



Parashat Vayakhel



English version

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THE ART OF MANAGING BEAUTY

The Eshet Chayil is not a woman of strength, but of valor. Valor is strength of the mind, the ability to face danger and adversity with firmness, bravery and courage. A woman needs valor and courage to dress nicely but modestly, and that courage comes from a focus on the next world and on the future of her family. עֲזֹרָהּ לְבוּשָׁה נְתֻמָּה לְיוֹם אֶחָד (see Akedat Yitzchak Chaye Sarah)

G-d has no interest in monks or nuns; He has plenty of angels in Heaven. He wants humans who make the mundane spiritual, infusing it with meaning and purpose. Separating ourselves from worldly pleasures is not a Jewish definition of holiness. Jewish Holiness is using the worldly pleasures only for spiritual, Torah purposes and to sanctify G-d's Name. Refraining entirely from having any connection to anything material or physical is a sin, as the Nazir needs to bring a sin offering to finish his Nazir status, because he could not enjoy wine, during his Nazir days.

When Moshe fundraised for the Mishkan, the women came running with all their jewelry. With their gold, silver and copper. They brought ornaments such as the כּוֹמֵז, a women's belt ornament, and they brought their copper mirrors, בְּמִרְאֵת הַנְּחֹשֶׁת. One reason why women gave in their copper mirrors, נְחֹשֶׁת, is to fix the sin of Chava with the נֶחֱשׁ, the snake, as the letters are similar. Moshe was disgusted with these mirrors that women used for beautifying themselves, for he understood that the attention to physical appearance was a ply of the yetzer hara. But before

he rejected the mirror and belt donations, G-d said to Moshe: Take those mirrors and belts!!! They are the most precious to Me, to be used for My Mishkan and my copper כִּיּוֹר, water basin! There is nothing more precious to Me and My Mishkan than the mirrors that were used by these Jewish women in Egypt to beautify themselves for their beaten and broken husbands, and build large families during the 86-year holocaust. Each woman would take her mirror out to the fields and call her husband/slave to eat lunch under the apple tree. And they would look at themselves in the mirror, together with their husband, ... as the passuk says, וְיָקָח הַתְּפִילִים עִוְרֵרְתֶיהֶן. (See Rashi 38;8)

Hormones are not bad or good. They just *are*, and it depends how you use them. When a person uses them in accordance to the Torah, G-d says that there is nothing more holy and precious. When a person gets married, in accordance with Jewish law, this is called Kiddushin. There is nothing else, in Judaism, that is referred to as holiness, other than marriage, itself. Because according to Judaism, holiness is making the mundane spiritual, and there is no greater making the mundane spiritual than marriage.

When a woman uses her strengths to strengthen the man to be holier and greater, there is nothing more spiritual that a woman can do. If we look at all the women who entered the Eshet Chayil hall of fame, it was always because of their having empowered men, not because of something related only to themselves. *Sarah, for making her husband rich*



from Pharaoh. Rivka, for helping Yitzchak overcome the loss of his mother. Leah, for greeting Yaacov with a cheerful face when he returned from the field, when she purchased that night from Rachel for some mandrakes. Rachel, for going through the embarrassment of having no children, every day, hoping to be a mother of the Tribes. Bitya, daughter of Pharaoh, who converted and dealt with Moshe. Yochebed, for being the mother of Moshe. Miriam, for prophesying that her mother would have the child (Moshe) that would save the Jewish People, for getting slapped on her head over her prophecy by Amram when the slavery got worse instead of the redemption arriving, and when little Moshe was thrown into the Nile, she stayed strong to her prophecy, by waiting on the side of Nile to see what would happen to her brother. Chana, for praying for a son, and in that merit of prayer, to be the mother of Shmuel, who was equal to both Moshe and Aharon. Yael, for not killing Sisra with a sword, so as not to wear something associated with men, but instead, killing him with a tent peg. The widowed woman who gave bread and water to Elyahu the prophet. Rachav, the harlot, who was willing to help the Jewish Spies when the Jews came to destroy Yericho. Bat Sheva, for being the mother of King Shlomo. Michal, for saving King David's life from the hands of her father, King Shaul. Shimshon's mother. Elisheva bat Aminadav, the wife of Aharon, and the mother of all Kohanim. Serah Bat Asher, who saved a whole city of Jews, with her sound advice. The wife of Ovadiah the prophet, who prevented her sons from falling into King Achav's persuasion to worship idols. Shunamit, for feeding the prophet Elisha. Ruth, for converting and embracing the religion in such a way that she merited to be King David's grandmother. (Midrash Mishlei)

