

# Women's Talmud Study

Class 21

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## 1. קידושין כט:

איהי מגלן דלא מיחייבא דכתיב ולימדתם כל שמצווה ללמוד מצווה ללמד וכל שאינו מצווה ללמוד אינו מצווה ללמד ואיהי מגלן דלא מיחייבה למילף נפשה דכתיב ולימדתם כל שאחרים מצווין ללמד מצווה ללמד את עצמו וכל שאין אחרים מצווין ללמדו אין מצווה ללמד את עצמו ומגין שאין אחרים מצווין ללמדה דאמר קרא ולימדתם אותם את בניכם ולא בנותיכם

### 1. Talmud Bavli, Kiddushin 29b

From where do we know that the mother is not obligated to [teach the son]? For it is written 'and you shall teach [vilimadtem]' and 'and you shall study [ulmadtem]': those who are obligated to study are obligated to teach, and those who are not obligated to study are not obligated to teach. And from where do we know that the mother is not obligated to teach herself? For it is written 'and you shall teach [vilimadtem]' and 'and you shall study [ulmadtem]': those whom others are obligated to teach are obligated to teach themselves, and those whom others are not obligated to teach are not obligated to teach themselves. And from where do we know that others are not obligated to teach her? For it is written: 'and you shall teach your sons' (i.e.) and not your daughters.

## 2. סוטה כא:

אומר בן עזאי חייב אדם ללמד את וכו' ר' אליעזר אומר כל המלמד את בתו תורה מלמדה תיפלות: תיפלות ס"ד אלא אימא כאילו למדה תיפלות

### 2. Talmud Bavli, Sotah 21b

Ben Azzai taught: one is obligated to teach [his daughter Torah]. R' Eliezer taught: anyone who teaches his daughter Torah has taught her licentiousness. Truly licentiousness? Rather, it is as if he had taught her licentiousness.

## 3. רמב"ם הלכות ת"ת פרק א, הל' טז-יז

טז) אישה שלמדה תורה, יש לה שכר; אבל אינו כשכר האיש, מפני שלא נצטווית... ואף על פי שיש לה שכר, ציוו חכמים שלא ילמד אדם את בתו תורה: מפני שרוב הנשים, אין דעתן מכוונת להתלמד, והן מוציאות דברי תורה לדברי הבאי, לפי עניינות דעתן. יז) אמרו חכמים, כל המלמד את בתו תורה, כאילו לימדה תפלות. במה דברים אמורים, בתורה שבעל פה. אבל תורה שבכתב, לא ילמד אותה לכתחילה; ואם לימדה, אינו כמלמדה תפלות.

### 3. Maimonides, Laws of Torah Study, 1:16-17

16) A woman who studies Torah receives reward, but not as much reward as a man receives, for she is not obligated... And although she receives reward, the sages taught that one should not teach his daughter Torah, for the majority of women do not have the requisite knowledge to be taught, and they turn Torah into folly, due to the weakness of their minds.

17) The sages taught that whoever teaches his daughter Torah, it is as though he taught her licentiousness. In what regard is this said? Regarding the oral law. But regarding the written law, ideally he should not teach her, but if he did teach her, it is not as though he taught her licentiousness.

## 4. הרב קוק, עין איה שבת א, עמ' רפו

באשה כל הכוח המוסרי שלה גנוז ברגש הלב הטבעי ואם תהיה גם כן חכמה ומשכלת, אין כוח הכובד אצלה כוח הדעת, כי אם כוח הרגש.

### 4. Rav Kook, Eyn Aya on Shabbat, p. 286

For a woman, all her moral power is stored in the natural feelings of the heart. And [even] if she is wise and intelligent, her essential strength is not the strength of knowledge, but the strength of emotion.

## 5. שו"ת בית הלוי, חלק א, סימן ו

דגם במצוות שנוהגות בהן, אין בהם מצוות תלמוד תורה כלל כמו דהווי באנשים. דבאנשים הווי הלימוד מצוות עשה, וכמו הנחת תפילין, וכשלומד מקיים מצוות עשה. וגם במצוות שאין נוהגין בו, מכל מקום מחוייב ללמוד משום מצוות עשה דתלמוד תורה. אבל בנשים אין בלימודם שום מצווה כלל מצד עצמו, רק הסמ"ג כתב דמכל מקום מחוייבים ללמוד מצוות הנוהגות בהן, כדי שתדע היאך לקיימם. וזהו דמחלק בחגיגה: אנשים באים ללמוד, נשים באות לשמוע... אבל הלימוד בעצמו לא הווי שום מצווה כלל אצלם, ואם כבר בקיאה היא בדינים שלה, ויודעת היאך לעשות, שוב אינה צריכה ללמוד עוד, אפילו להסמ"ג.

