

Shiur L'Yom Chamishi¹

[Thursday's Study]

READINGS: ***Torah Chayei Sarah:*** **Genesis 24:29-67**
 Haftarah: **I Kings 1:22-27**
 B'rit Chadasha: **I Corinthians 15:50-53**

If you intend to act in true goodwill toward my master tell me; and if not tell me.

[Genesis 24:49]

Today's Meditation is Psalm 116:12-14;

This Week's Amidah prayer is Petition #2, *Teshuvah* [the Prayer of Return]

Ul'Rivkah ach ush'mo Lavan – and Rivkah's brother was named Laban ... vayarotz Lavan el-ha-ish ha-chutzah el-ha'ayin – And Lavan ran out to the man at the well. Genesis 24:29.

Avraham has sent a trusted servant to Paddan Aram in search of Yitzchak's soul mate. The great *treasure hunt* is 'on'. The girl must be ready, willing, and able to leave hearth, home, and everything and everyone she knows at the drop of a hat to marry a man she has never met. Third, she must agree to travel 500 miles, through treacherous terrain, under constant threat from highwaymen and hostiles, accompanied only by an old man she never met before today – a strange fellow who falls face-first on the ground from time to time and carries on conversations with an invisible friend. Fourthly, assuming the odd couple somehow make it to wherever it is the old man intends to take her, when she gets there she has to marry and bear children to Yitzchak – a man she has never seen or spoken to. Finally, she has to be prepared to serve as the next-gen matriarch to a people destined to be the intended target of one genocidal campaign after another. The task is imposing for certain. But what was it the angel said when Sarah laughed? Oh yes - ***Is any thing too hard for the Holy One?*** Genesis 18:14a.

Wonder of wonders, the servant is having a really good day. It started, as most really good days are wont to do, with a session of early morning prayer. In meditation, the servant entered the courts of Heaven that he knew so well, and followed the protocols he had learned from Avraham to enter the Throne Room. Once there, he prostrated himself before the Creator of the Universe and reverently whispered the Hebrew equivalent of: ***Oh Holy One, God of my master Avraham, give me success this day, and show chesed to Your servant Avraham. Behold, here I stand by the well of water, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water. Now let it be that the young woman to whom I say***

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‘Please let down your pitcher that I may drink’, then she says ‘Drink, and I will also give your camels a drink’ – may she be the one You have appointed for your servant Yitzchak. And by this I will know that You have shown chesed to my master. Genesis 24:12-14. Then *lo* – just as the servant had spoken it, it happened! Immediately after the servant whispered his audacious prayer for Divine assistance, an equally audacious young maiden came into view. Could it be providence? The servant broke cultural protocol to test it out. He approached the girl without either an escort or an invitation, and did the unthinkable: he asked her to fetch him a drink. What a cheeky request! After all, he was far from incapacitated. He did not appear to be ailing. He had a set of competent hands - not to mention strong arms and nimble legs. He was every bit as capable of drawing water as was she. He was traveling with ten camels loaded with goods – so undoubtedly, somewhere in those packs, he had an implement with which he could draw his own water. Why should she even acknowledge his existence – much less help him? Why should she interrupt her life – and put her family’s needs on hold - for a cheeky stranger? How dare he ask her to fetch him a drink – or anything else? It was not fitting. It was not culturally acceptable. Who did he think he was? Who – and what kind of girl - did he think *she* was? But the man did ask. And the girl did acknowledge his presence. She lowered the water jar that was intended to provide for the drinking, cooking, and personal hygiene needs of family to his dusty traveler’s lips. She did not stop there, though. She ran back and forth, to and from the well, like a woman on a mission. She kept filling and emptying her water jug over and over and over again, and pouring it into the animal-watering trough, until she had watered each of his camels. She did not stop – or even slow down to wipe her brow – until not only the cheeky stranger but also each of his thirsty camels could drink no more.

This girl had met every condition. She was the one – the servant was sure! He opened one of the treasure chests that the camels had borne, drew out a precious jeweled bracelet and a ring fit for a princess or queen, and gave it to her. He did not tell her why he had come – much less the critical role he envisioned her playing in the future of mankind. He knew that he would have to speak her the girl’s parents about these things before presenting them to her. So he stopped short. He prostrated himself on the ground, and quickly, through the art of meditation he had learned from Avraham, he was back in the courts of Heaven, before the Throne of the King. Through tears, he whispered: *Blessed be the Holy One, God of my master Avraham, Who has not forgotten His chesed and His emet toward my master. I, being in the Way, has He led to the house of my master’s brethren.* The girl had never seen a grown man behave like that. She had no grid through which to process what she was witnessing. She ran off to tell her mother what had transpired – and to show off to her family the beautiful jewelry the man had given

her. Ah, *Rivkah* – if you only knew! The surprises of this day are far from over! *Listen, O daughter; consider and incline your ear! Forget your people and your father's house Instead of your fathers shall be your sons, whom you will make princes in all the earth. I will make your name to be remembered in all generations; therefore the people will praise you forever and ever.* Psalm 45:10, 16-17.

