

# Zera Shimshon

by Rabbi Shimshon Chaim Nachmani zt"l

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## Chapter V: Chavei Sarah (Gen. 23:1-25:18)

Essay 9: This essay presents a number of different concepts: A) Eliezer's ulterior motive in seeking a wife for Isaac; B) The match of Isaac and Rebecca was ordained by G-d; C) Eliezer's reliance upon miracles; and D) The ulterior motives of Laban and Bethuel.

### A. Eliezer's ulterior motive in seeking a wife for Isaac.

**פְּסוּק** [אלי] לא־תלך האשה אחרֵי, פִּירַשׁ רש"י, אלי כתיב. בת היתה לו לאליעזר, והיה מחזר למצוא עילה שיאמר לו אברהם לפנות אליו להשיאו בתו וכו'.

There is a verse: **“Perhaps the woman will not follow me?”** (Gen. 24:39). **Rashi explained, “ ‘Perhaps’ is written” [deficiently without the *vav*]**, i.e., אלי instead of אולי.<sup>1</sup> The Masoretic tradition still has the word in that verse pronounced the same as though it had the *vav*, i.e., “*ulai*.” However, the spelling אלי is typically used for a different word, “*elai*,” meaning “to me.” Rashi explains: **“Eliezer had a daughter, and he was rehearsing to find a rationale by which he would be unable to bring a wife back for Isaac, so that Abraham would say he wants to turn to him, to marry Isaac to his daughter. But Abraham said to him, ‘My son is blessed and you are cursed, and one who is cursed is forbidden to cleave to one who is blessed.’”**<sup>2</sup>

הקשו המפרשים למה נתן הפתוב רמז זה בהזרת דברים שאמר אליעזר ללבן, ושם כתב אלי חסר, ולא רמז זה בתחלה, מיד שאמר אליעזר לאברהם אולי לא תלך וכו', ששם היה ראוי לכתוב אלי חסר. ועוד יש לדקדק מה עילה שיהיה בכאן, היה לו לומר בקיצור, בת היתה לו והיה מחזר שיאמר לו אברהם וכו', דלשון עילה נראה שהיא כמו תחבולה וערמה.

**The commentators questioned why Scripture gave this hint in repetition of [Abraham's] words that Eliezer said to Laban, i.e., Gen. 24:39, where “perhaps” is written**

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<sup>1</sup> In the first edition, the word אולי is spelled fully. It has been corrected here to match the Torah's spelling.

<sup>2</sup> Rashi's source is Midrash Gen. Rabbah 59:9, which is actually a commentary on a different verse, Gen. 24:5, where Eliezer was speaking with Abraham. Rabbi Avigdor Bonchek, What's Bothering Rashi? Vayikra, Volume 3, p. 9–10, notes that the Midrash was not motivated by the deficient spelling, because at Gen. 24:5, the word אולי is spelled fully. Rather, Rabbi Bonchek suggests that the Midrash was motivated by the selection of the word “perhaps,” which is more likely to indicate a positive outcome, whereas the word פן (*pen*) (lest) would have been more appropriate to indicate a negative outcome. I.e., from Abraham's point of view, “lest” would have been more appropriate, because it would have been bad if Eliezer wouldn't be able to find a suitable wife for Isaac. But from Eliezer's point of view as speaker, he was hopeful that he wouldn't be able to find a suitable wife for Isaac, and that Abraham would instead choose his daughter; therefore, he used a more positive word, “perhaps.”

**deficiently. It didn't hint this** by using the deficient spelling **at the beginning**, i.e., in Gen. 24:5, **immediately when Eliezer said to Abraham, “Perhaps she won't”** consent to **come** with me to this land, where it would have been fitting to write **“perhaps”** deficiently. **Also, one should scrutinize why** the words **“to find a rationale”** belongs there in Rashi's commentary, **as he could have more succinctly said, “He had a daughter and was rehearsing that Abraham would tell him.”** The word **“rationale”** appears as if Eliezer intended a **trick and a ploy**.

—וְנִרְאָה שְׂאֵחָת פִּירוּקָא לְחִבְרָתָהּ, שְׁהָרִי כְּתִיב, וַיִּקַּח הָאִישׁ נָזֶם זָהָב. וְלֹא פִירַשׁ הַכְּתוּב מָה עָשָׂה בּוֹ כְּמוֹ שֶׁפִּירַשׁ בְּצַמִּידִים—וּשְׁנֵי צַמִּידִים עַל-יָדָיָהּ—שְׁהַנִּיחָם עַל יָדָיָהּ. וּמִסְתַּמָּא יֵשׁ לָנוּ מְקוֹם לִזְמֵר שֶׁקִּדְשָׁה בְּשִׁבִיל יִצְחָק עִם הַנָּזֶם, וְזֶהוּ לְשׁוֹן, וַיִּקַּח הָאִישׁ, דְּשִׁיבָה בְּעִנְיָן הַקִּידוּשִׁין. כְּדָא מְרִינָן, גְּמַר קִיחָה קִיחָה וְכוּ'.

In one of the adjoining verses, it is written, “And it was when the camels had finished drinking, **and the man took a gold nose-ring weighing a half-shekel**, and two bands for her arms, ten shekels of gold in weight” (Gen. 24:22). **Scripture doesn't explain what he did with [the nose-ring], as it explains for the bands—“and two bands for her arms”—that he placed on her arms. We can likely say that she was betrothed to Isaac with the nose-ring, and this is the significance of the language “and the man took,” which pertains to the matter of betrothal. As it says:**

That betrothal is accomplished by means of giving money is **derived** because the word **“taking”** is used in the context of betrothal and similarly **“taking”** is used with regard to the field of Ephron. How so? It is written with regard to marriage: “When a man takes a woman” (Deut. 24:1), and it is written concerning Abraham's purchase of the field of the Cave of Machpelah from Ephron the Hittite: “I will give money for the field; take it from me” (Gen. 23:13). This verbal analogy teaches that just as Ephron's field was acquired with money, so too, a woman can be acquired with money.

- (Kiddushin 2a)

וְאַחֲרֵיכֵן נָתַן לָהּ הַצַּמִּידִים, בְּתוֹרַת סְבִלוֹנוֹת. וְאִיתָא בְּבִבְא בְּתֵרָא פָּרַק מִי שְׂמַת (דף קמ"ו) הַשּׁוֹלַח סְבִלוֹנוֹת לְבֵית הַמִּי, שֶׁלַּח שָׁם מֵאָה מָנָה, וְאָכַל שָׁם סְעוּדַת חֲתָן אֶפִּילוּ בְּדִינָר אֵינָן נִגְבִּין. לֹא אָכַל שָׁם סְעוּדַת חֲתָן. הָרִי אֵלָיו נִגְבִּין. שֶׁ[ ] לִוְחֹ מֵאֵי אָכַל שָׁם חֲתָן? וּפִירַשׁ רַש"י דְּמִשְׁמַע הוּא עֲצָמוּ עַכ"ל.

