



# ת כ ע י ט י כ ל ה

(זוהר אמור צח)

## A TIKKUN LEIL SHAVUOT READER FROM DERACHEHA



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# Tikkun Leil Shavuot

## A Night of Torah

### Why should someone stay up to learn Torah on Shavuot night?

Shavuot is *Zeman Matan Torateinu*, the time of receiving our Torah. There are various customs associated with the holiday. One of the more Torah-oriented ones is staying up all night to study Torah.

This practice has its earliest roots in the Zohar:

זוהר ויקרא, אמור צח. חסדי קדמאי לא הוו ניימי בהאי ליליא והוו לעאן באורייתא ואמרי נייתי לאחסנא ירותא קדישא לן ולבנן... וההוא ליליא כנסת ישראל אתעטרא עלייהו ואתיא לאדווגא ביה במלכא ר"ש [=רבי שמעון] הכי אמר בשעתא דמתכנשי חברייא בהאי ליליא לגביה נייתי לתקנא תכשיטי כלה בגין דתשתכח למחר בתכשיטה ותקונהא לגבי מלכא כדקא יאות

Zohar Emor 98a

The ancient pious ones would not sleep on that night but would study the Torah and say "Let us come take possession of the inheritance holy to us and our children...." That night, the Congregation of *Yisrael* is adorned, and comes to couple with the King.... R. Shimon said thus when fellows gathered with him that night: "Let us come to affix [*le-takna*] the jewels of the bride so that tomorrow she will be found in her jewels and her adornments for the King, as is fitting.

In kabbalistic works, Torah can be referred to as a *tachshit*, a jewel. According to the Zohar, the pious learn Torah on Shavuot night in order to adorn or bejewel the *keneset Yisrael*, the metaphysical essence of the Jewish people past and present, in preparation for her wedding with God, i.e., renewing the covenant of Sinai.

The introduction to the Zohar tells us that learning on Shavuot also grants a person the merit of being like an indispensable attendant to the wedding at Sinai:

זוהר, הקדמה ח. ... אמר לון רבי שמעון בני זכאה חולקכון בגין דלמחר לא תעול כלה לחופה אלא בהדייכו בגין דכלהו דמתקנין תקונהא בהאי ליליא וחדאן בה כלהו...

Zohar Introduction, 8a

Rabbi Shimon said to them: meritorious is your portion in that tomorrow the bride will only go up to the Chuppa together with you, because everyone adorned her this evening and delighted with her for all of it ...

Arizal adds that a person who stays up all Shavuot night to learn Torah will come to no harm in the coming year.<sup>1</sup>

With incentive on that order, the practice eventually spreads beyond kabbalistic circles. In the seventeenth century, Magen Avraham offers a more straightforward rationale for it, based on a midrash. The midrash states that God found *benei Yisrael* asleep when it was time to give Israel the Torah:

שיר השירים רבה א:יב ישנו להם ישראל כל אותו הלילה לפי ששינה של עצרת עריבה הלילה קצרה, ... בא הקדוש ברוך הוא ומצאן ישנים התחיל מעמיד עליהם בקלאנין



הה"ד [=הדא הוא דכתיב] ויהי ביום השלישי בהיות הבקר ויהי קולות וברקים... א"ר  
 יצחק זה הוא שמקנתרן על ידי ישעיהו שנאמר (ישעיה נ') מדוע באתי ואין איש קראתי  
 ואין עונה...

Shir Ha-shirim Rabba 1:12

Israel slept all that night because sleep on Shavuot is sweet and the night is short...God came and found them asleep. He began to approach them with noises. That is what is written "And it was on the third day when it was morning and there were sounds and lightning" (Shemot 19:16)...Rav Yitzchak said: This is what they are criticized for by Yeshaya (50:2), as it is said, "Why did I come and there is no man, I called and there is no response..."

