

Women and Torah Study: Obligations and Opportunities



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And from where do we [know] that [a woman] is not obligated to teach herself Torah? – For it is written: *V'limad'tem* ⁽¹⁵⁾ (“you shall teach”), which can also be read as *ul'mad'tem* (“you shall study”). This leads us to formulate the following principle: **Anyone whom others are commanded to teach** – *is likewise commanded to teach himself*; **and anyone whom others are not commanded to teach** – *is not commanded to teach himself*.⁽¹⁸⁾ Hence, since a woman is not someone whom her father [“others”] is commanded to teach, it follows that she is not required to teach herself.

This derivation, in turn, rests on the premise that a woman need not be taught Torah by her parents. The Gemara now derives the source for this:

And from where do we [know] that others are not required to teach her? – For the verse states:⁽¹⁵⁾ *“You shall teach them to your sons, and not to your daughters”* – which implies that you must

1. *Kiddushin 29b*

3. *Magen Avraham*
R' *Avraham Gombiner*
(1633-1683)

2. *Shulchan Aruch o.c. 47:14*

יד ק * יד (י) נשים מברכות
מברכות ברכת (יד) התורה :

Women must recite the blessing on the Torah

[Women recite the blessing on Torah] because they are obligated to study the laws relevant to them

4. *Vilna Gaon - Gr" a*
R' *Eliyahu b. Shlomo Zalman Kremer*
(1720-1797)

... סי' נשים כו'. עין היא נש אגור ודכריבס דחויין הכתב פנים וקרת מות ולמדה את בניכם ולא בנחיתים היאך האמר וזונו ונתן לנו אלה העיקר ע"פ ת"ש הוספיה וס'פ דנשים מברכות על כל ה"פ שהז"ג וכמו שכתבתי לעיל סי' י"ז סעיף ב' ואף דק"ל כאלו מלמדה חיפלות דווקא בתורה שבעל פה כמ"ש ב"ד סי' רמ"ו סעי' ו' :

See the Agur whose opinion is unacceptable for a number of reasons. The Torah itself shouts to us, “And you shall teach your sons” and not your daughters. So how could women possibly say, “Who has commanded us” or “Who has given us the Torah?” Clearly, the matter must be explained according to what is written in Tosafos and the other poskim that women are permitted to recite a beracha whenever they choose to perform a *mitzvas aseï she'hazman grama* (positive time point commandments). Although the Rabbis have taught “whoever teaches his daughter Torah it as if he has taught her tiflus,” this statement was only made in connection with Oral Torah.

5. Rama
R' Moshe Isserles (1520-1572)

הגה [כו] ומ"מ חייבת השעה ללמוד דינים השייכים לאשה (אגור כ"ס סמ"ג) [כו] ואשה אינה חייבת ללמד את בנה
תורה [בת] ומ"מ אם עזרת לבנה או לבעלה שיעסקו בתורה חולקה שכר בהדייהו (הגהות מיי' פ"א דה"ה וסמ"ג):

Women must study the laws relevant to them. Women are not obligated to teach their children Torah however if they enable their sons or husbands to study they receive reward.

6. Sota 20a

The Mishnah states that the waters' effects are sometimes deferred:
יש זכות – If she had a merit, היתה תולה לה – it would hold her punishment in abeyance.^[19]
יש זכות תולה שתי – There can be one merit that holds the punishment in abeyance for one year;
יש זכות תולה שלש – there can be another merit that holds the punishment in abeyance for two years;
יש זכות תולה שנים – and there can be another merit that holds the punishment in abeyance for three years.^[20]
מקאן אומר בן – From here Ben Azzai says: חייב אדם ללמד את בתו תורה – A man is obligated to teach his daughter Torah,^[21]
עזאי – so that if she drinks תדע שהזכות תולה לה – she will realize that merit can hold her punishment in abeyance.^[22]
עזאי – R' Eliezer says: רבי אליעזר אומר – Whoever teaches his daughter Torah (is as though he) teaches her physical intimacy.^[23]
עזאי – R' Yehoshua says: רבי יהושע אומר – A woman prefers one kav and physical intimacy over nine kavs and abstinence.^[24]

The Gemara quotes the next section of our Mishnah to elaborate on it:

אומר בן עזאי חייב אדם ללמד את וכו'. רבי אליעזר אומר כל המלמד את בתו תורה חולקה שכר – BEN AZZAI SAYS: A MAN IS OBLIGATED TO TEACH etc. [his daughter Torah]. R' ELIEZER SAYS: WHOEVER TEACHES HIS DAUGHTER TORAH TEACHES HER PHYSICAL INTIMACY.

