

# REASONABLE REPETITION

*by Rabbi Yaakov Menken*

Sometimes, the Torah strikes us as repetitive. We are forced to wonder why the Torah felt it necessary to tell us the same thing twice, and to attempt to determine what changes and nuances can be learned from the retelling.

Nowhere is this more striking than in our parsha, in the story of Eliezer going to find a wife for Yitzchak. First of all, the story is told in great detail. Furthermore, we are given a complete record of Eliezer's conversation with Besuel and Lavan, in which he repeats the story nearly in full - who Avraham was (as if we didn't know), how he wanted to find a wife for his son, how he sent Eliezer, and how Eliezer found Rivka. And finally, one of the most crucial elements of the tale, the "test" which Eliezer devises in order to determine which woman G-d has sent for Yitzchak, is told not twice, but **four** times: first, when Eliezer prays to G-d that the sign should come to pass, second, when Rivka emerges and immediately proceeds to do exactly what he said, third, when Eliezer tells Besuel and Lavan about his test, and fourth, when he describes for them how Rivka fulfilled his prayer!

Let the Torah say, "and it came to pass, before he had finished speaking, that behold, Rivka came out... and she did according to all that found in the prayer of Eliezer to G-d..." And then, "and I prayed that G-d would show me a sign... and Rivka came out and did all in accordance with that sign..." and that's it! We've just saved at least a paragraph and a half - any editor would obviously have cut the same sections.

But G-d's Torah is hardly obvious. There are layers beneath layers of meaning, waiting for us to find them. The possible editing is **so** obvious that we should know to look for more.

There is an interesting Medrash related to this, which Rashi [Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki] quotes at the point where Eliezer is telling Besuel and Lavan about the test he made. "Rabbi Acha said, 'the simple conversations of the servants of the forefathers is more pleasing before the Omnipresent than the Torah of the children, for the parsha of Eliezer is repeated in the Torah, whereas many laws which are part of Torah itself are given only as hints.'" The Rabbis tell us many detailed laws which are part of Torah, and yet can only be found in the written document by using the various methodologies for comparing and analyzing the verses.

Concerning the stories of our forefathers, the Kanfei Nesharim elaborates: "when we concentrate and delve more deeply, we find within them many other lessons, intentions, and hints towards holy

and great things, as we find in the books of early and later authorities who have written about them." If these stories are worthy of being told in full - and even repeated numerous times - it must be that many great lessons may be learned. And indeed, this is what we find.

I found one brief example offered by the Bais HaLevi, Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik of Brisk. Eliezer comes to Besuel and Lavan and tells them that Avraham had instructed him to go "and take a wife for my son." [24:38] But if we look earlier, we see that Avraham told him to go "and take a wife for my son, for Yitzchak." [24:4] Why did Eliezer omit Yitzchak's name?

For an answer, the Bais HaLevi looked at the behavior of many wealthy people in his day (which, unfortunately, remains true in some cases today). They would routinely offer large dowries in order to marry off their daughters to the sons of outstanding scholars. But if someone would offer a young man who was **himself** an outstanding student, likely to be a leading scholar in the next generation, they wouldn't be interested. They didn't want their daughter to be a Rabbanis (Rebetzin), they wanted her to enjoy life! So they valued Torah and scholarship, but from a distance. They wanted the honor of marrying off their daughter to the son of a leading scholar, but they weren't interested in having their daughter leading a life of relative deprivation, **married** to a leading scholar.

When Avraham instructed Eliezer to find a young woman, Avraham said she should be "for my son," meaning, appropriate as a daughter-in-law for someone of his nature and Divine service, but still more important, "for Yitzchak," in accordance with Yitzchak's own great characteristics and potential. But when Eliezer went to Rivka's family, he recognized immediately that discussing Yitzchak's character in any detail might blow the whole match. So instead, he merely discussed the fact that **Avraham** was seeking a wife for his son.

Thus we learn to contrast the attitude of Besuel and Lavan, who were interested in the honor of having their daughter and sister married to the son of Avraham, with that of Avraham himself, who was more interested in finding a match which was inherently good. Are we ourselves more interested in doing that which is right, or doing that which merely makes us look good? This is just one of the lessons to be learned from one single word of the "repetitious" stories of our forefathers!