

The Jewish Woman

I. Role of the Jewish Woman Under the Law of God

The dissemination and encouragement of misconceptions and false notions have come primarily from the cavalier manner in which untruths and half-truths are constructed from premises that in themselves are true. Hasty conclusions that hold good only for a limited number of people or special circumstances are proclaimed as universally applicable and are used to place the imprint of supposed truth upon notions that are very far from the original premise and whose very essence would resist such distortions. The natural sciences and social and historical studies suffer equally from such morbid distortions of logical judgment. The premise on which the conclusions are based may be true, but the conclusions themselves are false. But if such pseudo-scientific conclusions can be made to support notions that happen to enjoy popularity at a given moment, these conclusions will be passed from hand to hand like so much small change; they will be automatically accepted into the treasury of accumulated popular notions and prejudices, and no one will go to the trouble of testing the quality of the time-flattened coin to see whether its value really accords with the value of the denomination stamped upon it. The coin may be made of the most inferior alloy in the world, but what does that matter? The coin is accepted for the value stamped upon it and it gets us what we want. What more, then, do we need to know?

Not a few notions and prejudices current in Jewish life today, which are being passed from mouth to mouth and from book to book, owe their coinage and acceptance to similar irresponsible modes of creation and dissemination. [Unjustified conclusions about Judaism are being formed on the basis of certain general characteristics:] Judaism has a Bible and a tradition; Judaism has priests and a Temple; it had its origins in the East; and today it is split into parties debating which of its traditions should be changed and which preserved. The fact that these external features occur also in some other religions is considered

sufficient justification for automatically applying to Judaism and its various manifestations all the characteristics of Bible and traditions, priesthood and Temple that went into the formation of other religious faiths. The tendency is to interpret Judaism in terms of all the notions that have taken root among modern Europeans as regards Oriental life and customs and as regards the strife that is now taking place in other religions. It apparently does not occur to the disseminators of these notions that in Judaism the significance of the Bible and tradition, priesthood and Temple is entirely and markedly different from what it is in any other religion, that the Orient may have been the birthplace of the Jewish people but not of its customs and of the Jewish way of life. It is these customs and that way of life, emanating directly from the Law of God, that have made the Jews a nation set apart from all the others in the Orient of old and in Europe today. The innermost essence of the issues that are dividing Israel today into opposing parties has nothing in common with the questions that serve as party slogans in the camps of other nations.

No Jewish concept has suffered more from such distortions than the present-day notions of the position accorded in Judaism to the Jewish woman. Even though every page of the Jewish Bible, every word of Jewish tradition, every leaf of Jewish history, indeed, every Jewish home, past and present, bears unambiguous and eloquent testimony to the contrary, current popular notions about the position of women in the Orient have been exploited to help spread the most baseless fantasies about the degradation and subordination of womanhood in Israel. The modern era is glorified, above all, for its efforts to deliver Jewish womanhood from the yoke of Oriental degradation. Is this not an ingenious bait to dangle before Jewish women in order to win their favor for efforts at Jewish religious reform? In this process only one small consideration has been overlooked: The effort to win Jewish women for the Israel of the future is in itself an eloquent refutation of all the notions about the degradation of women in Judaism; as a matter of fact, it gives most impressive proof of the high position and profound influence enjoyed by the Jewish woman in Israel. The reformers apparently believe they can win their case only if they win over the women to their cause.

Let us attempt to outline the terms in which the Word of God expresses the role of the Jewish woman. Let us examine the Jewish laws that regulate her position, the realities of Jewish history in which

she has been a figure, and the statements of the Sages of Judaism that set forth the Jewish view of womanhood. The resulting biographical portraits and character sketches might then dissipate the much-vaunted European notions and fancies about the subjugation of women in Judaism like so much glistening haze before the rays of the rising sun.

ויברא אלקים את האדם בצלמו בצלם אלקים ברא אתו זכר ונקבה ברא אתם. ויברך אתם אלקים ויאמר להם אלקים פרו ורבו ומלאו את הארץ וכבשה ורדו בדגת הים ובעוף השמים ובכל חיה הרמשת על הארץ His image; in the image of God He created him: male and female, He created them both. And God blessed them both and God said to both of them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and exercise dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky and every living thing that moves upon the earth' " (Genesis 1,27-28).

Note the change in the subject of the first verse from the singular to the plural, which we have also sought to convey in our rendering of this Scriptural passage. Occurring as it does in the very first introduction of man and woman in the story of Creation, this change most significantly expresses the complete equality, indeed the close union, of man and woman as human beings created in the image of God. The concept of man created in the image of God embraces both sexes; together, male and female comprise the term "human." God has created them both equally close to Him and for the same active purpose according to His Will: זכר ונקבה ברא אתם.

The Hebrew term for "male" is זכר; the Hebrew for "female" is נקבה. The male is זכר; this means that he functions as the depository for the revelations of God and the intellectual and spiritual achievements of mankind. The male has been entrusted with זכרון, the preservation of the traditions of the human species as reflected in the developments of mankind. The male is זכר, the bearer of history; within him the link is formed that binds together, in a full circle, the beginning and the end of the story of mankind. The work and creativity of the male are not to be affected by transient influences. As he performs the functions assigned to him, the male must always remember [זכור] the duties and traditions he has received from God and from the past. It is by wedding these with the phenomena and the conditions of his own lifetime that the male continues the work of Creation, the constant process of adding links to the chain of historic tradition. Thus, the work of the male is a determining factor in shaping the course of history.

The female is נקבה שנוי עלי (נקבה—fixed; cf. Genesis 30,

28; *אברה, גנבה, אשר פי ה' יקבנו*, Isaiah 62,2. Cf. also the forms *אברה, גנבה*, etc.*). Woman *receives* her purpose in life and accepts it. The male *chooses* a vocation and thus creates a position for himself. The female, on the other hand, receives her vocation and position in life by entering into a union with a man and identifying with the vocation he has chosen and the position he has created for himself. The Jewish maiden becomes a mature human being, a full-fledged adult Jew, only once she has a husband. Only through her union with her husband does she receive her own uniqueness, entering the more narrowly defined sphere of human endeavors in which she, too, united with her husband, is to fulfill her own purpose as a human being and as a Jew through the vocation and position she has received as the result of her marriage. And precisely because she is not required to choose a vocation and attain a position on her own can the woman function as the nurturer of all that is truly human in mankind.

Consider the momentous words with which the Father of all mankind, the Educator and Guardian for the course of human history, has proclaimed the ultimate healing and ingathering of mankind from the vagaries of their experiments in history-making: *כי ברא ה' חדשה בארץ: נקבה תסובב גבר* "It is God Who creates the new [things] on earth; woman encircles the man" (Jeremiah 31,21). The male must strive to attain a vocation and a position for himself as defined by his specific lot in this world, through which he is to make his personal contribution to the fulfillment of the purpose common to all mankind. But as he struggles for success and achievements, he runs the danger of losing himself; he may come to regard his endeavors, which in fact are only means toward an end, as ends in themselves, as the all-absorbing purpose of his life, forgetting his larger purpose, his task as a human being, which all his material achievements are only meant to help him accomplish. Indeed, he may in time come to subordinate and sacrifice the truly human aspects of his life to these endeavors. This error probably accounts for virtually all the errors and delusions that have marked the history of mankind. It is the woman who can lead the man back to true humanity. The enigma of history can be solved when one considers the dominant role of the female. The male is "encircled," i.e., he is kept within the sphere of purely human existence and activity by the female, who has been entrusted with safeguarding the nobler aspects of life. That is how

* See Hirsch Commentary, Genesis 1,27. (Ed.)

the male can revert from being merely a prestigious public figure to the pristine state of a human being in accordance with the Will of God.

That is the reason why the blessing and the vocation expressed in the words *פרו ורבו ומלאו . . וכבשה* was accorded equally to both male and female. These four words sum up the purpose of the human species and create the moral basis for the institutions of marriage, the family, the state and personal property.

פרו refers to marriage, the union of the two sexes for the purpose of begetting offspring that will continue the noblest and the best of all the godly and human qualities of their parents, *בדמותם כצלמם*, resembling their parents not only in body but also in spirit. The male quality of the father, directing and shaping the destinies of the family, and the female quality of the mother, receiving and accepting the directions given to her, will unite in their children to form new individuals, thus contributing to the endless variety of human personalities.

רבו refers to the family. You are to nurture and educate the offspring you have produced so that they may grow up in your image, replicating the best that is within your own selves. Without care, without the proper education, your offspring will become morally stunted and will run wild. The one-time act of giving birth to a child is not sufficient to fulfill the commandment of multiplying the human species or to replicate the parents on earth. This endeavor requires a continuing process of creation on the part of both parents, a constant, united effort of the father and the mother in the care, the rearing and the education of the child. This effort is nothing else than the continuing transfer of the noblest and best of the godly and human qualities of the parents to their children, with the result that the parents are then truly replicated in their offspring.

The wealth of profound ideas inherent in Jewish etymology can be seen, among other things, from the fact that the Hebrew term *רבה* denotes not only the concept of "multiplying" but also the concepts of "training" and "education." The work of child-rearing is the fruit of the union of the two parents, male and female. The female parent produces and nurtures the human being; the male produces the citizen of the world outside, the bearer of God-ordained and man-sanctioned tradition. The seedbed and nursery of human education is the home, the family. Only from the fact that the commandment *רבו* makes child-rearing the object of *פרו* does marriage, the union of the two sexes, derive its moral significance and its great, Divine purpose, which is to help build and develop the world.

מלאו refers to society, to the state. The fact that every married couple is told **מלאו**, fill the earth, see to it that the earth becomes and remains filled with its noblest contents, an abundance of human beings, implies that the parents' task extends beyond the intimate sphere of their own home. Every parent is required to contribute his or her share in the establishment and preservation of as many human families on earth as possible. Every parent is responsible for the survival and prosperity of all these human beings.

וכבשה: This Divine commandment justifies and hallows the acquisition of personal property. Note, however, that this commandment comes only after the commandment dealing with marriage, family and society. The implication is that the acquisition of personal property is humanly and morally justifiable only if it is regarded as subordinate and conducive to the advancement of the purposes of marriage, family and society.

The blessing and the fourfold commandment dealing with marriage, the family, society and the acquisition of personal property is addressed to **זכר ונקבה**, male and female alike. It is true that, according to our Sages, the "defective" spelling (**כתיב חסר**) **וכבשה** implies that the commandment to make a living, to procure the material means required for marriage and for the establishment of a home, is addressed to the male alone. It is the God-ordained function of the male to work so that he may subdue the earth for the purposes of mankind. Thus, the commandment to marry and to establish a home is categorically binding only upon the male. Nevertheless, the fact that these commandments are actually directed to both sexes implies that the accomplishment of mankind's task to build up the world requires the harmonious cooperation of male and female on a basis of complete equality. If the female is exempt from the task of acquiring money and property, from the hard labor of "subduing the earth," it is only so that she may be free to devote herself to the nobler aspects of human life, the endeavors more closely related to the purposes of true humanity. It is the function of the female to manage and utilize what the male has acquired through his labor for the human and moral purposes of home and family. It is the female who makes the gains of the male's labor usable for their true purpose, and who sees to it that they are employed only to advance human welfare. **אדם מביא חיטין חיטין כוסס פשתן פשתן לובש**: The man brings home the wheat, but does he chew the wheat? He brings home the flax, but does he clothe himself in it? This argument is recorded in the Talmud (**יבמות**)

סג) as proof that, with respect to one's livelihood, the nobler aspects of human endeavor must be credited to the woman.

Initially, the Word of God (Genesis 1,27) introduces man and woman together into the work of creation as human beings, both of them created equally in the image of God and designated as His representatives on earth, their positions and tasks being assigned to both of them together. A subsequent Scriptural passage (ibid. 2,18) clearly makes a point of addressing itself particularly to the relationship between man and his wife in order to impress upon the man the paramount value and significance of his wife for every aspect of his own personality and for the fulfillment of his vocation and his life's purpose. As the "subduer of the earth" and as the winner of the material means enabling him to marry and establish a home, the man could easily come to view himself as the only real and indispensable factor on earth and, under the spell of this illusion, to act toward his wife in an overbearing manner. It seems that precisely for this reason the word of God seeks to make man aware of how helpless and joyless he would be without his wife, even in the midst of Paradise, no matter what his own strength and insight, and that only his wife can give him the support he needs to make him whole.

"It is not good that man should be alone" (Genesis 2,18). Man's purpose could never be adequately fulfilled by individuals acting alone. The momentous task that God has set for human beings is too great for any one person to carry upon his shoulders; it requires the collaboration of two human beings who share the labor and complete it by complementing one another. "I wish to create for him עֹזֵר כְּנֶגְדוֹ, a fitting helper." עֹזֵר (cf. אֹזֵר, אֶזֶר, עֹזֵר, עֹזֵרָה) denotes the kind of help that, by taking over a portion of the partner's share of the work to be done, enables that partner to concentrate his own energies on the work specifically assigned to him. In this manner each of the two partners enables the other to accomplish the aspects of the work specifically entrusted to him. As a result, it becomes possible for both partners, together, to accomplish the sum total of the work. This is division of labor, pure and simple.

