



Fraida Blau

Woman's Place in Torah Study

Every word, every letter of Torah is filled with sanctity and has a profound influence on the soul of anyone who engages in its study.

Women are not without this need.

Housewife . . . Mother . . . Secretary . . . Administrator . . . Storekeeper . . . Saleslady . . . Think for a moment. When was the last time you opened a *sefer*? Was it yesterday? Last week? Or was it perhaps years ago—when you last studied for your final exams?

Unfortunately, many girls view their Bais Yaakov diplomas as a formal farewell to serious Torah study. After all, they assume, women have no obligation to learn Torah, and therefore are exempt from this, our greatest *mitzva*.

Torah is the life force of Judaism that forms us into a unique and holy people, and is meant to be studied by women, too. Every word, every letter is filled with *kedusha* and has a profound influence on the *neschama* of anyone who engages in its study. Women are not without this need.

A Share in the Merit

In fact, the *Gemora* in *Brachos* asks, "What merit do women possess [to be revived at *techiyas hameisim*—when the dead will be resurrected]?" The *Gemora* replies: "They permit their husbands to study Torah and await their homecoming, and they accompany their children to *cheder*."

Mrs. Blau, a *Monsey* housewife, is indebted to her husband, Rabbi Nosson Binjamin Blau, for the sources on which this article is based.

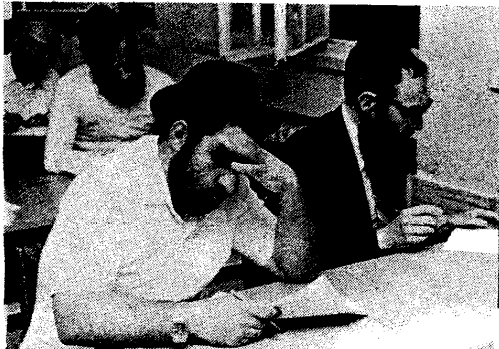
Asks the *Tashbatz*, "Why not credit them with the merit for the many *mitzvos* that are unique to them?"—and then explains: "While it is true that women do perform many *mitzvos*, the Torah is so vital for eternal life that we must find a *mitzva*-activity directly connected to Torah-study as a prime source of merit for them."

In the time of the *Gemora*, women apparently gained sufficient knowledge and inspiration from their environment and non-structured activity to lead a Torah life without resorting to formal study, but they still required Torah study as a vital source of merit, and for this they relied on their indirect involvement. Today, such a level of involvement may not be sufficient.

This is not as radical as it may sound, for in truth, women have been actively involved in some form of Torah study for millennia. They were included in the *mitzva* of *Hakheil*, when every seven years, men, women, and children gathered in Jerusalem to hear the king read *Mishna Torah* (*Sefer Devarim*). The men came to learn, we are told, while the women were expected to listen—a term that implies comprehension, not just hearing. The impact of the knowledge and inspiration of that gathering was strong enough to last seven years.

The *Sefer Chassidim* points out that some women made Torah study a more frequent experience. When the Shunamite woman told her husband that she was going to see the Prophet Elisha, he questioned her: "Is today

**Imagine a Kolel with 1300
Talmidim Around the World,
Whose Goal is to Produce a
Generation of "SHAS YIDEN".**



Mifal Hashas is an organization founded by the **SANZ-KLAUZENBERGER REBBE SHLITA**, which to-date has over 1,300 "yungeleit" on its payroll whose only requirement is that they submit to a stringent written test each Rosh Chodesh — covering 30 "blatt of gemora and tosfos.

Acclaimed by the Gedolim as a *modern-day Yisachar/Zevulun investment opportunity*, **Mifal Hashas** looks to you to take part in this most ambitious undertaking.

Sponsorships are available to those who wish to take a partnership role in producing a generation of yungeleit who can recite—"gantz shas".

- \$150 Shutaf Hatorah — Torah Partner
- \$ 75 Parnes Hatorah — Torah Sponsor
- \$ 36 Mokir Torah — Torah Donor
- \$ 18 Chai Torah Supporter

עץ חיים היא למחזיקים בה

Make Contributions payable to Mifal Hashas
MIFAL HASHAS
4606 — 16th Avenue
Brooklyn, N.Y. 11204
(212) 436-7790

then *Rosh Chodesh* or *Shabbos* that you are going to hear a Torah lecture?" Apparently, it was her practice to attend Torah lectures regularly.

There are other indications throughout Jewish literature of women's involvement in study, such as the reference to the cannisters that served as "traffic dividers," to prevent the mingling of men and women—during Torah lectures, according to some commentaries. Obviously, the women of Talmudic times attended Torah classes in sufficient number and frequently enough to warrant such safeguards. (*Kiddushin* 81)

Beyond the Exemption

There is plenty of evidence in historical sources that Jewish women were always literate, for they were tutored by their mothers, aunts, or grandmothers. Only formal classroom education did not exist in earlier millennia.

Today, too, Torah study should be part of a woman's routine. Every morning, both men and women are required to recite the *bracha* "la'asok B'divrei Torah—to be occupied with the words of Torah." Not focused on merely listening to Torah, the *bracha* emphasizes being actively engaged in Torah study. True, the *Siddur* provides everyone, man and woman, with minimum Torah passages to follow the *bracha*, but there is certainly more for every person to study as is required for most men, and as is recommended for most women.