### **5. Responsa Beit Halevi 1:6**

For even regarding commandments that apply to them, there is no obligation to of Torah study as there is for men. For men have a positive obligation to study, just as is for putting on tefillin, and whenever he studies he fulfills a commandment. And even for commandments that don't apply to them, nonetheless [men] are obligated to study them because of the commandment of Torah study. But for women, their study is not an independent commandment. Rather, the Semag wrote that nonetheless they are obligated to learn the commandments that apply to them, so they will know how to perform them. Hence the Talmud in Chagiga differentiates between the men, who come to 'learn', and the women, who come to 'hear' [the Torah, at Hakhel]. But study itself is not a commandment for [women], and if a woman was already well-versed in her laws, and knew how to perform them, she would no longer be obligated to study, even according to the Semag.

### **6. Letter of Approbation for Bais Yaakov, Written by the Chafetz Chayim, 23 Shvat 5693 (1933)**

#### **6. מכתב מהפז חיים**

ב"ה, יום כ"ג לחודש שבט תרצ"ג

אל כבוד האלופים הנכבדים חובבי ומוקירי תורה החרדים לדבר ה' אשר בעיר פריסטיק נ"י. כאשר שמעתי שהתנדבו אנשים יראים וחרדים לדבר ד' ליסד בעירם בי"ס "בית יעקב" ללמוד בו תורה ויראת שמיים, מידות ודרך ארץ זו תורה, לילדות אחינו בני ישראל, אמרתי לפעלם הטוב יישר ד' חילם ומעשה ידיהם יכונן, כי ענין גדול ונחוץ הוא בימינו אלה, אשר זרם הכפירה רחמנא לצלן שורר בכל תקפו והחפשים מכל המינים אורבים וצודים לנפשות אהב"י. כל מי שנגעה יראת ד' בלבבו המצוה ליתן את בתו ללמוד בבי"ס זה וכל החששות והפקוקים מאיסור ללמד את בתו תורה אין שום מיחוש לזה בימינו אלה. ואין כאן המקום לבאר באריכות, כי לא כדורות הראשונים דורותינו, אשר בדורות הקודמים היה לכל בית ישראל מסורת אבות ואמהות לילך בדרך התורה והדת ולקרות בספר "צאינה וראינה" בכל שבת קודש, מה שאין כן בעונותינו הרבים בדורותינו אלה, ועל כן בכל עוז רוחנו ונפשנו עלינו להשתדל להרבות בתי ספר כאלו ולהציל כל מה שבידינו ואפשרותנו להציל".

הכותב למען כבוד התורה והדת  
ישראל מאיר הכהן

### **6. Letter from the Chafetz Chayim (R. Israel Meir Kagan)**

Please God. The 23rd of Shevat, 5693 [February 19, 1933]

To the esteemed champions and lovers of Torah, the G-d-fearers (*hareidim*) of Pristik,  
When I heard that G-d-fearing (*hareidim*) people had volunteered to establish Bais Yaakov schools in the cities to teach Torah and piety, moral virtues and secular/practical studies (*derekh erez*) and Torah to Jewish girls, I pronounced their enterprise praiseworthy and prayed that G-d would bring their efforts to fruition. Theirs is a great and necessary endeavor in these times, as the tide of heresy and all manners of miscreants are lurking and hunting Jewish souls. Anyone who is concerned about piety should consider it a mitzvah to enroll his daughter in such a school. Those who have fears and doubts because of the prohibition against teaching their daughters Torah should not concern themselves with that in these times, and this is not the place to explain this at length, for our own times are not like those that have past, when there was a strong tradition of mothers and fathers to go in the path of Torah and religion, and to read the Tse'ena Re'ena (Bible translation for women) every Sabbath. Due to our many transgression this is no longer the case. Therefore every effort should be made to establish as many schools of this type as possible and to rescue what can still be rescued.  
Writing for the sake of the honor of Torah and religion,  
Israel Meir HaKohen