The Back-Story Behind the Infamous 'Woman At the Well' Narrative

Most who are familiar with the writings of Yeshua's *talmidim* [disciples] think of the *woman at the well* as the promiscuous Samaritan regarding whom much is written in the 4th chapter of *Yochanan* [John]. But anyone familiar with the patriarchal chronicles of Torah knows that Yochanan's narrative has quite a 'back story'. They know that the original, prototypical 'woman at the well' lived several millennia before the one about which Yochanan wrote. They know that the original 'woman at the well' was none other than *Rivkah* – daughter of Betu'el. And that is important – because unless one knows, understands, and keeps in mind the story of Eliezer's encounter with *Rivkah* at the well outside Charan one will never fully grasp the significance or appreciate the beauty of the story of Yeshua of Natzret's encounter with the prostitute of Samaria at the well outside Sychar. Those familiar with the back story in Torah know that the Master's point is that it is not only the *Rivkah*'s of the world - the pure, the young, the beautiful, the servant-minded innocents – for whom the doors of the Covenant have been thrown open. They know that, in Yeshua, in accordance with the promises of Isaiah 55, 56, 60, 61 and 66, the invitation to participate in the Holy One's plan of Messianic redemption has been extended to *Rivkah*'s complete opposite – even the scarlet woman of Samaria who had blustered and blundered her way through four husbands, and who was in the throes of an illicit relationship with a man that was not her husband at all – and was probably someone else's.

Rivkah is described in Torah as *betulah v'ish lo y'da'ah* [i.e. a virgin not 'known intimately by any man']. She was prototypically young, pure, and chaste. The Samaritan 'woman at the well'? Well, she was *none of the above*. She was representative of the exact opposite prototype – the opposite end of the purity spectrum. She was selected for this encounter, I would suggest, precisely because she was the epitome of not young, and was the epitome of not pure, and was the epitome of not chaste.

Rivkah is depicted for us in Torah as the consummate servant-minded helper. She ran to water 10 camels for a stranger who merely asked her for a drink from her water jug. The Samaritan woman on the other hand is depicted for us as an *anti-Rivkah* of sorts. The woman of Samaria who encountered Yeshua at the well is –

on the surface at least – a crusty, skeptical, self-righteous religious shrew. When Yeshua asked her for a drink the way Eliezer had asked Rivkah for a drink, what did she do? She *chastised Him*², then *argued with Him about genealogy*³, then *challenged Him on His theology*⁴, and finally *turned around and asked Him – mockingly - for Him to give her a drink instead*. Indeed if you read the narrative carefully you discover that the Samaritan woman *never did* offer Yeshua a drink.

Now do you begin to see the connection between the Eliezer-Rivkah narrative of Torah and the Yeshua-Samaritan Prostitute narrative of Yochanan's [i.e. *John's*] gospel? And now you begin to understand why, in light of what we discussed in yesterday's shiur about the well-encounter of Eliezer and Rivkah being the stage upon which the Holy One chose to introduce the concept of personal 'worship', Yeshua said to the Samaritan prostitute, who was hung up on in which temples made with human hands and through the ministry of what priesthood people were supposed to 'worship':

*Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when
you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father.
You worship what you do not know.
We know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews.
But the hour is coming, and now is,
when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth;
for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.
God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth."*
[John 4:21-24]

Yochanan's original readers understood the obvious parallels in the two stories. Yochanan's readers knew Yeshua was saying that Rivkah's descendants – His own covenant people - had become like the Samaritan prostitute. They understood that Yeshua was saying that they, like the Samaritan woman, had become polluted by intimate relations with the secular world around them. They understood that He was telling them they had like the Samaritan prostitute become hardened by sin. They understood that Yeshua was telling them that He knew they had, rather than waiting for their *bashert*, given themselves and their virtue to multiple 'husbands' and illicit lovers [i.e. abusive and sinful kings, corrupt priests, and despotic foreign generals], to the extent they had cut themselves off from the true well of living water which the Holy One has opened for their ancestors.

² According to Yochanan's account the woman of Samaria responded to his request for a drink of water by saying to Him, "*How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?*" *For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans*". **John 4:9.**

³ The woman of Samaria said to Yeshua: "*Are You greater than our father Ya'akov, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as well as his sons and his livestock?*" **John 4:12.**

⁴ According to Yochanan's account the woman of Samaria said to Yeshua: "*Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship.*" **John 4:20.**

Yochanan's original audience understood that Yeshua was teaching through this passage that Rivkah's descendants were unbeknownst to them now trapped in a religious system of false temples and empty theologies. And Yochanan's original audience understood that through this story Yeshua was saying that even so the covenant the Holy One had made with Rivkah's descendants was as strong as ever - and that He had come to open the well of living water again and give a mikveh to His Bride in living water that would cleanse her of every spot, blemish, and wrinkle, and restore her to the purity and the passion of Rivkah.

Redeeming Rivkah – The First Descent Into Laban's Lair

Even Rivkah had to be redeemed from the house in which she lived before she could become the bride she was called to be. So let us return to the narrative of Torah and see how this was accomplished. If we understand how *Rivkah's redemption* was accomplished, perhaps we can better understand the redemption of the Samaritan woman – and get an understanding of the ultimate redemption promised for the nation of whom both Rivkah and the Samaritan woman are prototypes as well.

Every great adventure has to have its moments – and characters – of intense drama. Every step forward in Covenant by the earthly participants in the Kingdom has to deal with substantial resistance from the most flesh-obsessed people on earth. Every great story has to have a villain. Every great rescue story has to have its malevolent oppressor. This one is no exception. Cue the music to '*Be Prepared*'. Enter *Lavan*, Rivkah's brother, stage left.

