

She said, drink, my lord. (24:18)

Eliezer asked Rivkah (*Imeinu*) if she had water to spare. The young girl's actions, her outstanding *chesed*, kindness, in not only providing for Eliezer, but also for his camels, indicated the type of person she was. In addition, she did not tarry in carrying out his request. As soon as Eliezer asked her for water, she immediately ran to do his bidding. These two aspects of Rivkah's character are evident. Another one of her attributes is often overlooked, but should be underscored: *derech erez*, manners, respect, human decency. This, explains *Horav Yitzchak Yaakov Ruderman, zl*, is to be gleaned from the word *adoni*, my lord/master. Rivkah did not know Eliezer, yet she addressed him with respect. This was probably the way in which she spoke to everyone. Indeed, acting with *derech erez* is the foundation upon which our Torah stands. Regardless of the person who stands before us, we must always address him or her respectfully. *Horav Chaim Ozer Grodzinsky, zl*, *Rav* of Vilna and pre-World War II *gadol ha'dor*, preeminent leader of European Torah Jewry, would greet and treat anyone who passed his door with the utmost care and respect.

Derech erez is similar to *kavod Shomayim*, the honor of Heaven. When a person leaves this world, he is asked by the Heavenly Tribune: "Did you engage in Torah study? Did you coronate your Heavenly Father morning and evening? (Did you pray daily?); did you coronate your friend in a satisfactory, pleasant manner? (In other words, did you treat your friend with respect?) (*Reishis Chochmah Shaar Ha'Yiraah* 12). Thus, we see that the way in which we treat others follows naturally from the way in which we act towards Hashem.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* cites a number of passages from *Chazal* which stress the importance of *derech erez*. He concludes with an interesting observation in which he distinguishes between an *adam gadol*, great man, and an *adam hagun*, decent and honest man. The *Midrash* teaches that when the three angels (disguised as Arabs) passed by Avraham's tent, he immediately ran towards them to invite them in to grace his home and feed them. *Chazal* (*Bereishis Rabbah* 48:9) teach that Avraham mused to himself, "If I see that the *Shechinah* waits for these men (Avraham was engaged in conversation with Hashem, Who had appeared to him to visit him during his recuperation from his *bris milah*. The Patriarch "excused" himself to tend to the wayfarers.), then I know that they are an *adam gadol*, great men. If I see them proffering respect to one another, then I know that they are *hagunim*, decent and honest men. *Chazal* intimate that being an *adam gadol* is insufficient. One must achieve the level of *hagun*, integrity and decent; he must possess and manifest positive, refined character traits in order to define himself as a *hagun*.