

Modern Orthodoxy in the 21st Century: Lecture VII: Women in Halacha: Advanced Torah study

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Selected Bibliography

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Ben Azzai said that a man must teach his daughter Torah... R. Eliezer said that he who teaches his daughter Torah is considered as if he had taught her *tiflut*.

A woman who studies Torah is rewarded, but not to the same degree as is a man, for she is not commanded, and anyone who does that which he is not commanded to do, does not receive the same reward as one who is commanded. However, even though she is rewarded, the Sages commanded a man not to teach his daughter Torah. This is because women are not disposed to dedicate themselves to study and will turn the words of Torah into foolish words according to their limited understanding [due to lack of interest]. Our Sages said that anyone who teaches his daughter Torah is to be considered as if he had taught her trivial and unimportant things.

I say that one should not engage in esoteric (kabbalistic) study until they have filled their stomachs with the meat and bread of Torah – namely Halacha and details of Mitzvoth (Talmudic analysis)... which is accessible to all, young, and old, man and woman, those with great minds and those with limited ones...

אשה שלמדה תורה יש לה שכר, אבל לא כשכר האיש, מפני שאינה מצווה ועושה. ואע"פ שיש לה שכר, צו חז"ל שלא ילמד אדם את בתו תורה, מפני שרוב הנשים אין דעתן מכוונת להתלמד, ומוציאות דברי תורה לדברי הבאי לפי עניות דעתן. אמרו חכמים: כל המלמד את בתו תורה, כאילו מלמדה תיפלות

(פי' דבר עבירה). בד"א בתורה שבע"פ; אבל תורה שבכתב לא ילמד אותה לכתחלה, ואם מלמדה אינו כמלמדה תיפלות (רמב"ם סמ"ג ולא כמקצת ספרי הטור). הגה: ומ"מ חייבת האשה ללמוד דינים השייכים לאשה. (אגור בשם סמ"ג). ואשה אינה חייבת ללמד את בנה תורה, ומ"מ אם עוזרת לבנה או בעלה שיעסקו בתורה, חולקת שכר בהדיהו. (הגהות מיימוני פ"א דת"ת וסמ"ג).

INTRODUCTION: The Rov's Mother

A TRIBUTE TO THE REBBITZIN OF TELNE - Hespel for Rebbitzin Rebecca Twersky, Jan. 1977, Tradition, 17.2 1978, Rabbi J. B. Soloveitchik

People are mistaken in thinking that there is only one Massorah and one Massorah community; the community of the fathers. It is not true. We have two massorot, two traditions, two communities, two *shalsalot ha-kabbalah* — the massorah 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 those two massorot, traditions? What is the distinction between *mussar avikha* and *torat imekha*? Let us explore what one learns from the father and what one learns from the mother.

One learns much from father: 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 from father what to do and what not to do, what is morally right and what is morally wrong. Father teaches the 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 *mussar*, which is the Biblical term for discipline.

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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 messoretic role of the Jewish mother. Only by circumscription I hope to be able to explain it. Permit me to draw upon my own experiences. I used to have long conversations with my mother. In fact, it was a monologue rather than a dialogue. She talked and I "happened" to overhear. What did she talk about? I must use an halakhic term in order to answer this question: she talked *me-inyana de-yoma*. 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 every Friday night and I still remember the nostalgic tune. I learned from her very much.

Most of all I learned that Judaism expresses itself not only in formal compliance with the law but also in a living experience. She taught me that there is a flavor, a scent and warmth to *mitzvoth*. 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 a 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 mothers *lived* the Shabbat, experienced her presence, and perceived her beauty and splendor.

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

שו"ע יו"ד רמ"ו:

רמב"ם יסודי התורה ד ואני אומר שאין ראוי לטייל בפרדס אלא מי שנתמלא כריסו לחם ובשר, ולחם ובשר הוא לידע האסור והמותר וכיוצא בהם משאר המצוות... ראויין הן להקדימו, שהן מיישבין דעתו של אדם תחלה, ועוד שהם הטובה הגדולה שהשפיע הקב"ה ליישוב העולם הזה כדי לנחול חיי העולם הבא, ואפשר שידעם הכל קטן וגדול איש ואשה בעל לב רחב ובעל לב קצר.

I. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik: *As Posek of Post-Modern Orthodoxy*, Rabbi Dr. Walter Wurzburger, Tradition, vol 29, 1994.

Ethical considerations also prompted the Rav's refusal to participate in granting a *heter me-a rabbanim* to husbands whose wives were unwilling to accept a get. The Rav explained that his policy was based upon the realization that, if the shoe were on the other foot, corresponding procedures would not be available to the wife.

Especially revolutionary was his pioneering of the intensive study of *Gemara* by women. He was convinced that under contemporary conditions, it was necessary to confront the challenge of modernity, and therefore Jewish women must be provided with the intellectual resources needed to appreciate the meaning of halakhic Judaism. Mere familiarity with the do's and don'ts of religious observance would no longer be adequate, especially at a time when mothers rather than fathers exercise the strongest influence upon children. If Jewish mothers were to provide proper guidance to their children in an era when relatively few Jews abided by halakha, they had to possess a real understanding of the halakhic process, since without knowledge of halakha one could not possibly acquire a genuinely Jewish perspective. It was for this reason that the Rav insisted that girls receive thorough instruction in *Gemara* at his Maimonides Day School in Boston. Many years later, Stern College and some other institutions followed suit, and, despite the traditional aversion to instructing girls in *Gemara*, initiated programs for intensive study not merely of the practical aspects needed for proper observance, but also of the theoretical underpinnings of the halakha.

III. Controversy over Studying the Oral Torah

Mekor Baruch, "Chochmat Nashim, Chapter on Mrs. Rayna Batya, daughter of R. Izele Volozhiner, granddaughter of R. Hayyim Volozhiner and first wife of the Netziv

1988 Translation, "My Uncle the Netziv"

"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 HaYashar*, *Tzemach Dovid*, *Shevet Yehudah*, and many other books of this nature."

מקור ברוך (ר' ברוך הלוי עפשטיין)
וכך הי' דרכה לשבת תמיד
בסמיכות לתנור החורף אשר
בבית האוכל. וגם בימי הקיץ.
ולפניה שלחן צבור ספרים
שונים: תנ"ך, משניות, עין
יעקב, מדרשים שונים, מנורות
המאור, קב הישר, צמח דוד,
שבט יהודה, ועוד כמה וכמה
ספרים ממינים אלה ומספרי
אגדה

"Fundamental Problems Regarding the Education of the Woman", Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, *Ten Da'at* Vol. III, reprinted from *Halacha V'Chinukha*. Edited by Ben Zion Rosenfeld, published by Emunah, Ulpanot Bnei Akiva, Kfar Saba, 1980.

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.

Intensive study contributes a great deal to women's education in terms of religious awe and Torah life. It helps halakha become a living entity, encourages a woman to seek halakhic guidance from a Rav, to ask a *she'elah* and the like. But learning isn't everything. There are additional things that contribute to education: discussions are extremely important, the atmosphere within the school contributes, there is a need to create an attachment to the values of Torah, as embodied in a Torah personality, what *Chazal* called a "*Gavrah Rabbah*" (a great person), a living personality, so that a woman would be able to see before her eyes an individual for whom Torah is part of his very essence, a person with whom one can relate and identify. All of these must be combined. Learning is not only cognitive awareness of Torah and halakha, or personal ethics and faith. All of these need to be symbiotically intertwined.