**7. Letter from Rav Soloveitchik to Rabbi Leonard Rosenfeld, May 27, 1953, from *Community, Covenant, and Commitments: Selected Letters and Communications of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik*, ed. Nathaniel Helfgot (Ktav: 2005), p. 83<sup>1</sup>**

As to your question with regard to a curriculum in a coeducational school, I expressed my opinion to you long ago that it would be a very regrettable oversight on our part if we were to arrange separate Hebrew courses for girls. Not only is the teaching of *Torah she-be-al peh* to girls permissible but it is nowadays an absolute imperative. This policy of discrimination between the sexes as to subject matter and method of instruction which is still advocated by certain groups within our Orthodox community has contributed greatly to the deterioration and downfall of traditional Judaism. Boys and girls alike should be introduced into the inner halls of *Torah she-be-al peh*.

I hope to prepare in the near future a halakhic brief of the problem which will exhaust the various aspects of the same. In the meantime I heartily endorse a uniform program for the entire student body.

**8. Letter from the Lubavitcher Rebbe, May 22, 1957 (*Iggros Kodesh*, 15:151)**

Regarding your question whether it is permissible to explain to women those matters of G-d's Torah that will help them bear difficult times ... I am amazed that there is even any doubt, especially in our generation of the Messiah's footsteps, the final generation of exile, during which we must prepare for the future - for the beginning of the redemption and for the redemption itself. As is well known, our Sages informed us that the future redemption will be patterned after the Exodus from Egypt, which was in the merit of the righteous women of that generation. Moreover, women were always obligated to know these types of matters, and they therefore attended the sermons of the Sages, even in the tannaitic era. All of the aforementioned is codified in the Alter Rebbe's Laws of Torah Study, since all of the aforementioned belong to the category of laws that they need to know: as can be clearly seen, without understanding matters of divine providence, the purpose of humankind's creation, the true good of humankind, etc., it is difficult to withstand all the trials of the day.

**9. Rav Mordechai Willig, Dvar Torah for Parshas Eikev**

([http://www.torahweb.org/torah/2015/parsha/rwil\\_ekev.html](http://www.torahweb.org/torah/2015/parsha/rwil_ekev.html))

Chazal discouraged Torah being taught to women, especially Talmud (Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 246:6). The gedolim of the twentieth century (e.g. Chofetz Chaim in Likutei Halachos, Sotah 21b) understood that directive of Chazal to not be a definitive ban on women's learning Torah but rather guidance on what approach to women's chinuch would best encourage their adherence to the mesorah. Those gedolim, guided by their yiras Shomayim as well as an absolute mastery of kol haTorah kulah, understood that in light of the weakened state of the mesorah from one generation to another in the twentieth century (ibid), talmud Torah for women was a necessity to, "implant pure faith in their hearts" (Rav Zalman Sorotzkin in Moznayim L'mishpat siman 42, etc.), and as such was entirely consistent with Chazal's mandate to provide the most productive chinuch for women.

However, in the words of a "pioneer of the religious feminist wave" cited in the aforementioned article, "What is happening today is a direct continuation of the beginning of Talmud studies for religious women in the 1980's; This candid admission must, for the genuinely Orthodox, call into question the wisdom of these studies. Although there are ample reliable sources that encourage individual women who have proper yiras Shomayim and whose motives are consistent with our mesorah to further their Torah study, the inclusion of Talmud in curricula for all women in Modern Orthodox schools needs to be reevaluated. While the gedolim of the twentieth century saw Torah study to be a way to keep women close to our mesorah, an egalitarian attitude has colored some women's study of Talmud and led them to embrace and advocate egalitarian ideas and practices which are unacceptable to those very gedolim.

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<sup>1</sup> This letter was sent in response to a query regarding the permissibility of teaching *Torah she-be-al peh* to girls in elementary school and high school sent to Rav Soloveitchik by Rabbi Rosenfeld, director of the Department of Yeshivot at the New York BJE. shlomozuckier@gmail.com

**10. “Torah Study for Women,” Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein (Ten Da’at Vol. III No. 3 pp.7-8, 1989)**

In my opinion, what is necessary in order for women to be adequately prepared from a Torah perspective for practical living is far more than what she is being taught today. Torah education for women must be strengthened, both quantitatively as well as qualitatively, including the teaching of all aspects of Torah. Even so we will not be violating the framework that was outlined above...

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.

