

## The Way to Redemption Paved by the Jewish Family

*Haftorat Masei (Matot/Masei)*

*Yirmeyahu 2:4 - 2:28*

*I have come to treasure my family more and more over the years, and do the best I can to give each member the attention deserved. It so happens that as we learn about the importance of the Jewish family from this week's haftorah, I'm on a family vacation.*

### The Invisible Bond of Family

"Hear the word of Hashem, O House of Ya'acov, and all the families of the House of Israel" (*Yirmiyahu 2:4*). The Prophet Yirmiyahu makes it clear that the security of the People of Israel lies in the family unit; therefore, he stresses "House," and "Family," for no-one lives in a vacuum. Throughout the forty year journey of the Israelites in the wilderness, they camped according to the flags of their tribes, but traveled according to their respective families, (see *Bemidbar 2:34*). Even our personal journeys affect and are affected by the members of our families. One of the reasons that helped me make *aliyah* to Israel was that I already had a lot of family living here. However, when I was a teenager and more interested in friends than family, my mother would tell me: "Friends come and go, but the family is always there for you." The longer I live, the more I value the family, my husband and children as well as our extended family. Even though we live far apart and do not share the same values, the invisible bond of family ties us together.

### The Matriarch Influences the Holiness of the Jewish Family

The captain of the family-ship is the matriarch. She steers the entire family to secure shores. We can find an allusion to this from the fact that the *haftorah* precedes, "House of Ya'acov" to the "Families of the House of Israel." It is well known that in the Torah, "House of Ya'acov" refers to the women (See *Rashi, Shemot 19:3*). Holy women create holy families. The laws of the mikvah are called the laws of family purity, rather than the laws of women's purity, because keeping the laws of *nidah* meticulously, (separating from the husband during menstruation until going to the kosher mikvah) creates holy families. Children conceived in purity have a higher spiritual potential. However, this does not detract from the many great *ba'alei teshuva* (returnees to Judaism), who also have great spiritual potential. Avraham, our father, was himself conceived through *nidah*. Hashem always gives us a chance to rectify our past, yet, by keeping family purity and modesty, the Jewish woman influences her family with holiness. The *Zohar* elaborates on the blessings bestowed on the family of the woman who is covered even in the corners of her home: Her children are compared to olive branches (*Tehillim 128:3*), that do not lose their leaves neither winter nor summer. Her sons rise up in importance above other sons of the world, just as the olive tree is considered more important than the rest of the trees because of its oil. "Not only that, but her husband will be blessed with everything – from the blessings of above and from the blessings of below, with wealth, with sons, and with children of children...As it states, 'Hashem shall bless you out of Tzion, and you shall see the good of Yerushalayim all the days of your life. You shall see your children's children and peace upon Israel'" (*Tehillim 128:5-6*), (*Zohar, Parashat Naso 80*).

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“Moshe heard the people weeping throughout their families, every man in the opening of his tent.” (*Bemidbar* 11:10). “Everything goes according to the family” (*Imrei Pinchas*, Gate One). When the family is fenced against illicit relationships and when the door of their tent is sealed from improper intruders, Israel is protected against both internal strife and attacks from the enemy. The holiness of the Jewish women protects the “Tents of Ya’acov.” Therefore, not even the most cunning enemy, with all the dark powers at his disposition has any power over them. When Bilam saw the holiness of the Jewish dwelling, guarding the privacy of each family, his curse reverted to a blessing. The word “*mishpacha*” משפחה (family), shares the same numerical value (433) with the word *hakochot* הכחות (the powers). The holiness of the family has greater powers than a whole army, protecting us from any possible evil. Interestingly, the word הכחת can also mean “you have proven.” The servant of Avraham used this word when praying to Hashem to send him the right wife for building the continuation of his Master’s family. “...She shall say, drink and I will give your camels drink also, let her be she that you have proven [suitable] for your servant Yitzchak” (*Bereishit* 24:14). It is not an easy task for the Jewish woman today to keep the family together. We need to do everything in our power to prevent the dangerously increasing rate of broken homes in the Jewish world, and use the “wisdom of women” to build our home. The letters of the word משפחה can be broken up into שחפה – “Mashach po” – “The anointed one is here.” Through building holy families, we pave the way for Redemption.

## The Tightrope of Balancing Family and Work

“The *Shechina* (Divine Feminine Indwelling Presence) dwells only on a family of distinguished Jewish lineage” (*Babylonian Talmud*, *Yevamot* 42a). A healthy Jewish home serves as a mini Temple, a place of serenity, respect, love, and holiness – it is a home for G-d. It takes the presence of the mistress of the home to keep the light of the *Shechina* present within the family.

There are many intricate Torah laws regarding relationships among family members. The basic foundation requires sufficient time to devote to raising the family. Today it is not a simple task for the working mom to be home whenever needed. A woman in my family was fired from her job as an assistant lawyer, because she requested to adapt her work hours to the schedule of the day care center. What is most disconcerting, is, that the lawyer who fired her, happened to be a *chareidi* Jewish mother of a flock of children herself. In the cruel corporate world, even the mitzvah-observant are being forced into replacing devotion to our families with loyalty to the company.

## Climbing Big Corporation’s never-ending Ladder – a Spiritual Descent for the Jewish Family

Sarah Azulay on *Jewish Family Life and Corporate Business*, describes another, extremely articulate, corporate female attorney, who had been looking for a new position for more than half a year. In her job interview, she requested some flexibility, since, her children were young – “I could work until 6:00 or so in the evening, go home to my children, and after they are in bed, continue my work as necessary.” When, women are being cornered into proving unyielding dedication to climb up *Big Corporation’s* never-ending ladder, it causes a spiritual descent for the Jewish family. The descent of Western culture into obsessive thirst for materialism is a sledgehammer against a three thousand

year old cement foundation, centered on family and spiritual development. The unfortunate result is reflected in the growing rate of divorces, critical health problems, violence in schools, crime, and other evidence of a society rotten to its core. Which material benefits can outweigh any of these disconcerting “side effects”?

### **The Intimate Sweetness of Tucking the Family into Bed**

There is a place in society for the Jewish woman who insists on the “Golden Mean” advocated by the Rambam, and replaces excessive workaholic obsession with proper balance between time for work and time for raising the family. I believe the most vital moments, when our presence at home is absolutely essential are the times of waking up, serving breakfast, sending the children to daycare/school and the intimate sweetness of tucking the family into bed. In our day, it is not easy to keep our priorities in place, which demand strengthening our bonds with our spouse and guiding our children. However, walking the delicately balanced tightrope between family and work, is one of the secret pathways to building holy families, and redeeming Israel.