The Gemara questions R' Eliezer's statement:
Can it enter your mind that R' Eliezer calls Torah "physical intimacy"?^[1]

The Gemara therefore revises the statement:
Rather say that R' Eliezer means that one who teaches his daughter Torah is "as if" he taught her physical intimacy.^[2]

The Gemara analyzes R' Eliezer's view:
What is R' Eliezer's reason (i.e. Scriptural basis)? מאי טעמא דרבי אליעזר – אמר רבי אבהו דכתיב, "אני חכמה" – R' Abahu said: – אמר רבי אבהו – For it is written:^[3] I [the Torah] am wisdom, I dwell with cunning, implying that once the wisdom of Torah enters a person, cunning enters him.^[4]

7. Yirmiyahu 23:13

ובנביאי שמרון ראיתי תפלה הנבאו בבעל ניתעו את עמי את ישראל י

¹³ I saw fraudulence in the prophets of Samaria; they prophesied by the Baal and misled My people Israel, ¹⁴ and I see disgrace among the prophets

8. Rashi

לימדה סיעלום ס"ד • וכי תורה תיפלות קרא לה: כאילו • שמתוכה
היא מזינה ערמומית ועושה דבריה בהלגע: חכמה • תורה:

9. Iyov 6:6

הַיֶּאֱכַל (תַּפְּל) מִבְּלֵי־מֶלַח אִם־יִשְׁטַעַם בְּרִיר חֲלָמוֹת:

° Is bland food eaten without salt? Does the white of an egg have taste? °

10. Rambam

Hilchos Talmud Torah 1:13

אִינוֹ כְּשֶׁכֶּר הָאִישׁ . מִפְּנֵי שְׁלֵא נִצְטְוִית . וְכֹל הָעוֹשֶׂה דָּבָר שֶׁאִינוֹ מִצְוָה עָלָיו לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ . אֵין שְׂכָרוֹ כְּשֶׁכֶּר הַמִּצְוָה שֶׁעָשָׂה אֲלֵא פָחוֹת מִמֶּנּוּ . וְאֵעִיף שִׁישׁ לֵה שְׂכָר צוּוֹ חֲכָמִים שְׁלֵא יִלְמַד אָדָם אֶת בְּתוּ תוֹרָה . מִפְּנֵי שְׂרוּב הַעֲשִׂים אֵין דַּעְתָּן מִכּוֹנֶת לְהַתְלַמֵּד . אֲלֵא הֵן מוֹצִיאֹת דְּבָרֵי תוֹרָה לְדַבְרֵי הַבְּאִי לְפִי עֲנִיּוֹת דַּעְתָּן . אִמְרוּ חֲכָמִים כֹּל הַמְלַמֵּד אֶת בְּתוּ תוֹרָה כְּאִילוֹ לְמַדָּה תַּפְלוֹת . ° בְּמָה דְּבָרִים אִמְרוּם בְּתוֹרָה שֶׁבְעַל פִּה אֲבָל תוֹרָה שֶׁבְכָתָב לֹא יִלְמַד אוֹתָהּ לְתַחֲלָה וְאֵם לְמַדָּה אִינוֹ כְּמַלְמַדָּה תַּפְלוֹת:

A woman who studies Torah will receive reward. However, that reward will not be [as great] as a man's, since she was not commanded [in this mitzvah]. Whoever performs a deed which he is not commanded to do, does not receive as great a reward as one who performs a mitzvah that he is commanded to do.

Even though she will receive a reward, the Sages commanded that a person should not teach his daughter Torah, because most women cannot concentrate their attention on study, and thus transform the words of Torah into idle matters because of their lack of understanding.

[Thus,] our Sages declared: "Whoever teaches his daughter Torah is like one who teaches her tales and parables." This applies to the Oral Law. [With regard to] the Written Law: at the outset, one should not teach one's daughter. However, if one teaches her, it is not considered as if she was taught idle things.

