

# Ki Sisa

## Women's Lib

*Aaron said to them, "Remove the rings of gold that are in the ears of your wives..." The entire people removed the gold rings that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron.*

Shemos 32:3–4

Nearly five hundred years ago, the Arizal (Rabbi Yitzchak Luria) predicted the rise of the women's liberation movement in our age.<sup>1</sup> He said that in the times just before the Moshiach's arrival, the souls of those living would be reincarnations of those who lived in the time of the *midbar*, and sinned with the Golden Calf. Since in the episode of the Golden Calf, only the men sinned, while the women abstained, in the times when these souls are reincarnated, those women will control their husbands. It is interesting to note that the control of woman by man was a punishment for the sin of enticing Adam to eat from the tree, and by abstaining from aiding and abetting sin, this punishment was removed!

Our *Chachamim* have told us unequivocally that this is the era of *Ikvisa Dimishicha*, the footsteps of the Messiah.<sup>2</sup> The women's lib movement took strong hold in the western world in the 1960s. The goal was expressed as gaining full social and economic equality.

The great Lev Avraham, Rav Avraham Weinfeld,<sup>3</sup> explained that this punishment is worse than it sounds. He approaches the gemara that says, "All men wish to wed a convert."<sup>4</sup> Though this may sound a bit unusual, he explains it based upon the gemara where we are taught, "There are three whose lives are not worth living...he whose wife rules over him."<sup>5</sup> Thus, to escape the torture that could possibly result in marriage to a wife who feels superior to her husband, men seek to marry converts, who will always feel lucky to have a husband from more respectable stock than themselves. He concludes that this is especially true in our days, in which, the Arizal told us, there is great danger of men being controlled by their wives. A great Talmid Chacham in Yerushalayim once told me that he finds it fascinating that the more that women distance themselves from the curse of "and he shall rule over you," with which Chava was punished after the sin, the more they bring upon themselves the curse given to man, "By the sweat of your brow shall you earn your bread."

However, what the saintly Lev Avraham understood as a punishment to men is disputed by

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1 *Sbaar Hagilgulim*, introduction 20, p. 19b

2 As long ago as the early nineteenth century, Rav Chaim Palagi made this assertion (introduction to *Tochachas Chaim*) and most recently, the Chofetz Chaim was quite vocal about the nature of our times as the Epoch of the Messiah.

3 *Chachmei Lev*, vol. 4, p. 55. It is important to know that this great man, himself, in fact married a convert.

4 Horayos 13a (other texts have "all men *rush* to marry converts.")

5 Beitzah 32a

R. Yaakov Hillel.<sup>6</sup> He quotes the Baal Shem Tov,<sup>7</sup> that when a person does certain sins, his wife controls him, and he quotes something similar from the Chida. He explains that a person has no right to claim that the reason that his wife is controlling him is due to his living in the last generation, because this is not at all what the Arizal meant. After all, women and men have very different roles in Hashem's grand picture, and the role of woman is not fulfilled in ruling over her husband, and turning his life into a living death. Rather, explains Rav Hillel, the control given to women over their husbands is a greater influence upon the spiritual growth of their husbands. In our times, the women have the ability to convince their husbands to further learn and grow and involve themselves in mitzvos.

In a similar vein, the Satmar Rebbe z"l told of how he once asked a young man about some flaw in the spiritual state of his household. The man replied to the Rebbe, "You are correct, but my wife is in charge of me!" The Rebbe went on to say that this is not what the Arizal was talking about at all, but rather, that the women would have merit in being able to increase spiritual influence over their husbands' growth in Torah and mitzvos – not simply that they would rule the roost.

Many Americans call their wives "Honey." *Dvash*, the Hebrew word for honey, is 306 in *gematria*. So is *isha*, the word for "woman."<sup>8</sup> One of the most interesting properties of honey, in Halacha, is related to the eating of bees' honey. Though we can be certain that organs or limbs of the bees will be scattered through the honey jars that we buy, we may nevertheless eat it. The reason for this is that we are taught that honey changes the actual bee leg that falls into it into honey. The chemical makeup is now that of honey!<sup>9</sup> A wife also has the ability to change her husband into whatever she is made of.

The Midrash<sup>10</sup> tells us of a couple who were both equally righteous people, but sadly, were married many years without children. They thus divorced, and each remarried. They both remarried wicked people. The man who married a wicked woman turned wicked, while the woman who married a wicked man turned her husband righteous. Everything depends upon the woman.

In our day, we have seen the fulfillment of the words of the Arizal. There may have never been a society of women supporting and encouraging their husbands in Torah and growth as we are seeing in our times. The Midrash tells us that women hold an important sway over their

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6 *Amudei Horaab*, 9, p. 11

7 Quoted in *Toldos Yaakov Yosef*, Lech Lecha, s.v *shomati mimori*.

8 R. Bechaya, Vayikra 1:11; *Dvash Liji* of the Chida, *dalet*, 1.

9 This is the opinion of R. Yonah, quoted by Rosh (to Brachos, ch. 6, 35). The Chafetz Chaim, in his introduction to *Likkutei Halachos*, uses this concept to understand the verse (Tehillim 19:11) that describes Torah as "sweeter than honey." He explains that the Torah has an even greater ability to take a simple – and even bad – person, and turn him into something truly good. R. Elyashiv, in his *Haaros* on Bechoros, adds that honey can only change a portion of a creature into honey, but not an entire creature. Torah is even sweeter, and can change an entire man into a man of Torah.

10 Bereishis Rabbah 17:7

husbands as well. Our generation is that of the woman, encouraging her husband in a way that has not yet been seen. Though Chava did encourage her husband in his sin, her granddaughters did not partake in the sin of the *Egel*, and for this reason, the great women of our time have managed to create a generation of husbands who are striving to learn and grow in ways that they never could have without these great women.