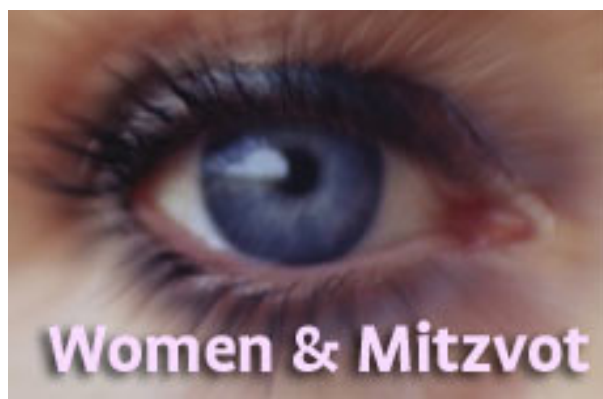




LAWS OF DAILY LIVING

CLASS #3



SETTING THE FOUNDATION FOR JEWISH FAMILY LIFE.

BASED ON THE RESEARCH OF
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Success in life is predicated on two distinct undertakings: On one hand, an organism must advance and expand. On the other hand, it must protect and nurture. These two undertakings are opposites, but both are necessary for success. No football team could succeed with an excellent offense but no defense. The same is true on every level of societal and personal existence. It was with this theme that God created two distinct genders, to work together in unison to accomplish their ultimate goals.¹

In the 1990s, John Gray's bestseller asserted that relationships can only be successful if gender distinctions are recognized and adhered to. For millennia, Jewish sources have taught that women's physiological and psychological needs are different from that of their male counterparts. In God's infinite wisdom, he delineated different responsibilities for men and women according to their respective metaphysical and physiological needs.²

Special Mitzvot for Women

Unlike other religions where the church is primary, Judaism treats the home and synagogue as being co-equal. Some of our most important rituals belong exclusively to the home, such as the Seder, the Sukkah, the Sabbath table, and the Chanukah menorah. The continuity of Judaism rests on the home more than anything else.

Throughout the ages, Jewish women have imbued spirituality into the Jewish home. As such, certain mitzvot are set aside especially for women because of their special connection to the home.³ Family purity laws, candle lighting on Shabbat and holidays, and the separation of challah are rituals that women always observed with particular pride and meticulousness.

¹ See *Male and Female He Created Them* by Yisrael Ben Reuven [Targum Press]

² *Shu"t Igros Moshe* (Orach Chaim 4:49)

³ See Shabbat 31b

And of course, Jewishness itself is passed on via the mother. If the mother is Jewish, the child is 100 percent Jewish.⁴

Pillar of the Family

Since the beginning of mankind, all societies have recognized that a woman's sensitivity and warmth are ideally suited for motherhood. Moreover, the extraordinary feeling that men can never experience – nurturing a baby inside them – puts women in the position of being the best, most loving caregivers for their children. For the preservation of the family structure, and by extension the overall health of society, the Torah encourages women to embrace this role.

In this vein, the Torah released women from the obligations of certain time-bound mitzvot. This is not because of any difference in the level of sanctity between men and women.⁵ Rather, these exemptions allow a woman the ability to be totally devoted to her family without the constraints of having to fulfill such mitzvot at the correct time.⁶ Of course, whenever a woman does not face conflicting family obligations, she may fulfill these mitzvot and receive eternal reward.⁷ Whatever the case, she is fulfilling God's will, Who knows that her spiritual growth is intertwined with her primary mission as the family cultivator.

Women are obligated to observe all the negative commandments, e.g. don't murder, don't steal.⁸ Regarding the time-bound positive commandments, a woman is exempt, with certain exceptions including:

- observance of Shabbat⁹
- eating matzah on Passover¹⁰

⁴ Talmud - Kiddushin 68b, based on Deut. 7:3-4

⁵ *Shu"t Igros Moshe* (Orach Chaim 4:49)

⁶ Abudraham (Seder Tefillot Shel Chol); Kol Bo (73); *Shu"t Igros Moshe* (Orach Chaim 4:49)

⁷ Mishnah Berurah (589:8)

⁸ Talmud - Kiddushin 29a. There are certain exceptions where women are exempt from prohibition.

⁹ Orach Chaim 271:1

- lighting Chanukah candles¹¹
- all the mitzvot of Purim¹²

Women are also required to perform all positive mitzvot that are not time-bound,¹³ e.g. mezuzah, returning lost items, etc.¹⁴

Regarding certain mitzvot, although a woman is technically exempt, women have historically accepted the performance upon themselves. This is the case with hearing the shofar on Rosh Hashana,¹⁵ sitting in the Sukkah on Sukkot,¹⁶ and taking the four species. But this should not come at the expense of family life.