Oh, you thought this was going to be easy? Nothing worthwhile ever is. Welcome to the inspiring story that I like to call '*The Redemption of Rivkah*'.

From what does Rivkah need to be redeemed? From *the dark, hopeless, humanist/pagan culture of Charan* in general and from *the deceitful, oppressive manipulation of her brother Laban* in particular. In the aliyah of Torah, you see, the servant sent to fetch a bride for Yitzchak will go to the dysfunctional home in which Rivkah grew up – which we will quickly discover is the lair of a vicious and cunning predator of prototypical proportions – Laban, Rivkah's manipulative older brother.

Through an improbable series of actions with immense prophetic connotations the servant [himself clearly a prophetic character] will in one fell swoop redeem Rivkah [1] from the manipulations of Laban, [2] from the materialistic, humanistic, and narcissistic culture of Paddan Aram, and [3] from the thick, oppressive darkness of

paganism/natural religion. This fascinating tale is *the Redemption Story in microcosm*. It is glorious both in itself and its impact upon the characters directly involved *and* in its grand prophetic implications for the rest of the world.

The Dangerous Invitation

Remember as we begin our study of this prototypical redemptive process that at the well the servant had taken care not to disclose to Rivkah either his mission [i.e. to find a bride for Yitzchak, the *chosen one* of the Holy One] or his intention toward her [i.e. that *he intended to free her to become that bride*]. When he gave her a gold ring and two gold bracelets he did so merely in reward or repayment for her kindness in giving him a drink and watering his camels. Even when he ‘worshipped’ [Hebrew *shachah*] he blessed the Holy One only because ***‘Here I am, still on the road, and God has led me to the house of my master’s close relatives!’*** The servant knew, you see, that he had *quite a bit of worldly business to transact* with the conniving Laban before the marriage that the Holy One had ordained for Yitzchak from the foundation of the world could become a physical reality.

Based upon tradition one would have expected for the servant’s invitation to Rivkah’s house to come from the head of that household, i.e. from Rivkah’s father Betu’el. But that is not what happened. After seeing the jewelry that had been given to Rivkah and hearing what she was telling her mother about the encounter, Laban ran out to the well to meet the stranger.

V’yavo el-ha-ish v’hineh omed al ha-g’malim al ha-ayin

He came to the man, who was still standing beside the camels near the well,

V’yomer bo beruch Adonai L’mah ta’amod bachutz

and he said, ‘Come, blessed of the Holy One! Why stand outside?’

v’anochi piniti ha-bayit umakom l’gemali

I have cleaned the house and prepared a place for the camels.’

[Genesis 24:29-31]

Laban is one of the darkest characters of Torah. His domain is the domain of darkness, yet he clothes himself very nicely in garments of light. He is quite frankly a *very dangerous man*. And alas, there are many today possessed by a similar spirit, and characterized by similar personality traits, as Laban. We are instructed by Torah concerning such spirits and such traits for a reason - so we can learn by studying Laban’s words and actions to recognize who our enemies are and gain a clear understanding of what tactics they are likely to employ against us.

As we see Laban slither into our narrative today therefore do not merely sit back and hiss at “the villain of the story”. Instead, heed the warning and instruction of Torah as to how to deal with the Laban’s who are destined to cross your path – and mine - in the course of life.

Just Who IS This Guy?

Laban's name is usually translated into English as "white". In Laban's case however "white" does not mean "spiritually pure". Laban is "white" in a physical sense of *reflecting light*. Let me explain by reminding you of a little grade school physics. A physical object is not really "white" or "black" in any substantive sense any more than it is any other color. In the darkness no object has any color whatever. What color an object appears to our eyes depends upon how the object interacts with light. Our eyes perceive color when light is cast upon an object; in the course of interaction of the object with light (which is made up of many wavelengths), the object usually absorbs some of the wavelengths of the light that shines upon it, and reflects others. What one who looks upon the object as light is shining on it sees is the reflected color (or the mixture of the reflected colors). An object appearing red absorbs all wavelengths of light except those our eyes see as red; those wavelengths it rejects, and reflects back at our eyes. When the "red" light waves enter our eye our mind interprets the message it is receiving as "*that object is red*".

But what about *white (Laban)* you may ask? When one looks upon a physical object and sees white it means that *the object has not absorbed any of the light shined upon it* - and therefore has hidden, so to speak, its characteristics from your sight. An object appearing white - to your eyes - is reflecting light that is not its own. It is unchanged by the light cast upon it. It is *deceiving you*. It *mimics light* - but is itself steeped in the deepest darkness imaginable. Perhaps with this explanation you can better understand the teaching of Shaul of Tarsus in II Corinthians 11:13-15:

*For such men are false apostles,
deceitful workmen masquerading as apostles of Messiah.
And no wonder, for ha-Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.
It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness.
Their end will be what their actions deserve".*

With this understanding let us return to the narrative of *Chayei Sarah*.

I See Your True Colors Shinin' Thru ...