The noise that accompanied the giving of Torah served in part to awaken *benei Yisrael* for that momentous event! Beyond that, though, Yeshaya chastises *benei Yisrael* for lack of readiness for Torah. Magen Avraham suggests that this shortcoming demands rectification on our part:

מגן אברהם סימן תצד איתא בזוהר שחסידי הראשונים היו נעורים כל הלילה ועוסקים בתור' וכבר נהגו רוב הלומדים לעשות כן ואפשר לתת טעם ע"פ [=על פי] פשוטו לפי שישראל היו ישנים כל הלילה והוצרך הקדוש ברוך הוא להעיר אותם כדאיתא במדרש לכן אנו צריכים לתקן זה:

Magen Avraham 4:94

In the Zohar it is written that the ancient pious ones would stay awake all that night and busy themselves with Torah. Already, most of those who study Torah have the custom to do so. It is possible to provide a reason for this in accordance with a simple reading [as opposed to a kabbalistic one] because Israel were asleep all that night and the Holy One Blessed be He had to awaken them, as is written in the Midrash, therefore we need to remedy this.

Here, we see a rationale not restricted to the pious but open to any learned person who wishes to rectify a missed opportunity of the entire Jewish people. Magen Avraham does not make any special mention of what one should study.

## What to Study

In practice, whether or not one's orientation toward learning on the night of Shavuot is kabbalistic can determine what one studies then. The Zohar gives a rough outline of what one should learn:

זוהר, הקדמה ח. למהוי עמה כל ההוא ליליא, ולמחדי עמה בתקונה דאיהי אתתקנת למלעי באורייתא מתורה לנביאים ומנביאים לכתובים ובמדרשות דקראי וברזי דחכמתא ...

Zohar Introduction, 8a

To be with her [the bride representing Israel] all that night, and to rejoice with her in her adornment. For she is adorned by the study of Torah from Chumash to Prophets and from Prophets to Writings and midrash of verses and in the hints of wisdom ...







Arizal lays out a program of study that builds on the description found in the Zohar, including the beginnings and ends of most portions of Tanach and then moving on to kabbala.<sup>2</sup> Reading the beginning and end of each portion is tantamount to reading the whole thing. Rav Ya'akov Chayim Sofer explains that this completes the kabbalistic objective of rectification of the *sefirot* begun by *sefirat ha-omer*.<sup>3</sup> The same word, *tikkun*, can mean either rectification or adornment.

כף החיים תצד:ח והטעם לג' פסוקים שקורין מכל פרשה בליל חג שבועות לפי שבשבעה שבועות על ידי ספירת העומר נתקנין ז' ספירות...ונשאר בבחינת הכתר ונצח הוד יסוד וזה נתקנים בליל שבועות על ידי לימוד התנ"ך...ונפקא מינא למי שאי אפשר לו להיות ניעור כל הלילה מאיזה סיבה לפחות ילמוד התנ"ך כדי להשלים התיקון.

Kaf Ha-chayim 494:8

The reason for the three verses that we read from each parsha on the night of the holiday of Shavuot is because during the seven weeks, seven *sefirot* are rectified through *sefirat ha-omer*...The *Keter*, and *Netzach*, *Hod*, and *Yesod*, remain and these are rectified on the night of Shavuot by learning Tanach...The practical implication of this is that someone who is unable to remain awake all night for some reason should at least learn the Tanach [segments of the *tikkun*] in order to complete the rectification [of the *sefirot*].

To the Kabbalists, learning specifically *tikkun leil Shavuot* has great significance in preparing the celestial bride for her wedding covenant. Rationalists, however, prominently Rav Ya'akov Reischer, a contemporary of Magen Avraham, treat *tikkun leil Shavuot* as a lesser form of Shavuot learning:<sup>4</sup>

רב יעקב ריישר, חק יעקב תצד עיקר תקון לא תקנו רק בפני עמי הארץ שאינו יודעין ללמוד

Rav Ya'akov Reischer, Chok Ya'akov 494

The primary *tikkun* [formal text of *tikkun leil Shavuot*] was enacted for the ignorant people who do not know how to learn

This comment is more consistent with Magen Avraham's more populist explanation than with the Zohar's appeal to the select pious.

## Women on Leil Shavuot

### How does this discussion relate to women?

If we take a kabbalistic approach, then the question is not just about learning, but about whether a woman recites *tikkun leil Shavuot*. This question, in turn, may depend on whether women can accompany the Bride or on whether women count the *omer*. In a responsum, Ben Ish Chai assumes the answer to both is no:

שו"ת רב פעלים א סוד ישרים ט...המנהג פה בביתנו, שהנשים אין אומרות הלימוד של ליל חג השבועות והם ישנות...ונ"ל בס"ד [ונראה לי בסיעתא דשמיא], הלימוד של ליל חג השבועות לא יאות אלא לזכרים, חדא משום שהם התחילו בתיקון בתחילתו בספירת העומר, והנשים לא נתערבו בתיקון זה של הספירה, והשנית כי הלומדים





הלימוד הקדוש הזה של ליל חג השבועות, נחשבין ונקראים שושבינין דמטרוניתא...רק הזכרים יהיו שושבינין דמטרוניתא.. כדי שלא יהיה נראה נוקבא רדפה בתר דכורא, אלא דכורא רדיף בתר נוקבא.

