



שליחות גורלית

Mission of Destiny

Most of this week's portion of Chaye Sarah is the story of the *shidduch* between Yitzchak and Rivka. Avraham sends his servant Eliezer to Aram Naharayim to find a wife for his beloved son, and Eliezer soon returns to Eretz Yisrael with the perfect match – a bride who meets all the conditions that Avraham had set. When Yitzchak is introduced to his new wife, Eliezer tells him the entire story of how he met Rivka and persuaded her family to allow her to leave. (B'reshit 24,66)

Quite clearly, the Torah does not need to tell us exactly what Eliezer said, as we already know the story, and the Torah is always quite sparing in its words. In fact, some of the most important parts of Jewish Law are derived from mere hints in the Torah, using the well-known hermeneutical principles. As the Medrash says: "The Scriptures are written in brief and concise language" (P'sikta, V'Zot HaB'rachah, 68a). The famous Mishnaic-era sage R. Meir even used this principle as an educational guide, saying, "One should always teach his students concisely." (P'sachim 3b)

Precisely because of this, we are confounded by the fact that the entire story of Eliezer and Rivka was recounted two times in the Torah! After it was told the first time as it occurred (24,1-33), it appears a second time in the words of Eliezer as he enthusiastically tells it over to Rivka's family (verses 34-49). Just as the Torah states that Eliezer told Yitzchak the story, without recounting Eliezer's exact words, why could the Torah have not sufficed with simply informing us that Eliezer also told Rivka's family what happened?

This point was noted by Rav Acha, quoted in the Medrash as follows:

Rav Acha said, "The utterances of the servants of the Patriarchs are more precious than the Torah of the sons. For the story of Eliezer is told and repeated over the course of two or three pages, while a most basic Torah law – that the blood of a reptile has the same laws of impurity as does its flesh – must be derived from the presence of one extra letter." (B'reshit Rabbah 60,8)

Rav Acha points out this interesting fact, but doesn't explain it. Why are the words of our Patriarchs' servants more valuable than the Torah-speech of their sons?

It can perhaps be explained that in general, the Book of Genesis is our book of roots – our national ancestry and the foundations of faith. It therefore makes sense that such critical fundamentals, such as the story of Eliezer and Rivka, should be granted more space and explanation.

One of the Torah's most important objectives is to ensure that, as the Nation of Israel develops and builds itself in Eretz Yisrael as a people of deep faith and morals, the nations of the world will watch admiringly and choose to follow the same path of belief and trust in the Creator. As the Prophet foretells:

וְהָלְכוּ עַמִּים רַבִּים וְאָמְרוּ... כִּי מִצִּיּוֹן תֵּצֵא תּוֹרָה וּדְבַר ה' מִירוּשָׁלַם.

Many nations will go and say: ... He will teach us His ways and we will walk in His paths, for from Zion will go forth Torah, and G-d's word from Jerusalem. (Yeshayahu 2,3)

And here, Eliezer has succeeded in bringing about exactly that! With his pleasant speech, sweet sincerity and wisdom, and humble enthusiasm, Eliezer manages to bring Betuel and Lavan, Rivka's idol-worshipping father and brother, to recognize Hashem. *"This matter has emanated from G-d!"* they said *"We can say nothing about it, whether for good or for bad"* (24,50). They are saying nothing less than the famous and fundamental declaration of faith, *"Hashem Hu HaElokim!* Hashem is the G-d!" They are acknowledging that what will be is whatever G-d has decreed. Clearly, Eliezer's story of his prayer and its quick Divine answer made a strong and shocking impression on the two of them, causing them to immediately agree to allow him to take Rivka. Is it any wonder that the story is told over again?

But in truth, there is something even more profound and fundamental taking place here. Two accounts of the same story are told, slightly different in their details. Clearly, as wherever this phenomenon appears, the Torah wishes to transmit a very important message – precisely via the differences! As the Talmud teaches:

It was taught in the Beit Medrash of R. Yishmael: Every repeated passage in the Torah, is repeated only for that which was added to it.

