

# SYMPOSIUM ON WOMEN AND JEWISH EDUCATION

## INTRODUCTION

*It is axiomatic in Judaism that the study of Torah is not merely an intellectual option or a means of acquiring knowledge. It is a fulfillment of a divine imperative, a positive mitzva based on Devarim 6, "veshinantam levaneckha, and you shall teach them diligently to your children" (Kiddushin 29b).*

*This obligation has traditionally devolved upon men and not upon women. Maimonides, basing himself on an opinion in Mishna Sota 3:4, explicitly exempts women from the obligatory mitzva of Torah study (Hilkhos Talmud Torah 1:13).*

*Despite this technical exemption, pious Jewish women have always studied Torah, albeit its more practical elements rather than the theoretical—the Shulhan Arukh rather than the Talmud, the Written rather than the Oral Torah. Such study was not formalized or structured, and although the rather informal, home-based schooling produced many learned and pious women, it was not until this century that formal, structured, Orthodox schools—pioneered by Sarah Schenirer and the Bais Yaakov movement—began to emerge. Hafetz Haim supported this vigorously, and in a famous footnote (Likute Halakhot, Sota, folio 11, n. 3) points out that women in contemporary times no longer can learn all they need to know from their parents in the home, since parental authority has diminished and people do not live in the same places as their fathers, and therefore:*

*It is certainly a great mitzva to teach [women] the Five Books, the Prophets and the Writings, and . . . Pirkei Avot, Menorat Hamaor, and similar works. . . . If we do not do this, they may wander entirely from the path of God and violate the basic laws, God forbid."*

*While Hafetz Haim avoided giving a green light to the study of Mishna or Gemara, his comment added great momentum to the establishment of schools for Orthodox women.*

*As this century draws to a close, we are witness to a veritable explosion of Jewish learning for women, not only in elementary and high-schools, but also—and particularly—beyond high-school. A cornucopia of choices awaits today's Orthodox woman, from college level courses and majors in Judaica to intensive haredi and non-haredi Israeli seminaries and schools, geared to Hebrew and English-speaking students.*

## TRADITION

*In recognition of the crucial importance of Torah education for the contemporary Jewish woman, and in an effort to focus on some of the issues involved, Tradition asked a representative group of working educators in the field to respond to a series of questions on this theme. In an effort both to ensure as broad a range of participants as possible and to achieve a balance among varying philosophic orientations, we invited men and women educators from across the Orthodox spectrum, from Israel and from America. Those who appear in this symposium are those who chose to participate.*

—E.F.

*The questions which our respondents were asked to consider are:*

**1.** The past decade has witnessed an explosion of Jewish educational opportunities for women, with heightened intensity and deepened quality. This has been coupled with calls for still greater exposure to classic rabbinic texts, heretofore an area not fully available to women. Is this a natural and positive development in the Torah community or simply an intrusion of current secular feminist concerns?

**2.** In general, to what extent, if any, should Jewish education for men and women differ on the elementary, secondary and advanced levels with regard to such issues as competence in biblical, rabbinic and halakhic texts, secular studies and careers? Do any proposed differences reflect differing innate abilities between men and women, or, rather, do they reflect traditionally distinct gender roles within Judaism?

**3.** At a time of increased public opportunities for women, how do you reconcile the traditional meaning of Psalms 45:14, "*kol kevuda bat melekh penima* (the glory of the king's daughter is within)," which has traditionally been read as encompassing less public and more private roles for women? In general, how does one educate for *tzeniut* in an age of promiscuity, for *hesed* in an age of self-indulgence, and for genuine piety in an age of secularism?

**4.** Women have been assuming increased leadership roles in Jewish education, including heading co-ed and single-gender yeshivot, developing curricula, and supervising male and female teachers. Do you see them confronted with any special problems or limitations?

## KAREN BACON

It has become normative in a discussion of women and Torah study to make reference to the modern condition, characterized on the one hand by the breakdown of family tradition and on the other by extensive secular educational opportunities for women. (See, for example, Moshe Weinberger, "Teaching Torah to Women", *Journal of Halacha and Contemporary Society*, No. 9, Spring, 1985, pp. 19-52). These realities have convinced even those most cautious of change, that girls must receive formal, structured Jewish education to inform and strengthen their faith and practice.

The educational institutions that have been established comprise a broad spectrum with regard to curricular content and teaching style. They have been variously described by supporters and detractors as superb, inadequate, and everything in between. What is clear, however, is that the situational imperatives that made formal Torah study essential for girls, inevitably opened the door for the evolution over time of ever more demanding and extensive textual exposure for women. This evolution in many ways has paralleled a general trend in the American Orthodox world. More and more communities expect their rabbis to speak with the authority of a *talmid hakham* and not just an orator, and more and more communities sponsor lecture series and public *shiurim* for both men and women that presuppose significant background "in learning" if they are to be understood at anything other than the most superficial level. These trends have lent increasing validity and approbation to the intensive study of Torah texts by women. What has been the impact of this study on the women whose lives it has molded? To answer this question, I need to go back in time.

My grandmother came to this country from Vilna at the start of the 20th century. From a well-to-do family (she often entertained me with stories of the embroidered linens in her trousseau), she scraped together a life with her husband and children by working in the infamous sweatshops of New York. By the time I was old enough to know her, she was physically wasted by the ravages of rheumatoid arthritis but mentally alert, especially on *Shabbat* and *Yom Tov*. That was when miraculously her pains eased as she read to me from her *Tz'edah ur'edah*. In *Shul*, she was the one who helped the other ladies "find the place", the one who recited each word with care and with insight. She acquired her knowledge the traditional way, at home and by example. Was this enough for her? Perhaps.

Her daughter, my mother, was raised in the American public school system. Deprived of the Old World environment and ways and provided by the community with little in its place, she dedicated her considerable talents and efforts to ensuring that quality Jewish education would exist for all children, including her daughter. Did my mother—skilled businesswoman, energetic fund-raiser, religiously committed wife and mother—feel deprived by

her limited formal Jewish education? Can there be any doubt? And so, we arrive at today.

It is instructive to note that lectures on the topic of women's Jewish education rarely attract an audience of younger women. This group, by and large, already has accepted the secular norm that all may aspire to the highest levels of education and to the most challenging career paths. Despite assertions to the contrary, women who accept this model are not making a feminist statement. Rather it is the character of this generation to assume that an egalitarian approach to education and career choice is the natural order of things. Therefore, for young women, a lecture on women's Jewish education seems at best unnecessary, at worst regressive. Yet even as these women assume they have a right to a full Jewish education, they struggle with the ambiguities this presents in their lives.

Although the Jewish community today provides opportunities for advanced study for women, there is no real expectation that women should study Torah alongside their college courses and their preparation for careers in law, medicine, accounting etc. Indeed, the Jewish community has not, by and large, ascribed value to the woman with true competence in rabbinic and *halakhic* texts. Thus, women who are inclined to such study must, of necessity, feel somewhat isolated and ill-at-ease. The net result is that few pursue this path as a life's goal. The few who do choose higher Torah studies are, for the most part, actively fulfilling a personal religious need. They are neither passively responding to an external set of expectations, since there is none, nor are they seeking public recognition. These are women who understand that systematic and consistent study of biblical, rabbinic and *halakhic* texts will enable them to conduct their professional lives with appropriate Jewish care and create homes and communities based on real Torah values and *halakhic* principles. As a scientist, I am often amazed by those who would have us believe that a simple reading of Genesis is all there is to understanding the origin of the world, as if the Creator's powers are limited by our meager understanding of His words. Similarly I am amazed that there are those who believe a woman entrusted with the responsibility of creating and maintaining a Jewish home today can be effective in this endeavor knowing only the basics of *halakha* and *hashkafa*. Thus, it is eminently clear to me, that advanced Torah study by women is not an attempt to blur traditional roles. Rather it flows from a desire to make those roles more meaningful.

In practice, I have seen the model that I am describing enacted time and again by countless women. It is to be found among those who daily excuse themselves from their professional commitments to *daven minha*, who take time out from their graduate studies for an afternoon *hevruta*, who knowledgeably confront and seek to resolve the conflicting demands of patient care and personal religious observance, who teach Torah as it

should be taught and who, by word and deed, encourage and inspire their husbands, sons and daughters to intensify their own learning. These are truly impressive women who should rightfully be viewed as models in our communities. Yet, an aura of controversy and negativism continues to surround them.

There is a considerable body of psychological literature that addresses apparent differences in leadership and decision making styles between men and women. (For example, see Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Harvard University Press, 1982).) In general women are seen as more consultative than men, more interested in relationship building, cooperation and consensus than in competition and "winning". Based on research findings and reinforced by observations in both the school and the work place, this model is not far different from the Jewish one. Traditionally "*kol kevuda bat melekh penima*" has been understood as defining an outcome, a private role for women. Alternatively, perhaps, one can understand it as describing a *derekh*, way of being, a woman's approach to life based on an inner sensitivity to the concerns of others. It is an approach to problem solving and leadership that does not feed on a need for empty public acclaim. If that is in fact the case, and I believe it is, then we can be confident that the woman with an advanced Jewish education has the right instincts to conduct both her private life and her public life appropriately.