Now if both partners, each in his own sphere of activity, are to achieve total satisfaction in their joint endeavor and are to make the best use of their personal energies and potential, thus ensuring the consummate accomplishment of that endeavor, then their division of labor presupposes that each of the two partners should be different

from the other in strength and potential. However, at the same time, the two should be bound together by such strong bonds of solidarity that they will complement one another and the weaknesses of the one partner will be compensated by the strengths of the other. This thought is expressed most significantly by the apposition **בנגדו נגד**. **נגד** assigns to one subject a position which is different from that of the other, but which nonetheless is determined by the other's position. The word **נגד** clearly places the woman on the same level as the man, while at the same time giving each a distinct position of creation and endeavor. The male cannot assume the position of the female; conversely, the female cannot occupy and hold the position of the male. But both of them are stationed, and working, on an equal level; working hand in hand, their functions interlock, as it were, with each doing his or her own share of the task that both must accomplish together as human beings. Also note that this division of labor between male and female was not a matter of convenience or accident. From the very outset, the female was created **בנגדו**, in such a manner that she could complement the work of the male. Man and woman were fashioned for each other, and both of them together were created for one and the same purpose. The man regards his wife as part of his very own being but at the same time as a creature distinct from himself. He calls her **אשה** because she was "taken from **איש**." She belongs to him. It is she that makes him whole; without her, his existence is only half a life. "For this reason a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh" (ibid. 2,24).

Here, then, we have the profound significance of marriage as an institution established by God.

II. Eve

The wife's position in relation to her husband is clearly reflected also in the story of the first fateful misstep of the first human couple in their life together. "She also gave some of it to the man [who was] with her and he ate" (Genesis 3,6). Adam then explains, "The woman whom You put at my side gave me of the tree and I ate" (ibid. 3,12).

It was neither greed on the part of Adam nor any gift of persuasion on the part of Eve that made Adam eat of the forbidden fruit. He ate of it because Eve herself had eaten from it and because she had given him

of the tree. Eve's behavior and Eve's judgment were decisive for her husband in his choice. He attempted to justify his act not with an excuse to the effect that he had been tempted by the fruit, or that Eve had persuaded him to eat of it, but with the fact that Eve had given him of the tree. He considered Eve's action sufficient justification for partaking of the forbidden fruit himself. After all, Eve was the creature whom God Himself had put at his side. Was Adam not supposed to cling to her, to become "one flesh," one single creature with her in all his endeavors and aspirations? If so, then they should remain united not only in their desires and aspirations but also in bearing the consequences of their actions. And now God's sentence closed the Paradise on earth to Adam and Eve and to their descendants over thousands of years to come. Man's expulsion from Paradise opened a new stage for the development of mankind through trials, purification and character training.

Let us see how God's sentence has established the position of woman during the course of mankind's journey through the ages, and how woman's position, even after the expulsion from Paradise, reflects the lofty significance of her life's purpose.

It has become customary to interpret the Biblical verse (Genesis 3, 16) **בַּעֲצָב תֵּלְדִי בָנִים** as a condemnation: "In pain shall you bear children." But even a cursory examination of all the relevant Scriptural passages should be sufficient to note that the root **עצב** is never used in Scripture to denote physical pain. **עצב** is a phonetic modification of **עזב** [to leave behind, to forsake, to let go, to relinquish]. Hence (as implied in the sharp **צ** sound) this verb has the connotation of parting from, or leaving, something with reluctance. It would thus be equivalent to "renunciation," and it is in this connotation that Scripture uses it most significantly to describe the newly-decreed destiny not only of the woman but also of the man. Of the woman it says: **אל האשה אמר הרבה: ארבה עצבונך והרנך בעצב תלדי בנים ואל אישך תשוקתך**. Of the man it says: **ולאדם אמר וגו' ארודה האדמה בעבורך בעצבונך תאכלנה כל ימי חיך** (ibid. 3,17). The use of the past tense in the two verses **אל האשה אמר**, **ולאדם אמר** stresses that God spoke to the woman before He spoke to the snake, and to the man before He spoke to the woman.* Before telling the woman **אל האשה אמר**, **אל האשה אמר**, **אל האשה אמר**, God had first told the man **ולאדם אמר**. This fact should contribute significantly to our proper interpretation of the words addressed by God to the woman.

* See Hirsch Commentary, Genesis 3, 14–15. (Ed.)

בַּעֲצוֹן: “renunciation.” This is the element of training that will henceforth be the distinguishing feature of man’s mental and moral work upon himself. Paradise on earth was lost through greed; only through renunciation can it be regained. The Paradise on earth will be opened only to those who have learned to renounce it and are capable of renouncing it. To renounce the gratification of sensual impulses and cherished desires for the sake of a higher purpose, to perform one’s duty in a spirit of renunciation and to find one’s happiness in so doing—that is the task through which human beings are henceforth to mature into men and women, and through which both man and woman are to preserve and demonstrate the Divine qualities inherent in them. The gates of Paradise will be locked to them in order that they may go through this training course. The earth will assume new forms in its relationship to man; henceforth, the destiny of the man, who was initially appointed to “subdue” the earth, will be בַּעֲצוֹן תֵּאֱכֹלָהּ, “you shall eat of it in resignation.” You will have to do without many things in order to earn just the bare bread of your existence.

This change in nature’s attitude toward man, in that nature will no longer gladly offer him its fruit without his working for it, will affect the woman no less than it will affect the man, for this particular Divine sentence to a life of renunciation includes the wife no less than her husband. However, the woman will be called upon to bear an even greater burden of renunciation than her husband. Her whole life will become an act of selfless devotion to the wellbeing of others, above all to the wellbeing of her husband and children. The true woman personifies duty gladly performed. She will take pleasure in the practice of עֲצוֹן; she will find her personal happiness in self-abnegation, in self-sacrifice for the happiness of her husband and children. Thus, the true woman, the true wife, is the noblest embodiment of the human being created in the image of God.

Having said to the man בַּעֲצוֹן תֵּאֱכֹלָהּ, God said to the woman הִרְבָּה עֲצוֹנֶיךָ וְהִרְבָּה אֲרָבָה עֲצוֹנֶיךָ וְהִרְבָּה בְּנֵיִם. “I will multiply your renunciation to even greater lengths,” and the same will apply to הִרְבָּה, your pregnancy, which will be a continuous surrender of your own life’s strength and energies to the existence and wellbeing of another person. בַּעֲצוֹן תֵּלְדִי בְּנֵיִם: in renunciation will you bear children. And we would say, “bear *and raise*” children, because the act of childbirth and the subsequent raising of the child is one continuous הִרְבָּה for the mother. (Phonetically, הִרְבָּה is a modified form of עָרָה, the state of being exposed, without cover

or protection, to outside impressions and influences. It is a condition which, in its most extreme form, ends in חרה, destruction by fire, complete consumption by an overwhelming force.)

God says to the woman further: ואל אישך תשוקתך והוא ימשל בך. "Your longing shall be for your husband and he will rule over you." The word תשוקה (from שוק, "leg," and שוק, "the market place" to which all men direct their steps and to which all roads lead) has the connotation of a strong movement toward an object of attraction. Your entire being and all your aspirations will be directed toward your husband. You will do everything in your power to win his love and approval and to make him happy. You will allow him to rule over you; you will submit to his will and allow him to guide you. This surrender on the part of the wife to her husband is a basic prerequisite for the unity of husband and wife. The husband cannot be the one to submit to his wife because the husband, in his position as זכר, is the upholder of the Divine and human traditions which are put into practice in the home through the institution of marriage and to which both husband and wife, together, should dedicate their united energies.

The very first commandment from God not to eat from the עץ הדעת was addressed to the man and, through him, also to the woman. Therefore, Adam should not have disobeyed God's commandment for the sake of Eve. Rather, Eve should have subordinated her own desires to the Will of God as communicated to her through Adam. So, too, the husband shall henceforth act as spokesman for the vocation decreed by God for all human beings, and shall see to it that these God-ordained tasks should be discharged also in his own marriage and in his own home. The subordinate role of a wife to her husband became more evident after nature's relationship toward man was changed (ארורה האדמה בעבורך) and the resulting reliance on man's labor for the maintenance of home and family.

But, contrary to the long-cherished popular notion that death was first brought to earth through the action of a woman, Adam perceived his wife as the mother of life. "Adam called his wife חיה because she had become the mother of all living" (Genesis 3,20). Adam viewed his wife as the upholder and instrument of immortality on earth and of the perpetuation of the parents in their children. That is why Adam called his wife חוה, not חיה (cf. יחוה דעת, the giver of spiritual life). She was not merely חיה, the giver of physical existence to her children; she was

the nurturer of her children's spiritual lives. This, indeed, is the unique, lofty vocation of every true mother, אִם כָּל הָי.

Therefore it was also Eve, not Adam, who named the first male child to be born on earth. All her exultation and sense of self-pride are evident from the triumphant manner in which she shouted out the name she had chosen for her first-born. (קַיִן, from קָוַן and קָנָה; cf. צִיד from צוּר and צִדָּה. There is a conceptual relationship between קָוַן, the expression of grief or pain over the loss of a possession, and קָנָה, or קָנָא, to vindicate the right of ownership.) קָנִיתִי אִישׁ אֶת ה' "I have acquired a man with God!" Eve proudly exclaims (Genesis 4,1). This child is mine! I have acquired him jointly with God by sacrificing my own heart's blood and my own life's strength! Could this exaggerated self-confidence (probably based on a mixture of motives) with which Eve carried and nurtured her child beneath her heart have had an adverse effect on the temperament and attitudes of her son, with dire consequences in his later life? This is a question every mother would do well to consider.

It was also Eve, the mother who, following the murder of her second son by his own brother, named her third son Seth, "replacement," because she regarded him as a God-given substitute for the son she had lost.

III. Sarah

From the mother of all mankind we now turn to the mother of the Jewish people. At the very outset let us state that all the momentous tests and acts of self-surrender with which Abraham demonstrated his awareness of God, his trust in God, his loyalty and obedience toward God, and his love of mankind took place in close union with his wife, Sarah. Indeed, Abraham could hardly have gone through any of these trials if Sarah had not been his faithful companion in his long wanderings through life, if Sarah, too, had not been inspired by the spirit that moved her husband, and if Sarah had not shared his every good endeavor and aspiration as his close and faithful companion. The spiritual and moral halo that crowned Abraham's head was also an eternal diadem, an everlasting ornament, on the forehead of Sarah. For when Abraham left his native country, his birthplace and his family to follow the call of his God, isolating himself from the world around him for the sake of his God, Sarah, too, left her loved ones and, for

the sake of that same God, followed her husband upon his lonely road in the midst of the rest of mankind. Not without good cause do our Sages comment on the Scriptural passage *וַאֲחֵי הַנַּפְשׁ אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ בְּחָרֵן* "and the souls whom they had made in Haran" (Genesis 12,5) that, while Abraham had won souls for God from among the men, Sarah had done the same work among the women. True to God's directive, *לֵךְ לְךָ* "Go for yourself," go on your own, isolated path, Abraham and Sarah moved into the desolate southern region of Palestine, far from the communal life of the cities. The sacrifice this entailed seems implied in the use of the *hiphil* form of the verb in *וַיַּעֲתֵק מִשָּׁם הַהָרָה*, telling how Abraham first set out for the mountains (ibid. 12,8). The form used is not the *kal*, "he moved on," but the *hiphil*, "he gave orders to move on." Abraham had to wield his authority in order to get the members of his household to move from the hospitable locality of Shechem and the grove of Moreh. And when Abraham settled in the mountains, we are told *וַיִּטֵּא אֶהֱלָה*, "and he pitched *her* tent," not *אֶהְלֵי*, "his tent." The Sages take due note of the fact that Abraham pitched Sarah's tent before pitching his own. His first concern was always for Sarah. But then Sarah's tent was also the tent of Abraham; *אֶהֱלָה*, the tent of Abraham was actually the tent of Sarah, *אֶהְלָה*. She was the essential spirit of the home. Such delicate etymological and orthographic nuances are probably found only in the speech and spelling of our Holy Tongue. It is these fine nuances that reflect the spirit of the Hebrew language and of Judaism.

Mother Sarah was beautiful. As our Sages put it in their interpretation of her Scriptural obituary, Sarah was as beautiful at the age of twenty as she had been at the age of seven, and as innocent at the age of one hundred as she had been when she was twenty. We have already pointed out in another essay* the contrast between the time-honored view of our Sages and the notions of our own modern age on this subject. We usually say of a woman that she is as innocent as a child and as beautiful as a young girl. Our Sages, on the other hand, saw the ideal of beauty not in girlhood but in childhood, before the little one's pure, angelic features could be marred by the cruel paintbrush of passion. They looked for the ideal of womanly virtue in the maiden whose mind had already matured but whose heart was still young enough to be capable of enthusiasm for everything noble, great and sublime. Alas for the era that equates innocence with simplemindedness, and therefore

* "Beauty and Long Life," p. 137 in this volume. (Ed.)

expects to find innocence only in children and can find no other praise for youth except beauty!

Mother Sarah was beautiful but she did not know it. She did not even think that she was beautiful, as we learn from what Abraham said to her when famine forced them to leave their remote habitation in the mountains and move into Egypt, close to the cities and the camp of Pharaoh's court. "Look," Abraham said to Sarah, הֲנֵה נָא יְדַעְתִּי "but I do know that you are a beautiful woman" (Genesis 12,11).*

From what we know about the precautions taken by our forefathers during their sojourns in ancient Egypt and Phoenicia, we have reason to believe that virgins were safer from attack in the licentious cultures of those countries than married women. A foreigner who was known to be still a virgin enjoyed more protection from molestation than a married woman visiting from abroad. For this reason Abraham felt that Sarah would be in less danger if he identified her as his unmarried sister rather than as his wife. Sarah, however, was too innocent to be aware of her beauty; she could not believe that her charms might prove dangerous for her, not even when her husband pointed it out to her. She was simply not vain enough to believe that the deception suggested by Abraham was necessary. Only when Abraham explained to her that he himself might be in danger of being killed if it became known that Sarah was his wife did she agree to Abraham's plan. She did so not in order to protect herself but only for the sake of her husband's safety. However, Abraham had forgotten about the moral standards that prevailed among the princes and the mighty of the land. It did not occur to him that they might not respect even the honor of a virgin. As a result, only an act of direct Divine intervention saved Sarah from harm.

