "easier" - that's right, EASIER - to use our innate G-dliness and the potential of creation to come closer to G-d and to achieve fulfillment.

The 613 Torah Commandments and the Seven Rabbinical "mitzvos" combine to make up the "620 Pillars of Light" that emanate out from the spiritually high level of Arich Anpin. You don't know what that means? It means that all aspects of Torah, including the rabbinical decrees such as "eiruv tavshillin," have their roots at the most sublime levels, even if they don't appear until later points in history.

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## MELAVE MALKAH:

### Perceptions On The Times

#### Article #1: In Egypt

To an article I recently wrote for a web site, I received the following remark:

*Anonymous, 10/29/2001*

*What happened to Tikun Olam?*

*How can we as Jews allow ourselves to lose ourselves in this talk about the world ending? This is no different than the apocalyptic talk that goes on after any tragedy. While six million Jews were dying in the Holocaust and the whole of Europe was at war, our ancestors had a right to believe that the world was ending - especially their (our) world. We have not yet seen concrete evidence of this happening in our generation and it is imperative that we do not think this way or we will have already lost the battle. The terrorists want us to abandon our efforts to heal and repair the world, and by thinking that they will destroy what we have built up for a millinea, is a blatant disgrace to our people. This could be perhaps an even greater tragedy. Psychologically we must not let ourselves fall into the trap. We must do our part and use these awful events to help us remember what is important in life - not what we should do to prepare for the worst.*

Anonymous writes, "... thinking that they will destroy what we have built up for a millinea, is a blatant disgrace to our people. This could be perhaps an even greater tragedy."

I suggest that a person with such a point of view, reorient himself with the goals of Torah, improve his research of Jewish history over the millennia, and gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics of Divine Providence before defining "a disgrace to the Jewish people." There can be fewer disgraces to our people than vast assimilation, 52% intermarriage, lack of unity, and wholesale rejection of Torah values. How glorified is the house if the people inside do not remain true to the values upon which it is founded?

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Imagine the following scenario. It is Egypt in the year 2447 from creation, 1314 BCE, in the Jewish month of Elul. After being in Egypt for 209 years, 115 of which have been in slavery, the lives of the Jewish have begun to change. Two terrible and bizarre things have happened to Egypt: first, the Nile

turned to blood before returning to water one week later, and three weeks later, the land became infested with frogs.

Moshe returned. The Jew turned Egyptian prince turned prophet of G-d returned back to Egypt to free the Jewish people from their Egyptian bondage once and for all. However, the last time he tried (just over six months ago) to accomplish the same impossible feat, only made matters worse, resulting in increased, not reduced slavery. Thus, his talk of redemption is, for the most part, falling on deaf ears.

"Listen Moshe, aside from a few strange occurrences here and there, nothing really concrete has happened to suggest that you are correct about this redemption thing. Egypt is still master of its own destiny and not about to let their prized possessions - millions of capable Jewish slaves - leave their line of employment so quickly and travel to another country. Paroah seems unmoved by the blood thing and all those frogs."

"Nothing concrete?!" an incredulous Moshe asks. "All the waters of Egypt turning into blood without any natural explanation, disappearing upon my command, and a week of massive amounts of frogs going everywhere except Goshen where Jews live, you say 'nothing concrete'?"

"Well, I didn't say that they weren't interesting . . . and significant. But you know, Moshe, stranger things have happened before. Did you test the water to see if it was really blood? Did the frogs come from nowhere? Leaving Egypt is serious business you know. We may only be slaves, but we're well-rooted slaves, you know, used to being here and living in this country. It wouldn't be, well, you know, responsible to think about leaving so fast . . ."

"You mean you don't believe all of this is from G-d, and a message for the Jewish people?" a very concerned Moshe asks.

"G-d forbid! EVERYTHING is the hand of G-d," the skeptic answers. "I'm the first one to admit that. But it's this message business that has me concerned. And besides you, who has heard G-d speak about all of this?"

"But what about our tradition?" Moshe pleads, knowing that this person's perspective is not unique, and will be repeated throughout Jewish history in similar situations in the future. "G-d promised Avraham Avinu that Egyptian slavery would come to an end in the fourth generation, and that this generation would go out with great wealth! If you count them, you will see that we are the fourth generation! Does that not make what is happening a little more meaningful for you?"