Yesterday we concluded our reading with the story of Rivkah excitedly relaying to "her mother's household" everything that had just transpired at the spring between her and the stranger from Kena'an. The first thing we read in today's aliyah is that *Rivkah's brother Laban is running out to meet the man at the spring*. **Genesis 24:29**. Wait a minute. Torah specifically told us that Rivkah's conversations about the man occurred at her *mother's tent*. How did Laban find out? It appears Laban was hanging around Rivkah's 'mother's tent' instead of hanging with his father,

working in the fields, transacting business, or learning a trade. In that fact resides a spiritual principle we all will do well to grasp. The first characteristic of the Laban personality is this: *he has only a superficial relationship with the father; but he spends his time acting like he is the lord of his father's household.*

How can we tell this characteristic is in play? Simple. A son who honored his father would have gone to find Betu'el, reported the events to him, and allowed him to decide what steps to take on behalf of the family. But this is not what happened with Laban. Torah tells us why. It was *Vayehi kir'ot et-ha-nezem* [as soon as he] *had seen the nose ring*, and *v'et ha-tzmidim al-yedei achoto* [and the bracelets on his sister's arms] that he headed for the spring.

What was the main motivator of Laban in going out to where Avraham's servant was standing? Was it a *sh'ma* response to a prompting of the word of the Holy One? Was it *a desire to give hospitality*? Was it *a yearning to re-establish family ties*? Neither of those motivations are what Torah suggests to us. Torah seems to be telling us right up front that what motivated Laban was *the sight of the nose ring and of the bracelets on his sister's arms*. Laban saw the gold and silver, it appears, and immediately saw an *opportunity*!

Introducing A Prototypical Human Deceiver – Preparing Us To Recognize and Withstand the 'Laban Deception'

The Author of Torah has appointed this time each year to teach us to *recognize the characteristics of and familiarize ourselves with the strategies of the first of the great human deceivers that He knows we will face in every generation*. The first prototypical deceiver and mission-disrupter to which Torah introduces us is none other than *Laban*. Laban is not just a man – he is the Torah Prototype of *all who will 'deceive even the Elect'*⁵. Do you know how to recognize his *modus operandi* – and avoid falling victim to his age-old tricks?

Let's take a closer look! Note that instead of seeking out his father Betu'el, advising him of the good news, and seeking his father's counsel, Laban makes a beeline to the spring and invites *the man with the bling-bling* to the family home. This reveals the second and third characteristics of the Laban personality. The second characteristic of the Laban personality is this: *he claims for himself that which belongs to the father*. The third characteristic of the Laban personality is this: *having never asked the father's will, he presumes to speak on the father's*

⁵ According to Hebrew Midrash, *Laban and Bila'am* [i.e. Balaam], the Arami prophet summoned by the Moabite king Balak to curse the Children of Israel on the eve of their entry into the Holy Land, are the same person. Laban/Bila'am begins by seeming like a friend. He initially smiles and offers 'hospitality' and/or refuge. But his behavior is always self-interested and manipulative. Given time, when he does not get what he wants from the relationship, he always turns hostile.

behalf. Are you beginning to see how *dangerous* this person is? Let's go on with the narrative. When Laban got to the spring he said to Avraham's servant:

Bo beruch Adonai

Come, you who are blessed by the Holy One,

lamah ta'amod bachutz

why are you standing out here?

v'anochi piniti ha-bayit umakom l'gamalim

I have prepared the house and a place for the camels.

[Genesis 24:31]

What do these first words of Laban tell us? They reveal the fourth, fifth, and sixth characteristics of the Laban personality.

The fourth characteristic of the Laban personality is this: ***his mouth is full of flattery***. This, by the way, is the primary clue one who *sh'ma's* the Word of the Holy One should look for in dealing with one who appears to be an angel of light. God does not flatter. He does not *have to*. Love and acceptance *emanate from Him like light*. The reason the enemy flatters is ***to try to make you feel the same way you would if you were in God's presence***. It is an essential part of the deception. Immediately be wary, therefore, of anyone and everyone who flatters you with glowing compliments. Favor in the countenance is good – a clear sign to you that the Holy One's Hand is working on your behalf; but flattery with the tongue is a very different story. Flattering words are a sure sign that you are being manipulated by either a narcissist, an ideologue, or a deceiver.

The fifth characteristic of the Laban personality is this: ***he punctuates his sentences by casually 'dropping' the Name of God in ordinary conversation***. Not only will Laban-types *flatter* you, they will often *clothe the flattery in spiritual-sounding language*. Beware this practice, Beloved. It is best to utter the precious names by which our Creator has made Himself known very, very sparingly – and if/when doing so to do it extremely humbly, respectfully, and reverently! Moreover, concerning any person who tends to throw any of the Creator's revealed 'Names' around loosely – much less arrogantly or casually – we must be constantly on your guard. Name-droppers tend to have a personal agenda, not a Kingdom agenda. Be wise as serpents, harmless as doves. Even our Rabbi, Yeshua, therefore, referred to the Holy One - and taught His talmidim to address Him in prayer - simply as 'Father', rather than by any Biblical 'name'.

The sixth characteristic of the Laban personality is this: ***he takes credit for the work of the father and others in the father's household***. Laban said "I have prepared the house and a place for the camels". We know better, don't we, Beloved. Someone in the household had blisters on their hands and straw in their

sandals alright – but it most definitely was *NOT Laban*.

How do I know this? Torah makes it clear. First of all Torah tells us as soon as Laban heard what had happened at the well he *made a beeline to the spot* - taking time to make no preparations for true hospitality at all. If anyone was preparing for hospitality, therefore, it was not Laban – it was Rivkah. Secondly, think with me for a moment. The house in question was not even Laban's house to prepare - it was his father Betu'el's. If Laban had done anything (which he clearly did not) he would have only done it as *an agent of Betu'el* - to whom all honor and glory should have gone. Why then did Laban say he had prepared the house? Ah Dear Reader, it was a convenient lie designed to make the stranger think he was *in Laban's debt* and *to manipulate him into doing what Laban wanted*.

