

Sedra Highlight

- Dr Jacob Solomon

CHAYEI SARA

In asking Betu'el and Lavan to allow Rivka to leave home and marry Yitzchak, Avraham's servant refused to eat: Food was served, but Avraham's servant said:

"I will not eat until I have said what I have to say." "Speak", said the host (24:33).

Only afterwards, after his long narrative quoted:

"The servant and the men with him ate and drank..." (24:54)

G-d answered the prayer of the servant (Eliezer of Damascus according to Tradition; c.f. 15:2) for finding the right woman in the right place for Yitzchak. There were no changes in nature, no spectacular miracles. No angel or pillar of fire came down to show him the way to Yitzchak's future wife. Things 'just happened' - after praying and specifying precisely what he wanted, he turned up in the right place by the right household with the right young woman just happening to come out to do just the right task that would show her being suitable for Yitzchak, his master's son. Such a series of coincidences that one could not fail to see the Yad HaShem, the Hand of G-d, bringing it all together.

Indeed, the Rashbam emphasizes that on realizing G-d's having arranged things in this way, it would not be fitting for him, Eliezer, to eat or drink without sharing the details of what happened.

Perhaps one can expand. The Torah recounts the details that Eliezer shared, even though we already know about them in the story. It does so for reasons. Not just to show the joy that the conversation of the pioneering tzadikim gave Him, which is the purpose Rashi quotes, but to emphasize the importance of recounting, recalling, and reflecting on the details of the events that demonstrably show Yad HaShem in daily lives, and duly celebrating them. Even if the water doesn't turn into blood or the sea doesn't split. When the miracle of something turning up at the right moment on that very particular occasion that you need it does happen, it needs continual recognition which can be in the form of a SE'UDAT MITZVA, a meal celebrating and cementing G-d emergence in this way into the communal memory. But first, there should be reflection, discussion, and HAKAROT HATOV, recognition of how G-d arranges things to intervene in our favour. And like with example shown by Eliezer, the eating and drink comes after that, in that framework of reflection and HAKARAT HATOV. Like the order of the Pesach Seder, where

the seuda celebrates Y'tzi'at Mitzrayim after we have reflected on it and discussed it. Not merely an after-dinner speech, which goes through one ear and out of the other.

Through drawing our attention to Eliezer's detailed recounting of G-d's arranging things to work out, the Torah could be telling us how important it is to consider our own life stories and the stories of the lives of those we know. As Lavan and Betu'el declared: **"It has come from G-d" (24:50)**. The Torah wants us to not only keep the Mitzvot, but to reflect on how He comes in to guiding our paths. Indeed, you yourself may well be able to put in stories of your own or of people you know, especially in these very difficult times for Am Yisrael. Perhaps not of that magnitude, but certainly worthy of your notice. Let's recount one miracle of that type.

A young man suffered a cash-flow crisis soon after making Aliyah more than 30 years ago. He was fortunate in finding employment teaching at Tel Aviv University at the beginning of August, but then found out that his first salary would not come through until October. He did not have sufficient cash after paying his landlord, to last out. He hitch-hiked daily to from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv to avoid spending. Finally, the crisis hit. One Friday in mid-September, he got

back to Jerusalem with the total available cash resources of just one silver five-shekel piece.

Having no choice, he walked from the Jerusalem central bus station to a good friend nearby who managed a free-loan fund (g'mach).

He answered the door with: "Where have you been? I've been trying to get hold of you all day?" It turned out that this gentleman needed me for a colleague in kolel. Of S'faradi background, this man had been hired by an Ashkenazi synagogue outside Israel to lead the Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur services and wanted to learn the right tunes (nusach). Time was running out. He could well-afford to pay. "Would you help?"

"Will he settle at the end of each lesson?" The friend phoned: 'Of course! Tell him to come over at once'.

That silver five shekel coin got the young man to his home in Ramot, on the western edge of Jerusalem. The rest - happily - is history...

A miracle. One would be blind not to see Yad HaShem in such a happening. I happen to know the story is authentic as I was that young man in need. 📖