



June 15, 2024



Parshas Nasso

9th of Sivan 5784

The Great Gender Mystery

Ever wonder why certain things in Judaism go according to the father, while others go according to the mother? When determining which shevet one belongs to, we assign him whatever shevet his father was, even if his mother was from a different one. On the other hand, one's Jewishness is determined by one's mother, and we disregard the religious status of the father. Why is that? When a man gets called up for an aliyah, we call out his name referencing him as the son of his father. But when we say a MiSheberach for cholim, we reference the mother's name. Firstborn status in regards to double inheritance is received if one is the firstborn of the father. Yet, firstborn status determining if one needs a pidyon haben is determined only with regard to one's mother. Why the discrepancy? Is there a rhyme and reason for who determines what, or is it merely arbitrary?

The Tanach Mystery

During the time I was learning in Eretz Yisrael, I decided to learn a bit of Tanach every day. After a few months I noticed a strange pattern. Throughout Jewish history, women seem to always be the savior in the times of potential national annihilation. Almost without exception. The very first time the Jewish people were at stake was when Yishmael was threatening to push Yitzchak off the Jewish path. No Yitzchak, no Jewish people. Who was the savior? Not Avraham – it was Sarah. Eisav was out to kill Yaakov after he “stole” the berachos. No Yaakov, no Jewish people. Who was the savior? Rivka.

In Mitzrayim, there were many instances of women being the saviors. When Moshe was in a basket in the river, who saved him? Both Basya and Miriam. In Parshas Shemos (4, 24) it says that Moshe didn't give a bris to his son, and Hashem was preparing to kill Moshe for it. Who prevented that from happening? Tziporah. The Jewish babies were slated to get systematically slaughtered in Egypt; who saved them? Shifra and Puah. The Jews in Egypt were close to being decimated. Who were the saviors? *"Bishvil nashim tzidkonios nigalu avoseinu miMitzrayim."* It was the righteous women who earned our freedom.

After we left Mitzrayim as well, the women continued to be the righteous ones. Women didn't commit the Chet Ha'eigel. Women didn't commit the sin of the Meraglim (Midrash Tanchuma Pinchos 7). When we were attacked by the Plishtim, who was the savior? Yael. When Dovid was about to be killed by Shaul, who was the savior? Michal. When Haman threatened the entire Jewish people, who was the savior? Esther. When the Greeks battled the Jewish army, Yehudis played an important role in saving her people. The extraordinary list goes on. The question, then, is, why did history play out this way, with the women stepping in to be the saviors?

I once went over to Reb Doniel Belsky, a Rosh Kollel in Yerushalayim, and asked him this question. He jumped out of his seat, took out a key, unlocked his office, took out another key, unlocked a closet within his office, and pulled out a sefer written by the Arizal. Blowing off the dust that was accumulated atop the sefer, he flipped to a certain page and read me the following words: "Any time there is a national calamity in which the physical future existence of Klal Yisrael is at stake, the savior was and will always be a woman. Why? Because a woman is the treasure chest of her husband's kedushah. The husband is like a foot-soldier, and she is the safe that stores the holiness. In times of national crisis, we need an extra dose of kedushah, and it is stored within women."

Rabbi Belsky explained that when the Jewish people are facing a threat on a national level, it is often the symptom of low zechuyos – merits – in the "national zechuyos bank". It is demonstrative of the fact that the scale has tilted towards the side of persecution. The only thing that will save us, the only thing that will tilt

the scale back, is an additional dose of merits and kedushah. Much like when we tap into the zechus of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, we tap into our national zechuyos stored through the ages. Those zechuyos are found within women. Women are the safe where the Torah and mitzvos that her household accumulated are stored. Hence, amidst times of national peril, the one to bring that extra dose of kedusha must be a woman.

With this Arizal in mind, it is no longer a wonder why some things in Judaism follow the mother and others the father. The rule of thumb is obvious: things that are holy go after the mother; things that are mundane go after the father. When one is getting called up for an aliyah, and we merely need to identify one Moshe from amongst ten of them in shul, we clarify, "Moshe ben Menachem." But when one is sick and needs a MiShebeirach, we use his mother's name, for we now need to tap into the holiness stored inside of her. If one is to get double inheritance, we go after the father, for that is merely a financial obligation a father has towards his firstborn son. But to determine who receives the spiritual firstborn status requiring a pidyon from a kohen, we go after the mother, for she is the one who held that additional dose of kedushah. Which shevet one belongs to has mostly physical ramifications, as in which jurisdiction one can live and which courts one should go to. Hence, the father is the one who passes on the shevet to his son. Innate Jewishness, on the other hand, is something immensely spiritual. It is the ultimate spiritual ingredient we have on earth. Hence it is passed down by one's mother, for that is where the spirituality is stored.

Our name, our bank accounts, our plots of land are given to us by our fathers; our holiness, our Jewishness, and our souls are given to us by our mothers.

The War of Words

A woman named Ariella who lives in Atlanta told me the following story. She grew up unaffiliated, in Philadelphia. She eventually went on to learn in Israel, and now is a fully observant woman. When she was about to return home to the United States, her seminary teacher told her to spend Shabbos with a special woman who lives in Philadelphia. Ariella got dropped off at the woman's house right before Shabbos. The woman greeted her, showed her to her room, and then said, "Come, let's daven Minchah." And what Ariella

saw struck her as very unusual. The woman said every sentence of her davening extremely slowly, pronouncing every word with such careful attention, as if it was her first encounter with the siddur. The woman's siddur was held up high and her finger was on every word. She would routinely go back and read lines again that she felt she hadn't read well enough. Ariella was confused. She thought she must have been in the wrong house. This woman seemed to be taking much longer than any woman that she had ever seen davening Minchah. Eventually, this woman's husband walked in with a whole entourage, who referred to him as the "Rosh Yeshiva". It turned out to be the house of Reb Shmuel Kamenetzky, and the woman davening Minchah was his wife. Utterly confused, Ariella turned to the Rebbetzin and asked her, "Why do you daven like that?"

Rebbetzin Kamenetzky responded, "These words are our weapons. This is how we battle our wars. Davening needs to awaken all of our senses. We need to touch and hear these powerful words."

When women pray, we are not merely talking to G-d. We are waging war on behalf of the entire Jewish people. We are waging war, ensuring peace and prosperity is showered upon us. We are waging war that our children remain pure and that our marriages remain happy. We are waging war that our host countries don't expel us and that the populace continues its tolerance of us. We are waging war perpetuating the continuity of the Jewish spirit. And therefore, much like a physical war, we need to taste the words. We need to smell the words. We need to feel the words. For these words are the bedrock of our nation. Without them we lose the war.