לימוד משניות לבנות



11. Igros Moshe
R' Moshe Feinstein
(1895-1986)

Our Rabbis commanded us not to teach women Mishnayos which is Torah Sh'b'al peh and falls under the category of tiflus. Therefore, we should prevent women from studying it. Only Pirkei Avos which deals with matters of morals and ethical behavior, should be taught to women in order to inspire in them love of Torah as well as noble characteristics. Other tractates may not be

בַּע"ה
מַעֲיָכִי דִידֵי הָרַג' מוהר"ר אֱלִיהוּ שׁוּי שְׁלִיט"א
הַר"ם בְּפִילָאדֶּלְפִיא שְׁלֹן.
הִגָּה בְּדַבֵּר שֶׁנִּמְצָאוּ בְּתֵי סֵפֶר לִילְדוֹת וְלִנְעוּרוֹת שֶׁנִּקְרְאוּ
בְּשֵׁם בֵּית יַעֲקֹב וְכַדּוּמָה שְׂרוּצִים הַהֲנַהֲלָה וְהַמּוֹרִים
לְלַמֵּד עִמָּהֶן מִשְׁנֵיּוֹת, הִגָּה הַרְמַב"ם פ"א מִהַלְכוֹת ת"ת
הַי"ג פֶּסַק כ"א בְּסוּטָה דף כ' ע"א שֶׁאֵין לְלַמֵּד לְבָנוֹת
תוֹרָה אֲךָ הוּא מִחֻלָּק שְׁכֵאלוֹ מִלְמַדָּה תַּפְלוֹת הוּא בְּתוֹרָה
שֶׁבְע"פ וּבְתוֹרָה שֶׁבְכָתָב אִינוֹ כְּמַלְמַד תַּפְלוֹת אֲךָ
שֶׁלְתַחֲלָה גַם זֶה אֵין לְלַמֵּד, עַכ"פ מִשְׁנֵיּוֹת שֶׁהוּא תוֹרָה
שֶׁבְע"פ צוּוֹ חֲכָמִים שְׁלֵא יִלְמְדוּם וְהוּא כְּאִילוֹ לְמַדּוּם
תַּפְלוֹת, וְלִכֵּן צָרִיךְ לְמוֹנַעַם מוֹזֵה וְרַק פְּרָקֵי אֲבוֹת
מִשּׁוּם שֶׁהוּא עֲנִינֵי מוֹסֵר וְהַנְהַגּוֹת טוֹבוֹת יֵשׁ לְלַמְדָם
בְּהַסְבֵּר לְעוֹרְרָן לְאַהֲבַת תוֹרָה וְלִמְדוֹת טוֹבוֹת, אֲבָל לֹא
שָׂאֵר הַמִּסְכָּחוֹת וּמִתּוֹךְ הַפְּשִׁיטוֹת אֶקְצֵר וְגוֹמֵר בְּבִרְכָה
לְכַתְרָ"ה שִׁירְבִיץ תוֹרָה וִירַאת שָׁמַיִם לְעוֹלָם.

משה פיינשטיין דידי

The minds of most women are not adapted to be taught Torah. However, if a woman has taught herself, it is apparent to us that she is no longer included in the category of most women. Therefore, the Rambam wrote that she is rewarded. This refers to a woman who has studied Torah properly and consequently will not turn the words of the Torah into words of nonsense. A father is forbidden to teach his daughter Torah lest she turn the words of Torah into words of nonsense since he does not know what lies in her heart.

12. *Perisha* 246:6
 R' Yehoshua Falk (1555-1614)

ש"ס (טו) ... שרוב נשים אין דעתן מכוונת וכו'. אבל אם למדה לעצמה או רואין שילמה מהרוב ולכן כתב לעיל שיש לה שכר ורצונו לומר אם למדה התורה על מכוונה שאינה מושיאה לדברי הבאי. אבל האב אינו רשאי ללמדה דדילמא תושיא דגרייה לדברי הבאי כי הוא אינו יודע מה שבלבה וק"ל:

13. *Torah Temimah*
 R' Baruch Ha'Levi Epstein
 (1860-1941)

I have seen it fit at this point to copy something that I have found written in an old, rare *sefer* called *Maayan Ganim* written by R. Shmuel ben Elchanan Yaakov Rekavalti, in which the author addresses a letter to a certain "educated" woman concerning the *heter* of women to study Torah: "The statement of our Rabbis, 'Whoever teaches his daughter Torah is considered as if he has taught her *tiflut*', is perhaps referring to a father who teaches his daughter while she is still young and impressionable and tends to understand everything in a literal sense. Certainly, in such a case there is reason to apply the warning since most women are frivolous and spend their time involved in trival things ... However, those women, whose hearts have motivated them and brought them closer to the work of G-d as a result of their own choice to do what is right, may ascend the mountain of G-d and dwell in His holy place. These women are considered exceptional and the Torah sages of their

generation must encourage, strengthen, and direct them ... Carry out your plans and succeed, and from Heaven you will be helped."⁴⁹

