

## Parshas Chayei Sara

In *Parshas Chayei Sara*, the *Torah* relates the story in which our patriarch *Avrohom* seeks a fitting spouse for his son *Yitzchok*. It gives us great detail about the charge that he gave his trusted servant *Eliezer* and *Eliezer's* test of *Rivka*. The *Torah* describes how *Eliezer* encountered and engaged her family to make the proposal that she return with him to *Eretz Yisroel* to become *Yitzchok's* wife. When we learn this narrative through the lens of *Chazal*, we discover that *Rivka's* family is composed of rather unsavory characters; her brother *Lavan's* nickname is *the conniver*. When we meet *Lavan* again in *Parshas VaYeitzei* in a different role, as *Yaakov Avinu's* father-in-law, he shows his true colors as a trickster and an unscrupulous scoundrel.

Yet here in *Parshas Chayei Sara*, *Lavan* seems very charming. When he first hears that an emissary has come from his famous relative *Avrohom*, he rushes out to meet him at the well. This is how the *Torah* describes the encounter, "*Rivka* had a brother named *Lavan*. He ran outside to the stranger, to the well... He came to the stranger, who was still standing beside the camels near the well, and said, 'Come! [You're a man] blessed by God! Why are you still standing there outside? I have cleaned the house and prepared a place for the camels.'" *Chazal* explain that although *Lavan* is playing the role of a gracious and generous host, he is really hoping to rob *Eliezer* of his valuables and then to dispatch him by poisoning his food.

The *Ben Ish Chai* (*Rabbi Yosef Chaim* of Bagdad 1835-1909) has an interesting homiletic interpretation of these *pesukim*. He says that *Lavan* is playing the role of the *Yetzer Hara*, the evil inclination. When the *Yetzer Hara* first encounters a person, his invitation is "to come outside to the *ayin*." The word *ayin* which means well also means the eye. The *Yetzer Hara* wants us to leave all boundaries behind and to pursue our desires. The eye is the organ which introduces us to all vices and desires. As decent human beings, we have inhibitions and morality which create boundaries that keep us away from improper behavior. The evil inclination goads us on to leave the boundaries behind and follow our eyes. Once we are under his spell, his advice becomes, "Why are you outside, blessed one! Come on in, the house is ready for you." He assuages our conscience and reassures us that this is normative behavior which is within the boundaries of decency. This is how he seeks to consolidate his gains as he draws further from the right path.

The *Torah* encourages us to be inhibited and to use it as a means of self-control. We don't celebrate *losing it* or *being your real self* if that means becoming vulgar, nasty and uncouth. Natural boundaries are expressions of our *neshamah* which seek dignity and discipline. We should listen to that message and not become enticed by the allure of a crass and loud world.