

**How To Make or Break a Relationship
In Memory of Ben Blutstein and Marla Bennett**

<p>Exodus 19:3 And Moses went up to the Lord and God called to him from the mountain saying, thus shall you say to the House of Jacob and declare to the children of Israel.</p>	<p>שמות פרק יט פסוק ג ומשה עלה אל האלהים ויקרא אליו יקוק מן ההר לאמר כה תאמר לבית יעקב ותגיד לבני ישראל:</p>
<p>Thus shall you say to the House of Jacob (Exod. 19:3) refers to the women; and declare to the children of Israel (ibid.) refers to the men. Why were the women addressed first? Because they are more diligent in the performance of mitzvot. Another explanation: so that they should direct their children to the Torah. R. Tahlipha of Caesarea said, "The Holy One Blessed be He said, 'When I created this world, I first commanded Adam and only afterwards was Eve commanded. However, she disobeyed and brought ruin to the world. Now, if I do not call upon women first they will render the Torah void. Therefore, the passage opens, Thus shall you say to the House of Jacob.'"</p>	<p>שמות רבה (וילנא) פרשה כח כה תאמר לבית יעקב, אלו הנשים, א"ל אמור להם ראשי דברים שהם יכולות לשמוע, ותגיד לבני ישראל, אלו האנשים, א"ל אמור להם דקדוקי דברים שהם יכולין לשמוע, ד"א למה לנשים תחלה שהן מזדרזות במצות, ד"א כדי שיהו מנהיגות את בניהן לתורה, א"ר תחליפא דקיסרין אמר הקב"ה כשבראתי את העולם לא צויתי אלא לאדם הראשון ואחר כך נצטוו חוה ועברה וקלקלה את העולם עכשיו אם איני קורא לנשים תחלה הן מבטלות את התורה לכך נאמר כה תאמר לבית יעקב...</p>

<p>Genesis Rabbah 17: It once happened that a pious man was married to a pious woman and they did not produce children. Said they, 'we are of no use to the Lord', whereupon they divorced each other. The former went and married a wicked woman and she made him wicked while the latter married a wicked man and made him righteous. This proves that it all depends on the woman.</p>	<p>בראשית רבה (וילנא) פרשה יז מעשה בחסיד אחד שהיה נשוי לחסידה אחת ולא העמידו בנים זה מזה, אמרו אין אנו מועילים להקב"ה כלום, עמדו וגרשו זה את זה, הלך זה ונשא רשעה אחת ועשתה אותו רשע, הלכה זאת ונשאת לרשע אחד ועשתה אותו צדיק, הוי שהכל מן האשה.</p>
<p>Rabbi Shmuel the son of Nahman said in the name of Rabbi Yohan: Every woman who forces her husband to do a mitzvah – she will have sons the likes of whom have not been seen even in the days of Moses....</p>	<p>תלמוד בבלי מסכת עירובין דף ק עמוד ב אמר רבי שמואל בר נחמני אמר רבי יוחנן: כל אשה שתובעת בעלה לדבר מצוה - הווין לה בנים שאפילו בדורו של משה לא היו כמותן.</p>
<p>Rav said: He who follows his wife's advice is destined to end in <i>gehinnom</i>, as Scripture says, <i>Indeed there never was anyone like Ahab who committed himself to doing what was evil in the eyes of the Lord at the instigation of his wife Jezebel</i> (I Kings 21:25). Rav Pappa said to Abaye: But do not people say if your wife is short, bend down so that you can hear her counsel? There is no contradiction; one statement refers to worldly matters and the other to household matters. Alternatively, one refers to spiritual matters, the other to worldly matters. R. Helbo said, A man should always be careful to honor his wife, for the property of the home depends upon her, as we read, <i>On her (Sarah's) account he favored Abraham</i> (Gen. 12:16). Similarly Rava said to the people of Mehoza, "respect your wives so that you may prosper."</p>	<p>תלמוד בבלי מסכת בבא מציעא דף נט עמוד א ואמר רב: כל ההולך בעצת אשתו נופל בגיהנם, שנאמר +מלכים א' כ"א+ רק לא היה כחאב וגו'. – אמר ליה רב פפא לאבבי: והא אמרי אינשי: איתתך גוצא גחין ותלחוש לה! – לא קשיא, הא - במילי דעלמא, והא - במילי דביתא. לישנא אחרינא: הא - במילי דשמיא, והא - במילי דעלמא. ... [אמר ר'] +חלבו: לעולם יהא אדם זהיר בכבוד אשתו, שאין ברכה מצויה בתוך ביתו של אדם אלא בשביל אשתו, שנאמר +בראשית י"ב+ ולאברם הטיב בעבורה. והיינו דאמר להו רבא לבני מחוזא: אוקירו לנשייכו כי היכי דתתערתו.</p>
<p>The promise that the Holy blessed be He made to</p>	<p>תלמוד בבלי מסכת ברכות דף יז עמוד א</p>

