

THE GREATEST JOB IN THE WORLD

TRUE EQUALITY AND THE WOMAN'S RIGHT TO BE A MOTHER.

Compiled By: Rabbi Levi Greenberg (OH)

Written By: Rabbi Shneur Itzinger

לזכות חייל בצבאות ה'
מאיר שלמה שיח' סלונים
לרגל חגיגת האפשרניש
שלו י"ד כסלו ה'תשפ"ו

יה"ר שיגדל להיות חסיד, ירא
שמים ולמדן כרצון כ"ק אדמו"ר

MOTHER FIRST, PROPHET LATER.¹

Word spread throughout the town of a strange sight: an entire extended family, parents, sons, daughters, and more, all sleeping in the street. "Are they poor?" wondered the townspeople. Not at all. Elkana, the family's patriarch, was known for his abundant resources. As the murmurs grew and the group of curious onlookers gathered, the family split up, men speaking with the men and women with the women, explaining their actions. They were traveling to the Mishkan in Shiloh, to be *oleh regel* for Yom Tov. To see and be seen, and experience *Elokus* firsthand.

Over time, their excitement was contagious, with more and more people joining the pilgrimage. First it was five, then ten, and eventually sixty families, people who might never have

considered leaving their homes for the long journey to Hashem's House, came to walk alongside Elkana's family.

And it wasn't just one town. Elkana would frequently change his itinerary, bringing his growing entourage through different places where Jews lived. In each city they passed through, the traveling family sleeping under the open sky made a scene. "Come join us," they urged, "to the house of Hashem in Shiloh, from where Torah and good deeds flow."²

One year, however, an important member of the family was missing. Chana, Elkana's wife, was not among the travelers. After many long and painful years of waiting, she had finally given birth to her son.

Could the wealthy Elkana not bring along servants and childcare staff to help mother and child on the road? This was certainly within his means. Were

נשי
ובנות
חב"ד
N'SHEI
U'BNOS
CHABAD

there no babysitters available to watch young Shmuel at home while his mother made the trip, so that mother and son could both benefit from Chana soaking in the atmosphere of the Mishkan?

When Elkana packed his bags and set out, he accepted her explanation as to why she would not join him: her mission now was to watch over her son, the offspring Hashem had granted her. She would do so in the best way possible: by raising him at home. Going to the Mishkan and sparking a renaissance of *aliya l'regel* along the way is important. So was experiencing *Elokus* in Shiloh, especially for Chana, a *neviah* herself. But Chana saw the bigger picture. No matter how many helpers or comforts could be arranged on the road, it would not compare to a child being raised by his mother, in the steady environment of a Jewish home.

“When the boy grows up, then I will bring him,” she told her husband, who understood and accepted. Prophecy could wait. Raising her child was her priority now, her role as a mother came before all else.



Women can follow the example of Chana *Haneviah*. Rather than feeling inferior or seeking to imitate men by pursuing a career, the Jewish woman can embrace her equally important yet distinct life's mission: building a home on a Torah foundation and raising her family within it.

“[T]hose who think that the Torah places the woman in an inferior role to that of the man labor under a misconception...” wrote the Rebbe to a woman. “Man and woman are like the head and the heart in the physical body: both are equally vital, though each has entirely different functions, and only the normal functioning of both together ensure a healthy body. The same is true of the role of the man and woman in Jewish life, and, indeed, in any healthy human society.”³

Why strive to be like a husband who comes home weary after a long day's work? Copying someone else's mission is not equality; it is a loss of self-worth. True equality is recognizing the greatness of your own path. Women have a role in the most extraordinary mission in the world—let's embrace it.

FROM SINAI TO TODAY⁴

Three thousand, three hundred and thirty-seven years ago, a nation some three million strong gathered at the foot of a desert mountain, awaiting the most important event in history—both before and after: Hashem communicating directly with human beings, and giving them the rules for life.

The guide He gave us that day has been passed down through the generations in an unbroken chain. Such an inheritance is not preserved only by wise men cloistered in study halls, nor can it endure through a nation of career-driven individuals hustling for a living—noble as those pursuits may be.

It is the Jewish woman, compassionate and nurturing, who takes credit for the growth of future

generations, ensuring Torah is still in our hands. It is she who ensures the unbroken chain of sweet children studying its teachings, generation after generation, from Sinai until today.

From the moment the child is formed, the mother bears the primary responsibility for the child's growth and development. It is she who nurtures, educates, and encourages the child to follow the path of those who came before us, raising the next generation of the Jewish people.

