



## The Torah Reading for the First Day of Rosh Hashana How Can We Apply in Our Lives “Everything that Sarah Tells you Listen to Her Voice”?

### Must a Woman Allow the Man to Always Have the Last Word?

I deeply relate to the messages of the first Torah reading for Rosh Hashana, which I have been teaching for many years. On the birthday of Adam and Eve, we learn about our spiritual role-models who enacted the ultimate rectification for the downfall of humanity. Whereas, the second day of Rosh Hashana focuses on Avraham and his otherworldly devotion, in the near sacrifice of Yitzchak, Sarah, our mother, is highlighted on the first day of Rosh Hashana. The Torah reading opens with the story of Sarah’s conceiving and giving birth. As Yitzchak grows, we learn about the clarity of Sarah’s vision, when it comes to protecting her son – the heir of Avraham’s legacy. In contrast to several current Torah teachers, who emphasize that women must always listen to their husbands, Hashem told Avraham, “Everything that Sarah tells you, listen to her voice!” (*Bereishit* 21:12). This verse is a great Torah backing for assertive women, who are not afraid to voice their truth, whenever necessary. I’m not saying wives must always be bossy and dominating, making their husbands dance to their every tune. In my family, it was my father, ob”m, who was, as he put it himself, “wearing the pants!” My mother, may she live – although an accomplished doctor in her own right – was subservient to my father and often allowed him the last word. I have always admired my mother-in-law for her dedication to cater and dote on the needs of her husband, for no less than 70 years! I also approve of the post feminist, “Surrendered Wives’ movement”, inspired by Laura Doyle’s *The Surrendered Wife*. When she stopped bossing her husband around, giving him advice, burying him in lists of chores, criticizing his ideas and taking over every situation as if he couldn’t handle it, she experienced a magical return of intimacy in her marriage. This work of letting go of control, is certainly central for the *tikkun* (rectification work) of today’s women, necessary to bring redemption. So, how does Hashem’s command to Avraham, “Whatever Sarah tells you listen to her voice!” apply to women today? When is it appropriate to allow the man to have the last word, and when is it Hashem’s will that women speak up and take charge?

### Sarah Rectified Chava by Separating Good and Evil

The field of a women’s voice and feminine intuition is specifically related to separating good and evil. In her role as a mother and a matriarch, Sarah was imbued with prophetic spirit in order to protect her son – whom she was raising to be the spiritual heir of Judaism – from any negative influence. This *בירור/birur* – ‘separation’ between Yitzchak and Yishmael enacted by Sarah, rectified the sin of Chava, who caused the previous separate energies of good and evil to become entrenched. Since then, it has become the role of women to reparate good from evil in order to bring redemption. Sarah’s separating Yishmael from Yitzchak also rectifies the first sibling rivalry of Chava’s sons, Kayin and Hevel, which resulted in murder. Furthermore, Sarah accomplishes the rectification of Chava, as Arizal says; because she rectified *chalah*, *nidah* and *candlelight* (*Sefer Halikutim, Shoftim* 15:15). To reverse Chava’s act of tempting Adam to eat from the Tree, which caused good and evil to become mixed, Sarah instructed Avraham to separate between Yitzchak and Yishmael. (Rav Tzaddok Hakohen, *Kometz Hamincha* 2:38). It is interesting to note, that although her prophetic instruction seems harsh on Hagar and Yishmael, it facilitated them both to eventually return to Hashem in complete teshuva (see Rashi, *Bereishit* 25:1, Rashi *ibid.* 9).

### Sarah – A Greater Prophet than Avraham

The clue for us to know when to respect the decision of the men and when to voice our truth is alluded to in the text of our Torah reading for the first day of Rosh Hashana:

ספר בראשית פרק כא פסוק יב וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל אַבְרָהָם אֶל יִרְעָ בְּעֵינֶיךָ עַל הַנָּעַר וְעַל אִמְתְּךָ כֹּל אֲשֶׁר תֹּאמַר אֵלֶיךָ שָׂרָה שְׁמַע בְּקוֹלָהּ כִּי בְיִצְחָק יִקְרָא לָךְ זָרַע:

“Then G-d said to Avraham, ‘Be not displeased concerning the lad and concerning your handmaid; whatever Sarah tells you, listen to her voice, for in Yitzchak will be called your seed’” (*Bereishit* 21:12).

