

Parshat Yitro Feminine Forte

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles
Summary by Channie Koplowitz-Stein

As *Bnei Yisroel* embark on their destiny toward *Sinai* and Hashem's giving us the Torah, Hashem tells Moshe: "So shall you say to the House of Jacob and tell the children of Israel.... Are not the House of Jacob and *Bnei Yisroel* one and the same? Rashi says the House of Jacob, refers to the women while the Children of Israel refers to the men. Why was Moshe to speak to the women first? In fact, Chazal explain that the women were mean to approach the men and convince them to accept the *Torah*.

God created man and woman, writes Rabbi Jacobson, to represent two forms of divine energy as they are manifested in this world. The masculine represents the more aggressive energy while the feminine is more subtle. Men tend to be physically stronger and externally oriented, while women manifest their strength through inner dignity and subtlety. Man refines the exterior world while woman reveals the Godliness within the world. Yet at times, man must become sensitive and woman must become assertive. The total human being, man or woman, embodies aspects of both. The Gemara says that women have greater understanding. Therefore, they are ready to accept the responsibility of *Torah* and *mitzvot* at an earlier age than men. *Binah* is an added sensitivity that can translate information to its practical applications. *Da'as*, knowledge, on the other hand, is more analytical and abstract, and is the realm of the male. While men and women have both attributes, women are more intuitive and lighter in *da'as*, whereas in man, the faculties are reversed.

Rabbi Leff then defines the roles of men and women in Jewish life. The male is usually in charge of the abstract in both the physical and the spiritual aspects of the home. He earns the living and studies *Torah*. But it is the woman who transforms these to the practical in the home, she is the *boneh*, the builder, preparing food and clothing from the money the man earns and infusing the home with the aura of Godliness beyond the rote performance of *mitzvot*. That is how women influence men, how their righteousness was the turning point in our history, and how women will preserve Judaism for future generations. According to the Gerrer Rebbe, the greatest *Torah* personality of the previous generation was Sarah Schenirer who founded the Bais Yaakov movement and taught a generation of young Jewish women who would then become teachers of future generations.

It is the woman who traditionally sees the children off to school in the morning and greets them with compassion when they come home, writes *Areset Sefoteinu* citing *Rabenu Yonah*. So, while the schools teach the subject matter, the mother must teach them proper *middot*. Rabbi M. Salomon notes that a child needs that love and sensitivity to create a sense of calm before he leaves for school and especially when he comes home after a full day of living with rigid rules. The mother should greet her child with a smile and unquestioning love and affection. Then he will come to love and appreciate the *Torah* values he learned in school.

Rabbi Sternbach notes that women protect the walls of the home, preventing the intrusion of

unwanted influences and protecting the purity and integrity of the home. The man fills the home with content which changes from generation to generation and from place to place, but the role of the guardian, the mother, remains to maintain the home's moral integrity. "The House of Yaakov, come let us walk in the light of Hashem." It is the women who lead the way for their husbands and children, and maintain the spiritual light of our people.

If the same exact words were to be used as *Bnei Yisroel* arrived at *Sinai* for both men and women, asks Rabbi Belsky in *Einei Yisroel*, how could two different messages still have been transmitted? If we examine the actual words, we can see how men and women could focus on and derive different ideas from the same text. The women, with their heightened sensitivity to the spiritual, would be inspired and encouraged by Hashem's words, that Hashem wanted to draw us close to Him. While they were aware of the punishment, they focused on the beauty of the relationship with Hashem. The men, on the other hand, were more concerned with the responsibility for upholding the laws of *Torah*, avoiding punishment and meriting reward. The words Moshe was to speak represented two speeches in one, maintaining both love and reverence for the *Torah* that Hashem was about to gift to us.

Thus, within these verses the balance between men and women, between love and reverence is maintained. The *Beit Yaakov* and the *Bnei Yisroel* together keep the words and the spirit of the *Torah* alive and imbue our lives, our families and the entire world with meaning.

Bar/Bat Mitzva

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller-Gottlieb

The literal meaning of a Bar or Bat Mitzva is the son or daughter of a *mitzva*. This connotes that there comes a point in a person's life when he sees himself as being born for the *mitzvot* he does. There's a premise in Judaism that in a certain sense we give birth to ourselves through our deeds. When a child is born, he's a creature of

instinct. A baby doesn't make moral or spiritual choices. He acts on what his body tells him. But when a child reaches the age of three, he is called *hegia ledei chinuch*, a child who is educable. This age is tied to intelligible speech where a child can talk about yesterday and tomorrow and what he wants and needs. He's acquired some level of abstraction and humanization. Parents are then obligated to

teach him *Torah*, the roadmap of life, to differentiate between good and bad, and to raise him according to his way.