**Afterward, he gave her the bands**, per the **teaching** of giving **betrothal gifts** to a bride. **It's brought in Bava Batra, in the ninth chapter “One who died” (page 146a):**<sup>3</sup> **“With regard to one who sends betrothal gifts to his father-in-law's house following his betrothal, even if he sent there the sum of one hundred maneh (i.e., 10,000 shekalim), but subsequently ate there a groom's feast (even if it was worth only the value of a single dinar), if for any reason the marriage**

<sup>3</sup> “One who Died” is chapter 9 of Bava Batra, beginning in the Gemara at 139b. The text quoted is a Mishnah [Bava Batra 9:5] that appears in the Gemara at page 146a.

doesn't occur, [the betrothal gifts] sent by the groom **are not collected** to be returned to him. However, if **he did not eat a groom's feast there**, then [the betrothal gifts] sent by the groom **are collected** to be returned to him, as they were not an unconditional gift." (Bava Batra 146a). The Gemara asks, "**What is the law if it was the agent of the groom who ate there?**" The Gemara does not provide an answer, **but Rashi [sic]<sup>4</sup> explains, "The meaning is the groom himself, i.e., only a meal eaten by the groom himself would exempt the bride's family from having to return the gifts."**

והנה אֵלֶיֶזֶר הָיָה שְׁלִיחַ וְכֹבֵד שְׁלַח הַסְּבִלוֹנוֹת. וּבֵינָם אִם הָיָה אוֹכֵל שָׁם אוֹ לֹא, אִם הֵם לֹא יִרְצוּ לִיתֵן לוֹ רֵבָקָה, הִיוּ הַסְּבִלוֹנוֹת חוֹזְרִים. וְלֵמָּה לֹא רָצָה לְאָכֹל עַד שֶׁדִּבֶּר דְּבָרָיו? אֲלֵא נִדְּאֵי שְׁאֵלֵיֶזֶר נִהְגָּ אֶת עֲצָמוֹ בַּתְּחִבּוּלָה וּמִרְמָה כְּדֵי שְׁיִחְשְׁדוּהוּ, שֶׁהוּא רוֹצֵה לִיקַח אֶת רֵבָקָה לְעֲצָמוֹ וְלֹא לִיִּצְחָק. וְהִרְאִיָּה שֶׁלֹּא רָצָה לְאָכֹל כְּדֵי שֶׁלֹּא לְאֵבֵד הַסְּבִלוֹנוֹת שֶׁכֹּבֵד נָתַן. וְהֵם בְּנֵדָאֵי לֹא יִרְצוּ לִיתֵן רֵבָקָה לְאִשָּׁה לְעֵבֵד. אוֹ לְפִי שֶׁהִיָּה מִתְחַלֵּה עֶבֶד כְּדִלְקַמֵּן שְׁחָרְפָה הִיא לָהֶם. וְאִזּוֹ הוּא פְּטוּר מִשְׁבוּעַת אֲבָרָהֶם, וְהִיָּה יָכוֹל לִיתֵן לוֹ בְּתוֹ עֲכָשָׁיו, שִׁיִּצְאָ מִקְּלָל אֲרוּר וּבֵא לְקָלֵל בְּרוּחַ, דְּהִיָּינוּ מִקְּלָל עֶבֶד לְקָלֵל גַּר צָדִיק. וְנִהוּ הָעִילָה שְׁאָמַר אוּלַי חָסֵר, דְּמִשְׁמַע אֵלַי, כְּלוּמַר שֶׁהִיָּה רוֹצֵה רֵבָקָה לְעֲצָמוֹ, וּלְפִי זֶה לֹא תִלְדָּה הָאִשָּׁה אַחֲרָיו.

**Here Eliezer was an agent and had already sent the betrothal gifts. Whether he ate there or not, if [Laban and Bethuel] didn't want to give him Rebecca, the betrothal gifts would be returned. So why didn't he want to eat until he spoke his words?<sup>5</sup> Rather, it is certain that Eliezer comported himself with a trick and a ploy so that they would fear him, that he was not acting as an agent but rather would want to take Rebecca for himself and not for Isaac. The proof of this is that he didn't want to eat, in order that they would think he was viewing himself as the groom and wanted to ensure that the betrothal gifts that he already gave to them wouldn't be lost by him eating a meal at their home, in the event the wedding was cancelled. They certainly didn't want to give Rebecca as a wife to someone who was presently a servant. Or even if he was presently a freeman, he was originally a servant, which was a disgrace to them. Thus, [Eliezer] schemed that he would be exempt from the vow to Abraham (Gen. 24:2–4), i.e., by having made an effort, and that after having scared off Rebecca's family, he would be able to give [Abraham] his daughter now as a wife for Isaac, and would be exempt from the category "cursed" and would come to the category "blessed," that is from the category of a servant to the category of a convert. This was the "rationale" that Rashi said Eliezer was rehearsing, and that [Scripture] said "perhaps" deficiently, having the meaning "to me," as if to say that [Eliezer] wanted Rebecca for himself, and according to this he hoped that the woman would not follow him.**

<sup>4</sup> Bava Batra has a commentary by Rashi only up to page 29b. The commentary presented for the later pages of Bava Batra is by his grandson Rabbi Samuel ben Meir (c. 1085–c. 1158) (Rashbam).

<sup>5</sup> "But when food was set before him, he said, 'I will not eat until I have told my tale.'" (Gen. 24:33).

ומשום הכי, רמזו הכתוב בכאן בתזרת דברים שאמר אליעזר ללבן, כדי להודיענו תחבולה זו ולהשמיענו הטעם שלא רצה לאכול עד שדיבר דבריו. וזהו הטעם שהתחיל לומר, ויאמר עבד אברהם אנכי.

**Because of this, Scripture hinted to us here in repetition of the words spoken by Eliezer to Laban, in order to inform us of this trick and to let us know [Eliezer's] intent that he didn't want to eat until he had spoken his words. This is the reason that he began his introduction by saying, "I am Abraham's servant." (Gen. 24:34).**

אי נמי יש לומר שמתחלה, שהיה עבד, לא היה לו מקום לומר ליתן בתו ליצחק, שהרי עבד אין לו יחס, ואברהם אדרבא היה מבקש אשה ליצחק מיחס הגון. אמנם, עתה שיצא מקלל עבד, שפיר רמז הכתוב בכאן אלי חסר. וזהו נמי שכתב רש"י שהיה מבקש עילה וכו', שהרי לפי האמת אף שיצא הוא עתה מקלל עבד, הלא בתו שפכר נולדה מן העבד, היא שפחה ואין לה יחס. אלא שפשלא ירצו לתת לו רבקה, שאז אברהם מתרצה ליקח אשה מבנות כנען, כמו שפירש רש"י בפרק ג' דקידושין (דף ס"א), ועיי"ש. אפשר שבגדון זה תבוא איזו סברא לאליעזר שבתו עדיפא מינייהו, ועוד שיכולים לשחרר אף אותה.

