

November 13, 2009

Shabbat Shalom!

In any crucial moment in our lives, we may have, at least, a fleeting thought of hoping for the best outcome under the circumstances, whatever they may be. This isn't necessarily an attempt to control specific events in our lives. It can be, more appropriately, a way of creating within ourselves a positive attitude that can help us through even the most difficult of situations. For some, that "fleeting thought" may be a prayer. No matter how we choose to express ourselves, it is part of our nature to say, in one way or another, "please, let this turn out all right on some level when it's all over."

I wonder, then, why some rabbinic commentators scolded Abraham's servant (named Eliezer by later tradition, but not in the Torah) who went to find a wife for Abraham's son, Isaac, among the extended family. Once he arrived at his destination, Eliezer said to himself, "God, grant me good fortune this day." He then began to imagine that one of the young women who came to draw water would offer him a drink AND, without him having to suggest it, draw water also for his camels. He was looking for someone kind and generous. It so happened that the young woman who did what he had hoped, Rebekah, was beautiful, but she would not have been "the answer to his prayer" if she had not given water to Eliezer's camels. Some rabbis thought, in looking at the biblical tale, that Eliezer was asking for divine intervention. Others said that he was simply looking for a sign of kindness from, at least, one person. It is possible that he may not have ended up finding it, but he did, and, consequently, he extended to Rebekah and her family the same kindness and generosity that emanated from her.

Kindness and generosity are signs of menschlichkeit, being a decent human being. They are characteristics that are expressed through actions that offer us support and warmth. We can find these signs all around us, in any situation. Even when times seem dark and foreboding, kindness and generosity can offer us light and hope that will enable us to keep ourselves going and offer such gifts to others in return. May we find and create such signs among us in the days to come.

-- L'shalom, Rabbi Larry