

ארבעה צריכים חיזוק (ברכות לב:) - שיתחזק אדם בהם תמיד בכל כחו (רש"י)

A *Sichah* from Maran Rosh HaYeshivah Rav Gershon Edelstein *shlita* . *Chayei Sarah* 5783

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## The Ordinary Speech of our Ancestors' Servants Is More Pleasant Than Their Sons' Torah

The *pasuk* in *Parshas Chayei Sarah* states (24:42), "So I came today to the fountain," and Rashi explains (from the Midrash): "Rabbi Acha says, 'The ordinary speech of our ancestors' servants is more pleasant to Hashem than their sons' Torah, for the section dealing with Eliezer is repeated in the Torah, and many *gufei Torah*, fundamentals of Torah, were only given through allusions."

The "ordinary speech of *avdei Avos*" refers to whatever Eliezer said. His conversation does not include any *halachos* or *dinim*, it's just retelling the story as Eliezer related it, and it's more pleasant to Hashem than "their sons' Torah." It's more pleasant than *divrei Torah* — many *divrei Torah*, great, fundamental *halachos* were only given over through allusions, and we derive these *halachos* from one word or one letter. For example, the halachah that the blood of a *sheretz* makes one *tamei* just as its meat does is learned from one seemingly extra letter in the Torah. Now, Avraham Avinu's servant Eliezer's conversation was written out in great detail — twice: once when he spoke to Avraham as he was given his mission, and a second time when he repeated it again to Rivkah's family. We see from here that the ordinary conversations of *avdei Avos* are nicer, and apparently more important, than *gufei Torah*. Let us contemplate the reason for this. What is so special about Eliezer's speech, and why is it more important than *divrei Torah*?

The *mefarshim* explain that Eliezer's conversation indicates that he acted with very good *middos*. Even though his personal bias could have swayed him to fail in his mission, he didn't consider his own personal bias and did whatever he could to complete his mission with perfect loyalty. On an earlier *pasuk* (24:39), "ואומר אל אדוני אלי לא תלך האישה — ואמר אל אדוני אלי לא תלך האישה" — And I told my master, 'Perhaps the woman will not follow me,'" Rashi comments that אלי (perhaps) is written without a *vav* [which means "to me"] to hint that Eliezer had a daughter, and he asked Avraham to let his daughter marry Yitzchak. However, Avraham told him: "My son is *baruch*, blessed, and you are *arur*, cursed, and a cursed one cannot cling to a blessed one." When Eliezer went to find the

*shidduch* for Yitzchak, he really was biased — because if he wouldn't find a *shidduch* for Yitzchak, perhaps, for lack of any other option, Avraham would agree to make a *shidduch* with him and let Yitzchak marry his daughter. Nonetheless, his personal bias held no sway over him, and he did whatever was possible to succeed in his mission for Avraham.

This type of behavior is against human nature, because a personal bias naturally sways us. The Chazon Ish *zt"l* was once told about someone who was a tremendous *baal chesed* and *mezakeh es harabbim* who was faced with a *nisayon*, and due to his personal *negi'os*, he did not withstand the *nisayon*. The Chazon Ish was asked: If this person cannot control himself and allows his personal bias overtake him, how is it that he merits so much *siyatta d'Shemaya* in his *zikkui harabbim*? The Chazon Ish replied: "*Di bissele emes vos ehr hot, dos git ehm siyatta d'Shemaya.*" Meaning, the little bit of *emes* he has is what gives him *siyatta d'Shemaya*. That is, in our generation even "a little *emes*" is a *maalah*, and since he has a little *emes* because some of his actions are *l'shem Shamayim*, in that *zechus* he has *siyatta d'Shemaya* and is successful.

We see that *b'derech hateva*, even a great *mezakeh harabbim* is liable to let his own personal wants and needs sway his decisions. Eliezer *eved* Avraham's *maalah* was that he took his personal bias into consideration. *Adaraba*, he invested all his strength and effort for the success of his mission, to benefit Avraham and Yitzchak. Let's look at what we can learn from Eliezer's conversation and pay attention to the tactics he used to bring the *shidduch* with Rivkah to fruition.

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At the beginning, when he spoke to Avraham and told him (24:5), "Perhaps (אולי) the woman won't want to follow me," the word אולי is written *malei*, with a *vav*. Afterwards, when he spoke with Rivkah's family and repeated his conversation with Avraham, the word אלי is written *chaser*, without a *vav*.

This requires explanation, because when he had originally spoken to Avraham, *that* was when he requested to marry off his own daughter to Yitzchak. So why does the Torah allude to this during the repetition of his conversation, when he spoke with Lavan and Besu'el?