Sarah had no children. This was the only respect in which her husband's hopes for their marriage had remained unfulfilled. What if Abraham and Sarah would have to abandon this one hope in their old age? The accomplishment of Abraham's mission depended on whether he would have a son. He had received God's promise that he would become the progenitor of an entire nation that would be a blessing to all the other nations on earth. But now it seemed that his marriage would end without having produced even one child. If Abraham were to die childless, what would have been the purpose of his life? Who would not understand the pain that Sarah felt at this thought? How happy she

* In his Commentary to this verse, R. Hirsch explains that the word נָא is used to emphasize a statement that is contrary to another's belief. (Ed.)

would have been to bear Abraham a son, and to raise and nurture him for his future calling as heir to Abraham's mission! But now it seemed that, at least judging from human standards, she would no longer be able to fulfill this wish of hers.

Nevertheless, Sarah wanted to come as close as possible to the fulfillment of her desire. She wanted to come as close as possible to mothering a son for her husband. If she was no longer physically capable of conceiving and bearing a child for Abraham, she could still help cause a child to be born to her husband and then become the child's nurturer and educator in every respect as if she, Sarah, had been his true mother. Accordingly, she asked Abraham to take her maidservant as his second wife. When this woman would bear Abraham's child, Sarah and Abraham would raise the child as their own.

Only with great difficulty could Sarah persuade Abraham to do what she wished. Here again Scripture uses the word נָא to show how much effort it cost Sarah to overcome Abraham's reluctance: הֲנֵנּוּ נָא עֲצֹרֵי ה' מִלֵּרֶת בָּא נָא אֶל שַׁפְּחֹתַי אֹלֵי אֲבוֹנָה מִמֶּנּוּ. Look, I am the only one to blame for your having no children. Please come to my maidservant; perhaps I will have a child through her (Genesis 16,2). At last Abraham acceded to Sarah's request, and Sarah gave him her maidservant to be his wife.

Unfortunately, Sarah had miscalculated. Her plan was based on the assumption that, even as Abraham's wife, Hagar would remain her maidservant. Only under such an arrangement could Sarah hope to obtain complete, unimpeded control over any child born of Hagar, remove him completely from Hagar's educational influence and raise him entirely in the spirit of Abraham. But Sarah failed to take into consideration that a woman who had become Abraham's wife and carried his child beneath her heart could not be expected to remain a slave. Her pregnancy with Abraham's child had made Hagar a free woman. As soon as she was aware that she was expecting Abraham's child she was seized with a compelling thirst for freedom and felt she could no longer submit to the authority of a mistress.

Sarah's hopes had been deceived, but then they had been based on self-deception all along. For a nation that was to have entrusted to its care the spiritual and moral future of all the other nations of the world, it would not be enough to have a man such as Abraham as its progenitor. In addition to being sired by Abraham, it would have to be conceived and borne by a woman such as Sarah so that the spirit of Abraham, coupled with the nature of Sarah, might be perpetuated

in that nation. A woman of Egypt would not be a fit mother for a son of Abraham.

The imprint of their origins has survived remarkably well, clear and undiluted, in the character of the Ishmaelites, the progeny of Hagar fathered by Abraham. The monotheism of Abraham, the Hamitic sensuality and thirst for freedom that stamped the personality of Hagar, and the virtual fanatic belief in the providence of Almighty God, drawn, as it were, by Hagar from the “well of the Living One Who sees me”—this mixture of qualities has shaped the traits for which the Arabs are known to this day and with which they have made their own contribution, in the form of poetry and scholarship, to the spiritual symposium of humanity.

Sarah was already ninety years old and still childless when God reconfirmed His promise to Abraham that he would be the progenitor of the nation of God, and this Divine promise was exalted to become an everlasting covenant by virtue of Abraham’s circumcision. But Abraham was only one of the parties in the covenant; the participation of Sarah was essential to its realization. When God reconfirmed His promise to Abraham, Sarah was included in the covenant as a matter of course. A nation of God could be produced only from a union of a man such as Abraham and a woman such as Sarah. Therefore, as a supplement to the covenant marked by his circumcision, Abraham is told by God, “You shall no longer call your wife Sarai but Sarah, and I will bless her and (as part of My covenant with you) I have already appointed for you a son from her. . . she will become nations, leaders of nations shall be descended from her” (Genesis 17,15–16).

From that time on, both Abram and Sarai were to have new names reflecting their Divinely-ordained purpose. Abram became Abraham, from **אבר** **הם**, to express the soaring (**אבר**—wing) spiritual energy of the multitude of nations. The text reads **אב המון גוים**, not **אבי המון גוים**.^{*} Abraham would be the spiritual father of the nations that, without his spirit to guide them, would become a lawless mob, **המון**. Sarai became Sarah. Contrary to popular assumption, **שרי** cannot very well denote “my princess;” if the word had that meaning, what would be the explanation for the plural form and the pronoun? Also, the feminine suffix would be missing. The Hebrew term for “my princess” would not be **שרי**

^{*} One would expect the text to use the construct (**סמיכות**) form **אבי**, indicating specific paternity (e.g., **יום הוא אבי כנען**). The absolute (**נפרד**) form **אב** indicates the generic concept of “fatherhood.” (Ed.)

but שרתי. It therefore seems that the difference in meaning between these two names, שרי (from שרה) and שרה (the feminine form of שר, from שור), lies in the difference between the two roots שרה and שור, both of which seem to denote dominion or rulership. The words שרית in שרית עם אלקים (Genesis 32,29) and למרבה המשרה in המשרה (Isaiah 9,6) are derived from שרה. The word שרים in בני שרים ישרו (Proverbs 8,16) is derived from שור. Both these root words have the connotation of "dominion" and "prince," but each implies a different concept of rulership. שרה, related to שרע and טרה, i.e., "to extend," "to be more than," describes the prince as the one who stands out from among all the others because he is greater and mightier than the rest; thus, it defines the prince as he appears in the sight of the world. שור, the root of משורה, "measure," or more specifically, "periphery," has us see the prince as the moral authority who sets the "measure" of all things under his rule and who, by his personal example and influence, encloses and keeps all the individual and collective endeavors in his nation within the periphery of law and order.

שרי, as derived from שרה (as שרי is derived from שרה), identified Sarah merely as the mistress who stood out from among all the others. שרה, as derived from שור, on the other hand, describes her as the moderating, tone-setting authority. This, in fact, is the true function of motherhood in general and of all true mothers among our people in particular. Gifted with a delicate sense of morality and decency, these mothers bear within their own hearts the fine, sensitive measure of what is good and right, and by their personal example they become the nurturers and guardians of morality and self-control. Crudeness, baseness, licentiousness and immorality will keep their distance, of their own accord, from the place where a true daughter of Sarah reigns as wife and mother. The very presence of such a woman will drive away rudeness and lack of moderation. The soaring spirit of Abraham and the moral standards guarded by Sarah—these are the outstanding individuals whom God has appointed to educate the nations of the world.

Sarah was ninety years old when she learned that she was to bear for her husband, who was one hundred, the son upon whom the promised nation was to be founded. When Abraham was told that Sarah would bear him a son, he laughed and thought to himself, "Shall a child be born to a man of one hundred and shall a woman of ninety indeed give birth?" (Genesis 17,17). And when Sarah heard this promise reconfirmed, she

laughed within herself, "That I should be given vigor again now that I am already worn out, and my lord, too, is an old man!" (ibid. 18,12).

At this point we should note parenthetically that when Sarah addresses Abraham, or speaks of him within the hearing of others, she never refers to him as "my lord." In the close relationship between Jewish husbands and wives there is no room for such expressions of subordination from either partner. Nevertheless, in her thoughts Sarah regards him with deep respect as her lord, whose wishes and endeavors she is happy to serve. Furthermore, let us note that it was probably not an ancient Eastern custom, but merely a custom in the family of Abraham, that the wife did not appear before her husband's guests or participate in their conversation. We can surmise this from the question that the three guests ask Abraham, "Where is Sarah, your wife?" In other words, the guests are surprised that Sarah is not there to serve them their refreshments. Abraham replies (Genesis 18,9), *הנה באהל*, she is inside the tent, of course. It is Sarah's sense of propriety that keeps her from coming out to join her husband and his visitors.

It appeared ridiculous to both Abraham and Sarah that they should have a child at their advanced age. And when their son was born the rest of the world, too, laughed at the sight of the ninety-year-old mother suckling the baby at her breast and at the claims of these two aged parents, with one foot in their graves, that they were raising this child to be the progenitor of a nation that would subdue the other nations.

This element of the ridiculous was of such a basic significance in the birth of Abraham's son that it was only right for Abraham and Sarah to be made aware of it. Therefore, when Sarah was ashamed to admit that she had laughed within herself, God told her not to deny having laughed (Genesis 18,15). As a matter of fact, her laughter was so significant that it was immortalized in the name of the baby. *צחוק* (as distinct from *שחוק*, which is used primarily to denote the laughter of joy) has the connotation of "ridiculous" or "absurd;" it implies a person's reaction to unexpected contrasts between the tiny and the gigantic in phenomena, in actions or in expectations. The idea that a couple in the tenth decade of life, who until then had been childless, should suddenly be capable of producing a son, and that this incredible event should be capped with the preposterous expectation that this son would be the progenitor of a nation that would have an impact on the future of all mankind, seemed ridiculous to all human judgment. And it was entirely proper that it should appear to be so. From the very first stirrings of expectation

until the ultimate realization of its great mission on earth, the nation descended from Abraham and Isaac was to be a nation of God, an indication of the workings of Divine Providence, a proof that loyalty to God and trust in Him will ultimately win the day. The beginnings of this nation, its survival despite all odds, its hopes for the future—all these “ridiculous” visions would come true despite expectations and contrary to the normal course of natural events. This nation should indeed appear ridiculous with its absurd claims and self-assurance, but ultimately יצחק, it will be the one to have the last laugh on earth. While the hopes of all the other nations will come to naught, the hopes of this one nation will be fulfilled. That is why, when this son was born to her, Sarah said, “God has prepared laughter for me; all who hear of this will laugh at me” (Genesis 21,6). But, as she lovingly cuddled the infant to her breast, she exultantly added, מי מלל לאברהם “who has explained to Abraham even in part the more profound significance of my nursing Isaac?” (היניקה בנים שרה *מלילות. cf. מלל means to give partial details; cf. מלילות.) “Sarah has nursed *children!*” Of all those who had laughed, none had realized that, with this one infant Isaac, Sarah was nurturing the future of a whole nation at her breast, היניקה בנים שרה.

But no one looked with so much derision on these hopes for the little latecomer, and gave such crude expression to his contempt, as did the infant's brother, Ishmael, who was already an adult in the full vigor of young manhood. In connection with the attitude of people in general to the birth of Isaac the text uses the words כל השמע יצחק לי. Of Ishmael, on the other hand, we are told that he was actually מצחק! His attitude of frank contempt proved that Ishmael would never be capable of assuming Abraham's heritage and of preserving it in partnership with his half-brother Isaac. He therefore had to leave Abraham's home, and, in order that he would have nothing more to do with Isaac's future life, his mother, too, was expelled from Abraham's household as a maid-servant (שם על שכמה). Sarah's role as the deciding and controlling authority in this incident shows us, once again, the position of importance enjoyed by the wife in the Jewish home.

By the time Sarah died at the age of one hundred twenty-seven, Isaac was a mature man of thirty-seven; yet he was all but shattered by the loss of his aged mother. He felt a gap in his life that nothing and no one, not even his father Abraham, was able to fill. He remained

* See Hirsch Commentary, Genesis 21,7. (Ed.)

inconsolable until he brought home Rebecca as his wife and saw in her a spiritual reincarnation, as it were, of Sarah. *ויבאה יצחק האהלה שרה אמו*. She became his wife, he loved her, and only then was Isaac comforted for the loss of his mother.

This account is not only the most beautiful epitaph that could be written for a woman but also a brilliant example of the respect in which Jewish sons hold their mothers. With the death of Sarah the home of Abraham had lost its moving spirit; when Isaac brought Rebecca home as his wife, the spirit of Sarah returned to the home of Abraham.

Our Sages tell us that as long as Sarah was alive, the Presence of God hovered in a cloud above the tent. When Sarah died the cloud departed, but it returned when Rebecca entered there. As long as Sarah was alive, the bread in her home was blessed. When Sarah died that blessing departed, but it was reinstated with the coming of Rebecca. As long as Sarah was alive, the doors of her home were wide open in generosity to all those in need. When Sarah died this generosity ceased, but it was resumed when Rebecca came. As long as Sarah was alive there was light in the home from one Sabbath to the next. When Sarah died the light went out, but it was rekindled when Rebecca took her place. Thus we see that already in the days of Abraham the presence and blessings of God, and the spirit of humanity and serenity in the home, were dependent on the presence and the activities of the woman within.