You Have Been Forewarned!

The purpose of this discussion about the characteristics of the prototypical deceiver known as Laban is not to cause you to become cynical or to look at any individual whom you may know with suspicion or distrust. The words of this shiur are certainly not intended to point fingers - or cause you the reader to point fingers - at any individual. In these critical 'last days' however we must understand that deception is more prevalent in our world than truth. If you do not happen to be in relationship with a Laban personality right now, I assure you - you will be before very long. So be *forewarned* - and be *prepared!*

Allow the Holy One to train you in Torah-skills of discernment as to people who *know how to appear to have your best interest in mind when they do not*. Draw close to the Bridegroom-King of Heaven, and lean on His Breast. Let Him empower you to see things – and people – as He sees them. And let Him teach you how to fight off the urge to plop down in the seat of the scornful and start judging and automatically writing off people around you who exhibit one or more of those Labanic characteristics. And perhaps most importantly, while you are at it why don't you ask the Holy One to *search out and expose any aspect of the Laban personality that lives in you - so that you make t'shuvah* and receive cleansing and purging from the Holy One of all Labanic tendencies.

It is inevitable that we will come face to face with Laban some time. But the one place we should never run into him is in the face staring back at us from the mirror. *Selah*.

The Prophetic Covenant is Cut

Avraham's servant may or may not have recognized Laban as the opportunist and deceiver he was. It did not matter. He had come to *redeem Rivkah* from the house of Laban. He therefore accompanied Laban back to the house, entered his lair, and

waited for the appropriate moment to make his move:

V'yavo ha-ish ha-baytah v'yefatach ha-gemalim
The stranger came into the house and unmuzzled the camels.

Vayiten teven umispo l'gemalim
And he gave the camels straw and fodder,

umayim l'rchoz raglav v'rag'lei ha-anashim asher ito
and provided water for the men with him to wash their feet.

V'yusam lefanav l'echol v'yomer lo ochal ad im-dibarti devarai
Food was served, but he said, 'I will not eat until I have spoken my piece.'

[Genesis 24:32-33]

In the ancient world of the Middle East *one did not eat with just anyone*. Unless the parties understood each other and had some common ground of agreement there could be no sharing of bread between them. Hence the servant would not eat the food offered him by Laban *until he had both [a] explained his mission and his intentions and [b] heard the response of Rivkah's family*.

So with platters of food sitting untouched and growing stale in front of him the servant painstakingly laid out the reason for and circumstances of his visit and his intention regarding Rivkah. ***Eved Avraham anochi*** – i.e. *I am a servant of Avraham*. ***Vayomer elay ... lakachta ishah livni mimishpachti umibeyt-avi*** – *And he said to me: 'Take a wife for my son from my family and my father's house. Genesis 24:39-40*. The servant then told them all, from his perspective, the story of his encounter with Rivkah at the well. The only place his explanation to the family varied from the events as they were told to us by Torah is when he explained the reason he had prostrated himself and blessed the Holy One. Concerning this point he felt the need to advise everyone there:

V'ekod v'eishtachaveh l'Adonai
I bowed low and prostrated myself to the Holy One

v'avarech et-Adonai Elohei adoni Avraham
I blessed the Holy One, God of my master Avraham,

asher hinchani b'derech emet
who led me on a true path

lakachat et-bat-achi adoni livno
to get a niece of my master for his son.

[Genesis 24:48]

There. The servant has said it plainly. He is not there by accident, but by *intelligent design*. He has come on a Divine Mission - to retrieve 'a niece' of his master for Yitzchak's bride.

With the 'cat' being 'out of the bag' Avraham's servant wasted no time. He

proceeded immediately to ‘*pop the all-important question*’:

V'atah im-yesh'chem osim chesed v'emet et-adoni hagidu li

'Now if you want to do what is kind and right to my master, tell me.

v'im-lo hagidu li v'efneh al-yamin o al-smol

'If not, say so, and I will go to the right or to the left.'

[Genesis 24:49]

This is the ‘*pregnant moment*’. From an earthly standpoint all seems to hinge upon the response of Laban and the rest of Rivkah’s family members to the proposal. If they will accept a betrothal agreement for Rivkah and Yitzchak the meal before them will be a sealing of the covenant. If they refuse ... well, the servant must see to it that they do not refuse.

Vaya'an Laban uVetu'el v'yomeru

Laban and Betuel both spoke up.

m'Adonai yatza ha-davar

'It is something from the Holy One!'

lo nuchal daber eleicha ra o-tov

'We cannot say anything bad or good.

Hineh-Rivkah l'faneicha

Here is Rebecca in front of you.

kach v'lech uteihi ishah l'ven-adoneicha

Take her and go. Let her be a wife for your master's son

ka'asher diber Adonai

as the Holy One has spoken.'

Excellent! The time is right. The parties are willing. The door is open. Now it is time to get down to the details, and close the deal. There are, you see, some significant formal covenant protocols which must be followed and finalized – there must be specific agreement regarding the covenant ‘down payment’ or sign, establishing the bride price to be paid to redeem the maiden, regarding the covenant meal to inaugurate the new bond between the parties, and, of course, regarding the setting of a date and venue for the wedding.

