

## "How Equal Should Women Be?"

- 1) I am qualified to speak on this subject because of the happy circumstance that there are as many women as men in my ancestry.
- 2) Freud maintained that in the natural psychological makeup of the Human Race there is inherent a striving or battle between male and female. In addition, in any society, especially a competitive society, there will always be a tendency for friction between the sexes.
- 3) Ancient societies were generally directed and dominated by one of the sexes. Some of them were matrarchal, dominated by the women or mother. Most societies of ancient days were patrarchal. Our own society was originally patrarchal. It is now in a state of transition. The whole problem of "How equal should women be?" is peculiar to modern society, emerging, as it is, from a completely patrarchal culture to a new kind of civilization, perhaps partially matrarchal. The whole concept of women's rights is no more than about fifty years old. The problem was brought into sharp focus in World War I, when the men were away on the battlefield fighting, and women were called upon to serve their places in industry and offices, as a sort of second best. No one really thought that they would really prove anywhere near as capable as men. They were, however, surprised by the fact that in many of these temporary positions, the women proved to be superior to the male. From that day on, American women have been getting more and more rights. Today there are two and a half million voters than men voters. One third of the American labor force, about twenty-two million, are women. We are today, in so far as the position of women in society, in a state of flux. And the stress and strain of the transition period is having its definite effect upon all members of our civilization. If you will excuse the metaphor, the pattern of the American Women's position in society has been set; but the basting thread has not yet been taken out. Alterations still must and will be made.



4) The problem today in America is not primarily political. None of us would be surprised if a woman would be elected President within two or three decades. In Europe it is somewhat more of a problem - only recently a referendum to give the vote to women in Switzerland was defeated. The problem in America is not even an economic one; women may enter all professions. There is, however, a religious problem - as witness the recent difficulties in the Reform movement concerning women rabbis, and the <sup>e i</sup>per~~annual~~ mixed pews problem in Orthodoxy. And of course, there is a serious domestic problem. It is an evident and ost<sup>h</sup>ensible fact that the dynamics of womans' adjustment in modern society should reflect itself in tensions within the family. Every family is, after all, only society in miniature. In the United States therefore the battle for women's rights economically<sup>al</sup> and politically is rather irrelevant. As a matter of fact, some men maintain they would like to see equality of the sexes - they feel they have been <sup>de</sup>denied it for the past several years.

5) The real question is: what does equality mean? How can we maintain it - after all, exact mathematical equality is a tightrope<sup>upon</sup> which one must walk with great care, for the least slip means falling on either side. Exact and absolute equality means domestic problems too. Witness the case of husband and wife who, if exactly equal, do not know how to go about solving their problems, and to whom to assign the task of making a decision. Usually, many couples decide that the husband will solve the big problems, the wife the little problems. For them the question is: how about the difficulties between them as to who defines which problem, is big and which little? With some couples this is no longer a problem. The husband takes care of all the big problems, such as whether to admit <sup>china</sup>Scheiner into the U.N., while the wife solves all little problems, such as the family budget, what school to send the children, etc... The real question, then, is what does equality mean and how far should it go.



6) What I shall tell you today, is, I believe, the essentially Jewish attitude. And I firmly believe that this Jewish attitude is in tune with the best and wisest of the contemporary psychological, sociological, and anthropological wisdom of man.

7) The essential point that I wish to make this afternoon is: there is a vast distinction between value and function. These are two <sup>fundamentally</sup> ~~vastly~~ different concepts and it is almost tragic for us to <sup>found</sup> ~~conceive~~ of them and to assume that one implies the other.

8) In so far as value is concerned, Judaism has always maintained that there is an absolute equality of value between men and women. After all, what determines in the first place that any human being is valuable, that he is worthy, that he has dignity? It is the fact that this human being was created in the צלם אלקים. And the צלם אלקים - free will, ethical character, the intellect - was given to man and woman equally.

Examples: דבורה הנביאה; רחל הקדושה; הגבורה; the Chassidic Maid of Ludmir. And we often seem to think that the role of woman in sex, her acceptance as an equal partner in the <sup>most</sup> intimate marital relationship, is a modern discovery of sexology. Actually, much before the Middle Ages, when the rest of the world was still in primitive darkness, Jewish thinkers already developed a sexology that puts all modern thinkers to shame, in its considerateness to woman.

9) Nevertheless, ~~dispite~~ <sup>of</sup> the absolute value of equality, there is no equality of function. The function of man and the function of woman are definitely different. This is so because of their <sup>natural</sup> ~~normal~~ structure and their normal psychological makeup. Even as in minor mannerisms, such as in the fact that men smoke cigars while women smoke only cigarettes, the different kinds of employment etc., it is obvious that men and women have completely differing

functions. (Prof. Ashley Montagu, prof. of anthropology at Columbia University, shocked many people when, in an article entitled "The Natural Superiority of Women" in the Saturday Review of March 1952, announced that biologically a woman is superior to a man. While it is true, he said, woman are more prone to illness, and become sick more frequently, it is well-known that she is <sup>more</sup> resistance to disease. In addition, and primarily, he points out that <sup>e</sup>genetically the woman is constitutionally superior. He maintains that the Y <sup>h</sup> chromosome of the sperm cell, which <sup>e</sup>determines the birth of a boy, is actually only an undeveloped X <sup>h</sup> chromosome, which portends the birth of a girl. In otherwards, a man is only a half-baked woman.) Our Torah understood and insisted on this difference in function. Thus, while man was assumed to be preeminent in the exercise of his intellect in the study of Torah, its moral contents - the Ten Commandments which are the moral heart of Torah - was given first to women.