הדגה ראונו להעתיק כאן בסוף הענין מספר עתיק יומין יקר המציאות הנקרא מעין גנים [שו"ת] ומחברו רבי שמואל ב"ר אלתן יעקב הרקוולטי (וויניצ'אה שי"ג) מה שכתב אל אשה חכמה אחת בנדון היתר ת"ת לנשים, וז"ל בהמשך הדברים, ומאמר חכמינו כל המלמד את בתו תורה כאלו מלמדה חפלות אולי נאמר כשהאב מלמדה בקטנותה שגם במשלים תחנך את י"ו ואם ישר פעלה, דודאי כי היא נוטה אצלו למהות שרוב הנשים דעתן קלות מבלתי זמן דבכרי הבאי וכרויבן בן תנאי מקולר רוח, אמנם הנשים אשר נדב לכן אותה לקרבה אל המלאכה מלאכת ה' מלמד וחריתן כבוד בהם שהוא טוב, בן הכה חפלותיה בהר ה' השכונה במקום קדשו כי נשי מופת הנה, ופל חכמי דודן לאדרן להדריך להדריך לחזק ידיהן לאמן גרועותיהן וכו', עבי והללויה וכן השמים ישיעך, עכ"ל. ולא מדע לנו מי הוא המחבר הנכבד הזה שעמד לחדש דין מתודם זה בסכרם בעלמא, ובתו"ס סוף מס' תמיד מביאו ומתארהו בשם מדקדק ומחבר ס' פרוגת הטעם על דקדוק לה"י

14. *Eruvin* 53b

R' Yose the Galilean was going down a road, when he met Beuriah.^[25] He asked her, "Which is the road we take to Lod?" She said to him, "Foolish Galilean, do not indulge in excessive conversation with a woman."^[26] You should have said, "Which to Lod!"

The Gemara records another incident involving Beuriah, which introduces a series of teachings on the importance of studying the Torah out loud:

Beuriah encountered a certain student who was reviewing his studies quietly.

She said to him, "Is the following not written in Scripture: 'Arranged in all and secure?'^[1] If your learning is arranged in all your two hundred and forty-eight limbs,^[2] then it is secure and will not be forgotten; but if not, it is not secure and will be forgotten."^[3]

15. *Pesachim* 62a

"We do not expound the Book of *Yochasin* either to residents of Lod or to those of Nehardea. and certainly not in this case, where you are from Lod and your dwelling place is in Nehardea."^[15] Eventually, however, [R' Simlai] pressured him and he agreed. [R' Simlai] said to him, "Let us learn it in the course of three months." [R' Yochanan] took a clod of earth and threw it at him. He said to him, "Now if Beuriah, the wife of R' Meir and the daughter of R' Chananyah ben Teradyon, who would learn three hundred rulings a day from three hundred different masters, nevertheless did not fulfill her obligation (i.e. she was unable to complete her study of this work) in three years, do you say that you want to finish it in three months!"



16. Jewish Action
 Adina Bar Shalom
 “My Abba, Rav Ovadia”

On weekday afternoons, we would spend a half hour with Abba during lunchtime. The radio would be on, and we would listen to Professor Nechama Leibowitz, z”l, explain the Tanach. He would say, “Learn from her, children; see what a wise woman she is. Learn the Tanach well, so that in twenty or thirty years from now, I will be privileged to hear you on the radio explaining the Tanach.” Indeed, today several of my brothers deliver regular *shiurim* on Israeli

17. Rabbi JJ Schacter
 “Facing the Truths of History”
 Torah U'Mada 8 (1998)

• *Sefer Mekor Barukh*, the memoirs of R. Barukh Halevi Epstein, most well known as the author of the *Torah Temimah* commentary on the Torah, contains a great deal of information about Jewish life in Eastern Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century. Particularly valuable are his descriptions of the leading *gedolei Yisrael* of the time, especially that of his uncle, R. Naphtali Zevi Yehudah Berlin (the Neziv) and the members of his family. This book contains an entire chapter on Mrs. Rayna Batya, daughter of R. Izele Volozhiner, granddaughter of R. Hayyim Volozhiner and first wife of the Neziv.⁸¹ At the beginning of his presentation, R. Epstein describes the books that she read:

וכך ה' דרכה לשבת תמיד בסמיכות לתנור החורף אשר בבית האוכל. וגם בימי הקיץ. ולפניה שלחן צבור ספרים שונים: תנ"ך, משניות, עין יעקב, מדרשים שונים, מנורת המאור, קב הישר, צמח דוד, שבט יהודה, ועוד כמה וכמה ספרים ממינים אלה ומספרי אגדה.⁸²

