



Parashat Ki Tisa

Why are only Males Commanded to Appear at the Temple During the Three Pilgrim Holidays?

Dearest Rebbetzin,

I have a question for you – I feel very hurt when I read that Hashem wanted only the “males” to come to the Temple during the *Shalosh Regalim* (Pilgrim Festivals). The word used to describe the commandment to appear at the Temple is זְכוּרָה/*zechurcha* – “your males” from the root *zachar*. The Torah didn’t even use a more general expression like *B’nei Yisrael* – “Sons of Israel” which could possibly include females.

Marina Malkin (Name Changed)

Dear Marina,

I understand that you feel hurt because it seems that when Hashem commanded only the males to appear at the Temple as if He only wants to see the men and doesn’t care about the women. Could it really be that Hashem prefers men, with no interest in a relationship with women? This seems out of character with how Hashem listened to the prayers of our Mothers throughout the Torah. So, how can we understand the commandment for only the males to appear at the Temple for the particular holidays of Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot, without it being denigrating of women?

Men Need Ritual Discipline

Personally, I’m not really bothered by the commandment for males to appear at the Temple mount, even though it is repeated three times in the Torah, in *Parashat Mishpatim*, *Ki Tisa* and *Re’eh*:

ספר שמות פרק כג פסוק יז שְׁלֹשׁ פְּעָמִים בַּשָּׁנָה יִרְאֶה כָּל זְכוּרְךָ אֶל פְּנֵי הָאֲדֹן הַשֵּׁם:
 “Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Master, Hashem” (*Shemot* 23:17).

ספר שמות פרק לד פסוק כג שְׁלֹשׁ פְּעָמִים בַּשָּׁנָה יִרְאֶה כָּל זְכוּרְךָ אֶת פְּנֵי הָאֲדֹן הַשֵּׁם אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:
 “Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Master, Hashem, the G-d of Israel” (*Shemot* 34:23).

ספר דברים פרק טז פסוק טז שְׁלוֹשׁ פְּעָמִים בַּשָּׁנָה יִרְאֶה כָּל זְכוּרְךָ אֶת פְּנֵי הַשֵּׁם אֱלֹהֶיךָ בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר בְּךָ הַמִּצְוֹת וּבְחַג הַשְּׂבֻעוֹת וּבְחַג הַסֻּכּוֹת וְלֹא יִרְאֶה אֶת פְּנֵי הַשֵּׁם:
 “Three times a year all your males shall appear before the face of Hashem, your G-d, in the place that He will choose, on the festival of matzah, the festival of Shavuot and during the holiday of Sukkot. They shall not appear before Hashem empty handed” (*Devarim* 16:16).

These verses describe the obligation to bring a specific sacrifice: the *Olat Re’iyah* during the three Pilgrim Festivals. When, b”H, we will have a Temple, I imagine I’ll be happy to visit it voluntarily, when I’m able, together with my husband, without the pressure of being commanded. Sometimes, having to commute and stay overnight for the holidays somewhere else, may be challenging for a woman, for example, at the beginning or end of her pregnancy and right after birth. Temple and Synagogue service is the man’s domain. He needs this ritual discipline in order to elevate himself from his lower, more animalistic nature. Women are naturally more in tune with their Divine essence. Therefore, they are exempted from all positive, time bound mitzvot, including the commandment to

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appear with a sacrifice at particular times at the Temple. Her home is a woman's private Temple, and she can be equally close to Hashem wherever she finds herself.

Men are Providers while Women are Receivers

It is known in Kabbalah and from the human physiology of procreation that men are *משפיע/mashpia* – providers, whereas women are *מקבל/mekabel* – receivers. The mitzvah to appear at the Temple during the Pilgrim Festivals is not a mitzvah of receiving, but rather a mitzvah of providing, as it includes the requirement to bring a sacrifice, in order not to come emptyhanded. This is why this mitzvah is associated specifically with the *זכר/zachar* – the male aspect, as the reason the Torah commanded the males to appear is for the sake of giving *נחת רוח/nachat ruach* – spiritual contentment to Hashem (*K'tav Sofer, Devarim 16:16*). Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot are, moreover, considered male holidays as opposed to Chanukah and Purim, which are considered female holidays. This is because all the miracles of Chanukah, and Purim occurred within the realm of nature, whereas the miracles of the Exodus were beyond the space and time frame of nature. This explains why the 'natural' miracles of Chanukah and Purim took place through women. Since the miracles occurred *within* nature during these holidays, and the world stands as 'receiver' in relation to G-d, they came about through women, who also symbolize the aspect of *mekabel* (Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev). It is interesting to notice that the male holidays will be abolished in the future, whereas the female holidays are eternal. "All the holidays will be nullified in the future except Purim and Chanukah" (*Midrash Mishlei Parasha 9*). The other holidays depend on the Jewish people's drawing down holiness into time. Since the future will be beyond time, it follows that the holiness of the holidays will be nullified, as a candle is nullified in bright daylight. Yet, on Purim, the realm of holiness within all reality was revealed independently of people's actions. Therefore, it will never be nullified, similar to Shabbat, which is not dependent on people's deeds (*Sefat Emet, on Purim*). Purim is a feminine holiday where, rather than effecting and rectifying reality, we receive and reveal the eternal light of Hashem which perpetually permeates all of reality. Therefore, the light elicited by the other festivals will pale in comparison with that elicited by Purim and Chanukah by means of women.

Revealing Hashem's Presence Within All Existence

The mitzvah of coming to the Temple during the three masculine holidays is described as an obligation to be "seen." The sacrifice required to be brought at these occasions was called *Olat Re'iyah* – "Appearance burnt offering." The mitzvah of appearing is an external action required of the men for their own sake. Since women are naturally more internally disposed, we do not have the obligation to appear externally, Hashem's knowing eye sees all of us equally, whether we appear before Him or not. In conclusion, there is no reason to feel hurt regarding the mitzvah for the males to appear at the Temple at specific times. It does not in any way reflect a preference for men over women. Men and women have different roles in serving Hashem. Our job, as women, is to tune deeply into our souls and into the hidden level of reality and reveal Hashem's presence within all of existence.