

From the Abravanel Jacob Solomon

In asking Betu'el and Lavan to allow Rivka to leave home and marry Yitzchak, Avraham's servant declared:

"I am Avraham's servant... tell me if you intend to do kindness and truth with my master. If not, tell me and I will turn to the right or to the left" (24:34,49).

The Torah twice narrates the events leading up to servant's (Eliezer of Damascus according to tradition; c.f. 15:2) meeting with Yitzchak's future wife. Firstly, as they actually happen. Secondly, when the servant is at her father Betu'el's home. The text does not say that "he told all that happened" (c.f. 24:66), but recounts the word-by-word account of the events as reported by the servant. Rashi quotes B'reishit Rabba's observation (59:9) that this illustrates the great esteem given to the words used in service to the Avot. These the Torah recounts in full; in contrast to practices commanded by the Torah that are sometimes just presented by a phrase or a hint.

Abravanel points out that there are subtle, but important difference between the events as they occurred and the servant's later narrative. In explanation, Abravanel implies two major concerns underlying the servant's quest for a suitable partner to Yitzchak.

The first was to find the right person. Avraham had insisted on Yitzchak

marrying someone from the family's original background and society. This, Abravanel explains, was because she was intended for the future role as a worthy mother figure for the Israelite nation. As G-d had told him: "It will be through Yitzchak that your descendants will be considered yours" (21:12).

For that reason the servant set up a test of character. He would arrive at the well that was worked by the local female water-drawers and ask the first girl for water. He would judge her response, and decide if she should be followed up. A standard: "It's all yours, help yourself" would not recommend. If, however, she acted along the lines of "These travelers have just arrived and are probably extremely tired after a long journey even though they don't show it: I must help them as well as I can", she would have demonstrated the necessary intelligence, perception, and kindness for further inquiries and developments.

After finding the right person, his second concern was to persuade her and her family to agree to the match, and let her travel back with him to Avraham's family.

Abravanel explains that just as the servant showed exceptional and admirable initiative in arriving at a suitable choice, he also showed similar outstanding finesse and judgment in parting her from her family to travel with him and marry Yitzchak. Abravanel derives this by

looking at the important differences between the events as they occurred and in the servant's later narrative. Specifically in the recount:

1. He stated his position in a persuasive manner. He emphasized his connection with Avraham, his wealth, and perhaps stretched Avraham's "Go to my land and birthplace and take a wife for my son Yitzchak" (24:4) to presenting it as "Go to my father's house and to my extended family and take a wife for my son" (24:38), to make the request more personal and attractive.

2. He avoided details that could annoy. For example, he did not mention that Yitzchak was never to leave the land of Canaan (24:8) as they might see it as an insult to their own homeland, culture, and surroundings.

3. In recounting the test, he went straight to its point: "She is the woman G-d has chosen for [Yitzchak]" (24:44). He left out what he said before meeting Rivka: "Through her I will know that you have done kindness with my master" (24:14). That "kindness" might well be interpreted as throwing himself at their mercy in letting her go, which could invite refusal. Instead, he used the powerful "That is the woman G-d has chosen" with no further comment.

4. He emphasized he was doing the right thing and that G-d was right behind him. He had originally declared: "G-d has guided me to the

house of my master's brothers" (24:27), but in their presence he recalled it slightly differently with "G-d of my master Avraham, who led me on the true path to take the daughter of my master's brother for a son" (24:48).

Abraham highlights several other differences, but they all emphasized the servant's considerable capacity in gauging the situation and phrasing the request to "get that yes" for Rivka to leave her family and marry Yitzchak.

We are often in situations when we approach people to comply with requests large and small. It might be a call for cooperation, funding, change in behavior, or even a proposal for marriage. Like Avraham's servant, our chances of getting the yes we want are greatly influenced by the manner we focus on the task and the way we ask, especially when the other party owes us nothing. 🙏