Responsa Rav Pe'alim I Sod Yescharim 9

The custom here in our home is that the women don't recite the learning of the night of Shavuot, rather they sleep...It seems to me with the help of Heaven that the learning of Shavuot night is only fitting for males: one, because they began the rectification from the beginning of *sefirat ha-omer* and women were not involved with this rectification of the *sefira*, and second, because those who learn this holy learning of the night of Shavuot [i.e., *tikkun leil Shavuot*], are considered and called attendants of the Lady...Only males should be attendants of the Lady...in order that it not seem that the Feminine is chasing after the Masculine, but that the Masculine chases after the Feminine.

For Ben Ish Chai, a woman does not stay up to recite *tikkun leil Shavuot*. She may not attend the bride for kabbalistic reasons, and she cannot complete a process begun by counting the *omer* if she didn't count the *omer* to start with (an assumption consistent with his own ruling on the subject).

Rav Ya'akov Chayim Sofer, on the other hand, also a kabbalist, maintains that women who count the *omer* should recite *tikkun leil Shavuot*.

כף החיים תצד:ח ולפי זה גם הנשים הנוהגות לספור העומר... יכולין ללמוד התנ"ך גם כן כיוון שהוא תשלום התיקון של ספירת העומר כנזכר אבל אם אינם סופרות העומר א"צ [=אינן צריכות] ללמוד התנ"ך אלא ילמדו דבר אחר.

Kaf Ha-chayim 4:94:8

According to this, also women who are accustomed to count the *omer*...may learn the Tanach [portion of the *tikkun*] as well since it is a completion of the rectification of *sefirat ha-omer* as mentioned. But if they do not count the *omer*, they need not learn the Tanach [from the *tikkun*] but should learn some other matter.

He notes that other women, who did not count the *omer* should still find something to learn. His ruling finds a modern echo in the words of Rav Mordechai Eliyahu:<sup>5</sup>

רב מרדכי אליהו, ליל חג השבועות טו לימוד נשים – נשים אינן חייבות בתיקון ליל שבועות, ואם הן באות ולומדות תנ"ך וכד' [=וכדומה] תבוא עליהן ברכה...

Rav Mordechai Eliyahu, The Night of Shavuot, 15

**Women's learning: Women are not obligated in *tikkun leil Shavuot*, but if they come and learn Tanach and the like a blessing should come upon them....**

This type of inclusive viewpoint finds support among kabbalists and rationalists alike.

### What are the implications for practice?

There is widespread support for women to learn Torah on the night of Shavuot. This practice is not obligatory, however. Neither women nor men have an obligation to learn all night, and all should consider carefully whether it will interfere with fulfilling *mitzvot* and proper functioning on Shavuot day. American educator Gabrielle Berger (nee Hiller), makes this point:



Gabrielle Hiller, 'Tikun Leil Shavuot: A Priority?', YU Torah-to-Go, 13 May 2015

**A person should also consider the consequences of staying up all night to ensure that it does not interfere with other religious obligations...Shavuot has been established as zman matan Torateinu, the time of the giving of the Torah, and the minhag of Tikun Leil Shavuot teaches that it is vital to seriously learn and study the Torah that we received. That message is not limited to the night of Shavuot. Rather, it should imbue our perspective of the entire holiday, encouraging us to learn during the day if we are unable to do so during the night.**

### How can communities make room for more women's learning on leil Shavuot?

Especially at the early end of the evening, communities can gear Torah study toward *shiurim* open to women and men or to dedicated women's *shiurim*. If there is parallel programming for younger children and teens, that can also widen the numbers of women who will be able to participate. Communities can also make sure that there are spaces in which women can sit and learn with each other over the course of the night, and even prepare source sheets to facilitate such learning.