There should be a battle raging, but not over the curricular content of women's education, important as that is. Rather we should be mobilizing to ascribe to Torah study so significant a part in a young girl's growing intellectual and spiritual life, that she chooses to continue this study as a personal commitment later on. If we succeed, we can anticipate the next generation of women will be both committed and able to make even greater contributions to the vibrancy of Torah Judaism.

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## DAVID I. BERNSTEIN

In her article on "Education of Jewish Women" (*Encyclopaedia Judaica* 1987 Yearbook), Deborah Weissman quotes a 1913 work on general education as saying "No part of the history of education is so obscure as that of the education of girls. The obscurity itself is suggestive that little is known because there is little to know." What we do know of is a handful of exceptional women, like Bruria and Rashi's daughter. We also know that there was universal education for boys and girls under King Hezekiah (Sanhedrin 94b). In the more recent past, Sefardim in 18th century Amsterdam and

Rabbi Samson Rafael Hirsch in 19th century Germany included girls in formal religious schooling.

However, notes Weissman, "religious education for girls was never as bad as in the dismal situation which existed in Eastern Europe in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries." Not only are most of us the progeny of those communities but—especially after the Holocaust—those Eastern European communities have come to be idealized by much of the religious (and even non-religious) community as being the most "authentically Jewish."

Organized Torah education for women, however, has been growing dramatically ever since Sara Schneirer began the first Beth Jacob school in Cracow in 1917 with a kindergarten class of 25. By the eve of World War II, there were over 40,000 girls studying in such schools over several continents. Following the tremendous growth of Jewish day schools in North America (both co-ed and separate ones for boys and girls), there has been an explosion in the number and types of Israeli religious post-high school seminaries open to *hutz la'aretz* students, and in the number of women enrolled.

Though still far less common than among men, there are now more young women staying for *shana bet* too. The last few years have witnessed the development of "scholars" programs, or kollelot for women. Here, women who usually have had a full day-school education plus a year or two of intensive Torah studies at a yeshiva in Israel follow up their college studies with an additional year or two in Jerusalem or New York. Almost all the wives of the Y.U. Gruss Kollel students in Jerusalem are seriously involved in Torah study today, whereas just a decade ago, only a few were. This says something not only about these women, but perhaps also about the expectations many *semikha* students now have of their wives, and how the future operation of modern Orthodox rabbis (and rebbetzins) will relate to serious, advanced Torah study for women.

Within almost all of these programs, there is now greater exposure to rabbinic texts—in *batei midrash* for women at schools in Israel and North America. (The inauguration of the *bet midrash* at Stern College by the Rav, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, zt"l, took place only some two decades ago.) The recent growth of *shiurim* and *batei midrash* on college campuses has usually been a boon for the women as well as for the men. (Although some of our graduates at an Ivy League college told me a few years ago that the men were not always flexible in allowing for "women's hours" in that *beit midrash*.)

Talmud study for women has grown much more common than ever before. Encouraged by the Rav, the opposition that remains is essentially a rear-guard action, at least in the modern Orthodox world. Talmud is now taught at more yeshiva high schools than ever before, and at Stern College. Additionally, many women who never studied Talmud before will do so at

Israeli yeshivot for women, where it is either required or offered as an option at a number of schools. Talmud study for women has not created a movement for Orthodox women rabbis, nor have these women been those to come to shul in *talit* and/or *tefillin*. On the other hand, thousands of Orthodox Jewish women now have greater Jewish knowledge, better insight into the world of Hazal and the halakhic process. If one believes in the beauty and divine nature of the "system," one can only be optimistic about the long-term results.

Even where actual Talmud study is not called "Talmud," it is called *Torah sheba'al peh* or Mishna, and the pages of Talmud are studied from xeroxed sheets. The difference is purely semantic; the words of Rav and Shmuel, whether in a bound *masekhet* from Va'ad Ha'yeshivot or on a xeroxed page, are still the same words. Clearly, there is no longer a halakhic argument in these cases, rather only a political one.

Only a few decades ago, Talmud study for women was much more limited; the thought of a woman Talmud instructor was preposterous. Today there are women teaching Talmud at a number of Orthodox institutions. Now, with a critical mass of young women competent to teach Talmud developing, this trend will no doubt grow dramatically in the coming decade.

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It is hard to measure—or discount—secular feminism as a factor in the growth of Torah learning for Orthodox women today. But if feminism has led more Jewish women to study more Torah in a reverent manner, then this is a most positive "intrusion" into Jewish life.

We can point to two factors which have spurred the growth of Torah education for women. The first is the desire to stem assimilation. With most Orthodox women going to college and beyond, and with intermarriage rates in America at unprecedented high levels, many Orthodox parents view an intensive Torah education for their daughters as a basic necessity in the struggle against assimilation. This is completely in line with the position of the Hafetz Hayim in Sara Schneirer's day, which clearly took into account changes in society and the lifestyle of Jewish women at the time.

The second factor is the growth of more intensive Torah learning for men in North America (college campus *batei midrash* and the increased popularity of *shiurim* in shuls) and especially at the yeshivot in Israel. It is now almost the norm for both male and female yeshiva high school graduates to spend a year at a yeshiva in Israel. For the men, two years of learning is now increasingly acceptable, and the growth in men's learning has quite naturally affected Orthodox women, who see themselves as intellectually equal to their brothers and friends—feminism in its most basic form!

To attempt to write off the explosion of Torah learning for women because it is merely an outgrowth of secular feminism is to ignore the Hafetz Hayim, who took such changes into account, and, of course, the writings and actions of Rav Soloveitchik zt"l. Changing lifestyles for women, and changing attitudes in society at large, demanded (and demand) authentic halakhic responses—and we are all fortunate that some *gedolim* confronted this reality head-on. Part of their greatness was in their courage to channel the energy of a popular movement towards a Torah ideal; as Rav Kook said, "*hayashan yit-hadesh vehahadash yitkadesh*, the old will be made new and the new will be made holy."

Even those uncomfortable with open Talmud instruction for women want a solid Torah education for women of the type that hardly existed only a few decades ago. Like most men, women who receive this kind of education do not do so with the purpose of becoming rabbis, but rather with the desire to gain basic skills to appreciate Torah and the halakhic system, and to grow spiritually.

While acquiring knowledge and basic competence in texts is now a goal in both men's and women's Torah education, there may have to be some differences between them. It may be easier, in fact, to correct in women's schools certain traditional errors in men's Torah education—like the exclusive focus on Talmud to the virtual exclusion of Bible and Jewish Philosophy. It may be more possible in women's Torah institutions to make references to secular learning more easily than in a men's setting, where such things might be deemed not "yeshivish."

Religious women today are taking more public roles in the general workplace. They are lawyers, doctors, physical therapists, corporate officials, and mental health professionals—and it is only natural (and desirable) that this spills over into Jewish communal life, including Jewish education.

Problems of gender relations confronting a religious woman who heads a school or supervises teachers are unique only in one way—that they take place "within" the community and not outside of it. From the increasing numbers of women involved in these kinds of positions, both in and outside of Jewish education, it does not seem to be a problem for most of the non-Haredi Orthodox community.

The question posed by the editors referred to the "past decade." What about a decade from now? What will Torah education for women be like in the year 2004/5764? While we no longer have the power of prophecy in our day, it seems that present trends are pointing towards more opportunities—in educational frameworks (schools, shuls, kollels for women), textual study, more women teachers with more advanced training than ever before, more women principals, writers of Jewish curricula, and women scholars. If this generation can produce more Nechama Leibowitzs than the last—in Tanakh, Jewish thought, and perhaps one day in Talmud—



then not only Jewish women, but the entire Torah world will be much the richer for it.

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## MALKE BINA

In Hafetz Hayim's famous *teshuva* on Torah study for women, he posits that, ideally and historically, Jewish women need to study Torah only insofar as they need to know about belief in God and practical halakha. They naturally learned from their mothers and gracefully accepted the yoke of Torah through observance. "All that has changed today . . .," he wrote about his own generation. Although less than thrilled, he saw that social and religious realities dictated that unless women began to study Humash, Prophets, Mussar and Jewish philosophy, they would drift away from Torah and *Klal Yisrael* would be weakened. He saw that women must be fortified with sufficient Torah knowledge to meet the intellectual challenges of the outside world. He, of course, intended that proper Torah educational institutions be set up to strengthen Torah and *yirat shamayim*. After a while, his less-preferred option (*b'dieved*) became the standard for even the most pious sectors in schools such as Bet Yaakov.

Today, much of a similar situation is faced by Orthodox communities regarding the study of rabbinic texts. Rather than fight the desire of women to learn, rabbis and leaders should structure educational frameworks which would advance the basic goals of strengthening Torah and *yirat shamayim*. Many women who "leave the fold" are intelligent and honest but uninspired Jewishly on an intellectual level comparable to their abilities and secular exposure. The halakhic approval given by Hafetz Hayim could certainly apply to our question regarding rabbinic texts. In a couple of generations, schools which teach rabbinic texts to girls and women will probably seem no more radical than Bet Yaakov appears today.