The *mefarshim* explain that the Torah is coming to teach us the beauty of Eliezer's conversation. When he spoke to Rivkah's family to suggest the *shidduch*, he told them that he himself wanted Yitzchak as a son-in-law, but Avraham told him, "My son is blessed and you are cursed." He was showing them that Avraham respected them — Avraham wanted them, not him. Additionally, he wanted to make them aware of Yitzchak's value and importance — even though Eliezer was a *gadol baTorah* and a big *yarei Shamayim*, as Chazal tell us, even his daughter was not good enough; Yitzchak needed someone on a higher level.

Furthermore, we see that he davened for success in his mission (24:12), "Hashem, the G-d of my master Avraham, please cause to happen to me today, and perform *chesed* with my master Avraham, etc." And then later (24:42), "If You desire to make the path I am going on successful." And the *tefillah* helped — Rivkah appeared as he was davening (see *Rashi* 24:66). In order for davening to be helpful, one must daven with all his heart; if one does not pray wholeheartedly, his *tefillah* is not counted, because *tefillah* is "*avodah she'balev*, service of the heart" (*Taanis* 2a) and "Hashem knows our thoughts" (*Tehillim* 94:11), and "Hashem sees one's heart" (*Shmuel I* 16:7).

The fact that Eliezer's *tefillah* was answered is a sign that his *tefillah* was truly from the depth of his heart. Even though he really wanted Yitzchak to marry his daughter, and he knew that if the *shidduch* with Rivkah would materialize, Yitzchak would never marry Eliezer's daughter, he still davened from the depths of his heart, disregarding his previous desire, and his desire actually changed! He served Avraham so loyally, that not only did he nullify his *daas*, his intellectual grasp of the situation, he also nullified his *ratzon*, his personal desire. His *hisbatlus* was so steeped in *chesed* and *ahavas habriyos* that his personal bias had no influence over him, and he davened from the depths of his heart — not for himself, but for Avraham and Yitzchak.

Eliezer davened from the depths of his heart, and *tefillah* uplifts man, as Chazal say (*Brachos* 6b) that *tefillah* is one of the matters that stand at the height of the world (*rumo shel Olam*). The *mefarshim* explain (see the introduction of *Siach Yitzchak* in Siddur HaGra) that man is called an *olam katan*, a small world, and he is uplifted through prayer. After such a lofty prayer, Eliezer immediately merited success and Rivkah appeared.

Additionally, we see that once Eliezer realized (through the signs) that he had found the right *shidduch* for Yitzchak, the *pasuk* states (24:26-27), "The man kneeled and bowed before Hashem, and he said, 'Blessed is Hashem the G-d of my master Avraham Whose kindness and truth did not leave my master.' Later, he says (24:48), "And I will kneel and bow to Hashem and I will bless Hashem the G-d of my master Avraham Who led me on the true path." And when Rivkah's family agreed to let her go with him, the *pasuk* states (24:52), "And he bowed on the ground to Hashem." *Rashi* explains: "From here we learn that one expresses thanks for good news." Eliezer was so happy about succeeding in his mission that he felt he must express his thanks. He knew that his success was not natural; it was from Hashem. He thanked Hashem on Yitzchak's behalf, as if he himself was the recipient of Hashem's *chesed*, because he was also happy that he succeeded in fulfilling Avraham's request. Even though he had a *negiah* and that should have interfered with his joy, it did not disturb him even one iota. On the contrary, he was completely happy, and he thanked and blessed HaKadosh Baruch Hu for granting him success in his quest to find a *shidduch* that Avraham was happy with.

This is what Chazal was referring to when they said "the mundane conversation of our Avos's servants is greater than their sons' Torah." From Eliezer *eved* Avraham's conversation, we learn how to act with good *middos*, and good *middos* are greater than Torah, because without good *middos*, Torah is not Torah; it's not *b'shleimus*. As we know, Rav Chaim Vital says (*Shaarei Kedushah*, Shaar 1, chap. 2) that this is why there are no explicit mitzvos about *middos* written in the Torah, because *middos* are a precursor to Torah. If a person has a blemish, *p'gam*, in his *middos*, it is a blemish on his soul, and all his Torah is *pagum* and is not *b'shleimus*.

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The truth is, even though Eliezer was "*arur*," he eventually became "*baruch*." Indeed, Lavan told him (24:31), "*Bo baruch Hashem*, Come, Hashem's blessed one." The Midrash says (*Midrash Rabbah* 60:7) that since he served "that tzaddik" loyally, he left the realm of "*arur*," and entered the realm of "*baruch*." That is, Lavan was stating the truth (even though he didn't mean it) when he called Eliezer "*baruch*," and the Torah even recorded it because he actually did become "*baruch*" after serving Avraham so faithfully.

