



Chayei Sarah

An Eternal Role Model

What are the ingredients necessary for somebody to become an eternal role model?

In Parshat Chayei Sarah, Eliezer travels to Mesopotamia in search of a wife for Yitzchak. He meets Rivka and she engages in such incredible altruism at the well side. He asks for water and she says, “I will not only give you water, but I will give all your camels water as well,” passing that test with flying colours.

Eliezer needed to stay in the area and so he posed a question to Rivka. He said “ha’yesh makom lalin”? - “is there place for me to stay with you in your house?” After all, he would need to negotiate with her family in order to try and bring her back to Canaan, so that she could marry Yitzchak. Rivka replied and she said, “gam makom lalun” – “of course, with pleasure, come inside, there is a place for you to stay.”

But notice that Eliezer's question used the word “lalin”, meaning to stay, and the answer was slightly different - “lalun”. Rashi explains as follows: “lalin” means to stay for only one night. After all, Eliezer did not want to impose on Rivka and her family. “Lalun”, however, means you can stay for as long as you like. That was Rivka's gracious response.

And indeed, notice that a vav is an extension of a yud. So, in “lalin”, you have the yud and then Rivka used “lalun” meaning, no, not just one night, you can have an extended stay.

Now fascinatingly, the Da’at Zekenim and other commentators say just the opposite. They say that “lalin” means I would like to stay for a long time and “lalun” means you can only stay for one night. So, what is their rationale? Eliezer was saying that he might need more than one day to negotiate and therefore he wanted to be up front and he wanted Rivka and her family to know that he might be staying for a considerable amount of time. But how can you justify Rivka's response, that it has to be “lalin”, only one night?

The Da’at Zekenim explains beautifully. Rivka, who was so spiritually motivated, realised her home was full of idols, that is not the right place for the servant of Avram Avinu, Abraham, our father, to be able to stay. So she said, all right, come in for one night but we will have to arrange something else for you after that. We do not want you on the street tonight.

What we see from here is that Rivka actually had two outstanding characteristics. She was that Ba’alat Chesed, full of altruism and selflessness and in addition to that, she was a person of great spiritual qualities. She wanted to cleave to Almighty God, raise her level of religiosity and ensure that others could as well, the ultimate considerations for a person who to this day is considered by us to be Rivka Imeinu, Rebecca, our matriarch.

Shabbat Shalom.