I will not review here the permissibility of women studying rabbinic texts. (See, for example, Rabbi David Aurbach's *Halikhot Beita*, pp. 389-391 and Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein's "Torah Study for Women," *Ten Da'at*, 3:3, Spring 1989, pp. 7-8.) Instead, I would like to broach a "hasidic" approach to the significance of outside forces and new trends in general. Rather than view "secular feminist concerns" as the enemy, why not see them as the guiding hand of Providence trying to reveal a new facet of Torah. We know that in the area of mitzvot "*mitokh she-lo lishma ba lishma* (even if the original intent is wrong, performing the mitzva brings with it proper intent)." In this case, secular concerns can be seen as an impetus to deepen and

broaden understanding of Jewish texts and, more importantly, to challenge the superficiality of Jewish commitment prevalent in our generation. This outside force can be utilized to strengthen and revitalize Jewish women's ties to Torah through greater learning. It is upsetting to think that today, when women are leaders in fields such as psychology or math, they often remain ignorant of the body of Jewish study which is its essence—*Torah she-Be'al Peh*, the Oral Law.

Ultimately, I would like see the establishment of institutions of Torah study for women that extend from pre-school age through adulthood, and which will set high standards of learning in both the written and oral law, Halakha as well as Jewish philosophy. As this has not been tried until now, I cannot foresee clearly what difficulties will arise in this type of girls' school system. This is not to ignore the important body of research which has been done on the differences between men and women in terms of intellectual and psychological development. However, I would aim to get beyond the current situation and then see what adjustments need to be made.

Differences between the needs of individuals or groups in such schools should be taken care of by tracking within the schools. Girls would not be forced into one particular mold—some would excel in Tanakh while others would concentrate on *Torah SheBe'al Peh*. The basis for advancement would be personal capabilities maximized and nurtured by careful instruction.

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The traditional interpretation of "*kol kevuda*" is simply not adhered to anymore by any sector of the religious community—witness kollel wives working in busy offices, *haredi* women teaching, running schools, and charities, etc. In the past many women were home most of the day but "all that has changed today . . ."

Realistically, the only difference between the "approved" jobs held by women outside the home and those whose legitimacy are questioned is the status that comes with the latter. For instance, a woman who wishes to serve on a shul board or religious council would be no more "visible" than a female principal in a girls' school. A woman who runs a prosperous business to support her husband who learns is no less involved in the outside world than a lawyer. Yet the first set is already accepted as a necessity even though it runs counter to the classical interpretation of "*kol kevuda*." I think that women's participation in decision making bodies such as a religious council or appearing for a client in court is also necessary so that both the social and religious needs of women are met and the needs of *Klal Yisrael* are better served. If a woman is more competent to fill a particular position than a man, the Jewish people lose out if she does not fill it.

Therefore, our challenge today must be to preserve the inner sanctum even while operating in public spheres. The question of how to educate for *tzeniut* in an age of promiscuity and inner values in an age where externals are so highly valued is a serious one for both men and women. Such education can only be based on personal examples and *mesirut nefesh* as exemplified by role models like Nehama Leibowitz or Miriam Adahan, women whose whole beings speak of internal values and modesty but whose voices are heard way beyond the confines of their own homes.

In order to practically serve both home and outside, two factors are essential. First, husband and wife must work together by mutual consent; second, both must realize that neither will have all their needs met—for example, a woman will either need house help or lessen household expectations. Priorities must be clearly set such as time spent with children as opposed to cleaning house.

I have always believed that women are released from positive time-bound mitzvot in order that they have more flexibility and more choices. There should be many different models for schools for women. Women should not be pressured to feel they must assume public roles but should feel that they have the option to do so. I do not think that either studying Talmud or assuming “public roles” is cause for fear that we will lose something or tarnish some ideal. Quite the opposite. Whatever path we choose, we have only to fear if Torah and “fear of heaven” are not our primary focus.

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## RIVKAH BLAU

1. The growth of Jewish educational opportunities for women attests to the vision of the founders of day schools in this country. First, they realized that a Jewish way of life which used to be absorbed in the home would now have to be taught in schools; second, schools were open to girls and boys (only in very large cities was there enough of a school population to start a single-gender school and, even in those cities, a school for girls opened soon after the school for boys); third, when Torah learning and living were offered to girls, the thirst that Amos predicted (8:11) took hold. The more one learns, the more one wants to learn.

Advanced learning for women is flowering on a tree whose roots were planted in the 1940's and '50's when girls entered Torah-school kindergartens. It has everything to do with genuine Torah learning and nothing to do with any secular movements. (For a thorough and incisive

analysis of the development of Jewish education for women, see Shoshana Pantel Zolty's *And All Your Children Shall Be Learned: Women and the Study of Torah* (Jason Aronson, 1993).)

If we have been affected by the secular world, it is in three ways: first, technology enables us to run a house properly in an hour or two a day, rather than ten hours a day, giving women time to learn. Second, as school is compulsory until the mid-teens and as all but the richest families require two salaries, women have become better-educated. Gershon Kranzler's recording of reactions by a group of Satmar women (*Tradition*, 28:1, Fall 1993) reveals schooling for girls through the eleventh grade; the Bais Rochel schools all provide Jewish studies in the morning before the required secular studies (in the Boro Park branch, through the twelfth grade). Women should be commended for wanting their Torah learning to be on a par with, if not superior to, their secular knowledge. Third, a longer life-span means that if one has devoted twenty years entirely to raising one's children, there are still forty or more years of active intellectual life to enjoy. All three factors have affected religious Jewish life and have affected feminism, but this does not mean that secular feminist concerns affect observant women.

2. Of course, women must learn as much and as well as possible. Unless we plan to consign half the Jewish people to an existence as Karaites, women must learn Jewish law, halakhah, in the Oral Torah in order to know what the Written Torah requires of us. In schools that choose to teach the Oral Law "orally," without giving texts to the students, young women will still benefit because only through the *Torah sheb'al peh* will they know how to keep the mitzvot. The scams perpetrated on the Jewish people in the last century succeeded because people were ignorant and, as Hillel observed, "An ignorant person cannot be scrupulously observant" (*Avot* 2:6). A major impetus for mixed seating was that women had no idea of what was going on in shul.

I do not think a single prescription should be offered for teaching, or avoiding the teaching of, Talmud to girls. That is why we have a *mara d'atra*, the *rav* who decides halakhic issues in his community. Let each student attend the school with the approach best suited to her interests and needs; let each school do the best job it can. No one in any yeshiva should attack another. Consideration should be given to how upset students are when they hear one *rav* or principal attack another.

The question of secular studies and careers must be left up to the individual; we should not forget about free will and people developing their capacity to choose. One can sanctify the Divine name, be *m'kadesh shem shamayim*, as a caring doctor, an honest lawyer, a truthful research scientist, a trustworthy person in business, insurance, stock-broking, textile manufacturing or real estate (the last two are among the areas of expertise of the *eshet hayil* in the last chapter of Proverbs). Women and men should exer-

cise responsibility in these choices, but to carry the *matbei'a* analogy out, just as our faces differ from one another, so do our opinions differ. This individuality is a gift from Hashem; we should not "stamp" it out.

3. There are many readings of Psalms 45:14. Malbim, for example, sees it in context of the presents being brought in verses 13-16 to the king's daughter, as a metaphor for "worthy things and spiritual matter that are appropriate" to her. If one is imbued with Torah qualities of character, one can work in public or private capacities. If, *has v'shalom*, modesty, kindness and genuine observance of mitzvot do not inform one's being, then one has either not learned or not chosen well.

Male medical students depend on their wives' work; the hasidic community depends on the wives' work; kollelim depend on the wives' work. For whom do we recommend these parameters of privacy? It is curious that some of the people who give a single reading of this verse to prove the need for women to be in the home, also advocate a kollel-wife supporting her husband by working outside the home. In Europe, a *kimpetoren* received gentle care for three months after giving birth; now, in the most caring schools, she will get two weeks of paid maternity leave. Most day schools cannot afford medical plans, large salaries or, in extreme cases, timely payments. Women often must go into the secular world for work in business, medicine (including the current favorites, sonography and physical therapy) or law. This mixed message, at best, confuses women. Since the use of this verse is inconsistent, let us honestly prepare young women for the world of work they will enter.

4. I can understand a man heading a coed or girls' elementary school, but I cannot understand, in light of the current preoccupation with *tсенит*, a man heading a girls' high school. How can he discuss a young woman's career choices? He knows the male view of marriage and child-raising. What does he know about pregnancy, childbirth, years of staying home with young children, the difficulties and the many joys? What does he know about the balancing required to care for one's family properly and to work outside the home? How can he have a one-to-one conversation with a student? Just as one could not imagine a woman heading a male school, a man should not head a female school. There should be no problem for a woman in developing curricula. One who knows a discipline should develop the curriculum in that discipline.