Abraham's own love and respect for Sarah are evident from his tears and lamentations at the time of her death and from the care with which he made the arrangements for her burial. His mourning was not put on for public display; he withdrew into his tent to weep beside his wife's remains *ויבא אברהם לספר לשרה ולבכתה*. When Abraham finally rises from the presence of his dead, whose loss affects him, as her husband, more than it does anyone else in the family, he does so only to purchase a burial property that will be deeded to him and therefore safe from disturbance by others. (In the days of Abraham, the land on which Sarah was buried was still alien soil.)

Note that the legal formula that eventually came into use for the "acquisition" of a wife in Jewish marriage harks back to *קידה קידה משרה*, the legal formula employed by Abraham in his purchase of the burial property. It is significant that the legal basis for Jewish marriages today should thus recall the first Jewish marriage, Abraham's love for his wife which endured beyond her death. This historic association

should have the following succinct message for every Jewish man and woman as they enter marriage: Look upon Abraham, your father, and upon Sarah, who was to give birth to you, and love and honor one another, as did these two, your original father and mother, until the end of your days.

Of course there are those who point with some irony to this legal formula. "So, you see, Jewish men acquire their wives by purchase," they say. Yes, it is true; the Jew "acquires" his wife. Note, however, that he acquires her not from others but from herself, out of her own free will, and then she remains his own most precious possession, his own most sacred treasure, even beyond death.

IV. Rebecca

The most eloquent, complete refutation of claims that Jewish husbands are guilty of "oriental-style" disregard for their wives is the painstaking care with which we see Abraham supervise the choice of a wife for his son Isaac. Only one who is himself thoroughly convinced of the wife's crucial role in the future of the home could exercise such meticulous care in this matter. Abraham has Eliezer, the oldest of his servants, the one who is in charge of his entire household, take a most solemn vow that he will not choose for Abraham's son a daughter of the Canaanite nation in whose midst he dwells but will travel to Abraham's native land, to Aram, in order to secure from there a suitable wife for Isaac.

Idolatry, that spiritual aberration of mankind, was no less prevalent in Aram than it was in Canaan. However, it did not produce as much moral corruption in Aram as it did among the Canaanites. We know from the Book of Leviticus that the most outrageous orgies of Hamite licentiousness took place in Canaan and Mitzrayim. There is always the possibility that mental aberrations can be corrected by the proper education, but moral corruption produced by inherited disposition and by the personal example of others can become so deep-seated in an individual that it is difficult, if not impossible, to effect a complete change in him. The tent of Abraham was well protected from the influences of Aramite idolatry, but every effort had to be made to keep Canaanite immorality from its threshold.

The dowry required of the first bride in Jewish history was purity of character, a fact reflected also in the manner in which Eliezer sought

to accomplish his mission. The text reads ויקח העבד עשרה גמלים מגמלי אדניו וילך וכל טוב אדניו בידו, ויקם וילך אל ארם נהרים אל עיר נחור (Genesis 24,10). The words ויקם וילך that come only after the reference to the paraphernalia he takes with him show that the first וילך in the passage does not allude to Eliezer's departure but to his preparations for his journey, to the manner in which he sets out on his mission. When he comes to his master's native land he does not want to appear as a wealthy gentleman but as a servant, a slave. He wanted to be received and accepted not for his appearance but for himself, for the person he was. He took ten camels from among his master's camels, choosing those that looked every bit like the camels of a wealthy man, but he himself traveled on foot, leading the camels. Moreover, the camels did not bear the precious gifts intended for the bride; Eliezer had taken them only for the transportation of the future bride and retinue (Genesis 24,61; cf. Ecclesiastes 10,7). The gifts for the bride were carried by Eliezer himself.

Both the master and his servant were convinced that Divine Providence was especially concerned that Isaac should get the wife best suited for him. Both Abraham and Eliezer raised their eyes heavenward, praying that God might send them His angel to show them the right path to the right wife "for His servant, for Isaac," for the one whose whole life was consecrated to the service of God and who, in seeking a wife, sought only כלה, the completion of his own place in life so that he might be able to serve God as a "whole" human being.

But how would Eliezer, that servant of the house of Abraham, go about seeking the maiden capable of filling the gap left in the home of Abraham when Sarah died, a maiden who, in partnership with Isaac, would be able to carry on the great heritage of Abraham and Sarah? He would recognize her not by her wealth, nor by her physical charms, nor by her intellectual accomplishments, but only by her character, by the humanity and morality of her heart, by her readiness to help others—in short, by her גמילות חסד, that character trait which has remained the most distinct identifying mark of the sons and daughters of Abraham to this day. The maiden whom Eliezer would recognize as the wife sent by God for Isaac, His servant, would be one who, when Eliezer would ask her to let him drink from her pitcher of water, would offer water not only to him but also to his ten camels that were waiting some distance away (the text reads אל הבאר, not על הבאר). And by the way, let it be noted that a camel is capable of drinking quite a large quantity of

water at one time so that enough water is stored up in his body to last him a week if necessary. (One camel raised in Paris is known to have regularly drunk four buckets of water at a time.)

The maiden whom Eliezer would identify as the Divinely-chosen wife for Isaac would be one that would have compassion not only for human beings but also for tired, thirsty animals, and would know how to express her compassion not in idle, sentimental phrases but by prompt, vigorous action taken on her own accord, without first being asked to do so. In short, she would be a maiden within whom there was the same spark of practical loving-kindness that burned so brightly within the hearts of Abraham and Sarah and upon the altar of their tent. It seems that even in those days this Abrahamite character trait was not generally found among other people but primarily in the clan of Abraham. Consequently, this was the one character trait by which Eliezer felt he would be able to recognize the proper bride for Abraham's son.

Had such purity of character not been the primary object of Eliezer's concern, and had it not been such a rare phenomenon in his day, it would have been quite easy for Eliezer to find a maiden from the land of Aram to marry the only son of a wealthy man such as Abraham. However, the task at hand was to find the right wife for a man such as Isaac, the servant of God. It was therefore essential that Eliezer put the maiden to the test, trusting that, with God's guidance and providence, he would be able to accomplish his mission.

He had hardly uttered these thoughts to himself when Rebecca appeared at the well. She turned out to be Rebecca, daughter of Bethuel, the son of Milcah, wife of Abraham's own brother. If, as tradition has it, Yiskah of Genesis 11,29 was identical with Sarah, Rebecca was closely related to Isaac by double family ties. Her grandfather was the brother of Abraham and her grandmother the sister of Sarah. At any rate, if both the Biblical narrative and the information volunteered by Rebecca put more stress on Bethuel's mother than on his father, then Milcah must have been a most praiseworthy, distinguished woman, sufficiently outstanding to make her granddaughter still proudly identify herself to a stranger as the granddaughter of Milcah. This little detail, too, shows that these "Oriental" women must have been regarded as something more than the insignificant, nameless figures portrayed by common prejudice.

Consider the delicate brushstrokes with which the Word of God

depicts the splendid character and behavior of this maiden. והנער טבת מראה מאר בחולה ואיש לא ידעה (Genesis 24,16). She was very beautiful, a virgin, ואיש לא ידעה! This phrase could not have been intended simply to identify her status as a virgin, for that is already indicated earlier by the term בחולה. Also, elsewhere in Scripture the description of a virgin is לא ידעה איש (cf. Judges 11,39); in this narrative, however, the text reads איש לא ידעה. The usual way of describing a virgin is simply to state that she had never had intimate relations with a man. In the story of Rebecca, however, the purpose apparently is to emphasize her chaste personality, which was such that no man had ever dared make any advances to her. The pure, virtuous personality of a truly modest woman has a magic power that drives away everything base and ignoble from her immediate sphere; no eye would dare cast a lewd glance upon the majesty of a truly pure woman: איש לא ידעה.

Rebecca went down to the well, filled her pitcher and came up again. Eliezer, the servant, ran to meet her. "Let me drink a little water from your pitcher," he begged her. "Drink, my lord," she replied, quickly lowering the pitcher onto her palm and giving him to drink. After having let Eliezer drink his fill, she said to him, "I will draw water also for your camels until they have finished drinking." Saying this, she quickly emptied the contents of her pitcher into the trough, ran back to the well to draw more water, and drew enough water for all his camels. This brief Biblical sketch portrays her as a wonderful person. She is kind and courteous, even addressing a mere servant as "my lord." She moves swiftly if there is anything she can do to help another person. She is not garrulous; she does not waste many words to explain what she is about to do. She first allows Eliezer to drink; only thereafter does she inform him that she also wishes to attend to the needs of the camels. She does not pour the rest of the water from her pitcher to the ground but pours it into the trough. Though she may have to run back and forth from the well eighty times, she accomplishes this arduous work for the thirsty animals with cheerful speed and vigor, and she is generous with her time and effort. At the same time she is careful not to waste any of the little water that is still left in the pitcher. Is this not a portrait of a truly splendid woman? She does not spare any labor, no matter how difficult, to promote the comfort and well-being of others. At the same time she attaches due importance even to the smallest result of her work lest it be wasted for no good reason. See, too, how exuberantly happy Rebecca is at the thought that she has been able to refresh Eliezer's camels with

cool water from the well. When Eliezer asks her, "Would there be room in your father's house for us to stay overnight?" she quickly replies, "There is also plenty of straw and fodder with us, and also a place to stay overnight." She first thinks of the food the animals need in addition to the drink, and only thereafter of the lodging for the man.

This was indeed the proper wife for the son of Abraham, the right wife for Isaac, the servant of God!

Note how the rest of the story, too, refutes the fanciful notions of Eastern culture. Contrary to popular notion, the girl is not "bought" from her parents with a "bride price." Only when Rebecca's family realizes that the meeting of Eliezer and Rebecca was an act of Divine Providence, so that they cannot do anything else but give their consent to the proposed marriage, does Rebecca receive gold and silver jewelry and fine garments. Her family receives only gifts of secondary importance, *מגדנות*, literally "fine fruits," perhaps preserves. Also, no arrangements are made against Rebecca's will. "We will ask the girl," the family says, and only after Rebecca has readily agreed to the marriage does her family hand her over to Eliezer.

It is significant that the one person whose wishes should have been regarded as decisive in this arrangement has nothing to say in the matter. Isaac, whose wishes should have mattered the most, remains silent throughout. While Rebecca is asked for her approval before any arrangements are made in her behalf, Isaac permits his father and his father's faithful servant complete freedom to act for him in a matter which, more than anything else, will be decisive for his personal happiness. Does this story not reflect a character trait in the family of Abraham that still predominates within the families of Abraham's true spiritual heirs today, promoting their true happiness throughout life? How much ridicule has been wasted on the fact that until very recent times Jewish marriages were made not by the well-known blind deity with his quiver of arrows but solely on the basis of thorough, rational consideration by the parents and families of both parties!

Here again we see a time-honored Jewish custom, with its good common sense, that has proven more effective than any other approach in the promotion of personal happiness. In other societies marriages are made by emotions as blind as their god of love. Passion acts as the matchmaker, thus excluding, from the very outset, the role of calm reflection in a matter where dispassionate consideration would seem to be of the essence. Partners whose emotions are blinded by passion

never get to know one another before marriage; as a result, they enter marriage with notions and expectations that have no relation to reality. But very soon reality brings disillusionment, chilling the passions and estranging the partners from one another. Jewish marriages, on the other hand, are made on the basis of calm deliberation and careful reflection, testing whether the prospective partners are mutually compatible in their emotions, character, personality and all the other factors that determine marital happiness. These are considerations and reflections of which neither the young man nor the young woman are capable but which are within the capability of the parents, relatives and friends of both parties. Only when good common sense would approve of the union are the couple's feelings toward one another taken into account. That is why statistics show a disproportionately higher percentage of happy marriages among Jews than among members of other societies. Therefore, too, in Jewish marriages the wedding* is not the climax but only the highly promising seeding of love that unfolds more and more with every passing day of the marriage. This is a love that, as the partners pass through life's days of sunshine and tempest, becomes ever more firmly rooted and bursts into ever more glorious flower as the two hearts grow into one another and the two souls, deeply involved in the serious business of life, become aware of what they mean to one another and realize what a treasure each has in the other. An Isaac who chooses his Rebecca on his own may well make a mistake, but an Isaac who permits his father Abraham to bring him his Rebecca will rarely be disillusioned.

Note, finally, the striking contrast between the Aramite family on the one hand and the family of Abraham on the other. See Isaac permitting his father to act for him in the most serious decision of his life. On the other hand, see Rebecca's brother, Laban, rudely pushing his aged father, Bethuel, aside when this most important family concern is discussed, impudently lording it over the family and shoving the "old man" into a corner like so much castoff household refuse. Even when the family is called upon to give its formal sanction to the proposed marriage, Laban does not allow his father to speak before him. The "old man" does not get any of the delicacies that Eliezer has brought for Rebecca's family. It is the son and his mother that do all the talking (with the son speaking before his mother, which was considered proper), and when the bride

* R. Hirsch alludes to the German term for "wedding," *Hochzeit*, literally "high time" or "climax." (Ed.)

receives the family's blessing as she leaves her home to go with Eliezer, it is not her father but her brother who blesses the departing daughter.

In view of the foregoing, it certainly was all the better for the future of the House of Abraham that Rebecca, its second matriarch, was able to depart at an early age from a home environment which seems to have been marked by rudeness and vulgarity, and in which she, with her pure and kindly heart, had grown up like a rose among thorns. It was a good thing, too, that Isaac had already reached the mature age of forty when he took as his wife the daughter of Bethuel the Aramite and the sister of Laban the Aramite.

