



SERMON RESOURCE FOR SHLUCHIM

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Men vs Women: Two Sides of the Same Tablets

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ר' מנחם זאב בן פנחס ז"ל
Emil W. Herman
who loved and supported Torah learning.

1ST day Shavuos

Men vs Women: Two Sides of the Same Tablets

Good Yom Tov!

Today I'd like to start with something personal that might get me in trouble. Here is a secret- my wife doesn't like to be called "rebbetzin."

As far as I understand, the reason for this is because to her, the word rebbetzin connotes a little old lady who walks with a cane and is hard of hearing—not the image she wants to be associated with.

However, if you ask her, she'll give you an explanation that's more philosophical and almost feministic: "Rebbetzin" is a description that a woman gets because of her husband; if he's a rabbi, she automatically is considered a rebbetzin. It doesn't matter what her talents and skills are, or what her level of involvement in the synagogue or community is—she might even visit the synagogue only once a year and will still be considered the rebbetzin because she's simply the rabbi's wife.

It's similar to being the First Lady. The First Lady doesn't have to run for office; you don't have to vote for her. It really doesn't matter who she is—the mere fact that her husband is the President automatically makes her the First Lady.

In the world of Chabad, on the other hand, a shliach who goes out for a career of field work must be married. And his wife is not just the wife of the shliach who travels along with him but is a shluchah in her own right. They build Chabad centers together. It is she who often runs many of the major programs at the Chabad center, whether it's the Hebrew school, classes for adults, kindergarten, the mikvah, parties, events and what not.

In my case, I can say that I'm the rabbi here because she's the rebbetzin, not the other way around—and I give thanks to G-d every day that in Chabad, women don't serve as rabbis because otherwise, I might have to look for another job!

The Rebbe built the institution of shlichus in such a way that it's a full partnership between husband and wife—and for that reason only, the women who go out on shlichus are prepared to go to such distant places as Alaska, China and so on. Because they are equal partners in the action and they have the same satisfaction that the shluchim get from their work, and perhaps even more so.

The Rebbe created a new model in Judaism that hadn't existed before.

For example, Moshe Rabbeinu was the greatest Jewish leader who ever lived—but his wife Tzipora was not involved in any of the action. She kept very far from the limelight. Miriam, Moshe Rabbeinu's sister, was the leader of the womenfolk—but you don't hear that her husband was involved in any public activism. And so it was throughout all the generations in the Jewish Nation—there were men who were leaders and women who were leaders, but never as a married couple.

In our generation, for the first time, the Rebbe turned shlichus into a job equally divided by the couple—and that is the secret of Chabad's success. As a general rule, when only one half of a couple is involved in activism, the other half sits around and mopes all day. On the other hand, when both husband and wife are equal partners in the activism, they each encourage the other.

And that brings us to the Ten Commandments that we'll be reading today in the Torah.

For starters, the Ten Commandments were written on two stone tablets—five on one tablet and five on the other.

The Rebbe (Simchas Torah 5733, Sichos Kodesh 5733 Vol. I pg. 81) asks, why indeed were the Ten Commandments given on two separate tablets? If G-d wanted to emphasize the importance of each Commandment, then He should have given each one on a separate tablet! And if that wasn't the intention, then perhaps they should have all been written on one tablet! Why five on one tablet and five on the other—especially when the letter count is not equal? The Ten Commandments contain 620 letters—but most of those letters are in the first five Commandments. The first tablet contains over 500 letters, but the second tablet, however, contains far fewer letters. And so, why five by five? What's so special about the number five?

The fact that G-d chose to give the Commandments in the number ten is understood—because it comes as an extension to the ten statements by which the universe was created. But what is there to the number five?

So here's one answer: When we look at the human body, we find the number ten divided in halves.

Every human being has ten fingers, divided among two hands—five on the right and five on the left. Now the right hand, and the right side, symbolizes the character trait of chesed, of giving, of action—"y'min mikarevess"—the right hand draws close. The left hand symbolizes tough love, "s'mol docheh"—the left hand pushes away. All this means that there are things that one should pull close and do, and things that one should reject and push away.

And we find this concept in the division of the Two Tablets: On the first Tablet, you have the five first Commandments: Faith in G-d, the prohibition of idol worship, not taking G-d's Name in vain, observing the Sabbath, and respecting one's parents. On the second Tablet, you have the second five Commandments: Don't murder, don't commit adultery, don't steal, not testify falsely, and don't lust.

Now the first Tablet's Commandments are more positive—and these we draw closer to ourselves with our right hands. These are the things that we need to do. With the second Tablet, however, we find that they are more negative—what not to do, what we must push away with our left hands: Don't steal, don't murder, etc.

But another difference between the Tablets was explained by the Rebbe, namely that the first Tablet contains mitzvos between Man and G-d, or the ritual mitzvos, while the second Tablet contains mitzvos between Man and his fellow man, or the ethical mitzvos.

But we can add another possible explanation that jumps out at us: The first Tablet contains mitzvos that pertain more to women, while the second Tablet contains mitzvos more intended for men.

After all, who respects fathers and mothers more? Who is busier with helping elderly parents? The sons will do their parents a favor and show up once a month and make them a cup of tea, thus discharging themselves of their duties to their parents. The daughters, on the other hand, are the ones busy with their parents day and night and never tiring.

The same thing applies when it comes to emunah, to faith in G-d. Women have much more simple faith and fear of Heaven than men. It's something that jumps out at you and something that everyone sees every day: Who worries more that there be a Shabbos in the house? Who creates the atmosphere of Shabbos in the house? Who worries about the Friday night meal? Who lights the Shabbos candles? And so on and so forth—without the woman, there's no Shabbos in the house.

However, the mitzvos on the second Table are intended primarily for men: Don't murder, don't steal, don't lust. No explanations are necessary. It's clear who those Commandments are intended for.

But what's interesting is that when G-d told Moshe before the Giving of the Torah, to go speak to the Jewish Nation and clarify from them whether they want the Torah, He said to him, "Say thus to the House of Jacob, and speak to the Sons of Israel" (Shmos 19:5). And Rashi says, " 'to the House of Jacob' means the womenfolk... 'and the Sons of Israel'... [means] the menfolk."

In other words, G-d told Moshe to first address the women and only then the men. And we might say that G-d also did so Himself—by first speaking the Commandments that relate more to women, and only then speaking those more related to men.

However, the Rebbe concludes and points out that a healthy person uses both hands, not just one hand—meaning that it's not enough to just do the interpersonal or ethical mitzvos, the mitzvos we do with the left hand. Rather, we also need to do the mitzvos that we do with the right hand. Similarly, it's not enough to just do the negative mitzvos (the things that we should not do)—rather, we need to also keep the positive mitzvos.

The young couples who go out on shlichus are like the two Tablets of the Ten Commandments, the right hand and the left hand. And the first Tablet, the mitzvos relating more to women, is the right hand, the trait of love. The second Tablet, the mitzvos relating more to men, is the left hand, the trait of tough love—which is also needed sometimes.

Only together do they complete the shlichus.

And what's true for the shluchim is true for every married couple. Every married couple is the Two Tablets—and one without the other cannot endure.

One just needs to be careful not to break the Tablets.

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