

Treat Her Right

written by Ozer Bergman
January 23, 2022



Treat Her Right

Abram said to Sarai, “Please say that you are my *achot* (sister), so that it will go well for me for your sake, and through you I will live” (Genesis 12:13).

For those of us who are new at this, and for those of us who may need a reminder: our holy Torah is many, many things at one and the same time. So a story about a man and a woman who lived a few thousand years ago in ancient Mesopotamia is a teaching story about many things—simultaneously—including: how a husband and wife should relate; how a nation was born; and the foundations of that nation.

Already in Rebbe Nachman’s time, marital friction and discord was becoming an issue, even in religious communities. Someone

related to Reb Noson a talk he had had with the Rebbe about the fact that it had become more common for relationships between newlyweds to degenerate. This often resulted in separation and occasionally in divorce. The Rebbe commented that this was the work of the Evil One, who works very hard to ruin the family life of young men in order to trap them in his net and destroy their lives.

Part of the solution, to prevent one's relationship from degenerating, is to honor and respect one's wife. The Rebbe often stressed the importance of this. He pointed out the (what should be) obvious, that women suffer in pregnancy and childbirth, and then bear the brunt of the burden of child-rearing. In accord with what our Sages teach, "Honor your wives so that you may have wealth" (*Bava Metzia* 59a); and, "It's enough for us that they raise our children" (*Yevamot* 63a), Rebbe Nachman reminded husbands, young and old, to genuinely sympathize with their wives, and to sincerely honor and respect them. (Bearing and raising your children is not the only reason, so even if there aren't any children yet, or it's twenty years since the last one, treat her like royalty.)

In Chassidic teachings, husband and wife parallel Torah and *tefilah* (prayer). For the greater part of the post-Beit HaMikdash (Holy Temple) era, *tefilah* has been little cherished and insufficiently respected. Prayer, for the most part, has been only for taking care of the body. But she can provide neither food nor clothing on her own. Such a prayer needs Torah. For this reason, it has been the man who has sought a wife, while the woman waited for a suitor because she has had no justifiable means with which to assert herself. "Give me Torah so that I may have nice clothing, a full stomach, etc." is not the true path of Jewishness.

But there is another kind of *tefilah*, a *tefilah* based on Torah that you've learned, a prayer that you Torah-walk the Torah-talk. A prayer like this has a wholesome foundation since its sole focus is to put the Torah into practice. A *tefilah* like

this is Torah! This kind of prayer brings with her her own food, clothing and anything else she may need. This *tefilah* can seek Torah for a husband. This is part of what the prophet means when he says (Jeremiah 31:22), “For God has created something new in the world: The female courts the man.” (Are we already witnessing a partial fulfillment of that prophecy as we see more of such courting, and increased financial independence for women? I would say so.)

In Hebrew, the words for brother (*ach*) and sister (*achot*) are related to the word for “one” (*echad*). Avraham Avinu (our Patriarch) tells Sarah Imeinu (our Matriarch), “Tell them you are my sister”—we are one. “Then it will go well for me for your sake”—*tefilah* will provide for the Torah. “And through you I will live”—Torah will be practiced as it should be. Amen, swiftly and soon, in our lifetime.

(Based on *Sichot HaRan (Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom) ##263–264; Likutey Halakhot, Rosh Chodesh 5:22*)