When a woman chooses to perform this category of “time-bound positive mitzvot,” there is a question of whether she should recite a blessing (e.g. “Who commanded us to sit in the sukkah”). According to Ashkenazi custom, women say the blessing in such cases. According to Sefardi custom, women do *not* say the blessing.¹⁷

The mitzvah of tefillin is exceptional, and may not be performed by women.¹⁸ The commentators explain that as tefillin is one way to connect with the Creator, women establish this link in a much more meaningful way than donning tefillin. When a man wears tefillin, he manifests that which a woman can accomplish naturally by carrying a child within her. Kabbalistically, the tefillin’s hollow chamber corresponds to the womb, and the straps correspond to the umbilical cord. Interestingly, the tefillin box is called the *bayit* (home). Thus, one can say that the home a woman develops is her private tefillin.¹⁹

¹⁰ Pesachim 43b

¹¹ Orach Chaim 689:1; Rema - Orach Chaim 685:4

¹² Orach Chaim 674:3

¹³ Kiddushin 29a

¹⁴ Kiddushin 34a

¹⁵ *Shu”t Rabbi Akiva Eiger* (Hashmotot #1)

¹⁶ *Shu”t Igros Moshe* (Orach Chaim 4:49)

¹⁷ Orach Chaim 589:6 with Rema

¹⁸ Orach Chaim 38:3

¹⁹ *Tefillin* by Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan (NCSY, 1975)

Similarly, it is forbidden for women to wear a tallit, as this is considered a “man’s garment.”²⁰

Privacy of the Woman

King David declared, “All the glory of the King’s daughter is found on the inside.”²¹ The regality and nobility of a woman emanates from her privacy and dignity. A woman’s choice of dress and behavior should be reflective of her natural dignity. For more on this topic, see *Laws of Daily Living - Kosher Clothes*.

Women and Prayer²²

Jewish women have long been praised for their ability to speak from the heart and pour out emotions to God. The prayers of the biblical Chana and other women serve as the source for many principles of Jewish prayer.²³

Because formal prayer is largely time-bound, a women’s obligation of prayer differs significantly from that of a man. A women’s obligation of prayer is superseded by her role as the pillar of the family. Whenever there is a conflict, the needs of her family come first. Of course, whenever it is possible for a woman to juggle her family responsibilities and still pray meaningful prayers, she should do so.²⁴

According to most authorities, a woman should pray at least Shacharit, including:²⁵

- morning blessings

²⁰ Prohibited by Deut. 22:5. Kaf HaChaim 17:5; *Halichot Shlomo* (vol. I p. 35)

²¹ Psalms 45:14

²² More information on this subject can be found in Rabbi Menachem Nissel’s *Rigshei Lev* [Targum Press].

²³ Talmud - Brachot 31a

²⁴ *Rigshei Lev*, p. 82-83

²⁵ Mishnah Berurah 70:1-2, 106:1

- first paragraph of Shema
- Amidah

Women should also try to pray the Mincha afternoon service.²⁶

Traditionally, a Jewish woman – from the moment that she woke up until she fell asleep at night – always had a prayer upon her lips.²⁷ She would entreat God as she dressed her children and sent them off to school. She would murmur Psalms as she would tidy up the house. She would even submit a silent prayer for the success of the food that she was putting into the oven. What every woman instinctively knew was that prayer needs no formalities; the Almighty just wants us to speak to Him.

Of course, women are welcome to come to the synagogue if it will make her prayer more meaningful, and it is a mitzvah to do so when there are no other conflicting responsibilities.²⁸ It is regarded as out of place, however, for women to assume a public role in the prayers such as leading the services, being counted in a minyan,²⁹ or getting called up to the Torah.³⁰

Mothers should especially pray for the welfare of their children.³¹ A particularly appropriate time for this is when lighting Shabbat candles.³² Here is the text of a traditional prayer to say when lighting the candles:

May it be Your will, Lord my God and God of my fathers, to be gracious to me (and to my spouse, children, parents) and to all my family. Grant us and all Israel good and long life. Remember us for good and blessing. Consider us for salvation and

²⁶ Mishnah Berurah 106:4

²⁷ As heard from Rabbi Yitzchak Berkovits

²⁸ Rav Yosef S. Eliashiv and Rav Chaim P. Sheinberg as quoted in *Rigshei Lev*, pg.178.

²⁹ Mishnah Berurah (55:3-4); *Shu"t Sh'vut Yaakov* (Orach Chaim 3:54); *Shu"t Teshuva M'Ahava* 2:229

³⁰ Orach Chaim 282:3

³¹ Rabbeinu Yona - Igeret HaTeshuva #59

³² Ibid; Magen Avraham 263:11

compassion. Bless us with great blessings. Make our household complete, crowning our home with the feeling of Your Divine Presence dwelling among us.

Make me worthy to raise learned children and grandchildren, who are wise and understanding, who love and fear God -- people of truth, holy and attached to God, who will dazzle the world with Torah and goodness and service of God. Please hear our prayers, in the merit of our matriarchs Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah, and ensure that the glow of our lives will never be dimmed. Show us the glow of Your face and we will be saved. Amen.

