THE KEY TO JEWISH CONTINUITY

by Rabbi Pinchas Avruch

Parshas Yisro

The Key to Jewish Continuity

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As the Jewish nation approached Mount Sinai, with the climax of their departure from Egypt imminent, G-d officially offered them His treasured Torah as the crux of an eternal covenant. G-d instructed Moshe to present the offer, "So shall you say to the House of Jacob and relate to the Children of Israel." (Shemos/Exodus 19,3) The apparent repetition of means of conveying the message to the Jewish people would violate the Torah's maxim against extraneous expressions. But Rashi explains that "the House of Jacob" refers to women and "say[ing]" is a softer form of speech, suited to their compassionate, maternal instincts, while "the Children of Israel" are the men and the more forceful "relat[ing]" is consistent with the legal minutiae and related punishments that men must confront.

By instructing the men and women separately, and, furthermore, directing the women first, the Torah is clearly emphasizing a special role that women play in the acceptance of the Torah on behalf of the entirety of the Jewish people. But what is that role?

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (1895-1986; Rosh Yeshiva/Dean of Mesivtha Tifereth Jerusalem in New York City; the leading Halachic/Jewish legal decisor and foremost leader of Jewry of his time) elucidates that the giving of the Torah at Sinai was a one time event, one that would need to last for all generations throughout eternity. But the continued transmission of Torah, the continuity of the Jewish people, is contingent on one simple premise - the education of the next generation of children. Rabbi Feinstein dismisses the notion that this can systematically be done with adults, because by that point, all the habits of adulthood are ingrained and the great majority would have too great a challenge to uproot those habits that are antithetical to Torah. Rather, the education must begin when they are young children.

This charge, concludes Rabbi Feinstein, is primarily that of the mother, who simultaneously provides for the children's physical needs and spiritual development. And even though the children

eventually go to school, the large share of their daily influence continues to come from the mother. Thus, women are of primary mention in the acceptance of the Torah because it is ONLY through their action that the success of Torah transmission, and with it Jewish continuity, for all generations is assured. They are uniquely in the position to instill in the children the tenets of Jewish faith and pursuit of G-dliness, character elements essential for their success in Jewish adulthood.

Have a good Shabbos!

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