כה תאמר לאיתר יצקא ותגיד לבני ישראל. And our rabbis maintain that <sup>e</sup>איתר יצקא, which comes first, refers to the woman folk, while <sup>e</sup>בני ישראל refers to the men folk. Our rabbis understood that when it comes to a crisis, a woman has greater capacity to survive. Thus, when they pondered why Isaac was more easily fooled by his evil son Esau than was his wife Rebecca, they replied that man was created out of the earth, and therefore, like an earthen pot or urn, he cracks easily when dropped. However, woman who was made from bone is like a vessel made of bone - even when it is dropped to the earth, and suffers all kinds of pressure, she will be <sup>e</sup>resilient and bounce right back without cracking. Our rabbis attributed <sup>e</sup>ביתר יצקא, deep intuition, to woman. This explains, in part, why man and women are assigned to a great extent, different <sup>e</sup>משימות in the structure of Torah. They simply differ in many of their functions.



10) It is the failure of the modern world to understand this dichotomy, the insistance<sup>e</sup> that woman's equality must be driven to the bitter end, the error of identifying equality of value with identity of function, that has caused<sup>s</sup> untold misery for us modern<sup>s</sup>. Some of our most brilliant thinkers tell us that as a result of this intellectual error, this assumption that equality of value equals identify of function, has caused untold grief which makes psychiatry the most underpopulated profession in the country. There has developed a confusion of role between man and woman. Their traditional identities have become blurred. Men ~~and~~ women now suffer from what they call "sexual ambiguity." The man has become more passive, more of a home-body, partly a mother. Meanwhile, the woman has lost her effeminate qualities, she has tended to become more acquisitive, more aggressive, more active, more mannish. In otherwards our men are become more like women and our women are becoming more like men. This "sexual ambiguity" has led so many of our contemporaries to misery and psychological grief. More important is the effect of this ambiguity upon our children. Once upon a time, a little boy knew what life had in store for him; his functions as a man in society were clearly deliniated and defined. The same was true with the little girl, who acted out her woman's role in her little girl's games. Now, however, the confusion in roles and the "sexual ambiguity" have made it difficult for the little boy and girl to know what role they are expected to play when they grow up. This same confu<sup>s</sup>sion has led to an increase in divorce. The man, more domesticated, is unhappy with his role. The woman, now competing with men on men's terms and in men's ways, obviously does not satisfy her husband, even as he in his effeminacy, does not satisfy her. And once the home - - the place which is sanctified as the home by a mannish husband and a womanish wife - -



breaks, the family unit disintegrates. That is our great trouble. We no longer have the centrality of the home. You probably heard of a story of the real estate man who wanted to sell a home to a young woman. "Home?" she asked, "who needs a home?" And then she proceeded to explain, "I was born in a hospital, raised in a nursery, spent my youth in a school, will be married in a wedding hall, live in a hotel apartment, be sick in the hospital, be buried from a chapel - - who needs a home?" Most of us are at fault in the same manner. We have never spent so much money as we do nowadays on our homes - - building them, furnishing them, decorating them. And yet as soon as we are finished furnishing and decorating our homes, we decide that we are tired and go off on vacations and cruises of all sorts! Furthermore, Judge Samuel Leibowitz, of The Brooklyn Criminal Court, has recently pointed out that it is this attenuation of the role of the father in the family - - his mannishness, as opposed to the womanishness of the wife - - that has been the root of the upsurge in juvenile delinquency. There is no father image in the home, because father is now half-mother.

11) Granted, then, that value and function are different, that women's value is the same as men's and her function different. What, now, is the main function of a woman? And the answer to that is, love - - maternal love. This is the greatest, most precious and most inimitable quality and function of a woman. אמה is generally interpreted as mercy or pity; that is an error. It really means love, motherly love. The word comes from the Hebrew root אמ which means the womb. This maternal love is the pattern for all other kinds of love. It is the highest form and the cause of all other kinds of love. Basically maternal love is identical with humanity. To be a mother, to give maternal love which is the function of a woman, means, in essence, to be a human being. The highest and most heightened form of humanity is this



selfless, devoted, self-sacrificing love when a mother gives of herself to her child. The very act of birth is the giving of the self, at the cost of pain, because of love. Therefore it is a pity that so many modern mothers have given up the act of nursing a child. The act of nursing again means giving of the self because of love. If our mothers will diminish their motherly love, humanity is the loser. This teaching of love (i.e. the mother teaching the child to be like herself) is the true genius of woman. Who cares for other kinds of genius compared with this? It is true that woman is poor as a musician. Women have been receiving music lessons for centuries and yet they have not produced one composer of note to compete with the mass of men who have achieved greatness in this field. But how can genius in music or art or science or technology ever compare with the genius at being a human being, with all the deep love that that implies? I think our Biblical tradition has that in mind when it maintains that Adam received his name from Adamah, the earth - man is ever disposed to conquer the earth and there must he return - lifeless, <sup>earth</sup> bound, inert. Woman however is descendent from Chava who received her name from Chave - life, humanity. And women have so much more to contribute to the world as woman than as spurious men.

12) There is, however, hope for the future. The reemergence of ~~new~~ and larger families, with three to five children for even the upper middle class families bodes well for the centrality of the home where once again a man will be a man and a woman will be a woman; where little girls will strive to a life, not of plots and plans, but pots and pans. And where father will once again be father. When that happens not only will Jewish families once again achieve <sup>the</sup> great Jewish tradition of domestic happiness and bliss, but all the world will be able to learn from us and we will again contribute to the stability of all the earth and, by us, the descendants of Abraham, will all the families of all the world be blessed.