

Parsha Ponders

Chayei Sarah | October 29, 2021 | 23 Marcheshvan 5782

The Guardian Angel¹

ויאמר אברהם אל-עבדו זקן ביתו וגו' ואשביעך וגו' לא-תקח אשה לבני מבנות הכנעני וגו' ויאמר אליו העבד
אולי לא-תאבה האשה ללכת אחרי וגו' ויאמר אליו אברהם וגו' יקוק אלקי השמים וגו' הוא ישלח מלאכו
לפניך ולקחת אשה לבני משם

Avraham said to his servant, the elder of his household...I command you through an oath...do not take a wife for my son from the Canaanite women...The servant said to him: "Perhaps the woman will not want to go with me..." Avraham said to him: "...Hashem, the G-d of Heaven...will send His Angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there²

Avraham tasked his trusted servant Eliezer³ to find a wife for his son Yitzchak. Avraham didn't want Yitzchak to marry one of the local Canaanite women, so he sent Eliezer to Avraham's homeland. Perhaps a distant relative would be better suited for his son. Eliezer was concerned his mission would prove unsuccessful, and expressed his doubts. Avraham responded that Hashem would send an Angel to help him on his mission. In the end, Eliezer successfully found a wife for Yitzchak. He met the family of Milka and Besuel, Avraham's niece and her husband, and found that their daughter was a perfect match for Yitzchak⁴. Yet, we don't see any mention of an Angel throughout his journey. Where was the Angel?

Despite Eliezer's success, his mission wasn't without potential setbacks. Our Sages tell us⁵ that he was almost murdered. When Eliezer sat down with Rivka's family to attain their consent to the marriage, they⁶ gave him some food to eat⁷. It turns out that there was some poison in the food. It would seem that they were less than keen for Eliezer to take their daughter away⁸. Eliezer somehow noticed their ploy⁹, and avoided eating the food. He gave them an excuse: "I will not eat until I have explained why I am here". He proceeded to tell them the whole story of his mission and journey, and managed to evade

¹ Based on various ideas shared by [Rav Daniel Glatstein](#) at the end of a *shiur* titled "The Shidduch of Yitzchak and Rivka – Behind the Scenes", which can be listened at <https://www.torahanytime.com/#/lectures?a=165918>

² [Genesis 24:2,3,5-7](#)

³ [Ibid 24:2](#), [Yoma 28b](#), and [Taanis 4a](#); [Targum Yonasan ad. loc.](#); See [Rashi](#) to [Genesis 24:39](#) who assumes this as well

⁴ This would make Rivka Yitzchak's first cousin once removed, as Milka was Yitzchak's first cousin. However, according to those who say Yiscah, Milka's sister, was really Sarah ([Megillah 14a](#) and [Sanhedrin 69b](#), brought by [Rashi](#) to [Genesis 11:29](#)), that means Rivka was also Yitzchak's first cousin, through his mother. Cf. [Rambam](#) in his [Mishneh Torah Hilchos Melachim 9:5](#), with [Radvaz](#) and [Kesef Mishneh](#), who holds, based on [Sanhedrin 58b](#), that the simple reading of the verses tells us that Sarah was Avraham's half-sister and not Yiscah ([Genesis 20:12](#))

⁵ [Bereishis Rabbasi](#) by [Rav Moshe HaDarshan](#) to [Genesis 24:30](#) and v. 33; [Yalkut Shimoni Chayei Sarah](#) § 109 from "Midrash Avkir"; [Midrash Aggadah](#), [Midrash Lekach Tov](#), [Sechel Tov](#), and [Midrash HaGadol ad. loc.](#) See also [Torah Sheleimah ad. loc.](#) § 141. [Rashi](#) to v. 55, based on [Bereishis Rabbah 60:12](#), and [Lekach Tov](#) and [Sechel Tov ad. loc.](#), just say רוצה לעכב

⁶ [Rashi](#) in the previous note and the sources that follow say it was Besuel who wanted to stop the marriage. Some say it was Lavan, and that's the intent of what we say in the [Haggadah](#): לבן בקש לעקור את הכל (Rav Eliezer Tzvi Naiman in [Chiddudei Torah](#) to [Genesis 24:33](#); Rav Chaim Kanievsky *shlita*, quoted in [Derech Sichah parshas Bo](#) p. 244, in the name of "Rav Heschel")

⁷ [Genesis 24:33](#)

⁸ [Yalkut Shimoni loc. cit.](#) brings from an unknown [Midrash](#) (see [Midrash Aggadah loc. cit.](#) with [Rav Buber's](#) note § 21, who says he has no doubt it's also from "Midrash Avkir") that they saw his riches and wanted to kill him. [Rabbeinu Bachayei](#) to v. 33 also says this. I don't understand this since he gave all his riches to Rivka, so what would be the point in killing him? I suppose this way they could keep their daughter and the riches as well

⁹ [Targum "Yonasan" ad. loc.](#), presumably based on [Midrash HaGadol loc. cit.](#)

a sure death. Rivka was interested in the marriage, and the family could do nothing to stop it. How did our Sages know that Rivka's family tried to kill Eliezer?