Matters of Covenant-Cutting Protocol

According to ancient covenant protocol in order for a covenant to be sealed the stronger partner in the covenant relationship – the *suzerain* – had to present to the weaker partner – the *vassal* – and the weaker partner had to accept, a ‘**down payment**’. This down payment, called an ‘*ot*’⁶. In ancient covenant protocols the *ot* functioned something like ‘earnest money’ in a real estate transaction today.

⁶ *Ot* is Hebrew, *alef, vav, tav*. Strong’s Hebrew word # 226, it is pronounced like the English word ‘oat’.

The essence of the *ot* protocol – much like the ‘earnest money’ requirement - is to ensure that *the stronger partner invests something in the venture – i.e. takes an initial active step toward beginning performance* of his covenant obligations, and that in response *the weaker partner has to receive and step under the protection of that performance*. The *ot* is *the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen*.

In a marriage covenant the stronger partner – traditionally the husband - undertakes to support and provide for the physical and emotional security of the weaker partner, traditionally the wife. Traditionally therefore the ‘down payment’ [*ot*] relates to that undertaking. Something valuable, that could be sold or traded for support and a place of safe dwelling, is to be given to, and accepted by, the weaker partner. Hence in today’s aliyah we are told that when the players in this Divine Drama sat down to negotiate the covenant protocols the first thing that happened was:

V’yotze ha-eved klei-chesef

Then the servant brought out silver jewelry

uchlei zahav uvegadim

and things of gold as well as articles of clothing

vayiten l’Rivkah

and he gave them to Rebecca.

[Genesis 24:53]

What do gold and silver jewelry and articles of clothing have to do with a covenant of betrothal, you ask? Consider whose responsibility it is to provide a woman with gold and silver jewelry and clothing. It is, of course, her husband’s responsibility. To make to a maiden an offer of tangible things a husband is obligated to provide for his wife is to take the first step toward performance of the husband’s commitment. It is to show good faith. The gold and silver jewelry the servant brought out were offered – and understood accepted – as down payments - *signs* as it were – that assured Rivkah that she would always be provided for. Her days of dependence upon her father and her brother for provision were over. She had found a new – and far more worthy – provider. She was now assured that by virtue of the covenant that was about to be cut *she would always be clothed, sheltered and adorned with splendor*.

At this point you may wish to read and meditate on Revelation 19:8: “***And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.***”

The Mohar Protocol

In the ancient world a girl of marriageable age performed valuable services for her family. To take her away from the family for marriage required therefore that the family be compensated for the loss of her services. Hence once it was agreed that Rivkah would marry Yitzchak the servant of Avraham brought forth the *mohar*⁷ – or ‘*bride price*’.

Immediately after giving Rivkah the gifts that were to assure her of the Bridegroom’s intention to perform all the covenant undertakings of marriage for her, the servant turned his attention to those who would consider themselves deprived of Rivkah’s services. As Torah puts it: *Umig’danot natan l’achiha ul’imah* - and he gave precious gifts to her brother and mother. Genesis 24:53(b).

The *mohar* was accepted. The loss of Rivkah was now compensated for. The covenant was now ‘cut’. The next step in the proceeding was the covenant meal.

The Breaking of Bread

The closest thing we in modern Western culture have experienced of a ‘covenant meal’ is the ‘engagement party’ or ‘rehearsal dinner’ at which a meal is shared by the families and friends of the prospective bride and groom. But the covenant meal was a part of all ancient covenants, not just covenants of marriage. By sharing a meal together the participants in the covenant declared themselves ‘at peace’ not just with *each other*, but also with *all the commitments and conditions set forth in the covenant*. Torah describes the covenant meal at the house of Betu’el as follows:

V’yoc’hlu vayish’tu hu v’ha-anashim asher-imo v’yalinu

And then he ate and drank, he and his men, and they spent the night.

[Genesis 24:54]

It is interesting to note that the only ones Torah refers to as eating are the servant and his men. Perhaps – just perhaps - Laban was not quite as ‘on board’ with the covenant as he had previously let on. We will see, Dear Reader.

The Setting of the Date and Determination of the Venue

It had been agreed that Rivkah would marry Yitzchak. The sign of the covenant had been tendered and accepted by Rivkah. The bride price had been offered and received by her family members. But no one as of yet had discussed a DATE or venue for the marriage.

Perhaps sensing the spiritual climate he was in, the servant of Avraham did not wish to linger in Laban’s household [for it was now obvious that he had usurped Betu’el

⁷ *Mohar* is Strong’s Hebrew word #4119. It is spelled *mem, hey, resh*, and is pronounced *moe-hawr*. It is from a verb root that means to physically deliver to a seller of goods the negotiated price one has agreed to pay for something one wishes to purchase.

position of leadership in the home].

V'yochlu v'yishtu hu v'ha-anashim asher-imo v'yalinu

And after they he and his men had eaten and slept

vayakumu v'boker vayomer shal'chuni l'adoni

And having awakened in the morning, he said, 'Let me go back to my master.'

[Genesis 24:54(b)]

At this point the 'crawl fishing' of Laban begins. Remember that before the meal, while the covenant negotiations were going on, Laban and Betu'el had both said:

*Behold Rebecca is before you, take [her] and go,
and let her be a wife for your master's son, as the Holy One has spoken.*

The next morning however Laban *and his mother* try to contravene Betu'el. They do not want to let Rivkah go so easily. They want to extract a higher price. They therefore insist that Rivkah stay with them a little longer.

