

ECHOES OF RASHI

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CAMELS

וַיִּקַּח הָעֶבֶד עֲשָׂרָה גְמַלִּים מִגְּמַלֵּי אֲדֹנָיו וַיֵּלֶךְ וְכָל טוּב אֲדֹנָיו בְּיָדוֹ וַיָּקָם וַיֵּלֶךְ אֶל אֲרַם נַהֲרַיִם אֶל עִיר נָחוֹר: (כ"ד:י)

Then the servant took ten of his master's camels and set out, taking with him all the bounty of his master; and he made his way to Aram Naharaim, to the city of Nachor.

רש"י: "מִגְּמַלֵּי אֲדֹנָיו" - נִכָּרִין הָיוּ מִשְּׁאָר גְּמַלִּים, שֶׁהָיוּ יוֹצְאִין זְמוּמִין מִפְּנֵי הַגֶּזֶל, שֶׁלֹּא יִרְעוּ בִּשְׂדוֹת אֲחֵרִים (בראשית רבה):

"Of his master's camels." – These were distinguished from other camels by going out muzzled to avoid robbery – i.e., that they should not graze in other people's fields.

Parshas Chayei Sarah is a striking text of redundancy – with almost excessive repetition. Sixty-seven pesukim are devoted to a story that could easily have been conveyed in ten. We hear Eliezer speaking to Avraham, then we see him at the well, and then we hear him repeat the entire story – his conversation with Avraham and the scene at the well – to Lavan and Besuel. Normally, those retellings happen offstage. The Torah tells us what happened, not how it was later narrated to people who were not present. And yet here, the Torah insists on recording the repetition.

Another unusual feature of this story is the attention given to secondary figures. People who are necessary for the story to unfold, but who ordinarily would remain in the background, suddenly receive disproportionate attention. You see a similar phenomenon elsewhere in Tanach. In Megillas Esther, for example, the letter-writers – the achashdranim b'nei haramachim – receive an almost excessive amount of airtime. When Tanach pays unusual attention to minor figures, there is generally a reason.

Eliezer sets out on what is arguably the most consequential mission in Jewish history: securing a bride for Yitzchak. The opening pasuk is curious: "Vayikach ha-eved asarah gemalim" – The servant took ten camels, "migmalei adonav" – from his master's camels. The pasuk mentions camels twice. Obviously, they belong to Avraham; where else would they come from? And yet the Torah insists on saying it.

Then the very next pasuk: "Vayavrech hagemalim michutz la'ir" – "He brought the



camels to rest outside the city." As the story unfolds, the camels keep reappearing. At every stage, at every dramatic moment, there they are. Who cares about the camels? They are functional. He needed transportation. And yet the camels are mentioned fourteen times, more than Lavan, more than Besuel. And not just in passing: at the climactic moments, they suddenly step into frame.

Eliezer departs, and there are the camels. He arrives at the city, there are the camels. Rivkah's test, and again, the camels. And at the very moment we have all been waiting for, when Eliezer gives Rivkah the jewelry, the Torah pauses to say: "Vayehi ka'asher kilu hagemalim lishtos" – when the camels finished drinking. Only after the camels are done can we move on to the presentation of gifts.

Rashi already senses that this is not incidental. He explains that gemalei adonav – Avraham's camels – were recognizable. They were different from other camels. They were muzzled so that they would not graze in other people's fields. They would not steal hay or fodder that didn't belong to them.

That detail immediately echoes earlier tensions in Avraham's life, particularly the conflict between Avraham's shepherds and Lot's shepherds. Chayei Sarah · 129

Chazal understand that dispute not merely as a territorial argument, but as a moral one. Lot's shepherds were permissive about where their cattle grazed, reasoning that "this land is going to be ours anyway." In contrast, Avraham's shepherds were disciplined and scrupulous about other people's property, even while living with divine promises about the future of the land.

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The camels therefore reflect Avraham's moral standards.

We may be committed to a national destiny; we may believe deeply in divine promises. None of that allows for greed or carelessness with what belongs to others. Avraham's camels are muzzled because Avraham himself is restrained. That same trait appears earlier when he refuses the spoils of war from the king of Sedom, insisting that no one say, "I made Avraham rich." Avraham is generous, but also exceptionally careful about acquiring wealth at another person's expense.

That is Rashi's reading, and it explains what the camels say about Avraham's character. It highlights his moral restraint, his refusal to allow destiny or promise to blur ethical boundaries. But it still does not fully explain why the Torah insists on pulling the camels into every dramatic frame of the story, why they appear again and again at moments that seem to belong to people, not animals.

There is another layer. This journey represents Avraham's longest reach.

Until now, his interactions have been largely local: Avimelech on the coast, the b'nei Ches in Chevron, the people of Be'er Sheva, Shechem, Elon Moreh. He has

circled the land, influenced those around him, and forged relationships with figures like Aner, Eshkol, and Mamre. His one significant departure from the land – his descent to Egypt – ended in failure.

But Avraham's mission is not parochial. He is meant to spread knowledge of Hashem and to live out vehyei berachah – to demonstrate that allegiance to a single God does not diminish human life but elevates it, and that faith advances the human condition rather than offering escape from it. For that vision to take hold, it cannot remain confined to Avraham's immediate surroundings.

That is where this journey of Eliezer becomes something more than a matchmaking mission. Eliezer's mission extends beyond finding a bride. He also represents Avraham and his religious vision. Wherever he travels, he goes as eved Avraham, speaking of "Hashem Elokei Adoni Avraham" (the God of my master Avraham), bringing Avraham's religious values into distant lands. Long-distance travel in the ancient world, especially across deserts, required camels. They are not incidental details: they are what make Avraham's reach possible.

The camels carry not only Eliezer the messenger, but also "kol tuv adonav beyado" – the wealth, the gifts, the material abundance that accompanies Avraham's spiritual vision. Avraham's message is accompanied by material generosity, demonstrating how religious life can enrich the human experience. That entire vision cannot travel without the camels.

And now notice the Torah's language. It says "Vayavrech hagemalim." On the surface, the word "vayavrech" means that Eliezer caused the camels to kneel and rest, derived from the word, berech (knee). But the resonance is unmistakable. Vayavrech also echoes the word berachah. The camels are resting, but they are also instruments of blessing. Through them, Avraham's mandate of vehyei berachah moves beyond his immediate world and begins to reach outward.

Rashi focuses on what the camels reveal about Avraham's moral discipline. But there is a broader message carried by the camels. This journey is not aimed only at local populations. It is moving outward, to distant lands, carrying more than the discovery of a bride. Of course, Eliezer is spreading monotheism, but he is also demonstrating something equally important: that avodas Hashem is not a regressive human experience. It does not diminish life or constrict it. It produces stability, dignity, comfort, and human prosperity. Avraham's vision is not ascetic withdrawal from the world, but elevation of the world.



WORD HAS TRAVELED

וַיְבָרְכוּ אֶת רִבְקָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ לָהּ אֲחֹתֵנוּ אַתְּ הֱיִי לְאַלְפֵי רְבָבָה וְיִירַשׁ זַרְעֵךְ אֵת שַׁעַר שֹׂנְאָיו: (כ"ד:ס)
And they blessed Rivkah and said to her, "Our sister! May you grow into thousands

of myriads; may your descendants seize the gates of their foes."

רש"י: "אַתְּ הֱיִי לְאַלְפֵי רְבָבָה" - אַתְּ וְזַרְעֵךְ תְּקַבְּלוּ אוֹתָהּ בְּרָכָה שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר לְאַבְרָהָם בְּהַר הַמּוֹרִיָּה וְהִרְבָּה אַרְבֶּה אֶת זַרְעֲךָ וגו', יְהִי רָצוֹן שֶׁיְּהֵא אוֹתוֹ הַזֶּרַע מִמֵּךְ וְלֹא מֵאִשָּׁה אַחֶרֶת:

"May you grow into thousands of myriads." – May you and your descendants receive that blessing which was promised to Avraham Chayei Sarah · 131 on Mount Moriah (Bereishis 22:17): "I will greatly multiply your seed…[and let your seed possess the gates of their enemies]." May it be God's will that this seed may proceed from you and not from another woman.

When Rivkah is about to leave, she's gathered by her family to receive a farewell blessing. Her father, Besuel, isn't present – according to Rashi, he's gone, having suffered a rather suspicious bout of food poisoning, but her brother Lavan and the rest of the family assemble to give her a proper send-off.

It's a dramatic moment. They're sending away a young daughter. And what do they say? They give her a blessing: "Vayevarchu es Rivkah vayomru lah: 'Achosenu, at hayi le'alfei revavah, veyirash zar'ech es sha'ar son'av'" (24:60).

Where does this blessing come from? It's a very specific berachah. In fact, it strongly parallels the blessing that HaKadosh Baruch Hu gave to Avraham after the Akeidah: "At hayi le'alfei revavah" echoes "harbah arbeh es zar'acha." "Veyirash zar'ech es sha'ar son'av" echoes "verirash zar'acha es sha'ar oy'vav" (22:17).

Their berachah for Rivkah is taken directly from the end of Parshas Vayeira. They're almost plagiarizing the divine blessing of the Akeidah.

How did Lavan know this blessing? Evidently, the story of the Akeidah had begun to resonate beyond Avraham's immediate circle. People were talking about it.

How did that happen? Technically, it could be that word simply traveled. Or it could be that Eliezer himself told them the story. The Torah doesn't explicitly record Eliezer recounting the Akeidah – we don't see it in the script – but it's very likely that he did. And that would explain why they chose the berachah that was given at the Akeidah.

They could have chosen many other berachos. They could have cited the Bris Bein HaBesarim. They could have cited the berachah at the beginning of Lech Lecha. But those berachos were given before Yitzchak was born. They are not Yitzchak blessings. The blessing of the Akeidah was given when Yitzchak was very much alive – Baruch Hashem, still alive after the Akeidah. It's a Yitzchak blessing. And when you're arranging a shidduch for Yitzchak, when Eliezer is trying to create this bond between Yitzchak and Rivkah, that information matters.

Whether the story reached them through Eliezer directly, as part of the shidduch negotiations, or whether it spread more generally through word of mouth, the point is the same: it resonated. The next morning, when they could have said anything to their daughter, they chose to repeat this berachah.

What this demonstrates, on a general level, is that Avraham's message is beginning to spread. People are talking about the Akeidah. The blessings that HaKadosh

Baruch Hu gives are resonating beyond the narrow fold of Avraham's household.

And, more specifically, within Parshas Chayei Sarah, Eliezer's journey to Aram Naharayim is not just about finding a shidduch. It's part of the broader process of spreading Avraham's ideas to a wider audience. It begins at home, with the family Avraham left behind, because he had to leave them in Lech Lecha in order to come to Eretz Yisrael and encounter Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

Now, in a sense, Avraham returns to his birthplace, but he returns through Eliezer. Avraham himself is too old, too weak, too infirm to make the journey. But what arrives in Aram Naharayim are not only camels and jewelry. Eliezer brings Avraham's religious vision to a family that has already begun to absorb its message.

And what's especially striking is that this berachah may even be counterproductive from their perspective. The first part – "at hayi le'alfei revavah" – is easy. Every parent and grandparent wants their child to have many descendants.

But the second part – "veyirash zar'ech es sha'ar son'av" – your children will inherit, conquer, or wield influence over the gates of their adversaries – that's much harder. They are essentially saying: "We are willing to be influenced by you. We are willing to accept that you are joining a people whose destiny is to shape other nations, including us." They are submitting, at least implicitly, to a system in which the Jewish people play an influential role.

That they would choose this blessing, specifically the blessing of the Akeidah, is remarkable. That it resonated so deeply, whether through Eliezer's telling or through the spread of Avraham's reputation, is equally remarkable. And this sets the stage for the second interpretation, the second peshat, that Rashi brings. Chayei Sarah · 133

The second peshat is that they gave a berachah that Rivkah would be the mother of Yitzchak's children. Why would that even need to be said? Why would they worry that Rivkah might not be? Because they knew that Yitzchak's mother had struggled terribly to give birth. Sarah's difficulty was so profound that she eventually introduced a handmaiden, bringing Hagar into the picture. So, there is an unspoken anxiety hovering over this farewell: Will Rivkah be able to do what Sarah could not easily do?

At first glance, that concern seems odd. There is no close genetic link between Sarah and Rivkah. They come from different families. Rivkah is the daughter of Besuel, the sister of Lavan; whatever shared ancestry exists is very distant. Just because Sarah had fertility issues, why assume Rivkah would face the same challenge? Perhaps they suspected that the difficulty lay on the male side, something in Avraham or Yitzchak.

