

חַיֵּי שָׂרָה

CHAYEI SARAH/THE LIFE OF SARAH Bereshith/Genesis 23:1-25:18

This week our parasha contains details of the **first actual marriage mentioned** in the Torah. **Rivkah** (Rebecca) was from **Haran**, a place which was **worldly, materialistic, and idolatrous**. **Yitzchak** (Isaac), on the other hand, had already lived much of his life in the **spiritual dimension**. He was the **first Hebrew baby to enter into the physical covenant** with יהוה by means of **circumcision** on the **8th day**. He was then **educated** by his **father Avraham** to a point where he was **even willing to sacrifice his own life as a burnt offering**.

The **marriage of Yitzchak and Rivkah** represents the **union of the spiritual and the physical**. It is the **story of a father who desires the perfect bride for his son**. To make this happen, **Avraham enlists the help of a nameless servant** (likely **Eliezer** who becomes a **shadow picture of the Holy Spirit**) who **never glorifies himself, but speaks the words of the father and testifies of the son**. The **son is absent during the selection process** (Yeshua is also **physically absent** while the **bride is being chosen**). **After agreeing to the marriage through the servant (Holy Spirit), the bride will be taken to the Promised Land to join with her husband**.

Bereshith 24 contains **67 verses** that tell the **story of the search for the bride**. The **actual search did not take very long**. From the time that **Avraham's servant prays to יהוה** at the **well in Haran until the next morning when he left with Rivkah** was likely only **about 12 hours**. Consideration of the **many details that Torah spends on this short incident** should be a **clue to us that this is a very important event!**

Many **commentators** point out that this **story is thematically about "kindness"** (*chesed* - חֶסֶד). The **servant even sets up a test** in which he is **primarily looking for a girl who will "kindly" offer not only him, but also his "camels a drink"**:

*Bereshith 24:12 Then he said, "יהוה Elohim of my Adonai Avraham, please give me success this day, and show **kindness** (*chesed* - חֶסֶד) to my master Avraham.¹³ "Behold, here I stand by the well of water, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water.¹⁴ "Now let it be that the young woman to whom I say, 'Please let down your pitcher that **I may drink**,' and she says, 'Drink, and I will also give your **camels a drink**' -- let her be the one **You have appointed for Your servant Yitzchak**. And by this I will know that **You have shown kindness** (*chesed* - חֶסֶד) to my master."*

On a **linguistic level**, this **test is bracketed by "kindness"** as the **servant prays for יהוה to show "kindness"** to his master Avraham **both before he states the test and at the conclusion of his prayer**. Thus the **servant is asking the Almighty for the "kindness" of divine assistance and the "kindness" of physical assistance from the young woman יהוה will choose**.

So **does the young woman coming with her single pitcher, pass the test of "kindness"?**

Bereshith 24:15 And it happened, before he had finished speaking, that behold, **Rivkah**, who was born to Bethuel, son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Avraham's brother, **came out with her pitcher on her shoulder.** ¹⁶ Now the young woman was very beautiful to behold, a virgin; no man had known her. And she went down to the well, filled her pitcher, and came up. ¹⁷ And the servant ran to meet her and said, "Please let me drink a little water from your pitcher." ¹⁸ So she said, "Drink, my lord." Then she **quickly** let her pitcher down to her hand, and gave him a drink. ¹⁹ And when she had finished giving him a drink, she said, "I will draw water for your camels also, until they have finished drinking." ²⁰ Then she **quickly** emptied her pitcher into the trough, **ran back** to the well to draw water, and **drew for all his camels.** ²¹ And the man, wondering at her, remained silent so as to know whether **יְהוָה** had made his journey prosperous or not.

One thirsty camel can drink up to 25 gallons of water. The servant has **ten camels**, so you can see that **Rivkah** has offered quite a "**kindness**"! And don't miss the **little phrase** in **verse 19** where she offers to let the camels drink "**until they have finished drinking!**" This is even **over and above** what Avraham's servant had asked for (verse 14).

Rivkah not only displays "**kindness**," but also displays a **servant disposition** as she is constantly "**rushing**" to fill the needs of this stranger she calls "**my lord**" and **his camels**. Once she has completely taken care of their thirst, the next thing we see is **Rivkah "running"** home to tell her family:

Bereshith 24:28 So the young woman **ran** and told her mother's household these things.

Next we are **introduced to another family member**. He also appears to be "**running**" for the purpose of **hospitality**:

Bereshith 24:29 Now **Rivkah** had a brother whose name was **Lavan**, and **Lavan ran** out to the man by the well.

When he arrives at the well, however, the **Torah** tells us that **Lavan notices something**:

Bereshith 24:30 So it came to pass, when he saw the nose ring, and the bracelets on his sister's wrists, and when he heard the words of his sister Rivkah, saying, "Thus the man spoke to me," that **he went to the man.** And there he stood by the camels at the well.