While he had been serving Avraham for many years, at this point especially he served Avraham "loyally," without any personal bias — his personal desires had no influence on him whatsoever. Even though he wanted Yitzchak to marry his daughter, he did not take his feelings into consideration. He acted with complete loyalty and did whatever he could to find the *shidduch* that Avraham wanted. As a result, he was

*zocheh* that his very nature changed, and he was transformed from “*arur*” to “*baruch*.”

The *Yefe To 'ar* on the Midrash adds: “By serving that tzaddik loyally” — Subservience to *gedolim* is precisely freedom and liberty. The *Baal Akeidah* writes that this is telling us that by serving Avraham loyally, Eliezer left the realm of servitude, which is the state of ‘*arur*,’ and entered the realm of freedom, which is the state of ‘*baruch*.” That is, if someone is subservient to a tzaddik — meaning that the tzaddik has an influence on him and whatever the tzaddik wants, he does — he is gaining, because he is learning from him; the tzaddik is teaching and guiding him and he's receiving the tzaddik's *chinuch*. This type of subservience creates freedom and liberty.

Chazal say (*Pirkei Avos* 6:2), “The only one who is a free man is someone who is busy with Torah study.” Torah is liberating; without Torah, man is a servant, he is not a free man because he is subservient to the powers of his nature and his physical desires and he cannot control them. He has no control over his body's desires and wants. But if he is *osek baTorah*, then the Torah refines him and purifies him to the point that he can control his nature. And that makes him a *ben chorin*, a free man, because if he is *osek baTorah* his nature becomes a slave to his intellect. So too, when a person is subservient to a tzaddik, he learns by example to control his nature, and he becomes a free man by controlling his physical desires.

When Eliezer served Avraham loyally, he turned into a “*baruch*.” Previously, he had been “*arur*” and he had a lack of *shleimus* in his *middos*, as this was the sin of Cham, Kena'an's father — that he followed his physical desires. Eliezer needed a *tikkun*, a rectification, to change that nature, and he attained this *tikkun* by loyally serving Avraham the tzaddik. Firstly, just by being in Avraham's company, with all of Avraham's Torah, has an influence and adds to one's *shleimus*, but that by itself is not enough. Of course, it's impossible to achieve *shleimus* without Torah, and Eliezer was *דולה ומשקה מתורת רבו לאהררים*, he drew and watered from his master's Torah to others, as it states in *Yoma daf* 38, but in addition to this, he also “served the tzaddik” — he was influenced by him, and he put whatever he learned into practice, “faithfully,” doing whatever he had to do *b'shleimus*. This is how he achieved complete *tikkun hamiddos*, and he became “*baruch*.”

As mentioned, the fact that he served Avraham faithfully was so special because he invested such efforts to bring the *shidduch* with Rivkah to fruition, with complete loyalty to Avraham and without taking his own personal desires into consideration. Even though he was “*arur*” by nature with Kena'an's *middos*, his actual conduct and behavior were on a very good level, and by dint of these good deeds, his

*penimiyus* changed as well, and his nature became “*baruch*.” He turned into a person with excellent *middos*.

And yet, his daughter still was not worthy of marrying Yitzchak because she was born before his nature turned to “*baruch*.” She was the daughter of an “*arur*,” she was not the daughter of a “*baruch*.” We find a similar idea with Yishmael, who is called “*ben ha'orlah*,” and not “*ben ha'milah*” (*Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer* chap. 31), because he was born before Avraham had a *bris milah* and therefore did not receive the *maalah* of “Avraham with a *bris*.” Eliezer's daughter, who was born before Eliezer's nature changed, remained with the nature of “*arur*,” even though Eliezer himself was “*baruch*.” If Eliezer would have had another daughter after his *teva* changed, she would actually have been worthy of becoming one of the Imahos.

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Not only did Eliezer's nature change from *arur* to *baruch*, Chazal tell us (*Yalkut Chayei Sara* 109; *Kallah Rabbasi*, end of chap. 3) that he was *zocheh* to enter Gan Eden alive. Very few people throughout the generations merited this — very few people entered Gan Eden alive.