An English “rendering” of this volume appeared in 1988 which contains the following version of this statement: “It was her habit to sit by the oven in the kitchen—even in the summertime—next to a table piled high with *seforim*. These included a *Tanach*, *Ein Yaacov*, various *midrashim*, *Menoras HaMaor*, *Kav HaYasbar*, *Tzemach Dovid*, *Shevet Yehudah*, and many other books of this nature.”⁸³ Conspicuous by their absence are the references to *Mishnayot* and *sifrei Aggadab*. While the subject of women studying *Torah she-be'al peh* is still a controversial one in the Orthodox community, there is no doubt that this great woman—wife, daughter and granddaughter of the most illustrious *rashei yeshiva* of the greatest yeshiva in nineteenth century Europe—at least read, if not studied, that literature.⁸⁴

It would seem to me that this (prohibition) is only at those times of history when everyone lived in the place of his ancestors and the ancestral tradition was very strong for each individual, and this motivated him to act in the manner of his forefathers as it is written, “Ask your father and he will tell you.” In this situation we can say that women may not study Torah and she will learn how to conduct herself by emulating her righteous parents. However, nowadays, when the tradition of our fathers has become very weakened and it is common for people not to live in the same place as their parents, and women learn to read and write a secular language, it is an especially great mitzvah to teach them Bible and the traditions and ethics of our sages like *Pirkei Avot* and *Menoras HaMaor* and the like, so that the truth of our holy heritage and religion will become evident to them; otherwise, Heaven forbid, they may deviate entirely from the path of G-d and violate all the precepts of the Torah.⁸⁵

ונראה
 דכל זה דוקא בזמנים שלפנינו שכל אחד היה דר
 במקום אבותיו וקבלת האבות היה חזק מאד אצל כל
 אחד ואחד להתנהג בדרך שדרס אבותיו וכמאמר
 הכתוב שאל אביך ויגיד בזה היינו יכולים לומר שלא
 תלמד תורה ותסמך בהנהגה על אבותיה הישרים.
 אבל כעת בעזרה שקבלת האבות נתרופף מאד מאד
 וגם מצוי שאינו דר במקום אבותיו כלל ובפרט אותן
 שמרגילין עצמן ללמוד כתב ולשון העמים בודאי
 מצוה רבה ללמדם חומש וגם נביאים וכתובים ומסרי
 חז"ל כגון מסכת אבות וספר כהנא המאור וכדומה
 כדי שיתאמת אצלם ענין אמונתנו הקדושה דאל"ה
 עלול שיטורו לגמרי מדרך ד' ויעברו על כל יסודי
 הדת ח"ו

18. Chafetz Chaim
 R' Yisroel Meir
 Kagan



TALMUD TORAH FOR WOMEN AND THE
MEHITSA CONTROVERSY

The Rav advocated teaching *Torah she-Ba'al Pe* to women. He personally taught *Torah she-Ba'al Pe* to his daughters, on his initiative and authority *Gemora* has been taught to girls in Maimonides School,⁴⁹ and he delivered a *shiur* inaugurating a Talmud program for women at Stern College. At first glance, the Rav's actions seemingly bespeak a modern instinct and reformist proclivities.

This superficial and simplistic interpretation, however, is clearly belied when we focus on another vital contemporary issue. In the 1950's nascent post-war American orthodoxy stood at a fateful crossroad. Increasingly acceding to societal assimilationist forces, both rabbinic and lay leaders were removing the *mehitza* from synagogues and abandoning separate seating, in the name of alleged egalitarianism. The sacredness and inviolability of *halakha* were threatened.⁵⁰ The Rav responded very forcefully, decrying the Christianization of the synagogue, beautifully articulating the rationale for a *mehitza*, and absolutely prohibiting entry into such a "modified" synagogue, even if it provided the only opportunity to fulfill the *mitsva* of *shofar* on *Rosh HaShana*. Here are the Rav's impassioned words as he spoke to that vital issue:

In particular, I wish to call the attention of the conference to the *mehitza* problem . . . many of our colleagues choose the *derech kezarah na'arucha*, the easy way which leads to doom and disaster. I do hereby reiterate the statement I have made on numerous occasions, both in writing and orally, that a synagogue with a mixed seating arrangement forfeits its sanctity and its halachic status of *mikdash me'at* (sanctuary in miniature), and is unfit for prayer and *avoda she-belev* (the service of the heart). I know beforehand the reaction to my letter on the part of our apostles of religious "modernism" and "utilitarianism." They will certainly say that since a great majority of the recently constructed synagogues have abandoned separated seating, we must not be out of step with the masses. This type of reasoning could well be employed with regard to other religious precepts, such as the observance of the Sabbath, and the dietary laws. However, we must remember that an ethical or halachic principle decreed by God is not rendered void by the fact that people refuse to abide by it. Its cogency and veracity are perennial and independent of compliance on the part of the multitudes. If the ethical norm, 'Thou shalt not kill,' has not lost its validity during the days of extermination camps and gas chambers, when millions of people were engaged in ruthless murder, but on the contrary, has been impregnated with deeper meaning and significance, then every halachic maxim assumes greater import in times of widespread disregard and unconcern. The greater the difficulty, the more biting the ridicule and sarcasm, and the more numerous the opponent—then the holier is the

principle, and the more sacred is our duty to defend it. In my opinion, the halachic dictum, *bishe'at geseirat ha-malekhot affilu mitsva kallab kegon le-shinuye 'arketa de-messana, yehareg ve'al ya'avur* [at a time of religious persecution through governmental decree, even for a minor custom, such as one involving changing a shoelace, let one suffer death sooner than transgress it] requiring of us a heroic stand in times of adversity, applies not only to political and religious persecution originated by some pagan ruler, but also to situations in which a small number of God-fearing and Torah-loyal people is confronted with a hostile attitude on the part of the majority dominated by a false philosophy.⁵¹

The Rav from his earliest youth was trained to be exceptionally sensitive and disciplined in matters of language. An extra word in Rambam's *Mishne Torah* could prompt profound novellae. Rav Chaim rewrote his own *hidushim* a hundred times, every word weighed and measured.⁵² The Rav imbibed and lived this hallowed tradition. How striking and revealing then is his language in his devastating critique of religious "modernism" and "utilitarianism." The description of the path of doom and disaster, the analogy to the Nazi abandonment of the precept against murder! The clarion call to martyrdom rather than surrender to a majority dominated by a false philosophy! Let one suffer death sooner than acquiesce to removing the *mehitza* from a synagogue! In this context, the Rav appears as the ultimate ideologue, author of extreme right-wing rhetoric.

The "third verse" which reconciles the apparent contradiction is this: Truth and men of truth transcend facile classification and defy superficial stereotyping. The Rav was neither left nor right wing, modern nor ultra orthodox. He was a man of Torah, truth. Truth, its underlying unity uncompromised, often undergoes a process of diffraction and manifests itself in a variety of guises. The Rav's position, like those of the Hafets Hayim and other *hachmei haMasora*, regarding women's education reflected his intuitive understanding of what the *internal* dynamic of *Masora* prescribes for the contemporary predicament.

Pre World War II European Jewry had been in the throes of a religious crisis, a fact omitted in our romanticized histories of the period. The forces of assimilation were very strong, and many succumbed. The crisis was most acute in the area of Torah education for women.⁵³ Profound corrective educational measures would have been necessary in Europe, the bastion of orthodoxy. *A fortiori* in the United States.

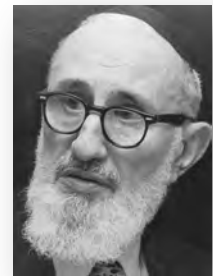
The *halakha* prohibiting Torah study for women is not indiscriminate or all-encompassing. There is complete unanimity that women are

19. "A Glimpse
of the Rav"
R' Mayer
Twersky
Tradition 30:4

obligated to study *halakhot* pertaining to *mitsvot* which are incumbent upon them.⁵⁴ Clearly men are allowed to provide instruction in these areas. A father's obligation of *hinukh* relates equally to sons and daughters.⁵⁵ The prohibition of teaching *Torah she-Ba'al Pe* to women relates to *optional* study. If ever circumstances dictate that study of *Torah she-Ba'al Pe* is necessary to provide a firm foundation for faith, such study becomes obligatory and obviously lies beyond the pale of any prohibition. Undoubtedly, the Rav's prescription was more far-reaching than that of the Hafets Hayim and others. But the difference in magnitude should not obscure their fundamental agreement: intuitively, it is clear that the guidelines of the Talmud in *Masekhet Sota* were never intended for our epoch. This is not an instance of modernism, but Torah intuition.