Lavan speaks to the servant, but try to imagine his tone of voice and compare his attitude to **Rivkah's**:

Bereshith 24:31 And he said, "Come in, O blessed of **יְהוָה**! Why do you stand outside? For I have prepared the house, and a place for the camels."

Lavan's attitude does not sound servant-like. In fact his words reflect a bit of pride. **Lavan continues to offer provision** for his guest, but **unlike Rivkah**, he seems to let the servant of Avraham take care of himself:

Bereshith 24:32 Then the man came to the house. And he unloaded the camels, and provided straw and feed for the camels, and water to wash his feet and the feet of the men who were with him.

So the point has been made that **Rivkah and Lavan** are **not alike** in their **motivations for hospitality**. But **does Rivkah remind you of another Torah character?** Not long ago we read of **Avraham's hospitality**:

Bereshith 18:1 Then אלהים appeared to him by the terebinth trees of Mamre, as he was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day.² So he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, **three men** were standing by him; and **when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the ground,**³ and said, "**My Lord,** if I have now found favor in Your sight, do not pass on by **Your servant.**"⁴ "Please let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree."⁵ "And I will bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh your hearts. After that you may pass by, inasmuch as you have come to **your servant.**" They said, "Do as you have said."⁶ So **Avraham hurried** into the tent to Sarah and said, "**Quickly,** make ready three measures of fine meal; knead it and make cakes."⁷ And **Avraham ran** to the herd, took a tender and good calf, gave it to a young man, and he **hastened** to prepare it.⁸ So he took butter and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree as they ate.

Both Rivkah and Avraham have "servant" attitudes, and their eagerness to provide hospitality and "kindness" to travelers is evidenced by their "hurried" actions. And in both stories, their hospitality seems to extend way beyond what is necessary...with Avraham it is a great feast and with Rivkah it is providing an enormous amount of water for the traveler and his camels.

Continuing in the comparison between Avraham and Rivkah, we notice that several key phrases are repeated in the command section of each story:

Bereshith 12:1 Now אלהים had said to Avram: "Get out of **your country,** From **your family** And from **your father's house,** **To a land that I will show you.**"² I will make you a **great nation;** I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a **blessing.**³ I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

"Your country," "Your family"

Bereshith 24:4 "but you shall go to **my country** and to **my family,** and take a wife for my son Yitzchak."

"Your father's house"

Bereshith 24:7 "אלהים Elohim of heaven, who took me from **my father's house** and from the land of my family, and who spoke to me and swore to me, saying, 'To your descendants I give this land,' He will send His angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there.

"To a land that I will show you"

Bereshith 24:5 And the servant said to him, "Perhaps the woman will not be willing to **follow me to this land.** Must I take your son back to the land from which you came?"

These **instructions that Avraham gives his servant** in the beginning of **Bereshith 24** make up his **last dialogue** in the **Torah**. Essentially **what he is seeking to do is to pass the baton**. The **wife of Yitzchak must be someone like Avraham**...someone who is **willing to be taken from “their land, their family, and their father’s house”** and **brought to a special “land”** in order that **He might bless them to become the mother of a chosen people**. This **young woman must be “kind, servant-like, and eager”** to take care of other’s needs, without selfish motives.

It is interesting to study the **words Avraham’s servant uses to present Rivkah’s family** with the **story of his search for a bride**. You wouldn’t know that he was **looking for someone like the Avraham of Bereshith 12**. Instead the **servant speaks from a worldly perspective** as he **portrays Avraham as an extremely wealthy man, favored by the Almighty whose preference is simply to marry off his son to a woman within his clan**:

*Bereshith 24:34 So he said, "I am Avraham’s servant.³⁵ " **יְיָ** has blessed my master greatly, and he has become great; and He has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, male and female servants, and camels and donkeys.³⁶ "And Sarah my master's wife bore a son to my master when she was old; and to him he has given all that he has.³⁷ "Now my master made me swear, saying, 'You shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I dwell;³⁸ 'but you shall **go to my father's house and to my family, and take a wife for my son.**'*

The **servant goes on to retell the incident at the well**, but if you **compare his recap with the actual incident**, you will see that there are **obvious differences**. **Avraham’s servant** seems to be doing all he can to **convince the family that it is יְיָ that has led him there to choose Rivkah, from Avraham’s clan, as a wife for Yitzchak**. In the same way that He has **blessed Avraham**, he will also **bless Rivkah in her marriage to Yitzchak**.