"Well, yes and no . . ." the skeptic continues. "A generation can last up to about thirty years . . . and if you recall, some from the tribe of Ephraim tried to leave Egypt about thirty years ago, and now their bones litter the desert! So, you see . . ."

"Do not worry about their bones! In the future, Yechezkel will resurrect those people and they will get to Eretz Yisroel and live there long after you have died (Sanhedrin 92b), and more than likely,

that will be in Egypt!"

"Yechez-what? There you go again with your prophecies. Listen, Moshe, I mean you're a pretty respectable guy and it is quite amazing (or quite suicidal) that you have come back here to the lion's den, if you know what I mean. But your track record is not so good. If last time you caused Paroah to increase the slavery for us, just think what you'll make him do to us this time! Why don't you quit while you're ahead?"

"There is a time for everything," says Moshe sternly. "It had been G-d's plan that we come to Egypt to perfect ourselves and this land. We had the potential to elevate this people from the depths of impurity and to return mankind back to his holy level, the level on which Adam HaRishon lived before he sinned. Tikkun olam. This world is about 'tikun olam' - rectifying mankind and being a 'light unto the nations' means to do exactly that. However, instead of rectifying the world around us, we were dragged down into it. Rather than perfect THEM, they made US even less perfect, until we barely resemble anything of our great Forefathers. For 209 years, G-d waited for us to fulfill the covenant of Avraham Avinu, so that He could bring us out of Egypt as kings and princes, to a holy land that would have been waiting for us. Instead, what He found was vast assimilation into one of the most immoral cultures in all of history!"

"Ah, well . . . at least we didn't intermarry . . ." the skeptic offered lamely.

"That is not to OUR credit!" Moshe thundered. "It is because the Egyptians have found us despicable and have forbidden such intermarriages. What Egyptian in his or her right mind would have married a slave, and a Jewish one at that! In another culture, in another time, the intermarriage rate would have soared to more than 50% of the population!"

"Well . . . I see . . . But, you know Moshe, things aren't that bad yet. You know, they might just get better . . . ah . . . blow over . . ."

"Blow over?" Moshe asked, bewildered by the obstinacy of the Jew before him. "When a Jew lives anywhere in the world but in the land of his Fathers, he must live as if on stand-by . . . as if at any moment the redemption may come and he must be ready for it, at least on some level. Now I ask you, what will it take before you feel uneasy living in the status quo, before you stop throwing caution to the wind, before you at least admit that maybe, just maybe, redemption is at hand? A personal invitation from G-d?"

"Yea, that would do it," the skeptic said, trying to lighten up the serious mood.

To this, Moshe could only look into the eyes of the skeptic Jew before him, and into the eyes of all those of his type who lined up behind him. Perhaps he was even aware at the time that they made up four-fifths of the population of the Jewish people at that time, and that they would perish in the ninth plague of darkness.

"So be it," Moshe said under his breath as he turned to walk away and face the huge task before him

of freeing those Jews who would merit the upcoming redemption. With tears in his eyes, he prayed to G-d to soften the stiff neck of his brothers, so that they should at least be open to the possibility of redemption and change their attitude, though he understood only too well that the purpose of creation necessitated the existence of free-will, and that the laws of free-will demand that a person come to his perceptions of truth and Divine Providence on his own.

There can be no better rectification of the person and creation than this.

"Said Rava: It will be similar to this in the Days of Moshiach as well." (Sanhedrin 111a)

Says the Zohar, the final days of Jewish history will be a rectification for the beginning days of Jewish history. Says Pirkei d'Rebi Eliezer, a time come will come in the Sixth Millennium that will be like the hour in which Adam ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil -- and it began in 1990. Says the Arizal: The Souls of the Jewish just in advance of Moshiach will be those of the Dor HaMidbar, the souls of the Jews who travelled the desert for 40 years with Moshe Rabbeinu. Why would that be the case, if not to have a chance to rectify that which was left undone after leaving Egypt? And, according to the Leshem, the biggest mistake THEY made was that they did not choose redemption. Are we making the same mistake?

Have a great Shabbos,  
Pinchas Winston