



---

FEMINISM WITHIN  
ULTRA-ORTHODOXY?

---

To the Editor:

Were I to tell you that the feminist movement has affected the yeshiva world, you would undoubtedly dismiss my claim as preposterous. After all, there are no congregational iterns nor women's prayer groups in our communities. On the contrary, we are vehemently opposed to the feminist ideology that women should adopt many of the roles traditionally assigned to men.

A few weeks ago in the waiting room of a doctor's office, however, I began to realize how many casualties we are suffering in the raging war of feminism. I was sitting amongst a number of young *kollel* wives like myself, and as we discussed the trials and tribulations of motherhood and raising children, the conversation suddenly took on a tone of frustration. It was not frustration with our children for being too difficult nor with our husbands for not helping enough. It was frustration at having been insufficiently prepared for marriage. We did feel capable of cooking

meals, keeping house, diapering babies, and dealing with the rest of the responsibilities that marriage and motherhood entail, but felt that we were not properly prepared with the awareness that this is our role.

On that first *Yamim Noraim* after I had a child, I had been accustomed to *davening* in *shul*, to being uplifted by the solemn *tefillot* of the day, by the awe-inspiring words and the haunting melodies. Instead, I spent my *Rosh Hashana* warming up food, serving meals, washing dishes, and caring for babies, with only a couple of hours to spend in *shul* when my baby-sitting shift was completed. *Rosh Hashana* was over and I was deeply disappointed. The most meaningful days of the year had become so mundane! Then, as I analyzed what had transpired, I realized that my priorities were out of focus and that my view of the woman's role had been distorted.

My conversation in the waiting room made me realize that I was not alone.

This distortion of priorities is a direct result of the infiltration of feminism into our camps. The woman's traditional role is considered to be inferior and unfulfilling, and to find satisfaction, they must look outside their homes and into other domains.

This is compounded by the school's strong emphasis on intellectual stimulation. All of us in the doctor's office had attended reputable schools and "ivy league" seminars, where we analyzed *mefarshim* and sharpened our minds. But marriage thrust us into an entirely new arena for which we now feel unequipped. After years of achieving spirituality through learning, we are left

frustrated upon entering a lifestyle where we seldom have the opportunity to open a *sefer* to learn, and sometimes not even a *Siddur* to *daven*.

To keep Jewish girls within the fold, the *Rabbanim* had *parkened* for Sara Scheneierer that rather than be exposed to secular literature and philosophy, girls should be taught *limudei kodesh*. In their great enthusiasm to impart sacred knowledge to their students, many schools have overlooked a very crucial point: learning is not the ultimate goal. Yet, learning is stressed to such an extent that a school/seminary's prestige is based on its intellectual level. Should a girl who got 100's on all her tests and went to such a seminary be considered a greater "catch" for a *shidduch* than someone whose outstanding quality is *chesed*?

Girls should be guided to understand that the learning is valuable in as much as it enhances our main function, not replaces it. Learning is meant to add spirituality to our lives, but we must be able to find fulfillment in household tasks, as well.

After all, value in Judaism is determined by the extent to which something brings a person close to *Hashem*, even though it may not be intellectual. This is achieved by emulating Him. "*Ma Hu...afatta* — Just as He is merciful, so should you be merciful." *Hashem* is a constant Giver and receives nothing in return. The woman too has an often thankless job as a "giver," yet she attaches herself to the Divine by following in His ways. A woman must view herself as the builder of a holy *Mishkan* (sanctuary), for it is primarily her influence that guides her children along the Torah path. Her seemingly mundane tasks are not mundane at all, for she can be compared to the *kohanim* in the *Beis Hamikdash*. They were the elite of *Klal Yisroel*, chosen to do the holy *avoda*. Her toil is also *avodas hakodesh* (sacred assignments), in keeping with what *Hashem* requires of her.

While it is important to have various forms of achieving fulfillment, our girls should come to realize that their primary fulfillment must be through

**Karka in  
Eretz Yisroel**

תלמידי תורה

Call Rabbi Gavriel Beer  
for information on  
obtaining cemetery plots in  
Eretz Hachaim Beth Shemesh  
Har Menuchoth - Har Hazeisim

011-972-2-641-1923

being good wives and mothers. Devora Hanevia was a woman who made it to the top. She is a heroine to “liberated” women, as she was a *shofetes* (judge), a *nevia* (prophet), and a general. In *Shiras Devora*—the Song of Devora, there are many titles she could have used to describe herself, yet she chose the one which she felt was the greatest of them all. She sang: “Until I, Devora, arose. I arose, a mother in Yisroel” (*Shoftim* 5,7). She prided herself as a leadership in terms of being a mother.

