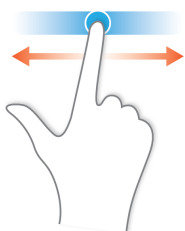


## Swipe Right for Loving the Little Things That Matter - *Hayei Sarah 5783*

So, if you are in a relationship, how did you meet your spouse, your partner?

I was speaking with a few 30 years olds about weddings and meeting people, and I mentioned that by far, the greatest number of couples that I have married met on websites like JDate.

In fact, I would say that 3/4 of the weddings I have officiated began online. They looked at me as if I were speaking about a rotary phone. They told me: "Nobody uses JDate; we just swipe on our phones!"



I guess I have not been keeping close track of this trend over the last few years. I had thought the swiping apps were for people looking for how-shall-I-put-it: "a less than a long-term relationship."

Turns out I was wrong.

Most couples these days meet on



Hinge, Tinder, or Jswipe. They see a picture and a profile about the person and swipe right if they are interested. If both people swipe right, boom: a match.

\* \* \*

Not surprisingly, the Torah is not that familiar with dating apps, but it does realize the importance of finding a suitable mate. This week contains the classic narrative of finding a partner for Isaac.

As in much of human history, this task was left to parents. But Abraham outsources this to the senior servant of his household, Eliezer. Eliezer is sent to the land where Abraham grew up to find Isaac's wife.

He makes the long journey from Canaan - modern-day Israel - to *Aram-Naharaim*, the city of *Naḥor* - what today would be southeastern Turkey.

Stopping by a well, he prays that if he asks a young woman for a drink, she will offer water for him and his camels as well. And then, Eliezer will know that she is the one.

Sure enough, like in a great RomCom, Rivkah/Rebecca immediately appears, and Eliezer asks her for water. She says, “*Sh’teh Adoni*, drink my lord,” and he does.

There is a little suspense at first since she doesn’t offer to bring water to the camels. But after Eliezer is no longer thirsty, she does offer to water the camels, and she adds, “*ad im keelu lishtot* - until they finish drinking.”

Not a small task! A camel can drink 25 gallons after a long trek, and there were 10 camels - that’s 250 gallons of schlepping!

She is going above and beyond the character test, revealing the *hesed* - the kindness that she possesses not merely to a traveler, but to animals.

As Me’ir Sternberg writes in his book *The Poetics of Biblical Narratives*, Rebecca’s actions “dramatize a single point: That the young woman’s performance surpasses even the most optimistic expectations.”

\* \* \*

But today, I want to share an added fact that I had not noticed before in the text. While Rebecca is bringing all this water for Eliezer’s camels, the Torah states, “*V’ha-ish mishta’eh lah maharish la’da’at* - the man, stood gazing at her silently wondering.” (Gen 24:21)

This is a verse I have never really thought about. Eliezer is standing there noticing; he is taking in her actions, observing this act of kindness.

The word *mishta’eh* is an unusual Biblical word - the root is *shin - aleph - heh*, and this is the only time in the Tanakh - in the Hebrew Bible - that we find it in this form; for the fans of Hebrew grammar: the *Hitpa’el* form.



At its core, the root means to crash or to devastate. But it is in the reflexive form, what could it mean to crash into yourself? He was struck watching her. Perhaps it was her beauty, or perhaps he was taking in her behavior, seeing who she really was.

\* \* \*

Sometimes, we don't really notice people. We don't really take the time to focus on them.

We may be on our phone texting or swiping through an Instagram feed. Here, the Torah emphasizes that Eliezer was taking in what he was seeing - and wondering if this could be Isaac's match.

And it's her small act of kindness that makes all the difference.

Little things matter.

Her awareness of the needs of his animals forms his perception of her.

She is not only a beautiful young woman, but a person who embodies the values of hospitality, kindness, and *gemilut hasidim* - a person who naturally performs good deeds.

Later on in the story, we see the same awareness when Isaac and Rebecca see each other for the first time. The Torah emphasizes how Rebecca sees him.

Isaac is walking in the field toward evening, *la'suah ba-sadeh* - he is walking or taking a stroll as the sun is setting. But the root of *la-suah* - can also mean to converse, to speak with, as in the modern Hebrew word *si<sup>h</sup>ah*, a conversation.

But, there is no one there with him, so who is he talking to?

In this reading, Isaac is speaking with himself, praying to God, engaged in a meditative walk, and appreciating the beauty of the world. Rebecca notices this, raising her eyes to take him in, watching him, appreciating his core, his soul.

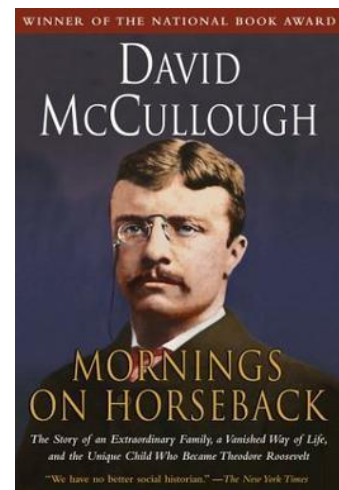
Once they meet, the Torah says *Va-ye'eh'ha've'ha* - and he loved her. This is the first mention of love between two partners in the Torah. Parental love is mentioned before, but this is the first "falling in love" we hear of between people.

And it makes sense, they are both presented in this Torah reading as people who care about the little things, and we can see how much they then appreciate each other.

Noticing the small things about another person can lead to love.

\* \* \*

I was reading a quote from David McCullough's book *Mornings on Horseback* (1981) about President Teddy Roosevelt:



“Walking beside him on the White House grounds one spring morning she watched him stop, stoop, pick up, and examine a minute feather, which he held between thumb and forefinger. ‘Very early for a fox sparrow,’ he said.”

Noticing nature and noticing the noticing.

\* \* \*

While our society moves at a fast pace with quick swipes, there are benefits to living a more contemplative life that allows us to see the small things that can make all the difference. Subtle behaviors and the details of the world around us can open us to deeper feelings and to a richer appreciation of others and nature.

It may not be easy to slow down and notice these smaller acts, but they can make all the difference.

They may even open us up to love.