And so Rebecca came to Isaac. He led her into Sarah's tent as the reincarnation of his mother. She became his wife, he loved her, and only through this beloved wife did he find comfort for the loss of his mother.

Even as Sarah was to Abraham, so we see Rebecca, too, as a steadfast, loyal companion to her husband, Isaac, in all his trial-filled wanderings through life. Indeed, this daughter of Aram had entered into the spirit of the household and mission of Abraham so completely that, long before Isaac himself could do so, she was able to judge, from the Abrahamite viewpoint, the worthiness and unworthiness of her two dissimilar sons to be the heirs of Abraham and Isaac, and to open her husband's eyes to these realities.

An unprejudiced, sober examination of the much-maligned story of Isaac's blessing will show that Rebecca's ruse, which resulted in Jacob's receiving his father's blessing instead of Esau, was simply an attempt by a discerning wife to help her husband attain better understanding in a question crucial to the future of their family and its mission. If Rebecca's act had been nothing but a ruse that could be and was, of course, quickly discovered, how could she have expected it to yield the true results she desired? Above all, how could anyone imagine that a woman of Rebecca's character would care for, much less build her hopes upon, a blessing obtained by trickery and deliberate deceit?

Whether we interpret Isaac's blessing as a father's testamentary disposition to establish the future leadership of his family, or whether we construe it as a promise made under Divine inspiration, to be fulfilled as part of Divine Providence, in either case this blessing would have lost all meaning if it had involved an act of deceit on the part of Rebecca. A testamentary disposition based on false presumptions is null and void, and the God of heaven and earth, Who had chosen Abraham for the

sole purpose that Abraham should bequeathe to his descendants the legacy to practice צדקה ומשפט, and Who had made the fulfillment of all His own promises dependent upon the accomplishment of this purpose, cannot be deceived, nor could He have allowed this legacy and His promises to stand on a foundation of deceit. Not even a heathen would consider one of his fetishes ready to enter into such a scheme. And certainly no one could have been farther removed from such behavior than Rebecca, the successor of Sarah in the household of Abraham. But Esau, that “hunter with his mouth,” understood how to deceive and capture his father’s heart and had succeeded so well in hoodwinking the prematurely aged and nearly blind Isaac that the latter truly believed that Esau was the proper inheritor of the moral and spiritual legacy of Abraham. This despite the fact that Esau had so little understanding for the Abrahamite vocation that, for instance, he believed he had satisfied the requirements of his Divinely-ordained calling by adding one wife of Abrahamite descent to his Canaanite wives who had caused his parents so much grief by their conduct and their lack of all sense for morality.

At this point Rebecca, the sensible wife who surely must have tried often, without success, to disillusion Isaac, finally devised a drastic plan to make her husband realize how gullible he was and how, in his blindness, he could be deceived even by so obvious a disguise as that of Jacob pretending to be Esau. She deceived her husband in order to cure him of his illusions. That is why Isaac was seized with such terror when he realized that he had been tricked. Immediately, the blindfold fell from his eyes. Quickly composing himself, he added, deliberately and of his own free will, the words that confirmed his blessing: גם ברוך יהי.

We have dwelt upon this episode in the life of our matriarch not in order to find an apology for her act, nor because of any feeling on our part that we must not allow any shadows to attach to the biographical pictures of our great forebears. We completely disagree with that view. Our ancestors were never presented to us as angelic models to emulate in every respect; indeed, had they been presented to us as angelic creatures, their example for us to follow in our own lives would have been far less ideal and instructive than it actually is. If we were to discover no shortcomings in their personalities, they would appear to us like higher beings who, free of all human passions and weaknesses, never had to struggle against sin and were never in need of an incentive to virtue. We would conclude that, given our own human imperfections,

any effort on our part to emulate their saintly qualities would be doomed to failure. Precisely by not concealing their shortcomings from us, the Word of God has brought our patriarchs and matriarchs closer to us as human beings, human like ourselves and exposed to the same struggles and temptations. And if, nevertheless, they attained that high sense of morality and loyalty to their calling that made them worthy of God's nearness, they thereby demonstrated to us the heights that are within our own power to attain, despite our weaknesses and imperfections.

Also, our Sages never turn a blind eye to the shortcomings of our forefathers; on the contrary, they demonstrate how each error of our great ancestors had its own unhappy consequences. The commentators on the Word of God, including, for instance, the רמב"ן,* follow our Sages also in this respect.

Still, we believe that the lives of our forefathers should be understood in terms of pragmatic historical research, which seeks to explain the individual features of their lives as part of the total picture of their personalities and aspirations. In so doing, this approach seeks to trace the delicate allusions that should not escape the attention of the reader. We have presented our own interpretation of the story of Isaac's blessing because that incident can be meaningful to us when seen in this light. A step by step analysis of the narrative confirms our view.

Now let us consider the true nobility shown by Rebecca and Jacob following this incident. It is quite common among baser characters that, once the damage has been done, it is the aggressor, even more than the victim, that works himself into a rage of hostility and hatred, as if seeking to justify his action, persuading himself that the victim had fully deserved what had been done to him, and more. But in this case, even after Isaac had reconfirmed his blessing in favor of Jacob, Esau remains Rebecca's "eldest son," Jacob her "younger son," and Esau the brother of Jacob (Genesis 27,42). Esau's mother sympathizes with Esau in his anger, but both her sons, Esau and Jacob, remain close to her heart. She fears that even as she bore both her sons on the same day, she will now lose them on the same day, the one, Jacob, physically as the murder victim and the other, Esau, morally as the murderer of his own brother.

One can imagine how a lesser woman might have exploited Esau's wish to murder Jacob, telling it to Isaac to justify her own conduct

* Cf. רמב"ן to Genesis 12,10. (Ed.)

and as proof that the foolish Isaac had loved, and even had intended to bless, a son who was in fact a second Cain. But Rebecca did not do so. In an effort to shield her husband, she spares him this sad discovery, giving him other, innocuous explanations for Jacob's sudden departure from home.

Also note how Rebecca and Jacob anxiously avoid giving the appearance that their striving after Isaac's blessing and the privileges of a first-born son had been motivated by material considerations. What does Jacob have to gain from obtaining the rights of a first-born son and his father's blessing? Esau, his twin brother, has already acquired two wives since the age of forty and has been living in grand style at his father's home, at his father's table and from his father's wealth. Jacob, on the other hand, is still unmarried, and when he finally leaves his parental home to establish a home of his own, he leaves as a poor man, taking with him nothing except his staff, lest Esau miss so much as a pin after Jacob's departure. After that, he must perform slave labor to acquire a wife and to provide for his family: **ויעבד ישראל באשה ובאשה שמר** (Hosea 12,13). All this documents the nobility of character for which Rebecca and Jacob are remembered.

V. Rachel and Leah

We will now address ourselves to the two women who, in fact, were the founding mothers of the tribes of the Jewish people. Jacob acquired these two wives by toiling as a slave for fourteen years. No ardent wooing from the age of chivalry can compare to this man's toil to win his wife. Jacob performed fourteen years of slave labor for a scheming, vexatious master, all for the latter's two daughters, who would not receive any dowry when they married. Since Jacob received no wages, he was still as poor after fourteen years of loyal, hard slave labor as he had been when he first entered Laban's service. He had become richer only in wives and offspring and in worries about them, without so much as a penny to set up a household of his own. Has any other man ever made such enormous sacrifices in order to win a wife?

Jacob's fourteen years of slave labor laid the foundations for the spirit of all subsequent Jewish marriages. The example set by Jacob is eloquent proof of what the Jewish wife means to her husband, reminding the Jewish man that in choosing a wife he should not seek to win a dowry but should regard his wife herself as his most priceless treasure.

Jacob's fourteen years of slave labor should serve to clear the Jewish marriage and the Jewish home forever from the allegation that Jewish wives are subjected to Oriental-type degradation.

In this portrait of Jacob and his family Leah is shown as the prolific mother, the most important nurturer of the tribes of Israel. She, the elder of the two sisters, was the less beautiful of the two, and she became Jacob's wife only due to the machinations of her father, Laban.

It was for Rachel that Jacob toiled for the first seven years at Laban's home, and these years appeared to him as no more than one happy day because of his love for Rachel. Laban said to his future son-in-law and probably also to his daughter, "Whoever in our midst wishes to marry the younger of two daughters thereby implicitly wishes to marry also the elder, for it is not customary among us to betroth the younger daughter before her elder sister."

And so both Leah and Rachel became Jacob's wives, but Jacob did not make Leah suffer for being the wife he had not wanted. ויאהב ויאהב (Genesis 29,30) גם רחל מלאה (Genesis 29,30)—To be sure, he loved Rachel more than Leah; after all, Rachel had been the wife of his choice. But note that according to the Biblical text he "also loved" Rachel more than Leah. In other words, his heart went out also to Leah; she was not cheated of her husband's love. True, we read (ibid. 29,31) וירא ה' כי שנואה לאה; however, this does not mean כי שנואה לאה, that Leah was actually hated, but merely that Leah was the less beloved of the two.

This slight only had the effect of keeping awake in Leah's heart the true significance of conjugal love with all its fiery passion. This wonderful mother of the Jewish people, this splendid model for all Jewish wives and mothers to follow, realized and understood the magic spell that motherhood, woman's true and most sublime calling, can cast upon a husband's heart. She understood that a wife as the mother of his children could perhaps mean more to her husband than she would merely as his betrothed and his bride. And she perpetuated this thought, and thus also the sublime values of the Jewish marriage and the Jewish home, in the names she chose for her sons. It was because, as a bride, she had been the less beloved of Jacob's two wives that God granted her the joys of motherhood, so that she became the cause of her husband's happiness and pride at becoming the father of children. After giving birth to her first son, Leah said, "God has *seen* my sufferings," and that was why she named her first son ראוּבֵן. After giving birth to her second son, she said merely, "God has *heard* that I am the less beloved." The

slight she suffered was no longer noticed by the world outside, but she still missed the tone of intimacy in the private words that Jacob addressed to her. It was no longer so obvious as to be *seen* by others, but she believed that people could still *hear*; from her husband's tone in talking with her, that she was the less loved of the two wives. Therefore she named her second son שמעון. By the time her third son was born, however, she felt that her husband had become bound to her by ties of conjugal attachment and devotion. Therefore she named her third son לוי. By the time her fourth son was born, she was a truly happy wife. She was filled with gratitude toward God, and therefore she named the child יהודה.

Thus, Mother Leah chose for her sons names that were to perpetuate for all time the values that make a Jewish marriage happy and sacred. The names שמעון and ראובן imply that the eye and the ear of God participate in every marriage; that God sees and hears the conduct and the relationship between the two spouses; that God is the witness between husband and wife, the third participant in the covenant of the two; and that whatever husband and wife say and do in their marriage is said and done before His eye and His ear. לוי implies לויה, the bond between husband and wife; each of the partners considers himself and herself לזה, the debtor to the other. Only through the presence of the one can the other feel truly whole. This feeling of mutual indebtedness and gratitude makes for increasingly close and intimate ties between husband and wife. The name יהודה implies that even as each of the partners feels לויה, indebted to the other, so they unite in gratitude to God, הודיה, that brings both of them closer and closer to Him. Every breath of husband and wife is an act of gratitude, gratitude for every moment of good health and happiness granted to them, for every joy given them and for God's help in good and evil days alike. All of this gratitude should be given in the manner God expects it, not by empty phrases and ceremonies but in the form of joyous, devoted obedience to God in every phase of life and with all the vigor of one's very being.

זבולון and יששכר, respectively, denote the diligence of the man in acquiring what his family needs (שכר) and the work of the woman, which is to use her husband's acquisitions to transform her home into a comfortable habitation (זבול). Finally, we have גר and אשר.* גר implies apparent, unexpected good fortune, while אשר denotes the inner bliss, the moral and spiritual riches that make for a truly happy marriage.

* גר, from גרד, to drive in quickly, suddenly, to separate, גרוד, a raiding troop; hence,

These are the essential points, this is the "marriage manual" that Mother Leah left to her people through her children. If children, בניים, are the true "building blocks" that go into the construction of the House of Israel and of every single home in its midst, then Leah, through the names she gave her children, has pointed out to future generations the spiritual and moral building materials and mortar needed for the healthy development of the House of Israel and all the homes within it.

We see, then, that it was given to Leah, the sad one of the two sisters, to attain and perpetuate in her life the cheerful, happy aspects of marriage. Meanwhile, Rachel, the happier of the two sisters, had been made to taste the solemn, trial-filled aspects of marriage and perpetuated these in the names she gave to her children. The names בן דן and בן אהלי, respectively, remind of Divine judgment and of the struggles that are our lot. When, after long years of patient waiting, Rachel could finally hold her first-born son in her arms, she did not give herself completely to the bliss of long-awaited gratification. She regarded her first son only as an "on-account payment," as it were, a promise of additional children. To show that she was not yet satisfied, she called him יוסף. And after she had given birth to a second son, who held out to her a promise of fulfilled hopes at last, she had to pay for this promise and this fulfillment with her life. She lived only long enough to give to her child, who received life through her death, the name of בן אורי.

Note that all the tribes of our nation received their names from their mothers. The fact that it was not Jacob but Leah and Rachel who chose the names for Jacob's sons is another indication of the position of women in the House of Jacob. We see that, far from suffering degradation, the women actually occupied a position of authority in the family, and that Jacob treated his wives with the utmost respect for their personal dignity. So, too, he did not make the decision to return home without first discussing the matter with Rachel and Leah (Genesis 31,4 ff.), whose intelligence and judgment he respected. He made his final decision only after both wives had consented to it of their own free will, without coercion from anyone.