Bereshith 24:42 " And this day I came to the well and said, 'יְיָ Elohim of my master Avraham, if You will now prosper the way in which I go,⁴³ 'behold, I stand by the well of water; and it shall come to pass that when the virgin comes out to draw water, and I say to her, "Please give me a little water from your pitcher to drink,"⁴⁴ 'and she says to me, "Drink, and I will draw for your camels also," -- let her be the woman whom יְיָ has appointed for my master's son.'⁴⁵ " But before I had finished speaking in my heart, there was Rivkah, coming out with her pitcher on her shoulder; and she went down to the well and drew water. And I said to her, 'Please let me drink.'⁴⁶ "And she made haste and let her pitcher down from her shoulder, and said, 'Drink, and I will give your camels a drink also.' So I drank, and she gave the camels a drink also.⁴⁷ "Then I asked her, and said, 'Whose daughter are you?' And she said, 'The daughter of Bethuel, Nahor's son, whom Milcah bore to him.' So I put the nose ring on her nose and the bracelets on her wrists.⁴⁸ "And I bowed my head and worshiped יְיָ, and blessed יְיָ Elohim of my master Avraham, who had led me in the way of truth to take the daughter of my master's brother for his son.⁴⁹ "Now if you will deal kindly and truly with my master, tell me. And if not, tell me, that I may turn to the right hand or to the left."⁵⁰ Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, "The thing comes from יְיָ; we cannot speak to you either bad or good.

I think that sometimes the **Holy Spirit** guides us to **speak to the world** in words that **they will understand**. Avraham's servant would **not have been successful** had he **focused** on the fact that he was **on a mission** to find a bride with qualifications like Avraham. Lavan understood **wealth, family, and the power of יהוה**. He would **not have been as impressed with** and even **offended by** the servant's search for a woman with attributes like Avraham who was **willing to leave her "family, her father's house, her land, and idolatrous practices"**.

In the end, the family becomes hesitant to send Rivkah, and so they call her and ask her what her desire is:

Bereshith 24:55 But her brother and her mother said, "Let the young woman stay with us a few days, at least ten; after that she may go (talach - תִּלַּךְ)." ⁵⁶ And he said to them, "Do not hinder me, since יהוה has prospered my way; send me away so that I may go to (alchah - אֲלַח) my master." ⁵⁷ So they said, "We will call the young woman and ask her personally." ⁵⁸ Then they called Rivkah and said to her, "Will you go (talchi - תִּלְכִי) with this man?" And she said, "I will go (ailaich - אֵילַי)."

"Going"...this is the same concept we saw with Avraham when he agreed to leave "his family, land, and birthplace" in order to follow after יהוה to "another land" where he would be blessed to become a "great nation":

Bereshith 12:1 Now יהוה had said to Avram: "Go for yourself (Lech lecha - לֵךְ-לְךָ) from your country, From your family And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you. ² I will make you a great nation...

Initially יהוה chose Avraham and he responded to the call. In the book of Hebrews, Avraham is listed in the faith chapter as one who was willing to "go":

Hebrews 11:8 By faith Avraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.

Now we see that the Almighty has also chosen Rivkah as the bride for Yitzchak. Rivkah also consents to "go." He chooses her because she has the faith of Avraham to "go." Rivkah is different from her relatives. She is "kind" without ulterior motives and she has the heart of an "eager servant." Our story turns out to be less about the search for a bride, and more about the characteristics of a future bride...kindness, servant hood, of pursuing the Almighty, a willingness to "go," and being able to imagine a future with the Bridegroom, our Messiah in the land of Israel.

There is one final way that we can connect Rivkah with Avraham. After the Akeida (binding of Yitzchak), יהוה spoke the following blessing over Avraham:

Bereshith 22:17 "blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies.

It is no surprise that **Rivkah** receives nearly the **same blessing** from her family concerning **countless descendants** and a "**gate**"!

Bereshith 24:60 And they blessed Rivkah and said to her: "Our sister, may you become the mother of thousands of ten thousands; And may your descendants possess the gate of those who hate them."

A "**thousand of ten thousand**" is **10 million people**. So when "**thousand**" is plural (thousands of ten thousands), that **actual calculation of descendents for Rivkah** becomes a **countless number**. We read a **similar comment** made by Yeshua:

Matthew 16:18 "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My assembly (ekklesia - ἐκκλησία), and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

Who is the "**rock**" upon which **Yeshua** will build "**His assembly**" (the thousands of ten thousands)? It's **not Peter**. **Peter's** name means "**stone**." He's only a small part of the "**rock**." Scriptures tell us that **Yeshua** is this "**rock**":

Isaiah 28:16 Therefore thus says Adonai יהוה: "Behold, I lay in Zion a Stone for a foundation, A tried Stone, a precious Cornerstone, a sure foundation..."

1 Peter 2:6 Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, "Behold, I lay in Zion A chief Cornerstone, elect, precious, And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame."

And **who** is **Yeshua's** "**assembly**" which the "**gates of Hades**" shall not prevail against (Matthew 16:18)?

Acts 7:38 "This is he who was in the assembly (ekklesia - ἐκκλησία) in the wilderness with the Angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers, the one who received the living oracles to give to us,

The "**assembly in the wilderness**" at the foot of "**Mount Sinai**" was **Israel...all of the tribes of Israel...** "**thousands of ten thousands**" of them. These **tribes** make up a **countless number** that only the **Almighty** can restore back to an **identifiable Israel**. And praise יהוה, we know the end of the story. That is, the "**gates of Hades**" shall not prevail against them!

Shabbat Shalom!

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