Time passes and the child reaches Bar or Bat Mitzva. The Gra explains that when a child is born the animal self is much stronger than the spiritual self. It takes 12 and 13 years until they

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become more or less equal. At this point they can understand cause and effect and the consequence of their actions. Bar/Bat Mitzva is the gate towards maturity and becoming a full member of the Jewish people.

In non-Jewish society coming of age parties celebrate freedom. A Bar/Bat Mitzva celebration implies responsibilities. *Mitzva* means commandment which means that there's a commander and that one has to listen to the commands. *Mitzva* also comes from the root word *zavta*, joining together. An immature child is not spiritually aroused yet. All he knows is what's tangible. Through doing *mitzvot*, he develops an awareness and a relationship with Hashem.

For a boy, the core *mitzva* at Bar Mitzva is donning *tefillin*. Until this point, he was exempt and not considered mature enough. *Tefillin* requires awareness and consciousness. By custom, the boy practices wearing tefillin thirty days beforehand. On the day of his Bar Mitzva, there's a party celebrating the fact that he can now make choices and give birth to himself by using his conscious and spiritual abilities.

In the traditional community, there are often three parties. Party one is for the boy's class. The kids are expected to make little speeches and bless the Bar Mitzva boy. Usually the teacher will accompany them to add to the momentous aura of the occasion. Party two is the main celebration which usually takes place in a hall. The highlight is the boy's speech

which his parents or Rabbi will help him prepare. If the boy has stage fright, the boys might interrupt with singing which is a great kindness. The third party is usually just a family dinner, a warm welcome to the boy to the great world of adulthood. Now that he's reached maturity, he's held accountable for his deeds.

Many boys go through a huge transformation after their Bar Mitzva as the feeling of responsibility is very maturing. It's also a time when the boy begins wearing more traditional or Chassidic garb depending on his background. Much like a new recruit to the army, a boy at Bar Mitzva develops a new image of himself that will help him grow into his role as a worthy member of the Jewish people.

Leah: A Role Model For Us

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

When Eisav and Yaakov were very young there was an agreement made between the families of Yitzchak and Lavan that the older son Eisav would marry the older girl Leah and the younger son Yaakov would marry the younger girl Rachel. *Chazal* tell us that forty days before a person is born, it's already announced in heaven who will marry whom. It was not just a simple agreement but a heavenly decree. Rachel and Yaakov were in fact a match as both were righteous. However, while Leah was very righteous, Eisav was wicked.

The Torah tells us, "*V'einei Leah rakot*- The eyes of Leah were soft." This is not meant in a negative manner but in fact to show her greatness. When she heard that her destined one, Eisav, was evil, she cried and prayed until her eyes were very red. As a result of her desire and intense prayer, she merited to marry Yaakov.

In reality, Rachel was the intended one. She fully deserved Yaakov. She was so righteous to the point that she was ready to give up her

place in the marriage to her sister. Leah married Yaakov first. Rachel went through the pain of not knowing if she would ever marry. She thought she had lost it all. Leah had six tribes while Rachel only had two. Leah merited to be buried in *Mearat Hamachpeila* near Yaakov while Rachel was buried alone on the way to *Beit Lechem*. This was not an indication of who was greater. It was the way Hashem led creation in order to build the Jewish nation. Both Leah and Rachel in their particular way were supposed to bequeath something to the Jewish nation. And in order for that to be, circumstances had to transpire in the particular way it did. Rachel and Leah were supposed to marry Yaakov because Eisav was not fit to be part of the Jewish nation and didn't deserve Leah. But couldn't Hashem make Lavan give Rachel to Yaakov first and then offer him Leah? Couldn't Hashem have given each of the wives an equal number of tribes? What was this all meant to accomplish for the Jewish people?

The commentators explain that Yaakov and Eisav corresponded to the two trees that were in *Gan Eden*, *Eitz Hachaim*- the Tree of Life

and *Eitz Hadaat* -the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil. These two trees represent the two ways of serving Hashem. The Tree of Life symbolizes *Torah*, the source of all good. Yaakov was born with the desire to excel in serving Hashem. He represents *asei tov*-doing good and is compared to *Eitz Hachaim*. Another way of serving Hashem is by fighting evil which is compared to *Eitz Hadaat Tov V'ra*. It's seeing two choices, good and evil, and overcoming evil do the will of Hashem. This was the mission of Eisav. Both are necessary ways to connect to Hashem.

Originally Rachel was described in the *Torah* as, "*Yifat toar yifat mareh*-beautiful in appearance. She was like Yaakov. She only wanted to do good. The Torah describes her as *reia irah* which is the same letters as *yirah*- fear of Hashem. She recognized the greatness of Hashem and wanted to follow Him. Her mission like her intended one Yaakov, was *asei tov*. This is the meaning of "*Vayehav Yaakov et Rachel*-Yaakov loved Rachel." He saw in her his soulmate, his partner in achieving his mission in life.