



## PASSOVER

Passover Day 1

MeToo: Women Rule and Uphold The World

March 31, 2018

## METOO: WOMEN RULE AND UPHOLD THE WORLD

### ABSTRACT

Intimacy portrayed in mass and social media is anything but intimate. Sensitive issues of gender and human relations are turned into senseless and grotesque circuses.

For more than a half-year, a reckoning on male-female dynamics has played out in the public – and, surely, private – stage.

From Hollywood to the White House, academia to sports, tech to media, the abuse and objectification of women has roiled a tempest of significant proportions and mass repercussions.

As is often the case, the core of the matter is rarely discussed: What is the appropriate behavior between males and females? Why do men take advantage of women? Do men think they are better? Are women better than men? Are men better than women? Do men and women play the same role in society?

We talk and we talk, but has anything really changed?

The #MeToo movement gives voice to the women who have been victimized. This sermon voices the Torah's profound light on women, men, and the holy interaction between the two.

Passover is when we celebrate the liberation of our people.

3330 years ago, we were liberated because of the righteous women.

And so are we today. Women carry the power to liberate us in these challenging times.

### 1. Punctuation 101

An English professor wrote the words, “Woman without her man is nothing” on the blackboard and directed his students to punctuate it correctly.

The men wrote: “Woman, without her man, is nothing.”

The women wrote: “Woman! Without her, man is nothing.”

## 2. Women and Men

Is a man nothing without a woman? Is a woman nothing without a man?

For thousands of years, the world perceived women to be inferior to men. The world saw women similar to how it saw Jews: no right to vote, own property, or hold certain jobs. Like Jews, women were too often seen as property to be owned and manipulated for man's use or enjoyment.

For thousands of years the world decided that a woman is nothing without a man. But, just as it was wrong regarding the flatness of earth, for thousands of years the world was wrong about women.

Over the past half-century, the world has begun to come around. Movements that empower women

But as with anyone that makes a mistake, the world hasn't got it right

Women may be liberated but all too often they are liberated on men's terms. You must be liberated, says the man, sexually, morally, ethically. It's not enough to be liberated from the control of men, you must – **must**, not a very liberating word – be like them too. To be a woman you must follow the standard set by man.

And what a standard. You **must** control women, you **must** sacrifice family building so that you can career-build, you **must** dress like a man, be strong like a man, be uncompassionate like a man.

For the right to vote and be a CEO you **must** give up your femininity and womanhood.

To compound the societal situation, even as women have become more like men, men have become more like women. There are hair products for men and male fashion lines galore.

The line between genders is blurring, morphing male into female and female into male instead of empowering both of them.

In the process of trying to liberate women their quality and uniqueness has become underplayed and marginalized. And, out of guilt or whatnot, men have become less chivalrous, more effeminate and, too often, objectifying women in sexual and less-than-soulful ways.

While much has changed in society, much has also not changed. How does the Torah see women and men and their unique contributions to the world?

### 3. Passover: Slavery and Freedom

Passover is called *Zman Cheiruteinu*, the Time of our Freedom. As we read in the Haggadah, we were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt and, to make a long story short, G-d freed us, formally establishing our people as the nation of Israel.

What did the slavery in Egypt consist of? Slavery, exile, restriction could be defined in many ways. How was Egypt enslaving and limiting? And what made us free?

Based on the verse, *And they embittered their lives with hard labor, with clay and with bricks and with all kinds of labor in the fields, all their work that they worked with them with back breaking labor*,<sup>1</sup> the Talmud<sup>2</sup> lists various ways the people were enslaved, some more known, others less. One of the forms of slavery holds much insight into our topic:

*All their work that they worked with them with back breaking labor:* Said R' Shmuel bar Nachmoni in the name of R' Yonatan: They interchanged the work of the men for the work of the women, and the work of the women for the work of the men.<sup>3</sup>

Rashi explains that is back breaking difficult labor because neither were used to the work of the other – men were not used to or versed in the expertise of the women, and women weren't used to or familiar with the work of the men.

Anyone could understand how a business where the lawyer does the job of the web developer and the copywriter does the work of the accountant and the sales department does the work of the research and development would be an enslaving environment.

So was it in Egypt: the people were made to squelch their unique expertise and forced to do someone else's job.

### 4. Slavery: Not Allowed To Be Yourself

One type of slavery, then, is when you are forced to be someone you are not. Say you have an incredible talent in music; yet, from day one, everyone tells you that you must be a doctor lest you be deemed a failure by society. Or, say you are excellent at and passionate about biology and you want to become a doctor; yet, society and family pressure you to go into music. In both cases it's a form of slavery – forced to be who you are not and used for things you aren't good at or interested in.

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1 Exodus 1: 14.

2 Sotah 11a-b.

3 Sotah 11b; Tanchuma ad loc.

So was it in Egypt. On a simple level the work was backbreaking because men were doing subtle and artistic works that were the expertise of the women, and women were forced into heavy lifting and construction that was the expertise of the men.

Men were forced to be something they are not, and women were forced to be something they are not. Men were forced to become women, and women men.

This, says the Talmud, isn't freedom. This is slavery.

Trying be someone or something you're not is the epitome of slavery.

## 5. The Psychology of Slavery

One becomes something one is not when does not know or is insecure with who they are. If a young person, malleable and impressionable, is looking for who he or she is, and the entire world shouts at the person that you are this or you are that, then in all likelihood that person would become this or that. If a parent or teacher tells a child over and over again that he or she is stupid or limited, then that child begins to believe that he or she is stupid or limited.

Pharaoh did not break the people overnight. It was a 210-year process. Slowly but surely Pharaoh endeavored to break the people. After years of persecution, Pharaoh attempted to add another deep layer of slavery: you are not you, man is woman and woman is man, you don't have any true expertise or significance and therefore you must do the job of another. Like the child who is beaten down again and again, the Jews were all too close to believing what their captor and succumbing to slavery.

But they didn't. Why? Because of the women.

## 6. Women's Liberation

The Talmud<sup>4</sup> teaches that the Jewish people were redeemed from slavery because of the merit of the righteous woman. Many examples are given of how the women caused the redemption. All of the examples could be distilled into one theme: the men were at the brink of succumbing to Egypt and Pharaoh, giving up their personality, their purpose, their *raison d'être* and joy of life.

The men were ready to break up their families and end the legacy of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The men were ready to slave away for the boss Pharaoh and forgo Jewish family life, their wives, their children, their G-d.

It's hard to blame the men. When they saw Pharaoh bathing in the blood of their children and using tiny baby carcasses as sheetrock, one could pity the men for succumbing to slavery. Better no family life than seeing evil

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<sup>4</sup> Sotah 11b.

bathe in the blood of your children.

While we may empathize with the men, if they had their way, we wouldn't be here today, celebrating 3330 years later.

There is only one reason we are. And that is the women.

When the men began to question and falter, refraining from getting married, desiring divorces, refraining from intimacy and thus having children and building family, the women insisted on listening to G-d and building family.

## 7. The Feminine Mystique

What it is about the righteous woman that empowered all the people, including the men, to forge ahead and ultimately be freed from bondage?

A woman is blessed and endowed with a deeper faith and fortitude.<sup>5</sup>

A woman, they say, is like a teabag. You don't know how strong she is until you put her into hot water."

Every Jew has a natural element of faith. The Jewish people are called "believers, children of believers."<sup>6</sup> Yet, among Jews women have a deeper and more revealed sense of connection. They generally can be not as distracted as men and can see the bigger picture. The feminine archetype has a gentler and more ethereal nature, which is not as blinded by aggressive materialism.

When the Jewish people were oppressed by the Egyptians to the point of despair and surrender, it was the women's higher sense of vision and faith – her unique strength and mystique – that lifted up the spirits of the people.

And that is why the Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt in the merit of the righteous women of that time. Indeed, all the great salvations of the Jewish people throughout history – like Purim and Chanukah – were in the merit of Jewish women.

When the women led the way, the men said "me too," we too want to follow the path of G-d, the path of eternity.

For a woman to want to be a man is akin to a leader desiring to be a follower.

G-d created men and women. And G-d breathed into us our uniqueness. To deny that is deny divinity. To embrace that is to be divine.

<sup>5</sup> See Ohr HaTorah Nac"h p. 927. Yahal Ohr p. 435. See Shemot Rabba 28:2.

<sup>6</sup> Shabbas 97a. Shemot Rabba 3:12.

## 8. Conclusion: Me Too Movement

Perhaps for thousands of years the world denigrated and enslaved the woman. Not the Jew. From before the Jewish nation was born, the woman was the primary foundation of the home and family, and the man followed her lead.

Indeed, it was in the merit of the woman that the Jewish nation came to be. We would not be celebrating here today were it not for the Jewish women in Egypt and through the generations.

Moses himself would not have been born if his sister and mother did not insist to Amram, their father and husband, to continue building family and birthing more life and light into this world.<sup>7</sup> If Amram had his way, Moses would not have been born, Jews would not have been freed, Passover would never have happened, and we would not be here today.

Only because Amram, and all the men, followed the women's lead do we exist and celebrate in 2018.

As it was then so it is today. In our materialistic world, we have much to learn from women. Their innate faith and broader perspective on life can teach us all how to define our priorities, and not be caught up in minutiae and superficial short-term gains.

Let us encourage the women to lead the way to a moral world. To build gentler and kinder families, communities and nations. To transform this physical world into a divine home.

So this is the today's true Me Too Movement. Women don't have to say Me Too because they were first, they led. Rather it is the men who say Me Too, We Too will follow the women to lead us into freedom, redemption, and the Promised Land.

As it was 3330 years ago so is it today.

Happy Passover and Chag Kosher v'Sameach!

Sources: Igros Kodesh Admur MehuRayatz vol. 3 p. Sefer HaSichos 5702 p. 122. 5703 p. 169. Degel Machne Efraim Parshas Yisro.

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<sup>7</sup> Sotah 12a.