But more likely – and this is how Chazal frame it – they understood that barrenness in Bereishis was never merely a medical condition. It reflected a larger spiritual drama.

The Imahos are challenged by HaKadosh Baruch Hu. He seeks their tefillos. The delay, the struggle, the pain – all of it is part of a larger spiritual drama. So, when Rivkah's family blesses her, they are reacting not only to a single dramatic episode like the Akeidah; they are aware of a larger pattern. They sense that this is a unique

family, and that part of that uniqueness is undergoing nisayon, trial, struggle, and spiritual tension. You can almost feel their mixed emotions. That is the tone of this blessing. They are excited, but they also know what their daughter is stepping into.

And history bears out their concern. Rivkah is barren for ten years. Yitzchak davens, and Baruch Hashem, their tefillah is answered. The blessing comes true. Rivkah becomes the only foremother who does not need to introduce a co-wife. Sarah had Hagar, Rachel had Bilhah, and Leah had Zilpah. Although it takes time, Rivkah alone builds her family without that painful detour. So, the fear embedded in this blessing was not imaginary. It was grounded in a deep awareness of the spiritual cost carried by this family.

Once again, this shows how attuned Rivkah's family was to what was happening back in Eretz Yisrael. Rivkah was entering a family whose extraordinary blessings were accompanied by unusual spiritual challenges. Those ideas had already crossed borders. They had become part of the family's vocabulary, part of their emotional world. And so, they worry for Rivkah, for her future, and for the burden she is about to shoulder.

TZNIYUS AND HUMILITY

וַתִּשָּׂא רִבְקָה אֶת עֵינֶיהָ וַתֵּרֶא אֶת יִצְחָק וַתִּפֹּל מֵעַל הַגָּמָל: וַתֹּאמֶר אֶל הָעֶבֶד מִי הָאִישׁ הַלָּזֶה הַהֹלֵךְ בַּשָּׂדֶה לִקְרָאתֵנוּ וַיֹּאמֶר הָעֶבֶד הוּא אֲדֹנִי וַתִּקַּח הַצָּעִיף וַתִּתְכָּס: (כ"ד:ס"ד-ס"ה)

And Rivkah raised her eyes, and she saw Yitzchak, and she fell from the camel. And she said to the servant, "Who is that man walking in the field toward us?" And the servant said, "That is my master." So, she took her veil and covered herself.

רש"י: "וַתִּפֹּל" - הִשְׁמִיטָה עַצְמָהּ לָאָרֶץ.

"She fell." – She let herself slide towards the ground.

Tzniyus involves far more than standards of dress. Sleeve length is one expression of tzniyus, but the middah extends into many other areas of life. So, what does tzniyus actually mean? Where does it come from?

At its root, tzniyus means not wanting to draw attention to yourself. Not wanting people to look at you, talk about you, or single you out. In yeshiva, students often dress the same. They wear similar shirts, similar pants, and wear their hair in a similar way. Nobody wants to stand out. That itself is already a form of tzniyus.

People seek attention in many ways. They may dress differently or wear their hair differently to attract attention. But today, the primary arena of attention-seeking is online: posting, curating, or writing things designed to provoke reaction. Once a person begins seeking attention, it becomes addictive. And once that happens, values begin to hollow out. Instead of asking yourself, "What do I believe?" a person starts asking, "How did people respond?" or "How many 'likes' did I get?"

Now look at Rivkah. This is arguably the first explicit moment of tzniyus in the Torah. Chazal tell us that Sarah was deeply tzanuah, but that is inferred. Here it is explicit. The pasuk describes Rivkah's response when she sees Yitzchak for the first time: "vatipol mei'al hagemal."

Before that moment, the Torah describes

Rivkah seeing Yitzchak from a distance "Va'tomer el ha'eved: 'Mi ha'ish halazeh ha'holech ba'sadeh likraseinu?'" – Who is that man walking toward us in the field? She is clearly moved by the sight. Chazal note that the encounter unsettles her. Something about Yitzchak captures her attention, and she inquires about the mysterious man she sees from afar. When she learns that "hu adoni" – he is my master, the man she is meant to marry – the Torah records her response.

