

And Yitzchak brought her into the tent of Sarah, his mother... and thus was Yitzchak consoled after his mother. (24:67)

Rashi teaches that the arrival of Rivkah *Imeinu* in the tent of her late mother-in-law, Sarah *Imeinu*, reestablished the practices of the first Matriarch, to the point that Yitzchak *Avinu* was finally consoled over his mother's passing. The spiritual void left by Sarah's demise seemed to be filled with the presence of Rivkah. *Rashi* focuses on three miracles that were regular occurrences in Sarah's home. First, *Ner daluk mei'erev Shabbos l'erev Shabbos*, the candle which she lit on *erev Shabbos* (to usher in the *Shabbos*) did not burn out. It remained lit the entire week. Second, *Brachah metzuyah b'issah*, there was a special *brachah* to be found in her dough. Third, *Anan kashur al ha'ohel*, a cloud (signifying the Divine Presence) hung over her tent. When Sarah died, these three blessings ceased, only to resume once Rivkah entered the tent, indicating that Rivkah was a worthy successor to her mother-in-law.

This is a beautiful and inspirational *Chazal* which demonstrates the elevated spiritual plateau upon which our first two Matriarchs stood. With the maxim, *maase avos siman la'banim*, "The deeds of the fathers serve as a portent for their children," on our mind, we wonder how we, as descendants of these women, are to act, and what we may learn from their actions that we can apply to our lives.

Horav Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg, zl, takes a practical approach toward both understanding these blessings and how to apply the positive lessons to our lives. The *Shabbos* candle that remains lit all week is the first lesson for developing the proper Jewish home. The *Shabbos* candle represents the source of light which illuminates the Jewish home, the guiding light by which it views life. The father is the one who imbues the sons and daughters with the Torah/*halachah* perspective of Jewish life. The father choreographs the day-to-day survival, both at home and in the world. The spiritual/moral/ethical challenges of the work-week are dealt with through the lens of *halachah*, as taught by the *rosh ha'mishpachah*, head of the family – the father. Knowing what to do, and doing it, are often separated by the bridge of motivation, based on emotion, positive interest and sensitivity. The children may know what to do, but unless their mother inculcates them with the proper emotion, love and desire to serve Hashem, the *halachah* will fall on "dry" lifeless, unfeeling, unenthusiastic children, so that it will soon dissipate. This is where the mother comes in, represented by her illuminating the home with the light of *Shabbos*, holiness, spirit of life, pleasant and positive feeling to serve the Almighty. The mother is the one who brings her children's tender *neshamos*, souls, close to Hashem.

How do we measure a mother's success in imbuing her children with the light that illuminates their *neshamos*? *Mei'erev Shabbos l'erev Shabbos*: if the power of her inspiration endures throughout the week; if the children remember the light of *Shabbos* during their mundane weekly activities, then we know that their mother has achieved success in her work.

The mother's influence is tested during other junctures in the family's life experience: when they are faced with economic hardship; when food is scarce, and the father finds supporting his family increasingly difficult. It is then that the mother must rally her children by infusing blessing and positivity into the family's food. A strong mother is able to take a simple meal, without luxuries, and transform it into a lavish banquet. It all depends on her attitude. Her love, her constant smile, and her enthusiasm for life bring blessing into her "dough." *Brachah metzuyah b'issah*; "Blessing is to be found in her dough." She manages the mundane meals in such a manner that the family does not sense that it is lacking anything.

Anun kashur al ha'Ohel; her home is ensconced in a cloud of *tznius*, privacy, modesty, refinement, moral decency. Her home is a palace. Although her door is open to assist those in need, she takes great care concerning what type of individual passes through her threshold. She offers friendship, kindness, assistance – but not at the expense of her family's spiritual/moral development. Her home is a veritable *Mishkan*, a Sanctuary, where *kedushah*, holiness, reigns and where the *Shechinah*, Divine Providence, may rest.

Sarah *Imeinu* exemplified these traits, which were manifest in her home. When she passed from this world, a void was felt, until it was filled with the appearance of Rivkah.