**11. “The Future of Centrist Orthodoxy,” Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, *Leaves of Faith*, Vol. II, (2004) p. 318-321**

Positive ramifications have been dual. At the purely personal plane, increased exposure to Torah has not only advanced knowledge but has, concomitantly, generally stimulated growth in religious sophistication and meticulous Halakhic observance. To be sure, many – including some within centrist or *dati-leumi* circles – have expressed reservations about the spread of women’s learning. Quite apart from possible Halakhic objections, they contend that benefits cited have been attained at the expense of innocence; that advance in insight and information have been accompanied by the attrition of the naïve piety historically ascribed to our largely unschooled great-grandmothers. This may be, to a degree, correct, but barely relevant. The naivete of women exposed to the modern world has unquestionably been sapped – as has that of men; but, overwhelmingly, not because of learning but in spite of it. For all but a most limited circle of centrist women, *tzenna u-r’enna yiddishkeit* – even if it were to be idealized as the optimal and ultimate religious telos – is not a live option. Dare any one suggest, then, that it is better supplanted by vacuous leisure than by serious study?

The primary value of women’s Torah study inheres, then, in the potential stimulus to *avodat Hashem*, and its advocacy is to be construed as aimed neither to parry the thrust of feminist pressure nor to ward off insidious secularism, but as grounded in its intrinsic contribution to personal growth. There are, however, derivative social implications as well, themselves dual. When imbued with a genuine Torah *hashkafah* – and this is the crucial sine qua non – better educated and, hopefully, more deeply committed, women, will expand their constructive contribution to public life, enabling the community to mobilize a fuller range of human resources to cope with its challenges. Concurrently, a *bat Torah* should be better qualified and motivated to function, spiritually, in her traditional roles of wife and mother within a Torah-centered home.

**11. RAL, “Women, Talmud Study, and Avodat Hashem,” *The Lehrhaus*, October 30, 2017, accessible at <https://www.thelehrhaus.com/commentary/women-talmud-study-and-avodat-hashem/>**

*Editor’s Note: This document records remarks given by Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, ztz”l, Rosh Yeshiva at Yeshivat Har Etzion, at the opening dedication, of Ma’ayanot Yeshiva High School for Girls of Bergen County, in Teaneck on November 24, 1996. Ma’ayanot, under the founding leadership of Rebbetzin Esther Krauss, saw (and sees) Talmud study as a cornerstone of its Judaic Studies curriculum, and Rabbi Lichtenstein was asked to provide remarks on women’s Talmud study in general...*

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Thirdly, the long-standing involvement, both ideologically and professionally, of my own family in the field of women's education brings me here today to join in the dedication of the school. My mother, *aleha ha-shalom*, was actively involved in serious women's education back in Lithuania in the 1920s. My father, *alav ha-shalom*, taught for close to a quarter century at Central High School in Brooklyn. The Rav, *zikhrono le-verakha*, of course, was a leader in stressing, in championing, the importance of intensive women's education in all areas of Torah... Above all, I am here not only because of any of these factors concerning the past. I am here because of a concern for the present and hope for the future.

My concern is with Torah and *yirat Shamayim* and *harbatzat Torah* and *yirat Shamayim*, with inculcating, promoting, and disseminating Torah. My concern is both for the study as well as the practice of Torah, *lilmod ve-la'asot*, in that whole area generally, and with profound appreciation of the importance, both at that level of study and implementation of this area, with regard to women specifically, regarded both as individuals and as a vital, dynamic force within the general community...

It is in that context that I find myself presenting something of an *ani ma'amim*. A credo which, broadly speaking, perhaps relates to my own educational thought and practice, but which needs to be honed and sharpened and applied specifically with regard to the field of women's education particularly.

What is the cardinal principle that lies at the heart, on the one hand, of Yeshiva education and, on the other hand, is the lynchpin of liberal education. It is, first and foremost, the notion that one is concerned with molding the person and only secondarily with preparing or training for the fulfillment of a certain role...

Of course, that is not to suggest that preparing for a role, be it a domestic role, a professional role, or a communal role, is not important. It is important, but secondary. The first principle, I think, with regard to education generally, and which needs to be particularly emphasized in the field of women's education, is that first and foremost one needs to mold the person as an individual in all respects, with regard to character, personality, intellectual ability, and above all, of course, in religious terms, as an *oved Hashem*.

