



## Parshat Vayera

### Do Women Need to Serve their Husbands?

Dear Rebbetzin,

I'm struggling with the issue of "Women serving their husbands" – It is so difficult. Do you have any illumination that can help me internalize this? My Israeli Moroccan husband seems to need it at such a deep level. Yet, I believe it is also MY task to become closer to Hashem. I'm not looking for sources – there are too many of them! Just some heart-to-heart advice. What if I'm wrong? And all the work and the struggling I go through in order to serve him wasn't really what I needed to in order to be closer to Hashem and rectify my soul ????? Help!!!

*Ezer K'negedo* (name changed)

Dear *Ezer K'negedo*,

I can definitely identify with you. It is difficult to put our own aspirations to the side in order to serve our husbands continually, especially if they need it so much. That can naturally cause resistance. However, we are all created to serve Hashem, even though it is not necessarily easy. We serve Hashem by keeping his mitzvot. For a woman, that entails finding the perfect balance between serving her husband, while also developing her personal talents with which she can serve Hashem in her own special way.

### Avraham was Inferior to Sarah in Prophecy

Although you didn't ask for sources, a look at our biblical role models, enables us to find answers for our current dilemmas. Sarah, our mother, achieved the perfect balance between serving Avraham, her husband, and maintaining an independent sphere of her own spirituality, prophetic insight and Torah teaching to women. She was on such a high spiritual level that Hashem told Avraham to listen to her, regarding the most important matters vital for the formation of the Jewish nation.

**ספר בראשית פרק כא פסוק יב ויאמר אלהים אל אברהם אל ירע בעיניך על הנער ועל אמתך כל אשר תאמר אליך שרה ששמע בקולה כי בייצחק יקרא לך זרע:**

"Let it not be bad in your eyes regarding the youth and your maidservant. Everything that Sarah says to you listen to her voice, for in Yitzchak your seed will be called" (*Bereishit* 21:12).

You may notice that the word *קולה/kolah* – her voice, is extra. It could have simply stated, "Listen to her" rather than "listen to her voice." From this, the Talmud learns, "She was able to see with the Divine spirit as it states, 'Everything that Sarah tells you listen to her voice'" (*Babylonian Talmud, Megillah* 14a). Rashi goes even further and explains, "We may infer that Avraham was inferior to Sarah in respect of prophecy." From the fact that Hashem told Avraham to listen to the voice of Sarah's Divine spirit, we learn, that a Jewish wife is not subordinate to her husband. Often times, the wife has a clearer understanding of what is best for the family. Serving her husband does not only pertain to preparing his meals, and washing his clothes. It includes challenging him, helping to set him straight and strengthening his emunah.

### Guiding our Family by Developing Women's Extra Intuition

How is it possible that Avraham's prophesy is inferior to Sarah's, when the Torah repeatedly mentions how Hashem speaks to Avraham? There is not even a single instance in Scripture where Hashem addresses Sarah directly. Perhaps the difference in Avraham and Sarah's prophecy exemplifies the

difference between men’s and women’s spirituality and relationship with G-d. Although Hashem spoke to Avraham, whereas Sarah was not spoken to directly, the level of her prophecy was a higher quality. It is possible that her kind of prophecy was an inner connection – a direct relationship and intuition as in, “From my flesh I see G-d” (*Iyov* 19:26). Sarah didn’t need to be addressed externally, since she was completely in tune with G-d’s will from within, to the extent that all of Avraham’s prophesy became bleak in comparison. Especially today, when we no longer experience direct prophecy, we women have a responsibility to develop our *binah yeterah* – women’s extra intuition – to help guide our loved ones in how to serve Hashem best.

### Shaping Your Husband’s Will

It is known that many great men, from Avraham, our father, to Rabbi Akiva, only achieved their importance due to the guidance of their wives. Through serving your husband, you have the opportunity to shape him and bring him to greatness. The Hebrew word *עושה/oseh* – can mean either ‘does’ or ‘shapes.’ Thus the Talmudic saying: “Who is a kosher wife? The one who does her husband’s will” has the following alternative reading: “A kosher wife is she who shapes the will of her husband.” Use your extra intuition to discern whether your husband’s special need to be served is coming from a true place. If so, it is an even greater *chesed*, for you to support him and fulfill his needs. You can build up your husband’s self-confidence, and empower him to face the world by serving him and showing him respect. Alternatively, you may recognize that it would serve your husband better, if you gradually, subtly and lovingly teach him to be less needy of your subservience. Simultaneously, you can gently direct him to learn more Torah, pray in a *minyán*, and associate with good people. When your husband feels assured of your love and devotion, he will, with Hashem’s help, reciprocate and offer to help, allowing you to pursue your personal calling as well.

### Her Own Independent Relationship with G-d

Scripture often mentions Sarah as “Avraham’s wife.” Yet, it is interesting to note, that in the matter of *רוח שדיקדוק/Ruach Hakodesh* – Divine spirit, Sarah is mentioned without the title, “Avraham’s wife.” For example, she is not called “wife of Avraham” at pivotal moments: when mentioned as Yiskah – denoting prophecy, when Avraham listened to Sarah and married Hagar, when Sarah told Avraham to expel Yishmael and Hagar, and when Hashem told Avraham to listen to Sarah (*Bereishit* 11:29, 16:2, 21:9, 21:12). Maharal explains that Sarah was a prophetess in her own right even before she became the wife of Avraham, while she was known simply as the “daughter of Haran.” Avraham and Sarah were two individual seekers of G-d in a world of idolaters. Sarah had her own unique relationship with G-d, independent of Avraham’s connection to the Almighty and they met as equal bearers of spiritual power. Their union caused a spiritual monotheistic revolution throughout the entire world, reaching countless generations.

### Balancing Wifedom with Her Independent Spiritual Path

Sarah had two parallel missions: She was Avraham’s wife, serving him and supporting him, as well as the prophetess who had her own spiritual independence and the ability to see with Divine Spirit. At her death, she was not given the title, “wife of Avraham,” since she possessed perfection of her own and her merit stands alone. Sarah, being the first Jewess, and thus our role model, teaches us that every Jewish woman must find the right balance as she synthesizes the role of wifedom with developing her own spiritual path. The Jewish woman has her independent spiritual power and superiority that she may not neglect, even for the sake of serving her husband and attending to all of his needs. I bless you with the confidence to find fulfillment in serving Hashem in the highest way. May you succeed in creating the perfect balance in your life between serving your husband while developing and expressing your talents in the world!