Sometimes married women with children in particular experience Shavuot as difficult, because husbands may sleep in for most of the day, limiting family time together and putting a heavier load on their wives. On Shavuot day, parents in the community, and the community as a whole, stand to benefit if the community pools resources to provide children's programming or groups over the course of the day to add to the children's experience of the day and to help ensure that staying up late does not come at the children's or caretaker's expense, and everyone should plan the holiday carefully in advance so as to maximize its potential.



# Simchat Yom Tov

## Defining the Mitzva

Each of our festivals marks a joyous religious milestone, tied to our connection with God and the Land. On Pesach, we begin the Spring harvest as we celebrate our freedom and redemption as God's people. On Shavuot we celebrate the reaping of the grain and the giving of the Torah, which binds us to God. On Sukkot we celebrate the ingathering of the harvest and the miracle of God's protection as we traveled through the wilderness to the Promised Land.

It follows that the Torah commands us to rejoice on the festivals:<sup>1</sup>

דברים טז:יט וְעָשִׂיתָ חַג שִׁבְעוֹת לַה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ מִסֹּת נִדְבַת יָדְךָ אֲשֶׁר תִּתֵּן כְּאֲשֶׁר יְבָרְכֶךָ ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ: וְשִׂמַּחְתָּ לִפְנֵי ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ אַתָּה וּבִנְךָ וּבִתְּךָ וְעַבְדְּךָ וְעַמְּתְךָ וְהַלְוִי אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ וְהַגֵּר וְהַיְתוֹם וְהָאֲלֻמָּנָה אֲשֶׁר בְּקִרְבְּךָ בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ לְשֹׁכֵן שְׁמוֹ שָׁם: וְזָכַרְתָּ כִּי עֶבֶד הָיִיתָ בְּמִצְרַיִם וְעָשִׂיתָ אֶת הַחֻקִּים הָאֵלֶּה: חַג הַסֻּכּוֹת תַּעֲשֶׂה לָּךְ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים בְּאַסְפֹּךָ מִגֶּרֶןְךָ וּמִיֻּקְבֶּךָ: וְשִׂמַּחְתָּ בְּחֹגְךָ אַתָּה וּבִנְךָ וּבִתְּךָ וְעַבְדְּךָ וְעַמְּתְךָ וְהַלְוִי וְהַגֵּר וְהַיְתוֹם וְהָאֲלֻמָּנָה אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ: שִׁבְעַת יָמִים תֹּחֵג לַה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר ה' כִּי יְבָרְכֶךָ ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ בְּכָל תְּבוּאָתְךָ וּבְכָל מַעֲשֶׂה יָדֶיךָ וְהָיִיתָ אֶךְ שִׂמֵּחַ:

Devarim 16:10-15

And you shall observe the festival of Shavuot to the Lord your God, the abundance of the contribution of your hand that you shall give as the Lord your God blesses you. And you shall rejoice before the Lord your God, you and your son and your daughter and your bondsman and your bondswoman, and the Levite who is in your gates, and the stranger and the orphan and the widow who are among you, in the place that the Lord your God will choose to make His name dwell there. And you shall remember that you were a bondsman in Egypt, and you shall keep and observe these laws. You shall observe the festival of Sukkot, for seven days, when you gather in from your threshing floor and from your wine press. And you shall rejoice on your festival, you and your son and and your daughter and your bondsman and your bondswoman and the Levite and the stranger and the orphan and the widow who are in your gates: Seven days you shall hold a festival for the Lord your God, in the place that the Lord will choose; for the Lord your God will bless all your crops and all the work of your hands, and you shall be only joyous.

Our connection to God past and present and our gratitude for being able to sustain ourselves provide ample cause for celebration.

### Rejoicing Appropriately

As our households celebrate, we are commanded to include the more vulnerable elements of our community, the orphan and widow, in the rejoicing. Rambam elaborates on this responsibility to the community. He emphasizes that our rejoicing becomes service of God only when we generously welcome others to participate with us.

רמב"ם הלכות יום טוב ו:יח וכשהוא אוכל ושותה חייב להאכיל (דברים ט"ז) לגר ליתום ולאלמנה עם שאר העניים האמללים, אבל מי שנועל דלתות חצרו ואוכל ושותה הוא ובניו ואשתו ואינו מאכיל ומשקה לעניים ולמרי נפש אין זו שמחת מצוה אלא שמחת כריסו...