This may seem to be in direct contradiction to the classic *drash* on the *pasuk*, "You should teach your sons (*Devorim* 6:7)—but not your daughters." This limitation, however, refers to the Oral Law, which women are not obligated to study in the same manner as men are. But women are obligated to study those matters that pertain to them, says the *Bais Yosef*. In fact, *Sefer Chassidim* maintains that a father is *required* to teach his daughter *halacha*, and rather than limit himself to those areas that pertain exclusively to women, he should guide her to mastery of all *halachos* that apply to her. As verification, the author cites the description of the high level of Torah scholarship during the time of *Chizkiyahu*: Everybody, including women and children, knew the laws of

KARKA IN ISRAEL

Take advantage of the opportunity to purchase cemetery plots in Eretz Yisroel in Migash Shimon, near Yerushalayim, through our newly established

CHEVRA OSEF CHESED OF AGUDATH ISRAEL

Membership in the Chevra entitles one to all benefits which accompany the services of a Chevra Kaddisha and interment. When you purchase a plot from the Chevra Osef Chessed of Agudath Israel, you are supporting the many Agudist activities, especially the Pircher and Bnos activities as well as a Free Loan Fund in Israel.

(212) 791-1500

THE CHOFETZ CHAIM ON WOMEN'S TORAH STUDY

It would seem to me that this (limitation on women's study of Torah) only pertains to those times when everyone lived in the same place that his ancestors lived, and the ancestral tradition was very strong for each individual. This motivated him/her to conduct his/her life in the ways of his forefathers. Nowadays, however, when the tradition of forefathers has weakened and many people do not live close to their parents, and especially in view of the many who have had a secular education, it is necessary to teach them the entire Bible, *Mussar*, *Avos*, *Menoras Hamaor* (ethical writings of our sages), and so on, so they will be strong in the principles of our holy faith. Otherwise, G-d forbid, they may totally abandon the path of G-d, and violate all the *mitzvos* (*Likutei Halachos*, *Sotah* 20a).

Taharos (ritual cleanliness) and of *Korbanos* (Temple sacrifices), which are of universal application. This level is often cited as the ideal every Jewish society should strive to achieve.

"The More Things Change . . ."

The categories of what women should study have not changed over the years, but as the Chofetz Chaim explained [see box], the amounts have. This should not be taken to mean that the *halacha* has changed. Rather, women always have been obligated to acquire both sufficient knowledge and enough inspiration to dedicate themselves to live in accordance with Torah. Many years ago, they could rely on our strong, viable tradition for their needs, and there was no necessity to teach women Torah in today's broader and more formal format. They never studied the Oral Law, and only approached the Written Law when it was deemed essential for them. (See *Rambam in Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah*).

In his day, the Chofetz Chaim recognized that women had need to increase their Torah study—in *halacha* for practical guidance and in Scripture and *Mussar* for inspiration. Today, when we are constantly being bombarded by influences that do violence to Torah values, women certainly should make a greater effort to study Torah than ever before, but in the same prescribed areas. The goals, and the areas to be studied to reach these goals, do not vary. Only what and how much should be covered does.

The Chofetz Chaim was not alone in his contention that the strongest weapon to combat alien influences is *limud HaTorah*. Six hundred years earlier, the *Rambam* stated: "Lewd and illicit thoughts only enter a heart that is void of Torah." There are no vacuums in life. Space

will be filled, and if it is not filled with Torah, it will be taken by thoughts that are contrary to Torah. This is a concern that should touch everyone.

"A Little Knowledge . . ."

Just one word of warning: In the last paragraph of *Shmoneh Esrei*, we pray to Hashem: "My soul should be as dust to all, open my heart to your Torah." According to one interpretation of this passage, only if we see ourselves as dust, as nothing, can we become proper utensils for Torah. Humility is a basic prerequisite for the successful acquisition of Torah. Unfortunately, some women who have learned "some" Torah become arrogant, and their Torah knowledge serves to corrupt their character. Such women are definitely misusing their knowledge, for the purpose of Torah learning is to improve character, to make a person more humble and sincere.

Priorities

The approaches may undergo change from generation to generation, but they still lead to the same goals. A Torah-study frame of reference can bring fresh meaning to a woman's seemingly endless mundane chores, and certainly can give her the spiritual uplift she so desperately needs for her most sacred task—the *chinuch* of her children. Indeed, the fruits of Torah study may well provide her with the necessary element to help transform her home atmosphere into one of *kedusha* and *Yiras Shomayim*—sanctity and fear of G-d.

So it is time for all good women to grab a rag, wipe off that thick layer of dust from their old *seforim* and renew their Torah study. Not only will they be enriched personally from this great experience, they will also enrich the lives of all those dearest to them. ❧

תשמ"ה

לשנה טובה תכתבו ותחתמו
Best Wishes to all our
friends and relatives
for a Happy, Healthy and
Prosperous New Year

Mr. and Mrs.
Alan Jay Rosenberg
Kew Gardens, N.Y.