Moreover, the relationship between the two sisters, Leah and Rachel, seems to have been a thoroughly cordial and friendly one. True, we

גד, unexpected fortune. אשר, from אשר, collecting, אשר, to step up, אשר, progress; hence, עושר, riches. See Hirsch Commentary to Genesis 30,11-13. (Ed.)

have only one passage in Scripture to document our assumption. But precisely that passage portrays the two women to us—to the best of our understanding—as engaging in innocuous mutual banter. It is difficult to believe that Leah's words *המעט קחתך את אישי* (Genesis 30,15) were meant seriously. Why should these two sisters, whose entire lives were shaped by the importance they attached to their husband's love, have placed their love for their husband so unworthily and senselessly on a level with insignificant flowers that grew wild in the fields? "Is it a small thing that you have taken my husband from me?" Leah says to Rachel, "And now you want my child's flowers also." That would be like saying, "You have already stolen a million from me and now you want me to give you a pin also." Hence we would regard this contretemps as nothing but harmless banter. Leah's little son has brought home some flowers from the field and gives them to his mother. Rachel, sitting next to her sister, asks to be given some of the flowers. "You are asking a lot from me," Leah replies jokingly. "You already have my husband and now you also want my son's flowers." However, she lets Rachel have the flowers. "Well, *לכן*, just for this, because you've been so kind, Jacob will visit you tonight," Rachel replies in the same casual, friendly tone.

Rachel died as a young woman on the family's way home to Canaan and consequently was not buried in the Holy Land, in the tomb of the other patriarchs and matriarchs. Even as he lies on his own deathbed, Jacob sadly recalls that there is no national memorial to the one wife of his choice and his heart. It was not given her to bear to Jacob the first-born of all the tribes of the Jewish nation, and when someday her descendants, grown into a nation, will visit the tombs of the patriarchs and matriarchs at Machpelah, they will not find a tomb of Rachel there on which to shed a tear in her memory. It was this consideration that led Jacob to adopt Rachel's two grandsons, Ephraim and Menashe, as his own. By creating the two half-tribes of Ephraim and Menashe, Jacob created a national memorial, as it were, to his lost love, and at the same time elevated his and Rachel's son Joseph virtually to the position of a first-born. When Jacob blessed his children during the final hour of his life, characterizing each one of them, he was strengthened (if we understand his words correctly) by the memory of Rachel and recalled her in the blessing he gave to her beloved son. Joseph had been crowned with the diadem of wisdom, virtue and majesty among men, but it was not life that had endowed Joseph with his nobility of mind and spirit; he had received those qualities before he was born, from his mother,

the source of his being, whose spirit towered high above the narrow sphere of ordinary domestic pursuits:

When still a lad Joseph was ennobled,*
 Ennobled already at the source.
 Women! She, too, strode over the walls!

(Genesis 49,22)

Unfortunately, just as Rachel died at an early age and was buried on alien soil, so, too, the kingdom established by her descendants was destroyed at an early date and her children were forced to take the tear-drenched road into exile. And if, to this day, we hear the whispering lament from the treetops of Ramah, we know it is Rachel weeping for her children. She cannot be consoled because she misses the Presence of God. However, she is comforted with the words, "Weep no more and dry your tears; there will still be a reward for your work. They will return home from the land of the enemy; hope still blossoms for your end; the sons will return to their Homeland" (Jeremiah 31,14-16).

VI. The Woman in the Jewish Nation

If we enter into the wider circles of the Jewish nation, will we see the women occupying a position different from that which we might expect from the biographical portraits of the nation's patriarchs and matriarchs? Do we ever, in the history of the Jewish nation, note a decline in the esteem in which women are held or a denigration of the woman's role in the home and the family from what it was in earlier periods? Has the participation of Jewish women in the affairs of the Jewish nation ever been less significant than that of women in other nations, ancient or modern? Does Jewish history have fewer heroines, fewer inspired women of word and action who have played a crucial role in the fate of their nation?

When the Jewish nation lies in chains, when the men collapse, mentally and physically, beneath the yoke of tyranny, then it is the נשים צדקניות who acquire immortality in the nation's memory for cheering their men on, keeping up their courage and sustaining the spirit of hope and trust among the people.

* See Hirsch Commentary, *ibid.* (Ed.)

When the sinister politics of a tyrant are pledged to the destruction of the nation at the very hour of its birth, it is the midwives, simple, ordinary women from among the people, who have the courage to defy the command of the mighty and to confront an angry Pharaoh with the spirit of women who fear God more than they fear men.

When the nation despairs because it seems that its leader, a mere mortal, has disappeared, loses its faith in its everlasting God, and falls back into the orgiastic worship of Egyptian idols, it is the women who remain firm in their loyalty to God and refuse to participate in the creation of the nation's idols.

In view of all the foregoing, when God wishes to turn over His Law to that nation which is to bear it aloft through the world, both for its own salvation and the salvation of the rest of mankind, it is the women whom He summons first into His presence and upon whose acceptance of the Law He builds the covenant of faith and the hope of fulfillment. When a Sanctuary is to be built for that same Law of God, it is the women who vie with the men in selfless work and devotion for the Sanctuary. And whenever this Divine covenant and this loyalty to the Law of God are reconfirmed through a reiteration of the Law at a national public assembly, the women are not missing from the crowds that rally around the Law.

And was it not two women, Yocheved and Miriam, who rescued the infant Moses and to whom Moses owed his earliest training and education, the first childhood impressions that generally leave their mark on the child for life? Was it not another woman, Hannah, who bore Samuel for her people? Was there ever, at the same time, a more tender, loving marriage than that of Hannah and her husband Elkanah, coupled with the position of freedom and respect that Elkanah accorded to his wife, the mother of his son? And could the wife of Manoach, or Abigail, or the Shunammite ever be described as anything but their husbands' equals in every respect, women truly respected in their calling as mothers, homemakers and wives? Are not Ruth and Naomi figures of whom the women of any nation could be proud? Indeed, how many men are there from the same period in Jewish history who could be named as noble personifications of their sex?

Miriam, Deborah and Hannah—the nation's memory lists these women gratefully among the outstanding spirits, the personalities whose activities brought blessings to their own generation and to all the generations that have followed since. When God, through Michah,

wished to remind His people of the mercies He had shown them, He recounted among those mercies the fact that He had sent Moses, Aaron and Miriam to be the leaders of the people. Miriam is regarded as a prophetess who led the women of Israel by her personal example just as her brothers acted as leaders among the men. Even during a later age, the era of the kings, a woman, Hulda, comes to the fore as one of the Divinely-inspired prophets of her day.

Deborah's triumphant hymn and Hannah's prayer of thanksgiving may well rank among the most beautiful outpourings of Divinely-inspired hearts and minds in the treasury of our nation's literature.

Deborah, prophetess, judge, bard and victor in battle; courageous Yael, the homemaker who stabbed the tyrant to death; Hannah, imbued with the spirit of God, mother of Samuel, the woman who taught us to hope, to pray and to give thanks to God; Michal, daughter of King Saul, who saved the life of her husband [David]; the wise woman of Tekoah, the peacemaker [who, at Joab's instigation, persuaded David to pardon Absalom]; the wise woman of Obel (II Samuel 20,16 ff.), counselor and rescuer of her city—what other nation's history can boast of a more brilliant chain of women who, in a spirit of shining purity, contributed to the happiness and prosperity of their people?

That is why this people knows no more splendid image among mortals than that of a woman of consummate purity, a woman who commands respect but at the same time is surrounded by an aura of charm and modesty. This people knows no loftier, purer or more sacred bond of everlasting love than that which binds husband and wife faithfully to one another. In contemplating the ideal of perfection to which it aspires, this nation pictures itself as a "maiden." "Daughter of Zion," "Daughter of Jerusalem," "Daughter of Judah," "Daughter of My people," "Maiden Daughter of Zion"—these are the sweetest and at the same time the proudest images in which God's own people sees itself, sometimes in exultation and at other times in grief. Zion, Jerusalem, is pictured as a woman ascending to the mountaintops to proclaim the salvation of mankind *מבשרת ציון מבשרת ירושלם* (Isaiah 40,9). Even as a youth woos a maiden, so will the sons of Zion woo her once again (Isaiah 62,5). The maiden of Israel will be built again by God Himself; the maiden of Israel will be adorned with her tabrets once again and will go forth in the dances of those who make merry (Jeremiah 31,3). Or, she laments like a maiden girded with sackcloth for the husband of her youth (Joel 1,8). Or, she sits upon the ground, solitary like a

widow, weeping in the night, and the tears do not depart from her cheeks (Lamentations 1,1-2). There is no one to guide her from among all the children she has borne, nor is there anyone to sustain her from among all the children she has raised (Isaiah 51,18).

The loftiest ideals upon which this nation should reflect with Divinely-inspired purity and which should guide it to the most ethereal heights of its mission and its perfection, namely, the relationship of the nation to God and God's relationship to it, are portrayed in the image of the relationship between husband and wife. The tie that binds the wife to her husband and the husband to his wife is to give to God's people a proper understanding of its obligations and aspirations, of what God expects from His people and what that people, in turn, may expect from God. Israel is God's own bride, His beloved wife, and all the phases of Israel's devotion to duty, its dereliction from its duties, and its eventual return to duty, its flowering, its decay and its restoration to full flower—all of Israel's variegated history is reflected in the image of a marriage with its happy days of faithfulness and its sad days of infidelity, a relationship alternating between devotion and estrangement, dissension and reconciliation, rejection and renewed acceptance into a happy, everlasting covenant.

"When you were born," God says to the Daughter of Zion, "no eye had pity upon you to nurture you. . . You were flung out into the open field in contempt of your very being. And I passed by you and saw you perishing in your own blood. And I said to you: In your blood shall you return to life; I said: Return to life in your blood. I then caused you to become as numerous as the growth of the field; you increased, you grew big and strutted about in the ornament of beauty, your breast was perfect, and you had flowing tresses; but yet you were naked and bare. Now I passed by you again and I saw you; you were ready for the covenant of love, and I spread My cloak over you and covered your nakedness; I swore to you and entered into a covenant with you, and so you became Mine" (Ezekiel 16,5-8).

"I remember for you," the prophet Jeremiah, at God's command, cries out to the exiles in the wilderness of the nations, "the devotion of your youth, the love of your betrothal, when you followed Me into the wilderness, into a land that was not sown. Israel shall remain sacred to God; it shall remain the first of His harvest. Whoever attacks it will incur guilt and bring misfortune upon himself, says God" (Jeremiah 2,2-3).

“Where is your mother’s letter of divorce?” God asks those who think they have been discharged from their covenant with God. “Where is your mother’s letter of divorce that I should have sent her away, or who is My creditor to whom I should have sold you? Behold, for your iniquities were you sold and for your crimes was your mother sent away. Why have I come and find no one there, [why have I] called and no one answers? Is My power perhaps insufficient, so that it cannot redeem? Do I not have the power to save?” (Isaiah 50, 1–2).

“Rejoice, O barren one, you who did not bear; rejoice aloud and into the distance, you who have never gone into labor, for the children of the solitary are more than the children of the married wife, says God. . . Fear not, for you shall not be deceived; blush not, for you have no reason to be ashamed. You may [now] forget the shame of your youth; you need no longer remember the disgrace of your widowhood. For your Husband, your Maker, ה' צבאו is His Name, and your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel—He is now called God over all the earth. Even as a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit has God called you again; the wife of youth remains, even if she has [been] found [deserving of] blame, says your God” (Isaiah 54, 1; 4–6).

“From now on you shall call Me ‘my Husband’ and you shall no longer call Me ‘my Lord’ . . . I will betroth you to Myself forever. I will betroth you to Myself in justice and righteousness, in love and compassion; I will betroth you to Myself in faithfulness, and you will recognize your God” (Hosea 2, 18; 21–22).

The words of the Prophets all carry that same refrain. According to our Sages, the Song of Songs, that sublime prose-poem of Jewish life (*כל השירים מרוחין והיא דחוקה וכו'), is a celebration of the relationship of this people to its God, to Whom it is wedded, and that of God to His people. Consider the purity (we would almost venture to say, the majesty) that must have marked the marriages among this people, the signs of mutual love, respect, devotion and self-sacrifice that must have characterized these marriages, and the happiness of the wife with her husband and of the husband with his wife, if one could even consider using marriage as a metaphor in describing God’s covenant with His people.

Indeed, the profound character of this relationship is given full expression also in the Sacred Writings of God’s people. The husband

* עיין ילקוט שה"ש א, א *

is expected to regard his wife as the source of whatever good a mortal may desire—life, happiness, joy, blessings, the greatest riches that God can give to man. “He that has found a wife has found the good and will obtain additional favor from God” (Proverbs 18,22). “House and riches are the inheritance of fathers, but a sensible wife is from God” (Proverbs 19,14). He is expected to be so completely under the spell (this is the literal meaning of שגה in the verse quoted below) of his love for his wife that he should have eyes for no one and nothing else. The unfaithful husband is severely castigated. “Let the fountain—the fountain of all your existence—be blessed and have joy from the wife of your youth! A loving hind, a gazelle in grace, let her breasts satisfy you at all times; be absorbed completely, and at all times, in her love. How could you allow yourself to be spellbound (תשגה) by another woman? How could you embrace another? Behold, the ways of man are before God, and He examines all his paths. [Eventually] the wicked will be ensnared by his own sins and he will be held against his will in the bonds of his own frivolity” (Proverbs 5,18–22).