DIFFERENT BUT EQUAL

Torah certainly assigns different roles to men and women. But different does not mean unequal, equality is not sameness. In the divine plan for creation, men and women have distinct missions, which work in harmony, complementing one another and bringing the

divine plan to fruition. The role of one is neither higher nor lower than the other's: they are simply different.

If we *were* to measure tasks, that of the woman would rank highest, in terms of self-fulfillment, importance, and almost any other criteria. Is there anything in the world loftier than bringing another Jew into the world, guaranteeing the perpetuation of the Jewish nation, and thereby guaranteeing also the perpetuation of Torah and its teachings?

Yes, Torah teaches that the woman's role is primarily to raise the children and to be the *akeres habayis*. For it is a sacred mission, the importance of which dwarfs any other. It is a perversion of our times to perceive having children, raising them in the ideals of our heritage, and setting the tone for the entire household, husband included, as being inferior to earning money, making a name for oneself, or anything else seen by society as being the ultimate goal in life.

Women have been given Hashem's most precious gift, and they are being told to throw it away in exchange for worthless baubles. The Creator, in His infinite wisdom, has granted the woman the ability to carry a fetus in her womb for nine months and to give birth to a new member of the holy people. No man, no matter how wise or capable or willing, can do it: only the woman. Can there be greater self-fulfillment than when she carries out this magnificent G-d given mission?

PRIORITIES

In fact, the cry of equal rights is a tragic corruption of the very concept of 'rights.' To bombard girls with propaganda that they will be fulfilled only if they imitate men is to *deprive* them of their natural right to be mothers, the perpetuators of Jewry and Torah! It is a swindle to convince women to exchange *their* most holy of missions for things that are meaningless in comparison.

It is wrong to persuade girls that they should first enter the business or professional world and only afterwards, if they want to, should they establish families and homes. It is wrong to impose such a warped set of priorities on a young woman, implying that raising children and running a home is a secondary course of action, applicable only after one has first established a business or professional career. Becoming an *akeres habayis* doesn't happen overnight; it necessitates adequate

preparation, and the firm conviction that being so is one's primary function.

This is not to say that for women to work is always wrong. It is a question of priorities, of knowing what one's primary mission is. What is false is to replace women's sacred mission with the ideal that having a business or professional career is a goal *in itself*.

ADDITIONAL INSIGHT

- » Fire and water can work in harmony to create the perfect meal—when a pot separates them. A wall between two distinct identities is not a division, but a safeguard to bring about harmony in the proper way. When men and women perform their separate, distinct tasks, true peace can exist between them.⁵
- » In recent times, a previously unheard-of phenomenon has become so commonplace that reversing it would seem like “a decree the Jewish people cannot uphold.” Unmarried girls go out to work, with the claim that their income will enable their future husbands to study Torah. In truth, the opposite is the case: a girl living in the spirit of *bas melech p'nima* is a support for her future husband's Torah study.⁶
- » Regarding your question about pursuing a career in your profession: Torah gives us two directives, which are certainly possible to reconcile. On the one hand, “*Kol kevuda bas melech p'nima*,” and on the other, “Everything—including your unique talents—was created by Hashem for a purpose.” Seek guidance from a *rav*.⁷

CAREER COUNSEL:

SHOULD I BE A DENTIST?

I am in receipt of your letter in which you write about your wife, asking advice whether she should take up dentistry, in connection with the opportunity she has to enter Dental School, the problem being how it may affect the care that is due to your child.

In general you are of course both right that the upbringing of children has priority, especially a mother's love and care that should be given to a child of tender age. In your case, there is no indication in your letter as to what would be the hours that the Dental School would require of your wife, which would take her away from her child. You should ascertain whether there is a possibility that her taking up a course at the Dental School would or would not be in conflict with her motherly duties, then decide accordingly.

There is surely no need to point out to you that since all blessings come from G-d and the channel to receive them is through the everyday life and conduct in accordance with His will — every additional effort in matters of Torah and *mitzvos* in the everyday life, including also participation in activities to spread Yiddishkeit in your environment, widens the channels to receive G-d's blessings in all matters, including also the making of the right decision in important questions such as the one under consideration.⁸

CAN A WOMAN BE A JUDGE?

With reference to the subject matter of your letter namely, your seeking a judicial appointment in the City Courts, mentioning, inter alia, that you are orthodox, married and mother of

three children — I trust you will appreciate the fact that — in this matter as in all others — I can only be guided by halocho. The halocho, however, does not approve of a woman holding the office of *Dayan* (Judge). As has amply been explained, this is in no way a reflection on the status and importance of womanhood, but is based on the fact that the Creator has given the Jewish woman a superior and more vital task of *Akeres Habayis* (“Foundation of the Home”) and mother — a task which requires her undivided attention for the wellbeing of her family and children, etc. For this reason the Creator has endowed her with a generous measure of emotional qualities — gentleness, compassion, tolerance, indulgence, etc. — all of which are essential in the raising of the children and conduct of the household.

