

- (א) וְאַבְרָהָם זָקֵן בָּא בַיָּמִים וְה' בָּרַךְ אֶת־אַבְרָהָם בְּכָל.
 (ב) וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם אֶל־עֲבָדָיו זָקֵן בֵּיתוֹ הַמְּשַׁל בְּכָל־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ שֵׁים־נָא יְדָךְ תַּחַת יָרְכִי.
 (ג) וְאַשְׁבִּיעַךָ בְּה' אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֱלֹהֵי הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תִקַּח אִשָּׁה לְבְנֵי מִבְּנוֹת הַכְּנַעֲנִי אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי יוֹשֵׁב בְּקִרְבּוֹ.
 (ד) כִּי אֶל־אֲרָצִי וְאֶל־מִוְלַדְתִּי תֵלֵךְ וְלִקְחָתְּ אִשָּׁה לְבְנִי לְיִצְחָק.

Avraham then bows in gratitude to two groups of people: to *the people of the land* (the common folk) and to *Bnei Cheis* (the leaders of the land). When Avraham heard what *Bnei Cheis* had said he was certainly very pleased. However, he realized that the success of his request depended not just on the good will of the authorities but also on that of the common folk. If he bowed in thanks to the leaders, the people could rise up against them in protest against a foreigner's being given privileges generally reserved for residents like themselves. He therefore acted wisely, bowing first to *the people of the land*. He then turned and bowed to *Bnei Cheis* — for it is more respectful to end one's conversation by bowing to the most important people. [This answers Question 7.]

Answer to
Question 7

AVRAHAM INSTRUCTS ELIEZER TO FIND A WIFE FOR YITZCHAK

Consider the following questions:

1. Why do we need to know that *Avraham was old* at this point? What does this have to do with Avraham's commanding Eliezer to find a wife for Yitzchak?²⁴

23. The Sages teach us that the *slave* was Eliezer.

24. Alshich notes that Yitzchak was already forty years old at this time (see *Bereishis* 25:20 with Rashi). Certainly it was time to find a wife for him.

2. What is the meaning of the unusual expression “*coming with days*” (verse 1)?
3. Why is it relevant to know that Hashem *had blessed Avraham with everything*? How is this connected to finding a wife for Yitzchak?
4. Why do we need to know that Eliezer was (a) *the elder of his [Avraham’s] household*, and (b) *in charge of everything he had*?
5. Why does Avraham make Eliezer swear that he will not take a wife for Yitzchak from among the Canaanite women (verse 3)? If he just swears to find a wife from Avraham’s family members (verse 4),²⁵ this obviously includes the idea that he should not take a wife from Canaan.
6. Why does Avraham need to add the words “*the Canaanites amongst whom I dwell*”? Eliezer knew that Avraham lived in Canaan among the Canaanites!
7. How could Avraham tell Eliezer (verse 4) “*Go to my land... and you shall take (לִקְחָתָּ) a wife for my son*” when this was not fully under Eliezer’s control? After all, the girl’s family could refuse to cooperate.²⁶
8. Why does Avraham use the double language, “*for my son, for Yitzchak*”? After all, Eliezer was well aware that Yitzchak was Avraham’s son!

In order to understand the unusual expression, “*Avraham was old, coming with days*,” let us look at what the Zohar²⁷ says about a verse later in *Sefer Bereishis*:

25. Who were at that time in Charan. [See *Bereishis* 11:31, where the Torah tells us that Terach had settled his whole family in Charan; only Avraham eventually continued on to Eretz Yisrael.]

26. Instead, the Alshich writes, Avraham should have said, “Go to my land to take (לִקְחָתָּ) a wife for my son.” This language would indicate that Eliezer was to try to take a wife — something that really was under Eliezer’s control.

27. *Sefer Bereishis* 221b.

Yisrael's (Yaakov's) *days to die drew close* (*Bereishis* 47:29). R' Yose said: It doesn't say, "Yisrael's day to die approached" but Yisrael's days to die approached." [This is difficult to understand, for] surely a person dies in one single moment and not over a number of days! But [the explanation is that] when God wants to take back a person's soul, all the days of that person's life gather before Him to be judged. Fortunate is the person whose days come before the King [of Kings] without shame, i.e., all of his days, where not even one is pushed away because a sin was committed on that day. This is why it says about *tzaddikim* that "their days drew close"; it means that they drew close before the King without shame... Thus Yisrael's days drew close [before Hashem] without shame, perfect, with complete happiness.

We see from here that when a *tzaddik* nears his death, his days gather around him, each one prepared to testify about the Torah and mitzvos fulfilled on that particular day. [Although "days" are not generally regarded as having any real "existence,"] each day on which spiritual deeds were accomplished in fact acquires an eternal spiritual existence through those deeds, and thus becomes capable of standing in heaven before God and giving testimony.

Based on this we can explain the phrase, "*coming with days*." Avraham was a prophet, and he sensed the presence of the days of his life gathering around with their spiritual splendor. [This answers Question 2.] He thought this was a sign that he was going to die soon — especially since *Avraham was old*. (He did not realize that these "days," these spiritual entities, gathered around him simply because of his great holiness, not because he was about to die.) Believing that he did not have much longer to live, he decided that he must attend to the vital matter of finding a suitable wife for Yitzchak. [This answers Question 1.]