How much more fulfilled we women would be if only we realized what a crucial role we play as wives and mothers. We are entrusted with taking care of a *Mishkan*, a holy sanctuary, and we are responsible to produce, to educate, and to inspire the next generation of *Ovdei Hashem*.

SHOSHANA NANNAS

*Sanhedria HaMurchevet, Jerusalem*

---

WAKE UP CALL TO  
THE WOMAN'S ROLE

---

To the Editor:

I am a Bais Yaakov graduate and a seminary product. I was taught about supporting my husband in *kollel*. *Eretz Yisroel* was an ideal. Teaching was encouraged. *Tzenius* (modesty) was stressed. But I was never taught the value of being a mother. The importance of mothering—being the person who is actually there with the child, providing the minute-to-minute care—was not mentioned.

Like so many others, I found myself at a total loss my first Rosh Hashana after the baby was born. For years, I had been crammed with lofty ideals for the *Yamim Nora'im*. That year, there was a *shiur* or two—but mainly, a lot of time on my hands with an infant. I thought that all that my physical preparations for the *Yom Tov* were just getting in the way of the main *avoda*, the spiritual preparations. I knew some things had to be done, of course, but I didn't think all that cleaning and cooking were important in and of themselves.

It wasn't until I had my own “wake up call” that I learned the value of what

I was doing. Twelve years ago, my daughter was born with a defect and died at two weeks. This experience made me realize how precious are the lives entrusted to us — they can be taken away.

Ordinarily, when I notice any lack in my own education, I put it down to my inattentiveness. But this attitude of not valuing our mothering role is one I have come across again and again among women. Thus, I am writing these few words.

I feel very strongly that when we bring children into this world, it's our responsibility to provide a presence for them. Sure, there are plenty of reasons to pass on the burden: money, Torah learning, the “need” to get out of the house. But do these goals have to be mutually exclusive? Is there a way to earn money, help support our households and be stimulated during our hours as a mother—and still take care of our own children?

From the beginning, I did not want to leave my kids with a babysitter. We found jobs for me to do at home, so I could stay with the children, and my husband did manage to learn in *Kollel* for five years. Did I love what I was doing? Not necessarily. But is the goal to love what we're doing all the time? Not every task is going to be stimulating.

... We have to accept the “blahs,” the routine tasks that life is so full of. Day after day, the *avoda* (main task) continues: to provide a warm, loving presence for our children, along with a physically safe, nurturing environment. There is great satisfaction in this job—and plenty of aggravation. Children will challenge us. They lose the eyeglasses we just bought them. They untidy what we've just straightened out. A full-time housekeeper would be helpful, but we can't even afford cleaning help! I want to be pleasant with my children. I also want my home to be neat and clean. These two wants are almost mutually exclusive! That's part of my challenge. But we have to carry on, teaching our kids to take responsibility in the home, and trying hard to build a relationship with them at the same time. After all, who can really love and teach our chil-

dren the proper way better than we ourselves can?

Not everyone will like what I want but it does come from the heart. It is not a matter of faking that you enjoy parenting—the “be happy” panacea. It's a matter of accepting the challenge. Go to that evening *shiur*, or give one after they are asleep. *But be there* for your child. It means so much to him.

Perhaps you can't *daven* the way you did when you were single. But your *tefilla* (prayer) is so much more poignant now. You don't need all the *p'sukim* (text), just a few heartfelt words when you can sneak them in. After all, you are caring for *Hashem's* children. Once children are older (over three), and can entertain themselves more, things improve in the *davening* arena.

As for happiness, that is a lifelong journey. We all know it is not found “out there,” but within.

Easy to write. I struggle daily with these issues. I *kvetch* all the time about the sabotage my children do to my efforts around the house. I have to remember all of these things too. The journey goes on. I hope my children will want to be there for their own children. That would mean a lot to me, if I could pass this lesson on to them.

So, to the young mothers who struggle with their own conflicting yearnings: I hope that my thoughts will help in some small way.

RISYL EDELMAN  
*Baltimore*

(This letter originally appeared in “Where, What, and When,” a monthly Baltimore-based publication.)

יצא לאור  
ספר  
שמושה של תורה  
ממון הגרא"מ שך שליט"א  
בעל "האבי עזרי"  
ובו עוברות ואמרות חכמה ומוסר  
מרביתנו גדולי הרדות וצ"ל  
רנפיק מפומיה דרב רבנן בלהבת  
אש קודש במועדים ובזמנים שונים  
הפצה ראשית "מישור"  
718-871-8652