Of course, as in all things, there may be exceptions to the rule and there may be women who take a strictly objective view in all situations, just as there may be men whose emotional disposition predominates over their judgments. But the halocho is of course based on the rule, not on the exception.

Thus, while you may have legitimate personal reservations and exceptions, the fact of an orthodox Jewish housewife and mother holding the position of Judge would strengthen the inimical forces undermining the halocho and further enlarge the breach in their clamor for women Rabbis, Dayanim, etc.

In a matter of such importance, affecting public opinion and public office, one must be very circumspect even in a case of doubt.

In light of the above, I hope you will understand my position in this matter.⁹

However, as a means to further Torah study, for example, there is a long Jewish tradition of women working, in a *tzniusdike* manner, to allow their husbands to devote themselves entirely to studying Torah. Even then, of course, it was not allowed to prevent raising a family.

THE TRUE “ASCENT”

In a similar vein, the fact that women are not called up to the Torah for an *aliya* or are not counted as part of a *minyán* is irrelevant to their worth. To demand such ‘rights’ is a total misunderstanding of what they mean.

Having an *aliya* and being part of a *minyán* are indeed lofty matters. *Aliya* literally means ‘ascent,’ referring to both the physical ascent on steps to the platform where the Torah is read and to the spiritual ascent that accompanies it. Through a *minyán*, Hashem is sanctified in this world and in all the spiritual worlds, too. But sanctity and spirituality are not man-made matters, to be toyed with as one desires. Holiness is attained by cleaving to Hashem, and it is He who has established how one becomes sanctified and how one sanctifies.

There is not just one way in which to approach Hashem. Hashem has given men one path and women another; the underlying condition for all is to carry out Hashem’s will in the manner set for that particular person or persons.

Hashem has indeed said that He is sanctified in a *minyán*, and that having an *aliya* produces a spiritual ascent for the person. But the same *Aibershter* has said that this is the way for men *only*; women have different ways to be spiritually uplifted and to sanctify Hashem.

LIBERATION, NOT DEBASEMENT

Ironically, the movement to *liberate* women does the opposite: it *debases* women. A person who is sure of her own value and worth, secure in the conviction that she is equal to others, will not attempt to imitate anyone else. It is only the person who views herself as inferior to others and has no values of her own who will try to imitate another person.

Jewish women have their own mission, their own identity, their own worth. Why the frenetic endeavors to adopt those of men? It is debasing and betrays an astonishing lack of self-esteem, an inferiority complex

that compels one to junk everything and anything that may be construed as marking women different from men.

Torah says emphatically that the diverse missions of men and women does not mean inequality. Just as Torah commands that ‘A man shall not wear a woman’s garment,’ so equally it commands ‘A man’s garment shall not be on a woman.’ Neither men nor women carry out their G-d given tasks or achieve self-fulfillment by imitating the other. A woman has no reason to feel inferior to a man, and therefore she has no need to try to be like a man.

It is time to restore sanity to a world where light is called darkness and darkness light. Time to restore to women the dignity and worth of their sacred role of being the *akeres habayis*, the raisers, molders, and perpetuators of Yiddishkeit for the future. **1**

1. Adapted from 6 Tishrei 5734. Toras Menachem vol. 74, pp. 40–45.
2. *Tanna D’vei Eliyahu Rabbah*, chapter 8. *Yalkut Shimoni* on Nach *remez* 77.
3. English letter of the Rebbe dated 13th of Iyar, 5737. *My Story* vol. 2, p. 348; chabad.org/887542.
4. Adapted from 6 Tishrei 5745. *Hisvaaduyos 5745* vol. 1, pp. 128–132. The majority of this translation was prepared by Sichos in English and is accessible at SIE.org/2514076. It is presented here with minor edits and some additional sections incorporated from other parts of the original *Sicha*.
5. Adapted from *Likkutei Sichos* vol. 18, pp. 210–211.
6. Adapted from *Chamisha Asar B’Av 5743*. *Toras Menachem Hisvaaduyos 5743* vol. 4, p. 1869.
7. Adapted from a letter of the Rebbe dated 17 Sivan 5742. *Weekly Lahak* publication, *Shabbos Va’era 5783*, p. 37.
8. Excerpt from a (unsigned) English letter from the Rebbe dated 1 Sivan, 5741.
9. Excerpt from a (unsigned) English letter from the Rebbe dated 21 Tammuz, 5737.