On a simple reading, "vatipol mei'al hagemal" means that she falls. She sees Yitzchak, is overwhelmed, loses her balance, and tumbles off the camel. But Rashi says otherwise: "Hishmitah atzmah la'aretz." Rashi understands that Rivkah intentionally lowered herself rather than accidentally falling.

Why is that an act of tzniyus? Because she does not want Yitzchak to see her. She tries to avoid drawing attention to herself as Yitzchak approaches. This does not mean that tzniyus requires physical evasiveness. It means that tzniyus is about not positioning yourself as the object of attention.

Here we reach the deeper point. The root of tzniyus is anavah, or humility. If a person is full of himself, he wants to be seen. He believes he deserves attention. But if a person is humble, he does not feel the need to be singled out. Tzniyus flows from humility, and it also generates humility.

This applies not only to dress, but to speech and presence. How is tzniyus expressed in conversation? Do you speak primarily about yourself, or do you make space for others? Some people dominate every conversation; that is not tzniyus. One expression of tzniyus is clothing. Another is the extent to which we dominate conversations and insist on drawing attention to ourselves.

This applies to men as well. If someone walks in with an appearance or demeanor that screams for attention, and looks wildly out of place, it becomes a lightning rod. People look. People talk. That is not tzniyus. For women, because Hashem created physical beauty differently, tzniyus often expresses itself through how the body is presented. But the principle is identical: not positioning oneself at center stage.

Now notice what Rivkah does next. The Torah says: "va'tikach ha'tza'if va'tiskas." She takes the veil – va'tiskas. This is a strange verb. Grammatically, the Torah could have written va'techas – she covered herself. Instead, it uses a form that implies receptivity rather than authorship.

Chazal identify this grammatical pattern elsewhere with the word va'tikaveir. A dead person does not bury himself; he is buried. Va'tikaveir Chayei Sarah · 139 means he allowed himself to be buried. He became the object, not the actor. Likewise, although Rivkah herself takes the veil, the Torah chooses a form that presents her as receiving the action rather than directing it. She willingly allows events to unfold without trying to control them. She is not trying to create an impression; she is preparing to meet Yitzchak.

This opens a second dimension. Tzniyus is not only about not drawing attention to yourself. It is also about not needing to be in charge, not needing to author every situation. It reflects a willingness to be a mekabel rather than always the one exerting force and control.

To see this clearly, imagine a room full of men who are all dressed the same. A conversation unfolds. One person insists on dominating the space, directing the flow, asserting himself so as not to disappear. Another chooses to remain quieter, to listen more than speak, to remove himself slightly from the center. There is a powerful instinct within all of us to control situations, because control feels like presence, and presence feels like value.

Tzniyus challenges that instinct. It is the ability to step back without feeling that we have lost our importance, even when that means relinquishing a measure of control.

This is why tzniyus is so difficult in the modern world. The very idea of passivity carries negative associations. And of course, the Torah does not glorify victimhood. If someone is being harmed or abused, passivity is neither virtuous nor permitted. That is not what is being described here.

Rather, the Torah points to a different kind of passivity, a psychological humility. The ability to let situations unfold without insisting on managing them, to allow oneself to be shaped by reality rather than constantly shaping it. This kind of humility is especially difficult in a culture which encourages constant self-promotion.

Against that backdrop, the Torah's quiet verb – va'tiskas – speaks with unusual force. Rivkah's physical gesture reflects her humility and her willingness to avoid attention. She is comfortable stepping away from the center of attention.

This is the same tzniyus that Chazal see in Rachel. Why is Rachel the paradigm of tzniyus? Because she gives Leah the signs. She allows events to unfold without insisting on being the center, without controlling the outcome, even at enormous personal cost. That, too, flows from humility.



So tzniyus has two expressions: First, not drawing attention to yourself. Second, not needing to be the one in charge. Allowing space for others. Allowing events to unfold even when you are not the author.

All of this flows from humility. And that is why Shlomo HaMelech says: "Eikev anavah yiras Hashem" – "In the footsteps of humility comes fear of Heaven." If you are looking for a single trait that opens the door to many others – a multiplier trait – work on humility. It is the gateway. ■



Rabbi Moshe Taragin's latest sefer entitled: **Echoes of Rashi** is available at: taraginbooks.com.