Teachers who know their subject, who engage the students in learning, who are models in character and personality for their students and who consider the nurturing of students' abilities their goal, will work well with a male or female principal toward their shared goal. Teachers who are preoccupied with their own needs and unresolved angers, and who do not see the students as the *raison d'être* of the school, will bring grief to any principal (and every class).

We are living in a time when the education that used to be available to women in learned homes, or in the Yavneh School in Telz, Lithuania, is available to any woman who wants it. We should rejoice at this opportunity. Let every man and woman learn as much Torah as possible. Let everyone go to the teacher or yeshiva of one's choice. The energy wasted in sniping could be spent in learning.

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### **SORO YEHUDIS FISHMAN**

Torah philosophy teaches that many theoretically neutral areas of life become theologically positive or negative depending on the intention behind those activities. Functions such as recreation, secular studies, and even survival-related behaviors like eating, sleeping or working—can have very different religious meanings depending on whether the primary motive is ego enhancement or the service of Hashem. On one hand, even the most seemingly mundane acts can be sanctified through proper intention. Conversely, even the performances of mitzvot can lose value with self-centered motives. These considerations apply to women as well as to men, and I think this kind of distinction needs to be raised in the context of the present discussion.

This is the basis of my response to the question to increased exposure of classic rabbinic texts to women. As I see it, if this is indeed a natural and positive development of Torah, it will turn out to be just that. However, if it is indeed an intrusion of current secular feminist concerns, that, too, is the direction it will probably take. Any stamp of approval or disapproval on this issue cannot be separated from its subjective dimensions.

My personal feeling is that girls should be exposed to all areas of Torah literature. I may be rather biased here, as I attended Maimonides Yeshiva in Boston where I received the graduation prize for my favorite subject, Talmud. I am also influenced by the opinion expressed a few years ago by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, zt"l, that the realities of women's increased involvement, both in advanced secular studies and in professional public life, make it important that women be encouraged to learn Oral Torah in depth. This also applies to full-time mothers, who now are taking an increased responsibility for insuring a proper education of their children.

The actual details of Jewish curricula is a complex issue. Even in all-male yeshivot, the content and method of learning has never been monolithic. The Maharal of Prague, for example, would probably be opposed to many yeshiva formats of our times (not to mention his own times). Many

contemporary rabbis also feel that a premature and exclusive emphasis on Talmud is not the best way to educate Jewish *boys*, let alone *girls*.

Actually, the issue of co-ed learning may be halakhicly more controversial than the content of that learning. But halakhic issues aside, I have found that in over thirty years of teaching almost all ages of both genders, boys and girls (as well as men and women) seem to respond differently from each other to both styles and subject matters of Torah studies. As a broad generalization, women appear more interested in relationships, attitudes, discussions and practical implications, whereas men focus more on the facts themselves and their underlying theories, and tend to get impatient with extensive speculation or personalizing. Whether these differences reflect nature or nurture is probably an unresolvable question.

I feel that Sarah Schenirer was a pioneer and a role model not only for Jewish educators, but also for Jewish women in leadership positions. She showed us all how to confront a world of increasing promiscuity and self-indulgence with unwavering and unabashed *tzeniut*. Her ideas—Torah ideals—called forth *mesirat nefesh*, self-sacrifice, from herself and her students. In a world of growing secularism, she taught and lived with unashamed piety and with uncompromising allegiance to halakhic principles. She knew with every fiber of her being that laws such as *kol isha*, *yihud*, modest dress, and hair covering are not antiquated Victorian customs to be cast off like shackles in an enlightened age of new-found individual freedom.

Her message is all the more relevant in our Western culture, where sexual awareness in both media and life has never been more pervasive and invasive. When there is a breach of fundamental Torah values in the non-Jewish world, we are specifically urged to fortify ourselves in the neglected areas. Just as Jews are directed to go out to their *succot* when the rest of the world is coming in from their summer homes, so now do Jewish women have an unprecedented opportunity to express their femininity and divine worth through restraint and inwardness even when they are most actively involved in the outside world.

Regarding the compatibility of women in public roles with the image conveyed in the verse, "*Kol kevuda bat melekh penima*," the Lubavitcher Rebbe distinguishes between the objective of conquering and the process of conquering. The objective of conquering, which means making the world a vessel for Godliness, is incumbent on a woman as well as on a man. However the process of using a conquering or forceful mode is more of a masculine activity than a feminine one. Furthermore, he stated, the feminine approach of "friendly persuasion" rather than coercion would, in an ideal world, be preferable. It is not only more in keeping with the concept of "*darkei noam*, ways of pleasantness," but is also engages deeper levels of the one influenced, for it works with, rather than against, his natural desires. Seen from this perspective, "*kol kevuda*" takes on new meaning:

Though the primary role of a woman may be to create a Godly home, when she does enter the sphere of public life, the Torah teaches her how best to exert her influence in the world at large.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate my belief that the underlying objective of both private and public activities for men as well as women should be that both the letter and the spirit of Torah-true values be actualized and strengthened. Of course, even within the framework of Torah standards, there will be variations in applied rulings and directives. For example, some hasidic and right-wing yeshivot may be unconditionally opposed to co-ed Torah learning, while some Modern Orthodox may allow, accept, or even encourage co-ed schools under certain conditions. Furthermore, what may have been applicable under the threat of the Haskala at the time of the Seridei Eish, what may be acceptable to rabbinical leaders of NCSY or deemed necessary in Orthodox quarters of a college Hillel or on the grounds of a Habad house in Katmandu, may not be considered appropriate in the streets of Monroe or the Geula section of Jerusalem.

With regard to women in particular, I feel that whatever the specific situation of the individual, Yiddishkeit considers nothing more valuable than the direct influence of a mother, especially during the early years of a child. Whatever else she happens to be doing in her life for whatever the reasons, it is very important to Jewish survival that in the depths of her being she realizes what a tribute the Torah pays to the unique significance of the Jewish mother.

There are many people—including many who express commitment to Torah values—who wonder subconsciously or even consciously if perhaps some of the Talmudists were, to varying degrees, male chauvinists, whether by social circumstances or personality. To me, the voice of this wondering does not seem resonant with the voice of *Torah MiSinai*, divine spirit which spoke through our great ones.

Certainly, given past and present trends in both Jewish and non-Jewish society, there are injustices in the attitudes toward and treatment of women. These need to be addressed with the same consideration and sense of urgency as the injustices committed against anyone who is taken advantage of. Equal pay for equal work? Definitely. Protection and assistance for *agunot*, for those needing child support, or for victims of abuse? Without question. Whatever women in particular can do to help in these areas should be facilitated. Everyone needs to provide opportunities for bringing women's knowledge, awareness, sensitivity, insight, expertise and skill to bear in any situation that needs to be rectified or improved, whether collectively or individually.

However, I believe that ultimately no truly beneficial experience or accomplishment is denied one who is genuinely committed to Torah and mitzvot. When a change in society does elicit a legitimate Torah response,



this response does not mean a change in Torah values. On the contrary, it is an expression of the eternal viability of a God-given teaching. This Torah, both written and oral, is the supreme teaching which enables any Jew, man or woman, in any society or age, to fulfill his or her dual purpose in life—to both refine one's own being, as well as to sanctify a world in dire need of sanctification.

We Jews can hardly be a light unto the nations if we discount or diminish our own light of Torah. With the doors of education for women more open than ever before, there is a unique historical opportunity for women to appreciate and transmit this priceless wisdom, an opportunity for the *eishet hayil* which represents the feminine ideal and the *ishet hayil* which symbolizes Torah to merge into one. Women like Sarah Schenirer succeed in "mending the world—not in spite of their loyalty to Torah, but only because of it. "For the sake of righteous women, all the generations are redeemed."

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## NURIT FRIED

1. Exposing women to texts which heretofore were an exclusively male domain seems to me to be an extremely positive educational development for women and for the entire Torah community. Women delve into classic rabbinic texts not only to satisfy an intellectual need but also to attempt to fortify their spiritual personality and identify with the profound Jewish tradition which spans the generations. Modern secular feminism plays no role in this phenomenon. Rather, we are seeing groups of women striving to gain familiarity with the complete Jewish Library, something previously unattainable.

It is true that in the past the only source for knowledge and understanding of Jewish sources was the male scholar, the *talmid hakham*. But the current trend of women attempting to achieve fluency in the Talmud and the Shulhan Arukh with their commentaries without assistance is a new and blessed phenomenon in this generation.

2. In the ancient Jewish tradition, there is a difference between Torah study for women and men. As the men are the rabbis and *poskim*, it makes sense that from the earliest stages of their studies they should be completely exposed to and achieve fluency in rabbinic texts such as the Mishna, Talmud, Shulhan Arukh, etc.

Therefore, in my opinion, men should begin studying those sources at

an earlier age than should women. I think that a woman should study Mishna in elementary school and then, as she approaches junior high, she should begin to study Talmud. Taking into account the way in which a woman approaches studies, her personality, and her future home roles, I believe that the man's Torah study should concentrate primarily on Talmud while the woman should study Bible, Midrash, Halakha, Talmud, and Jewish Philosophy and she should deal with the various subjects as sub-categories of an organic whole.

