

DIFFERENT MISSIONS IN LIFE FOR MEN AND WOMEN

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

God told Moshe and Aharon in Egypt, "This month will be for you the beginning of the months; it will be the first month of the year for you." (Shemos 12:1)

One of the most controversial blessings has to be the one that women make each morning: "Blessed are you, Hashem, our God and King of the world, that He made me according to His will." For, if men bless God saying, "... that He did not make me a woman," why do women not bless Him by saying something similar like, "... that He didn't make me a man"?

Furthermore, the implication from the blessing that women do make is that men were not created according to His will. Some women might argue that this is indeed true since given how some men act, could God really take responsibility for such creations? They think not, even though nothing can exist if God does not approve of its being part of Creation.

An answer to the question posed above can be extrapolated from this week's parshah. In this week's parshah, the Jewish people get their first mitzvah, which is to sanctify the new moon, even though they would not be able to perform it until reaching Eretz Yisroel, and after conquering and dividing the land and establishing a Sanhedrin, which eventually took 14 years altogether.

The question is why, since so many other mitzvos seem to be more fundamental to Judaism, and therefore the redemption from Egypt. Secondly, why not give a mitzvah that is immediately relevant, rather than one that could and did take decades to first perform it? What is so central to being Jewish about sanctifying the new moon each month?

Everything, of course. As the Talmud explains, the moon represents the Jewish people, who like the moon, have waxed and waned throughout history. But, more importantly, just as the moon does not emanate its own light, but rather it reflects the light of the sun to the world, likewise are the Jewish people meant to reflect God's light—Torah—to mankind in order to rectify it. Wrapped in the first mitzvah given to the Jewish people is the entire mission statement of the nation.

In more Kabbalistic terms, the moon, which is considered to be feminine, and associated with the Shechinah—the Divine Presence—is a mekabeles—a receiver. It has no light of its own to interfere with the light of the sun; if it receives none then it has none, and that is the way it should be for a Jew with respect to God. Avodas Hashem—Service of God—is primarily about working on oneself until one becomes this way.

Women are naturally set up this way. They are constantly receiving and then giving to others. The most obvious representation of this idea is the entire process of childbirth, during which a woman receives from a man, allows for the development of what she has received, and then gives birth to it in a far more complete form.

This is very similar to the Torah-learning process. The original ideas must come from God via His Torah, but once received, we must think about them and work with them, until we have developed them to the point that we can express them in a way that is novel and yet consistent with the original concept. This is a feminine-like procedure, crucial for grasping Torah and for the educational process.

I once heard a story of two great rabbis who were very close. However, one was older than the other, and presumably wiser as well. At the eulogy of the older one, the younger rabbi recounted a story where the two of them were walking home together discussing an important point. The elder rabbi, after trying several times unsuccessfully to have the younger rabbi understand his point finally told him, "You are not being a listener."

In other words, the younger rabbi was hearing him, but not listening to him. He heard the words, but they were not registering on the level for which they were intended by the elder rav, and therefore lacked the necessary impact. Apparently, the younger rabbi recounted, his own perspective blocked him from seeing the perspective of his mentor; it blocked him from being a proper mekabel—a receiver.

That is a naturally male thing to do. It seems, in general, more natural for men to be givers rather than receivers, usually because of pride. There is something about the male ego that demands that a man do things on his own, without the help of others. Men seem to need independence more than women do, which is why my wife is ready to ask directions the moment we are lost, and I won't until I have made every effort to solve the dilemma on my own.

It's an issue of hisbatlus—self-nullification. Sounds bad, right? I mean, who would want to nullify himself? Only someone who wants to live with true freedom. For, in truth, what is being nullified is not the person, but his ego that interferes with his becoming a proper mekabel. Hisbatlus is a spiritual house cleaning that rids a person of all those extraneous ways of thinking and habits that prevent the person from becoming a full member on God's team.

In fact, this is the entire point of exile in the first place, which is why great rabbis like the Vilna Gaon used to impose it on themselves, something I can personally relate to a little when going on speaking tours. While traveling, you live out of context, staying in places that you cannot call home, working out of a suitcase. It all makes life seem quite transient, and tends to make you more aware of your surroundings than of yourself. You feel more like a spectator than spectated.

This is even though when going on speaking trips, I get enough attention. Not only that, but everywhere I have ever gone I have been treated very well, quite respectfully. Yet, by being a guest

in someone else's home, I feel less at the center of my world than I do at home, even though I get less attention there, and less respect, being only 'Abba' and just one of many in my community. Just having a fixed location I can call my own, and a schedule that I can control (for the most part), gives me context and makes me self-conscious.