Now, since Avraham felt that he was unable to do this

mitzvah himself (because of his advanced age), he had to send Eliezer. But surely it would be only natural for Avraham to be concerned that by doing so the mission was less likely to succeed: The girl's parents might be insulted that Avraham himself had not come, or at least sent important people in his place, instead of sending a slave. Furthermore, the girl's parents might very well be wary of sending a young and beautiful girl in the care of a strange man on a lengthy journey through desolate regions. Indeed, shouldn't Avraham himself have recognized the impropriety of asking them to do so?

The Torah immediately addresses these concerns: First of all, the Torah tells us, "*Hashem had blessed Avraham with everything.*" Avraham had faith that everything would work out because Hashem had blessed him at every stage of his life; He had always been with him, and surely would be with him once again. Therefore, he could send Eliezer instead of himself and the mission would nonetheless be concluded successfully. [This answers Question 3.]

The Torah continues by describing Eliezer as "*the elder of his household* (זָקֵן בֵּיתוֹ)." Eliezer had grown up in Avraham's household. Avraham knew him to be of upright character, to the point that he had attained the position of being its trusted elder. In addition, the Midrash²⁸ says that Eliezer's countenance was extremely similar to Avraham's, indicating that his character was noble and exalted, comparable to Avraham's own.²⁹ For this reason Avraham was not concerned about Eliezer traveling with Rivkah. (Nevertheless, we find that God took extra precautions regarding this matter: He miraculously enabled Eliezer and Rivkah to travel from Charan back to Eretz Yisrael in a single

28. *Bereishis Rabbah* 59:8 with *Eitz Yosef*.

29. The Alshich cites the Midrash further, where it expounds the phrase הַמְשֵׁל בְּכָל אֲשֶׁר לוֹ, lit., "who ruled over all that was his," as referring to Eliezer's mastery over his *yetzer hara*.

day so that they would not be secluded together at night.)³⁰ [This answers Question 4a.]

Finally, the Torah tells us that Eliezer was *in charge of everything he [Avraham] had*. Avraham's great wealth and fame was known the world over. Since Eliezer was the administrator of all the possessions of such a prominent person, he would be considered a highly important person in his own right, even though he was a slave. It would certainly not be beneath the girl's dignity to be escorted by Eliezer. [This answers Question 4b.]

We asked above (Question 5) why Avraham made Eliezer swear not only to take a wife for Yitzchak from Avraham's family members, but also not to take a wife for Yitzchak from among the Canaanite women. The answer is that had he just made Eliezer swear the first oath, Eliezer might have thought that if his mission to find a wife from Avraham's household was unsuccessful, the oath would no longer be binding and he would be able to realize his secret ambition of marrying off his own daughter to Yitzchak³¹ — even though she was a Canaanite. In fact, Eliezer might intentionally not try his best to fulfill his mission. He might hope that the girl's parents would refuse to let her go to Eretz Canaan, and he would not push too hard to convince them otherwise. Avraham therefore made Eliezer swear explicitly at the beginning of the oath that he was not to take a Canaanite girl for Yitzchak, under any circumstances. [This answers Question 5.] Avraham even added the words, “*you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites **amongst whom I dwell***” to hint to Eliezer that this included Eliezer's daughter. In this way, Eliezer would have no conflict of interest and would work wholeheartedly to fulfill his mission. [This answers Question 6.]

30. *Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer* Ch. 16 (Hager edition). Such miraculous shortening of a journey is called קפיצת הדרך, “contraction of the way.”

31. See *Bereishis Rabbah* 59:9.

(5) The slave said to him, “Maybe the girl won’t want to go after me to this land. Should I return (lit., should I return, return) your son to the land that you went out from there (Charan)?”

(6) Avraham said to him, “Be extremely careful not to return my son there.

(7) “Hashem, God of the heavens Who took me [away] from my father’s house and from the land of my birth and Who spoke to me and swore to me, saying, ‘I will give this land to your offspring’ — He will send His angel before you and you shall take a wife for my son from there.

(8) “But if the girl does not want to follow you [back], you will be released from this oath of mine. Just make sure not to return my son there.”

We also asked why Avraham uses the phrase, “*Go to my land ... and you shall take a wife for my son, for Yitzchak,*” when this was not fully under Eliezer’s control. The answer is that the words “*and you shall take*” are not part of the oath that Avraham insisted Eliezer swear, but rather a promise that Avraham made to him to encourage him to do so: “Swear to go to my land, and I promise that *you shall* [succeed and] *take a wife for my son, for Yitzchak.*” [This answers Question 7.] Avraham uses the double expression “*for my son, for Yitzchak*” to hint at two separate reasons why he is so confident that his family will not refuse Eliezer’s request that their daughter come to Eretz Canaan and marry Yitzchak. “First,” Avraham said, “since the wife is for *my son* [who is a member of their family, too], they will not turn you away. And second, after the *Akeidah* God told me explicitly that the girl intended *for Yitzchak* had been born to my niece Milkah and her husband Besuel.³² Since you will merely be retrieving

Answer to
Question 7

32. See *Bereishis* 22:20 with Rashi; *Bereishis Rabbah* 57:3.