Official positions for women in the Torah world are still limited. The possibilities today include education, even in institutions of higher education. Women can become advocates (*to'anut*) in rabbinic courts. This requires the study of Shulhan Arukh and Talmud. She can do research and achieve advanced degrees in all disciplines of Jewish Studies. In addition, the field of Jewish Jurisprudence (*Mishpat Ivri*) is open to the Jewish woman. The differences between the fields and methods of study open to Jewish men and women in no way reflect their respective intellectual abilities. In the licensing tests for rabbinic courts, women advocates scored on average twice as high as their male counterparts. Even so, men and women apparently differ in their respective methods of study and in the type of pleasure they derive from their learning. Traditional roles certainly play a role in this difference.

In our school, *shiurim* in Talmud—both *bekiut* and analytical—have been offered for women for the past several years, and the women who attend these *shiurim* follow the talmudic give and take as well as their male counterparts. Though the number of women attending these *shiurim* is constantly growing, the number of women ready or willing to devote their lives to the study of Torah remains low. The number of men who want to devote their lives to Torah and the number of women who want their husbands to continue to study Torah on a full-time basis even for a number of years after marriage is much greater.

3. "*Kol kevuda*" is an expression of a woman's modesty, but not as a dictate confining her to her home. In modern times, very few women do not work outside the home in one capacity or another and few do not study in some institution of higher learning. The phrase should now be interpreted as expressing the feminine ideal—less conspicuousness, less drawing of attention to oneself.

In the modern world, the borders between one's internal identity and the outside world have become blurred. Married women function on many planes, relating to their families, including spouses and children, as well as addressing their responsibilities to community, society, and career.

Modern society uses sex to advertise its products, and women are especially exploited in this manner. As a result a woman's struggle to maintain her uniqueness and inner sense of self is a thousand times more difficult than that of a man. She must utilize all of her energy and abilities to

develop her own personality, guide her family and serve the community in which she functions, perhaps even as a public or political personality. At the same time, she must battle all of those who would relate to her not as an independent personality with ability and talent, but rather as a sex object. Viewing women externally and taking advantage of them on the basis of selfish, external criteria is the opposite of "*kol kevuda*."

The challenge facing a woman much more so than her male counterpart in today's world is to concentrate on development and progress on all fronts without success in one coming at the expense of another. Secularism and promiscuity threaten the framework of the family and its viability, and it is primarily the woman's battle to revitalize the family unit. If a woman must choose, in my opinion the family must take precedence over all areas of endeavor. Maybe a new, modern definition of "*kol kevuda*" is that she must first invest her energy within the framework of the house and family and only thereafter outside the home.

4. Over the last number of years, women have assumed roles as the head of institutions previously led by men, and this is not limited to institutions of Jewish education. Today, women play leadership roles in national and local politics, banking and the judiciary; some women supervise staffs comprised totally of men. Male society has not yet learned to accept women in authority with equanimity. There are still places where women receive less pay for similar positions, though the situation is improving.

Personally, I am involved in the area of training women to serve as licensed advocates in rabbinic courts. The women excel in all aspects of their work—as scholars, psychologists and social workers rolled into one. Part of the rabbinic establishment and some of its constituent rabbis and *dayanim* have experienced great difficulty in adjusting to the new reality of women involved in the study of Halakha Law and Talmud. As a result, the women have encountered opposition. I believe that this too shall pass.

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## **BEVERLY GRIBETZ**

The question, "Is learning affected by gender?" came to me relatively late. I attended Yeshivat Ramaz, where boys and girls learn Talmud, like all their other subjects, together. My mother had studied Talmud at the Herzlia Hebrew Teachers Institute in the 1940s, and my grandmother had studied Talmud in the 1920s. It was only when I tried to continue my study of Talmud after high school that I encountered the stream in our tradition that

restricted women's study of *Torah shebe'al Peh* (so-called rabbinic literature). In those days, a generation ago, I was usually the only woman in the class.

The recent push for greater exposure to classic rabbinic texts for women in the traditional community can for me be nothing but a positive development. It may well be that the drive for higher levels of educational opportunity for women in the Torah community has been influenced by secular feminist concerns. Traditional Judaism has always integrated positive elements from the surrounding world and woven them into a distinctly Jewish fabric. In the traditional community, where public ritual is an area in which women do not see a place for themselves, learning serves a unique function for women who seek to enhance their religious participation.

As an educator, I do not believe that we should be determining curricula according to the gender of the student. The psychoeducational research on the subject is inconclusive. In a traditional Jewish context, any research would be skewed by the fact that the material that our boys and girls study, the sources of classical Judaism, is transmitted in the name of men and reflects a male point of view. The absence of female role models in the process of learning classical Jewish texts has surely been a factor influencing female students. My mentor and supervisor at Ramaz observed me teaching my co-ed seventh grade Talmud class recently. Among the many helpful and interesting things he later shared with me was his genuine surprise at the high level of engagement and participation of the girls. This was no surprise to me. My students, unlike the large majority of girls studying Talmud in yeshivot and day schools, have a female teacher with whom they can identify. If I can discuss Talmud, so can they.

The traditional interpretation of "*kol kevuda*" has, in my view, backfired against us. At a time when we wish to expand female roles in Jewish learning and religious life, we lack sufficient models. Jewish educators who wish to cultivate new female roles, must find and employ the women who exemplify them. Jewish women who have made learning their avocation, must "go public." Girls can, of course, learn much from men, as I have. But it is questionable if students can—or should—truly identify with teachers of the opposite sex.

In any event, I do not think we should educate our children according to any broad preconceptions, whether they relate to gender or to other kinds of categorization. We ought to look beyond group differences and the theories about them and focus on the individual. We must escape the macro-thinking that generalizes and attempt to educate each child at his or her micro-level, in his or her style, and work to make that learning as intensive as possible.

Nevertheless, the fact that girls are capable of learning Talmud as well as boys does not mean that girls do not tend to see things differently. I do not have systematic research, but I do have stories. *Ma'ase she'haya* (an

anecdote): I was teaching *Shabbat* 23b to an all-girls class at the Pelech High School in Jerusalem. The Gemara moves from the kindling of Shabbat lights to the kindling of Hanukka lights, and then presents the following *sugya*:

Rava said: It is obvious to me [that if one must choose between] *ner beito* ("the home light" = the Sabbath lights) and the Hanukka light, the former takes precedence on account of [the value of] *shelom beito* (peace at home). [If one must choose between] the home light and the Sanctification (*Kiddush*) of the Day (that is recited over wine), the home light takes precedence.

Rashi explains that the situation the *sugya* presupposes in this instance is a Shabbat that falls during Hanukka. What if a person cannot afford oil for both the Hanukka and the Shabbat kindling? Which takes precedence? The Talmud goes on to ask, in its typically associative style: What if on an ordinary Shabbat a person cannot afford both oil for the lights and wine for kiddush?

In both instances, the oil for the Shabbat lights takes precedence. The reason given is "peace at home." Rashi draws an explanation of the reason "peace at home" from a passage two pages below in the Gemara: the family would be unsettled—*mitztaarin*—to sit and eat in the dark on Shabbat. Where there is no light, there is no peace (Rashi, BT *Shabbat* 25b).

The first time I taught this passage, a young fifteen-year-old girl raised her hand and gave an interpretation at odds with Rashi's. The reason that the mitzva of kindling the Shabbat lights, which takes precedence over having wine for kiddush, produces "peace at home" is that this mitzva is one of the few that is reserved for women. If it were taken away, there would really be no peace at home. Recently I taught this passage again, to a class of women at a modern Orthodox synagogue in New York. This time an old and sage eighty-year-old woman raised her hand and suggested the same interpretation. The teenage girl and the older woman were doing what commentators throughout our history have done. They were looking deeply into their minds and hearts to uncover the truth that speaks to them.

Might a man have come up with the same insight as to the meaning of "peace at home?" I don't know. But I have no question about the fact that this interpretation enriches the text's meaning for us, for understanding how our lives intertwine with Judaism. That is, after all, the purpose of Jewish education: to make one of Torah and life.

Let us return to my Talmud class at Pelech. We began to discuss the halakhic decision holding that where one can only afford either oil or wine for Shabbat, one buys oil for kindling and makes kiddush over the halla. One of the girls said: "Oh, that's the *pesak halakha* that the old lady knew in the Bialik poem!" In a marvelous act of integrating her Hebrew literature material and the Talmud—and both subjects in turn with her life as an observant Jew—she evoked the poet's portrayal of his pious mother who, as Shabbat

approached, could find only two pennies, and knew she had to purchase candles. The particularity of a woman's experience within Judaism sheds unique light on the meaning of our texts and the relations between them.

