
*"New Jewish Vistas
in a Changing
Society"*

MAJOR ADDRESSES

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happiness, in bliss, in joy, and in creativity. The name *ish* contains a *yod*. The name *ishah* contains a *heh*. Together they form the Name of G-d. If the element of Kedushah is infused into their relationship, then the marital relationship and the natural instincts in general are a source of bliss and happiness. However, if the Shechinah is not infused into their relationship, then the natural instincts become a source of a fire which sheds neither warmth nor light but only consumes.

WOMAN'S SPIRITUAL ROLE

The Frenchman says, "Cherchez La Femme" — look for the woman. This adage might sound vulgar and un-Jewish to some, but I think it is expressive of a great Jewish verity. Our Sages expressed the same idea in the saying: "Everything is dependent upon the woman." Everything depends upon the attitude that one has towards the woman; everything depends upon the kind of marital relationship one maintains with a woman, whether it is a relationship which is couched in purity, sanctity, beauty, love, and reverence or it is a relationship which is couched in selfish instincts and animalistic lust.

The concept of "Everything is dependent upon the woman" is implicit in the first two verses of the prophetic portion of last Shabbath. The Navi says: "And Jacob fled into the field of Aram, And Israel served for a woman, And for a woman he kept sheep, And by a prophet the Lord brought Israel out of Egypt, and by a prophet Israel was kept." What is the connection between Jacob's serving and keeping for a woman and the fact that Israel was delivered and kept through a prophet? The connection consists in the proper attitude towards a woman and the proper marital relationship with a woman. "And Jacob fled into the field of Aram," Jacob fled from the wrath of his brother, destitute and poverty-stricken, with only a wanderer's staff in his hands and journeying towards a doubtful haven of refuge. He was encompassed by anxiety, trouble and exposure to danger. However, this insecurity and misery did not last forever. Jacob served Laban for a woman and he kept sheep for a woman. And in due time, Jacob was not only able to prosper and to increase exceedingly in the possession of flocks, camels and asses, but he also succeeded in attaining salvation, bliss and eternity by becoming the founder of the Jewish people.

All that was done through a woman because Yaakov had the

right attitude towards a woman. And when Yaakov served for a woman, he not only kept and preserved the sheep of Lavan, but he also, at the same time, paved the ground for the preservation of the *Tzon Kedoshim*, the Holy Flocks of the future generations. And just as Yaakov kept and preserved for a woman and through a woman, so also was Israel delivered from Egypt by a prophet, through the efforts and merits of the Jewish women. "It was solely on account of the merits of the righteous women who lived at that time that the Children of Israel were redeemed from Egypt." What did the women do at that critical moment to ensure the redemption of the Jewish people? All that they did, all that entitles them to this glowing encomium of appreciation, is that, while their menfolk were being subjected to the deliberate policy of breaking their bodies and their spirits, they encouraged them and strengthened their spirit, and provided in their lives that background and that atmosphere which rendered it possible for them to carry on and to find a modicum of sweetness and joy which more than atoned for their sorrows and trials. In other words, the great merit of Jewish wives and mothers was — that they were indeed Jewish wives and mothers.

One can readily see from this *ma'amar Chazal* that Judaism not only accords to the woman an encomium of appreciation as an equal partner of man, but that it also recognizes the female as the gender which possesses innate spiritual superiority as compared with the male gender. This outlook can be deduced from a mere cursory glance at the Creation in Bereshith. It appears from Genesis that whatever is superior was created later: "*B'asarah ma'amaroth nivra ha'olam*," the world was created in ten Divine Decrees. First light was created and with it other forms of energy. Then the inorganic world; then the organic world. And in the organic world, vegetative life came first and then animal life. And again, in the animal kingdom, the lower species came first and then the higher species. The human being was created after all animals. But in the human species, the male gender came first and then the female gender. This proves the proposition that the woman has innate spiritual superiority as compared with man.

