



Achieving Work/Life Balance - A Struggle as Old as the Talmud

Anne-Marie Slaughter: Can we all "have it all"? TedGlobal 2013

So my moment of truth did not come all at once. In 2010, I had the chance to be considered for promotion from my job as director of policy planning at the U.S. State Department. This was my moment to lean in, to push myself forward for what are really only a handful of the very top foreign policy jobs, and I had just finished a big, 18-month project for Secretary Clinton, successfully, and I knew I could handle a bigger job.

The woman I thought I would have said yes. But I had been commuting for two years between Washington and Princeton, New Jersey, where my husband and my two teenage sons lived, and it was not going well. I tried on the idea of eking out another two years in Washington, or maybe uprooting my sons from their school and my husband from his work and asking them to join me. But deep down, I knew that the right decision was to go home, even if I didn't fully recognize the woman who was making that choice.

That was a decision based on love and responsibility. I couldn't keep watching my oldest son make bad choices without being able to be there for him when and if he needed me. But the real change came more gradually. Over the next year, while my family was righting itself, I started to realize that even if I could go back into government, I didn't want to. I didn't want to miss the last five years that my sons were at home. I finally allowed myself to accept what was really most important to me, not what I was conditioned to want or maybe what I conditioned myself to want, and that decision led to a reassessment of the feminist narrative that I grew up with and have always championed.

I am still completely committed to the cause of male-female equality, but let's think about what that equality really means, and how best to achieve it. I always accepted the idea that the most respected and powerful people in our society are men at the top of their careers, so that the measure of male-female equality ought to be how many women are in those positions: prime ministers, presidents, CEOs, directors, managers, Nobel laureates, leaders. I still think we should do everything we possibly can to achieve that goal. But that's only half of real equality, and I now think we're never going to get there unless we recognize the other half. I suggest that real equality, full equality, does not just mean valuing women on male terms. It means creating a much wider range of equally respected choices for women and for men. And to get there, we have to change our workplaces, our policies and our culture.

In the workplace, real equality means valuing family just as much as work, and understanding that the two reinforce each other. As a leader and as a manager, I have always acted on the mantra, if family comes first, work does not come second -- life comes together. If you work for me, and you have a family issue, I expect you to attend to it, and I am confident, and my confidence has always been borne out, that the work will get done, and done better. Workers who have a reason to get home to care for their children or their family members are more focused, more efficient, more results-focused. And breadwinners who are also caregivers have a much wider range of experiences and contacts. Think about a lawyer who spends part of his time at school events for his kids talking to other parents. He's much more likely to bring in new clients for his firm than a lawyer who never leaves his office. And caregiving itself develops patience -- a lot of patience -- and empathy, creativity, resilience, adaptability. Those are all attributes that are ever more important in a high-speed, horizontal, networked global economy.



Legal Context:

Tractate Ketubot deals with the laws of marriage, and specifically with the obligations of the husband and wife to each other. The Rabbis of the Talmud understand marital relations to be the Biblical right of the wife, and thus a Biblical obligation on the husband. This section deals with the frequency of this obligation.

Babylonian Talmud Tractate Kehubot 61b

Mishnah: If a man forbade himself by vow to have relations with his wife, Beit Shammai ruled: two weeks (until he must divorce her) Beit Hillel ruled: one week. Students may go away to study the Torah without the permission (of their wives) for a period of thirty days; Laborers – for one week. The times for conjugal duty prescribed in the Torah are: for those who live at home - every day; for laborers outside the city - twice a week; for donkey -drivers, once a week ; for camel drivers, once in thirty days; for sailors: once in six months. These are the rulings of Rabi Eliezer.

תלמוד בבלי מסכת כתובות ט"א עמוד ב
מתני'. המדיר את אשתו מתשמיש המטה, ב"ש אומרים: שתי שבתות, בית הלל אומרים: שבת אחת. התלמידים יוצאין לתלמוד תורה שלא ברשות שלשים יום, הפועלים - שבת אחת. העונה האמורה בתורה, הטיילין - בכל יום, הפועלים - שתיים בשבת, החמרים - אחת בשבת, הגמלים - אחת לשלשים יום, הספנים - אחת לשישה חדשים, דברי רבי אליעזר.

Questions for reflection:

- How often must students of Torah have relations with their wives?
- What is the significance of the word permission in this source?

Now please read Stories One, Four, Six and Seven. Please consider the questions as you read.

