

ALL THANKS TO MY MOTHER

RABBI MOTTY LIPSKIER

A group of women were bragging about their adult children. “My son loves me so much,” boasted one, “that all he talks about with his therapist is me!”

Jokes aside, a mother’s influence over her children is tremendous.

When a woman reportedly told the Rebbe that she wanted her children to be like him, the Rebbe responded, “When they have a mother like mine, they’ll be able to be like me.”

The Rebbe made a similar statement publicly at a *farbrengen* in the winter of 5741 (1981), when he encouraged everyone to participate in an upcoming *melaveh malkah* benefiting Machon Chana—the school for *baalos teshuvah* established in memory of Rebbetzin Chana. “People will surely think I have a personal bias,” said the Rebbe. “After all, this institution carries the name of my mother, the person who dedicated herself to my upbringing, and any qualities I have are thanks to her. So let it be; I am biased, and for good reason.”

Harav Yitzchak Hutner, one of the greatest leaders of the *mussar* movement in our time, credited his mother with his love and passion for Torah. One morning he told his mother that he’d be completing an entire *masechta* of *Gemara* that day. When he came home from *cheder*, he found the table set as if it was a *yom tov* and he saw his mother wearing the brand-new dress she’d been saving for Pesach. Given their poor financial state, he was shocked to see such lavishness. He asked his

mother what the occasion was. With a loving smile, she explained, “The joy of my son completing a *masechta* is the greatest *yom tov* of all!”

Today, unfortunately, even the *frum* community grapples with the roles and rights of women. A common misunderstanding is that the Torah considers women to be second-class and incapable of achieving what men can. But this isn’t true.

We know women can be fantastic doctors, lawyers, and politicians, but men can fill those positions as well. There is one position, however, which can be filled *only* by a woman—that of mother.

A mother directly affects her child’s emotional, psychological, and spiritual wellbeing. She shapes her child’s ability to love, trust, and bond with others. Our sense of self comes primarily from our mothers. Whether we’re outgoing or bashful, fearful or courageous, is largely due to the nurturing we received from our mothers.

Sounds daunting? It is. At least for men. Only a woman has what it takes.

Even the Greeks at the time of Chanukah understood this. One of their decrees was that every Jew must etch into the horn of an ox, “We have no portion in the G-d of Israel.” What was the meaning of this decree? Some explain that an ox represents a person’s livelihood, and they wanted to ingrain the idea that we don’t need Hashem for that. Others say that they wanted their message to be spread loudly amongst all Jews, like the sound of a horn. But another interpretation says that the Greeks understood that if they wanted to have a deep and lasting impact on the Jews, they couldn’t do it with money or loud announcements; they had to do it through the women. In those days, the ox’s horn was used as a baby bottle and they wanted every Jewish child, while in the loving, caring and trusted arms of his mother, to see those spiritually lethal words. The women, they reasoned, were the only ones who could achieve real change.

Women and girls shouldn’t be discouraged from pursuing careers. Instead, they should be encouraged and emboldened to pursue the career so sorely needed today: Dedicated, present Jewish mothers. This career includes medicine, psychology, and so much more. As the Rebbe said at that *farbrengen*, “Nutritious food is the best preventive medicine. When a child becomes ill, *chas v’shalom*, it’s usually the father who runs to the doctor. But it’s the mother who maintains the child’s good health the rest of the time, preventing illness to begin with.”



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There are, of course, many dedicated mothers who have no choice but to work. Their families simply can't survive otherwise. In those instances, it's not a matter of ideals but of necessity. It's usually plain to see that their family's

wellbeing remains their first priority, so there's no need to talk to them about perspectives and priorities. Instead, we could direct our arguments to Hashem and demand that He make it easier for these women to be where their heart so aches to be—with their families. (And likewise regarding women whose communities need their public service, such as teaching or *shlichus*. But that's another article.)

As a community, it's time we reflect on how we can improve the current situation and general outlook. Instead of getting caught up in the minutiae of women's rights, let's focus on the right of women to be women.

A woman who finds fulfillment in providing a warm, healthy, and happy environment for her family—both spiritually and materially—should applaud

herself and be celebrated by others. And a woman who craves fulfillment in areas outside of her home should be encouraged to ask herself: Am I fully aware of the impact my being home or away from home will have on my children?

And with Hashem's help, instead of visualizing your children talking about you to their therapist, imagine the moment they'll say with pride, "Any qualities I have are thanks to my mother." ❧

Rabbi Motty Lipskier is a teacher and mashpia in Crown Heights. He and his wife, Chanel, run the Crown Heights Women's Circle. To receive his weekly dvar Torah, email Thebeismedrash@gmail.com or WhatsApp 347.620.2063. To learn more about the Crown Heights Women's Circle, visit CHwomenscircle.com.

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