(Sotah 3a)

The Talmud seems to be saying that the Torah would repeat an entire passage even for just one new item therein. But the message is actually deeper: “When a passage is said once and then repeated, this is a sign that important information has been hidden there” – information that can be revealed by comparing the two passages, noting even the small differences, and gleaning that which they reveal. It might not be clear why the Torah chose to impart this knowledge in this manner, but this does not change the fact that the message is there.

■ The Sukkot Hint

The following is a fascinating example of the use of the above key. It deals with the important Sukkot mitzvah of drawing water, which traces back to the Six Days of Creation (Sukkah 50b). We mark its importance in the joyous Water Drawing Ceremony (Simchat Beit HaShoevah) in the Holy Temple, and its elation was felt in every courtyard in Jerusalem. The Sages even said: “He who has not seen the joy of the Beit HaShoevah, has never seen true joy in his life.” (Sukkah 51a)

And what is the source of this important mitzvah? Surprisingly, it is nothing more than a few extra letters in Bamidbar. In the listing of the festival sacrifices there in Chapter 29, the offerings of each of the seven days of Sukkot are almost exactly the same – yet the Torah repeats the same description all seven times, word for word, with only tiny differences between them. R. Yehuda ben Betera, in the Gemara in Taanit (page 2b), explains these slight differences and what they signify:

Describing the libations of this seven-time sacrifice, the Torah generally uses the word ונסכה, *its libation*. However, for the second day, the word ונסכיהם, *their libations*, is written, and on the sixth day the Torah says ונסכיה, *its libations*. In addition, on the seventh day, it says במשפטם, *according to their law*, instead of במשפט, *according to the law*. In each of these changes, there is an extra letter – first *mem*, then *yud* and then *mem* – and together they spell מים, water.

This indicates the Biblical origin of the mitzvah of pouring water [on the altar in the Beit HaMikdash during Sukkot].

We also notice something else: The days on which the wording is changed are the 2nd, 6th, and 7th days; this is not by chance. Adding these numbers together gives us 15, the numerological value of the letters *yud* and *heh* of the Divine *Havayah* Name, that which is always used in connection with water.¹

1. See our Sukkot lesson, “The Voice of G-d Upon the Waters.”

The Torah thus repeats over the same passage seven times, with changed spellings – three extra letters in the course of some 20 verses – to teach us this law of Simchat Beit HaShoevah! This indicates how important is this mitzvah of drawing water, for it is taught via no fewer than seven repetitions of the same passage – and also how important it is to compare the repetitions and learn from their differences. Again, it is irrelevant to ask why the Torah chose to transmit the message in this fashion.

■ The Land of Israel

Let us now compare the two versions of the story of Rivka and Eliezer and seek out the differences between them. The first one is narrated objectively by the Torah, while the second is told in the words of Eliezer himself - an active, subjective participant. The servant tells his story to Lavan and Betuel with great enthusiasm, recounting the series of miracles that accompanied him to Rivka's house. He remembers everything, omitting only a few details – accidentally or otherwise.

The first thing he does not report is the strict ban Avraham imposed on taking Yitzchak out of the Land of Israel. When Eliezer originally asked Avraham what to do if the chosen woman does not want to come with him, Avraham gave him a very lengthy answer, repeating more than once that Yitzchak was not to be taken out of the Land. But when Eliezer repeats over the story, he does not tell them that Avraham so strongly emphasized, *“Guard yourself lest you return my son to there.”* (verse 6)

The second thing that Eliezer leaves out of his story is G-d's promise to Avraham of the Holy Land. Avraham had told Eliezer that G-d Who *“vowed to me, saying, ‘To your seed I will give this Land’ – He will send His angel before you”* (24,7). Instead, Eliezer says only that Avraham told him that G-d *“will send His angel before you and help you succeed, and you will take a woman for my son from my family and my father's home”* (verse 40). He omits all mention of Eretz Yisrael.

In short, Eliezer does not tell Rivka's family that Yitzchak must never leave the Land of Israel, or that the Land was promised to Avraham. These omissions show that Eliezer did not comprehend the true significance of the mission Avraham was assigning him.

Let us review Avraham's “mission statement” to Eliezer, and we will see that it includes three fundamental concepts:

1. Brit Milah, the Covenant between Avraham's descendants and Hashem. Avraham alluded to this when he told Eliezer, "*Place your hand beneath my thigh*" (verse 2) for an oath.
2. The Covenant of the Nation of Israel, and the importance of retaining Israel's purity: "*Do not take a woman for my son from the Canaanite daughters.*" (verse 3)
3. The Covenant of the Land of Israel, expressing the eternal bonds between Israel and its land. In the words of Avraham: "*Guard yourself lest you return my son to there.*" (verse 6)

Eliezer, Avraham's servant, did not understand this third element, namely, the essential value and importance of Eretz Yisrael. He felt that preserving Avraham's unique national family line was much more important than the links to the land. He therefore asks: "If a bride is found who meets all the qualifications, but a problem arises regarding where to live, shouldn't I agree to have Yitzchak relocate?"

Avraham's response was strong and firm: "*Guard yourself lest you return my son to there.* Hashem, Who brought me to this land that He vowed to give my descendants – He will surely send His angel and grant you success on your mission."

But Eliezer did not understand the depth of his master's words. He was unable to comprehend the importance of the Land of Israel or the prophetic context of Avraham's arrival there. All he sees are lots of "tests:" the famine in the land immediately after he arrived (12,10), the war of the kings (chapter 14), the destruction of S'dom and Amora (chapter 19), and the difficulties in finding a place to bury Sarah (chapter 23). He is unable to see how Hashem reveals Himself as the G-d of this land, nor the value of acquiring it amidst suffering.

What *does* impress the servant? He is overcome by miraculous events and wondrous signs that come true before his eyes. He is enchanted by the hidden angel walking before him and miraculously paving his way to success. These are the things that he tells over with great enthusiasm. But everything having to do with the uniqueness of the Land of Israel, involving difficulties and future promises from G-d, he ignores.

Eliezer only wants to tell of his successes, such as how Rivka appeared to him even before he finished praying for her. He feels ashamed to talk about G-d's gift of Eretz Yisrael, which our Sages say is "acquired through great difficulties" and demands great fortitude. He does not grasp why it

has to have a famine every few years, and why there are wars and grueling day-to-day hardships. Compared to Lavan and Betuel's Aram Naharayim, nourished by great rivers, the Holy Land seems greatly inferior.

But this message about Eretz Yisrael that Eliezer has missed, is precisely the crucial message that the Torah passes on to *us*, within his own words. The “utterances of the servants of the Patriarchs” are so valuable precisely because they are a tool by which the fundamentals of Torah and faith are passed on to us. **The Torah shows us what the servant didn't understand, and by this we realize what we should understand – namely, the importance of the Land of Israel as the place of holiness and prophecy linking G-d and Israel.**

The servant is unable to transmit this message to the people of Aram Naharayim. He is unable to explain to them that it is better to forego even the most perfect bride if it means having to abandon the Land of Israel and return to the place that G-d ordered Avraham to leave. This is something that foreigners cannot understand. The concept of Eretz Yisrael as a place of sanctity, prophecy and Divine revelation, can be grasped only by the chosen descendants of Avraham Avinu, who forged a covenant with Hashem for His chosen land, Eretz Yisrael.

■ In the Tents of the Righteous

G-d's supervision over most of the world is manifest via natural law. Avraham refers to G-d as “*Hashem, the G-d of the Heavens*” (B'reshit 24,7), indicating that He is revealed via the natural laws that He instituted at the time of Creation. This is how Avraham viewed G-d before he left for the Land of Israel.

In Eretz Yisrael, however, G-d is revealed through direct and personal supervision, unrestricted and free of the laws of nature. This is why, when Avraham has Eliezer vow to fulfill his mission, he refers to G-d as “*the G-d of the Heavens and the G-d of the earth*” (verse 3). This is because he is talking about G-d's direct supervision over the Land of Israel, whether for blessing or for punishment. So explains the Ramban, who adds that the destruction of S'dom and neighboring cities stemmed directly from their being located in Eretz Yisrael. The Holy Land cannot tolerate such debased levels of injustice, corruption and sin, and therefore the evil towns had to be made to directly suffer the catastrophic consequences thereof.

