

Dear Rabbi Fried,

Our daughter has just turned 11, and we are beginning to make Bat Mitzvah plans. My husband and I, however, are torn whether to celebrate the event at her 12<sup>th</sup> birthday, in the traditional way, or to wait until she's 13. Many of our friends have done it at 13 at our Temple. One friend explained to us that traditional Judaism looks at women as more shallow than men, so they attain their maturity, which is to stay with them throughout their lives, at an earlier age. Men, who are meant to be deeper, wait an extra year to be more mature, as that deeper understanding stays with them. Based on that interpretation we certainly would wait until 13. Have you any insight to add on this question?

Anita J.

Dear Anita,

The context through which we approach traditional Torah practices greatly affects our understanding. If we view the Torah to have been written by humans, it becomes possible to assign chauvinistic biases to its precepts. If, however, we view the Torah as a divinely transmitted document by the Creator Himself, we assume that the laws within express deep and profound truths about the human condition.

The tradition that a girl becomes a Bat Mitzvah at age 12, a year before a boy, is based upon numerous laws and sources throughout Torah and rabbinic literature. (See, for example, Numbers 6:2 with Mishna Nidah 5:6, 6:11, Talmud Nazir 29b).

Rather than this reflecting women's relative shallowness, it is quite the contrary. In the creation story, Eve was built (*va'yivein*) from the rib of Adam. The word "va'yivein" has a dual meaning; "to be built", and also "intuition and understanding". The Talmud explains this word "va'yivein" was used in the Torah, rather than the usual "va'yitzer", created, to hint to a significant component in the creation of women. Eve was, unlike Adam, endowed with the trait of "*binah yaseirah*", meaning additional understanding and intuition.

The concept of "binah" which is specific to women has profound Kabbalistic roots, which explain many of the emotional, physical and spiritual differences between women and men. Due to this unique trait, we find many instances of spiritual superiority of women over men. This is reflected in the necessity for men to undergo the *tikkun* of *bris milah*, circumcision, to enter into the covenant of Judaism. Women, however, enter this covenant automatically at birth, as they need no such *tikkun*.

It is this trait which gave our matriarch Sarah a level of spiritual intuition over a spiritual giant such as Abraham. The Torah tells us that Sarah noticed the destructive behavior of Ishmael, and requested he be sent away to not ruin the spiritual atmosphere of their home for her son Itzhak. Abraham was greatly distressed by her request, until G-d said to him "All that Sarah says to you, listen to her voice". (Bereisis/Genesis 21:12) The classical commentary, Rashi, explains "her voice" to mean that Sarah was superior to Abraham in prophecy. A similar story takes place later, when Rivkah's spiritual intuition was superior to that of Isaac, in choosing Jacob over Esau as the heir of the Abrahamic dynasty.

It is this *binah* which enables a girl to mature earlier than a boy, with her unique understanding and intuition, and to become a Bat Mitzvah a year earlier. It would be an offence to that unique trait to defer your daughter's Bat Mitzvah to conform to that of a boy.