

WOMEN IN JUDIASM

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I wear many hats (and head scarves and sheitels – but more about those another time). I am fortunate to wear the hat of wife and mother, daughter, sister, niece and aunty, teacher & educator, friend, confidante, community member, eternal student... I wear these all with equal measures of gratitude, pride and humility.

Yet all these hats are covered by one larger hat, a unifying and all-encompassing one, the one that shapes my identity, defines my purpose and guides my decisions – I wear the hat of a committed, religious Orthodox woman. I believe being born a Jewish woman is by far the greatest gift I have ever been given, and the choice to adhere to its laws and customs to the best of my ability, the greatest choice I have ever made. In a world where religion is so often associated with rules and restrictions, I find complete liberation and actualization in choosing to be a servant of my Maker. I find it humbling to know I am in His presence at all times and comforting knowing He has a plan. In this crazy COVID world – we are being challenged in so many ways and need to find ways to guide us through this darkness. As always, I believe that the Torah can help us achieve this.

One of the greatest challenges I believe women have experienced over these last few months, is the sense that they may not be faring as well as their Facebook-super

-mom counterparts. For each mom posting their colour coded schedule of gourmet dinners, daily exercise regimes, amazing crafts, the foreign language they're learning and the joy that this is all bringing, I firmly believe there are at least ten moms waking up with a pit in their stomachs wondering how they're going to survive till lunch time without inflicting harm on anyone.

When the non-Jewish prophet Bilam was hired to curse the Jewish people, he was taken up onto a mountain overlooking the valley where the Jewish nation were camped. After gazing at the encampment, the intended curse came out instead as a blessing, "How goodly are the tents of Ya'akov..."

What was it that Bilam saw that he was commenting on? Our sages teach that he was struck by the modest way in which the camp was structured, that each tent was set up in a way that one family couldn't see into another's private space. Even further than this, he was amazed that the people he observed were not looking into the tent of their neighbours. Each looked inward, focusing on what was within their space.

This is such a fine balance to achieve in life. Being part of a bigger picture, gleaning insights, ideas and inspiration from those around us, yet somehow staying focused on the unique space we find ourselves in, without comparing ourselves to others and doubting our self-worth. The Torah does not require us to measure up to others. Hashem wants us to achieve our own greatness. If we are constantly looking outwards we are probably ignoring the beauty and power we have within. As the famous saying by Rabbi Zusha of Anipoli goes "*When I get to heaven they are not going to ask me Why weren't you like Moses?. They are going to ask me Why weren't you like Zusha?*"

Being a Jewish woman, we have many such role models of our forebears who mastered this balancing act. Leading the nation, building eternal Jewish homes, yet knowing that their mission in the world cannot and should not be belittled by comparing themselves to others. Let us take pride in who we are, what we have accomplished, and who we are able to become and not allow ourselves to get sidetracked by the mom making rainbow coloured play doh, when you are struggling just to feed them lunch.