In Az Yashir, we mention how, when the Jews left Egypt and they crossed the Sea, the nations of the world were petrified from the Jewish nation. תִּפְּלָה עָלֵיהֶם אֵימָתָהּ וְנִפְסְדָה Her fear and trepidation will fall upon them. The word אֵימָתָהּ, her fear, is strange

VOICES OF A LEADER

Andrius Caesar, of Rome, once challenged Rabbi Yehoshua, son of Hannanyah, a very wise rabbi who was close to him: "I am better than Moshe,

here. Why doesn't it just say אֵימָה, fear? The answer is, when the nations of the world saw all the little children leaving Egypt, they wondered how the Jews were able to have the strength to have children, while they were in an 86-year holocaust? Every male slave was definitely going through the two greatest causes of depression: hopelessness and helplessness. How were they able to have children?!? The answer has to be that the Jewish nation has SUPERWOMEN!!! Women who know how to give their husbands hope, encouragement and spiritual strength! Women who recognize that only through building families, can we hope that יְיָ יִקְנֶנּוּ! מִלְּמָד לְעֵלָם וְעַד, that Hashem will rule forever, through descendants. The nations of the world realized that with women like that, the Jewish nation is indestructible!!! And that is who they feared! The incredibly spiritual Jewish women!!!

How does the woman have this power? This עֶזֶר? The answer is, וְתִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לַיהוָה אֱתֶרְוֹן, she knows how to laugh through the craziness, because in the end, on her last day, she will laugh best. She will give back her soul to her creator, saying, I gave every part of me for You, G-d! She knows how to look into the future, past the slavery. Ever wonder where Miriam and the women had drums and bongos in the desert, to sing at the Yam Suf? The answer is that the women were preparing these bongos while they were in the midst of slavery, knowing that there will be a lot to sing and dance about, when G-d brings about their salvation!

Mirrors, beauty, are creations of G-d, and they are good and beloved to G-d, but only when used in line with the Torah's guidelines. According to the Ibn Ezra, it was the giving in of these mirrors, by these women, that G-d loved so much. These women realized that now that we have a Mishkan, we don't need mirrors as much, because our homes will have tranquility in them, with the husband and wife growing spiritually, through their connection to the Mishkan, which brought G-d into their homes. And those mirrors, G-d wanted more than anything else!

your teacher and leader, for I am alive, and he is dead. And it says in your Torah, in Kohelet כִּי לַחַיִּים חֵטְא לָמוּת – A live dog is better than a

dead lion. (Kohelet 9 ; 4) R' Yehoshua asked the Caesar in return , "If you were to decree that your people light no fire for three days, would they obey?" The Caesar responded – "Yes, of course". And so he decreed.

The first night after his decree , they both climbed up to the rooftop of the Roman castle. They looked around Rome, as far as the eye could see, and there was no light. Then, suddenly, they saw smoke in the distance. R' Yehoshua asked the Caesar, "What is this smoke coming up out of that chimney in the distance?" The Caesar answered, "The general of the city fell ill, and the doctor went to examine him. The doctor said that this general needs to drink hot water to get better. They lit fire to heat up the water." R' Yehoshua answered the Caesar, "Even while you are still alive, your people do not keep your decrees. They disobey your command even for reasons that are not פיקוח נפש , not a life and death issue. Even on the first day of your decree, one of your generals has disobeyed your words. From the time that Moshe, my leader and teacher, taught us in his Torah לא תבערו אש בכל משבתכם ביום השבת (Shemot 35 ;3) no Jew, during his whole life, lights a fire on Shabbat. Moshe's decree was not annulled. How do you say, then, that you are better than him? (Kohelet Rabbah 9; 3)

Just a few questions here. First, Caesar's argument was based on Kohelet. If he is *alive*, he is better than Moshe, who is *dead*. How did R' Yehoshua refute this? Second, were there no non-observant Jews who did not keep Shabbat over the years and did not listen to Moshe? And finally, why did R' Yehoshua pick this law, specifically, out of all the laws that Moshe gave his people in order to prove his point?