Similarly, Torah intuition and reasoning dictated a firm, resolute stand in the *mehitsa* controversy. Firstly the requirement for a *mehitsa* is absolute. Moreover, any *hora'at sha'ah* would be dangerously misguided because succumbing to a religiously and culturally hostile environment, compromising principles and distorting *halakha* can not preserve but only distort Torah. As the Rav underscored, the *mehitsa* issue was representative. If orthodoxy would not remain true to its principles on this issue, no precept would be immune to such religious accommodationism. The Rav keenly perceived and forcefully articulated this truth, and was instrumental in stemming the tide of assimilation and rescuing nascent post-war orthodoxy.

20. Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik
(1903-1993)



People are mistaken in thinking that there is only one masorah, and only one

masorah community, the community of the fathers. It is not true. We have two masorot, two traditions, two communities, two shalshalot ha-kabbalah [chains of tradition]- the masorah community of the fathers and that of the mothers. "Thus shalt thou say to the House of Jacob [=the women] and tell the children of Israel [=the men]" [Exodus 19:3], "Hear, my son, the instruction of thy father [mussar avikha], and forsake not the teaching of thy mother [torat imekha]" [Proverbs 1:8], counseled the old king. What is the difference between these two masorot, these two traditions? What is the distinction between mussar avikha and torat imekha? Let us explore what one learns from one's father and what one learns from one's mother.

From one's father one learns how to read a text- the Bible or the Talmud, how to comprehend, how to analyze, how to conceptualize how to classify, how to infer, how to apply, etc. One also learns what to do and what not to do, what is morally right and what is morally wrong. Father teaches son the discipline of thought as well as the discipline of action. Father's tradition is an intellectual-moral one. That is why it is identified with musar, the biblical term for discipline.

What is torat imekha? What kind of a Torah does the mother pass on? I admit that I am not able to define precisely the masoretic role of a mother. Only by circumscription may I hope to explain it. Permit me to draw upon my own experiences. I used to have long conversations with my mother. In fact, they were monologues rather than a dialogue. She talked and I "happened" to overhear. What did she talk about? I must use a halakic term in order to answer this question. She spoke of *inyana de-yoma* [the affairs of the day]. I used to watch her arranging the house in honor of a holiday. I used to see her recite prayers. I used to watch her recite the sidra [weekly Torah portion] every Friday night; I still remember the nostalgic tune. I learned much from her.

Most of all I learned that Judaism expresses itself not only in formal compliance with the law but also in living experience. She taught me that there is flavor, a scent, and a warmth to mitzvot. I learned from her the most important thing in life- to feel the presence of the Almighty and the gentle pressure of His hand resting upon my frail shoulders. Without her teachings, which quite often were transmitted to me in silence, I would have grown up a soulless being, dry and insensitive.

The laws of Shabbat, for instance, were passed on to me by my father; they are part of mussar avikha. The Shabbat as a living entity, as a queen, was revealed to me by my mother; it is a part of torat imekha. The fathers knew much about the Shabbat; the mother lived the Shabbat, experienced her presence, and perceived her beauty and splendor.

The fathers taught generations how to observe the Shabbat; the mothers taught generations how to greet the Shabbat and how to enjoy her twenty-four-hour presence.

21. Lubavitcher
Rebbe

R' Menachel Mendel
Schneerson zt"l
(1902-1994)



Roshei dvarim from the Yichidus of the Belzer Rebbe with the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Tuesday 4 Adar II 5741, (1981)

Belzer Rebbe: It follows from our previous discussion that the Rebbe holds that girls must learn Mishnayos and Gemara?

Lubavitcher Rebbe: Mishnayos are halachos, thus there is no doubt that we teach this to girls. And with respect to Gemara, when I was asked about ~~women~~ ^{girls} studying Gemara, I said that we should teach them those Gemarot that pertain to Halocho L'maaseh, to those areas that pertain to their daily lives such as Shabbos, Brochos, etc.

Furthermore I said; do not think that this is a revolutionary step. Rather, if we do not teach it to them in school, they will learn it anyway; only we do not know from whom and from which texts.

In our day and age it is not as if the girl is at home all the time and does not make a move without first asking her mother or father for permission.

We live in an age where a girl asks advice of her friends and follows the crowd. When she goes to shul to daven she meets other girls and asks them what they have learned. When a girl learns something and knows that the Gemara discusses this subject, I do not believe that there is any girl from whom one can hide this information... she will seek out the Gemara or a commentary on the Mishna that contains the discussion.