But the servant Eliezer does not personally know the Divine Presence – neither via the Heavens (natural law), nor through Eretz Yisrael. He knows

G-d only via Avraham's tent. He sees there daily miracles, and he observes the pristine actions of Avraham and Sarah and their deep-rooted morality and faith in Hashem. These are the *"voices of joy and salvation in the tents of righteousness"* (Psalms 118,15) that Eliezer sees. This is why Eliezer repeats over and over the phrase, *"Hashem, the G-d of my master Avraham."*

■ She is the Woman

The servant was charged with finding Avraham's family in Aram Naharayim, and persuading them to agree to send their daughter to far-off Canaan, along the same long path Avraham took so many years before. In his pre-mission prayer, however, Eliezer totally ignores this condition – that the bride be of Avraham's family – and instead, sets other terms. As Eliezer later tells Lavan and Betuel, he prayed as follows:

וְאָמְרָה אֵלַי גַּם אֶתָּה שְׂתָה וְגַם לְגִמְלִיךָ אֶשָּׂא
הוּא הָאִשָּׁה אֲשֶׁר הִכִּיחַ ה' לְבִן אֲדֹנָי.

And if she says, "You shall drink, and also for your camels I will draw water," this is the woman that G-d has proven for my master's son. (24,44)

Eliezer himself certainly remembered that the girl must be from the family and home of his master Avraham, as he had earlier told Rivka's family:

וַיִּשְׁבַּעֵנִי אֲדֹנָי... אִם לֹא אֶל בַּיִת אָבִי תֵלֶךְ וְאֶל מִשְׁפַּחְתִּי וְלִקְחָת אִשָּׁה לְבָנִי.

My master had me swear, 'Go to my father's house and to my family, and take a wife for my son.' (verses 37-38)

How then could Eliezer make a different condition? What would happen if a girl met Eliezer's condition regarding the camels, but afterwards turned out not to be from Avraham's family? This is why our Sages had sharp words for Eliezer's apparent rashness, saying that he was one of three people who made an improper request of G-d. (Taanit 4a)

To explain why Eliezer omitted this point, we note that Avraham actually never stipulated that the bride be from his family. He said only, *"Do not take a wife for my son from the Canaanites... Rather, go to my homeland and find a wife for my son Yitzchak"* (24,3-4). This explains why Eliezer did not mention a condition regarding the family in his prayer. (We will see below why Eliezer did mention this condition when he later spoke with Betuel and Lavan.)

What actually was bothering Eliezer? He knew that the difficult part of his mission was not that of finding Avraham's relatives, which could be

accomplished simply by asking a few questions of passersby, just as Yaakov Avinu later did when he arrived in Haran. The true difficulty he faced was in obtaining her family's permission, and her own consent, to leave her home forever for a foreign land. We know that this was Eliezer's main concern from the very beginning, because when Avraham first gave him the assignment, Eliezer's only question was: *"Perhaps the woman will not want to come with me to this land?"* (verse 5)

When Eliezer arrived in Haran, he realized that only a woman naturally driven to a life of kindness and giving would be willing to agree to leave her home and go to a far-off place where such qualities would be anticipated and valued. This is why, when he arrived at the well, Eliezer asked in his prayers that G-d find him a girl filled with the desire to do kindness and the willingness to make special efforts towards this goal. When Rivka then appeared before him, running back and forth to the well to bring water until all the camels had finished drinking, he realized with amazement that the condition he had set was fulfilled. Marveling at the developments, he approaches her:

וְהָאִישׁ מִשְׁתַּאֲה לָהּ מִחֲרִישׁ לְדַעַת הַהֲצְלִיחַ ה' דְּרָכּוֹ אִם לֹא.