**One could alternatively say that originally, when he was a servant, he didn't have grounds to suggest giving his daughter to Isaac, because a servant doesn't have a distinguished lineage, whereas Abraham requested a wife for Isaac from a proper lineage. But in fact, now that [Eliezer] had exited from the category of a servant, the deficient spelling of "perhaps" is a good hint written here as to his intentions. This is why Rashi wrote that [Eliezer] wanted a rationale etc., because even though he was now truly exiting from the category of a servant, his daughter had been born from him while he was a servant, and therefore she was a maidservant, without a distinguished lineage. Rather, when [Laban and Bethuel] wouldn't want to give Rebecca to him, then Abraham would want to take a wife for Isaac from daughters of Canaan, as Rashi explained in the third chapter of Kiddushin (page 61b), and see there.<sup>6</sup> It's possible that in this discussion, some thought came to Eliezer that his daughter would be preferred, and that they would be able to also liberate her from her servitude.**

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<sup>6</sup> Abraham made Eliezer swear an oath and then instructed him, "You shall not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites in whose land I dwell; but you shall go to my father's house, to my family, and get a wife for my son." (Gen. 24:37–38). At Kiddushin 61b, the Gemara asks why Abraham needed to add, "Only in this way shall you be freed from my oath: if, when you come to my family, they refuse you—only then shall you be freed from my oath." (Gen. 24:41). The Gemara answers that it is to clarify that the arrangement had to be satisfactory not only for Rebecca, but also for her family, and that otherwise Eliezer should not bring her against their wishes. Rashi's interpretation is that if the family didn't agree, Eliezer would be free from the oath and could seek a wife for Isaac among the Canaanites.

B. The miracles showing that the match of Isaac and Rebecca was ordained by G-d.

ומעתה נבוא לביאור הפסוקים, שמתחלה אמר לו אברהם, ה' אלהי השמים, אשר לקחני מבית אבי ומארץ מולדתי וכו'— הוא ישלח מלאכו לפניך וכו'. ה' שיודע טוב מולדתי ויחסי ישלח מלאכו לפניך, כדי שחס ושלום לא אפגום יחסי לקחת אשה שאינה הוגנת לו. ואיתא בפרק ד' דקידושין, כל הנושא אשה שאינה הוגנת לו, אליהו כופתו והקב"ה רוצעו וכו'. והכי נמי, ישלח מלאכו לפניך, לרמוז על אליהו הממונה על זה, כדאיתא התם. ועל פולם, אליהו [ו] כותב והקב"ה חותם— חוץ ממי שנושא אשה שאינה הוגנת לו. והיינו דאיתא בבבא אשית רבה, ישלח מלאכו לפניך, ר' דוסא אמר זה מלאך מסויים עכ"ל.

From here we will come to a clarification of the verses, that at first Abraham said to [Eliezer], “The L-rd, the G-d of Heaven, who took me from my father’s house and from my native land, who promised me on oath, saying, ‘I will assign this land to your offspring’—He will send His angel before you, and you will get a wife for my son from there.” (Gen. 24:7). That is, the L-rd who knows the goodness of my native land and my lineage “will send His angel before you” in order that, G-d forbid, I won’t impair my lineage by taking a wife who is not fit for [Isaac]. It is brought in the fourth chapter of Kiddushin (70a), “Anyone who marries a woman who is not suited for him due to her lineage, Elijah binds him, and the Holy One, Blessed be He, lashes him.” Also, another reason that Scripture says, “He has sent His angel before you,” is to hint that Elijah is the appointee for this, as it is written there in Kiddushin 70a.<sup>7</sup> For everything, Elijah writes and the Holy One, Blessed be He, signs off—with the exception of one who marries a woman who is not suited for him. As it is written in Bereisheet (Gen.) Rabbah (59:10) regarding the verse: “‘He will send His angel before you,’ Rabbi Dosa says this refers to a particular angel.”<sup>8</sup>

ויען וכו' לא נוכל דבר אליה רע או טוב. דלקאורה הנה מקום לדבר רע. כדאמרינן בפרק ב' דקידושין, אסור לאדם שיקדש בתו עד שתגדיל ותאמר בפלוני אני רוצה. ויש לדבר טוב, לפי שאם קדשה מקודשת. ובאמת, כל היכא דאיפא, שום החרם, מקדשים אותה אפילו לכתחלה, כמו שכתב בהגהה באבן העזר (סימן ל"ו סעיף ח') ועיי"ש.

“Then [Laban and Bethuel] answered and said, ‘The matter was ordained by the L-rd; we cannot say to you that it is bad or that it is good.’” (Gen. 24:50). But apparently there was a place to say that it was bad. I.e., except for the fact that they believed it was ordained by G-d,

<sup>7</sup> I.e., that Elijah is the angel referenced in Gen. 24:7. Some rabbis believe that Elijah was a mortal who never died, but who was instead elevated to serve as an angel (II Kings 2; Bava Batra 121b; Gen. Rabbah 31:5), and referred to as the “Angel of the Covenant” (Mal. 3:1; Berachot 4b; Zohar Chadash Ruth 2:1). According to this view, he could not have been an angel in Abraham’s time, which was some 800 years before Elijah served as a prophet. However, other rabbis believe that Elijah was always an angel, sometimes taking human form (Yalkut Reuveni; Pardes Rimonim 24:4; Emek haMelech 175c) and having multiple incarnations on earth (such as Pinchas, who lived some 500 years before Elijah served as a prophet). According to the latter view, Elijah could have been the angel accompanying Eliezer.

<sup>8</sup> As is noted in the preceding text and footnote, Zera Shimshon believes the angel referenced in Gen. 24:7 was Elijah. Other rabbis have other views. For example, Rabbi Meir Zlotowitz, in Yonah (Jonah): A New Translation with a Commentary Anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic and Rabbinic sources (ArtScroll 1978), p. 901, identifies the angel in Gen. 24:7 as either the angel Michael, or the angel in charge of marriage.

they could have raised an objection, as it says in the second chapter of Kiddushin (41a), “It is prohibited for a man to betroth his daughter when she is a minor, until such time that she grows up and says: I want to marry so-and-so.” One could alternatively say that it was good, because if he betrothed her, she is betrothed. I.e., they could have acknowledged it as a good match, whether it was ordained by G-d or not. In fact, countering the view that a man is prohibited to give his minor daughter in marriage, anywhere that it is possible, even without compulsion, she is betrothed even at the start of her life, as is written in the Rema’s annotation to the Shulchan Aruch, Even HaEzer (37:8) and see there.<sup>9</sup>

והקא נמי הנה ההקדמת, שיצחק לא הנה יכול לבוא שם, הואיל שנתקדש בהר המזריה. אלא, שאינו כבוד לאשה שתלך אחריו על הספק, דדילמא לא תמצא חן בעיניו. וכל-כבודא בת-מלך פנימה. ועוד, דדרכו של איש לחזר על אבידתו, ואין דרכה של אשה וכו'. אמנם, מאחר שמה' יצא הדבר, אין לחוש ולהסתפק, שבנדאי כשתגדיל תהיה רוצה בו וגם היא תמצא חן בעיניו.

