



## **Avraham's Servant: The Model of a Trusted Friend**

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Whom do you trust? Why do you trust them? Do we base it on experience with that person? Is it a quality that someone has? Is it an emotional response to a person? Dr. Judith Sills wrote for *Psychology Today* that, “trust — whether in a person or a product — is more than a compilation of information and experience. It is that data squeezed through some individual emotional filter, invisible to the eye yet active in every encounter.” In this week’s Torah portion, *Hayei Sarah*, Avraham puts all of his trust in one person to guarantee the continuation of his family.

Up to now in the book of *Breishit* (Genesis), the focus has been on Avraham and Sarah, their journeys, joys, travails, and trials. In *Parshat Hayei Sarah*, they fade into the background as the next generation of their family comes of age. At the beginning of *Hayei Sarah*, we immediately learn that Sarah has died at the age of 127. After Avraham mourns her and buries her in a cave he purchased from the local council of elders, he turns to one last task before he fades from the pages of the Torah: finding Yitzhak a wife.

After Avraham buries Sarah, we take a new look at Avraham:

“And Avraham was old, advanced in days, and God had blessed Avraham with everything. And Avraham said to his servant, the elder one who oversaw all that was his, ‘Put your hand beneath my thigh, and I will make you take an oath to Adonai, God of the heavens and God of the earth, that you will not take a woman for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites where I am now living, but rather you will go to my native land and take a woman for my son, for Yitzhak.’”  
(Breishit 24:1-4)

This is neither the Avraham who set out across a continent to find a new home, nor the Avraham the warlord who fight battles and contends with kings. This is the Avraham at the end of his life, turning to someone else he trusts for help. The person Avraham turns to is the star of this week’s Torah portion: Avraham’s servant. The Torah does not give him a name, but the rabbis assume, and reasonably so, that this is Eliezer, the previously mentioned steward of Avraham’s household. Avraham summons him and sends him on a mission to go back to Avraham’s ancestral homeland to find a suitable wife for Yitzhak. It is remarkable that Avraham would put such a crucial task in the hands of someone who is not a blood relation, and may even be a Canaanite! For Avraham to trust him, he must be a person of distinguished character. A close reading of the narrative of this servant’s

journey to find Yitzchak a wife reveals a person of remarkable *midot* (character traits). Avraham's servant can serve as a model for what a trusted friend should look like.

**He is thoughtful.** Before he sets off on his mission, he thinks about Avraham's request to find Isaac a wife, and anticipates potential problems that might arise. He asks, "Perhaps the woman will not want to go with me to this land? Shall I return your son to the land you came from?" (Bereishit 24:5) Avraham changes the conditions of the oath that his servant swears based on this potential problem.

**He takes initiative.** Avraham charges him with his mission, but it is up to the servant to decide how to carry out that mission. He takes ten camels and a load of valuable gifts. Sforzo, a medieval Italian commentator, says "he took permission from his master to go after he had prepared the camels, and he took with him gold, silver and cloths, but did not need permission to take them because he had everything in his hand to do with as he pleased". (Sforzo's comment to Bereishit 24:10) Avraham does not micromanage his servant. He knows that this person has what it takes to get the job done.

**He trusts God.** The servant turns to God for guidance when he is at the well and needs help finding a fitting partner for Yitzchak. "He said, 'Adonai, God of Avraham, make this happen for me today, and keep faith with my master Avraham.'" (Bereishit 24:12) Several commentators note that, unlike many people in their time, Avraham's servant did not turn to a fortuneteller to predict for him if and how his mission would succeed. Perhaps influenced by the life and deeds of Avraham, the servant turns to God in prayer.

**He is insightful.** Avraham's servant knows what kind of person Yitzchak needs for a wife, and asks God for that specifically in his prayer. Avraham's servant asks that a young woman offer not only to provide him with water, but then offer to water all ten of his camels as well. Hizkuni, a 13<sup>th</sup> century French commentator, adds that the servant was "checking to make sure she had integrity, for all that she did [by the well] was from her own wisdom, but that which she did at home would not be from her own wisdom but rather from her relatives who commanded her to do so". Avraham's servant chose a public spot to find a wife because he would see her true inner qualities and not merely obedience stemming from the watchful eye of her parents.