Members of today's decadent society see the Jewish mother through the lens of their own self-loathing. They have been shameless in stereotyping the Jewish mother as overbearing, nervous and guilt inducing. In reading *Horav Shlomo Carlebach's* biography of his father, **Horav Yosef Carlebach, zl**, I came across an essay which he (*Rav* of Hamburg prior to World War II, and the most prominent Orthodox Rabbi in Germany at the time) wrote. I take the liberty of excerpting a few ideas from his essay: "The mother's virtuous influence within the home achieves, as our prophets teach us, a central role in all that occurs and is regarded as a factor of fundamental significance.

"Outwardly, religious activity, including community service and synagogue worship, as well as predominance in the study halls, is the domain of man. The ultimate bearers, however, of all religious energy and all Jewish activity, although somewhat shrouded in a mystic fog, are not the men, but the women, the mothers.

"It is this calling of motherhood which Jewish law values as women's greatest achievement, so much so that it guarantees them equal status with men. In her home, the mother is the Priestess. There is no other feat which can compare to motherhood, whether in public life, administrative service, or even the devotion of scholarly pursuits."

Rav Carelbach, Shlita, fondly remembers the Friday night "parade" around the *Shabbos* table. It was led by the *Rav* (*Rav Yosef*) with all nine children following him, singing the precious melodies of *Sholom Aleichem*. When they reached *Aishes Chayil*, with their mother sitting in an armchair, the *Rav* and all of the children stood in a semi-circle around her, resoundingly serenading the presiding queen of the *Shabbos* home, with the grand finale of *Sefer Mishlei*, just as the *melech chacham*,

wise king, did for his mother.

In conclusion, he wrote: “No other civilization, no other culture or religion, can compare in assigning such a measure of dignity and high regard as the Torah and *Talmud* do for the Jewish woman.”

Veritably, we often forget the true essence of the Jewish mother. It has gotten so bad that women forget the function of Jewish motherhood. The following story, which has often been retold in *chassidic* Circles, is very telling. It might raise some eyebrows, but will certainly generate discussion (hopefully positive).

Horav David Biederman, zl, was one of the *tzaddikim*, righteous leaders, of the *Yishuv Hayashan*, old Jewish settlement, in Yerushalayim. A scion of rabbinic and *chassidic* lineage, his only concern in life was whether he was living up to Hashem’s expectations of him. While today traveling from Yerushalayim to *Kever Rachel* is a quick jaunt, a century ago it was considered an arduous day-long journey by mule. After *davening* at the *k’vasikin*, sunrise, *minyan*, he set out on the trip. During the entire journey his mind was focused on organizing his prayers, careful not to forget what he wanted to say. After all, it was not every day that he had an opportunity to visit the “Momma Rachel.”

When he finally arrived, he realized that he was not alone. A woman, a mother with a collection of young children, had arrived prior to him and was making herself at home in the monument’s domed chamber. She had already spread out a blanket on the floor and had laid her youngest child down to sleep, as she was busy preparing dinner for her family.

Rav David was shocked. Did this woman have no regard for the sacredness of this site? Was she clueless concerning where she was? How could she involve herself in mundane matters in such a holy place? He could not contain himself, so he asked her in a less-than-amicable manner what she was doing.

The weary mother looked up from her seat on the floor and replied softly, “I would think that our Momma Rachel would be pleased that we are eating and resting here.”

Rav David suddenly felt faint and uneasy. This simple woman, in all innocence, had just shattered his understanding of what *Kever Rachel* represents. He had been coming here for decades to pour out his heart in prayer, but this unlearned woman possessed a greater, more profound perception of the holiness of Rachel’s tomb. What had he been doing here all these years? He now understood that Momma Rachel was the mother who weeps and prays for her children. Her desire is only that they should have some relief, some solace, some comfort in life, some peace of mind, so that they are able to serve Hashem better.

Rav David continued making the trek to *Kever Rachel* on a regular basis, but now he made sure to

bring along a meal which he would share with all the others who had come to entreat our “Mother Rachel” to intercede for them and their families and bring their prayers to the Heavenly Throne.

How often we forget our priorities in life. We have professions, occupations, vocations, whatever name one wants to call it, but motherhood, with its concomitant responsibilities, precedes it all. By the way – this also applies to fatherhood.