

"She said, 'Here is my maid Bilhah, live with her, so that she may bear upon my knees and I too may be built up through her.'" (30:3)

The precedent for Rochel giving her maidservant, Bilhah, to Yaakov for the specific purpose of having a child was set by Sarah *Imeinu*, who gave Hagar to Avraham. We must endeavor to understand what there is about transferring one's maidservant to her husband for the purpose of childbearing that increases one's "chances" of being blessed with a child.

Horav Meir Bergman, Shlita, responds by first citing a *Midrash*, which recounts the dialogue between Michal *bas* Shaul and David *Ha'melech*. Michal criticized David *Ha'melech* for the manner in which he expressed his joy when the *Aron Ha'Kodesh* was brought through the streets of Yerushalayim. She felt his behavior was degrading for someone of his stature, especially in front of the women, to whom she referred as *uvnt*, maidservants.

David *Ha'melech* retorted that he was dancing before the King of Kings and that this joyful expression was one of exultation. He felt her criticism was motivated by pompous arrogance. He cared not for his own dignity; his concern was for *kavod Shomayim*, the respect due Hashem. For her derogatory remarks about the women, she was punished by not having a child until the end of her life. *Horav Bergman* explains the *middah k'neged middah*, measure for measure, regarding Michal's punishment in the following manner.

Michal sinned by referring to *bnos Yisrael* as "*amahos*," maidservants. True, *Chazal* comment that the ultimate merit for women is a result of their commitment to the furtherance of their husbands' and sons' *Torah* study. This is not the function of a servant; this is clearly the achievement of a Jewish mother! Raising children in the *Torah* way, so that they aspire to become *Torah* scholars and knowledgeable Jews with a love for *Torah*, is not a demeaning role. Jewish women are not *amahos*, maidservants; rather, they are *imahos*, mothers, whose primary function is to see to it that their family structure is viable according to *Torah* standards.

It is truly unfortunate that the secularization of Jewish and family life has diminished the role of the Jewish woman. Adam named Chava "*the mother of all mankind*." Only the vacuous seek to undermine this G-d-given role and reduce it to something psychologically degrading and ultimately meaningless. Michal's characterization of Jewish women indicated a disdain on her part for the primary function of raising children in the *Torah* way -- for this she was punished not to have the *zchus* to raise her own children.

Horav Bergman suggests that this was Sarah and Rachel's intention in giving their maidservants to their respective husbands. Their desire was to have the opportunity to raise a child, to carry out their role in life. If the child would not be their own, then at least it would be a child whom they could foster and inspire in the *Torah* way. They aspired for motherhood regardless of whether it

was their natural child or not. Their motivations and actions merited their ultimate reward.