

Rivkah

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

Let me try to illustrate why Rivkah was such a special person. Imagine a modern day Rivkah living in any large Jewish community anywhere in the world. She goes to the door and there's a strange man who says his car has run out of gas and asks if she can help. And she says "Sure, let me grab my coat, fetch the gas can we have in the garage and I'll walk with you to the nearest gas station, fill it up walk back and pour it into your tank and give you a cup of coffee before you go on your way."

Wouldn't you think she was something really special? How many girls nowadays do you think would do that? More likely they'd be on their cells texting and probably send the help to answer the door! The trouble is that if she were very good looking and slim she'd have no trouble finding a husband. But if she were just kind and caring but not so hot she'd probably find it much harder.

Which set of values is the Torah telling us is preferable do you think? Rivkah is a good person, caring even for the camels. She is surrounded by not so good people. Here brother Lavan will reveal his true nature later on. Here he seems preoccupied with money, with the gifts Eliezer brought. Her father Betuel seems strangely absent. Some even say Lavan killed him because he stood in the way. Yet surrounded by such people she was willing to leave and travel a long way because she trusted Eliezer and his judgment that Isaac was a good man. She also took her nursemaid with and tradition has it that he was the one who brought Rivkah up and gave her moral compass.

The Torah adds other details about her character. As she and Eliezer come towards her new family she sees a man meditating in the field. She wants to know who he is. Clearly she was impressed by someone showing such spiritual characteristics. When Eliezer identifies him as Yitzchak she covers her face with a veil to greet him. Showing her modesty and respect for convention. Some commentators understand the part about covering herself negatively. She hid her true feelings. She was not very good at communicating with her husband which is why later on they came to make different choices over the upbringing of their children and the succession. But most take a positive view.

Yitzchak welcomes her and takes her into the tent to Sarah his mother. But Sarah has already died. And in the very same sentence it says that Rivkah was a comfort to him for the loss of Sarah. By taking Rivkah into the tent to Sarah, it really means 'to replace Sarah' as the most important woman of the encampment and the mother of the family. But notice too, the sequence. He took her home to his mother's tent, then he married her and then he fell in love with her! The opposite of what usually happens today.

The Torah emphasizes the importance of love. But that true love is not based on first sight or indeed on marriage itself but rather on two people sharing

values, background, growing to appreciate and love each other for the way they are and live. True love grows. And having a good, caring, modest character, helps.