22. Lubavitcher Rebbe
Igros Kodesh 7:247

In response to your letter from 7 Iyar, in which you wrote that as a Beis Yaakov teacher you wish to know whether the rumor that Talmud study has been permitted for women is true, though you do not specify which part of the Talmud and in what manner. The mode of instruction must depend on the character, ability, and prior education of the students. The principles for determining the specifics must be based on the Laws of Torah Study, *Yoreh De'ah* 247:3 and the commentaries ad loc. A summary and final ruling can be found at the end of Chapter 1 of the Alter Rebbe's Laws of Torah Study ... Additionally, nowadays, when the foundations of faith have been weakened in the minds of the masses, and especially the youth, and cunningness has already penetrated them from without, this study is vital. It is especially true that young women, who in but a few years will be anchoring their households, must be imbued with the beauty of the Torah and must become aware of our Torah's viewpoint regarding the problems they will encounter on a daily basis as a wife and mother. Recent experience has shown just how vital this knowledge is.⁷⁷



23. R' Aharon Lichtenstein
 "Torah Study for Women"
 Ten Da'at 3:3

To my mind it is desirable and necessary, not only possible, to provide intensive education for women even from Torah *She'bal Peh* sources, whether resorting to the argument that since women are engaged in all professions, why should they be specifically limited regarding Torah, or because of the words of the Chofetz Chaim (when Beit Yaakov was founded), that if the Ram-

bam can say that it is necessary to teach a convert the essentials of Judaism, an individual who grows up in a Jewish context should all the more so be afforded such an education.

That is to say that it is clear that it is necessary to provide a woman with the education and knowledge that make it possible for her to realize a strong and rooted faith and to face reality with dignity. Women today receive a broad general education and many attend universities, and there — as well as within society in general — they come into contact with diverse worldviews and philosophies, to the point that the knowledge and values of Torah are urgently required by women.

In the same vein, I am not opposed to teaching women Talmud. From a practical point of view, this is somewhat difficult because many women seem to

lack the motivation, a societal support is missing and, more importantly, there is lacking a desire to be unconditionally committed to such learning in the future. It is necessary to understand that in Talmud study, the first steps are difficult and they do not naturally engage one's intense interest. This is acceptable to someone who views these steps as preparation for intensive future study, but for one who may remain at a beginner's level, the study is difficult. Since one should not be blind to present societal realities, it is clear that it is improbable that women will develop the same level of intensity as that of men. I am also not convinced that it is desirable to press women to study Talmud in such an intensive form. After all, halakha does differentiate between men and women in this matter, and their respective life roles are also different. But when one speaks about the ability to study a page of Talmud, to understand it and enjoy it, I see no reason to deny these teachings to women. And it is even necessary to establish this as an integral part of the school curriculum, an actual *shiur*. This is the way I teach my daughter and so was my wife educated. This seems to me to be the recommended approach regarding the women of our generation.



24. R' Moshe Meiselman
 "Jewish Women in Jewish Law"

The words of the author of *Hafetz Hayim* are echoed by Rabbi Zalman Sorotzkin (d. 1966) in his work *Moznaim la-Mishpat*.¹³ In an ingenious tour de force, he says that nowadays one who does not teach his daughter Torah leaves her prey to street culture and *eo ipso* teaches her its immorality. It is not the teaching of Torah that teaches *tiflut*, immorality, but rather the lack of such teaching.

The overwhelming weight of modern authority follows this line of reasoning,¹⁴ and the existence of schools of higher Jewish learning for women among all factions of contemporary Orthodox Jewry is ample proof of this fact.

In summary, the learning of Torah is not obligatory for women as it is for men. A man's ultimate task is an all-encompassing involvement in the study of Torah. A woman's ultimate task is in another area and another direction. She is obligated to study and be proficient in order to perform her mandatory tasks. All knowledge necessary for the performance of her tasks is obligatory. At times when only technical knowledge is necessary, only technical knowledge is required. When more sophisticated knowledge is necessary to ensure performance, such knowledge is required. Other areas of knowledge are optional. The sages were cautious about permitting women to venture into areas irrelevant to performance. Some scholars say that they forbade it. Most say that they urged caution and prudence out of fear of the dangers of superficial knowledge. No authorities ever meant to justify the perverse modern-day situation in which women are allowed to become sophisticatedly conversant with all cultures other than their own. If, in the twentieth century, American women are more familiar with the Protestant ethic than with the Jewish ideal, it is nothing but a violation of the original intent of R. Eliezer's statement. In twentieth-century America, there is no reason for Jewish women to be ignorant of the basics of their tradition. All are dutiful to learn the word of God and serve Him.