If we ask ourselves, what substantively does that molding entail? In answer, from a religious standpoint, it entails a dual focus. In part it is a development of powers, of ability, of capacity, which from a certain point of view is a kind of self-contained procedure, the Greek ideal, as it were, of *paideia*, bringing out of the person the potential that was inherent within him or her.

But from a Jewish standpoint, of course, the definition of "self" is itself not self-contained. Its primary focus is relational and the relation, of course, is to the *Ribbono Shel Olam* and to meeting His demands, aspiring to connect up with Him...

The world of the *Halakhah* is built on the condition that it is through the interaction of the broad and the minute that the totality of the human person, particularly of a Jewish person, is best built and the relation to the *Ribbono Shel Olam* is best maintained.

Now that this demand is one which is posited equally to men and to women—*ועתה ישראל*: The community as a whole, each and every individual, male or female, within that community. And this is the primary goal of education, certainly Torah education. But the *pasuk* presents this as if were a minimal kind of demand. "What does the *Ribbono Shel Olam* want of you? Just this ..." Hazal in the Gemara in *Berakhot* (33b), of course, raise this issue: "אטו יראשת שמים מלתא זוטרתא היא?"

Is fear of Heaven a small thing? Is it a *kleinkeit*? Only this? Hazal explain that this is formulated in relation to Moshe Rabbeinu, so for him it was somehow a minimal demand. For us, of course, it is not minimal at all; it is taxing, it is demanding, it is challenging, it is comprehensive...

Traditionally, over the centuries, there has been a fairly sharp dichotomy precisely regarding this very issue, namely the means to be employed in relation to men versus women, even as the same goals of "ועתה ישראל" were known to be addressed to men and to women alike. Intensive study was central and crucial with respect to *bahurim*, with respect to men, while with regard to women, with regard to whom it was assumed, the emphases were to be different, perhaps the balance between Torah and *hesed* should be different, that aspect of intensive study was very often regarded to be different.

This is not the occasion to examine whether that was justified historically. What is clear, however, is that notwithstanding how one judges the past retrospectively, in our present historical and social setting we need to view the teaching and the learning of girls and women as both a major challenge, as well as a primary need. Looking at the present particularly, in comparison to the past, two major differences could be noted. First, the need is greater; Second the opportunity is greater. As long as women led relatively sheltered lives, cloistered in their homes, married very early, imbibing observance, commitment, *yirat Shamayim* from their immediate environs, be it the home, be it the street, be it ambient culture, it was felt that as far as ensuring that a girl, a woman, would grow up suffused in *yirah*, in *ahavah*, *le-dovkah bo be-khol derakhav*, it was not terribly important to study Torah formally...

Today, of course, where there is so much exposure to cultures and countercultures, *le-mineihem*, when various ideological whims that are inimical to *yirat Shamayim*, *yirah* and *ahavah*, are the order of the day, then surely the need for study and intensive study is clearly there...

Leaving aside for the moment the question of some kind of inherent *hiyyuv* with regard to *talmud Torah*, with regard to which clearly there are differences between men and women, with regard to scope and with regard to the character of that study, at the very least, that which *Rishonim* mention that women too say *birkat ha-mazon*, (though the text speaks of receiving the mitzvot of *berit milah* and Torah, of which they are seemingly not included) because, with regards to those areas of Torah which impinge upon their practice and observance, they certainly need to learn, and are obligated to learn.

Taking that as a principle translated to our current reality, that means, of course, that there exists an obligation for a girl to study the *halakhot* of *niddah* and *taharat ha-mishpahah*, and also *kashrut* and *Shabbat* because these impinge on her daily life. What is intended is that we need to ensure, minimally, that the depth of intensity, knowledge, and sensitivity which are needed in order to assure commitment, even if we are not interested for the moment (if that be the case) in the knowledge *per se*, but instrumentally, as molding a woman in becoming an *ovedet Hashem*, a *keli* in serving the *Ribbono Shel Olam*, that certainly needs to be studied. And, of course, within the modern context, that applies to areas of Torah that are far, far remote from the level of practical implementation. It is entirely conceivable, that in order to assure that a girl should be genuinely a *ma'amina* and an *ovedet Hashem* and to be *shomeret Shabbat*, *ke-dat ve-ka-din*, you need to be able to address yourself to a question that she may have about the world of *korbanot*.