women is greater than that which He made to men, as we read, Tranquil women, arise, hear my voice, confident ladies, give ear to my speech (Isaiah 32:9). Rav said to R. Hiyyah, "By virtue of what deeds do women merit reward? By taking their children to the classroom, by sending their husbands to the house of study and by waiting for them until they return. "	גדולה הבטחה שהבטיח הקדוש ברוך הוא לנשים יותר מן האנשים, שנאמר +ישעיהו ל"ב+ נשים שאננות קמנה שמענה קולי בנות בטחות האזנה אמרתי. אמר ליה רב לרבי חייא: נשים במאי זכיין? באקריוי בנייהו לבי כנישתא, ובאתנויי גבריהו בי רבנן, ונטרין לגבריהו עד דאתו מבי רבנן.
R. Avira said: Because of the merit of the righteous women of that generation, Israel was redeemed from Egypt. When the women went to the well to draw water, the Holy One provided little fish for their buckets and they would draw half water and half fish. They would carry their buckets out to their husbands in the fields. There they would wash and feed them, anoint them and submit to their embrace between the banks of the stream. And when the time came for them to give birth, they would go forth and give birth under the apple tree, as it is written, Under the apple tree, I roused you." Song of Songs 8:5	תלמוד בבלי מסכת סוטה דף יא עמוד ב דרש רב עוירא: בשכר נשים צדקניות שהיו באותו הדור - נגאלו ישראל ממצרים, בשעה שהולכות לשאוב מים, הקב"ה מזמן להם דגים קטנים בכדיהן ושואבות מחצה מים ומחצה דגים, ובאות ושופות שתי קדירות אחת של חמין ואחת של דגים, ומוליכות אצל בעליהן לשדה, ומרחיצות אותן וסכות אותן ומאכילות אותן ומשקות אותן ונוקקות להן בין שפתים, שנאמר: +תהלים סח+ אם תשכבון בין שפתים וגו', בשכר תשכבון בין שפתים זכו ישראל לביות מצרים, שנאמר: +תהלים סח+ כנפי יונה נחפה בכסף ואברותיה בירקרק חרוץ, וכיון שמתעברות באות לבתיהם; וכיון שמגיע זמן מולדתן, הולכות ויולדות בשדה תחת התפוח, שנאמר: +שיר השירים ח+ תחת התפוח עוררתיך וגו',
Rabbi Natan said, greater is the power of women than men. Men said, let us choose a head and return to Egypt (Numbers 14 4) and women said give us a plot within the inheritance of our father's brother (Number 27 1-3)	ספרי במדבר פסקא קלג ר' נתן אומר יפה כח נשים מכה אנשים אומרים נתנה ראש ונשובה מצרימה (במדבר יד ד) ונשים אומרות תנה לנו אחוזה בתוך אחי אבינו.
It is not good that the man should be alone: It was taught: He who has no wife dwells without good, without help, without joy, without blessing, and without atonement.....	בראשית רבה (וילנא) פרשה יז בלא טוב, תני רבי יעקב כל שאין לו אשה שרוי בלא טובה בלא עזר, בלא שמחה, בלא ברכה, בלא כפרה, בלא טובה, לא טוב היות האדם לבדו.....
Question (R. Yosi): "I will make for him a helper" - how does a woman help a man? Answer (Eliyahu): A man brings (home) wheat and flax, but he does not chew wheat and wear flax! We see, she enlightens his eyes and stands him on his feet!	תלמוד בבלי מסכת יבמות דף סג עמוד א ואמר רבי אלעזר, מאי דכתיב: +בראשית ב'+ אעשה לו עזר כנגדו? זכה - עוזרתו, לא זכה - כנגדו. ואיכא דאמרי, ר' אלעזר רמי: כתיב כנגדו וקרינן כניגדו! זכה - כנגדו, לא זכה - מנגדתו. אשכחיה רבי יוסי לאליהו, א"ל: כתיב אעשה לו עזר, במה אשה עוזרתו לאדם? א"ל: אדם מביא חטים, חטים כוסס? ששתן, ששתן לובש? לא נמצאת מאירה עיניו ומעמידתו על רגליו?

