

PARASHAS CHAYEI SARAH

A Match Made in Heaven

Finding a life partner is always a difficult thing, but imagine how much more difficult it must have been for Abraham to find a wife for his son Isaac in ancient Canaan. The entire world was pagan except for Abraham, his family and a small group of his followers. Where was he to find a girl who would readily abandon her culture and embrace the Jewish way of life?

As we read in this week's portion, Abraham sends his retainer Eliezer to Syria to seek out a wife among the other branches of his family. Eliezer arrives at his destination bearing gifts for the prospective bride and somewhat daunted by his mission. Standing beside the well in the town square, he prays to Hashem that he be allowed to find a proper mate for Isaac.

Eliezer seems prepared for a grueling search, but lo and behold, no sooner does he finish praying than Rebecca instantly appears. She meets all the criteria for character and background. Couldn't be better. The girl is perfect. So perfect, in fact, that we are a little disconcerted. After all the build-up, we were expecting an arduous search. We were expecting Eliezer to reject girl after girl until at long last he finds the right one. We were expecting drama and suspense, when everything unexpectedly falls perfectly into place. Why did Hashem orchestrate the events in such a supernatural way?

Furthermore, our Sages tells us that Eliezer miraculously made the seventeen-day journey to Syria in a single day. Why was such a spectacular miracle needed? And if there was some important celestial deadline that had to be met, why couldn't he have begun the journey sixteen days earlier?

The commentators explain that Hashem wanted the first matrimonial match mentioned in the Torah to serve as a paradigm for all future matches. It may appear to us that matches are the result of happenstance. Two people meet or are introduced by a mutual friend. They find they have much in common, and that they enjoy each other's company. One thing leads to another, and they get married and raise a family.

How fortuitous it was, they might think, that they both just happened to be in the same place at the same time or that they both just happened to have a mutual friend or that they both enjoyed the same things and had similar points of view. But of course, there was nothing

fortuitous about it. Our Sages tell us that well before birth a child's future life partner is already determined in Heaven. There is no random factor in the process of finding a mate. Everything is preordained.

Eliezer's search for a wife for Isaac seems to evolve in a natural manner, but at the same time, it is laden with elements of the supernatural at every step of the way, the speed of the journey, the immediate appearance of Rebecca. Seemingly random fate, we are being taught, is only a cloak for divine providence. Simple events are often the most powerful conduits of divine providence.

A young man about to embark on the rather frightening enterprise of finding a mate sought the advice of a great sage.

"What shall I do?" he asked. "I am very worried. This is such a critical decision. It can determine the quality of the rest of my life. How do I know I won't make a ghastly mistake?"

"Tell me, young man," said the sage. "Do you remember the first time you went into the city as a little child?"

"Yes, I do."

"All the noise and the sight of all the people and the vehicles must have been overwhelming. Were you frightened?"

"A little bit. But I held on tightly to my father's hand, and everything was fine."

"Exactly," said the sage. "The same thing will work here, too. Hold on tightly to the hand of Your Father in Heaven, and everything will be fine."

In our own lives, we often find ourselves on quite a bumpy ride, with all sorts of detours and obstructions interposed between us and the goals we seek to attain. But let think for a moment. Wasn't there ever a time when we felt lost and helpless and then everything fell into place? In retrospect, can't we detect the unseen hand of divine providence guiding us through the minefields of life? Let us draw comfort and inspiration from the thought that, no matter what happens, our Father in Heaven is holding our hand and leading us towards our destiny.