Here it was necessary for a man to marry his minor daughter, because Isaac wasn’t able to go there, as he had been sanctified as an offering on Mount Moriah and couldn’t properly leave Canaan.<sup>10</sup> Rather, a more valid reason for objecting, if not for the fact that G-d had ordained the match, was that it was not honorable for the woman to follow [Eliezer] while having a doubt that perhaps she wouldn’t find favor in [Isaac’s] eyes. Another reason for objecting is that “the king’s daughter is all glorious within” (Ps. 45:14), i.e., she wasn’t accustomed to spending time in public, let alone traveling long distances. Further, it is the way of a man to go after his lost item, but it is not the way of a woman etc. (Kiddushin 2b).<sup>11</sup> In fact, after “the matter was ordained by the L-rd,” (Gen. 24:50), there was no cause to fear and to doubt, for certainly when she would grow up she would want [Isaac] and she too would find favor in his eyes.

<sup>9</sup> The Shulchan Aruch, Even HaEzer 37:8 reads, “It is a mitzvah to not marry off one's daughter when she is a *ketanah* [younger than 12 years old] until she grows up enough to say, ‘I want so and so.’” However, the Rema notes, “But some say, that today's custom is to marry off daughters who are *ketanot* because we are in exile and don't always have enough for a dowry. Also, we are few in number and can't always find a fitting mate (Tosafot beginning of Ch. HaIsh Mekadesh). And this is our custom.”

<sup>10</sup> Later, in Gen. 26:2–3, G-d instructs Isaac not to go to Egypt, but to remain in Canaan. Rashi on Gen. 26:2 says that Isaac was considered equivalent to a perfect burnt offering, and being outside the Holy Land was not fitting for him. Rashi’s source is Gen. Rabbah 64:3.

<sup>11</sup> Kiddushin 2b: “It is taught in a Baraita that Rabbi Shimon says: Why did the Torah say: ‘When a man takes a woman’ (Deut. 22:13) and did not write: ‘When a woman is taken by a man?’ Because it is the way of a man to pursue a woman, and it is not the way of a woman to pursue a man. The Gemara cites a parable of a man who lost an item. Who searches for what? Certainly, the owner of the lost item searches for his lost item,” not the other way around. Since woman was created from man’s lost side, the man seeks that which he has lost.

אי נמי בדרך אחר דאיתא בילקוט ראובני על פסוק, הוא ישלח מלאכו לפניך, לפעמים פשטתם מבקש אשה היא ממאנת, שהמלאך מסית אותה למאן. אבל הכא, ישלח מלאכו לפניך ולקחת אשה, שיהיה שם מלאך אחר שישיתם לומר קח ונה, ורבה תאמר אף בעל פיהם עכ"ל.

**On a different manner, on the verse, “He will send His angel before you” (Gen. 24:7), it is brought in the Yalkut Reuveni<sup>12</sup> (citing Chacham haRazim),<sup>13</sup> that “sometimes when a man requests a wife she refuses, because the angel agitates her against him. But here, Scripture reads ‘He will send His angel before you, and you will get a wife,’ which implies that another angel will be there to divert them, i.e., Laban and Bethuel, so that instead of refusing, they will say, ‘take her and go’ (Gen. 24:51), and Rebecca will say, ‘I will go’ ” (Gen. 24:58), i.e., with their will.”<sup>14</sup>**

ולפי זה, לכן ובתואל אמרו לא נוכל דבר אליך רע או טוב, לפי שהיו שם שני מלאכים, אחד אומר למאן, ואחד אומר להסכים, ואין אנו יודעים מה לעשות. אבל רבה אמרה, אני רוצה לילה, שעיקר שליחות המלאך היה דוקא בשביל רבה, כמו שאמר הכתוב, ואם לא תאבה האשה ללכת אחריו וכו', אולי לא תאבה האשה ללכת אחריו.

**According to this** understanding that there were two angels, one agitating against the marriage, and one encouraging it, we reconsider the verse. **“Laban and Bethuel” said, “The matter was ordained by the L-rd; we cannot say to you that it is bad or that it is good”** (Gen. 24:50). They said that **because there were two angels there, one saying to decline and one saying to agree, and “we—we don’t know what to do.” But Rebecca said “I want to go,”** and we see **that the principle of sending the second angel was specifically for encouraging Rebecca, as the Scripture says that Abraham made Eliezer swear an oath, but told him, “If the woman does not consent to follow you, you shall then be clear of this oath to me”** (Gen. 24:8). That was in response to Eliezer’s question, **“What if the woman does not consent to follow me?”** (Gen. 24:5). That wasn’t going to happen, because the match was ordained by G-d.

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<sup>12</sup> Rabbi Avraham Reuven Katz (1605–73), a Kabbalist of Prague, wrote Yalkut Reuveni, an anthology of Midrashim from various books of Kabbalah, including works by the RaMaK (1522–70), Arizal (1534–72), and Rabbi Menachem Azaria da Fano (1548–1620).

<sup>13</sup> Otzar Midrashim (1915), an anthology of minor midrashim by Judah David Eisenstein (1854–1956), identifies Chacham haRazim as a Midrashic work dealing with angels and Gematria. Eisenstein cites Moritz Steinschneider (1816–1907) that Chacham haRazim is a work by Elazar of Worms (c. 1176–1238), being alternately entitled Sodei Raziel or Sodei Raza.

<sup>14</sup> Gen. Rabbah 59:10 agrees that there were two angels. It quotes Rabbi Dosa: “When our father Abraham said, ‘He will send His angel before you,’ the Holy One, blessed be He, appointed two angels for him, one to bring out Rebecca [i.e., to the well], and the other to accompany Eliezer.”

C. Eliezer's reliance upon miracles.

ועוד אמרו רז"ל בפסוק קמא דתענית, אמר ר' שמואל בר נחמני אמר ר' יונתן שלשה שאלו שלא בהוגן. לשנים השיבו בהוגן, לאחד השיבוהו שלא בהוגן. ואלו הן: אליעזר עבד אברהם, ושואל בן קיש, ויפתח הגלעד. אליעזר עבד אברהם, דקתיב ובנות אנשי העיר וכו', והיה הנער וכו'. יכול אפילו חגרת או סומא. השיבוהו בהוגן וננדמנה לו רבקה. שואל, דקתיב והיה האיש אשר יבנו יעשרנו וכו', יכול אפילו עבד או מזר. השיבוהו בהוגן וננדמן לו דוד ע"כ.