Babylonian Talmud Tractate Ketubot 62b

Rav Adda Bar Ahava said in the name of Rav: This is the opinion of Rabi Eliezer (that students may leave their wives for month without their permission) however, the Sages say that a student may leave his wife for two, or even three years, without her permission. Rava stated: The Rabbis relied on R. Adda b. Ahavah and act accordingly at the risk of [losing] their lives.

Story One:

Thus Rav Rehumi who was commonly at the school of Rava at Mahoza, he used to return home on the Eve of Yom Kippur. One day he was pulled in by his learning. His wife was looking out for him, saying: 'He is coming now, he is coming now'. He did not come, she became depressed, a tear fell from her eye. He was [at that moment] sitting on a roof. The roof collapsed under him and he was killed.

Halachic Interlude:

How often must a Student of Torah have relations with his wife? (The Mishna above only mentions how long he may leave for). Shmuel says: From Friday night to Friday night....

Story Two:

Yehudah the son of Rabbi Hiya was the son in law of Rabbi Yanai, he (Yehudah) went and sat in the Beit Midrash, and every Friday night he would come home to his wife, and when he would come home, one would see a pillar of fire in front of him. One day, he was pulled in by his learning, and since they did not see the sign preceding him (i.e. the pillar of fire) Rabi Yannai said: Turn over his bed (a sign of mourning) for if Yehudah was still alive he would never forgo his Biblical duties of marital relations. It was "As an error that goes forth from a ruler (Qohelet 10:5)" and he died.

Story Three:

Rabi was engaged in the arrangements for the marriage of his son into the family of R. Chiya, but when the ketubah was about to be written the bride died. Rabi said: Perhaps there was something wrong with the match God forbid? They sat down and investigated into the families. Rabi descended from Shephatiah the son of Avita while R. Chiya

תלמוד בבלי מסכת כתובות סב:

אמר רב אדא בר אהבה אמר רב: זו דברי ר' אליעזר, אבל חכמים אומרים: התלמידים יוצאין לת"ת ב' וג' שנים שלא ברשות. אמר רבא: סמכו רבנן אדרב אדא בר אהבה ועבדי עובדא בנפשיהו.

כי הא דרב רחומי הוה שכיח קמיה דרבא במחוזא, הוה רגיל דהוה אתי לביתיה כל מעלי יומא דכיפורי. יומא חד משכתייה שמעתא, הוה מסכיח דביתיה השתא אתי השתא אתי, לא אתא, חלש דעתה אחיה דמעטא מעיניה, הוה יתיב באיגרא, אפחית איגרא מתותיה ונח נפשיה.

עונה של תלמידי חכמים אימת? אמר רב יהודה אמר שמואל: מע"ש לע"ש + תהלים א + אשר פריו יתן בעתו - אמר רב יהודה, ואיתימא רב הונא, ואיתימא רב נחמן: זה המשמש מטתו מע"ש לע"ש.

יהודה בריה דר' חייא חתניה דר' ינאי הוה, אויל ויתיב בבי רב, וכל בי שמשו הוה אתי לביתיה, וכי הוה אתי הוה קא חזי קמיה עמודא דנורא. יומא חד משכתייה שמעתא, כיון דלא חזי הוה טימנא, אמר להו רבי ינאי: כפו מטתו, שאילמלי יהודה קיים לא ביטל עונתו. הואי +קהלת י + לשגגה שיוצא מלפני השליט ונח נפשיה.

רבי איעסק ליה לבריה בי רבי חייא, כי מטא למיכתב כתובה נח נפשה דרביתא. אמר רבי: ח"ו פסולא איכא? יתיבו ועיינו במשפחות, רבי אתי משפטיה בן אביטל, ורבי



descended from Shimei a brother of David.

Later he was engaged in preparations for the marriage of his son into the family of R. Yose b. Zimra. It was agreed that he should spend twelve years at the academy. When they made her pass in front of him he said to them, 'Let it be six years'. When they made her pass before him [a second time] he said, 'I would rather marry and then proceed [to the academy]'. He felt embarrassed before his father, but his father said to him. 'My son, you have the mind of your creator; for in Scripture it is written first, You bring them in and plant them and later it is written, And let them make Me a sanctuary. that I may dwell among them. [After the marriage] he departed and spent twelve years at the academy. By the time he returned his wife had lost her ability to have children. Rabi said 'What shall we do? If we order him to divorce her, it would be said: This poor soul waited in vain! Were he to marry another woman, it would be said: The latter is his wife and the other his mistress.' He prayed for mercy for her, and she was healed.