Moreover, today there is not only greater need, there is also greater opportunity. Greater readiness, communally speaking, to engage women seriously, intellectually in general terms and with regard to Torah particularly. We have been *zokheh* in this generation, in *Eretz Yisrael* and here as well, to see the spread of serious and intensive Torah study at levels which by and large were not prevalent only a generation or two ago. That is an opportunity which certainly we want our daughters to take seriously out of the conviction that, quite apart from assuring the fundamental *shemirat ha-mitzvot* and *yirat Shamayim*, even with that assured, out of the conviction that deepening their involvement in *talmud Torah*, that that is going to enrich and enhance them as religious personalities, as *ovdei Hashem*.

Even as there is, on the one hand, a greater need in order to assure the minimum, there is a greater opportunity in striving for the maximum...

*Talmud Torah* for women, particularly, although broadly speaking for men as well, is a process of bonding. Bonding with who and bonding with what? At one level, of course, with Torah. Developing not only the knowledge but an existential link not only in one's head, but with every fiber of one's being, to feel connected to Torah, to be sensitive, to be appreciative, to understand its worth and appreciate its centrality...

There is, secondly, a bond, not only with Torah as a body of text, of *halakhot*, but with that which Torah demands of us, with *shemirat ha-mitzvot*, with observance...

One of the things in which we need to invest ourselves with regard to religious education generally is to move away from a purely quantitative focus—not only “How many things does a person observe?” but also “How does he or she observe?” The Ramban, in a celebrated passage in the *Sefer ha-Mitzvot* (*Hasagah to Aseh 5*), discusses the meaning of the mandate of “*le'avdo be-khol levavkhem*,” or *avodah she-ba-lev*. In contrast to the

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Rambam, who sees this passage as the source for the biblical obligation of *tefillah*, Ramban sees this verse as relating to the practice of the entire corpus of Torah.

The Torah demands of us observance that is infused with full *kavvanah*, with total commitment, with passion, with the engagement of the whole of one's personality. We are bidden to take the lulav not only with the hand, but with the heart, with the mind. That requires an engagement, requires a meeting of the whole of one's personality with the world of *mitzvot*. And in this sense, too, serious study is significant...

How, asks the *Sifri*, do you attain the love of the *Ribbono Shel Olam*? So, of course, there are various avenues, but one of them, the *Sifri* says, referring to the following pasuk in *keriat shema*, “*ve-hayu ha-devarim ha-elleh asher anokhi mitzvekha ha-yom al levavekha*”—“and these matters which I commanded to you this day shall be engraved upon your heart” (Deuteronomy 6:6): תן הדברים האלה על לבך שמתוך כך אתה מכיר את מי שאמר והיה העולם: ומדבק בדרכיו “Place these matters upon your heart, learning Torah. Through that you attain love for the *Ribbono Shel Olam* and you cleave unto His ways.”

If we speak, then, of the *mitzvah* of *ahavat Hashem*: was that given only to men?... If we appreciate that Torah is a prime vehicle for attaining *ahavah* (leaving aside for the moment the independent *mitzvah* of *talmud Torah* as a separate test), that the *mitzvah* of *ahavat Hashem*, one of the ultimate goals, is achieved through this prime vehicle. Should we let that rust and sit idle with respect to our daughters and employ it only with our sons?...

This process of bonding, so critical, so crucial to the molding of our daughters as servants of the *Ribbono Shel Olam*, requires that their learning be not only comprehensive, but above all serious. Learning must be approached seriously. The halakhic basis for this seriousness is the *pasuk* in Va-Ethannan (Deuteronomy 4:9): רק השמר לך ושמר נפשך מאד פן תשכח את הדברים אשר ראו עיניך ופן יסורו מלבבך כל ימי חיך: “Take care, guard your soul very much, lest you forget anything of what your eyes have seen and lest these somehow escape from your heart.”

According to the Ramban, this is a *mitzvat lo ta'aseh*, a negative injunction counted as one of the 613 commandments in the Torah. As we well know, while women are exempt from certain, specific positive commandments, such as those that are time-bound, all negative injunctions are incumbent upon them, including the injunction never to forget, never to be oblivious to, what occurred at *mattan Torah*. This injunction includes not to be oblivious to the meaning of *mattan Torah* both as an occasion, an experiential high, as well as to the meaning and significance of the micro-substantive content of revelation... It is, in a word, the message of commitment, intensity, and seriousness.

