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OU ISRAEL FACULTY

Torat Imecha  
**NACH YOMI**

בס"ד

## Mishlei and Marriage

As our study of Sefer Mishlei continues apace with the preparations for my daughter's upcoming wedding, I can't but reflect upon the teachings of Shlomo HaMelech regarding the role of the Jewish woman. Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch cites the verse: "מצא אשה מצא טוב" - He who has found a wife has found great good" (18:22), and observes that "The text does not read: 'Who has found a good wife,' but merely 'a wife.' Obviously, the concept of 'wife' incorporates good; a fault in her disposition is tantamount to a lack of femininity."<sup>1</sup>

The ability of the woman to influence her home is built into Creation. Describing the creation of woman, the verse states: "ויקח" - אחת מצלעותיו ויסגר בשר תחתנה - Hashem took one of the sides of Man, and sealed the flesh beneath it."<sup>2</sup> The midrash interprets the *pasuk* to mean that Hashem sealed the influence of woman over man, and illustrates with an anecdote: There was once a pious couple who were married for many years and remained childless. They decided to divorce and each remarried an evildoer.

The woman succeeded in transforming her second husband into a righteous man, while the man was influenced by his wife and became an evildoer.<sup>3</sup>

This principle is found in Sefer Mishlei as well. Shlomo HaMelech taught: "חכמות נשים בנתה ביתה, ואולת בידיה תהרסנו" - A woman of much wisdom has built her house, while a foolish woman destroys her home with her own hands" (14:1) Rav Hirsch elaborates: "The wife is actually the builder of the home, and this is no simple art. The guidance of domestic life, entrusted to her hands, comprises an abundance of seemingly minor relationships; but the wise or unwise handling of these can be so decisive for the comfort, prospering and happiness of the home that *חכמה*, simple wisdom, is not sufficient. Rather *חכמות*, a whole combination of knowledge, insight, abilities and skills, as well as moral virtue and spiritual excellence, make up the art of the wifely home builder."<sup>4</sup> This truth is reflected in the marriage ceremony, as the bride circles the groom seven times under the Chuppah, symbolizing that she is building the walls that will encircle the new home being established. It is the wife, as the *עקרת הבית*, the mainstay of the home, who establishes its boundaries and moral underpinnings.

Sefer Mishlei concludes with Shlomo HaMelech's paean to the woman of valor,

1. Samson Raphael Hirsch, From the Wisdom of Mishlei p. 241

2. Bereshit 2:21

3. Bereshit Rabbah 17:7

4. SRH, From the Wisdom of Mishlei pp. 245-6

a woman who excels in all spheres of life. It is interesting to note that in all of Sefer Mishlei, Shlomo HaMelech uses the term “מִי יִמְצָא - who can find?” exactly twice - once in reference to the woman of valor, and once in reference to the man of faith: “וַיֵּשׁ אִישׁ אֶמֶן - נִים מִי יִמְצָא - who can find a man of faith?” (20:6). Each is an expression of something of great and rare value, a woman of valor and a man of faith, and lauds an attribute ordinarily associated with the opposite gender. חיל, valor, is ordinarily associated with the male, while אמונה, faith, is a quality more inherent to women. When man and woman form a bond of faithfulness with one another, they combine to reflect the bond between man and G-d, a bond of love and faithfulness that endures forever.<sup>5</sup> Man and woman were created as one entity, with both male and female characteristics. When man and woman unite in the service of G-d, these characteristics are given their fullest expression, each enhancing the qualities of the other and helping them to develop. The Maharal teaches that a woman has two dimensions - who she is when she is born, and who she becomes through association with her husband. Hazal teach that a man who marries a woman for the sake of Heaven is considered as if he gave birth to her. Marriage enables the woman to develop aspects of her personality that otherwise may remain latent. Thus Sarai, before her marriage to Avraham, was already spiritually superior. Through her association with Avraham, she became Sarah. Her spiritual intuition, which had been inner directed, was channelled into

5. Maharal, Netivot Olam Netiv HaEmunah

outreach and she became a teacher of women, an *Eishet Chayil* in her own right.<sup>6</sup>

May we all merit to see Nachat from our children as we escort them to the Chuppah and beyond. ■

6. Gur Aryeh, Bereshit 11:29

**Mrs. Leah Feinberg** is a master educator who taught at the SKA High School for Girls in Hewlett for twenty-one years, also serving as Tanach Department chairperson and New Teacher Mentor. Leah is currently on the faculty of the OU Israel Center and has taught in all three cycles of the OU Women's Initiative Nach Yomi program

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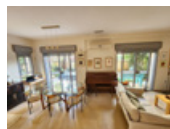


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