Eshet Chayil -

Praising a Woman of Valor

Eshet Chayil ("a woman of valor") consists of the concluding section of the book of Proverbs (31:10-31). On the surface, Eshet Chayil appears to be a eulogy to the "perfect wife," though most commentators believe it represents an idealized allegory, variously interpreted to refer to the Shechinah, Shabbat itself, the Torah, wisdom, or the soul.



The Hebrew word *eshet* is the construct form of *isha* (woman), and *chayil* connotes bravery (Ps. 76:6); capability (Prov. 12:4); triumph (Ps. 118:15); a rampart (Ps. 84:8); or wealth (Prov.13:22). The *eshet chayil* then represents virtues of courage and strength.

Traditionally, this entire passage is recited by the husband before Kiddush on Friday evenings. After the Shabbat candles are lit (but before the meal is eaten), the wife is praised and the children are then blessed.

This poem displays an acrostic arrangement (i.e., Aleph, Bet, Gimmel) so that the verses begin with the letters of the Hebrew alphabet in regular order:





Eshet-chayil mi yimtza v'rachok mip'ninim mikhrah A woman of valor who can find? She is far more precious than jewels.

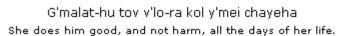


Batach bah lev ba'lah v'shalal lo yechsar
The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain.

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ּנְמָלַתְהוּ מוֹב וְלֹא־רָע כֹּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיהַ:







ָדְרִשְׁה צֶמֶר וּפִשְׁתִים וַתַּעֵשׁ בְּחֵפֶץ כַּפֶּיהָ:

Darshah tzemer ufishtim vata'as b'chefetz kapeiha She seeks wool and flax, and works with willing hands.





הָיְתָה כָּאֲנִיוֹת סוֹחֵר מִנֶּיְרְחָק חָבִיא לַחְמָה

Haitah ko'oniyot socher mimerchak tavi lachmah She is like the ships of the merchant; she brings her food from afar.



יַתְּקָם בְּעוֹד לַיְלָה וַתִּתֵן שֶּׁרֶף לְבֵיתָה וְחֹק לְנַעֲרֹתֶיהָ:

Vatakom b'od lailah vatiten teref l'vetah v'chok l'na'aroteiha She rises while it is yet night and provides food for her household and portions for her maidens.



ּוֹמְמָה שָּׁדֶּה וַתִּקְּתֵהוּ מִפְּרִי כַפֶּיהָ וְטַע כָּרֶם:

Zam'mah sadeh vatikachehu mip'ri chapeiha nat'ah karem She considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.



П

יָגָרָה בְעוֹז מָתְנֵיהָ וַתְּאַבֵּוץ זִלעוֹתֶיהָ:

Chagrah v'oz motneiha vat'ametz z'ro'oteiha She dresses herself with strength and makes her arms strong.

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טָעֶמָה פִּי־טוֹב סַחְרָהּ לֹא־יִכְבֶּה בַּלַּיְלָה גַרָהּ:

Ta'amah ki-tov sachrah lo yichbeh balailah nerah
She perceives that her merchandise is profitable. Her lamp does not go out at night.

יָדִיהָ שִׁלְּתָה בַכִּישׁוֹר וְכַפֵּיהָ חָמָכוּ פָּלֵדְ:

Yadeha shilchah vakishor v'chapeiha tamchu felech She puts her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle.



בַּפָּה פָּרְשָׂה לֶעָנִי וְיָדֵיהָ שִׁלְּחָה לָאֶבְיוֹן:

Kapah parsah le'ani v'yadeiha shil'chah la'evyon She opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy.



5

לא־תִירָא לְבֵיתָה מִשְּׁלֶג כִּי כָל־בֵּיתָה לָבָשׁ שָׁנִים:

Lo-tira l'vetah mishaleg ki chol-betah lavush shanim

She is not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household are clothed in scarlet.



בז

בַּרְבַדִּים עָשְׂתָה־לָּה שֵׁשׁ וַאַרְנָּמָן לְבוּשָׁהּ:

Marvadim astah-lah shesh v'argaman l'vushah She makes bed coverings for herself; her clothing is fine linen and purple.

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נוֹדֶע בַּשְּׁעָרִים בַּעְלָה בְּשִׁבְתוֹ עִם־זִקְנֵי־אָרֵץ:

Noda bash'arim ba'lah b'shivto im-ziknei-aretz Her husband is known in the gates when he sits among the elders of the land.



בָּין עָשְׂתָה וַתִּנְּשִׂכֹּר וַחֲגוֹר נָתְנָה לַכְּנַעֲנִי:



Sadin astah vatimkor vachagor natnah lak'na'ani
She makes linen garments and sells them; she delivers sashes to the merchant.



עז־וִהָדֶר לְבוּשָׁה וַתִּשְׂתֵק לְיוֹם אַתֵרוֹן:

Oz-v'hadar l'vushah vatischak l'yom acharon Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come.





