

Date: 20 Cheshvan 5786 (November 11, 2025)

Torah Portion: Chayei Sarah

Topic: To Achieve Full Mastery

As it is written (Gen. 24:2), “And Abraham said to his servant, the elder of his household who controlled all that was his, ‘Place now your hand under my thigh.’” The Midrash focuses on the phrase, “who controlled all that was his.” Homiletically, this implies that Eliezer had full mastery over his evil inclination, just as Abraham did. Although the Midrash acknowledges Eliezer’s moral strength, it notes a fundamental distinction between him and Abraham regarding the nature of this mastery.

R’ Yisroel Salanter explains that there are two levels of individuals who are capable of overcoming their evil inclination. The first is a person who remains subject to the urges and desires of the evil inclination but nonetheless is able to battle and defeat those impulses. Although this is clearly a remarkable level to achieve, such a person runs the risk of, at times, losing a battle, since he has not yet conquered his evil inclination to the extent that its cunning and manipulative suggestions no longer present themselves as viable possibilities in his mind.

The second type is one who has devoted significant time and effort to perfecting his character and subduing his evil inclination to such a degree that he is automatically focused on doing what is right. For such a person, the urges of the evil inclination exert no control whatsoever; he naturally desires only that which is correct and proper.

Abraham attained this level of complete moral and spiritual perfection. This is the sense of the divine statement directed to Abraham: “There is no fault with you except this foreskin. Remove it and thus eliminate the blemish, [and then] walk before Me and be perfect.” Eliezer, great as he was, did not achieve the same degree of perfection. While he was able to battle and overcome his evil inclination, he remained susceptible to its cunning and influence. Thus, the Midrash describes Eliezer as having “scales of deceit in his hand,” because he mentally “weighed” whether or not his own daughter was fit to be Yitzchak’s wife, despite knowing that such a match was improper.

As it is written (Hos. 12:8), “A trader (כַּנְעָן, *kena’an*) with scales of deceit in his hand, to exploit the beloved one.” The term “trader” is interpreted as a reference to Eliezer. He is described (Gen. 24:2) as “the servant” or “slave,” and thus alluded to by the word *kena’an*, which can also mean “Canaan”—symbolically associated with servitude, as Canaan was the slave par excellence. Eliezer is described as having “scales of deceit in his hand” because he internally deliberated over whether his daughter might be suitable for Yitzchak. This deliberation is viewed as an attempt “to exploit the beloved one,” referring to Yitzchak.

Yitzchak is called “the beloved one of the world” because even the angels cried out on his behalf when he was about to be sacrificed. When Abraham stretched out his hand to take the knife to slaughter his son, the ministering angels wept. This is the meaning of the verse, “Behold, *erelam* (אֶרְלָם) cried out outside” (Isa. 33:7). The commentators of Tanakh explain that *erelam* refers to *mal’achim* (מַלְאָכִים), a term that can mean either “messengers” or “angels.”

According to the Midrash, Eliezer’s statement—“Perhaps the woman will not wish to follow me to this land”—contains an implicit desire that his mission would fail, thereby allowing him to propose his own daughter as a suitable match for Yitzchak. The word “perhaps” (*ulai*) in Hebrew often implies that the speaker hopes for the outcome in question. The Midrash thus interprets Eliezer’s question as an expression of personal hope, despite its inappropriateness.

Abraham responded to him, “You, as a Canaanite, are accursed (Gen. 9:25), and my son is blessed; and the accursed cannot adhere to the blessed.”

Shalom