

A LESSON FROM THE PARASHA

Guide To Chesed

RABBI DOVID TZVI MEISNER

She [Rivka] said "Drink, my master", and she hurried and lowered her jug to her hand and gave him [Eliezer] to drink. When she finished giving him to drink she said, "I shall draw water even for your camels until they finish drinking." (Bereishis 24:18-19)

Ohr Hachaim notes that when Rivka offered Eliezer to drink, she didn't mention anything about giving his camels to drink; only after he finished drinking did she offer to draw water for his camels.

With her incredible understanding of human nature, she understood that had she initially mentioned drawing water for his camels, Eliezer would not have drunk his fill calmly. He would have hurried instead to ease matters for Rivka, knowing that she would still have to expend effort to draw water for his camels. Therefore, only after he had finished drinking calmly did she mention that she would draw water for his camels.


Rav Eliyahu Baruch Finkel OB'M points out from here the excellence of Rivka's trait of *chesed*, kindness, being so cautious as to avoid even the slightest discomfort to the recipient

of her kindness.

In a similar vein, Rav Moshe Feinstein explains why Eliezer omitted this point when he recounted his encounter with Rivka by the well to her family, Besuel and Lavan, in great detail. He just said, "And she said, 'Drink, and I will even water your camels.'" (ibid, 46) Eliezer thought they wouldn't believe that Rivka was that considerate; this was too foreign a concept to them.

This teaches us an important lesson in *chesed*, says Rav Finkel. It's not enough to do an act of *chesed*, even graciously. We must contemplate how the *chesed* will be received by the beneficiary. If the beneficiary were to know that you, the benefactor, will have to undergo some burdens or costs to perform the *chesed*, and will thereby turn down the *chesed*, you should contemplate a method to perform your *chesed* in which the beneficiary will not be aware of your burdens. This is true selflessness.

With this understanding, we can understand why Eliezer chose to test Rivka on the trait of *chesed*. How would he know if she has fear of G-d or other good attributes?

Rav Yechezkel Levenstein answers with this idea. *Chesed* (in its true form) is the baseline for all good attributes. It shows utter selflessness; it's all about the other person. All bad traits stem (to some extent) from self-loving and egotistic drives. Once Rivka showed that she embodied *chesed*, Eliezer understood that she had everything else as well and would be the perfect wife for Yitzchok. 



A HALACHA FROM THE PARASHA

RABBI CHAIM HEINEMANN

The Gemara (*Brachos* 40a) teaches us that it is forbidden for a person to eat before one feeds one's pets. This is derived from the *passuk* (*Devarim* 11:15), which also appears in the second paragraph of *Shema*, that first says, "grass for your animals" and then "you will eat." This *halacha* is quoted by all the *Poskim* (*Magen Avraham* 167:18 & *MB* 40) and seems to be regarded by *halachic* authorities as an *Issur D'rabanan* (Rabbinic prohibition) which applies even to animals that are not kosher (*Kaf Hachaim* 167:50).

There are several reasons given for the *halacha*. The *Yad Ephraim* (267:6) suggests that one should view oneself as unworthy to receive Hashem's bounty. Perhaps our only merit to be fed is that we feed the animals that are dependent upon us! The *Sharei Teshuvah* (167:9) understands that this *halacha* is based on the prohibition of paining an animal.

There is a discussion amongst the *Poskim* regarding whether this prohibition also applies to tasting or to a quick snack. The *Taz* and *Chayei Adam* say one may grab a snack before feeding one's dog or chickens, while the *Shevus Yaakov* and *Mishna Brurah* (167:40) make no distinction.

The commentators ask the following question on this week's *parasha*:

Eliezer asked Rivka for a little bit of water and she served him the water and then his camels. How could Eliezer

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A HALACHA FROM THE PARASHA

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drink without providing the camels with water first?

1) The *Ohr Hachaim* (*Bereishis* 24:19) explains that Rivka assessed that Eliezer was dangerously thirsty and needed to hydrate himself immediately. *Pikuach nefesh* (saving a life) certainly supersedes the requirement to feed or water the animals first.

2) According to the *Chasam Sofer*, this *halacha* does not apply when one is being offered food by a host. This explains why Eliezer drank before watering the camels.

3) The *Sefer Chassidim* concludes that although one may not eat without first feeding one's animals, one is permitted to drink. This is quoted by many later authorities, including the *Magen Avraham* (167:18) and *MB* (167:40).

R Tzvi Pesach Frank provides a rationale for this distinction. The primary concern is that once one gets involved in eating, one may get carried away and forget to feed the animals. Drinking takes less time and doesn't involve as much procedure. Additionally, suffering from thirst is far more uncomfortable and dangerous than suffering from hunger. Therefore, this *halacha* does not require one to remain thirsty before feeding one's animals. 🍷

A PARASHA Q 4 U

RABBI DOVID SPETNER

What two items in this week's *parasha* are incorporated in a Jewish wedding?

Bring this question to the Shabbos table and see who knows the answer! 🍷

GREAT ACTS OF ORDINARY PEOPLE

EHUD WORKED FOR A USED CAR DEALERSHIP IN Israel. Unfortunately, the owners of the dealership were not honest in their dealings with customers. One day a man with a white beard came in with a boy who was handicapped. The dealership owners saw very quickly that the man did not know cars at all and they gleefully began to show him their lemons. Ehud casually asked the boy why they were in the market for a car. "We want to get something to make wheelchair accessible so it's not such a big deal for me to get in and out of cars." "Oh no," Ehud thought to himself.

"These poor people are in such a hard position and they're going to be taken for a ride. I've got to protect these people from the owners," Ehud concluded. He went to go see what the owners were showing the man, and sure enough it was a van with a faulty transmission. "Don't take this car," Ehud broke into their conversation. "It's not going to last." The owners tried to show the man another car and Ehud told him not to take that one either. After that the man decided he'd seen enough and made his way back to the office to pick up his son and leave. "You're fired!" the owners told Ehud, "get out of here quick!" Ehud, trained as a mechanic,

began to look for another job, but he found that the reputation of the last place he'd worked ruined his chances time and again. Finally, he got an interview with a company that needed someone to be in charge of maintenance, as it had a large fleet of cars. He walked into the interview with three representatives of the company. As he looked from face to face, he thought he recognized one man with a white beard. That man recognized him as well from the used car dealership, and he was offered the job. 🍷

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TIDBITS OF CINCINNATI JEWISH HISTORY

RABBI MOSHE TZVI CRYSTAL

The Jewish owned dress making business, Fashion Frocks, made the bold and brave move of becoming the first business in Cincinnati to integrate its workplace and allow blacks to join the office staff. The move was pushed for by one of their employees, C.E. "Mike" Israel. He convinced the president of the company, Philip Meyers, to go along with it. Employees were informed that they could walk out if they desired and would even receive two weeks' severance pay. The night before the new black employees came to work, Israel could not sleep out of worry that the office would be up in arms. Although several disgruntled employees did leave, overall the change was accepted calmly. Israel also led a fight in the Fifties to force Coney Island amusement park to allow blacks entrance to the park. This time he did cause an uproar. Israel began to receive a regular stream of nasty phone calls, and the venture at that time was unsuccessful, as Coney Island stayed segregated until the early 1960s. 🍷

SOURCE: Sarna, Jonathan and Nancy H. Klein, *The Jews of Cincinnati*. Center for the study of the American Jewish Experience, 1989, PP. 168-169.

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