The great developmental psychologist Carol Gilligan years ago criticized male colleagues who studied boys as the norm for their theories. She wrote that "adding a new line of interpretation based on the imagery of the girl's thought, makes it possible not only to see development where previously development was not discerned, but also to consider differences in understandings of relationships" (*In a Different Voice*, 1982, p. 25). Wouldn't adding a new line of interpreters—educated traditional Jewish women—enrich our own tradition with hitherto un(der)seen perspectives? Our Sages regarded the legitimate interpretations of later scholars to be the discovery of what is already there, at least by implication. If there are any differences between the psychologies of men and women, it can be expected that increased study of our sources by women could make it possible for us to see in them new patterns, new relationships, new outlooks (*hashkafot*), perhaps even new halakhot that are already there, awaiting discovery.

Those who would challenge the new movement towards opening up classical Jewish texts to women must ask themselves honestly what it is that they fear. Learning brings a share of power and authority to those who come to possess it. It also produces insight. Can those who take seriously the traditional value of extending the depth and influence of the Torah—*le'hagdil Torah uleha'adira*—fail to include the vast potential contribution of women, whose study and teaching of Torah will assuredly make a difference?

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## HESHY GROSSMAN

Present-day discussions on this theme often overlook an obvious question: how do men and women differ in Torah's eyes, and what are their respective roles in God's eternal scheme? Once this matter is understood, the differences in Torah study for men and women are seen to be natural, organic outgrowth of the way the classical Jewish tradition views the sexes.

The biblical difference between men and women is literally expressed in their given names, *ish* and *isha*. The letters *yod* and *heh* mark the differences in these names. The Talmud (*Menahot* 29b) says cryptically: "This world was created with the letter *heh*; the world to come, with the letter *yod*." Maharal and others write that the *yod*, the man's letter, represents the metaphysical, that which transcends the earth. Therefore the *yod*, a simple dot, floats above the line of text, for it symbolizes that which is devoid of such physical ballast as time, matter, or space. The letter of the world-to-

come, the *heh*, the woman's letter, is the direct counter-balance to the *yod*. It is the letter which is formed only by a breath. Just as God gave us life by breathing His breath into us, so every human utterance is formed by human breath. As such, the *heh* reflects the creation of the physical universe. The *yod* symbolizes the floating dot of transcendence, while the *heh* symbolizes maintenance of this earth. (Note that *yod* and *heh* in the same word form the name of God.)

That this mystical concept is rooted in reality is illustrated by calligraphy and biology. Calligraphy: the *heh* is rooted solidly on the line of text. This is the letter of the woman, not a nebulous dot suspended in space without earthly moorings—as is the *yod* of the man—but firmly planted within the boundaries of this world, the embodiment of the very breath of life. Further calligraphy: just as the written *heh* conceals within itself the transcendent *yod*, so does each woman conceal within herself the ability to combine the physical and the transcendent, and thus to imbue physical life with sanctity.

Biology: while the man provides the initial root of conception, the woman nurtures and develops the fetus into life, providing it with her own *heh*/breath of life. This pattern continues after birth. Man is the sustaining force behind the home; woman maintains the basic framework which brings the home's potential to fruition, nursing the children into maturity.

This partnership of heaven/man and earth/woman underlies the famous discussion in *Bava Metzia* 59a: "He who follows the advice of his wife falls into Gehenna. . . . But people say, "If your wife is short, bend to listen to her"? [The statements are reconciled, because] . . . this refers to heavenly matters, and this, to worldly matters." That is, in worldly matters, the husband must listen to her, because she alone is capable of carrying out God's plan in the physical world. Once again a careful balance is struck between the male and the female.

(This, according to our classical thinkers, is the meaning of the woman's blessing, *she-asani kiretzono*—loosely translated as "Who has made me according to His will." That is, she acknowledges God for having created her with the express purpose of actualizing God's will—*kiretzono*, literally, "as His will." That is, she carries His will into the temporal world. The man, on the other hand, whose ideal state is not of this world and whose essence yearns to escape from earthly restraints, recites the negatively worded "who has not made me a woman". That is, man's essence is rooted in transcendence and not on earth which is represented by *isha*.)

Thus, traditional gender classification and even biological gender differences are merely surface paradigms for deeper metaphysical differences. An understanding of these different creation-roles makes it clear, for example, that if men emphasize *Torah sheb'al peh* and women do not, this is not due to some obtuse masculine desire for power, any more than the

woman's—and not the man's—ability to conceive a child reflects a feminine desire for power. In each case it is a reflection of the way God structured His creation.

All of which leads to the issue at hand: Torah study has two purposes. Firstly, knowledge of Torah is the basis for living by the Torah and is the source of moral values. An ignorant Jew, man or woman, can hardly live a halakhic life without knowledge. In this regard, we study Torah in order to know what to do and how to behave.

But Torah study, specifically Talmud study, has another purpose as well—to direct man's consciousness towards transcendent, non-worldly concerns. The oft-heard complaint regarding the impracticality of Talmud study is thus totally off the mark, since the purpose of Talmud study is not merely to know what to do. For this, one studies Shulhan Arukh. Further, it is not knowledge per se that is the focal point of Talmud study. Rather, it is the act of study itself that is the focal point—not this-earthly, but transcendent; not utilitarian, but simply engaging in a non-earthly abstraction.

This dual purpose of Torah study—knowing how to live as a Jew on earth, and study as an exercise in non-earthly concerns—reflects the different roles of women and men in creation.

While the success of the man is measured by the extent to which his mind is occupied with Torah, the success of the woman is measured by the extent to which she gives material life to that Torah.

Certainly a woman's mind is capable of comprehending Talmudic analysis. This is not the issue. The issue is that Talmud study—*Torah sheb'al peh*—symbolizes un-actualized ideas—and is not congruent with the woman's role of "actualizer-on-this-earth."

For this reason, the "current calls for greater exposure of women to classic rabbinic texts" strikes an artificial note—not because women should be barred from the texts or because they cannot absorb them. The texts are not the issue. Those "calls" not only echo secularist concerns; they also reveal an oversight of the most basic aspects of the Torah itself, which is that the differing roles of men and women in creation result in differing roles in the study of that Torah which is the blueprint of creation. The most esoteric and advanced of rabbinic texts will not truly educate women unless this basic concept is understood.

Obviously, a genuine search for self-realization can only be helpful, but I fear that a glossing over of these gender roles has led us instead to the tragic situation described in Question Three.

. . .

If we are to seriously confront the siren calls of society's current norms, we must give our students an original sense of Jewish self-respect.



How to do this? Here is a scaled-down sample lesson designed to help us understand the significant concepts of “princess,” “glory,” and “within” of “*kol kevuda*.”

Firstly, this phrase is echoed in Proverbs 25:2: “*Kevod Elohim haster davar*, the glory of God is in concealing the matter.” What is the connection between the *kavod*/glory of Ps. 45 and Prov. 25, and concealment and inwardness?

The word *kavod* is related to *kaved*, “heavy, difficult to move” as opposed to *kal*, “light, lightheaded, easily moved,” and *kalon*, “degradation.”

Application: a *kaved*/weighty item remains rooted in place, and does not sway in every wind. He or she has “weight”—that is, *gravitas* and value—the true meaning of honor or glory. In contrast, the light-headed person, without honor and glory, is rootless and sways with every wind. He or she has no *kavod*. This person reflects today’s society, emphasizing external things, physical beauty, worshipping the vulgar and the tawdry—which are always evanescent. In a light-headed, flighty, non-*kavod* society, innerness is mocked and degraded—the meaning of *kalon*.

The Torah way is to reject such external “lightness” and to develop the *kavod* which is concealed *penima*—within the princess. This inner bedrock invests the princess with weightiness, *gravitas*, consequence, identity. This is Proverbs 25: “the glory of God is in concealing the matter.” Divine *kavod*—honor, glory, worth, dignity—is concealed. The Ark is covered with the *parokhet*. The *kavod* is within.

Thus, when the person dresses modestly, she is stating that she possesses *kavod*, and that she deliberately conceals and de-emphasizes her body which is merely an external adornment of her essence and which does not accurately reflect her individual and unique personhood. She reveals only her face—the only part of her which reflects her individual self (for *panim*, “face,” and *penim*, “within,” are the same word and is that which distinguishes her from others.) By doing this, she actualizes her true identity and connects herself to her divine roots, her *tselem Elohim*.

Modesty in dress and demeanor is thus a reflection of her unique personhood, and is a rejection of the idea that she is a thing or object. This is why the Psalmist emphasizes *bat melekh*, “princess,” and not the male prince—who, to be sure, must also be modest—because it is the woman rather than the man who is often demeaned and transformed into a valueless physical object, used and discarded.

From all this there flows a natural and profound appreciation of internal qualities like *tzeniut*, *hesed*, and piety. Once educators understand this, our disciples will follow our model. But if we ourselves are victimized by today’s slogans, our students will get the message very quickly.