**The rabbis of blessed memory also noted, in the first chapter of Taanit:**

**Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachmani said that Rabbi Yonatan said: Three people entreated G-d unreasonably. [G-d] responded reasonably, i.e., favorably, to two of them, and responded unreasonably, i.e., unfavorably, to one. They are: Eliezer, the servant of Abraham; Saul, the son of Kish; and Jephthah the Gileadite.** With regard to **Eliezer, Abraham's servant**, he made a request, **as it is written:** "Here I stand by the spring **and the daughters of the townsmen** come out to draw water. **And I will say to the maiden:** Please let down your pitcher that I may drink. And she shall say: Drink, and I will also give your camels to drink. That maiden will be the one whom You have appointed for your servant Isaac" (Gen. 24:13–14). This was an unreasonable petition, for a maiden who **might have been lame or even blind** could have responded in this way, and Eliezer had promised to take her to Isaac. Nevertheless, **[G-d] responded to him reasonably and Rebecca happened to come to him.**

With regard to **Saul**, the son of Kish, when Goliath the Philistine challenged the Jews, Saul offered, **as it is written:** "And it shall be that the man who kills him, the king will enrich him with great riches, and will give him his daughter" (I Sam. 17:25). The man who killed Goliath **might even** have been **a slave or a mamzer** (one born from an incestuous or adulterous union), who would be unfit to marry his daughter. Nevertheless, **G-d responded to him reasonably and David happened to come to him.**

By contrast, there is the case of Jephthah the Gileadite. Upon leaving for battle, he issued a statement, as it is written: "Then it shall be that whatever comes forth from the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace . . . it shall be to the L-rd and I will bring it up for a burnt-offering" (Judges 11:31). This might even have been an impure, non-kosher animal, which he had committed himself to sacrifice. In this instance, **G-d responded to him unreasonably, and his daughter happened to come to him.**

- Taanit 4a



והתוספות מקשים שם אמאי לא קאמר באליעזר יכול אפילו ממזרת, כמו שאמר בשאול. ותירצו דגבי אליעזר, לא שייך צדיין ממזרת, דהא לא ניתנה התורה. אבל מהרש"א ושאר מפרשים מקשים על תירוץ זה, דאיד אפשר שאברהם לא היה מדקדק באיסור גדול כזה, והא כתיב עקב אשר שמע אברהם בקלי נישמר משמתי וכו'.

**The Tosafot raise a question there at Taanit 4a, why it doesn't say in Eliezer's case that perhaps even a *mamzeret* could appear, as [the Gemara] says for Saul. They provide a solution that in Eliezer's case, a *mamzeret* wasn't a relevant concern, as the Torah had not yet been given. But the Maharsha and the remaining commentators question this solution, as how could Abraham not be meticulous regarding a great prohibition such as [*mamzerut*], as it is written, "inasmuch as Abraham obeyed Me and kept My charge: My commandments, My laws, and My teachings." (Gen. 26:5).<sup>15</sup>**

ולעניות דעתי נראה שפוננת התוספות בתירוץם כך היא, שהרי בנות בתואל היו נכריות וצריכות להתגייר, כדחזינון ביצלב. שלקח שתי אחיות, בנות לבן, לפי שגגירן, וגר שנתגייר כקטן שנולד דמי. ובנכרים לא שייך ממזרות, שהרי אין לה עליו ולא על אחרים קידושין. וכן פירש רש"י בפרק האומר (דף ס"ו ע"ב), ולד נכרי גוי, ואם גיירוהו [ו] הוי גר ואינו ממזר עכ"ל.

**In my poor opinion, it seems that Tosafot's intent in their solution was that the daughters of Bethuel were foreigners (i.e., non-Jews) and would need to convert, as happened with Jacob. For he took two sisters, the daughters of Laban, such that he converted them,<sup>16</sup> "as the legal status of a convert who just converted is like that of a child just born" (Yevamot 22a; Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah 269:10). With foreigners, the concept of *mamzerut* is not relevant, for they don't have the sanctification of marriage. Thus, Rashi explained in his commentary on the third chapter "one who says" in Kiddushin (page 66b), which says, "The offspring of a foreigner is a foreigner, but if he converts he will be a proper Jew and not a *mamzer*."**

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<sup>15</sup> As noted in Essay 6, and in footnote 3 in Essay 8, "Rav said, 'Abraham our Patriarch fulfilled the entire Torah before it was given'" (Yoma 28b).

<sup>16</sup> Lev. 18:18 forbids a Jewish man from marrying his wife's sister while the first sister is alive. The commentators thus try to understand how Jacob could have married both Rebecca and Leah. One solution is that the Torah had not yet been given at that time, but this is contrary to the opinion that the Patriarchs inherently obeyed the entire Torah even before it was given (Yoma 28b). Thus, a second solution is that Jacob converted Rebecca and Leah, and as conversion is effective in severing blood ties, the sisters were not be considered as such according to Torah law (Yevamot 22a; Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah 269:10).

וְהָכִי נָמִי אִיפְסִיקָא הִלְכְתָּא דְגוּי הֵבָא עַל בֵּת יִשְׂרָאֵל, הַנִּלְדָּ כְּשֶׁר וְלֹא מִמְזֵר. וְאִפִּילוּ הַמְּמֵזֵר עֲצָמוּ הֵבָא עַל הַנְּכָרִית, הַנִּלְדָּ נְכָרִי, נִתְגַּזֵּיר הָרִי הוּא כְּשֶׁר כְּשֶׁאֵר גָּרִים, כְּמוֹ שֶׁפֶסֶק הַרְמַב"ם (פְּרָק ט"ו מֵהִלְכוֹת הַלְכָּה ב'). וְלֹא הֵנָּה לֵן לְמִיחַשׁ אֲלֵא לְהֵיבָא, שְׂכַתְבֵּי שָׁם הָרַב הַנִּ"ל. נְכָרִי הֵבָא עַל הַמְּמֵזֵרֶת הַנִּלְדָּ מִמְזֵר, וְשָׂמָא בְּתוֹאֵל אוֹ אַחַר לְקַחוּ מִמְזֵרֶת לְאִשָּׁה? וְזֶה אִי אִפְשָׁר, שְׂהָרִי בְּאוֹתוֹ זְמַן לֹא הָיוּ מִמְזֵרִים בְּעוֹלָם, לְפִי שְׂעֻדָּיו לֹא נִיתְּנָה הַתּוֹרָה. וְעוֹד, שְׂאֲנוּ מְקַבְּלִים כָּל הַגָּרִים הֵבָאִים לְהַתְּגַזֵּיר וְאִין אֲנוּ חוֹשְׁשִׁים לָהֶם מִשׁוּם מְמֵזֵרוֹת. וְאִם כֵּן, לֹא הָיָה לוֹ לְאַלְיָעֶזֶר לְחַוֵּשׁ כָּלֵל לְמִמְזֵרֶת.