In fact, I found out this last trip, that most of the pleasure I have while traveling does not come from the success, thank God, that I have while abroad, though that certainly makes the trip more worthwhile. It comes from being out of context for a while, and becoming less aware of myself, and less concerned about self-image. It results from the automatic hisbatlus that comes from being away from home, from going from manhood to moonhood.

In an ideal world, one in which roles do not get mixed up and men do not act like women and women do not act like men, a woman would have no problem relating to what I am talking about. Her natural sense of hisbatlus and moonhood make her a natural receiver, which is why the women did not fall for the trap of the Spies and entered the land 40 years later, after all the men who died in the desert.

This is also what made Moshe Rabbeinu the great leader that he was, as the mishnah points out:

Moshe received the Torah from Sinai and transmitted it Yehoshua. Yehoshua transmitted it to the Elders ... (Pirkei Avos 1:1)

It only mentions 'received' with respect to Moshe, but not with respect to Yehoshua and the Elders, for they were not mekablím on the level of Moshe Rabbeinu.

Hence, God says regarding Moshe:

The man Moshe was extremely humble, more than any man upon the face of the earth ... "My servant Moshe is the most trustworthy in My entire house." (Bamidbar 12:3-7)

However, this can worded differently: Moshe is the greatest mekabel in My entire world. Loyalty and trustworthiness is completely a function of how much one accepts about another, and from another. The more accepting someone is of another, the more that person will stand behind the person to whom he is loyal.

When it comes to human beings, that can be a problem sometimes. Sometimes, people can be loyal to others to a fault, ultimately resulting in their own betrayal by the person whom they trusted so much. People can be selfish and greedy, and use another person's loyalty to their own gain, causing much destruction along the way.

However, when it comes to God, you can never go wrong by being completely loyal and trustworthy. God has none of the human traits that can make a person take advantage of another

person's trustworthiness. On the contrary, the more loyal one is to God, the more loyal he is to himself. For, the more loyal one is to God the more God can do for him.

It's like a son who dutifully gives his father a portion of his weekly paycheck, unaware of what his father does with the money. All he knows is that his father asked him for the money, and that he trusts his father implicitly. And, if he ever wonders what his father does with the money, he simply tells himself, "It must be for some family good."

Unlike his brother, though, who trusts his father less. As a result, the second son, one day, opts out of his obligation, and chooses not to give anymore of his paycheck to his father. For months his father continues to ask him for the money, and for months the son refuses, until eventually, the father gives up and ceases to make the request anymore.

Years go by, and the time comes for the boys to marry. When the first son gets engaged, his father surprises him with a gift of a check for a lot of money. All of a sudden, the son's financial position changes for the better, and he is able to get married and make a down payment on a new home that he and his wife had only dreamed of buying one day far into the future.

When the second son gets married, the father also presents him with a check, but for a lot less money. Anticipating at least the same amount of money as brother received, his face drops and angrily, he asks his father why he favors the other son more? How would he be able to afford a new house for his new family like his brother?

The father explains, "It was not my money that I gave to your brother, and it is not my money that I am giving to you now. The money I gave to your brother was his own, saved up from the weekly deposits I made in his name from the portion of the paycheck he gave me each week. Plus the interest, of course. The same is true of your check: it is your money, plus the interest, up until the time you stopped making your payments."

Selfishness and mistrust have a way of backfiring on us in the long run. That is the way we were born, but not the way that we were made. We were created in the image of God, and therefore, 'according to His will.' We were selfless, and trusting, until we made the mistake of acting differently, and eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Then we became more physical, as we are today.

The process of growing and developing throughout life is the process of becoming selfless once again, until we exist only to receive the light of God, and to share it with others. It is the process of increasing hisbatlus, in the pursuit of moonhood, which marriage and family raising can certainly promote as they make and increase demands on family members' time and energy, while at the same time the person is trying to live a life of Torah and mitzvos.

But, how else can a person arrive at the wonderful point of being happy with one's own portion, the opposite of Western ideology? When one achieves this holy level of living, then he can finally say

that he is as the will of God intended him to be.

Until such time as a man reaches this level, women will make the blessing that they do, while struggling to maintain such a holy approach to life, which is a major struggle, since society is bent on pulling them completely in the opposite direction. And, men will make the blessing they do, to at least acknowledge their difference, to make clear their mission in life, and to state their commitment to it.

Text

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