Now the question arises as to the quintessence of the innate spiritual superiority. What is it that makes the woman spiritually superior? The answer to this question can also be found in the account given in Genesis. It appears that Almighty G-d bestowed

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two separate gifts upon man. One gift is the gift of conquest, of power, and of grasping. The other is the gift of cultivation, of work and dedication, and of reaching unto things and people. Immediately upon the creation of man, we are told in Bereshith, that G-d blessed man and told him: "Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that creepeth upon the earth." In this blessing is contained the gift and the mandate of grasping, of conquering the earth and all its possessions. Without this gift there can be no progress. Obviously, the Almighty blessed man only with the gift of justifiable conquest, of might backed by right, of legitimate grasping, not unlimited and unqualified grasping. This gift in itself, if properly exercised and not abused, can serve as a basis of progress and peace.

However, the Almighty granted another gift to man and that is the capacity to reach unto things and people through cultivation, through work, dedication and perseverance. This gift was bestowed upon man after the Almighty had planted the *Gan Eyden* where He put the man whom He had formed. As it is written in Genesis: "And G-d took the man and put him into the Garden of Eden to cultivate and keep it." Herein is mentioned the gift of reaching unto things through *Chazakah*, through cultivation, watching, work and dedication which is to supplement the gift of grasping. Man is capable of attaining great magnitudes of progress through the gift of *Kibush*, of grasping, but he cannot succeed in establishing a Paradise on earth unless the gift of *Kibush* is coupled with the gift of *Chazakah*.

TWO BLESSINGS, TWO APPROACHES

These two blessings represent two different approaches. It is for this reason that, in the Wilderness, the Almighty G-d required the ancient Israelites to realize two countings. One count related to all the members of the various tribes between the ages of twenty and sixty and the other count related to all the members of the tribe of *Leyvi* from one month old and over. *Shevet Leyvi* and the other tribes could not be included in one count. The endeavors and strivings of the various Jewish tribes were founded primarily upon the gift of *Kibush*. *Yehudah*, for example, dedicated itself to the task of conquering the Land of Promise and of establishing a royal government. *Yissachar* dedicated itself to the task of subduing the earth and its possessions; and *Zevulun* dedicated itself to the task of

developing industry and commerce. Only those members of the tribes who were twenty years old and were fit to be in service were to be counted, for the training required for achievement in the realm of *Kibush* can be acquired at the age of twenty when one is ready to enter the service. However, the endeavors and aspirations of *Shevet Leyvi* were founded primarily upon the gift of reaching. The members of *Shevet Leyvi* were to be counted specially because their endeavors and their methods were unique. The training required for achievement in the realm of *Chazakah*, of reaching unto things and people, cannot be acquired in adolescence, but must begin at birth.

However, when one delves into the Tanach, and especially when one delves thoroughly into the Talmud and the Midrash, he can readily see that only in the male gender was *Shevet Leyvi* the unique and especially selected group upon whom the mandate of *Chazakah*, as contrasted from *Kibush*, was imposed. In respect to the female gender, *Chazakah* only is the task and mandate delegated to all women. (According to our Sages, the gift of *Kibush* which the Almighty had bestowed upon the human being, was bestowed only upon the male gender. The mandate of *Kibush* was delegated to the man but not to the woman. The mandate of the woman is that of *Chazakah*, of cultivation, guarding, work, dedication, and perseverance, reaching unto things and people through compassion, love, consideration and guidance.)

[Almighty G-d created man and woman with different constitutions, not only biologically and physically, but also and especially so psychologically, emotionally and spiritually. Many self-crowned, enlightened people conjured up the erroneous notion that Judaism considers and treats the woman as inferior to man. In order to corroborate this proposition, these so-called enlightened people mention the fact that the Torah exempts women from obligatory Mitzvoth created by a time element and from Torah study. They also mention the fact that whereas a man recites every day in the morning the B'rachah "*Shelo asani ishah*," a woman recites the B'rachah "*She'asani Kirtzono*." But Almighty G-d imposed more Mitzvoth upon the man than upon the woman because man innately is disposed towards excessive and abusive *Kibush*. There is an abundance of energy in the male gender which, if not tempered and controlled properly, might be released in a very destructive manner. Almighty G-d in his Infinite Wisdom, therefore imposed upon the male gender the obligatory Mitzvoth created by a time element and

the obligation of constantly being engaged in the study of Torah so that man's psyche will always be preoccupied with spiritual and intellectual endeavors, thereby counteracting man's natural disposition towards abusive Kibush.