The answers can be understood on two levels. The first level is the basic difference between Moshe and Caesar's roles as leaders. The difference between Moshe's rule and the Caesar's rule is that in addition to Moshe having been our leader, he was also our beloved teacher. Caesar was just a leader in the form of a dictator who gave orders.

Moshe's teachings are eternal, he is *still* our leader and teacher, and therefore, he is still *alive in the minds of his people*. The words of Moshe are taken very seriously, and his words still echo in the thoughts of the nation, as they have done for thousands of years, *because Moshe knew how to be the greatest leader ever*. Once a week Moshe's people hear him say, just as he did thousands of years ago; "A fire shall not burn in your dwellings on the day of Shabbat." The reason why R' Yehoshua specifically chose this law regarding fire on Shabbat is because this law is one of the most inconvenient laws to live by; it effects our lives the most. For instance, lighting up a dark room, heating our homes in the winter, cooking... . Even today, electricity, the modern day "fire", is forbidden on Shabbat, for it falls under the category of burning an actual fire. Not lighting fire on Shabbat makes it obvious to all the nations of the world that we still adhere to Moshe's teachings. Although not all of the Jews keep all of the laws, it is about the significant number of Jews who *do* take the "trouble" to keep Shabbat. So, R' Yehoshua explained to the Caesar, *Moshe is still alive: people are still listening to his voice. Your voice, your command, is disobeyed for the slightest inconvenience*.

The deeper answer to the questions asked above is really in the way we understand how one hears the words of a leader. People go through their entire lives "hearing" voices of authority figures, leaders, in their heads, in their subconscious. Voices that they no longer hear in the literal sense, but still feel obligated to obey. These are the voices of our *parents and mentors, those who imprinted in us our morals and values*. It is they who told us *what* is important in life, and how important it is. These voices are so strong that people feel an obligation to heed their words, long after those who first spoke those words are gone.

So, can we say that *all* those who have been in a position of authority over us have this effect on us? Absolutely not. This is where the type of leader plays a crucial role in the degree to which one heeds his words, and for how long. The stronger the trust and love of the leader/parent is for the



subject/child, the stronger the impact of the voice, and the stronger the feeling that one must adhere to, or “hear” the words that were spoken.

Now, there are two types of authority figures/parents. There are those who are dictators, and there are those who are leaders. A leader’s voice is truly heard: it echoes in those who follow him. Of course, the *greatest leader ever* was Moshe, and that’s why his voice keeps echoing in Jewish hearts. If we just pay attention, we can learn all of the qualities that make one a good leader from almost every story we know about Moshe. To mention a few of these qualities; **Trust:** Moshe gave an exact account of funds received, down to the last shekel that he collected, avoiding any distrust amongst his followers. **Open communication:** Moshe was willing to hear and discuss whatever was important to his people; *if it was important to them, it was important to him.* They felt comfortable talking to Moshe about every last detail. Moshe preferred one-on-one communication, and was easily approachable. (Once he realized that he would become worn out by continuing this way, and it would have a bad effect on his leadership he followed Yitro’s advice to delegate certain positions.) On our level, we can understand that

leadership requires a person to be **emotionally intelligent**, aware of his own feelings and those of the people around him. This enables us to prepare for expected situations and reactions. (Moshe was sensitive to the fact that his older brother, Aharon, would logically be the one to lead and take the Jews out of Egypt.) **Knowing when and how to give criticism:** Moshe was careful not to criticize the Jewish nation until the end of his life. Moshe **went out to his people**, to be part of them and be “hands on” when they were still in slavery. Moshe displayed **compassion** by running after the sheep, which was one of the prime reasons he was chosen to be a leader. Immediately, he was appointed by G-d at the Burning Bush. Moshe **defended his people**, and he was able to **understand their feelings**... There is no end to how one can learn leadership qualities from Moshe.

As parents and role models, we must be aware of whether we are leading or dictating. We must learn from Moshe Rabbeinu what needs to be done in order to lead. We must decide whether we want to be heard for a moment, like a dictator, or if we want to be heard for generations, and have our voices echo for years to come, like true leaders.

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