



SERMON RESOURCE FOR SHLUCHIM

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Ladies First!!

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In loving memory of

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

Eikev

Ladies First!!

This coming week is Tu B'Av, the fifteenth of the month of Av.

This date is historically significant. In the Tanach era of Jewish history, the period of the Prophets and Kings, the 15th of Av was a day for getting engaged. Young Jewish women would go out into the vineyards, and the young men would come by to find their mates.

Speaking of which, this time of the year is a good time to work on strengthening your marriage too.

The key to a happy marriage is to understand that men and women are totally different from one another.

A woman who gets up in the morning with a high fever will still get up, deal with the kids, make breakfast, send them off to school and only then tend to herself. The husband, on the other hand, will notify his boss that he's not coming in today the moment he feels a little too hot. He cancels all his meetings for the week and lies in bed, convinced that he is dangerously ill.

Now in general, men don't pay attention to details. They don't perceive little things. For example, if the wife is suddenly wearing something new, she expects to hear from her husband how cute she looks. But he doesn't say a word. So when she finally can't bear it any longer, she asks him, "What—you don't love my new blouse?!" And the poor guy sputters, "Oh, no—it's beautiful! I just didn't notice that you had something new on."

Another example is when the baby starts crying at night. She wakes her husband up and nudges him to get up and give the baby his bottle. When in his “infinite kindness” he finally actually gets up to do it, he gets to the kitchen and shouts, “I can’t find the bottle!” And as much as she tries to steer him in the right direction, “It’s about two feet from the fridge,” “It’s in the corner next to the cabinets,” he gropes about in the kitchen like a blind man in the dark. He then comes back to the bedroom and notifies his wife that he can’t find it. So finally, she gets up—and, of course, the bottle is exactly where she said it would be.

But what can we do? Guys just don’t see things they don’t want to see.

Which brings us to this week’s Torah portion, Eikev.

In this week’s Parshah, we read the second paragraph of the Shma: “Vehaya Im Shamo.” But when we compare the two paragraphs, we discover something unusual: the Torah seems to be repeating the same mitzvos mentioned last week in the first paragraph.

In the first paragraph, a verse states, “And you shall love the L-rd your G-d”—we are commanded to love G-d. But this is something repeated in the second paragraph: “And it will be if you listen to My commandments... to love the L-rd your G-d...”

In the first paragraph, it says, “And you shall teach them to your sons,” meaning that you need to teach your kids Torah, and here in the second paragraph it again says, “And you shall teach them to your sons.”

In the first paragraph it mentions the mitzvah of tefillin and mezuzos, and here it repeats those very mitzvos.

What’s the purpose of all this?!

In the Torah, every single word and even letter is precisely measured. There are several very important mitzvos that are written very shortly, or only with a hint. But here, the Torah states several mitzvos twice!

It's one thing that the Aseress Hadibros, the Ten Commandments, are mentioned for the first time in the Book of Shmos and then again in the Book of Devarim. But in our case, the first paragraph of Shma is mentioned only one Parshah earlier than the one we're currently reading! That's just last week!

So let's look a little deeper into this.

Before G-d gave the Torah on Mt. Sinai, He sent Moshe Rabbeinu, to notify the Jewish Nation that He was about to choose them as a special nation—and to give them His Torah.

So in the Torah portion of Yisro, as soon as the story starts, the first words that G-d says to Moshe are, "Thus shall you say to the House of Jacob and relate to the Sons of Israel" (Shmos 18:3). But there's an obvious question right there: Why the repetitive term? Why say the "House of Jacob" and the "Sons of Israel"? Aren't they the same thing?

But along comes Rashi to explain that this verse is teaching us several things.

First of all, the "House of Jacob" is to be interpreted as referring to the womenfolk. The "Sons of Israel," on the other hand, refers to the menfolk. And what the Torah is teaching us here, says Rashi, is that when it comes to the really important things, one needs to address men and women separately. You can't give the same lecture to both.

Additionally, Rashi comments, women must be addressed “b’lashon rakah,” which literally translates to “soft tongue.” It means to speak to women gently, to ask nicely, to speak softly, etc. To the guys, however, you can give `em what Harry Truman would give `em. You can talk the tough-guy talk. You can exhort them like a field general to his men. To the menfolk, therefore, Rashi says one needs to speak “words as tough as sinews.”

That’s because men don’t understand when you ask them gently. When a man is asked something by his wife nicely again and again, he doesn’t hear at all. So finally she loses her patience and shouts at him: “Take the garbage out already!” And only then does he snap out of his stupor and say, “Sure, no problem—but why are you yelling?”

That’s why Rashi says that to men, one needs to speak firmly, sharply and clearly. Otherwise you’re talking to a wall.

But this verse teaches us yet another thing: One must always address the womenfolk first. Rashi says: “In that kind of language and in that order.” Why? The Rebbe quotes the Midrash, which says that at the creation of Adam, the first human being, G-d commanded him not to eat from the Eitz HaDaas, the Tree of Knowledge, and Adam was the one who passed on this message to Chava, or Eve, the first woman—and the result is known to all.

Says the Midrash: If G-d had only spoken to Chava first, she would have listened to G-d’s commandment and would not have let Adam into the kitchen anyway, and he’d have no chance of eating from the Tree of Knowledge.

But the most important thing of all is this: We see clearly that the women are the ones who influence the men in all matters of Judaism. The kids finally go to Hebrew School only when the mother decides—the husband generally doesn’t get involved. Likewise, the family joins a synagogue that the wife likes, and the husband has to join in whether he likes it or not.

And so G-d told Moshe, "Go speak to the women first—if you succeed in convincing them, you've already accomplished most of your job. They'll see to it that their husbands keep the mitzvos."

We might even say that this is the reason our Parshah repeats some mitzvos we only had just last week. Just like Moshe spoke to the women and men separately when the Torah was given, and in different styles, perhaps here too, at the end of the 40 years in the desert, did he first speak to the women, telling them the first paragraph of the Shma.

After all, it is in a "soft tongue"—it tells us to love G-d, teach Torah to the children, and see to it that the menfolk put on tefillin and put mezuzos on the front door of the house.

But the second paragraph of the Shma, the one we have in this week's portion, is addressing the menfolk. So here, Moshe repeats himself, but first, he uses "words as tough as sinews." To the guys, he talks serious business: "And it will be if you listen to My commandments... you'll gather your crops... you'll eat and be satisfied." Business will be good. You'll have plenty of customers. Your stocks will rise and everything will go as it should.

But if not, then you might end up with the opposite, G-d forbid: "The earth won't put forth its bounty." That kind of tough-guy talk is talked only to guys. To women, you don't need to give them you-know-what to get them to love G-d. And besides, they are generally not the primary breadwinners for their families. The husband is the one whose entire existence involves bringing in a livelihood.

And it's the same thing at the end of the paragraph, where the Torah again promises the menfolk that if they keep the mitzvos, there shall be fulfilled in their lives "So that your days are increased"—they'll live long lives.

Now who needs long life more? Men or women?

In general, women live longer than men. It's true today and it was true through all of history. So men are the ones who need the blessing of long life more—because they naturally live shorter lives.

Even in the Generation of the Desert, it was the womenfolk who merited to enter the Holy Land, while the menfolk didn't live as long and ended up dying in the desert. So therefore, Moshe told the menfolk at the end of the 40 years in the desert: If you keep the mitzvos, you'll merit long life.

And so ultimately, my friends, the best trick of all for living a long and happy life is to follow in the footsteps of Avraham Avinu, our Patriarch Abraham, who was told by G-d regarding his wife Sarah: "Everything that Sarah says to you, heed her voice."

May we heed our spouses' voices even better than we do already, and may G-d, whom the Kabbalah calls the Husband of the Jewish People, finally take his Wife (that's us!) out of Galus, exile, with the coming of Moshiach, speedily in our days, amen!

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