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Statement submitted by Institute of Noahide Code, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.



Statement

Question

I have often heard that Judaism sees women as more spiritual than men. This is supposed to explain why men have more religious obligations than women — men need these things to become closer to God, women are there already. Is it not just a patronizing way to avoid the issue of the different gender roles in Judaism?

Answer

I remember as a child being told that men and women were equal. I had a big problem with that. I would ask why, if men and woman were equal, they never competed with each other in sports. You never see a man playing against a woman in tennis, a female soccer team facing a male one or a mixed-gender 100-metre sprint. If we were all equal, why could we not compete together?

The answer I would receive was unsatisfying, namely that men were on average physically stronger than women, and it would not be fair for them to compete against each other in sports that required bodily strength, because men would always win. But in every other way, men and women were equal.

This did not sit well with me. If men were superior to women in physical strength, but equal in everything else, then men and women were not equal. Men had an edge. Unless there was some other area of human endeavour in which women were superior, we were not equal.

This bothered me for years. Until I discovered the attitude of Judaism towards women.

Women are more soulful than men. While men may excel in physical prowess, women are far ahead when it comes to spiritual strength. Women are more sensitive to matters of the soul, more receptive to ideas of faith, more drawn to the divine than men. The feminine soul has an openness to the abstract and a grasp of the intangible that a male soul can only yearn for. This is why God told Abraham, the first Jewish man, that whatever his wife Sarah told him, he should listen to her, and that, while men had stronger bodies, women had stronger souls. Sarah was the greater prophet, her soul more intuitive than his.

When I first heard this idea, it suddenly all made sense. There is indeed a balance between men and women. Men have stronger bodies, women have stronger souls.

There are of course exceptions. Some women could beat any man in an arm wrestle and some men are more spiritually attuned than the women around them. For the most part, however, men have bigger muscles and women have deeper feelings.

The Torah gives men more physical mitzvahs to tame the body and give the soul extra power. Women do not need that help because, while men can jump higher in the air, women can reach higher into the heavens.

Finally, the Torah is also compared to fire and, as the Talmud says, just as fire does not acquire impurity, so, too, the Torah does not acquire impurity. I believe in the power of Torah and truth, and that, in the end, what is good, right, true and redemptive in the issues women are bringing to the fore will lead to an increase and strengthening of the Torah. What is not, will not last. As the Talmud famously says, in the merit of the righteous women of that generation were the Jews redeemed from Egypt. So may it also be for us and for the righteous women of our generation.