A woman recites the B'rachah of "she'asani kirtzono" *not* because of innate inferiority but rather because of innate spiritual superiority. Man has to struggle in order to be good, compassionate, tolerant and noble. A woman's personality was molded in such a way that she is naturally disposed towards compassion and consideration. Woman's character was molded by G-d in accordance with the eschatological goals that Almighty G-d reserved for the world. In the Messianic era, every human being will be pursuing the gift of Chazakah. There will be no pursuit of Kibush. Today the overwhelming majority of men are pursuing the gift of Kibush. Consequently, a woman recites the B'rachah of "she'asani kirtzono." This B'rachah, far from implying a negative attitude towards the woman, is actually expressive of the superior status the woman has in Jewish Weltanschauung. Namely, that a woman's natural make-up is in accordance with the Divine Attributes of compassion, tolerance and grace, and also in accordance with the spiritual and moral trend of humanity in the Messianic era.]

MECHITZAH AND MIKVEH

The Hebrew equivalent for compassion is *rachmanuth*, which is derived from the term *rechem*, meaning a woman's womb. Compassion is an innate quality in the woman. When a man is cruel and ruthless, then he is unethical, but he is not inhuman. The reason for this is the fact that ruthlessness is not repugnant to man's innate nature. However, if a woman is cruel, then she is not only unethical, but also inhuman. It is from this point of view that we can understand the Halachic motive in requiring a *mechitzah* in a synagogue.

In the course of the last four decades, Conservative mentors have been hammering into the minds and hearts of the laity that the traditional practice of having a *mechitzah* in a synagogue stems from an attitude of contempt that orthodox Judaism has towards the woman as the gender of inferior rank. One could not conceive of a more repugnant interpretation and falsification of orthodox Judaism's attitude towards the woman. The Halachah requires a

a psychological fact that man, in the presence of the female gender, is spiritually and intellectually inhibited. When man is engaged in prayer, when man is present in a House of G-d, he must be psychologically free from all spiritual inhibitions so that he may be able to pour out his heart fully and thoroughly before his Creator. Several principals of Day Schools in which mixed classes are the pattern of the school, have conceded to me that, generally speaking, the girls in the mixed classes rate higher than the boys. This is true to a certain extent of all subjects but is especially true of religious subjects like Bible and Talmud. This is so because every boy unconsciously has the innate realization of a girl's superior spiritual and intellectual status. "*Binah nathan ha-Kadosh Baruch Hu ba'ishah yotzer miba'ish*," it is this unconscious realization that makes men spiritually and intellectually inhibited in the presence of a woman. A *mechitzah* in a synagogue is indispensable toward a full and thorough expression of one's yearning towards G-d.

In order that a woman be able to preserve and maintain the uniqueness and distinctiveness of her personality as the gender which naturally and innately conforms to the ethical pattern of G-d's attributes of compassion, graciousness and tolerance, it is essential that boredom in the marital relationship should be eliminated. It is impossible for a woman to maintain her superior identity if man in the marital relationship is bored with her. For this reason, Almighty G-d conceived of the laws of Taharath Hamishpachah. Rabbi Meir said: "Why did the Torah say that a woman in her menstrual period is forbidden to her husband? The answer is that man, on account of his being accustomed to his wife, is likely to become bored with her. Consequently, the Torah said: 'Let a woman who menstruated count seven days and then immerse herself in a Mikveh, thereby refreshing herself and renewing herself into a new bride unto her husband.' " The purpose of the law of Taharath Hamishpachah is to eliminate boredom and monotony in the marital relationship, thereby enabling the woman to maintain her ever-renewing and ever-refreshing bridal beauty, graciousness and nobility.

It is the sacred duty of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America to re-educate the Jewish laity in respect to the Jewish attitude toward the woman. This task is to be realized first by the UOJCA sending out a number of competent men on lecture tours throughout the country, who will enlighten Jewish men and