



# IN POTS, BATHS AND SHOPPING BAGS

Chanie Wolf

*It is a week before Pesach. Once upon a time, I used to prepare for the seder by learning the Haggadah. Delving into the deeper meaning of every passuk, I would get into the mode of Yetzias Mitzrayim. Now I am lining counters, peeling potatoes and cooking schmaltz.*

*It is Rosh Hashanah. Shuls all around the world are filled to capacity with Yidden who have come to crown Hashem as King. The niggunim inspire tears; the shofar inspires teshuvah. And I am reading children's books and changing diapers.*

*It is at moments like these that a nasty little voice in my head whispers, "Is that all you're good for? Is ruchnius a thing of the past?"*

The *mitzvos* given specifically to men, such as *tefillin*, *talmud Torah* and *tefillah* with a *minyan*, involve connecting with Hashem in an obviously spiritual way, removed from ordinary physical endeavors. Men are commanded to spend hours each day *davening*, and all available hours learning Torah, keeping worldly affairs to a minimum.

Not so for women. Of course, a Jewish woman is supposed to make time to *daven* and learn Torah (to the extent possible given her circumstances). Yet, oddly enough, the specific *mitzvos* entrusted to her – her spiritual obligations – are, essentially, very physical *mitzvos*:

The taking of *challah* which, by extension, includes the responsibility for the *kashrus* of the home.

The kindling of the Shabbos candles and more broadly the responsibility to prepare for and usher in Shabbos.

The primary responsibility for keeping the *halachos* of *taharas hamishpachah*.

Food, light and the marital relationship represent the existential needs of a human being. All people, Jews and non-Jews alike, need nourishment, security and love. Although on a soul level we are incomparably different – as only Yidden have a *nefesh Elohis* – on an external, corporeal level we are identical. Both Jewish and non-Jewish women go shopping; both cook dinner; both do bedtime routine.

And herein lies the unique *avodah* given to the Jewish woman: to infuse the physical life of her family with holiness. She is to bring Elokus from the higher realms down into our material world. Engaging throughout the day with food, clothing and home maintenance, involved in a marriage and in childcare, she must ask, “How can I use this to serve Hashem?”

Dinnertime for a Jewish mother is not only a time to pack in the daily portion of healthy calories – *eat your vegetables!* – but, more importantly, an opportunity to nourish



This 13th installment of The Moshiach Page is dedicated to our beloved Founder, Mrs. Brana Sheina Deitsch, a”h, shown here with her granddaughter Naomi, daughter of Mendel and Basya Deitsch of New Haven, CT.

her children’s *neshamos* with the *emunah* that comes from kosher food. The bedtime story is more than just a way to bond and build literacy skills; it is a chance to transmit timeless Yiddishe values. As she buys clothing for them, she is conscious not only of their practicality and cuteness, but also of the Yiddishe look she wants to create.

A Jewish marriage is more than a mutually satisfying relationship; it is a *mitzvah*, and the union of two halves of a *neshamah*. The couple is reminded of this as the woman’s observance of *taharas hamishpachah* determines the parameters of their relationship.

When Rabbi Yitzchak Meir of Gur, known as the Chidushei HaRim, was a young boy, someone who wanted to test his legendary brilliance said, “Yitzchak Meir, I will give you five kopeks if you tell me where Hashem is.” The young genius responded, “I will give you ten if you tell me where He is not.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> As told in Vedibarta Bam on Pirkei Avos, by Rabbi M. Bogomilsky

# “YITZCHAK MEIR, I WILL GIVE YOU FIVE KOPEKS IF YOU TELL ME WHERE HASHEM IS.”

To a woman, Hashem is everywhere because no matter what she is doing, there is a way Hashem wants her to be doing it. There is no place where He is not. Whereas a man finds Hashem in shul, the woman must find Him in her own home – and everywhere else in the world. She finds Hashem in her kitchen as she ensures that all her food is prepared to the highest standards of *kasbrus*. She finds Hashem in her dining room as she sets the table for the Shabbos *seudah*. She finds Hashem in her meticulous observance of the laws of *taharas hamishpachah*. She finds Hashem in the grocery when she checks the labels on packaged foods, and in the clothing store when she checks the length of a new skirt in the mirror.

She finds Hashem in every nook and cranny of her house as she cleans for Pesach. Between the vacuum cleaner, the *shmattas* and the endless rolls of silver foil, she proclaims the ultimate truth: Everything I own belongs to Him. This is Hashem's home.

And a Jewish mother finds Hashem in the often endless, tedious demands of raising children. For these are Hashem's children she is raising, the next generation of Am Yisroel.

This is the uniquely feminine way of serving Hashem. And in fact, this is a microcosm of the *Geulah*.

“In the merit of the righteous women of that generation, the Jewish people were redeemed from Mitzrayim.” And since the final *Geulah* will mirror the *Geulah* from Mitzrayim, albeit in a much greater way, we are taught that it will be in the merit of the righteous women that we will be taken out of our present *galus* as well.

The Rebbe explains<sup>2</sup> that the connection between women and *Geulah* is an essential one: The *avodah* of women is the ideal preparation for the times of Moshiach. For the definition of *Geulah* is the revelation of *Elokus* in our physical world. When Moshiach comes, it will be apparent that all of existence is an expression of Him. We will perceive *Getlichkeit* in our food and in our furniture, in the weather and in world events. We will tangibly experience how everything is being constantly recreated by Hashem, and that the purpose of all of creation is to serve Him. Finally, Hashem will have His *dirah b'tachtonim* – a home in this physical world.

Which is what we women are doing all day long. We constantly assert to ourselves and to everyone around us that “Everything is *Elokus*, and *Elokus* is everything”<sup>3</sup>, bringing the truth of *Geulah* into our bodies, homes and environment.

Every time we shop for clothing, making our fashion choices with *tznius* in mind, we bring the light of *Geulah* into the world. With every hour that we spend cooking or cleaning for Shabbos, and with every closet we declare free from *chometz*, we engage in the process of making a *dirah b'tachtonim*. Saying *brachos* with children, teaching them to speak with *derech erez* and singing Yiddishe songs with them are *Geulah* moments that elevate all the seemingly ordinary hours of childcare.

*I am standing in my kitchen, which now looks like a sea of silver and white, my Pesach pots ready to be put to work. But those will have to wait, because a chorus of crying tells me that my children are hungry. And bored. And in need of some loving attention. And I tell myself, “This is what a dirah b'tachtonim looks like. You are in the business of making a home for Hashem.”* ❧

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<sup>2</sup> Likkutei Sichos Vol. 20, p. 227

<sup>3</sup> From the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov