

ON THE HIGHEST LEVEL

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

This week's Dvar Torah comes from Rabbi Avraham Kelman.

"Love Of Our Fellow Man On The Highest Level"

The story of Eliezer's journey to Charan and his successful quest for a wife for Yitzchak is told in great detail - twice. It is first told as it happened. Then, when Eliezer arrives at the home of Rivkah's family, he recounts the mission entrusted to him and all the subsequent events - and that too is recorded in the Torah.

Our Sages were puzzled as to why the Torah devoted so much space to this single episode. Said R. Acha, "The conversation of the servants of Patriarchs is more pleasing before the Omnipresent than the Torah of the sons. For the section of Eliezer is repeated in the Torah, whereas many important principles of the Law were given only by hinting." (Rashi 24:42).

R. Acha does not tell us specifically why the conversations of Eliezer are so precious and deserve so much space and attention. The fact that he characterizes them for being "yafa" teaches us that there is a special quality and significance to Eliezer's comments and behavior. And how does the Torah convey its high esteem for Eliezer and all that he said? Through repetition.

In the Torah, words count for much. Something that is especially important is often repeated, such as the mitzvos of Shabbos and circumcision. Here, too, it is for us to discover what is so significant in this story.

When Hillel was asked by a would-be convert to teach him the entire Torah while standing on one leg, which means to capsule the ultimate purpose or the essence of the Torah, he answered. "Whatever is hateful to you, do not do to your friend." (Shabbos 31) Rabbi Akiva made a similar comment, "Love your fellow man as yourself which is a Klal gadol batorah - a basic principle of the Torah." Much has been written as to what this teaching requires of us. Hillel told the would-be convert that the negative side of the command should be his ultimate goal. "Love your fellow man as yourself to the extent that you should never hurt anyone else, just as you do not want to be hurt by others." Our Sages have given different explanations of Hillel's words. Eliezer, however, provides a new dimension to the mitzvah of "loving your neighbor as yourself" that is both extraordinary and

beautiful.

He demonstrated that it is possible for a person to rejoice at someone else's happiness and achievements, just as if they had happened to him. As a rule, if we hear about someone else's great fortune or good luck, our typical reaction ranges from mild satisfaction to indifference, or at worst, to feelings of jealousy. Suppose a neighbor won a huge sweepstakes. A typical reaction would be, "A shame it did not happen to me!" The lucky winner may be overjoyed, speechless upon hearing the news, but it is rare for a friend or an employee to react in that way. Yet, that was precisely Eliezer's response. The Torah tells us (Bereishis 24:20). "And the man remained silent, to know whether or not Hashem had made his journey successful." Rashi comments: "he was astonished and confounded because he saw his matter nearing success." He was standing with bated breath, overcome with joy, knowing that his mission on behalf of Avraham and Yitzchak was about to succeed, and his prayers on their behalf were about to be answered.

We must remember that, personally, he had every reason to hope that his mission would fail. Our Sages tell us that Eliezer had a daughter and, understandably, was most eager for her to marry Yitzchak. Had he failed in Charan, who knows? Perhaps his daughter would become Yitzchak's bride. But in spite of that powerful incentive for him not to succeed, he was overjoyed to see Avraham's hopes fully realized. This is "love of your fellow man" on the grandest scale, - to such an extent that only the rarest of individuals can achieve it.

Eliezer fulfilled this command on its highest level. For that reason, the Torah rewards Eliezer in the most precious of ways, - by devoting more than half the parsha of Chaye Sarah to his words.

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The author is the Director of Project Genesis.