

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 נפשוך 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 חפץ כפיה.

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 סמם, צמם. 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. מזמה 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	והגור 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 וְהִדָּר לְבוּשָׁה
וְחִשְׁקָה לַיּוֹם אַחֲרֶיךָ.

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 *בִּירְאָה עֲרוֹם*, 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 וְהִדָּר*, 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 ותורת 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 תהלהלל.
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 (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).