Rashi points out, that the word *בְּקוֹלָהּ/bekolah* – “to her voice” is superfluous, for the Torah could have simply stated, ‘listen to her,’ without adding the extra “her voice.” This phrase teaches us that Sarah was imbued with *Ruach HaKodesh* – Divine inspiration. Rashi, moreover, learns that Avraham was inferior to Sarah in prophecy, and therefore, he was told to listen to her [*Midrash Shemot Rabbah* 1:1, *Tan. Shemot* 1]; (Rashi, *Bereishit* 21:12). How is it possible that Sarah’s prophecy was higher than Avraham’s, when Scripture repeatedly mentions how Hashem spoke to Avraham? We never find even one instance in the Torah where Hashem addressed Sarah directly!? Perhaps, the difference in Avraham’s and Sarah’s prophecy exemplifies the difference in men’s and women’s relationship with G-d. Although Hashem spoke directly only to Avraham, Sarah’s level of prophecy may have been of a higher quality. Her kind of prophecy was an inner intuitive connection – a direct relationship – “From my flesh I see G-d...” (*Iyov* 19:26). She didn’t need to be addressed externally, since she was already completely tuned in with G-d’s will from within, to the extent that all of Avraham’s prophecy became bleak in comparison. Her level of divine vision merited for her to become the first of the seven well known prophetesses in the Torah: Who were the seven prophetesses? Sarah, Miriam, Devorah, Chana, Avigail, Chulda and Esther. Sarah, as it is written, “*the father of Milkah, the father of Yiskah*.” Rabbi Yitzchak said, Yiskah is Sarah. Why was she called Yiskah? For she saw by means of divine inspiration, as it states, “*Everything that Sarah tells you, listen to her voice*” (*Babylonian Talmud, Megillah* 14a).

### Listen to Her Voice

Menachem Mendel Shneerson z”l of Lubavitch was quoted saying that “Whatever Sarah tells you, listen to her voice” applies to all Jewish women. Just as Sarah’s voice was prophetic, so do we Jewish women – who attempt to walk in her footsteps – receive glimpses of divine inspiration, especially currently, at the threshold of redemption, with its return of the feminine light. This is alluded to in the seventh *bracha* of the *sheva brachot* (wedding blessings), which mentions that both “the voice of the groom and the voice of the bride” will be heard, when it could have simply said, ‘the voice of the groom and bride,’ without repeating the word ‘voice.’ The seventh sheva bracha is thus an allusion to the time of redemption when women will regain their voice, unlike presently, when only the groom speaks under the chuppah (marriage canopy), (Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, *Tefilat I’kol Hashana*). Yet, the voice of women is already beginning to return- hand in hand with the return of the Divine Feminine Indwelling Presence in the land. As we work on releasing spiritual and emotional blocks, we become vessels more fit for divinity and increased intuition.

### Listening to the Intuition Within Our Body

Listening to Sarah’s voice, can also refer to listening to our body, as it states, “Sarah represents the body and Avraham, the soul” (*Zohar* 1:123b with the *Sulam*). If Sarah represents the body, our physical part, does listening to Sarah’s voice imply that we should listen and follow our physical faculties, allowing our desires and ambitions to take charge? Doesn’t the Torah emphasize our higher soul-purpose, spiritual aspirations, selflessness and divine missions? The Ba’al Shem Tov teaches us that rather than being in constant war with our body, we must allow our body and soul to work together, to reach their joint mission (*Hayom Yom, Shevat* 28, *Shemot* 23:5). It is not always

easy to tune into the holiness in physicality. Yet, an ever-increasing part of spirituality is to listen to our body and harness our earthly drives for our spiritual service. Working on mindfulness, becoming conscious of our breaths and aspiring towards mind-body integration, is a way of fulfilling the perpetual calling of “listen to her voice.” This mastery is what made Avraham and Sarah an eternal inspiration in our daily lives. ([Inspired by, Chana Vaknin, Listen to Her Voice](#)).

### Listening to the Divine Voice Speaking Through Our Heart

In order to know when to expect men to listen to our voice, and when to hold back, we women must first learn to listen to our own voice. I’m referring to our true inner voice, which is in tune with the Shechina. When we heighten our awareness, then Hashem’s voice speaks through our own heart, as it states, “On Your behalf, my heart said, ‘Seek My presence.’ Your presence, O Hashem, I will seek” (*Tehillim* 27:8). The more we accustom ourselves to listen to the Divine voice emanating from our own heart, the more we will know when our voice must be heard in the world. When it is not our own, but the voice of Hashem that we assert, we will avoid power struggles and ego aggrandizement. Sarah, our mother, surely respected and listened to Avraham, most of the times. However, when she became aware of the spiritual and physical danger of her son, she had to put her foot down. It was not her own words that she voiced, but only the voice of the Divine spirit, like the expression, *בַּת קוֹל*/Bat Kol – ‘a heavenly or divine voice, proclaiming G-d’s will to the world’ (Siftei Chachamim, *Bereishit* 21:12). Sarah had her own unique relationship with G-d, independent “of Avraham’s connection to the Almighty. She was a prophetess in her own right. Avraham (which means “father of a great nation”) and Sarah (“Prophetic Princess”) were two individual seekers of G-d in a world of idolaters. They met as equal and united spiritual powers that caused a spiritual monotheistic revolution, felt throughout the entire world and reverberating for eternity.