



Why Should Women Listen to the Rabbis?

The Authority Crisis Preceding the Final King, Mashiach

There is a common feministic misbelief, that the Rabbis made up all the rules and since they were all men, they had no understanding of the world of women. Therefore, they are not qualified as an authority for women to heed. Women want to be their own Rabbis, so why not? Since women excel as lawyers and judges in the secular world, why can't we be ordained Rabbis in the Torah world? And even if we can't be Rabbis, why should we listen and defer to a set of archaic rules, dictated by male-chauvinistic Rabbis? Today, listening in general is difficult. Children don't want to listen to their parents or teachers. Husbands and wives have a hard time hearing each other, and the people don't want to heed their leaders. When I accompanied my mother and sisters to Petra recently, what impressed me more than the relics of ancient caves, tombs and temples, was the Jordanian respect for their sovereign king, whom they believe leads them in justice. This contrasts with the way of the Western world, in which several prime ministers have a criminal case against them. The Jordanian submission to their king, gave me a model for the paradigm shift awaiting us, when the world will soon learn to accept, respect and heed our King, the Mashiach. Meanwhile, we live in a time when "the judges judge one another, and everyone does what is straight in his own eyes." (*Ruth* 1:1; *Shoftim* 17:6). This is due to our living in the era of Mashiach ben Yosef. In this time, as our consciousness evolves there is confusion which causes an authority crisis. This must precede the shift, when we will crown our final Mashiach – Mashiach ben David.

The Spiritual Revolution (Especially for Women) During the Era of Mashiach ben Yosef

The entire 39 verses of Chapter 31 of the prophet *Yirmeyahu* (the haftorah for the second day of Rosh Hashana), describes the era of Mashiach ben Yosef in detail. It is amazing to experience how almost every part of this prophetic chapter is being fulfilled in our time. The main themes relating to our topic are the transformation of women's role, and the ability to learn directly from Hashem without the need for a teacher. "Yet again will I rebuild you, then you shall be built, O virgin of Israel; yet again shall you be adorned with your tambourines, and you shall go out with the dances of those who rejoice" (*Yirmeyahu* 31:3). Although this verse also alludes to the rebuilding of the Temple, on a literal (*p'shat*) level it describes the woman's evolving role, from a subservient maidservant drawing water from the well, to a joyous creative woman expressing her own voice. The curse of, "to your husband shall be your desire (dependence) and he shall rule over you" (*Bereishit* 3:16), is expiring, as women's own independent light rapidly increases. This leads to additional shifts in the male/female dynamic, as described further on in this prophetic chapter: "How long will you hide, O wild daughter? For Hashem has created something new on the earth, a woman shall surround a man (*Yirmeyahu* 31:21). Gaining our own voice, opinion and independence (both spiritually and financially) creates a greater challenge for women to accept the authority of 'the rabbis.' Furthermore, everyone, man and woman, are becoming less dependent on teachers and Rabbis as the direct connection with the Divine spark within our soul grows. Eventually, "no one will any longer teach his neighbor or his brother, saying, 'Know Hashem,' for they shall all know Me from their smallest to their greatest, says Hashem..." (Ibid. 33). I have personally experienced this "knowing" in my spiritual healing practice. By tuning into Hashem's voice within, I may receive Divine answers for life questions.

Impeded Listening Ability Caused by Constraints

For the Israelites during the Egyptian exile, it was also hard to listen to their Rabbi, Moshe Rabbeinu, yet for very opposite reasons:

ספר שמות פרק ו פסוק ט וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה כֵּן אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ אֶל מֹשֶׁה מִקְצֶר רוּחַ וּמֵעֲבֹדָה קָשָׁה:
 “Moshe spoke thus to the children of Israel, but they did not listen to Moshe because of [their] shortness of breath and because of [their] hard labor” (*Shemot* 6:9).

When we are stressed and under a lot of pressure it is hard for us to listen to anyone. When our survival instinct prompts us to enter the ‘flight, fight or freeze’ mode, there is no room for heeding even our closest friend. When we are in “shortness of breath” mode, we become stuck in a panic situation, without the ability to even listen to our own inner voice, emanating from the Divine spark within. During these situations of our personal ‘mitzraim’ (constraints), we need to sit ourselves down and lengthen our “shortness of breath” by taking several deep, slow breaths to center ourselves. With such meditative practice, we can learn to listen again. Thus, there are two opposite poles that challenge our ability to listen: Being short of breath by enslavement, pressure and various constraints on the one hand, and being independent and self-contained on the other.

The Importance of Listening and Accepting

Returning to our original question of why women should listen to the rabbis, it is tempting for “a wild woman” to ‘run’ without ‘returning’ due to her spirit of independence both from the men and from the Rabbis. What I mean is, that we can easily be seduced by the euphoria of our independence to run away from authority altogether. We get lost without pulling ourselves back to return and become anchored in the Torah, specifically in the framework of halacha (Jewish law). No matter how evolved and ‘newagey’ we become, the words of our eternal Torah will never be absolved. This includes the requirement to listen to the Rabbis:

ספר דברים פרק יז פסוק יא
 עַל פִּי הַתּוֹרָה אֲשֶׁר יוֹרוּךְ וְעַל הַמִּשְׁפָּט אֲשֶׁר יֹאמְרוּ לְךָ תַעֲשֶׂה לֹא תִסּוּר מִן הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר יִגִּידוּ לְךָ יְמִין וּשְׂמָאל:
 “You must follow the instruction that they teach you, and according to the law they say to you, you shall do; you shall not divert from the word they tell you, either right or left” (*Devarim* 17:11).

Moshe received the Torah from Sinai and he transmitted it to Yehoshua, and Yehoshua passed it to the elders, and the elders to the prophets, and the prophets passed it to the Men of the Great Assembly. They said three things: Be patient in judgment, raise many students and make a fence around the Torah (*Pirkei Avot* 1:1). Hashem has chosen the male Rabbis to transmit the law – from Moshe Rabbeinu to Rabbi Eliezer Melamed. The reason for this is not because women are inferior to men in any way. Rather, the greatness of listening and accepting is an ability no less important than teaching and deciding rabbinic rulings. Actually, the term describing the mystical, inner dimensions of the Torah – the Kabbalah literally means, ‘to receive, to accept.’ When we develop our innate ability to listen, the deepest, mystical Torah may be revealed to us!

Learning to Listen from a Place of Free Choice

Any person who does not listen to the sages’ authority transgresses a negative commandment of “Do not deviate neither right nor left from the thing that they tell you”...This responsibility applies to 1) those laws they heard from previous sages, which constitute the Oral Torah, 2) those laws they derive by using the laws of Torah exegesis and interpretation, and 3) those laws that the Rabbis institute to safeguard the Torah for whatever purpose. This includes decrees, institutions and customs. There is a positive commandment to listen to the rabbis for each category, as well as

a negative commandment for disregarding any of these categories. Therefore, the Torah writes, "You must follow the instruction that they teach you;" [ibid.] – these are the decrees, institutions, and customs that the rabbis instruct the people in order to strengthen Judaism and maintain the world... These are the laws that have been transmitted from sage to sage (Rambam, *Hilchot Mamrim* 1:2). As women in the Messianic Era, we walk on a tightrope between expressing our own voice creatively in Torah and submitting to the Torah authoritative halachic ruling. Thus, despite our spirit of renewal, we, women, are also called to heed the words of the Rabbis. This time, rather than being compelled by financial and spiritual dependence, we can choose to listen and accept out of free choice and this indeed is our ultimate rectification.