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## TZIPORAH HELLER

The current growth of women's learning is the logical outgrowth of the view expounded by the Hafetz Haim, which is that the simplicity of approach that characterized women's relationship to Judaism can no longer be maintained in a world in which greater departure from faith has been coupled with greater reliance on the acquisition of information. The skepticism that accompanies the modern age is, by its nature, a factor that is part of the reality of exile at its spiritual worst. It is a phenomenon created by the modern world's pervasive materialism. Responses to various challenges of the exiles, however, have been factors in ultimately enriching us as a people. Arguably, the Mussar and Hasidic movements, for example, were responses to the Enlightenment, on the one hand, and to the unspeakable oppression suffered in consequence of the Chmielnitzky uprising, on the other.

The increase of depth and the vision of spiritual reality caused by the great expansion of women's intellectual horizons have had far reaching results—not only for women, but for the entire Jewish people. As the Ohr ha-Haim taught, in the course of our exiles we redeem the sparks or dimensions of holiness that are within the societies that we encounter.

Similarly, *Pri Tzaddik* understood the adage of the Sages that "Israel was only exiled in order to lead them to making converts," to refer not necessarily to the actual conversions of gentiles, which has always been discouraged, but to the integration of what must be brought to the Jewish people via the circuitous route of exile.

The rise of secular feminism has brought to the observant community not the idealization of study of Torah as a path toward God, but an approach that comes very close to a rebellion against those very goals. When learning is used to actualize a very secular "self," it is no longer a path to Hashem. Motivation is important. Thus, for example, there was a negative rabbinic response to Mendelssohn's translation of the Torah and a most positive response to translation done by R. Aryeh Kaplan.

Therefore, we should be completely honest about motivations when discussing each individual educational situation. In my own experience, people are almost always sincere, with the voices that are less than sincere easily recognizable by the vociferous rage that characterizes their relationship not only to the decisors of halakha, but ultimately to the Torah itself.

The word "torah" means teaching, i.e., instruction in how one's life should be lived. The creation story itself leaves little room for the idealization of androgyny. Similarly, the fact is that the positive mitzvot, which, as the Gaon of Vilna points out, are meant to express one's most genuine self, are not identical for men and women. This tells us that, if nothing else, the Torah does not condone the blurring of gender roles. The focus therefore should be in tune with the unique dynamic specific to each group. The

greater capacity that women have for insight and faith should be reflected in the curricula accessible to them. By the nature of things, such classes can be both intellectually compelling and spiritually inspiring. Which specific texts are used, in my opinion, has less significance than the underlying principle that it address itself unapologetically to areas of Torah that are most in tune with the *bina yetera* given to women, and that it be intellectually compelling. Needless to say, common areas that men and women share, such as knowledge of the practical halakhot relevant to their lives, should be similar, if not in style, certainly in content.

As stated earlier, the mitzvot reflect one's genuine self; Jewish society has developed along lines reflecting the Torah. If we are not prophets, we are the children of prophets. Jewish society in the broad historic sense reflects the Torah's truth. The fact that women and men develop spiritually along different lines is viewed as inherent and positive. This fact is reflected by Torah society and is not created by Torah society.

Enormous contributions have been made by both men and women. *Tseniut*, which Maharal would define as a relationship to the eternal world as opposed to the superficial world, has been an area in which women have historically excelled. We must stop apologizing for *tсениut* in a promiscuous world! Rather than simply decry the decay of a liberal society in which spiritual values have no status, we must learn to spark our own yearnings for values that have more endurance and meaning. When we create educational systems that reflect pride in taking a role that is more defined by *pnimiut* (innerness), many life questions concerning career choices, leadership roles etc. will be answered more readily by women themselves. The fact is that women themselves will see the many "grey" areas as situations in which counsel should be sought (without an already existent agenda). In those cases where the woman herself is deciding her own position, she will at least use the the following formula: What am I losing by way of channeling my energy outward, and what am I gaining thereby?

In a place and time in which we inculcate our daughters in genuine and sincere regard for *pnimiut*, the decisions will be harder than they are at this time—and more honest.

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## CHANA HENKIN

1. The development of serious Torah study opportunities in recent years has encouraged a remarkably large number of women of all ages and backgrounds toward Torah learning. This phenomenon has manifested itself on every level. Women with very limited backgrounds, who previously might

have contented themselves with an occasional class with the rabbi, are seeking the exhilaration of direct confrontation with an understanding of the sources. Gifted Orthodox young women who, as recently as a decade ago, for lack of alternative might have turned to doctoral work in Bible or Jewish History at a secular university or to careers in law and the sciences, are today seeking Torah study at the highest level. Grandmothers, who despite long-standing observance and piety never had the opportunity to develop textual conversance, can today be found studying *b'havruta* with college students. Educated women have become unwilling to see Judaism play a progressively diminished role in their lives, the inevitable consequence of increased secular education and stagnant Jewish achievement.

There are parallels between the developments we are witnessing today and the genesis of the Bait Yaakov movement in the 1920's which resulted from the introduction of compulsory secular education in Poland. Yet today, who does not praise day-school education for our daughters? Present developments likewise bear the sociological imprint of our times, and, in the case of women's Torah study, the objective result is blessed.

2. We live in an increasingly intellectual and non-religious society where building a religious personality, and one's very relationship with God, demands a firsthand appreciation of the richness of the fabric of Torah. To some extent, we are all reflective today, with intellectual examination supplementing an organic and naive religious faith. If, in the past, learning was the result of personal piety, today personal piety is often the outgrowth of learning.

It is fatuous, therefore, in our day and age to distinguish between the necessary depth of men's and women's education, as if women's learning were merely a question of mastering externals of ritual. *Hechsher mitzva*, the rationale for women's learning, must be broadly interpreted today to include not only the detail of ritual but that learning which will enhance the quality of observance and the relationship with the Almighty. A woman who studies *Arvei Pesachim* will observe the seder with greater joy, devotion, and religious sensibility. A woman who studies *Yoreh Dea* will observe the laws of *kashrut* with greater application and appreciation.

To me, however, although I believe women should study Talmud, the primary question is not *what* women should study, but *how* women should study. Traditionally, men have studied from the sources, with emphasis upon extensive self-study, usually *b'havruta*. It is this primary textual confrontation which leads to textual competency and analytical maturity, as well as to the study habits which foster life-long Torah learning. Women, on the other hand, traditionally have been taught through lectures, with the basic—not auxilliary—tool of study being the pencil and notebook and today, the tape recorder. Women have been spared the burden of analysis. Texts were often used in order to review material already presented rather

than for independent mastery. This is a mode of study which ought to be retired. A class which is based upon prior preparation of sources will be better appreciated and retained, and on a far higher level.

The halakhic question of women's Torah study has been addressed by others, most recently by my husband, Rav Yehuda Henkin, in a *teshuva* written to my students at Nishmat and published in *Hadarom* (#61, Elul 5752). Might I only add that the classic authorities *Sefer haHinukh* and *Birkei Yosef* make theoretical provision for women scholars, even *poskot*. Women qualified to answer *Nidda* questions would certainly make a significant contribution to Torah observance today, and we should work to qualify such women.

On the other hand, there is today a diversity in curriculum for women which should be maintained even as new emphases and modes of study are introduced. There should be continued study of *Humash*, *Nakh*, and Jewish Thought beside *Torah shebe'al peh*, on all levels.

3. The glory of the Jewish woman has been in the home not because of an ideology of reclusiveness, but because her Torah education—*ein kavod ela Torah*—was in the home, and her nurture of family was, and remains, in the home. Few women are less reclusive than the *Eshet Hayil* in *Mishlei* who engages in commerce, bids successfully for real estate, and invests her earnings in viniculture while attending faithfully to her family, and of whom it is said, "Her forearm she extended to seek out the needy . . . her mouth she opened in wisdom and the doctrine of lovingkindness was on her tongue."

There is a tendency to wrongly limit the arena of *tzeniut* to women and to dress. *Tzeniut* is rather our entire demeanor before God. "*Hatznea Lekhet im Elokekha*"—only one who walks with his God, "*lekhet im Elokekha*," who possesses a sense of meaning and mission larger than himself, can walk modestly in all areas of life.

We do not educate toward *tzeniut*, *hesed* and piety in a vacuum. The assault on all three comes from the progressive selfishness of modern society, and the orientation away from the family is a facet of this. *Hesed* is deferring to the needs of others. Piety is deferring to the wishes of the Almighty. *Tzeniut* is deferring to a sense of higher purpose, and viewing one's talents, possessions, and the very gift of life as tools not for indulgence and self-display but for a higher purpose.

In order to educate successfully toward *tzeniut*, *hesed* and piety, we must moderate our own quest for material achievement. When a child reaches the age of mitzvot, do we send the child a message of obligation or of ostentation? When a child marries, can we rejoice and meet our social obligations with fewer expenses and more *tzedaka*?

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## AVROHOM DOVID OPPEN

I will address myself exclusively to Question 3, which encompasses the key issues of Jewish education for women. My response will contain the kernel of how I would address the balance of the questions.