**Additionally, it's a ruling of halacha that if a non-Jew has relations with a daughter of Israel, the child will be a proper Jew and not a *mamzer*. Even if a *mamzer* himself has relations with a foreigner, i.e., a non-Jewish woman, the child will be a foreigner; if [the child] converts, he will be a proper Jew like the remainder of converts, as the Rambam ruled in the Mishneh Torah, Sefer Kedusha, section 15 of the laws of Forbidden Intercourse, 2<sup>nd</sup> halacha [sic].<sup>17</sup> We don't need to guess which she is, i.e., if there was adultery or incest in her lineage, as the rabbi has said above, for regardless, a convert is considered a proper Jew. But a non-Jew who has relations with a *mamzeret*, the child will be a *mamzer*, and perhaps Bethuel or another of Rebecca's ancestors took a *mamzeret* for a wife? But this is impossible because at that time there weren't any *mamzerim* in the world, as the Torah had not yet been given. Furthermore, even today, we receive all prospective converts coming to convert and we don't worry about them because of *mamzerut*. This being the case, then Eliezer had no fear at all of her being a *mamzeret*.**

אֲלֵא אִי קִשְׁיָא הָא קִשְׁיָא: לְמָה סְמַךְ עֲצָמוּ עַל הַנֶּסֶם, וּבִפְרָט בְּדַבָּר הַגְּדוֹל הַזֶּה? וְיֵשׁ לוֹמֵר דְּאֲמְרוּ בְּמִדְרָשׁ, וְעֲשֵׂה-חֶסֶד עִם אֲדֹנָי אֲבָרְהָם, הַתְּחִלַּת גְּמוּר. וְזֶה תְּמוּהָ: מָה רָצָה לוֹמֵר הַתְּחִלַּת גְּמוּר? אֲכַל אֵיתָא עוֹד בְּמִדְרָשׁ עַל פְּסוּק, וְאַבְרָם הָיָם אֶל-הָעֵזֶר, הָיָם יִצְחָק וְהָיָם בְּאֵתִי, שְׂקַפְצָה לוֹ הָאֶרְזִי.

**Rather there's an even greater question: Why did he choose to rely upon a miracle, and in particular in regard to this great thing, that a fitting match would identify herself at the well? One can say, as was noted in the Midrash (Gen. Rabbah 60:2): “ ‘Deal kindly with my master Abraham,’ (Gen. 24:12) the beginning of the completion.” This is strange: what is the intent of “the beginning of the completion”? But it's also brought in the Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni 109:4) on the verse, “I came today to the spring” (Gen. 24:42), that “today I set out and today I arrived,” that the land shrunk before him (i.e., his journey was miraculously shortened to only a few hours). That is, Gen. Rabbah likely means that Abraham was the beginning of the completion of G-d's plan, to spread monotheism throughout the world. However, Rabbi Nachmani ties it to another Midrash, in Yalkut Shimoni, that by saying, “Deal kindly,” Eliezer**

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<sup>17</sup> Mishneh Torah, Sefer Kedusha, Forbidden Intercourse, 15:3: “A non-Jew and a servant who have relations with a daughter of Israel: the child will be proper, whether she is single or a married woman, whether she was raped or was willing. A non-Jew and a servant who have relations with a *mamzeret*: the child will be a *mamzer*. And a *mamzer* who has relations with a non-Jew: the child will be a non-Jew. If he converts, he will be fit as the remainder of converts. And if he has relations with a maid-servant: the child will be born a servant. If the child is freed, he will be fit as the remainder of servants who are freed and permitted to a daughter of Israel.”

meant that G-d should allow him to have a speedy beginning to the completion of his assigned task of finding a suitable wife for Isaac.

אם פו, אָמַר אֱלִיעֶזֶר, הוֹאִיל שֶׁקִּפְצָה לִּי הָאָרֶץ, זֶהוּ סִמָּן שֶׁהַקֹּב"ה יַעֲשֶׂה לִּי נֶס. וְלָכֵן סָמַד עֲצָמוּ עַל הַנֶּס, כְּמוֹ שֶׁעָשָׂה דָוִד שְׁנִיתָן לוֹ רִמְזוּ וְחָשׂ, גַּם אֶת־הָאָרֶץ [גַּם־הַדּוֹב] וְכוּ'. וְהוֹכֵרַח לֹאמַר פֹּן, כְּדֵי שֶׁבְּתוֹאֵל לֹא יֵאמַר לוֹ, אֲסוּר לְאָדָם שֶׁיִּקְדֵּשׁ אֶת בְּתוּלָה קַטְנָה. דְּהָא מִיָּדִי הוּא טַעֲמָא אֶלָּא פֶּן לֹא יִהְיֶה זִיווּגוֹ הָרְאוּי לוֹ וְלֹא סְמִכִּינָן אֲנִיסָא? שְׁאַנִּי הָכָא, דְּהַקֹּב"ה עָשָׂה כְּמָה נְסִים, וְדָאִי שְׁמַה' הִיָּתָה לוֹ רַבָּקָה, וְאִין עוֹד לְחוּשׁ שְׁמָא כְּשֶׁתְּגִדִּיל תֵּאמַר בְּפִלּוּנֵי אִינֵי רוּצָה, דְּהָא אֱלֹהִים מוֹשִׁיב יְהִידִים בְּיָתָהּ.

In light of this, **Eliezer said** to himself, **“Since the land shrunk for me, this is a sign that the Holy One, blessed be He, will perform a miracle for me.”** Therefore, he relied upon the miracle, as did David when a hint was given to him and he recognized it, **“both the lion and also the bear etc.”** (I Sam. 17:36).<sup>18</sup> This refers to Esther Rabbah 6:6, stating that Jacob and Moses did not recognize hints that they were given, while David and Mordechai did recognize hints that they were given.<sup>19</sup> **[Eliezer] was forced to say so**, i.e., to explain to Rebecca’s family that a miracle had occurred, **in order that Bethuel wouldn’t say to him, “It is prohibited for a man to betroth his daughter when she is a minor”** (Kiddushin 41a). **But isn’t the reason here that a man shouldn’t betroth a minor lest it wouldn’t be a proper match for him and not to rely upon compulsion? It’s different here, as the Holy One, blessed be He, created a few miracles, such as bringing Eliezer quickly, and it is enough that from G-d he has Rebecca, and there is no more reason to fear lest when she matures that she will say “I don’t want so-and-so,” for “G-d restores the lonely to their homes”** (Ps. 68:7).<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> The first edition reads “גם את הארי גם את הדוב”. The text has been corrected here to remove the second “את,” which is not present in the Torah.

<sup>19</sup> Esther Rabbah 6:6: “. . . Four righteous were given a hint. Two recognized it and two did not recognize it. A hint was given to Moses and he did not recognize it. A hint was given to Jacob and he did not recognize it. A hint was given to David and Mordechai and they did recognize it.