It could be it was implied by the way the Torah expresses that they placed food before Eliezer¹⁰. Although the word is read ויושם, they placed, it is spelled ויישם. This could be read as וייסם, that they gave him poison¹¹. Another possible source¹² is the word ויישם appears only twice in *Tanach*. One is here, and the other is in regards to Yosef¹³. When he died, it says that he was placed in a coffin. The fact that this word appears in only these two contexts teaches us that Rivka's family also desired, in a way, to put Eliezer in a coffin. Namely, by poisoning him.

Another possibly for how our Sages knew that they wanted to kill Eliezer is just from a careful reading of the story¹⁴. Imagine you invite a guest for Shabbos. You greet them, walk them in, and serve them a bowl of cholent. The thing is, no one else is eating. Wouldn't that seem suspicious? Why is the guest the only one eating? The verse says that they placed food *before Eliezer*. This implies that no one else was eating. Our Sages saw from here that they intended to poison him. Eliezer noticed the fishy situation, and avoided getting killed.

A final suggestion comes from an interesting law regarding a houseguest. Our Sages teach us¹⁵ כל מה (חוץ מצא) שיאמר לך בעל הבית עשה (חוק מצא), everything the host says to do, the guest must obey (except to leave¹⁶). The Vilna Gaon understands that this obligation to listen to the host is as binding as any other commandment¹⁷. Therefore, when Rivka's family told Eliezer to eat, he really should have listened to them. Why did he say he wouldn't eat until he's said what he has to say? Our Sages picked up on this and deduced that he must have realized his life was in danger. He has to listen to the host, but not if his life is at stake.

¹⁰ Genesis *loc. cit.*

¹¹ Bereishis Rabbasi *loc. cit.*, brought by Ba'al HaTurim *ad. loc.* See also Lekach Tov, Sechel Tov to v. 33, and Midrash HaGadol *loc. cit.* This could also be the intent of Midrash Aggadah *loc. cit.*

¹² Ba'al HaTurim *loc. cit.*

¹³ Genesis 50:26

¹⁴ Rav Daniel Glatstein didn't cite anyone for this explanation. Perhaps he thought of it on his own.

¹⁵ Pesachim 86b; brought in Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 170:5. See the following note

¹⁶ The *gemarra* has these last words in parentheses, indicating they don't belong there. The Shulchan Aruch *loc. cit.* also left it out of the *halacha*. The Be'ur Halacha *ad. loc.* brings these words, noting that this exception does appear in some texts of the *gemarra*. The simple meaning seems to be that if the homeowner demands that their guest leave, they don't have to listen. This on the surface doesn't make sense (see Maharsha *ad. loc.*). The Be'ur Halacha brings the explanation of the Bach *ad. loc.*, that it means if the homeowner asks you to do errands outside the house, you don't have to listen. However, the Meiri *ad. loc.* maintains that these words in the *gemarra* are a mistake, and were added in by jokesters, as they clearly can't be true

¹⁷ This comes from a story brought in the introduction to Be'ur HaGra on Shulchan Aruch, written by his sons, *s.v.* ואספר. The Vilna Gaon was traveling on the road with some of his students, and they became the guests of a generous person. He prepared them a meal and served it to them. The Vilna Gaon wasn't feeling well, but ate the food anyways. He had to excuse himself in order to vomit up the food, and afterwards returned to his seat. The homeowner noticed that the Vilna Gaon's plate was empty, and insisted he eat more. The Vilna Gaon ate it, and had to excuse himself again. This happened three or four times. One of the students asked the Gaon, why was he torturing himself? He responded that anytime *Chazal* say something with the words עשה, it must be followed עד שתצא נפשו (although not inclusively). He therefore couldn't refuse his "master's" command to eat more food

Getting back to our original question, where was this Angel that Avraham mentioned? Our Sages pick up on the fact that Besuel, Rivka's father, mysteriously disappears towards the end of the story. They tell us that an Angel switched the poisoned food with Besuel's food. He unknowingly ate it, and died¹⁸. It turns out then that Avraham's promise came true. If Eliezer would experience any difficulty in his quest, an Angel would be there to help him. Not only did the Angel help him fulfill his mission, it saved his life as well¹⁹.

Good Shabbos

¹⁸ Bereishis Rabbasi, Midrash Lekach Tov, and Sechel Tov loc. cit.; *Cf.* Bereishis Rabbah loc. cit., brought by Rashi loc. cit., and Lekach Tov and Sechel Tov to v. 55, which say בגילה נגף, that he died that evening in a plague. Although, Sechel Tov to v. 33, which says that he ate from the poisoned food, says he died that evening, unlike the other *Midrashim* which say this idea. Perhaps this indicates that they all mean the same thing and נגף just means he was killed

¹⁹ This is suggested by the Alshich to Genesis 24:33. Rav Daniel Glatstein cited this explanation from Rav Meshulam Dovid Soloveitchik zt"l