Approaching this issue seriously, we need to take a dual focus. First, out of respect for Torah, and, second, out of respect for women. Out of respect for Torah, we collectively are the custodians of Torah. To be *shomer Torah* is in one sense to observe in daily life its commandments. In another sense, it is to guard it, to see that it remains pure, that it not be adulterated by false ideologies or by deviant theories. And it means, among other things, to guard its integrity and to assure that its quality and essential character be sustained.

In the Rambam's discussion of the study of *Torah She-Be'al Peh* for women, he addresses himself to the rationale behind some of the strictures that we find regarding this area. He writes (*Hilkhos Talmud Torah* 1:13) of a concern that: הן מוציאות דברי תורה לדברי הבאי לפי עניות דעתן, “out of a certain simplicity or a certain limited development, they might take *divrei Torah* and transform them into something that is vacuous and empty.” If Torah is to be taught, it needs to be taught out of a concern for its integrity, not just taking *divrei Torah* and somehow trying to present it as something very superficial and limited, because one is “only” educating a girl. Such an approach is in a way debasing of Torah and opening up the possibility that *divrei Torah* and *devarim shel kedusha*, the treasures of the *Ribbono Shel Olam*, will somehow be transformed into דברי הבאי. If Torah is to be taught at all, and be taught it must, certainly in our contexts, then it needs to be taught seriously, to assure that indeed Torah is understood and absorbed with the seriousness and with the earnestness, with the exhilaration, with the excitement, the passion that is coming to it.

But secondly, not only respect for Torah requires this of us, but respect for women as well. Respect for their abilities, their commitment, for their potential which is inherent within them and if you want to mobilize this

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force for themselves and for the good of the community. What that means, of course, is maintaining standards that are demanding and challenging. In practice, of course, it means not simply teaching digests of digests, but a confrontation, at a basic level, with primary texts...

My nieces, when they used to attend [an established high school for girls in *Yerushalayim*], would tell me that they are learning “*Toshtap*.” At first I didn’t know what it was. Then I realized it was an acronym for *Torah She-Be’al Peh*. And I said to those teachers: “You know, when a boy goes to Yeshiva he learns *Bava Kamma*, he learns *Bava Metzia*. He learns the Rambam, he learns Shulhan Arukh. He learns the *Ketzot*, he learns Reb Hayyim. But this ‘*Toshtap*,’ this kind of undefined, amorphous reality, that is not meat, that is not serious.” The *mitzvah*, then, mandates that there must be a confrontation with the primary texts in a primary way. A way which, on the one hand, will challenge the mind and, on the other hand, will commit the heart. We should inculcate, on the one hand, the need to understand, and the need that takes as its point of departure profound faith and *yirat Shamayim* and therefore enhances that *yirat Shamayim*. A desire *lehavin u-lehaskil*, which then issues into a desire *lishmor ve-la’asot*. We need to develop within that individual an infusion of knowledge, sensitivity, and, above all, that spirituality which links, which bonds to the world of spirit to the world of the *Ribono Shel Olom*.

All of this is in order to meet the first goal, that of developing the person, developing the individual girl. But, ultimately of course, it is through developing the individual that we mold and build a community, not with the process being dichotomous or bifurcated, but interactive.

**12. Shlomo Zuckier, “Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein’s Novel Position on Women’s Talmud Study,” *The Lehrhaus*, October 30, 2017, accessible at <https://www.thelehrhaus.com/commentary/rabbi-aharon-lichtensteins-novel-position-on-womens-talmud-study/>**

Several novel points are offered by Rabbi Lichtenstein in this disquisition...

The standard account often given for women’s Talmud study, including the one attributed to Rabbi Soloveitchik, runs something like the following: in years past, it would suffice for women to have minimal to no formal Jewish education, as they assimilated the primary tenets of Judaism by osmosis and were able to grow into the role of matriarch, passing on the tradition to future generations. Now, with women pursuing advanced secular education and careers of great sophistication, to abstain from developing their Jewish education would be setting them up for failure, as they would experience only advanced secularism and unsophisticated Judaism. Thus, despite the Talmud’s injunction (*Sotah* 20a) against women’s Talmud study for fear that they will render it vacuous, it may be necessary to override that concern and teach them Talmud, for otherwise their Judaism may be compromised.

In addition to this rationale, at times one finds an explanation based on the fact that, although women lack the inherent obligation to study Torah, they do have an obligation to know the laws pertaining to them, in order to properly execute them. This is another commonly offered reason why it is permissible and appropriate for women to study Talmud, at least in some form.