Rabbinic Couples

I. Akiba and Rachel

Rabbi Akiba Learns Torah: Version Number One

Ketbuot 62b

R. Akiva was Kalba Savua's shepherd. His daughter saw that he was modest and fine. She said to him, 'if I became betrothed to you, will you go to the house of the Master?' 'Yes' he replied. She was then secretly betrothed to him and sent him away. Her father heard about this, expelled her from his house, and vowed that she would not benefit from his property (because R. Akiva was unlearned at the time). R. Akiva departed and spent 12 years at the academy; he returned home with 12,000 disciples. He overheard an old man ask his wife 'How long will you be like a widow (waiting for him)?' 'If he would listen to me,' she replied, 'he would spent another 12 years of study.' 'I have her consent then,' said Akiba and departed for another 12 years of study. He returned home with 24,000 disciples. His wife heard that he was returning, and went to greet him. Her neighbors said to her, you should borrow better clothes to greet him! She answered, "A righteous man

knows the soul of his animal."

When she reached him, she bowed to the ground and kissed his feet. R. Akiva's attendants started to dispel her. **R. Akiva said** Leave her! Mine and yours are hers! (c) Her father heard that a great sage came and said 'I shall go to him, perhaps he will invalidate my vow.' **R. Akiva asked him**, when you vowed, did you intend to forbid her even if her husband would become a great scholar? **Ben Kalba Savu'a**: Had I known that he would learn even one chapter, or even one Halachah, I would not have vowed.

R. Akiva responded, 'I am your son-in-law!'

His father-in-law bowed and kissed his foot, and gave half his money to him.

R. Akiva's daughter did similarly with Ben Azai. This is like people say, a sheep follows a sheep. The daughter did like her mother.

Nedarim 50a

Rabbi Akiva was the shepherd of Kalba Savua. The daughter of Kalba Savua became engaged to Rabbi Akiva. Kalba Savua heard and cut her off from any of his property. She went and married him in the winter. They used to lie in the hay barn and he would pick hay out of her hair. He said, "Were I only able, I would give you a 'Jerusalem of Gold!'" Elijah the Prophet came and appeared to them as a person crying out at the door. He said, "Give me some of your hay, for my wife is giving birth and I have nothing for her to lie down on." Rabbi Akiba said to his wife, "You see, there is someone who does not even have hay." She said to him, "Go and sit in the House of Study."....

Version Number Two

Avot De'Rebbi Natan

What was the beginning of Rabbi Akiba?

It is said: When he was 40 years old he had not yet studied a thing. One time he stood by the mouth of a well. "Who hollowed out this stone," he wondered.

He was told: "It is the water which falls upon it every day, continually." It was said to him: "Akiba, have you not heard, *the waters wear away the stones* (Job 14:19).

Thereupon, Rabbi Akiba drew the inference with regard to himself: If what is soft wears down the hard, all the more shall the words of the Torah which are hard as iron, hollow out my heart, which is flesh and blood! Forthwith, he turned to the study of Torah.

He went together with his son and they appeared before an elementary teacher. Said Rabbi Akiba to him: 'Master teach me Torah.'

Rabbi Akiba took hold of one end of the tablet and his son the other end of the tablet. The teacher wrote down aleph bet for him and he learned it. Aleph taf and he learned it. He went on studying until he learned the whole Torah....

Each day Rabbi Akiba would gather a bundle of straw; part he would sell to provide for his food and part for his clothing. His neighbours rose up on protest and said to him, 'Akiba, you are slaying us with the smoke! Sell the straw to us and with the money buy oil and study by the light of a lamp.'

'I fill many needs with it,' he answered them; 'first, I study by its light; then again, I keep warm by its heat; and finally I sleep on it;'

In the future, at Judgement Day, Rabbi Akiba will put all the poor in a guilty light. For if they are asked, 'Why did you not study Torah? And they say 'because we were poor' they shall be told:

'Indeed, was not Rabbi Akiba even poorer and in more wretched circumstances!' and if they say, 'because of our children, they shall be asked and did not Rabbi Akiba have sons and daughters?' But they are told, 'Because Rachel his wife had merit.'

