In the middle of Parashat Chaye Sarah, Avraham orders his trusted servant to journey and find a suitable wife for Yitzchak. While this servant is the central character of this part of the story, his name is not revealed in the Torah itself, and Chazal identify him as Eliezer. The Torah describes his story in great detail, as he sets out on his journey, holds a discussion with Hashem, witnesses the successful test, presents Rivka with gifts, blesses Hashem and returns with her to her home to finalize the arrangement (Bereishit 24:1-32).

As Eliezer arrives at Rivka’s home, we then read the whole story and details of the test again as he retells the events to her family (Bereishit 24:33-49). This repetition significantly lengthens the parasha, without seeming to add anything new to the narrative.

Why does the Torah include Eliezer’s retelling of the story when we have just read the entire narrative in great detail? Would the Torah not have delivered the same message by writing, “And the servant told them every thing that occurred”?

Many of the Torah’s fundamental halachic principles are taught almost incidentally, in great brevity, or with hints. Why does this servant’s repetition of a story we have just read deserve such attention?

In explanation of this seeming lack of balance, Rabbi Acha taught in the Midrash:

“The chatter of the servants of the forefathers is better before Hashem than the Torah of their children (descendants), for Eliezer’s passage is repeated in the Torah, and many of the Torah’s fundamentals were only taught with hints” (Bereishit Rabbah 60:8).

While we can understand the observation which led to this conclusion, what is the reasoning behind it?

Sometimes, the presentation of a living example influences and guides far more successfully than the formulation of direction through commandments.

My Rosh Yeshiva, HaRav Aharon Lichtenstein zt”l, explained that the Torah has two ways of showing us how to behave. The first one is formulated as commandments, expressed through directions of how to behave and how not to. The second is expressed through people, whose deeds, behavior and lifestyles give us direction. Sometimes, the presentation of a living example influences and guides far more successfully than the formulation of direction through commandments.

Rabbi Acha’s rule comes to teach us that the example of a living role model, who embodies and represents the letter and spirit of the Torah, can be a far more influential educational tool than learning the technical commandments and details alone. If this is true of the servants of our forefathers, how much more so is there to learn from the examples set to us from our forefathers and foremothers themselves.

Whilst our educational systems place great focus on developing and delivering content, how much focus do they place on providing role models who personify Torah and Torah values? Far more than learning the do’s and don’ts of Judaism, it is essential that our pupils (whether they be children, students or adults) have exposure to living examples who embody the Torah they teach.

If we consider the individuals who have made the greatest impact on our lives, while they may have held formal educational or leadership positions, the chances are that we were far more impacted by their general demeanor or behavior (when they were not intentionally aiming to impart a message), than their formal or frontal education.

Every individual is similarly capable of making a positive impact on others and whether we like it or not, we are all educators. Regardless of our individual level of observance, there will always be people who look up to us as representatives of Judaism, whether from inside or outside the faith.

In addition to paying attention to our technical performance of Torah, we must ensure that our “chatter,” our everyday behavior and lifestyles, suitably reflect our positions as representatives of the Torah and ambassadors of Hashem.

Rabbi Danny Mirvis is the Senior Rabbi of Mizrachi Melbourne.