The period of time Laban and his mother propose to delay Rivkah's union with Yitzchak is interpreted by some as *a week or 10 days*. By others it is construed as *a year or ten months*. The servant however was not in a mood to renegotiate this part of the deal. He had experienced quite enough of Laban's doubletalk. He wanted to take Rivkah and leave for home *right then* – as Betu'el had agreed the preceding day.

A compromise was reached. The parties agreed to settle the disagreement over timing in a very gentlemanly way - by *asking Rivkah her preference*. The bride, you see, has to make herself ready. Here is how Torah records the compromise of the servant and Laban:

Vayikre'u l'Rivkah v'yomeru eleiha ha-teleichi im ha-ish hazeh

They summoned Rebecca and said to her, 'Do you wish to go with this man?'

V'tomer elech

'I will go,' she replied.

[Genesis 24:58]

From this the sages of Israel derive that no one may be married against their choice. You can figure out the latter-days prophetic implications yourself, can't you?

It was now settled. Rivkah and the servant were on their way. 500 miles of dusty roads lay ahead of them. As a result of this journey the lives of Yitzchak and Rivkah are both about to change forever. And the world is about to change as well.

The Matriarchal Blessing

Rivkah has been redeemed from the house of Laban. More than that, she has been

chosen to become the *ishah* unto the only then-living heir to the covenant through which the Holy One had determined to redeem mankind. She is leaving her father's house and her kinsman behind. But Rivkah's family did not send her alone nor without their blessing. They sent with her some attendants and a trusted servant who had served as her wet nurse. And Rivkah's family proclaimed this amazing blessing over her:

achoteinu at chay l'alfei revavah

'Our sister, may you become thousands of myriads.

v'yirash zar'ech et sha'ar son'av

May your descendants inherit the gate of their foes.'

[Genesis 24:60]

To this day in orthodox circles these words are spoken by every bride's family members to the bride.

The Bride and Bridegroom Finally Meet

For most people it is hard to imagine marrying someone you have never even seen. But that is exactly what Rivkah did. And of course that is exactly what Yitzchak did as well.

*And Rivkah and her maidens arose and rode on the camels,
and they followed the man; and the servant took Rivkah and left.*

*Now Yitzchak was on his way, coming from Be'er Lachai Ro'i⁸,
and he dwelt in the land of the south.*

*And Yitzchak went forth to pray in the field towards evening,
and he lifted his eyes and saw, and behold, camels were approaching.*

And Rivkah lifted her eyes, and saw Yitzchak, and she fell off her camel.

And she said to the servant: "Who is that man walking in the field towards us?"

And the servant said: "He is my master."

And she took up the veil, and she covered her face.

Before Rivkah even saw Yitzchak she had agreed, with devotion and self-sacrifice, to be betrothed to him.

On her way to meet her bridegroom Rivkah saw a man approaching in the field. Somehow she knew intuitively that it must be the man to whom she was betrothed. Can you imagine what that was like? The sages say that Rivkah experienced such intense emotions at her first glimpse of Yitzchak that she *fell off her camel*. That was a day, I suspect, Rivkah and Yitzchak would always remember.

Nissuin – The Wedding

⁸ Rashi says Yitzchak had gone there to bring *Hagar* [now, according to the Talmud, known as *Keturah*] back to remarry Avraham.

The first stage of Hebrew marriage – *kiddushin* – has been completed. What had yet to occur was the second stage - *nissuin* [from a Hebrew verb meaning to "lift up"]. At the time of *nissuin* the bridegroom actually takes his bride to their marital home and they begin married life together. Here is how Torah describes the process in relation to Yitzchak and Rivkah:

*And Yitzchak brought her to the tent of Sarah his mother,
and he took Rivkah, and she became his wife.*

The marriage ‘*chuppah*’ [wedding canopy] selected for the *nissuin* celebration of Yitzchak and his bride turned out to be the special tent that had belonged to Sarah. Was there a ceremony? We are not specifically told. If there was one at all it was by no means ‘the wedding of the century’. There is no record of their being any music, nor are we told what the bride and groom wore. There was no ‘*minister*’ or even a ‘*justice of the peace*’. It appears that the parties simply ‘took’ each other - and became *ish* and *ishah*. No one said anything, however, about ‘happily ever after’. Torah is no fairy tale. It is about real people with real conflicts who over the course of a real lifetime learn to surrender those conflicts to a real God. Much more on that in next week’s studies.

Do You ... Love Me?

In the play and movie *Fiddler on the Roof* there is a touching song sequence in which, 25 years into marriage, the principal character, Tevye, asks his wife, Golda, ‘Do you love me?’ Their marriage, you see, had been arranged by their parents. They had never laid eyes on each other until the day they were betrothed. Here is how the sequence begins:

Tevye: Golda, do you love me?

Golda: Do I what?

Tevye: Do you love me?

***Golda: Do I love you? Our daughter's getting married
and there's trouble in the town.
You're upset, you're worn out,
go inside, go lie down! Maybe it's indigestion.***

Tevye: No. Golda, I asked you a question – do you love me?

Golda: You're a fool.

Tevye: I know, but

Tevye: I know, but do you love me?

