TITLE: Role of women in Judaism

We live in a time that is blessed with unprecedented recognition of the value of human rights and equality.  Since the industrial revolution, society is less involved with labor and more involved with information; and with unprecedented levels of communication, we are more open-minded than any generation has ever been. All races now have the same rights, faiths have the same religious freedoms, and genders are allowed the same opportunities.  Women have careers, are CEOs of multi-billion dollar corporations, and over the last century, female governor-generals, prime-ministers, and presidents have numbered well into the three digits.  Today’s women have freedom and opportunities that their grandmothers would not have thought to dream of.  So you might argue that women are better off and more liberated than ever, right?

While fashion magazines and tabloids inform women of what are *supposed* to wear and how much they *should* weigh, Torah also has something to tell the women of this generation.

It may have taken the world thousands of years to finally own up and give women what they rightfully deserve – equality under the law. According to Torah women can own property etc (list everything you mentioned at the end).

However Jewish thought goes above this. Woman are not just declared to be equal in property right, etc, but it is known and understand that a woman contains a special intuition. The sages throughout the ages have pointed at that “her wisdom is…..”

NOW BRING YOUR SOURCES

In preparation for giving the Torah on Mount Sinai, G-d instructed Moses to approach the women first. WHY IS THAT?

[Exodus 19,3][Rashi Loc. cit.], and consistent with G-d’s respect for women, the Talmud instructs men to place great priority on honoring their wives[B”M 59a], extolls one who honors his wife more that he honors himself, [Yev. 62b], IT MAKES SENSE TO TELL THE STORY OF SARAH AND ABRAHAM HERE.

relates that man is blessed on account of his wife [B”M 59a].

STORY OF TZIPPORAH

Abraham was the first formal Jew, and with two sons that were half-brothers and sworn enemies, family life in his house was not smooth sailing.  When Abraham’s personal inclination conflicted with that of his wife Sarah at a pivotal moment in the destiny of their family, G-d gave Abraham very clear instructions: "Whatever Sarah tells you, hearken to her voice” [Genesis 21,12].  The Midrashic sages explain that from G-d’s instruction to Abraham “We have learned that Abraham was inferior to Sarah in prophetic intuition.”  [Midrash Rabbah. Exodus 1,1].

Abraham was unique.  He recognized G-d on his own in a world of pagan idolaters, but his destiny of fathering the Jewish people was realized due to the superior divine intuition of his wife Sara.

Three generations later, Yehudah - the patriarch of one of the twelve Jewish tribes, was intimate with his widowed ex-daughter-in-law Tamar who he did not recognize at the time, and she became pregnant.  The pregnant Tamar was accused of harlotry, when in fact, at a time when her unconventional intimacy was neither prohibited biblically nor considered immoral, she had behaved appropriately in conceiving the son that she was destined to bear from Yehuda's lineage.  The Torah relates during this story that “(A heavenly voice responded) “It is from me”” [Genesis 38:25-26].  The Talmud explains that “A heavenly voice issue forth and declared: From me (these unconventional events) have precipitated” [Talmud: Makos 23b], and commentaries clarify further, that Yehudah was intrinsically an essential king (all kings of the Jewish people were destined to come from his lineage), and for her virtuous character, Tamar merited that that kings should descend from her, so G-d orchestrated that offspring should be had by both of them together [Rashi’s commentary loc. cit.].  Tamar’s unconventional behavior was actually appropriate and her divine intuition was accurate.

Yehudah was a natural born leader with King David and Messiah destined to descend from his lineage, but this destiny was realized thanks to the divine intuition of Tamar.

Three generations further down the line is the story of Moses’ wife Tzipporah and the serpent.  Immediately after the birth of their son Eliezer, Moses was instructed by G-d to return to Egypt and he postponed his son’s circumcision ao his family would be able to follow G-d’s instruction to travel.  Although the circumcision was delayed with good intentions, G-d did not agree with the decision, and the Talmud and Midrash relate that angels came in the form of a serpent and swallowed Moses.  Tzipporah understood that Moses was being harmed as a consequence of delaying the circumcision, so she immediately circumcised her son, and the angels let Moses go [Eruvin 32a][Midrash Rabbah: Shemos 5,8].

Moses was the greatest prophet in the history of the Jewish people -- the only man ever to speak face-to-face with G-d.  He returned to Egypt to lead the exodus of the Jews from slavery and personally received the Torah from G-d on Mt Sinai and delivered it to the Jewish people, but he would never even have made it back to Egypt alive if not for the insight of his wife Tzipporah.  When he erred, she was there with her superior intuition to make things right.

These are three examples of women who exemplified the proverbial wisdom of women that helps to keep things grounded and level when life gets bumpy [Prov. 14,1], and The Torah makes a point of bringing them to our attention.

Much of the developed world has given women equal rights to men in the last century or two, while in Torah law, women’s ability to own property of all types and transact business deals and contracts is a natural entitlement they have as human beings just like men, and it has been for millennia.

Members of both genders are equally important and equally entitled. They have always been different to each other, and they will continue to be in the foreseeable future; and it is the unique majesty and dignity of the feminine, earns women a special respect and honor -- as far as Torah is concerned.