

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter XXII: Vayakhel (Ex. 35:1–38:20)

Essay 4. The blessing of a natural ability to learn

פסוק "וְכָל-הַנָּשִׁים אֲשֶׁר נָשָׂא לָבֵן אֶתְנָהּ בְּחַכְמָהּ" וכו'. קִשָּׁה שֶׁהָרִי אִם "נָשָׂא לָבֵן אֶתְנָהּ" מְקַרֵּי שֶׁהֵם בְּרִשּׁוֹת לָבֵן. וְזוּהִי מִדַּת הַרְשָׁעִים, כְּדֵאִתָּא בְּיַלְקוּט עַל פְּסוּק "וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל-לִבּוֹ", הַצְדִּיקִים לָבֵם בְּרִשּׁוֹתָם וְהַרְשָׁעִים הֵם בְּרִשּׁוֹת לָבֵם.

There is a verse: “And all the women whose hearts have lifted them up in wisdom, have spun the goats’ [hair]” (Ex. 35:26).

A difficulty is that if their “hearts have lifted them up,” they are referred to as being controlled by their hearts. This is a character trait of the wicked, as is brought in the Yalkut Shimoni (parshat Noach, remez 61), on the verse, “and the L-rd said to Himself, ‘Never again will I doom the earth because of man’ ” (Gen. 8:21), for which the midrash says: “The hearts of the righteous are in their control, but the wicked are in the control of their hearts.”

וְנִשְׁ לֹמַר שֶׁהַנָּשִׁים אֵי אֶפְשָׁר שֶׁיִּהְיֶה לָבֵן בְּרִשּׁוֹתָן, שֶׁהָרִי רִשּׁוֹת אֲחֵרִים עָלֶיהֶן. וּמִטַּעַם זֶה אֵינָן נִמְי בְּרִשּׁוֹת לָבֵן, שָׂאֵם תַּעֲבוֹר עַל דַּת מֹשֶׁה וִיהוּדִית, תַּצֵּא מִבְּעֻלָּה וְתַפְסִיד כְּתוּבָתָהּ וְלֹא תִמְצָא מִי שֶׁיִּשְׁאַנְנָהּ, וְטָב לְמִיתָב טַן דֵּו מִלְּמִיתָב אַרְמִילוֹ.

It can be said that it’s impossible for women to be in control of their hearts, for they are under control by others, such as minor daughter being under the control of her father, and a married woman being under the control of her husband. **For this reason, they also are not in control of their hearts, for if [a woman] violates the precepts of Moses or Jewish women, she’ll be divorced without payment of her marriage contract,¹ and, as Reish Lakish says, it is better to sit as two bodies, i.e., be married, than to sit lonely like a widow.²** Thus, the fact that the verse states that some women’s hearts have lifted them up does not mean that they are wicked. So what is it coming to tell us?

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¹ Mishnah Ketubot 7:6; Ketubot 72a.

² Yevamot 118b; Ketubot 75a; Kiddushin 7a, 41a; Bava Metzia 111a.

ואין לה פשרה בנשים אלא שעושה רצון בעלה, אבל פאן הכתוב מיירי באומנות הצריכה חכמה יתירה, כמו שפרש רש"י על פסוק זה. וללמוד אומנות כמו זו אינו תלוי ברצון האדם לשעבד לבו ועצמו לכה, דדילמא לא יעלה בידו לפי שאין לו בטבעו האימון ידים הצריד. ואפילו שיהיה לבו ברשותו לא יועיל כלום. אבל אם הלב ישאנו ללמוד אומנות זו, נשמע מינה שהיא מוכן בטבעו ללמדו אם ירצה לטרוח, ועל זה אמר הכתוב "וכל הנשים אשר נשא לבן אתנה בחכמה" וכו'.

There is no fit woman except one who does the will of her husband,³ but here in Ex. 35:26, Scripture is dealing with craftsmanship that requires extraordinary wisdom, as Rashi explained on this verse, for they spun the goats' hair from off the backs of the goats while it was still on the living animals.⁴

To learn craftsmanship like this does not depend on the person's will to subjugate his heart and himself to this, for perhaps he won't attain the ability because his nature lacks the necessary skilled hands. Even if his heart would be under his control, it would be to no avail.

But if his heart will be lifted up [in wisdom] to learn this craftsmanship, we hear from this that he will be prepared by his nature to learn it if he is willing to toil, and regarding this, Scripture says, "And all the women whose hearts have lifted them up in wisdom, have spun the goats' [hair]." Thus, the Scripture is telling us that many women would never be able to learn this skill, regardless of their desire and effort, but there are some women "whose hearts have lifted them up," who were blessed by G-d with the ability to learn this skill if they devote the time to it.

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³ Tanna Debei Eliyahu Rabbah 9:1; Yalkut Shimoni on Nach 42:12; also cited by the Rema in Shulchan Aruch, Even haEzer 69:7.

⁴ There are videos on YouTube of women spinning yarn directly from angora rabbits, such as <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d3eHrx-AtDY>. Unlike most domestic sheep, which typically need to be sheared, goats and angora rabbits shed their coats. The shed hair can be removed by brushing, which can then be spun. But brushing, at least for rabbits, can hurt the animal's delicate skin. Spinning yarn directly from the animals allows one to skip the extra step of brushing to remove the shed hair, and also avoids the risk of harming the animal's delicate skin.