

D'var Torah for Women's League Shabbat on any date
By Rabbi Ellen Wolintz -Fields

(*Read Hebrew*) *Meen Ha-Mai-tzar Ka-ra-tee Yah*
 A-nai-ni B'Mair-chva
 Adonai Lee Lo E-ra
 Mah Ya-a-seh Le- A-dam.

(*Read translation*): In distress I called to God who answered by setting me free.
Adonai is with me, I shall not fear; what can mortals do to me ?

I have a question for you. Wouldn't it be great if reading these words would cause all of us here among our Sisterhood sisters to feel a powerful force? A kind of force like a magnetic current between ourselves and God - a force that would help us to feel as if God were surrounding us and protecting us as well as those dear to us. A force that would provide us with signs to tell us what God wants us to do.

In truth, each of us has our own individual way of relating to and with God. Some of us see God the minute we open our windows and look at the nature around us. Some of us pray to God only at set ritual times while others of us pray or call out to God whenever we feel the need. And there may be others of us who seemingly reject any kind of outright connection with God.

In the Torah, we see examples of all of these kinds of people . Two in particular , though, who had a deep faith in God and felt that kind of magnetic, protective current that many of us would like to experience in our relationships with God were our matriarch Rebecca and Abraham's servant, to whom *midrash* or rabbinic legend assigns the name Eliezer.

Eliezer is sent by Abraham to find a wife for Isaac, from Abraham's relatives, in the city of Nachor. When Eliezer reaches Nachor, he stops at the town well, where the

women come to draw water, and he becomes overwhelmed with self-doubt. What if he makes a mistake he thinks? Sitting there he does not hesitate to call on God. He prays, “O Lord, God of Abraham. I pray you grant me good fortune today, and deal graciously with my master Abraham. Here, I stand at the spring as the daughters of the townspeople come out to draw water. Let there be a maiden to whom I shall say, ‘O please lower your jar that I may drink’, And, hopefully one will reply, ‘Drink and I will water your camels.’ Let her be the one whom you have decreed for your servant Isaac. Thereby I shall know that You have dealt graciously with my master.”

His prayer is simple and direct. He wants a sign from God that he is choosing the right woman. He prays from his heart; he prays in the moment—certainly a lesson all of us can learn! He needs God's help in the here and now. How is the servant, the lonely individual sitting by the well to know that God is listening to him? Do any of us ever know if God is truly listening? He cannot be sure that God hears his prayer, yet he prays anyway. That is a sign of a person of faith, a person who feels a connection with God. This person does not need to wait for large life cycle moments to occur to call on God.

Nor does he need to follow a set liturgy. Abraham's servant speaks from his heart, and God hears him – and God delivers. As soon as he completes his spontaneous prayer, Rebecca, the daughter of Betuel, and the granddaughter of Nachor, comes to the well. The servant approaches this attractive woman and asks her to give him some water. She does this and offers to give water to his camels as well. At this point, the servant starts to get very excited. He takes her kindness to be a sign from God. But, before he can truly believe that God has answered his prayers so quickly, he asks her name. When he learns that she is indeed the granddaughter of Nachor, he immediately praises God and thanks God for showing her to him. Imagine how you would feel if your prayer to God was answered within a few minutes of your uttering it. With a light and happy heart, the Eliezer goes home with Rebecca to tell her father that she is destined to be the wife of Isaac.

Like Eliezer, Rebecca also has a strong, magnetic connection with God and is a woman of faith as well. Imagine for a moment what the arrival of Abraham's servant is

like for her. Here she is, a young woman running her errands, on what appears to be a day like any other. She does not expect anything unusual to happen to her. Then, at the well, a strange man approaches her and asks her for some water. She pours some for him, and noticing his camels a little way off, she pours some for them as well. For some reason, her actions make this man very excited. He gives her some gold jewelry and asks her name. When she tells him that she is Rebecca, the daughter of Betuel, the son of Nachor, he immediately bows down and thanks God. All of this must have appeared very strange to her. Yet, she offers the man lodging and runs home to her family to tell them of the stranger's arrival.

Eliezer follows Rebecca home and is greeted by her father and brother. A little precocious, and more than a little curious, Rebecca listens at the door as the servant relates who he is and what his mission is. Rebecca is astounded to learn that she herself seems to be a woman that God has chosen to be Isaac's wife. By being polite and giving this man and his camels water, she was acting out a sign from God. We learn how Rebecca feels about all of this when we come to the end of the story. At this point, Eliezer is ready to leave with Rebecca, and return to Abraham and Isaac, but Rebecca's mother and brother want to let her stay with them 10 more days. They agree to let Rebecca decide if she will stay or go: "They called to Rebecca and said to her, 'Will you go with this man?' And she said, 'I will go.'" This is the single most important verse in this entire story which has been building up to this point because it is here that Rebecca's faith is being tested. She has heard from the stranger that he is a servant of Abraham, and that God brought her to him when she offered to give him water. Should she believe this man and go with him? Leave the only life she knows, leave her family and her friends? Is this what God wants her to do? This reminds us of when God says to Avram, '*Lech Lecha* ... Go out from your native land, and from your father's house, to the land that I will show you.' (Genesis 12:1). Abraham hears these words directly from God's mouth. He listens and obeys. However, Rebecca hears God's message through another human being, Abraham's servant. This fact alone could give her reason to doubt that God is speaking to her. Nevertheless, Rebecca does not doubt. Like Eliezer, and like Abraham himself, Rebecca has a relationship with God. She believes in signs,

like the one the servant prays for and receives. She trusts God will protect her on her journey and provide her with a good life with Isaac. Although no direct communications between God and Rebecca are recorded, it seems that Rebecca does pray to God and asks God what she should do. We know that later in her life, she does not hesitate to ask God why she is in pain during her pregnancy. Unlike Rachel who asks Jacob, her husband, to pray to God for her, Rebecca needs no intermediary. She is not afraid to reach out to God herself.

Being able to reach out to God when you need to is a wonderful skill to have. We think of God when life thrusts some events in our way, a birth, a wedding, an illness, a death. But communicating with God on a daily basis often does not come naturally. Even those who recite the required prayers everyday, often do not feel a personal connection to the divine. We should all try to work on our relationship with God, and by sitting together in our Women's League services, we are not waiting for the major lifetime life-cycle events to come around. We are ready to have a conversation with God today. We are making ourselves ready to open our hearts to talk to God spontaneously. We know that it is important to pray our own words, from our hearts, when the words of liturgy do not express our own thoughts and feelings. This is what Eliezer and Rebecca do and this is what we are readying ourselves to do. Doing so enriched their lives and helped guide them on the right path, and so it will do for us.

Let us not wait to hear God in our lives; to connect with God - let us do it now as they did. Look around - see all these women here today, our friends, our sisters - we are all created *b'zelem elohim*, in God's image - And so by connecting with each other - we are truly already connecting with God! And what a wonderful thing that is!

Shabbat Shalom!!