Since Adam HaRishon's sin with the Eitz HaDaas, we are punished with death and every single person has to die, because the body has *tumah* — the *tumah* of the snake — and it cannot reach Gan Eden with the body, because the body is a hinderance and the person must die. At Techiyas HaMeisim, each person receives a different body — the same *neshamah*, just in a different body. However, it's not a completely new body. One bone does not disintegrate, because it is clean and devoid of *tumah* (see *Mishnah Berurah* and *Shaar HaTziyon siman* 300) and the entire body is renewed from it — just as a young child develops and grows and becomes an adult, a new body develops from this clean, untainted bone. The original body, however, must die, as this is the eternal decree of death due to the sin of the Eitz HaDaas.

Only four people died “due to the sin of the snake,” but they died nonetheless. Eliezer, on the other hand, was *zocheh* to something greater and he did not have to die. His body become clean and pure, a holy body just like Adam HaRishon's body before he sinned. Before the sin of Adam HaRishon, he actually had a different body and he ate from the Eitz HaChaim which was spiritual food. He did not have a yetzer hara either (see *Nefesh HaChaim* 1:6). After Eliezer's body became purified, he attained this *madreigah* and the same level of *kedushah* that Adam HaRishon had before the *cheit*. As such, he did not have to die, and he entered Gan Eden alive. Only very few individuals throughout the generations attained this *madreigah*.

And how was Eliezer *zocheh* to this? Where did he have the *kochos* to become so purified? After all, everything is in *Shamayim*'s hands, and a person needs *siyatta d'Shemaya* to attain every *madreigah* in *ruchniyus* — he needs Hashem to give him *kochos*. A person may feel that he's the one who's working, but it's really *Shamayim*. And in what merit was Eliezer *zocheh* to this? In the merit of serving Avraham Avinu loyally. [See *Maseches Kallah* ad loc.: "seven entered Gan Eden... and Eliezer for serving Avraham." *Yalkut Chayei Sarah* gives another reason for this, see there.] Despite his personal desires, he did whatever could be done to complete his mission for Avraham faithfully. As a result, he was *zocheh* to such high levels of *siyatta d'Shemaya* that his nature changed from *arur* to *baruch*, and he attained the *madreigah* of entering Gan Eden alive.

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We can learn from here that even if a person is cursed and has inborn bad *middos*, it is possible for him to change and to acquire an incomprehensible level of good *middos*. *Baruch Hashem*, while we are all "blessed" and not "cursed" — "*bruchim atem laHashem*, Blessed are you to Hashem" (*Tehillim* 115:15), and if so, it surely is not difficult for us to improve our *middos*, and we can surely do it — we just have to know how. *Mussar sefarim* explain how to do it.

Some people naturally have good *middos*, but their *middos* are only in potential, not in practice. Every Yid has good *middos* in potential but sometimes these good *middos* are hidden and inactive. There may be impediments that hinder or prevent him from putting his good *middos* into practice.

For example, I know someone who has good *middos*, deep inside him he has good *middos*, but *l'maaseh* his behavior does not show it. And when he realizes [he's not acting with good *middos*], it pains him terribly that his good *middos* are not being actualized and his behavior is not reflecting his *middos* — he's actually acting completely different. The

reason this is happening is because of his *tzidkus* — because he wants to learn, and he's always being *medakdeik b'halachah*, and he's meticulous about refraining from *bittul Torah*. Due to the stress of being completely involved in these matters, he does not think about other people, since he's so involved in himself and he's concerned about how he'll turn out, and he's worried that he has to accomplish more and more...

Another such person just paid me a visit. He is a *maggid shiur* in a yeshivah in Yerushalayim and he suffers from too much stress and tension. He takes things upon himself and overexerts himself to prepare *shiurim*. Although these efforts are for good things, it makes him tense and takes away his *yishuv hadaas*; he is always preoccupied with the duties he took upon himself, and he has no more headspace for other people. Even though he has innate good *middos*, he does not use them and does not actualize them.

This example is a little extreme, but there are many other people with good *middos*, who simple don't use their good *middos* either due to thoughtlessness or because they're too embarrassed. I knew someone who was embarrassed to attend *simchahs*, even though all the *baalei simchah* were waiting for him. When he actually did go, they were all so happy. He was just embarrassed and he said, What do they need me for? He was also too shy to go be *menachem avel* — if he would have gone, it would have made them happy, but he was embarrassed and said, What do they need me for? He did not think that they'd be happy to see him. This is *chalishus hadaas* that prevents people from doing *maasim tovim*. There are many such examples.

*L'maaseh*, the reality is that *baruch Hashem*, there are many *baalei middos tovos* among us who do put their good *middos* into practice, and their behavior influences others as well. This is truly a *zechus* to bring the *geulah sheleimah*.

(Compiled from Rabbeinu's *sichos*)

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The *sichos* are transcribed and translated from a weekly *va'ad* in Rav Gershon Edelstein's home.