According to God's Will

In the morning blessings, there is one blessing that only a woman recites:

*Blessed are You, God our Lord, Who has made me according to His will.*³³

What is the explanation for this blessing?

Adam and Eve were created in the image of God. Therefore, one who resembles God must also have the ability to create human life. Additionally, God is constantly nurturing us and giving us of His goodness. Therefore, one who resembles God must also be nurturing and have the ability to exceedingly give goodness.

As the primary creators and nurturers of human life, women more closely resemble God than men do. When a woman makes the blessing thanking God "Who has made me according to His will," she recognizes that her will is like His will.

³³ Orach Chaim 46:4

Now what about the morning blessing that men make? There is a series of three blessings that are stated in the negative: "Blessed are you God... for not making me a non-Jew... for not making me a slave... for not making me a woman." These blessings are in order from most general to specific.

Each mitzvah is a special opportunity to grow spiritually. The man is thanking God for providing these opportunities, as:

- 1) a non-Jew has seven mitzvot to observe,
- 2) a slave has a limited number of mitzvot, being that his time is not his own, and
- 3) a woman is also exempt from certain time-bound positive mitzvot

With each of these three blessings, the man shows an increasing gratefulness for opportunities to serve God in performance of the mitzvot.

A woman, who is inherently more spiritual, as we explained previously, does not need as many "tools" to become close to God, and thus – with a sense of satisfaction – she thanks God for "making me according to His will" – i.e. just the way I am.³⁴

Torah Study

One of the mitzvot in which a woman's obligation differs from a man's is Torah study. Jewish men are obligated to study the entire Torah – both the practical and the theoretical. The pragmatic nature of women, as well as the demands of family responsibilities, obligate women to know only practical halacha³⁵ – e.g. the pertinent laws of prayer, Shabbat, holidays, fast days, family purity, kashrut, interpersonal responsibilities, forbidden speech, etc. A Jewish woman must also know the Bible – for her own knowledge, and in order to impart the values and ethical lessons to her family.

³⁴ *Siddur Olat Re'iyah* by Rabbi A.Y. Kook; *Ruach Chaim* (Avot 4)

³⁵ Biur Halacha 47:14

A Jewish woman must also be well-versed in the books relating to Jewish thought that deal with faith in God, and character trait development, such as the talmudic tractate, Pirkei Avot.

For this reason, women recite the blessings on Torah study every morning.³⁶

The Talmud teaches that women receive eternal reward for encouraging the Torah study of her husband and sons.³⁷ In fact, the remuneration that she gets for her husband's Torah study is not independent of her husband's reward. Rather, she and her husband enjoy together the eternal portion of the World to Come.³⁸

Procreation

Men and women are both obligated to repopulate the world.³⁹ But men have a technical minimum requirement of fathering at least one son and one daughter.⁴⁰ Thus, if a man has 10 sons and no daughters, he has not yet fulfilled his requirement. Women are not bound by this technicality,⁴¹ yet she fulfills an important mitzvah with every child she bears.⁴²

Matters of Custom

As a Jewish home is a unified entity, it is very important to retain the concord among family members. Therefore, all members of a household should follow the same traditions. Consequently, a married woman follows the meaningful traditions of her husband in most cases.⁴³ For example, a married woman should adopt her husband's Passover customs, version of the prayers, etc.⁴⁴

³⁶ Orach Chaim 47:14

³⁷ Sotah 21a

³⁸ The Chafetz Chaim, Sefer Shem Olam #11

³⁹ Talmud - Megillah 27a; Mishnah Berurah 153:24

⁴⁰ Even Ha'Ezer 1:5

⁴¹ Even Ha'Ezer 1:13

⁴² Talmud - Megillah 27a

⁴³ *Shu"t Igros Moshe* (Orach Chaim 1:158)

⁴⁴ *Halichot Shlomo* 1:1:7

For further reading:

- *To Be a Jewish Woman* by Dr. Lisa Aiken
(Jason Aronson Publishers)
- *Jewish Woman in Jewish Law* by Rabbi Moshe Meiselman
(Ktav.com)

For review:

Mitzvot Incumbent on Women

<p>Obligated to Perform</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ all "negative" mitzvot (don't kill, don't steal, etc.) ▶ reciting blessings ▶ observing Shabbat and Yom Tov (including Kiddush and Havdallah) ▶ keeping kosher ▶ observing Yom Kippur ▶ lighting Chanukah candles ▶ all the Purim laws ▶ eating matzah on Passover ▶ fasting on public fast days ▶ putting up mezuzot ▶ all interpersonal laws (loving humanity, returning lost items, etc.) ▶ all financial laws
<p>Obligated, but different from men</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ prayer ▶ Torah study ▶ procreation
<p>Exempt, but should try to perform</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ hearing the shofar on Rosh Hashana ▶ dwelling in the sukkah ▶ waving the four species on Sukkot
<p>Exempt, and should not perform at all</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ wearing tzitzit ▶ donning tefillin