The question emphasizes the contrast of *tzeniut* to promiscuity, *chesed* to self-indulgence, and piety to secularism. In that vein, when the problem is presented as a battle against the secularism, promiscuity and self-indulgence of today, the chances of properly educating young women seem slim. However, perhaps the way to successful education lies in viewing our educational task in just the opposite manner. Perhaps instead of looking at what abounds around us, we should focus above—on our responsibility to our Creator.

*Mesilat Yesarim* states that there is only one purpose for which we were placed in this world, and that is to prepare for the ultimate good and reality which is the next world. A parent or educator has to make certain that the student is primarily imbued with this truth. All else has to fit into this formula. In other words, a person must ask himself about every decision he makes: "Will what I do enhance my *Olam Haba* or not? If it will, then I can do it, and if it will not, then I cannot do it." Once that simple yet profound approach to living is properly inculcated into students, then meeting the challenging and troubling areas of education become much easier.

Of course, the initial premise of living according to this formula might indeed be more difficult than any other area of education, but when this is kept in mind, one finds it easier to educate towards *tzeniut*, *chesed* and piety no matter what the world around us is like. That does not mean that the temptations disappear, but with the proper education, they can be met and overcome.

"*Kol Kevuda*" means that anything of value only retains its worth if it is treated as something valuable. By definition, the value of an object is a function of its availability. That which is common is of little value. A princess who wishes to retain her honor and respect will not regularly mingle and occupy herself with the common chores of the fishwives and washerwomen—otherwise she will, in very short order, be considered as just another fishwife. She must remain within the palace walls. When she does emerge, she must do so as a princess, and she will remain a princess wherever she goes because she realizes that she is different and unique. The more the princess remains distinctive, the more she will be respected as the princess.

A Jewish woman has to realize that she is a princess, distinct and different from those around her. The initial stage of such education has to begin with teaching our children to feel pride in the fact that Hashem chose us from among all the nations to be His special people. We should never let our children feel that we are really just like everyone else except that we

have the “burden” of being Jewish. A member of the king’s court feels privileged to be part of the king’s court, even if it involves extra burdens and responsibilities.

There has always been promiscuity to one degree or another, whether it was in ancient Canaan, Babylon, the Greek and Roman empires, or contemporary times. Perhaps the promiscuity was not greatly publicized, but it was always there. And the Jewish woman who viewed herself as the princess she was and as a servant of Hashem did not find this fact any more of a challenge than any other.

The formula for today is unchanged: be proud that you are a Jewess. Act like you are the daughter of the King. Do not degrade yourself by acting in a common manner—certainly not by doing that which would anger the King himself. If the uniform of the King’s court requires married women to cover their hair and to wear modest clothing, then one who is in the servant of the King, or who is in the King’s inner circle, and especially one who is the King’s daughter, would not want to wear anything different. She would be proud to wear the uniform. The key is to instill the sense that it is a privilege to be the daughter of the King.

The same applies to every area of piety; if this is what Hashem desires, then I do it. My function in this world, after all is said and done, is simply—and profoundly—to live according to the will of my Creator.

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## DAVID SILBER

1. To question whether the explosion of Jewish educational opportunities for women is “natural and positive” or “simply an intrusion of current secular feminist concerns” is misguided and historically naive. The question presupposes the existence of a pristine Judaism and confuses origin with value.

A pristine Judaism, completely isolated from the outside world and completely free of outside influences, has never existed. The Rambam views many of our *mitzvot*—even many of those mentioned explicitly in the Torah—as responses to non-Jewish society and its practices. Our interpretations of the Torah have also been influenced by the outside world. The genre of *parshanut*, extended and sustained commentary on the Torah so familiar to us from the pages of *mikra’ot gedolot*, was influenced by the precedent of Roman glosses, Islamic commentaries, and Christian exegesis. *Peshat parshanut* developed, in part, when commentators such as Ibn Ezra consciously employed the linguistic insights of Islamic scholars. Often, we

cannot even determine whether a particular trend within Judaism has its roots in Jewish or non-Jewish soil.

But there is a far more troubling assumption behind the question. The question assumes that the origin of a phenomenon in Judaism is necessarily an indication of its value. A “natural” development in Judaism is clearly “positive,” whereas a trend deriving from the non-Torah world is “simply an intrusion.” I don’t know whether we can determine with any certainty whether the increased demand for women’s exposure to classical rabbinic texts derives from within or without the Torah community. But even if we pinpointed a foreign origin, would such a determination tell us much about the value of these new demands and educational opportunities? Most of us in the centrist Orthodox community would not dismiss Zionism simply because it was developed by irreligious Jews and was influenced by 19-century nationalism. Why should we dismiss new kinds of study for women simply because the demand for this study may have originated in the secular world?

Every phenomenon deserves to be analyzed and evaluated in its own right. We all believe that Torah study is an essential component in the life of a committed Jew. In my view, anything that allows more Jews to engage in more Torah study is positive.

2. The purpose of education is to prepare people to function in a positive and active way in the world in which they live. For the centrist Orthodox community, this means giving children the ability to function in both the Torah community and in general society, and the ability to integrate these two worlds without simply accepting or rejecting the values of secular culture. Since our daughters as well as our sons live in both the Jewish world and the secular world, we must equip boys and girls equally for the challenges ahead of them. Girls and boys should receive the same education through twelfth grade.

I do not accept the argument that boys and girls are innately different and should therefore receive different kinds of education. While studies have shown different strengths in boys and girls, we still do not know whether the results reflect nature of nurture. Furthermore, the distinction between girls as a category and boys as a category pales next to the vast distinctions between individuals—male or female—sitting next to each other in a classroom. Education, after all, is ideally about the individual child, not about categories or groups of people. We should be less concerned about how to teach Girl and Boy than about how to address each child’s individual strengths and weaknesses, regardless of gender.

Through twelfth grade, both girls and boys should receive a basic grounding in all areas of Jewish textual study, including Tanakh, Mishna, and Gemara, and a good foundation in general studies. Above all, we must be sure to ask our children to *think*; they should come away with the feel-



ing that Torah *makes sense*. We are asking our children, after all, to function in a world where very little is taken on faith.

Beyond their basic education, young men and young women should both be afforded the full range of opportunities in the world of Jewish learning and scholarship. This means that no area of inquiry should be closed off to either gender, and that individuals, once they have acquired the basic, should do what they do best. Only by maximizing their gifts can people gain the sense of fulfillment that enriches their lives as well as the life of their community.

In practical terms, this means that a woman who demonstrates an aptitude in Talmud should be given the same opportunities to learn that are now generally given only to men.

There is another reason why women should be afforded the full range of opportunities in Jewish textual study. Our educational system is in dire need of outstanding teachers—individuals who are knowledgeable, committed, idealistic and broad-minded—and creating an environment that produces such teachers should be the number one priority of the North American Jewish community. By providing women with the most advanced learning opportunities, we have an opportunity to increase the number of truly outstanding teachers and to present a greater variety of positive role models for our community.

If we want the best and brightest to choose a life of learning and teaching, we must provide opportunities for greatness. At present, learning opportunities for women do not allow them to the great.

3. I must confess that I do not understand why this question appears in your issue on women and Jewish education. *Tseniut*, *hesed*, and piety are crucial aspects of the education we give our children, but they have nothing to do with girls or boys in particular. *Both* girls and boys need to learn and develop each of these qualities.

My following remarks about “values education,” therefore, relate equally to boys and girls. The most important and effective source of “values education” is the home. The home, after all, is where most of the behavior comes from. If the school is truly interested in teaching values (or in teaching anything, for that matter), there must be communication between the home and the school. The school must involve the family in the child’s education.

In the school itself, the most effective means of conveying values is the behavior of teachers and administrators. Children learn values by seeing them practiced in the school. And what I mean by the behavior of teachers and administrators goes far beyond the need for them to be sympathetic. We need to take a harsh look at the very structure of our educational system and think critically about the values that we impart to our children through that structure. Children are especially sensitive to inconsistencies

between the values professed by the school and the actual practices of the school. A school that professes the centrality of Torah but is chiefly concerned with getting kids into Ivy League schools will have trouble producing individuals with a life-long commitment to Torah. A school that professes interest in the individual child but focusses on standardized test scores will have trouble producing graduates with a nuanced sensitivity for those around them. A school that professes the importance of communication but encourages students to direct their comments only to the teacher will have trouble producing people who know how to talk to each other.

To truly teach values, we have to rethink and reshape the very structure of our schools. It is perhaps here that values education and women's education in fact interface. Women's issues are forcing us to reassess the practices and goals of our schools, and therefore provide us with an opportunity to create authentic centers of spiritual, intellectual, and ethical development.

4. The only special problem or limitation that women face in their new roles is the attitude of a community which views them as secondary figures. As women assume leadership roles and positions of real authority in the field of education, and in the Jewish community generally, these attitudes will change.

The radical transformation of the role of women has created a crisis in the Jewish community. Some members of the Jewish community view this transformation with varying degrees of apprehension or alarm, and they call for vigilance and retrenchment in the face of a foreign attack on Jewish values. I view this transformation and the crisis it has engendered as a necessary challenge and an unparalleled opportunity for the Jewish community.

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