The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Jacob, ‘I will protect you wherever you will go’ (Gen. 28:15), but he was afraid—a man that the Holy One, blessed be He, promised him was afraid, as it says, ‘Jacob was greatly frightened.’ (Gen. 32:8). Rather, he said, ‘Perhaps when I was in the house of Laban, the impurity ruined me and I became impure.’

[Regarding] Moses, [it is written] ‘place it in the ears of Joshua,’ that is to say that you [i.e., Moses] will die and Joshua will enter the people to the Land, but it is written, ‘and I pleaded with the L-rd’ (Deut. 3:23). [I.e., Moses didn’t take the hint, and continued to plea.]

But David and Mordechai were given a hint and they recognized it. David said, ‘Your servant has killed both lion and bear’ (I Sam. 17:36). David said, ‘What distinction do I have that I have slain wild beasts? But perhaps something is destined to happen to Israel, and they are destined to be saved by me.’

[Regarding] Mordechai: ‘and each and every day Mordechai went before the courtyard of the harem’ (Esther 2:11). He said, ‘is it possible that this righteous woman will be married to a non-Jew for naught? Rather a great future thing will happen to Israel and she will conquer this future thing.’ ”

<sup>20</sup> Sotah 2a ties this verse to the concept that G-d arranges marriages, i.e., He takes single individuals and causes them to dwell in a house, by properly matching a man to a woman.

ועוד יש לומר שאליעזר סמך עצמו על הנס לפי שקשב בדעתו שבנדאי אי אפשר שתזדמן לו אשה שאינה הוגנת, מכת זכותו של אברהם ושל יצחק נמי, וכן פתיב, כי לא נותן שבט הרשע על גורל הצדיקים. ועוד קשב בדעתו שאי אפשר שבית משפחתו של אברהם לא יתרצו מיד ליתן לו האשה, שקבר הנה מפורסם בעולם עשרו ותפארתו של אברהם, ואם למאנו בזה, לא ימצאו עוד דוגמתו בעולם. ואם הנה בא הדבר דרך טבע, לא הנה יוצא מזה שום פבוד לאברהם. ועוד היו משיאים בתם בכוננת העושר, ואף אם האשה תרצה בנישואין הללו, שמא עיניה נתנה בעושר וכבוד.

**Furthermore, it's worth saying that Eliezer relied upon the miracle because he considered it impossible that he would chance upon a woman who wouldn't be suitable, because of the merit of Abraham and also of Isaac, and thus it is written, "The scepter of wickedness shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous" (Ps. 125:3).<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, he also considered it impossible that the house of Abraham's family would not want to immediately give him the woman, for the wealth and splendor of Abraham was already world famous, and if they would refuse him in this, they wouldn't find another example like him in the world. But if the thing (i.e., the match) came about in a natural way, Abraham would not receive any honor from it. Also, there would be no honor if they would be marrying their daughter with the sole intent of the wealth. Eliezer also worried that even if the woman would desire this marriage, perhaps it's because her eyes were focused on the wealth and the honor.**

משום הכי, רצה שיבא הדבר דרך נס כדי שיתגדל כבודו של אברהם, שהקב"ה הפיק דרך נס משאלות לבבו, ובזה פל המעשה נגמר לשם שמים לקיים גזירת הבורא, לא זולת. וזהו הטעם שבתחלת דבריו אמר, עבד אברהם אנכי, כדי שלא יתפסו עליו שלא הנה נאמן בשליחותו שהרי שאל שלא פהוגן כנ"ל. משום הכי, הקדים שאדרבא הנה עבד נאמן, וכוננתו היתה לתועלת אברהם כנ"ל.

**Because of this concern, he wanted the matter to come about in a miraculous way that would increase the honor of Abraham. Eliezer hoped that the Holy One, blessed be He, would answer the requests of his heart by way of a miracle, and that the action would be concluded for the sake of Heaven to establish the pronouncement of the Creator, and nothing else. This is the reason that at the beginning of his words he said, "I am a servant of Abraham," in order that they wouldn't perceive him as being unfaithful in his agency, that he had entreated G-d in an unreasonably, as discussed above when he asked G-d to send him a woman who would offer to provide water for him and his camels. Therefore, [Eliezer] advanced that to the contrary, he was a faithful servant, and that his intention was for the sake of Abraham, as discussed above.**

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<sup>21</sup> Sotah 2a: "Rav Shmuel bar Rav Yitzchak says: When Reish Lakish would introduce his discussion of the Torah passage of *sotah*, he would say this: Heaven matches a woman to a man only according to his actions, as it is stated: 'For the scepter of wickedness shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous' (Ps. 125:3), indicating that if one has a wicked wife it is due to his own evil conduct."

D. The ulterior motives of Laban and Bethuel.

וְעַד־יִישׁ לְדַקְדַּק מָה רָאָה לָבָן לִזְמַר לוֹ, בּוֹא בְרוּךְ ה', לְהוֹצִיא מִכָּל עֶבֶד. וַיֵּשׁ לִזְמַר שְׂתַכְּף שְׂרָאָה הַגְּזֵמִים וְהַצְּמִידִים עַל יְדֵי אַחֲוֹתָיו, סָבַר שֶׁנֶּה אֵיִשׁ נִתְּנָם לָהּ בְּתוֹרַת קִידוּשִׁין. וְעַל כִּרְחֻף צָרִיד לִזְמַר שֶׁיֵּצֵא מִכָּל עֶבֶד, דְּאִמְרִינָן בְּפֶרֶק ב' דְּקִידוּשִׁין: מָה אַתֶּם, בְּנֵי בְרִית, אִף שְׁלוּחְכֶם בְּנֵי בְרִית. וְאִם אֲלֵיעֶזֶר הָיָה עֶבֶד, לֹא הָיָה בְּתוֹרַת גִּיטִין וְקִידוּשִׁין וְלֹא הָיָה יָכוֹל לְהִיּוֹת שְׁלִיחַ לְקַדֵּשׁ אֶת רֵבֶקָה. וְעַל כִּרְחֻף צָרִיד לִזְמַר נְמִי שֶׁפְּנוּנָת אַבְרָהָם הָיְתָה לְהוֹצִיא לְחֵירוֹת, כִּהְיָה דְאִתָּא בְּשִׁלְחָן עָרוּף יוֹרָה דְעָה (רס"ז סעיף ע') שֶׁעֶבֶד שֶׁצָּנָה לוֹ רַבּוֹ לַעֲשׂוֹת אִיזוֹ מְצָנָה אוֹ אִינָה דְבָר שֶׁהוּא אֵינּוּ חַיִּיב בּוֹ, יֵצֵא לְחֵירוֹת. וְלָבָן אָמַר בּוֹא בְרוּךְ ה'.