At the age of 40 he went to study Torah; at the end of 13 years he taught Torah to multitudes. It is said: Before he departed from the world he owned tables of silver and gold and mounted his couch on ladders of gold. His wife used to go about in gold sandals and in a golden tiara. 'Master' his disciples said to him, 'you have put us to shame by what you have done for her.' He said to them, '**many are the trials she endured for my sake, that I may study Torah.**

II. Meir and Beruriah

תלמוד בבלי מסכת ברכות דף י עמוד א

Certain brigands who were in the neighborhood of Rabbi Meir used to trouble him greatly. He prayed (sought mercy) that they die. Beruriah his wife said to him “What is your opinion/ Because it is written “Let sins cease...”? Is sinners written? Rather sins are written. Furthermore **cast your eyes to the end of the verse** and they are wicked no more. Since sins will cease, they will be wicked no more. He prayed for them and they repented.

Midrash Mishlei

What a rare find is a capable wife! Her worth is far beyond that of rubies (Prov. 31:10):
A tale is told of Rabbi Meir that while he was sitting and expounding in the academy on a Sabbath afternoon, his two sons died. What did their mother do? She left them both lying on their couch and spread a sheet over them.
At the close of the Sabbath, R. Meir came home from the academy, and he asked her, “Where are my two sons?”
She replied: They went to the academy.
He said: I looked for them at the academy but did not see them.
She handed him the cup for the Havdalah service and he pronounced it. Then he asked her again: Where are my two sons?
She replied: Sometimes they go someplace; they will be back presently. She served him his meal and he ate. After he recited Birkat Hamazon, she said to him: Master I have a question to ask you.
He replied: Ask your question.
She said: Master, some time ago, a certain man came by and left something on deposit with me. Now he has come to reclaim this deposit. Shall I return it to him or not?
He replied: My daughter, is not one who holds a deposit obligated to return it to its owner?
She said: Without your opinion, I would not give it back to him.
What did she then do? She took him by the hand, led him up to the children’s room, brought him to the bed and removed the sheet, so that R. Meir saw them both lying on the bed dead. He burst into tears, saying, “My sons, My sons! My masters, My masters! My natural born sons and my master who enlightened me with their learning in Torah.”
At this point R. Meir’s wife said to him: “Master, did you not just now tell me that we must return a pledge to its owner?”

מדרש משלי (בובר) פרשה לא

[י] אשת חיל מי ימצא. [זו היא התורה. ורחוק מפנינים מכרה]. שהיתה לפני לפנים, וזכה משה והורידה למטה לארץ. בטח בה לב בעלה ושלל לא יחסר. שלא חסר בה דבר. ד"א אשת חיל מי ימצא. אמרו מעשה היה בר' מאיר שהיה יושב ודורש בבית המדרש בשבת במנחה, ומתו שני בניו, מה עשתה אמו /אמן/, הניחה שניהם על המטה ופרשה סדין עליהם, במוצאי שבת בא ר' מאיר מבית המדרש לביתו, אמר לה היכן שני בני, אמרה לבית המדרש הלכו, אמר לה צפיתי לבית המדרש ולא ראיתי אותם, נתנו לו כוס של הבדלה והבדיל, חזר ואמר היכן שני בני, אמרה לו הלכו למקום אחר ועכשיו הם באים, הקריבה לפניו המאכל ואכל ובירך, לאחר שבירך אמרה לו רבי [שאלה אחת יש לי לשאול לך, אמר לה אמרי שאלתך, אמרה לו רבי] קודם היום בא אדם אחד ונתן לי פקדון, ועכשיו בא ליטול אותו, נחזיר לו או לא, אמר לה בתי מי שיש פקדון אצלו הוא צריך להחזירו לרבו, אמרה לו רבי חוץ מדעתך לא הייתי נותנת אצלו, מה עשתה תפשתו בידה, והעלה אותו לאותו חדר, והקריבה אותו למטה, ונטלה סדין מעליהם, וראה שניהם מתים ומונחים על המטה, התחיל בוכה ואומר בני בני רבי רבי, בני בדרך ארץ, ורבי שהיו מאירין פני בתורתן, באותה שעה אמרה לו לר' מאיר רבי לא כך אמרת לי אני צריך להחזיר הפקדון לרבו, אמר, ה' נתן וה' לקח יהי שם ה' מבורך (איוב א כא). אמר ר' חנינא בדבר הזה נחמתו ונתיישרה דעתו, לכך נאמר אשת חיל מי ימצא. אמר ר' [חמא בר] חנינא מפני מה נתחייבו בניו של ר' מאיר ומתו בבת אחת, מפני שהיו רגילין להניח בית המדרש ויושבין באכילה ובשתיה. אמר ר' יוחנן ואפילו בדברי הבטלה, שבשעה שניתנה תורה לישראל לא הזהירין אלא על דברי תורה, שנאמר היום הזה ה' אלהיך מצוך לעשות (דברים כו טז).

