

This week we begin transitioning from the story of Abraham and Sarah to the story of Isaac and Rebecca. Along the way, Sarah dies and is buried in a plot that Abraham makes sure to purchase from the neighbors; Abraham gets married again and has many more children, all of whom he sends elsewhere (loaded with financial resources, so they can make their own way in the world and leave Isaac alone), and then Abraham arranges that Isaac should get married.

We have seen sections of the Torah where hundreds of years are mentioned in a moment. This week we read a segment that seems to take forever to cover mere hours.

I refer, of course, to the first watering hole type-scene.

A type-scene is like a genre, except much more focused. Just as in a genre, we anticipate certain kinds of people and events (think Western, or police procedural, or even sit-com) and the value of the particular item we peruse is in how these things are changed up. So in the Torah, whenever we hear about people at a well, we know somebody is going to get married eventually. There will always be a potential bride, a potential groom, the well, animals drinking and some kind of problem that one of the parties will need to resolve.

In this week's version, we have the potential groom's representative, sent by the potential groom's father, without any explicit mention that the potential groom knows anything about it. We have the animals that the representative has with him. We have the problem, which the representative sets up - "How will I know the right woman to deal with Isaac? Whoever goes overboard when it comes to being considerate (and is physically capable, to boot) should be the right woman. If it isn't his cousin, then maybe Abraham's God wants Isaac to find his own wife."

We know, from past experience in reading these stories, that the search will be successful, for all of these stories are, each in their own way.

We read of Eliezer's success in not giving in to temptation, and actually doing what Abraham requests, as opposed to merely saying he tried without actually having done so. We read of Rebecca, who gives Eliezer water, and then waters the camels. We read of the moment when Eliezer discovers that this kind and strong woman is indeed Isaac's cousin. We read of the jewelry he gives her, and of the welcome Eliezer receives.

And then we get to read it all again as Eliezer recites the entire event verbatim to Rebecca's family.

Now, even if Eliezer had repeated the event word for word, the Torah text could have simply told us that in a single verse and been done with it. Why didn't it?

A few reasons I can think of, off the top of my head.

- 1) It is appropriate to give people time to realize that Abraham's story is basically over.

2) Eliezer was delaying things so that Rebecca could get packed, before her family came up with reasons against her going.

3) When those times come up in our lives when the next step is in somebody else's hands, we can remember this story and be a little more willing to let events take the time they need to take.

4) The messengers in our lives deserve their moment in the spotlight, for they are often the catalyst for greater things than we could have achieved without them.

5) Eliezer talks so that the members of Abraham's family don't. They might ask pesky questions that Abraham's servant should not be answering - like, "What has cousin Abram been doing with himself for all these years? How is Lot? What's Apropos of this week, Eliezer is a veteran of the wars that Abraham fought. He also happens to be very loyal to Abraham.

Keeping his story in mind, then, perhaps the next time we ask somebody a question which seems never to be answered despite lengthy conversation, this story will help us reflect that perhaps the answers we desire cannot be answered by the person we are asking.