**There is still a need to scrutinize what Laban saw that led him to say to Eliezer, “enter, blessed of the L-rd” (Gen. 24:31), removing [Eliezer] from the category of a servant. It’s worth noting that [Laban] immediately saw the nose-ring and the bands upon the arms of his sister, and he hoped that the man gave them to her per the laws of betrothal. Thus, it must be said that [Eliezer] exited from the category of a servant, as it says in the second chapter of Kiddushin (41b), “Rabbi Yannai derives: Just as you, those who appoint agents, are members of the covenant, i.e., Jews, so too, your agents are necessarily members of the covenant.”** The Gemara continues by quoting Rabbi Yochanan that, “A servant cannot become an agent to receive a bill of divorce from the hand of a woman’s husband on her behalf because he is not included in the laws of bills of divorce and betrothal.” I.e., there is a principle that if certain matters do not apply to a person, he cannot act as an agent with regard to those matters. **If Eliezer was a servant, he wouldn’t be subject to the laws of divorce and betrothal, and he wouldn’t be able to be a messenger to betroth Rebecca. Therefore, it needs to be said that Abraham’s intent was to set [Eliezer] free, as it is written in the Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De’ah (267:70), that a servant whose master has commanded him to do any *mitzva* or anything in which he’s not halachically obliged to do, emerges to freedom (i.e., is set free by his master). Therefore, [Laban] said of him, “enter, blessed of the L-rd.”**

וְעוֹד יֵשׁ לִזְמַר שֶׁלָּבָן, שֶׁאָמַר לוֹ בּוֹא בְרוּךְ ה', הָיָה בְּעָרְמָה וּבְמַרְמָה. וְכַוֵּנָתוֹ הָיְתָה לְטַעוֹן שֶׁהוּא הָיָה בֶן חוֹרִין וְקִדְשָׁה לַעֲצֻמוֹ, וְשִׁפִּיר מְקַרֵי חֲתָן וַיֵּשׁ כְּאֵן סְבִלּוֹנוֹת. וּמִשׁוּם הַכִּי, עָשָׂה לוֹ מִשְׁתֵּה מִיָּד, וְהוֹכִיחַ סוֹפֵן עַל תַּחֲלָתוֹ שֶׁבְּתוּאֵל הִטִּיל סֵם הַמָּוֶת בְּמֵאֲכָל אֲלֵיעֶזֶר, שֶׁהָיָה רוֹצֵה שְׂיָמוֹת וְלִזְכוֹת בְּכָל אֵלוֹ הַמַּתְנוּת.

**It should also be said that Laban, who told him, “enter, blessed of the L-rd,” was treacherous and deceptive. His intent was to claim that [Eliezer] was a free man and had betrothed [Rebecca] to himself, and thus it was fitting to call [Eliezer] a groom and to consider the ring and bands as betrothal gifts. Because of this, he immediately prepared a feast, but it proved their end, in that Bethuel placed deadly poison in Eliezer’s food, wanting him to die**

so that they would merit all the gifts. But Eliezer didn't eat the food, and later Bethuel ate the poisoned food by mistake. (Gen. Rabbah 60:12; Targum Yonatan on Gen. 24:33 and 24:55).<sup>22</sup>

וקודם צאתנו מהענגן הזה, יש לתת טוב טעם ונדעת למה אליעזר עשה הסימן בהנצרה אשר תאמר, להשקות אף הגמלים. דאיתא במדרש רבה כמו שפירש בעל מתנות כהונה, מאן דסבירא ליה דהגמלים של אברהם לא הנה להם זמם כלל, ועם כל זה לא היו רועים בשדות אחרים, כחמורו של ר' פנחס בן יאיר.

**Relying upon miracles: Before we leave this topic, we should appreciate and acknowledge that Eliezer set a sign that the young woman would say, “I will also water the camels” (Gen. 24:14 and 19). It is written in the Midrash (Gen.) Rabbah (60:8) about the stringent donkey of Rabbi Pinchas ben Ya’ir,<sup>23</sup> and as explained by the author of the Matnot Kehuna commentary on the Midrash, Abraham’s camels were not muzzled, but nevertheless did not graze in the fields of others, being honest like the donkey of Rabbi Pinchas ben Ya’ir.**

ואמר העבד בעצמו, הואיל ובהמתן של צדיקים אין הקב"ה מביא תקלה על ידו, אם כן באלו הגמלים ודאי לא תבא שום תקלה, שכן עינינו הרואות שאינם רועים בשדות אחרים. ואם לא תהיה זאת האשה ראויה ליצחק, הגמלים לא ישתו ממים שלה. ולכן אמר הכתוב, ויהי פאשר כלו הגמלים לשתות ויחח האיש נזם זהב, שפנדאי היה פטום שתהיה אשה הוגנת לו.

**The servant said to himself: Since the Holy One, blessed be He, won't allow the livestock of the righteous to bring fault through their actions, then these camels certainly won't come to any fault, as all can see that they are not grazing in the fields of others. If this woman won't be suitable for Isaac, the camels won't drink her water. Therefore, Scripture says, “When the camels had finished drinking, the man took a gold nose-ring” (Gen. 24:22)—certainly at that point he was secure that she was the proper woman for Isaac.**

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<sup>22</sup> Gen. 24:55 notes that after the meal, the party slept, and in the morning, Laban and Rebecca's mother suggested Eliezer and Rebecca delay their departure. Gen. Rabbah 60:12 asks where Bethuel was, and answers “he sought to delay [the marriage] and was smitten [and died] during the night.” Targum Yonatan on Gen. 24:33: “And he prepared food with deadly poison, and placed it before [Eliezer] to eat, but he objected, saying, ‘I will not eat, until I have spoken my words.’” Targum Yonatan on Gen. 24:55: “But as they were talking in the evening, Bethuel had [mistakenly] eaten of that prepared food; and in the morning they found that he was dead.”

<sup>23</sup> Gen. Rabbah 60:8 (derived from Yerushalmi, Demai 4a): “The donkey of Rabbi Pinchas b. Ya’ir was stolen by thieves in the night. It was with them for three days, during which it ate nothing. They said, ‘Let us return it to its owner, so it will not die here with us and cause the cave to smell.’ They brought it out; it went and stood by its owner’s gate, and brayed. [R. Pinchas b. Ya’ir] said, ‘Open up for the poor creature; it has eaten nothing for three days.’ They opened that gate for it and it came in. He said to them, ‘Give it something to eat.’ They gave it barley, but it did not want to eat. They said, ‘Rabbi, it does not want to eat.’ He said to them, ‘Is it [the barley] fresh?’ They said, ‘Yes.’ He asked, ‘And did you tithe it for *demai*?’ They said, ‘No, for did Rabbi not teach: ‘If one buys for sowing, for [feeding] animals, for flour, for hides, for oil for the lamp, or for oiling vessels, then he is exempt from *demai*?’ He said to them, ‘What then shall we do with this unfortunate animal, which is very stringent with itself?’ So they tithed, and it ate.”