

SETTING A GOOD EXAMPLE

by Rabbi Pinchas Avruch

Parshas Chayei Sarah

Setting A Good Example

By Rabbi Moshe Peretz Gilden

In relating the mission of Avraham's servant Eliezer to find a wife for Yitzchak (Isaac), the Torah's narrative (Beraishis/Genesis 24) is excessively lengthy and repetitive. The events are told as they unfold and then repeated when Eliezer recounts the events to the family of the bride to be, Rivka (Rebecca). Rashi, quoting Midrash Raba (60:8), explains (v. 42), "The ordinary conversation of the Patriarchs' servants are more pleasing before G-d than even the teachings of their children, for Eliezer's full account of his journey is recorded in the Torah, whereas many important halachic principles are derived only from textual allusions." Why is this so? What is so special about these interactions?

Rabbi Aharon Kotler (1) expounds that for the derivation of the many legal principles of the Torah, our Sages were given specific parameters within the oral tradition of how to extract the various laws and their details. It is, therefore, enough for the Torah to allude to the principles, avoiding verbosity, knowing they will be understood. However, if one is to learn proper Jewish conduct and ethics, a list of laws does not suffice. The code of appropriate human interaction is contingent on myriad variables that change in different situations. One must develop a sensitivity, set deep in the heart, to know the proper response for any given situation. Essential to this process is the careful observation of those who have achieved character refinement; profound understanding will be inculcated by the real-life examples.

To appreciate the numerous lessons in character refinement and proper interaction taught in this chapter of the Torah (2), the Torah needs to provide, at length, the background and context in which the events transpired. Thus, we are taught the proper conduct in any given context.

We are a nation charged with embodying the will and message of G-d. Thus, part of our mission is to be an example of proper conduct, morality, and character refinement. How do we become such a

people? We must observe and learn from the examples of our forefathers and Sages and find, in their example, an understanding of proper character that will guide us in all situations in our lives.

Have a Good Shabbos!

(1) 1892-1962; Rosh Yeshiva/Dean of Kletzk, Poland and founder of Beth Medrash Govoha in Lakewood, New Jersey

(2) This section of Eliezer's search for a wife for Yitzchak is full of numerous great lessons.

A. Eliezer's appreciation of the most important character for a wife and matriarch of the Jewish people - kindness.

B. Rivka, although she knew she would offer to bring water for the camels, did so only after Eliezer finished drinking. She understood that it is uncomfortable to accept too much kindness all at once.

C. Eliezer's humility that, although he was in charge of all of Avraham's great wealth, introduced himself simply, "I am Avraham's servant." (24:34)

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