The man stood looking at her, silently waiting to see if Hashem had granted success to his mission. (verse 21)

He takes the jewelry that he brought for her, fitted to her size, and asks about her family – not because it was a prerequisite, but because they, too, will have to be persuaded: *"Whose daughter are you?"* (verse 23) And when he then heard that she was, in fact, Avraham's grand-niece, he learned exactly how much the Divine angel had actually helped him: Not only was Eliezer's own requirement fulfilled, but she was also a member of Avraham's family!

But the miracle was even greater than that. For we know that Rivka left her house and set out for the well even before Eliezer said his prayer for a girl of kindness. This means that G-d heard his prayer even before he recited it, and even before he formulated it. The prayer was still hidden in the recesses of his heart, while above it was already being fulfilled!

■ "I Will Go"

When Eliezer tells the story to Betuel and Lavan, he states, *"My master had me swear"* to take a wife for his son only from Avraham's family (verses 37-38). Based on what we said above, it is not clear why Eliezer said this, since Avraham never made any such condition!

Let us return to what Avraham said in answer to Eliezer's question regarding the possibility that the girl would not wish to travel to Eretz Yisrael:

ה' אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם אֲשֶׁר לָקַחְנִי מִבֵּית אָבִי וּמֵאֶרֶץ מוֹלַדְתִּי...
וְלָקַחְתָּ אִשָּׁה לְבְנִי מִשָּׁם.

G-d the Lord of the heavens, Who took me from my father's house and from the land of my birth... Take a wife for my son from there. (24,7)

Combining the beginning and the end of this verse, Eliezer derived that the future wife must be taken not only from Avraham's former homeland, but also from his family. Why, then, did Eliezer remember this point only when he arrived at Betuel's house, and not in his prayer?

The answer, again, is that Eliezer always concentrates on the main mission at hand. When he arrives in Betuel's home, his main mission is to convince Rivka's family to allow him to take their daughter to a far-away land. He believed that by telling them that Avraham clearly had them in mind and sent him directly to them, they would be both flattered and impressed that Eliezer's master had thought of them, and would be more likely to agree to have Rivka go with him.

Rivka was not present when Eliezer told his wondrous story to her father and brother. They therefore had to call her in and ask her whether she would agree to go: "*Will you go with this man?*" (verse 58) They referred to him as "*This man!*" – an anonymous person, a foreigner with no name. They thus brought to the fore a fact that had been relegated to the hidden background: "This man wants to take you away to a strange, far-away place, cutting you off almost completely from your family. Will you go?"

This was the critical moment that Eliezer had feared. Hearing her family's question so carefully phrased and presented so as to evoke a "no," Eliezer remembered the doubts he had expressed to Avraham: "*Perhaps the woman will not want to return with me to this land?*" (verse 5) Avraham had answered firmly: "*Hashem, the G-d of the Heavens... will send His angel before you...*" (verse 7) But even Hashem's angel cannot intervene in Rivka's free choice! Avraham also knew this, and concluded: "*And if she does not want to go with you, you will be clear of this vow*" (verse 8). Eliezer thus knows that it is very possible that Rivka will refuse.

What does Rivka see, however? She sees before her a group of men who are tired and dusty from a long journey, and camels that are thirsty for a

drop of water. Immediately, her purity of heart and unbounded instincts of kindness arise within her, and she thinks to herself: “If these people came so far and made such efforts to find a girl who is kind and giving, it must be not only that such traits are lacking where they come from, but also that this family truly appreciates such qualities. My place is with them!”

And so, her response is immediate: ***“I will go!”*** (verse 58)

Precisely in the same way, Hashem waited for the Jewish Nation in Egypt for 210 years, and when Israel realized how much effort Hashem was investing in order to pave the way for truth and goodness in the world, Israel, like Rivka, said: “Yes! We will follow after Hashem!” As we read in G-d’s words:

זְכַרְתִּי לְךָ חֶסֶד נְעוּרֶיךָ אֲהַבַת כְּלוּלֹתֶיךָ
לְכַתְּךָ אַחֲרַי בַּמִּדְבָּר בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא זְרוּעָה.

*I remember the kindness of your youth, the love of your nuptials,
how you walked after Me in the desert,
in an unsown land.* (Yirmiyahu 2,2)