Rabbi Lichtenstein takes a different approach. First, he addresses education in general, averring that education as pre-professional training needs to take a backseat to the goal of molding a person’s character by training their “personality, intellectual ability.”

The goal of a Jewish educational institution for Rabbi Lichtenstein is for one to invest in Torah study and immerse in the supportive, religiously suffused cocoon of the Jewish textual tradition, ideally in a yeshiva, in order to emerge as a servant of God, follow the Torah and form an observant Jewish community. This aim, Rabbi Lichtenstein emphasizes, is “posited equally to men and to women”—all Jews are expected to be *ovedei Hashem*...

The relevant question posed by the modern age, however, is not in the *goal* but in the *means*. While in years past the presumption was that women could achieve religious success with limited education—a proposition neither endorsed nor critiqued by Rabbi Lichtenstein in the talk—today’s world requires formal Torah



education, both because there are greater religious hurdles for the *ovedet Hashem* to face and because universal education, and therefore universal Jewish education, is now a possibility.

Note that, although contemporary challenges are invoked by Rabbi Lichtenstein, they are not presented as an overriding religious crisis rendering impractical the prohibitions by necessity. Quite the contrary—the ideal principle that women are expected to be *ovedei Hashem* as much as men has always been true, enshrined as it is in Sefer Devarim! The only difference occasioned by the times is one of means, that nowadays the only method available to form a serious religious personality is through yeshiva education at a high level. On the whole, this development is not formulated as any less than ideal.

...If the goal of Torah study is to craft an individual within the crucible of Torah, to build them into the greatest servant of God possible, then there is no reason to stop at the halakhot that happen to be pragmatically applicable. In fact, argues Rabbi Lichtenstein, some women's personal growth might necessitate the study of abstruse and emphatically inapplicable laws such as those of sacrifice! The operating principle here is not one of necessity but of aspiration, as are so many things for Rabbi Lichtenstein.

The goal of such study is to build a bond with Torah and with its Giver, to define oneself in relation to Torah, to become a *bat* or *ben* Torah, to involve one's whole being in their Judaism. That, for both men and women, can only be accomplished by pursuing the study Torah at the highest levels, allowing one's curiosity to flow limitlessly throughout the Jewish textual corpus as one assimilates the Torah into the very fiber of their being. And, Rabbi Lichtenstein reminds us, it is obligatory upon all Jews to guard the Torah, to ensure one's relationship with Torah be true and deep. And, in most cases, that requires serious Torah study.

Rabbi Lichtenstein's reframing of these two arguments—seeing not a reluctant response to unfortunate developments but a happy embrace of welcome opportunities; and not settling for technical legal advice but aspiring for robust identity formation—are important and novel contributions. But they pale in comparison to this third innovative point, a re-reading of the Talmud's (*Sotah* 20a) and Rambam's (Talmud Torah 1:13) prohibition. These two texts famously rule that teaching Torah to women is to be avoided because, given women's limited intellectual development, they might transform Torah into *tiflut*, something vacuous. This prohibition is often invoked by opponents of women's Talmud study. Even those who take a more sympathetic position to women studying Talmud have to grapple with this source, often by limiting the scope of cases where women might study Talmud out of deference to this prohibition.

Rabbi Lichtenstein, however, turns this source on its head. First of all, he notes, the source does not pose a contemporary problem for teaching women Talmud, for all the reasons noted above. There is also the implicit attribution of the prohibition to limited *development* rather than differential inherent capacity. But that does not mean that the prohibition is now irrelevant. In fact, the prohibition against teaching women superficial Torah is now more operable than ever! Any institution that teaches women Talmud has the obligation to do so at only the highest levels; it may settle for no less, lest it fall prey to *tiflut*. The Torah will not suffer having its women play softball, *lehavdil*, rather than baseball...

With this, Rabbi Lichtenstein takes aim at schools that teach not Talmud per se but a more amorphous "*Torah she-be'al peh* curriculum." While such a move might feel safer, for Rabbi Lichtenstein it is mandatory that girls, just like boys, "confron[t] the primary texts in a primary way." Far from applying a limit or prohibition on women's Talmud study, in today's world the prohibition against teaching women *tiflut* morphs into an argument for *greater* rigor in Talmud study rather than its diminishment...

With such a powerful and novel approach to women's Talmud study, it is no surprise that Rabbi Lichtenstein championed these enterprises not only discursively but institutionally as well.