Chomer Lidrush

Some ideas to turn your gears heading into Parshas Chayei Sarah.

Is There Room to Lodge? The Critical Place of Hachnasas Orchim

Eliezer gives Rivka a gold ring weighing a *beka* and two bracelets weighing ten (24:22), and both Targum Yonasan and Rashi see them as hints: the *beka* to the half-shekel, the bracelets to the two *luchos*, the ten to the *Aseres HaDibros*. In on his famous Five Derashos Rav Soloveitchik asks why, of all the mitzvos, the half-shekel should stand for Israel's future. Unlike a *chatas* or *asham*, which atone for particular sins, the half-shekel is a "*kofer nafsho*" (Shemos 30:12) given by everyone, "sinners as well as God-fearing, ordinary Jews and Talmidei Chachamim." No one is complete. Every Jew has something to teach and something to learn, and no one may rebuke others unless he is ready to be rebuked himself.

This is not just a lesson in the hal-shekel. It is the essence of what Eliezer was seeking. That, says the Rav, is what Eliezer was testing when he asked "*hayesh beis avich makom lanu lalin*" (24:23). A person sure of his own perfection cannot truly welcome a guest, because what could the guest possibly teach him? A person who knows he is only a half-shekel treats every guest as important, since anyone may bring a fresh insight. The Rav stresses the "*gam*" in Rivka's answer, "*gam makom lalun*" (24:25): room for many nights, because she was thirsty to hear about Avraham's house and ready to learn. Only then did Eliezer know she was the one for Yitzchak.

For an example of how to take this to the pulpit, see this original derasha. It opens with a shadchan's call that dies on the word "nice," asks how Eliezer could choose one of the Imahos on the strength of a single test about water, and answers with the Rav: the deciding moment was not the camels but the offer of lodging. It then adds a halachic layer. The Mishnah (Shabbos 18:1) permits clearing away even four or five baskets of grain on Shabbos "*mipnei ha'orchim*," and the Rema (Orach Chaim 333:1) limits *orchim* for this purpose to real guests from elsewhere; inviting a friend over for a meal does not count. The Rema is drawing a halachic line, but the derasha hears a challenge in it as well: it is easy to host people like us, while *hachnasas orchim* means making room for someone outside the familiar circle. The next time there is an empty seat at the Shabbos table, think not only about whom you would enjoy, but about whom you might learn from, because every one of us is only a half-shekel.