



Derech Eretz – Kiddush Hashem

“Abba, I am enjoying reading the story of how Eliezer, the servant of Avraham, found Rivka as a wife for Yitzchak in this week’s parasha. I have a question, however.”

“Yes, Chaim.”

“The Torah relates the story at length with all of its details. Then, after Eliezer enters the home of Besuel and Lavan, he recounts the entire story to them. The Torah actually repeats the story twice! Altogether 67 verses from the beginning of chapter 24 to the end. Why does the Torah dedicate so many words to this story?”

“That is a very thoughtful question, Chaim. Rashi (24:42) answers your question by citing the Medrash (Bereshis Rabba 60:8). The conversations of the servants of our holy forefathers is more pleasing than the Torah of their sons.

The parasha of Eliezer (the conversation of a servant) is two and three pages long – it is recorded and repeated. On the other hand, the laws of insects are part of the mitzvos of the Torah. The law that their blood does not *mitamei* (defile the pure) is only learned from an extra letter in a verse.”

“How do we understand this puzzling phenomenon, Abba?”

“Rav Volbe zt”l has an explanation that is so startling that it changed my whole way of thinking.”

“Please share it with me, Abba.”

“With pleasure, Chaim.”

“Eliezer’s actions and words are an example of exemplary *derech erez* (conduct befitting of one who fears and serves Hashem). The commentary of Rav Ovadiah MiBartenura on the Mishnah (Kiddushin 1:9) defines *derech erez* as being pleasant towards people. One might think that *derech erez* is a nice thing to do, but not an obligation. However, there are two entire mesechtas in the Gemora - Mesechta *Derech erez* Rabba, and Mesechta *Derech erez* Zuta – each of which contain eleven chapters. These mesechtas teach *halachos* (laws) of *derech erez*. Being pleasant in your social interactions is not just a good idea. It is a Torah obligation, with 22 chapters of halachos!”

“Can you give me an example of some of these halachos, Abba?”

“Yes, Chaim. Let us look into the story of Eliezer and Rivka. Their *derech erez* is

based upon (faith) in the Almighty. When Eliezer arrived in Aram Naharayim, after settling down his camels, he saw Rivka at the well, filling up her vessel with water. He asked her for a little sip of water. She gave Eliezer a drink, and without him even asking, she drew enough water for the ten camels (several gallons). This was a *chiddush* (revolutionary concept) in *chesed* (acts of kindness). To fulfill the request and bring Eliezer his water is normal politeness. To bring enough water for the camels without even being asked to do so, is *chesed* of the caliber that is fitting for the family of Avraham Avinu. This is the type of *derech erez* that we learn from the Torah.”

“This is fascinating, Abba.”

“When Lavan and Besuel allowed Eliezer to take Rivka as a wife for Yitzchak, Eliezer immediately prostrates himself to Hashem. Rashi comments that we learn from here that one must thank

the Almighty when he hears good news. So you see, Chaim, the story of Eliezer teaches us many halachos of *derech erez*.”

“The question about the length of the story still bothers me Abba. I understand that *derech erez* has halachos in the Torah. Are these halachos of such supreme importance that they require a long, detailed story of two and three pages – 67 verses?”

“Yes they are, Chaim, and I will prove it to you. Let us begin with an *aveyra* in the Torah - *Chilul Hashem* (desecration of the Holy Name). This is one of the most serious sins that a person can commit in his entire life. The Gemora (Yuma 86a) lists various *aveyros* and the way to receive a *kapora* (atonement) for them. Neither teshuva, suffering, nor Yom Kippur will rectify *Chilul Hashem*. Only death can atone for this horrible sin. The Gemora then asks, what is an example of *Chilul Hashem*? It brings several examples of talmidei chachomim performing actions that would cause people to look down upon them, the Torah, and Hashem. Abayee sums it up by saying that one who learns Torah, serves talmidei chachomim and yet still does not behave properly, creates a *Chilul Hashem*. He is not trustworthy and he does not act pleasantly towards people. What do

people say about him? Oy to him who learns Torah! Oy to his father who taught him Torah! Oy to his Rebbe who taught him Torah! Look at how his deeds are ruined! Look at how his ways are repulsive! This person brings shame to himself, his nation, and the Creator of the Universe. The Rambam (Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah 5:1) defines *Chilul Hashem* in a similar fashion. Therefore you see, Chaim that one of the worse *aveyros* in the world is to behave improperly towards people.”

“I never realized, Abba.”

“It goes even deeper than that. Rav Volbe related the well-known fact that Hashem chose Klal Yisrael to be His nation. We say this in our tefillos on the Holy Days. “You chose us from all the peoples; You loved us and found favor in us; You exalted us above all the languages and You sanctified us with Your commandments. You drew us close, our King, to Your service and proclaimed Your great and holy Name upon us.” Why did He choose us? To give glory to Him. To be a light unto the world. To show people the proper way to act. In doing so we sanctify His Holy Name. That is *Kiddush Hashem*! Our entire purpose in this world is *Kiddush Hashem*. And how is that accomplished? With *derech erez*. Now, dear Chaim, you see why the Torah devoted so many words to the story of Eliezer. It teaches us *derech erez*. That is the way to fulfill our purpose in this world. That is the way to *Kiddush Hashem*. The length of this parasha reflects its importance. *Derech erez* and the *Kiddush Hashem* that it creates is the essence of Torah, mitzvos, and Avodas Hashem.”

Kinderlach . . .

Abayee summed it all up in the Gemora. Hashem should be beloved to people because of your actions. If you are trustworthy, and your words and deeds are pleasing to people, what will people say about you? Fortunate is his father who taught him Torah! Fortunate is his Rebbe who taught him Torah! Oy to those people who do not learn Torah! This man who learned Torah - see how pleasant are his ways, how proper are his deeds! The prophet (Yishaya 49:3) says about him, “You are My servant, Israel, in whom I take glory.” *Derech erez!* Kiddush Hashem!

Parasha Questions:

- How were Avraham’s camels identified? (Rashi 24:10)
- Why did Eliezer run to Rivka? (Rashi 24:17)
- What was hinted in the gifts that Eliezer gave Rivka? (Rashi 24:22)