

## All the women whose hearts inspired them with wisdom. (35:26)

The *Baal HaTurim* notes the *Mesorah*, Masoretic tradition, of the phrase, *V'chol ha'nashim*, "And all the women," is used again in *Megillas Esther*, *V'chol hanashim yitnu yikar l'baaleihen*, "And all wives should show respect to their husbands" (*Megillas Esther* 1:20). This refers to Haman's advice in which he instructs Achashveirosh to issue a decree, emphasizing the significance of women appreciating and valuing their husbands. This is undoubtedly one of the primary tenets that provide the framework for a successful marriage relationship. A woman who does not value her husband (and reminds him of his second-class status) will ultimately cause the matrimonial structure of their home to implode, creating an abnormal home, dysfunctional children, and a relationship that holds little hope for the future. It goes without saying that the husband must, likewise, acknowledge and appreciate his wife's input into the relationship and the home.

*Horav Meshullam Igra, zl*, was one of Europe's dominant Torah scholars. A brilliant mind, he was profoundly versed in all areas of Torah erudition. Even as a young child, his fame as a genius spread throughout the country. Many a young boy, upon reaching the age of twelve, if he had the reputation of which successful futures in Torah scholarship were made, was sought after by prospective fathers-in-law. Wealthy men were prepared to disperse large amounts of money to secure the right young man for their "perfect" daughters. This allowed these young men to sit and learn for years, unencumbered by the fiscal responsibilities of providing for their families. Obtaining a brilliant son-in-law who would one day become an erudite Torah leader was, indeed, a worthy investment.

When *Rav Meshullam* was a mere lad of eight, the lines for this extraordinary young boy began to form. In four more years, his parents would finally listen to *shidduchim*. The city's wealthiest man, an individual who valued Torah, as well as the good deeds for which he was famous, was able to procure the opportunity for his daughter to meet with the budding young scholar.

It was at this time that the coffee beverage was introduced. Being very expensive, this beverage was enjoyed only by the very wealthy. The *Igra* family, especially their son, had yet to be introduced to this latest rage. When the young *Meshullam* came to the man's home to meet his daughter, he saw coffee for the first time in his life. It was not Starbucks, nor even instant. It was coffee, sugar, and milk, in three different containers.

*Rav Meshullam* was clueless as to how to drink/eat the three items set before him. Thinking for a few moments, he turned to *Chazal* and *halachah* for guidance. First, our sages teach that eating precedes drinking, so he ate the contents of the plate of sugar cubes. Next, he saw before him two liquids: one dark in color; and one white. He decided that dark precedes light; so, he drank the coffee followed by the milk.

Watching in “horror,” the cultured girl could not believe her eyes. Demonstrating her level of maturity, she ran from the table right to her mother, and, after relating to her the boy’s lack of culture, declared that she was not interested in pursuing a relationship with him. The subject was closed. She would not marry Meshullam, because he did not know how to drink coffee! (For those who think such foolish reasoning is ludicrous and certainly not a reason to break a *shidduch*, such ridiculous absurdities, albeit “state-of-the-art,” continue to plague families to this very day, as the finest opportunities for a wonderful, lasting relationship are irrationally disregarded.)

When the father entered the kitchen and was confronted by the scene of mother and daughter weeping incessantly, he asked what had happened. After being informed of his daughter’s debacle with the brilliant boy her father had hoped she would marry, the father raised his voice in disgust and said, “You are willing to renege the opportunity to be married to a living *Sefer Torah*?!” Her response was sadly typical of young people raised in comfort and contemporary values, “A *Sefer Torah* belongs in an *Aron HaKodesh*. I am not prepared to spend the rest of my life with a *Sefer Torah*!” End of *shidduch*. The distraught father had to live with the products of his childrearing. He had lost the future *Rav* Meshullam Igra.

Fast forward seventeen years, and that wealthy man had occasion to be in the city of Breslau on business. While he was there, he felt he should visit the *Rav* of the city, *Horav Yeshayah Pik, zl*, who was one of Europe’s preeminent *gaonim*, brilliant scholars. He knocked on the *Rav*’s office and went in to see the *Rav* who was pacing back and forth, while staring at a letter that he held in his hands. The man figured that the *Rav*’s anxiety over the letter was due to the nature of its contents. Perhaps a Jewish community was undergoing a major crisis that required the *Rav*’s counsel or intervention. What else could it be? Being a man of means, well-connected throughout the world of commerce, he asked the *Rav*, “Perhaps I can help?”

The *Rav* replied, “I received this letter from a young man whose identity is unbeknownst to me. In it, he poses a *halachic* question with such incredible brilliance that I have literally spent hours in an attempt to grasp the profundity of his words. He must be an outstanding Torah scholar. Perhaps you might know who he is? He signs the letter, Meshullam Igra.”

When the man heard mention of the name of the young man who, if not for an absurdity, would now have been his son-in-law, he passed out. The *Rav* immediately revived him.

“What happened? What does this name mean to you?” he asked.

The man related the entire story of his daughter’s “on/off/almost” *shidduch* with the author of the letter. When the *Rav* heard this, he exclaimed, “If this is the case, then I regret having revived you. You have every reason to pass out – again!”