

Eishet Chayil- Discussion Questions

Shabbat at Home- Beth El Synagogue

Center

Proverbs 31

(10) What a rare find is a capable wife! Her worth is far beyond that of rubies. (11) Her husband puts his confidence in her, And lacks no good thing. (12) She is good to him, never bad, All the days of her life. (13) She looks for wool and flax, And sets her hand to them with a will. (14) She is like a merchant fleet, Bringing her food from afar. (15) She rises while it is still night, And supplies provisions for her household, The daily fare of her maids. (16) She sets her mind on an estate and acquires it; She plants a vineyard by her own labors. (17) She girds herself with strength, And performs her tasks with vigor. (18) She sees that her business thrives; Her lamp never goes out at night. (19) She sets her hand to the distaff; Her fingers work the spindle. (20) She gives generously to the poor; Her hands are stretched out to the needy. (21) She is not worried for her household because of snow, For her whole household is dressed in

משלי ל"א

(י) אִשֶׁת־חַיִל מִי יִמְצָא וְרָחֵק
מִפְּנִינִים מְכָרָה: (יא) בְּטַח בָּהּ לֵב
בַּעֲלָהּ וְשִׁלְלָהּ לֹא יִחְסֹר: (יב)
גְּמַלְתָּהּ טוֹב וְלֹא־רָע כֹּל יְמֵי
חַיֶּיהָ: (יג) דָּרָשָׁה צֹמֶר וּפְשִׁתִּים
וְתָעֵשׂ בַּחֲפָץ כַּפֵּיהָ: (יד) הִיטָה
כְּאֲנִיּוֹת סוֹחֵר מִמָּרָחֵק תָּבִיא
לַחֲמָה: (טו) וַתִּקֶּם אֲבָעוֹד לַיְלָה
וַתִּתֵּן טָרֶף לְבֵיתָהּ וְחֵק
לְנַעֲרֹתֶיהָ: (טז) זָמְמָה שְׂדֵה
וַתִּקְחָהּ מִפָּרִי כִפְיָהּ נֹטַע
[נֹטְעָה] כָּרֶם: (יז) חָגְרָה בְּעוֹז
מִתְנַיָּה וַתֹּאמֶר יָצַד זְרַעוֹתֶיהָ: (יח)
טָעְמָה כִּי־טוֹב סוֹחָרָה לֹא־יִכָּבֵה
בְּלִיל [בְּלִילָה] נֶרֶה: (יט) יָדָהּ
שְׁלָחָה בְּפִישׁוֹר וְכִפְיָהּ תִּמְכּוּ
פָלָךְ: (כ) כָּפָה פָרָשָׁה לְעֵנִי וַיִּדְּיָהּ
שְׁלָחָה לְאַבְיוֹן: (כא) לֹא־תִירָא
לְבֵיתָהּ מִשְׁלֵג כִּי כָל־בֵּיתָהּ לְבָשׁ
שָׁנִים: (כב) מִרְבֵּדִים עֲשִׂתָהּ לָהּ
שֵׁשׁ וְאַרְגָּמָן לְבוּשָׁה: (כג) נוֹדַע

crimson. (22) She makes covers for herself; Her clothing is linen and purple. (23) Her husband is prominent in the gates, As he sits among the elders of the land. (24) She makes cloth and sells it, And offers a girdle to the merchant. (25) She is clothed with strength and splendor; She looks to the future cheerfully. (26) Her mouth is full of wisdom, Her tongue with kindly teaching. (27) She oversees the activities of her household And never eats the bread of idleness. (28) Her children declare her happy; Her husband praises her, (29) “Many women have done well, But you surpass them all.” (30) Grace is deceptive, Beauty is illusory; It is for her fear of the LORD That a woman is to be praised. (31) Extol her for the fruit of her hand, And let her works praise her in the gates.

בְּשָׁעָרִים בְּעֵלְיָהּ בְּשַׁבָּת י
עִם־זִקְנֵי־אֶרֶץ: (כד) סֹדִין עֲשֵׂתָהּ
וּתְמַכֵּר וַחֲגֹר וְנִתְּנָה לְכַנְעָנִי:
(כה) עַז־וְהִדָּר לְבוּשָׁהּ וּתְשֻׁחַּ קֶ
לְיוֹם אַחֲרוֹן: (כו) פִּיָּהּ פְּתִיחָה
בְּחָכְמָה וְתוֹרַת־חָסֵד עַל־לְשׁוֹנָהּ:
(כז) צוֹפִיָּהּ הִלְיָכוֹת בֵּיתָהּ וּלְחֶם
עֲצֵלֹת וְלֹא תֹאכֵל: (כח) קָמוּ
בָנֶיהָ וַיֹּאשְׁרוּהָ בְּעֵלְיָהּ וַיְהַלְלֶיהָ:
(כט) רַבּוֹת בָּנוֹת עָשׂוּ חֵיל וְאֵת
עָלִית עַל־כְּלָנָהּ: (ל) שִׁקֵּר הַחַן
וְהַבֵּל הַיִּפִּי אִשָּׁה יִרְאֵת־יְהוָה
הִיא תִתְהַלֵּל: (לא) תְּנוּ־לָהּ מִפְּרֵי
יְדֶיהָ וַיְהַלְלוּהָ בְּשָׁעָרִים מֵעַשְׂיָהּ:

Questions for Discussion:

1. What traits in a wife are valued according to this text?
2. Is this gendered? In other words, could this be said about any partner regardless of sex?
3. If modern sensibilities around gender and sex have changed since this text was written, is there still value in singing it on Friday night?

Rabbi Ruti Regan, June 2018

I choose to read Proverbs 31 with the assumption that King Lemuel's mother (whose name no one bothered to record) knew that men often unjustly devalue women's work and disregard women's virtues. If you look at the plain meaning of Prov. 31:10, she doesn't actually say that it's rare for women to **be** valorous, she says that it's rare for men to **find** valorous women. Women are, in fact, valuable whether or not men see our value.[...]

Perhaps when King Lemuel's mother admonished him "do not give your valour to women", she meant "because they have their own, and trying to replace it with yours will not end well."

Questions for Discussion:

1. Does Rabbi Regan's interpretation that these verses acknowledge the difficulty of finding a partner who is valorous change your feelings about the idea of singing this on Friday nights or having these verses sung to you?
2. Can egalitarianism mean that men and women together make the choice to preserve traditional language even when they know that it does not reflect modern sensibilities around gender and sex? Do you think that egalitarianism means that anything that does not reflect modern egalitarian values should be changed or disregarded?
3. If you were to write a song that reflects the values that you want others to recognize in you, what would those values be?