“And in addition you are doing this,” Malachi (2,13 ff.) scolds his generation. “You see to it that the altar of God is covered with tears, with weeping and with cries of distress, so that He no longer turns to your homage offering and no longer takes anything for His delight at your hand. And then you would ask: Why is this? Because God has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, whom you have betrayed, even though she is your companion and the wife of your covenant. [You may reply] Has not the unique one [Abraham] done likewise, and yet the spirit remained with him? What do you want from that unique man? [is the reply]. He was looking for the son promised [to him] by God. But you take heed of your spirit so that it not become unfaithful to the wife of your youth. For I hate divorce, says the God of Israel, and iniquity always covers the garment that should conceal it, says God; therefore take heed of your spirit and do not become unfaithful.”

“Gain life with the wife you love all the days of your life on earth that God bestows upon you under the sun, all the days of your existence on earth, for that is your profit from life and from all your toil under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 9,9).

“Happy is he who fears God and walks in His ways. If you enjoy the labor of your hands, then you are happy and it will be well with you. Your wife [shall be] a flowering vine in the innermost parts of your

house, your children like olive shoots round about your table. Behold, where this is so, there the man who fears God is blessed" (Psalms 128,1-4).

Thus the Word of God sees all of the husband's happiness bound up with his wife. Ezekiel's wife is described as the treasure of his eyes (Ezekiel 24,16). The Book of Proverbs (2,17) refers to the husband as the guide of his wife's youth and to their mutual covenant as a covenant of God.

In general, woman is always seen at the side of man. The nation's happiness and prosperity is considered inconceivable without the participation of women. In the hymn celebrating the happiness of the Jewish people, our daughters are pictured as modest recesses of a building fashioned with the same skill, care and beauty as the Temple (Psalms 144,12). When God will transform mourning into joy, "the maidens will rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old men together" (Jeremiah 31,12). When God will pour out His spirit upon all flesh, the spirit of prophecy will seize Israel's sons and daughters, servants and handmaidens (Joel 3,1-2). And when Jerusalem will rise once again to become the city of truth and holiness, then "old men and old women will sit in the broad places of Jerusalem, each with his staff in his hand for the very aged, and the broad places of the city shall be full of boys and girls at play" (Zechariah 8,3-5).

Even during the periods of Israel's decline we can see the powerful influence of the Jewish wife within Jewish society, as it had been from time immemorial. In Chapters 3 and 4 of Isaiah the downfall of the first Jewish Commonwealth is ascribed primarily to the circumstance that the women misused their position of influence. God enters into judgment with the "elders of His people and its princes" (Isaiah 3,14) and, let it be noted, also with the women (*ibid* 3,16). Both the elders and the women had misconstrued and misused their position. Both had exploited their position of influence for selfish purposes—the high and mighty in order to appease their greed and the "daughters of Zion" to satisfy their vanity and love of luxury. Strutting about arrogantly, they became the "mistresses" of their people. According to Chapter 44 of the Book of Jeremiah, it was these "daughters of Zion" who especially favored defection to idolatry. According to Chapter 15 of the Book of Ezekiel, they were the ones that showed prophet-like enthusiasm for idol worship and became "huntresses of souls" to this end. They held sway in a manner that hastened the downfall of the Jewish Commonwealth

(Amos 4). Israel had to be cleansed of its corruption (Isaiah 4) by the collapse of its Commonwealth so that the ground could be prepared for the nation's rebirth under God's nearness.

All the foregoing documents the high position and the influence enjoyed by the women among the people, and makes it clear that this people's moral and political welfare was essentially dependent on the moral and spiritual nobility of its women.

VII. The Life of a Jewish Wife in Retrospect

He who finds a wife of valor—	אשת חיל מי ימצא
Her price is far beyond pearls.	ורחק מפנינים מכרה
The heart of her husband trusted in her	בטח בה לב בעלה
And he never lacked for unexpected gain. ¹	ושלל לא יחסר
She did him good and never evil	גמלתהו טוב ולא רע
All the days of her life. ²	כל ימי חייה.
She sought out wool and flax	דרשה צמר ופשתים
And worked upon it with the delight of her hands. ³	וחעש בחפץ כפיה.

1. שלל, lit. "booty." The term שלל has the connotation of a gain to which one had no claim or which one did not expect (cf. והיתה לך נפשך לשלל, Jeremiah 39,18). Her actions not only justified her husband's trust in her but in fact surpassed any expectations he might have had.

2. A person can extend many kindnesses to another and still cause him moments of pain by his whims and by his behavior toward him. By contrast, the woman celebrated in this hymn never gave her husband anything but happiness (גמלתהו טוב ולא רע) as long as she lived.

If we interpret גמל in the connotation of reward or compensation, the meaning of this passage would be that she always rewarded her husband for the good that he did her but never made him suffer for any grief he had caused her. The apposition "all the days of her life" would support the first interpretation, because it implies that no day of her life ever resulted in trouble or grief for her husband.

3. She was diligence personified. She did not wait for her husband to give her wool and flax to spin; it was not enough for her to perform chores assigned to her. She herself sought out the material; she demanded material in order to process it with the "delight of her hands." Note that the text reads חפץ ידיה, not חפץ ידיה as might have been expected, as in טוו בדייה (Exodus 35,25) and the subsequent passage שלחה בכישור ידיה.

She was like a merchant ship;	היתה כאניות טוחד
She brought her bread from afar. ⁴	ממרחק תביא לחמה.
It was still night when she would arise	ותקם בעוד לילה
And give food to her house	ותתן טרף לביתה
And work to her handmaidens.	וחק לנערתיה.
She saved for [the purchase of] ⁵ a field and bought it,	וזממה שדה ותקחהו
And she planted a vineyard from the fruit	מפרי כפיה נטע כרם.
of [the work of] her hands.	
She girded her hips with might	חגרה בעוז מתניה
And made her arms strong. ⁶	ותאמץ זרועתיה.

כפיים denotes the hands not as working, creating organs but describes them in terms of palms that are closed or that are enclosing an object. Her hands could not bear to be idle; even while her palms were closed or folded in a position of rest they were yearning for work. This is the meaning of **כפיה** חפץ.

4. She was always busy, and because she planned even for the most unlikely contingencies, she was in a position to obtain many good things for her household.

5. **זמם**, related to **צמם**, **סמם**. The basic connotation is "to hold together," "to concentrate." Hence, **סמים** would denote materials that have an impact out of all proportion to the small quantities in which they occur, materials in which an abundance of energy is concentrated in a miniscule space. Therefore **זמם** means to produce achievements of far-reaching significance with modest means and from small, seemingly insignificant beginnings. Similarly, **עדים זוממים**; they appear quite innocent, but one single word from them will lead to murder. **זמה** are transgressions which, in addition to being evil acts in themselves, have far-reaching pernicious consequences out of all proportion to their intrinsic nature. **זומה** is mostly employed in a favorable connotation; it implies constant, attentive watch over small, insignificant beginnings which, as a result of this continuous attention, give rise to great accomplishments (cf. Proverbs 1,4, with regard to the task of rearing and educating the young and, at the same time, training one's own character). In our context the meaning is: By her constant effort to effect small savings here and there, she eventually accumulated sufficient means to purchase a field.

6. She was not strong or sturdy by nature. She made herself strong. It was her diligence and sense of duty that gave her strength and power.

She found that her endeavor was good;	טעמה כי טוב סחרה
From then on her light did not go out during the night.	לא יכבה כליל נורה..
She then put her hands to the spindle,	ידיה שלחה בכישור וכפיה תמכו פלך.
and her hands held the distaff.	
But she also opened her hand to the poor	כפה פרשה לעני
And stretched out her hands to the needy.	וידיה שלחה לאביון.
She did not have to fear frost for her house;	לא תירא לביתה משלג
All her household was clothed in fine wool.	כי כל ביתה לבש שנים.
She prepared bed covers for herself,	מרבדים עשתה לה
But her [own] clothing was of linen and purple. ⁷	שש וארגמן לבושה.
Her husband was known in the public assemblies,	נודע בשערים בעלה
Where he sat among the elders of the land; ⁸	בשבחו עם זקני ארץ.
She made a cloth and sold it,	סדין עשתה ותמכר
And she gave a belt to the peddler as a gift. ⁹	ותגור נתנה לכנעני.

7. During the winter all the members of her household were dressed in wool, but she needed warm coverings only at night, when she was at rest. During the day, when she was busily at work, no one ever saw her dressed in anything but light linen. She wore wool only as an ornament. She was too busy to feel the cold.

8. When her husband sat in the councils of the city or the nation, he was pointed out as the husband of this particular woman of valor, whose moral and spiritual influence could be felt in the words and actions of her husband in public life. Thus, through the voice of her husband, her own fine example and her wise and prudent counsel had a beneficial effect in the community.

9. If this verse had been intended only to praise her endeavors for the welfare of her household, it would be entirely out of context with this section of the chapter, which describes the woman's spiritual and moral influence. This verse would have been more appropriate at the beginning, where her thrifty management of her household is praised.

Fortunately the phrase ותגור נתנה לכנעני necessitates another interpretation. נתן does not mean "to sell;" in fact, it denotes the very opposite of selling (cf. לגר אשר בשעריך תתננה ואכלה או מכר לנכרי Deuteronomy 14,21). This phrase seems to indicate the way in which she obtained the means for carrying on her good works. She did not perform them with money given her for the household; she was too conscientious and much too thoroughly imbued with the joy of giving charity. She wanted to perform her good works with her own earnings, her own work and her own strength.

Power and beauty were her garment,
And she faced the last day with a smile.¹⁰

עוֹז וְהַדָּר לְבוּשָׁה
וְחִשְׁקָה לַיּוֹם אַחֲרָיוֹן.

She spun and wove a cloth and sold it. As for the thread which was left over and which was the product of her handiwork, she also did not give it away in its crude state but used it to make a belt that she gave to a poor peddler as a gift. When the peddler then sold the finished belt, it yielded much greater profit than if she had given the money or even the finished belt as alms to a beggar. We see, then, that this woman was as painstaking as she was charitable; she knew how to employ the fruits of her labor in a way that would yield the greatest possible benefit for her fellow man.

In view of the foregoing, this verse portrays a shining example of what our Sages call *עֲרוֹם בִּירְאָה*, the use of common sense in the fear of God, the combination of good works with the intelligence and circumspection that will yield the most beneficial results.

This same sensible morality should be the basic principle also in public life. Just as Judaism has no double standard, one for public life and one for the running of a household, so, too, public affairs should reflect wisdom and administrative skills virtually identical with those that work so well in the management of the home. It is surely not wide of the mark to assert that the best father and head of a family will make the best administrator and leader of a community. One who cannot manage his own home well should not be named to public office. This is the reasoning that may also have helped persuade our elders to give preference in the choice of communal leaders and administrators to married men who, by virtue of their marital status, have already given proof of their skills at influencing people and managing property.

These considerations would indicate that the placement of the passage under discussion is entirely appropriate. It shows, from the example of one woman's work, how the fear of God coupled with common sense stood the test of time and served as an example also for her husband, who applied the same principles in the councils of his community.

10. This combination of kindness and punctiliousness was a basic trait of the woman's personality. It was the strength (actually, the resoluteness) and the beauty, *עוֹז וְהַדָּר*, that characterized her presence, and that is why she was able to face even the last day of her life with a smile.

She opened her mouth with wisdom, And the teaching of loving-kindness was constantly on her tongue.	פיה פתחה בחכמה וזורת חסד על לשונה.
She kept continuous watch over the ways of her household, And never wanted to eat the bread of idleness.	צופיה הליכות ביתה ולחם עצלות לא תאכל.
Therefore her sons now rise and laud her, Her husband [rises] and he praises her: "Many women have done valiantly, But you have surpassed them all! Charm is deceit and beauty is vain; A woman who fears God is the one that creates praise for herself.	קמו בניה ויאשרוה בעלה ויהללה. רבות בנות עשו חיל ואת עליית על כלנה. שקר החן והבל היפי אשה יראת ה' היא תהלל.
Give her of the fruit of her hands So that her works may praise her in the gates."	תנו לה מפרי ידיה ויהללוה בשערים מעשיה. —Proverbs 31,10–31.

This retrospective view of a Jewish wife gives us a most beautiful portrayal of one woman's work. Even if Scripture had preserved for us nothing more than this vignette from the history of our womanhood, this one hymn would be sufficient to afford us a splendid view of the position of women in Judaism and an eloquent rebuttal of all the fabrications, past and present, invented by incomprehensible thoughtlessness about the enslavement and degradation of Jewish women in days of old. What European woman of our own century would not look back upon this portrayal from remote Jewish antiquity as a shining ideal that she would be delighted to approximate in her own life?

What, then, is the position of the Jewish woman and wife? She is her husband's close friend and makes him happy. He feels secure with her, and he looks to her as the inspiration for his greatest achievements.

She enjoys full independence as the manager and supervisor of the home, but that is not all. She wants to do more than simply accept her husband's earnings and use them for the good of the home, to feed and otherwise provide for the members of her household. She herself participates in the work that needs to be done. She is eager to make her own economic contribution to the prosperity of her household. Thus, of her own free will, she has made herself an active partner in her husband's labors.

Constant activity is her element; good works are her delight; wisdom

dwells upon her lips, and her every word and action is a lesson in selfless love and devotion.

She is the ever-watchful supervisor of the routine of her household, and at the same time she is her husband's quiet, wise counselor in matters affecting the welfare of the community in which they live.

The memory of what she meant to them will live on forever in the hearts of her husband and children who, for the rest of their lives, will rise in respectful tribute to her memory and will never cease to praise her. Her memory will live on also outside her immediate family, in the hearts of her community, as an eternal praise and a valiant example to be followed by future generations.

Fortunate, and also immortal, the nation that can boast of such women and mothers in its history.

VIII. The Jewish Woman in the Talmud

The collapse of the Jewish Commonwealth put an end to the political history of the Jewish people as a nation. During the ages that have passed since that time, individual figures have no longer been in a position to influence the course of the whole nation's political history. The Jewish people has been a large family devoting its life and energies to the theoretical study and practical observance of the Divine Law they have inherited. The house of study and the home represent the quiet but nonetheless vital proscenium on which Jewish life unfolds. There are no more prophets with pens to record the history of this people. Heroic figures of spiritual scholarship and their teachings live on through the posterity that carries their wisdom into future generations.

From that point on, too, acts of morality and devotion to duty have been performed before God without fanfare. God records them in the chronicle of developments that move toward one shining goal. Elijah and the Messiah, who are waiting for the attainment of this goal that is brought nearer by every good deed performed, append their signatures as witnesses, as the Sages so ingeniously put it, to every such act performed in Israel.

Of course we no longer have reason to expect the emergence of new female figures crowned with the laurels of Jewish history. Yet even one glance into the records that document the continued survival of this people in all its spiritual vigor and moral nobility will

demonstrate that the ages that have gone by since the fall of the Jewish Commonwealth have remained true to the Biblical heritage also with regard to the woman's position. The manner in which the Sages of the Talmud discuss the position of the Jewish woman mirrors a respect and appreciation, a tender and considerate attitude toward the female sex, which could have originated nowhere else, in theory and in practice, than in the wellsprings of the Word of God and in the life of the nation drinking from these wellsprings.

To the Sages of Judaism there is nothing more sacred and godly than the institution of marriage, the tie that binds husband and wife to one another. God Himself blesses the bride and groom and adorns the bride so that she may please her husband (בראשית רבה ח' אות י"ג). In the view of the Sages the welfare of the whole Jewish community is involved every time a new Jewish home is set up—במקהלות ברכו אלקים—(Psalms 68,27). Our marriage ceremonies take place in public, with the whole community participating, for our Sages regard marriage as מקור ישראל (ibid.), the source and the root of all personal hopes and happiness (כתובות ז:). When the husband brings his newly-wedded wife into his home, he does so in honor of God Who ordained the institution of marriage in order to establish for Himself the everlasting edifice of all mankind and Who, with every new marriage, makes to Zion a new promise of consolation and joy in her children. Even as God caused the first married couple to rejoice in Paradise, so He still makes marriage a Paradise on earth for every couple between whom there is love. Indeed, He is the Creator of the husband's delight in his wife and the wife's delight in her husband. He is the Creator of joy and delight, of gladness and of the bliss that may be savored even here below. For He is the Creator of love, of brotherhood, of peace and of friendship which causes the couple's joy in each other to grow into full bloom (ברכות נשואין). It is from His own holy Name (י and ה, the letters being divided between אישה and איש) that God weaves the tie that binds husband and wife to one another. If the husband and wife walk in His ways and keep His commandments, His Name will bestow mercy upon them and save them from all trouble and harm. But if the couple do not follow this way of life, He will remove His Name from their union, and the letters י and ה will vanish, leaving only אש, fire, with fire from the one devouring the fire from the other (פרקי דרבי אליעזר, פרק י"ב).

What should the wife mean to her husband? A man who has no wife, we are told, has no joy, no blessings and no happiness. He has no

Torah, no wall to protect him, and no peace. In short, a man without a wife is not a complete person (יבמות טב; סג). A man who has no wife has no help, no atonement and no life (בראשית רבה י"ז אות ב').

Everything good comes to the husband through his wife. This includes his piety and his moral character. One honest, pious man had a wife who was honest and pious like himself. However, they had no children. And so they said, "Of what good are we to God?" and they divorced. The husband married a godless woman and under her influence he, too, became godless. His former wife married a godless man but, under her influence, the man became honest and pious. So we see that everything depends on the wife (שם אות ו'). Even the homes of Abraham and Isaac became pleasing to God and served the advancement of human happiness only thanks to the influence of Sarah and Rebecca. As long as Sarah lived, the cloud of God's Presence hovered above the tent; as long as she was alive the family's bread was blessed, the doors of Abraham's home were wide open to receive guests, and the Sabbath light burned brightly all week long, from Sabbath eve to Sabbath eve. When Sarah died, the cloud, the blessing, the hospitality and the light all vanished, returning only after Rebecca had come to take Sarah's place (בראשית רבה ט' אות ט"ז).

Therefore, too, a woman of valor is her husband's crown. Even Abraham was glorified by Sarah, not vice versa (שם אות א'). The moral character of the children is determined primarily by the godliness, purity and modesty of their mother (מדרש ילמדנו, פ' נשא). Even though women are not expressly required to engage in Jewish studies, they share the merits of their husbands in this respect as well because it is they that arouse and promote the desire for "learning" in their children and in their husbands, urging their children to study, encouraging their husbands to attend houses of study and giving them a cheerful greeting when they return home. Indeed, women were ready to make the sacrifice of having their husbands leave them for long periods to study at academies far away from home (טוטה כא, ברכות יז).

On ben Peleth was saved by the sensible exhortations of his wife, while Korach's death was due solely to his wife's inordinate ambition (סנהדרין ק').

Similarly, it was not a father but a mother who entered the annals of glorious martyrdom with her seven sons (גיטין נו'). Again and again, our Sages point to the נשים צדקניות who sustained their menfolk in Egypt, who did not allow themselves to be swept along when their menfolk

turned away from God to worship the Golden Calf, who from time immemorial have acted as the nurturers and rescuers of the Jewish spirit and who therefore were given a greater promise of salvation from God than the men (ברכות יז).

A man who has a wife beautiful in her character and in her actions is considered a rich man (שבת כה). Therefore, one Sage always referred to his wife as his "home" (שם קיה). In popular parlance the wife was described as the upholder of the home (דביתהו). The Sages interpreted the Scriptural term for "home" as referring primarily to the wife (ימא ב). A deceased husband is truly dead only for his wife and a deceased wife only for her husband (סנהדרין כב). One who has lost his first wife through death is as if he himself had lived through the destruction of the Temple; the world grows dark around him, his steps become smaller and his plans fail (שם כב).

In view of the foregoing, a man should exercise more care and purity of mind in selecting a wife than in any other decision. Some take a wife out of sensuality, others out of greed, others for personal ambition, and still others with pure intentions that are pleasing to God. One who marries out of sensuality will have disobedient and rebellious children. That is why the Biblical laws regarding marriage to a woman that was captured in battle are followed by the laws concerning the "stubborn and rebellious son." If a man marries for money, he will end his days in poverty and dependence on charity. The sons of Eli, who married women out of greed, lived through the humiliation of seeing what was left of their home sold to others for one coin and one loaf of bread. One who marries a man out of ambition will have descendants doomed to ruin. Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, dazzled by the splendor of the palace of Ahab, allied himself to the latter by marriage. What was the result? After his death, Athalia, the mother of his grandson, killed every possible rival in the family to make sure she could rule over Israel.

On the other hand, a man who takes a wife with pure and pious intentions will have children who will bring happiness and salvation to Israel. This was the case with Amram who, through his wife Yocheved, became the father of Moses and Aaron. Another case in point was Obed, the son of Boaz and Ruth, ancestor of David and Solomon (תנא דבי אליהו, קידושין ע).

Let a man sell all he has in order to marry the daughter of a scholar, for if he then dies or must go into exile he is assured that, under the care

of his wife, the children will grow up to become scholars. One should not marry the daughter of an ignoramus, because if he dies or must go into exile, the children, too, will become עמי הארץ (פסחים מט.).

The Sages expect a husband to treat his wife with the most tender consideration, love and respect. The first man called his wife, "the mother of all living;" that is why a husband should give in to his partner and not cause her grief (כחובות טא.). Let every man be careful not to offend his wife. A woman's tears come easily; therefore it is easy to offend her. Let every man be protective of his wife's honor because it is on her account that blessings come into the home (בבא מציעא נט.). Rabba would tell his fellow townsmen: If you honor your wives, you will become rich (שם). As long as a man is unmarried, all his love goes to his parents. Once he has married, his love belongs to his wife. This is also the meaning of the maxim that "therefore the man leaves his father and mother," etc. This certainly does not mean that he will cease to honor his parents, but the love of his soul will be for his wife (ילקוט).

When Jacob answered Rachel in anger (Genesis 30,2), God said to him, "Is that the manner in which a man should speak to women, the nurturers of the children? Truly, the day will come when your sons will stand in shame before her son" (בראשית רבה ע"א אות ז'). One who causes his wife to insult him because he refused to give her jewelry and nice clothes will become poor (שבת טב:). Even if a husband must deny his wife something that she wants or must rebuke her, let him draw her closer with his right hand even while his left pushes her away (סוטה מו:). If your wife is short, bend down toward her and seek her counsel (בבא מציעא נט.). A man should never terrorize his wife or make her afraid of him. The terror that the husband aroused in the woman of Gibeah cost the lives of thousands of Israelites (Judges 19-20). Even if he reminds her of her religious duties, as he must do, he should do it in a kind and gentle manner (גיטין ה:).

Just as there are various attitudes toward food and drink, so do men differ in their treatment of their wives. If a fly falls into the cup, some men will pour out the entire contents of their cup and refuse to drink from it. This corresponds to the way of Pappus, who used to lock up his wife indoors whenever he went out. If a fly fell into the cup of some other men, they will throw the fly away and then drink the contents of the cup. This corresponds to the correct and accepted manner of a husband who does not mind his wife associating with her brothers and male neighbors and relatives. On the other hand, there are those who,

when a fly falls into their soup, will squash the fly and eat it up. This corresponds to the way of the wicked man who sees his wife behave in an indecent, immoral manner and does nothing to stop her (גיטין צ').

In the Biblical chapter regarding the drink to be given to a wife suspected of adultery, it is specified that before he can subject his wife to this ordeal the husband himself must never have been guilty of infidelity. Only if the man has never been unfaithful to his wife and never indulged in any sexual irregularities will the drink be a reliable test for the wife's fidelity (טוטה כה).

In general, we do not encounter anywhere in Judaism instances of the kind of sexual isolation we would expect to find in Oriental societies. Even at feasts the host invites not only his brothers but also his sisters (ויקרא רבה ז' אות ג'). One passage in the פסיקתא רבתי (פ' מ"ג) describes the daily life of a woman with her husband and children; it accords very much with our own family life today. The wife rises early in the morning and washes the faces of her children so that they will be clean when they go to school. At noontime, when the children come home from school, she is there and has her noontime meal together with her husband and children (שם). If women are advised not to appear in large crowds, this is not done because one fears the levity of the women but because one fears the levity of the men (בראשית רבה ח' אות י"ב). Of one who loves his wife like himself and honors her more than he honors himself, who raises his sons and daughters in the right way and sees to it that they marry early, it is said: You will see peace and happiness in your tent (יבמות סב:). Happy is the man to whose decency his wife, his Torah and his [way of earning a] livelihood can all testify. Of such a man it is said: Your wellspring, your origin and the root of all your happiness is blessed (ילקוט Proverbs 5,18).

Even though the Sages of Judaism fully appreciate that women, because of their nature, are basically different from men, they regard women as full intellectual equals of the male sex. They interpret the Biblical passage וייצר ה' אלקים את האדם concerning the creation of man by the hands of God as implying that women were created in an equal fashion as men (בראשית רבה י"ד אות ב'). True, our Sages note the unique female traits, particularly their greater sensitivity, in such passages as, "A man is easier to appease," or "In the case of women the fire flares up more readily," or "A woman is more frequently moved to tears than a man" (בראשית רבה י"ז אות ח', טוטה יז, ב"מ נט.). Our Sages also utter the profound thought that "women have only one

heart." meaning that their emotions are less divided than those of men; they can address themselves to only one subject at a time (מדרש ילמדנו). But at the same time, our Sages consider women intellectually superior to men. The Creator has given greater intellectual gifts to the woman than to the man; that is why women attain intellectual maturity earlier than men (נדה מה:). This, too, is why the Sages of the Jewish people regard the matriarchs, women such as Sarah and Rebecca, as no less inspired by the spirit of God and no less capable of communicating with Him than the patriarchs (בראשית רבה ס"ז אוח ט', סנהדרין סט:). Like the men, so the women, too, attained the full spiritual and moral grandeur of pure human dignity through the deliverance and election of Israel (Leviticus 26,13). The glorification of God by women on earth is considered more important than the glorification of God by the angels (Exodus 15,1).

Moreover, the Sages gratefully acknowledge the spiritual perceptions with which women have enriched the Jewish conscience. Leah taught us how to give thanks to God; Tamar hurled herself into a burning oven rather than humiliate another person in public; and Hannah taught us how to pray and how to perceive God as *ה' צבאר* (ברכות נט, בבא מציעה נט, ז, לא). In general, the view of the Sages of Judaism is that every human being, regardless of class, sex or nationality, is capable of intellectual and moral perfection. What was it, we read in *תנא דבי אליהו*, that enabled Deborah to become a prophetess and judge in Israel at a time when a man of the caliber of Pinchas was still alive? "I call heaven and earth to witness, be a man a Jew or a non-Jew, man or woman, manservant or maidservant, only according to their actions will the spirit of God rest upon them" (Judges 4,4).