פִּיהָ פָּתְחָה בְחָכְמָה וְתוֹרַת־חֶסֶר עַל־לְשׁוֹנָהּ:

Piha patchah v'chochma v'torat chesed al-l'shonah
She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.

2

צוֹפִיָּה הַלִּיכוֹת בֵּיתָה וַלֵּחֵם עַצְּלוּת לֹא תֹאכֵל:

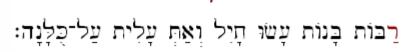
Tzofi'ah halichot betah v'lechem atzlut lo tochel
She looks well to the ways of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness.





Kamu vaneha vay'ash'ruha ba'lah vay'hal'lah Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her:





Rabot banot asu chayil v'at alit al-kulanah "Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all."



שָׁקֵר הַתַן וָהֶבֶל הַיֹּפִּי אִשָּׁה וָרַאַת־יִהוָה הִיא תִתְהַלְּל:

Sheker hachen v'hevel hayofi ishah yir'at-Adonai hi tit'halal
Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.



הָנוּ־לָה מִפָּרִי יָדֵיהָ וִיהַלְלוּהָ בַשְּׁעָרִים מֵעֵשֵׂיהָ:

T'nu-lah mip'ri yadeiha vihal'luha vash'arim ma'aseha Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates.

Eshet Chayil - A Woman of Valor

A woman of valor who can find? She is far more precious than jewels.

The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain.

She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life.

She seeks wool and flax, and works with willing hands.

She is like the ships of the merchant; she brings her food from afar.

She rises while it is yet night and provides food for her household and portions for her maidens.

She considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.

She dresses herself with strength and makes her arms strong.

She perceives that her merchandise is profitable. Her lamp does not go out at night.

She puts her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle.

She opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy.

She is not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household are clothed in scarlet.

She makes bed coverings for herself; her clothing is fine linen and purple.

Her husband is known in the gates when he sits among the elders of the land.

She makes linen garments and sells them; she delivers sashes to the merchant.

Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come.

She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.

She looks well to the ways of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness.

Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her:

"Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all."

Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.

Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates.



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אַשָּׁת־חַיל נִזִּי יִנִזּצָא וְרָחֹק נִזּפּנִינִים נִזְכַרָה: בְּטַת בָה לֵב בַעלָה וְשָׁלֶל לֹא יַחְסָר: וְּמָלַתְהוּ מוֹב וְלֹא־רָע כֹל יְמֵי חַיֵּיה: דַרְשָׁה צֶּנֶגֶר וּפִשְׁתִים וַתַּעַשׁ בִּחָפֵץ כַפֵּיהָ: הְיָתָה כְּאֲנִיוֹת סוֹחֵר נִוּמֵירְחָק תָּבִיא לַחִנָּזה נַתָּקָם בְּעוֹר לַיְלָה וַתְּתֵּן מָרֵף לְבֵיתָה וְחֹק לְנַעֵרתִיהָ: זָמַנָּיָה שָּׁרֶה וַתְּקַחָהוּ מִפָּרִי כַפִּיהָ נָטַע כָּרָם: תָּנֶרָה בַעוֹז מָתְנֵיהָ וַתְאַמֵין זְרֹעוֹתִיהָ: טָעָטָה כִי־טוֹב סַחָרָה לא־יכבה בַלַּילָה נָרָה: יָרֵיהָ שַׁלְּחָה בַּכִּישׁוֹר וְכַפֶּיהָ חָמְכוּ פְּלֶךְ: כַפָּה פָּרְשָׂה לֵעָנִי וָיָרֵיהָ שִׁלְּחָה לָאַבִּיוֹן: לא־תִירָא לְבֵיתָה מִשָּׁלֵג כִי כָל־בֵיתָה לָבַשׁ שָׁנִים: מַרבַדִים עָשִׁתָּה־לָה שֵׁשׁ וָאַרְנָנָן לִבוּשָׁה: נורע בַשְּעָרים בַעלָה בַשְבַתוֹ עם־זַקְנִי־אָרִץ: סָרִין עָשִׁתָה וַתִּנִיכֹר וַחֲגוֹר נָתְנָה לַכִּנַעַנִי: עזרוקרר לבושה וַתִשְׁחַק לִיוֹם אַחַרוֹן: פִיהָ פָּתִחָה בִחָכִנָה וְתוֹרַת־חֵמֵר עַל־לְשׁוֹנָה: צוֹפַיָה הַלִּיכוֹת בֵּיתָה וְלֵחֵם עַצְלוֹת לֹא תאכֵל: קמו בָנִיהָ וַיִּאַשרוּהָ בַעלָה וַיַהַלּלָה: רַבּוֹת בָּנוֹת עָשׁוּ חָיִל וְאַתְּ עָלִית עַל־כַּלְנָה: שֶׁקֶר הַתֵּן וְהֶבֶל הַיֹּפִי אָשֶׁה יִרְאַת־יִתנָה הִיא תִּתְהַלָּל: