

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

How does one go about finding the right shidduch for Yitzchak, the son of Avraham and Sara? As it is, parents agonize over who their child will marry and do everything possible to find the right boy or girl. If possible, they call friends and family. They check with local rabbis and teachers. They investigate the entire family in search of some skeleton or inconsistency that might become a concern. (the deal breaker) Lists of qualities are compared and characteristics are contrasted. Parents look for "michutunim" (in-laws) with whom they share mutual values and hopes. Family histories are researched in search of yichus or scandal. Phone calls and faxes fly furiously across international borders, all hoping to, "not be speaking Loshon Harah." Then, when that first stage has concluded and the TRW's and secret government files have been shredded or locked away, the parents or shadchunim (matchmakers) turn to their respective children (victims) and see if they have anything to say or add. What did Avraham do? Where was he to find a family that could meet his and Sara's expectations? Where was he going to find a girl equal to the task of marrying Yitzchak and raising the next generation of the Chosen People? Avraham and Sarah were unique in the entire world!

The Parsha relates that Avraham gave this seemingly impossible mission to his beloved and trusted servant, Eliezar. He instructed Eliezar, and sent him out in search of Yitzchak's bride. What were Avraham's instructions and how did he guarantee that Eliezar would follow his instructions?

First of all, Avraham detailed the parameters of Eliezar's mission. He specified where Eliezar should look, and where Eliezar should not look. He did not leave anything to conjecture or assumption. Eliezar was instructed to go back to Avraham's home town, and Avraham's family of origin, and not to look for a bride among the families of Canaan.

Avraham enjoined Eliezar in this sacred task by making Eliezar swear to follow his instructions. Avraham repeatedly emphasized that Yitzchak was not to be taken out of Eretz Yisroel. Avraham focused Eliezar on the element of heavenly intervention, and placed his ultimate trust in Hashem's guiding providence. The rest he left up to Eliezar.

Why did Avraham limit the search to his own family? Why didn't he go for a local family? Why did he force Eliezar to take an oath? Why couldn't Yitzchak leave Canaan and join Eliezar in the search? Why didn't Avraham himself go to do this most important mission?

Avraham's approach to finding the proper shidduch for his son is a study in the practical and the

esoteric. From a practical perspective, Avraham wanted to find a girl who had a similar background as his son. He knew that there was no other home like his in the entire world. Yet, the Canaanites, compared to Avraham, were among the most different in family upbringing and traditions. Therefore, he was forced to seek out "his own kind" in the only environment where a Rivka could be found.

The Gemara refers to the basic difference between Avraham and the families of Canaan as the "Blessed and the Cursed." Avraham was blessed and Canaan was cursed. The two were not intended to mix. This is why the practice of "checking out the family" is so important. Many potential difficulties between couples can be avoided when there is compatibility between their families of origin.

From an esoteric perspective, Avraham knew that the seeds of Mashicah could only be found within the three children of his father, Terach. Therefore, Eliezar was dispatched to the home of Nachor, his brother, in search of a wife for Yitzchak.

Keeping Yitzchak in Eretz Yisroel was both a test for the girl as well as essential for Yitzchak. Practically speaking, whoever the girl would be, she would have to give up her family of origin and join Yitzchak in the relative wilderness of Canaan. Ur Kasdim and Charan were metropolises compared to Canaan. The potential "Rivka" would have to be willing to abandon her family and home just like Avraham had done 65 years earlier.

In insisting that Eliezar swear by placing his hand on his thigh, near the place of his circumcision, Avraham emphasized the uniqueness of G-d's relationship with himself, Yitzchak, and his future grandchildren. "Remember, we are different than all other people. By virtue of this special covenant with G-d, we have been chosen. Do not compromise our uniqueness. Find Yitzchak a wife who will completely embrace that difference. Find me a girl who is prepared to totally leave her own past behind and accept the responsibilities of being one of G-d's teachers."

Esoterically speaking, Yitzchak represented the future of the Jewish people after all the exiles. He represented that stage after the coming of Mashiach when the Jews will live in Eretz Yisroel and never again leave. Therefore, Yitzchak could not ever leave Eretz Yisroel! Avraham himself could not leave, because Hashem had not commanded him to do so. Hashem had commanded Avraham to leave his own family of origin 65 years earlier and to go to Canaan. For Avraham to return would be in direct conflict with Hashem's commandment! Therefore, he was forced to send Eliezar.

Furthermore, Avraham had to know that the girl wanted to join his family due to her own yearning to be close to Hashem, not because of the power of his own reputations or personality. The "Imahot" - mothers of Klal Yisroel would have to be strong, resilient, creative, courageous, and independent in order to mold the future nation. Avraham wanted to be sure that Rivka's attraction to the family of Avraham was internally motivated, not externally influenced.

Eliezar was the "servant of Avraham." His every thought and feeling was dictated by his devotion to his master and teacher. If anyone could be trusted to fill in for Avraham in finding a wife for Yitzchak, it

was Eliezar. However, Avraham had one nagging reservation. Eliezar's devotion was born from his desire to be as close to Avraham as possible. According to the Medresh, Eliezar was the son of Nimrod and had abandoned his own father's ways to follow and serve Avraham. Avraham feared that Eliezar would want his own daughter to marry Yitzchak so that he and his children would be that much closer to Avraham, the source of blessings. To avoid this powerful and justifiable possibility, Avraham made Eliezar swear as an added motivation for Eliezar to fulfill his master's wishes, rather than his own.

In the end, as with all shidduchim, the success of Eliezar's mission was in the hands of G-d. Eliezar knew that his initial choice of a wife for Yitzchak would depend upon divine intervention. Yet, as a means of getting started, he devised a simple set of criteria that highlighted the characteristics of Chesed and modesty.

When Rivka first offered to take care of Eliezar, and only after he had satiated his thirst did she offer to give water to the camels, Rivka revealed those two important characteristics. Rav Shimshon Rafael Hirsch explains that Rivka did not initially offer to give both Eliezar and the camels because it would have appeared as if she was trying to show off her generosity. Instead, she gave Eliezar to drink, and then offered to care for the camels. However, it was Rivka's response to her family that sealed the deal for Eliezar. When her family asked her to stay a year before marrying Yitzchak, Rivka said she wanted to leave immediately. (24:55-58) She did not want to delay her marriage to Yitzchak. She accepted upon herself the imperative to "leave your land, your birth place, and the house of your father" This was the wife that G-d had chosen for Yitzchak. Mission accomplished!

Good Shabbos.

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