Story Four

Rabi Chanina ben Chachinay set out for the home of his rabbi at the end of the wedding of Rabi Shimon Bar Yochai. Rabi Shimon said to Rabbi Chanina, "Wait for me, and I'll come with you." He (Rabi Chanina) did not wait. He went, and he sat learning at the home of his rabbi for twelve years. By the time he left, all the roads of the city had changed, and he did not know how to get home. He went and sat by the river. He heard young girls calling out, "Bat Chachinay, Bat Chachinay, fill up your jug and let's go." He said, "This girl must be ours!" He followed her. His wife was sitting and sifting flour. She lifted up her eyes, saw him, her heart swelled, and her soul flew from her. Bar Chachinay said, "Master of the Universe! This poor woman - Is this her reward?" He asked for mercy upon his wife, and she lived.

Story Five:

Rabi Chama bar Bisa went and sat for twelve years in the Beit Midrash. When he returned home, he said; "I will not do as the son of Chachinay did." He went and sat in the local Beit Midrash. He sent a note home. R. Oshaya his son came to the Beit Midrash, sat before him, and asked him halachic questions. He saw that the boy's learning was very sharp and became depressed. He said: "If I had been here, I would have a child like this." He went home. His son came in and he (Rabi Chama) stood up. He thought that the boy had come to ask him more questions. His wife said to him: "Does a father stand up before his son?"

Rami bar Chama said about him: 'And the three fold cord will not quickly be torn' (Qohelet 4:12), this refers to R. Oshaya the son of R. Chama bar Bisa."

Story Six:

R. Akiva was a shepherd of Ben Kalba Sabua.

The latter's daughter, seeing how modest and meritorious he was, said to him, "Were I to be betrothed to you would you go away to study at an academy?"

'Yes', he replied.

She was then secretly betrothed to him and sent him away.

When her father heard, he drove her from his house and forbade her by a vow to have any benefit from his estate.

He went and spent twelve years at the Academy.

When he returned home he brought with him twelve thousand disciples.

He heard an old man saying to her, 'How long will you lead the life of a living widow?'

She said: 'If he would listen to me he would sit another twelve years'.

He said: 'It is then with her consent that I am acting,' and he departed

חייה אתי משמעי אתי דוד.
אזיל איעסק ליה לבריה בי ר' יוסי בן זימרא,
פסקו ליה תרתי סרי שנין למיזל בבי רב. אחלפיה
קמיה, אמר להו: גיהוו שית שנין. אחלפיה קמיה,
אמר להו: איכניס והדר איזיל. הוה קא מכסיף
מאבוה א"ל: בני, דעת קונך יש בך, מעיקרא
כתיב: שמות ט"ו תביאמו ותטעמו, ולבסוף
כתיב: שמות כ"ה ועשו לי מקדש ושכנתי
בתוכם. אזיל יתיב תרתי סרי שני בבי רב. עד
דאתא איעקרא דביתהו. אמר רבי: היכי נעביד?
נגרשה, יאמרו ענייה זו לשוא שימרה! וינסיב
איתתא אחרית, יאמרו זו אשתו וזו זוגת! בעי
עלה רחמי ואיתסיאת.

רבי חנניה בן חכינאי הוה קאזיל לבי רב
בשיליהי הלוליה דר"ש בן יוחאי, א"ל:
איעכב לי עד דאתי בהדך, לא איעכב
ליה. אזל יתיב תרי סרי שני בבי רב. עד
דאתי אישתנו שבילי דמתא ולא ידע
למיזל לביתהו. אזל יתיב אגודא דנהרא,
שמע לההיא רביתא דהוו קרו לה: בת
חכינאי, בת חכינאי, מלי קולתך ותא
ניזיל. אמר: ש"מ, האי רביתא דידן, אזל
בתרה. הוה יתיבא דביתהו קא נהלה
קמחא, דל עינה חזיתיה, סוי לבה פרח
רוחה. אמר לפניו: רבש"ע, ענייה זו זה
שכרה? בעא רחמי עלה וחיה.

רבי חמא בר ביסא אזיל יתיב תרי סרי שני בבי
מדרשא. כי אתא, אמר: לא איעביד כדעביד בן
חכינאי, עייל יתיב במדרשא, שלח לביתהו. אתא
ר' אושעיא בריה יתיב קמיה, הוה קא משאל ליה
שמעתא, חווא דקא מתחדדי שמעתיה, חלש דעתיה,
אמר: אי הואי הכא הוה לי זרע כי האי. על
לביתהו, על בריה, קם קמיה. הוא סבר, למשאליה
שמעתתא קא בעי, אמרה ליה דביתהו: מי איכא
אבא דקאים מקמי ברא? קרי עליה רמי בר חמא:
תקלהת ד ת' החוט המשולש לא במהרה ינתק - זה
ר' אושעיא בנו של רבי חמא בר ביסא.

ר"ע רעיא דבן כלבא שבוע הוה, חזיתיה
ברתיה דהוה צניע ומעלי, אמרה ליה: אי
מקדשנא לך אזלת לבי רב?
אמר לה: אין.

אי קדשא ליה בצניעה ושדרתיה.
שמע אבוה אפקה מביתהו, אדרה הנאה
מנכסיה. אזיל יתיב תרי סרי שנין בבי רב.
כי אתא, אייתי בהדיה תרי סרי אלפי
תלמידי.

שמעיה לההוא סבא דקאמר לה: עד כמה
קא מדברת אלמנות חיים?
אמרה ליה: אי לדידי ציית, יתיב תרי סרי
שני אחרני.

אמר: ברשות קא עבידנא, הדר אזיל ויתיב
תרי סרי שני אחרני בבי רב. כי אתא,

again and spent another twelve years at the Academy. When he finally returned he brought with him twenty-four thousand disciples. His wife heard of his arrival and went out to meet him. Her neighbors said to her, 'Borrow some respectable clothes and put them on', but she replied: "A righteous man knows the life of his beast" (Proverbs 12). On approaching him she fell upon her face and kissed his feet. His students were about to push her aside, he said to them 'Leave her alone, mine and yours are hers'. Her father heard that a great man had come to the town, said, 'I shall go to him; maybe he will annul my vow'. When he came to him, R. Akiva asked, 'Would you have made your vow (disowning your daughter) if you had known that he was a great man?' Her father replied: "Even if he knew one chapter or even one single law." R. Akiva then said to him, 'I am the man'. He fell upon his face and kissed his feet and also gave him half of his wealth. The daughter of R. Akiva acted in a similar way towards Ben Azzai. This is indeed an illustration of the proverb 'Ewe follows ewe; a daughter's acts are like those of her mother.'

Story Seven:

Rav Yosef son of Rava was sent by his father to the academy under Rav Yosef, and they arranged for him to stay there six years. Having been there three years, it was the Eve of Yom Kippur and he said, "I will go and see my family." When his father heard, he took a weapon and went out to meet him. "You have remembered your prostitute?!" or alternatively "You have remembered your dove?!" (There is only one letter difference in the Hebrew) They got involved in a quarrel and neither one ate the meal before the fast.

אייתי בהדיה עשרין וארבעה אלפי תלמידי . שמעה דביתו הוה קא נפקא לאפיה, אמרו לה שיבבתא: שאילי מאני לבוש ואיכסאי, אמרה להו: משלי י"ב + יודע צדיק נפש בהמתו. כי מטיא לגביה, נפלה על אפה קא מנשקא ליה לכרעיה, הוה קא מדחפי לה שמעיה, אמר להו: שבקוה, שלי ושלכם שלה הוא. שמע אבוה דאתא גברא רבה למתא, אמר: איזיל לגביה, אפשר דמפר נדראי. אתא לגביה, א"ל: אדעתא דגברא רבה מי נדרת? א"ל: אפילו פרק אחד ואפ"י הלכה אחת. אמר ליה: אנא הוא, נפל על אפיה ונשקיה על כרעיה, ויהיב ליה פלגא ממוניה. ברתיה דר"ע עבדא ליה לבן עזאי הכי. והיינו דאמרי אינשי: רחילא בתר רחילא אזלא, כעובדי אמה כך עובדי ברתא.

רב יוסף בריה דרבא שדריה אבוהי לבי רב לקמיה דרב יוסף, פסקו ליה שית שני. כי הוה תלת שני מטא מעלי יומא דכפורי, אמר: איזיל ואיחזינהו לאינשי ביתי. שמע אבוהי, שקל מנא ונפק לאפיה, אמר ליה: זונתך בזכרת? איכא דאמרי, אמר ליה: יונתך בזכרת? איטרוד, לא מר איפסיק ולא מר איפסיק .

Questions for reflection:

- What are the values that you see in this story? Are they competing?
- From these stories – what behavior is condoned? Which is condemned?
- Please notice the various time periods that the Rabbis leave their wives for. Do you see a difference in how the Talmud views them?
- Which story seems the most realistic – why?
- What is the primary struggle for the Rabbis? How is the struggle resolved in each case?

THE PARDES INSTITUTE OF JEWISH STUDIES located in Jerusalem brings together men and women of all backgrounds to study classic Jewish texts and current Jewish issues in an open, warm and challenging learning environment.