



### ACHIEVEMENT AND CARING

**T**HERE HAVE BEEN MANY ATTEMPTS TO CHARACTERIZE THE ESSENTIAL DIFFERENCE between men and women. Some have been absurd male chauvinist inventions; others have sounded more acceptable and meaningful. Are there any Jewish views?

Obviously, every single individual, male or female, is created with the primary goal to connect with G-d in the details of their daily lives, and through this to fulfil the purpose of their existence, which means also helping the world as a whole to fulfil *its* purpose.

In this task, each person has their own unique situation in life. Does one live now, or a thousand years ago? Is one in a time of war, or of peace? Is one poor or rich? A man or a woman? Artist, businesswoman or scientist? In each situation one has specific challenges, privileges and duties, as defined by the Torah. Wherever one is, and in whatever circumstances, there is a unique task which only *you* can achieve.

Within this, there might still be a general characterization of the distinctive natures of man and woman. A discussion of a point in the Sedra<sup>1</sup> brings this out, as regards our great forebears Jacob and Rachel, and perhaps for everyone.

Jacob, who has been living for the last seventeen years in Egypt, feeling that soon he will leave the world, asks his son Joseph to make sure that he will be buried in the Holy Land, in the Machpela Cave in

Hebron where Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, and Isaac and Rebecca were buried. Joseph agrees at once, but Jacob asks him to take an oath that he will do so, which Joseph does willingly<sup>2</sup>.

Then, a moment later, Jacob speaks about the fact that when his wife Rachel, the mother of Joseph, passed away, he did not transport her to the Cave in Hebron, but buried her at the wayside. He did not even carry her to the nearby town of Bethlehem.

Rashi comments<sup>3</sup> that Jacob felt that Joseph might feel upset that his father was asking him to make sure he would be buried in the ancestral burying place in Hebron, while he had not done the same for Joseph's mother.

Nonetheless, Rashi says, Jacob had acted according to G-d's Will, and hence, Rachel's own will. Because, many years later, when the Jews would be led into exile by the Babylonians, they would pass near Rachel's grave, where they would take courage, for they knew that she was imploring G-d on their behalf. The prophet Jeremiah, who lived through those events, said that "Rachel is weeping for her children" but also declared that G-d reassures her that they will be redeemed<sup>4</sup>.

Here we see the difference between Jacob and Rachel. Jacob sought the highest level of holiness which could possibly be achieved. Hence he wanted to be buried in the sacred Machpela Cave in Hebron. By contrast Rachel was concerned for her children. She was ready to forgo the sanctity of the Machpela Cave, because instead she would have the chance to help her descendants who were going into exile.

Perhaps this distinction applies to men and women in general. The male seeks achievement and fulfilment, through Torah study, many practical Mitzvot, and activity in the world. The woman seeks to care, to protect, to love and to help. It has been suggested that for this reason she has less Mitzvot to carry out. Of course there is a certain level of feminine characteristic in every man, and a masculine quality in every woman. Yet in general, one represents achievement, the other caring: Jacob and Rachel. The combination of these two qualities builds a wholesome life and a wholesome world....<sup>5</sup>

1. Genesis 47:28 - 50:26. 2. Gen.47:31. 3. See Rashi to Gen.48:7. 4. Jeremiah 31:14 -16. 5. Based freely on the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Likkutei Sichot* vol. 30, p.236 ff.

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SEDRA VAYECHI

**PARTNERS**

Sarah and Michal walked around the courtyard, their heads bent low together, talking. It was the last few days before their school play and the two were co-directing it together. But now, their friendship, which had always been very close, was suffering. They had begun as co-directors but their roles had changed. Sarah was now the one who was mainly directing the actual play and coordinating the different choirs and dances. Michal was organizing the fundraising brochure for the play.

The brochure had originally been a small addition to the planned event, but slowly it had grown into a fundraiser both for the costs for the play, which were not so very great, and also for an unfortunate family in need. Michal had originally been very excited about this project, but as she saw it taking more of her time away from the rest of the creative side of the play she began to feel a little resentful.

It was on this note that Michal came home. She sat down by the computer and opened up the files with the brochure. 'To my dearest granddaughter Miriam, Best of luck in your play, Love Grandma and Grandpa Lewis.' *Now which font shall I do that in,* thought Michal to herself. She continued putting in the different advertisements and didn't notice the time speeding by. *I really do enjoy doing all these graphics on the computer; it's just not what I planned at all when I took on this school play.*

“Hi Michal”. She jumped. She hadn’t noticed her brother Misha coming into the room. He now sat on the arm of the sofa reading her work. “You’ve missed out an ‘s’ in that ad in the corner up there.” She corrected the mistake, and then turned to tell her brother about her latest dilemma. Even though the two were only two years apart, Misha often had very clear reasoning and could make an awful situation seem quite positive.

“Hmm,” he said thoughtfully. “There’s no need to argue with Sarah or anything silly like that. Hmm actually, our teacher was telling us something today. I wonder why it just popped into my head. Oh yes, Zevulun and Yissachar. They were two sons of Jacob, and in this week’s Torah portion Jacob blesses all his sons before he passes away. Zevulun was the younger of the two, but despite it being customary for the older brother to be blessed first, in this case the younger one, Zevulun, was blessed before Yissachar. The question is why?”

Michal leaned back in her chair. It seemed interesting, but not very relevant. “Go on” she said.

“Well,” Misha continued, “the story goes that the tribes of Yissachar and Zevulun were partners. Theirs was a special type of partnership though. Yissachar would study Torah the whole day, while Zevulun were businessmen, sea merchants.

Zevulun would support Yissachar so that they could devote themselves to Torah study, while the merit of Yissachar’s learning was shared with Zevulun. In that way they both gained. The point is that Zevulun was blessed first by Jacob because he enabled his brother to study Torah. You and Sarah can really look at this whole thing like a partnership; she is running the play, but you are raising all this money which will cover the costs, plus help out this poor family, which is a big Mitzva.”

Michal smiled. “Hey, that’s great! Thanks Misha.” She could trust her brother to come up with something good.

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