***Golda: Do I love you? For 25 years I've washed your clothes,
cooked your meals, cleaned your house,
given you children, milked your cow –***

*After 25 years, why talk about love right now? I'm your wife!
do you love me?*

Golda: *Do I love him? For twenty-five years I've lived with him,
fought with him, starved with him.
25 years my bed is his. If that's not love, what is?*

Tevye: *“Then, you love me!”*

Golda: *“I suppose I do.”*

Tevye: *“And I suppose I love you too!”*

In the closing lines of today's aliyah of Torah we find the first time in the Bible that anyone is described as *loving* their spouse. The Torah never tells us that Adam loved Eve, or even that Avraham loved Sarah. With Yitzchak, however, we find the specific statement being made: *And he loved her. Thus Yitzchak was comforted for [the loss of] his mother.*

For Yitzchak, as with Tevye and Golda in *Fiddler on the Roof*, love is not what *led* to marriage – but is what *resulted* from it. Whatever happened, you ask, to "*first comes love, then comes marriage?*" We live in a world in which we say, "*All you need is love,*" and "*love will triumph over all*". Torah, however, seems to suggest the opposite. Torah seems to suggest that true marriage doesn't begin with love, but that a real marriage *leads* to love. This of course flies in the face of the conventional wisdom of our times. Movies, books and songs in our culture celebrate romantic love as the ultimate criterion for marriage. Torah, on the other hand, suggests that if there is a strong foundation of *common values*, a *shared destiny and purpose in life*, and *mutual submission to the will of the Holy One*, couples will, over time and through shared experiences, come to love one another in a meaningful way that far, far transcends romantic love. And if a couple does not share common values, share a similar sense of destiny and purpose in life, and share a mutual submission to the will of the Holy One, then all the romantic love in the world between them will result in only heartache and sorrow – not to mention bitter disappointment - in the end. Romantic love, after all, is at its root selfish, superficial, conditional, and sensual. The kind of love that a long-term marriage requires is the polar opposite kind of passion – what marriage requires is a passion that is *self-less, deeply rooted, unshakeable, and intensely spiritual*.

Ah, but I digress. Now is not a time to speak too much of weighty matters. It is time to celebrate. The song of the bride and bridegroom resonates through the camp of the covenant community. Yitzchak, the chosen heir, has his bride. Rivkah, the humble maidservant, at long last has her bridegroom. Another patriarch and matriarch are ready to build a household upon the foundation of the Covenant.

The Promises of the Holy One to Avraham that through his seed all nations of the earth will be blessed are right on course to carry forward into another generation. *Mazel tov* Yitzchak. *Mazel tov* Rivkah. And *mazel tov*, lost and dying world – for behold, your Redeemer is coming!!

Questions Concerning Today's Study

1. Let us begin our study of today's aliyah by answering a few simple questions:

- [A] What was the name of Rivkah's brother, mother, and father?
- [B] What is the meaning of each of those person's name?
- [C] What acts of hospitality did Rivkah's family perform for the servant and his men?
- [D] As he told his story and stated his purpose, in what ways did the servant give honor to the Holy One?
- [E] Which two members of Rivkah's family responded on behalf of Rivkah?
- [F] What was their response?
- [G] What did the servant give to Rivkah to seal the marriage covenant?
- [H] Who else received something from Avraham's servant? Why?
- [I] How long did the servant stay in Rivkah's home?
- [J] How long did Laban and Rivkah's mother want Rivkah's betrothal period to be?
- [K] What is the purpose of a betrothal period?
- [L] When Rivkah left with the servant, who went with her [Note: be careful to read verse 61 as well as verse 59]?
- [M] What were the two parts of the blessing spoken over Rivkah by her family?
- [N] While the servant was gone to look for a bride for Yitzchak, where had Yitzchak been living?
- [O] Torah indicates that as the caravan containing Rivkah approached Yitzchak was in a "field". What field did his family own?
- [P] For what purpose does Torah say Yitzchak had gone to this field?
- [Q] Whose tent was used as a *Chuppah* (wedding canopy)?
- [R] How old was Yitzchak when he and Rivkah were married? [Hint: look ahead to Genesis 25:20].
- [S] How old do you think Rivkah was when they married?
- [T] In verse 67, after the arranged marriage had been completed, Torah tells us that Yitzchak "loved" Rivkah. What do you think it means for a Godly man to "love" a Godly woman?

2. In today's haftarah aged King David is visited by *Natan* [Nathan], the primary prophet of the Holy One in David's time.

- [A] What did Natan say that Adoniyah had done?

[B] What question did Natan ask David?

3. In today's reading from the first letter from Shaul of Tarsus to the talmidim [disciples] in Corinth Shaul concludes his remarks about death and resurrection and the difference between the natural and the spiritual.

[A] What does Shaul say will not inherit the kingdom of God?

[B] What does Shaul mean when he says "*we will not all sleep*"?

[C] What does Shaul mean when he says "*we will all be changed*"?

[D] To what is Shaul referring when he mentions "*the Last Trump*"?

[E] What does Shaul say will happen when that shofar [trumpet] sounds?

[F] Why does Shaul insist this "must" happen?

*May your home be blessed with love,
and may you recognize Laban when you see him.*

The Rabbi's son

Meditation for Today's Study

Psalm 116:12-14

What will I give to the Holy One for all his benefits toward me?

*I will take the cup of Yeshua,
and call on the name of the Holy One.*

*I will pay my vows to the Holy One;
Yes, in the presence of all His people.*