**He is observant.** Right after Avraham's servant concludes his prayer, he notices Rivka, a beautiful young girl, go down to the well. It says that, "she went down to the well, filled her pitcher and came up". (Bereishit 24:16) The next verse says that, "the servant ran towards her". (Bereishit 24:17) What did he see that made him rush towards her? In the Midrash, the rabbis note that she does not actually draw the water from the well, so the rabbis conclude that the waters themselves must have risen up towards Rivka to save her the trouble. Avraham's servant notices this small detail and takes it as a sign that she is the one. It is his attention to detail that makes Rivka stand out from the crowd.

**He is grateful.** After Rivka finished providing water for the ten camels (which is several tons of water), tells Avraham's servant that she is Avraham's niece, and offers him a place to stay and food for the camels, the servant immediately bows down on the ground and offers thanks to God for providing him with success on his mission.

**He is enthusiastic.** Rivka runs back home, tells the family what has happened, and the servant tells them the entire story. In the morning, Rivka consents to go back with the servant and marry Yitzchak. Avraham's servant wastes no time after she agrees: "Rivka arose with her servants, then got on the camels, and went after the man; the servant took Rivka and went on his way." (Breisheit 24:61) Ramban, the 12<sup>th</sup> century Spanish commentator, notes that this verse "speaks of his enthusiasm". Avraham's servant, having accomplished his mission, does not dawdle but immediately gets back on the road to return home to Yitzchak.

**He is caring.** Ramban also notes in the same comment that "after the servant left the city and had all those women with him, the servant took Rivka with him [in particular] and did not leave her side in order to guard her from any misfortune". Avraham's servant demonstrates his care and concern for her welfare and takes extra measures to ensure her safety during the trip to her new home.

How fortunate for Avraham to have such a person as this in his life! Was it by chance that Avraham found such a helper? Given that this servant was with Avraham for many years and was trusted to run Avraham's household, Avraham had enough experience with him to know that he possessed all of these qualities. Throughout Avraham's life, the Torah describes him as a man that sees things that others do not. Avraham sees these qualities in his servant, and through his own emotional filter, knows that this is the man whom he trusts with the most important task in Jewish history: helping to create the next generation of the Jewish people. As the Torah will bear out, the choice of Rivka, a woman of action, plays her own critical role in determining the direction of the Jewish people when she helps Yaakov get the blessing from his father Yitzchak.

We should each strive to emulate the qualities of Avraham's servant, because not only are they good qualities to have in general, but so that when someone close to us needs someone to rely upon that they trust, they will have someone like Avraham's servant in their life.

Shabbat Shalom,  
Rabbi Pepperstone

**DISCUSS AROUND THE TABLE AS A FAMILY:**

1. What qualities make someone trustworthy? How do you know when someone has those qualities?
2. Which of Avraham's servant's qualities do you most admire? Why?
3. Looking at the entire story, are there any other qualities that you can find in Avraham's servant that were not mentioned?
4. Who are the people in your life that you trust most? Share with each other how you came to trust that person.

**TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THIS WEEK'S TORAH PORTION [HAYEI SARAH](#), ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:**

1. What is unusual about the way the Torah describes Sarah's age when she died?
2. To whom did Avraham turn to purchase a piece of land with a burial cave?
3. What is the name of the burial cave that Avraham purchases?
4. In what Israeli city can you find that burial cave?
5. When does Lavan first see when Rivka comes to tell him the news?
6. What does Avraham's servant add to his story when he tells it to Rivka's family?
7. What does Rivka do when she sees Yitzchak for the first time?
8. Whom does Avraham marry? How many children do they have? What does Avraham do with those sons?
9. How old is Avraham when he dies?
10. Who buries him? Where do they bury him?
11. How many sons does Yishmael have? What is the significance of that number?