Vayikra Rabbah

Rabbi Meir used to sit and teach on the Sabbath nights. A certain woman was there listening to him. Once his discourse was extended, and she waited until he had finished discoursing. She went home and found the candle already extinguished. Her husband said to you, Where were you? She said to him, I was sitting and listening to the teacher. He said, I swear to you that you will not enter here until you go and spit in the face of the teacher. She stayed away the first week, two, and a third. Her neighbour women said to her, Are you still angry with each other? We will come with you to the teacher. When Rabbi Meir saw them, he saw by the Holy Spirit. He said to them, Is there anyone among you who is

learned in the magical curing of eyes? Her neighbors said to her, Now go and spit in his face and you will be permitted to your husband. When she sat before him, she withdrew from him. She said to him, Rabbi I am not learned in the magical curing of eyes. He said to her, Spit in my face seven times. He said to her, Go tell your husband. You said one time, I spat seven times. His disciples said to him, Rabbi are we permitted to dishonour thus the Torah! Should you not have requested of one of us that we say an incantation. He said to them, Is it not enough for Meir to be like his Maker? For Rabbi Yishmael has said, "Peace is so important that a name written in holiness can be erased in the water, in order to establish peace between a husband and a wife."

III. R. Eliezer and Imma Shalom

Bava Mezia

R. Hisda said: All gates are locked, excepting the gates [through which pass the cries of] wrong [ona'ah]...

R. Helbo said: One must always observe the honour due to his wife, because blessings rest on a man's home only on account of his wife, for it is written, And he treated Abram well for her sake. And thus did Raba say to the townspeople of Mahuza, Honour your wives, that ye may be enriched.

We learnt elsewhere: If he cut it into separate tiles, placing sand between each tile: R. Eliezer declared it clean, and the Sages declared it unclean; and this was the oven of 'Aknai.

...It was said: On that day all objects which R. Eliezer had declared clean were brought and burnt in fire. Then they took a vote and excommunicated him....

R. Gamaliel too was travelling in a ship, when a huge wave arose to drown him. 'It appears to me,' he reflected, 'that this is on account of none other but R. Eliezer b. Hyrcanus.' Thereupon he arose and exclaimed, Master of the Universe! You know full well that I have not acted for my honour, nor for the honour of my father's house, but for your honor, so that strife may not multiply in Israel! 'At that the raging sea subsided.

Ima Shalom was R. Eliezer's wife, and sister to R. Gamaliel. From the time of this incident onwards she did not permit him to fall upon his face [say tachanun] Now a certain day happened to be the New Moon, but she mistook a full month for a defective one. Others say, a poor man came and stood at the door, and she took out some bread to him. [On her return] she found him fallen on his face. 'Stand up,' she cried out to him, You have killed my brother.' In the meanwhile the shofar went out from the house of Rabban Gamaliel that he had died. 'How did you know?' he questioned her. 'I have this tradition from my father's house: All gates are locked, excepting the gates of wounded feelings.'

. Babylonian Talmud Nedarim 20a-b

R. Johanan b. Dahabai said: The Ministering Angels told me four things: People are born lame because they [sc. their parents] overturned their table [i.e., practised unnatural cohabitation]; dumb, because they kiss 'that place'; deaf, because they converse during cohabitation; blind, because they look at 'that place'.**Imma Shalom was asked: Why are your children so exceedingly beautiful? She replied: [Because] he [my husband] 'converses' with me neither at the beginning nor at the end of the night, but [only] at midnight; and when he 'converses', he uncovers a handbreadth and covers a hand breadth, and is as though he were compelled by a demon. And when I asked him, What is the reason for this [for choosing midnight], he replied, So that I may not think of another woman, lest my children be as bastards....**