Mishneh Torah, Shevitat Yom Tov 6:18

When one eats and drinks, one must feed the convert, the orphan, and the widow along with the rest of the unfortunate poor. But one who locks the doors of his courtyard and eats and drinks, he and his children and his wife, and does not feed and give drink to the poor and embittered, this is not the rejoicing of a mitzva but rejoicing of his belly...

Our celebration only truly serves God when we open our homes to those who are destitute (or perhaps even to those who are lonely or difficult to host.) Otherwise, it can become mere decadence and hedonism.

The ultimate source of our celebration, though, is a sense of being before God:

דברים כז: ז' זָבַחַתְּ שְׁלָמִים וְאָכַלְתָּ שֶׁם וְשִׂמְחָתָּ לִפְנֵי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ:

Devarim 27:7

And you shall sacrifice peace offerings (*shelamim*) and eat there, and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God.

One who eats and drinks to excess, and thus loses sight of God's presence does not fulfill the mitzva:

רמב"ם הלכות יום טוב ו: כ' שהשכרות והשחוק הרבה וקלות הראש אינה שמחה אלא הוללות וסכלות ולא נצטוינו על ההוללות והסכלות אלא על השמחה שיש בה עבודת יוצר הכל

Mishneh Torah, Shevitat Yom Tov 6:20

For drunkenness and hilarity and frivolity is not rejoicing but wildness and foolishness, and we were not commanded in wildness and foolishness but in rejoicing, which includes worship of the Creator of everything.

In the absence of Beit Ha-mikdash

In *Beit Ha-mikdash*, the primary expression of *simcha* was eating peace offerings (*shelamim*) before God, as though partaking in a shared celebratory meal. The Talmud addresses the question of where that leaves us after the Temple's destruction, when we have no way to offer sacrifices:

פסחים קט'. תניא רבי יהודה בן בתירא אומר בזמן שבית המקדש קיים אין שמחה אלא בבשר שנאמר וזבחת שלמים ואכלת שם ושמחת לפני ה' אלקיך ועכשיו שאין בית המקדש קיים אין שמחה אלא בין שנאמר ויין ישמח לבב אנוש

Pesachim 109a

It was taught in a *baraita*: Rabbi Yehuda ben Beteira says: At a time when *Beit Ha-mikdash* is standing, rejoicing is only with meat, as it is said: "And you shall sacrifice peace offerings (*shelamim*) and eat there and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God" (*Devarim* 27:7). And now, when *Beit Ha-mikdash* is not standing, rejoicing is only with wine, as it is said: "And wine gladdens a person's heart" (*Tehillim* 104:15).

The Talmud teaches that, in the absence of sacrificial meat, wine becomes the central element of our Yom Tov rejoicing. Tosafot take this as a description of a rabbinic-level mitzva to rejoice in an era without *Beit Ha-mikdash*:

תוספות מועד קטן יד: ד"ה עשה דיחיד נראה לי דשמחת הרגל נמי דרבנן ושמחת היין בשלמי שמחה...



Tosafot Moed Katan 14b s.v. Aseh de-yachid

It seems to me that rejoicing on the festival is also rabbinic, and “*ve-samachta*” [the Torah-level mitzva of rejoicing] – that is with peace offerings of joy (*shalmei simcha*)...

Rambam, however, disagrees, He writes that the mitzva of rejoicing on a festival retains its Torah-level status, even without our partaking in the sacrifice:

ספר המצוות לרמב"ם מצות עשה נד והמצוה הנ"ד היא שצונו לשמוח ברגלים והוא אמרו יתעלה (ס"פ ראה) ושמחת בחגך... והענין הראשון הרמז אליו בצווי הזה הוא שיקריב קרבן שלמים על כל פנים. ואלו השלמים נוספים על שלמי חגיגה והם נקראים בתלמוד (שם ז ב) שלמי שמחה.... וכולל באמרו ושמחת בחגך מה שאמרו ג"כ [=גם כן] שמח בכל מיני שמחה. ומזה לאכול בשר בימים טובים ולשתות יין וללבוש בגדים חדשים... זה כולו נכנס תחת אמרו ושמחת בחגך. ומה שיתחייב מהם יותר שתיית היין לבד כי הוא יותר מיוחד בשמחה....

Rambam, Sefer Ha-mitzvot, Positive Mitzva 54

And the 54th mitzva is that He commanded us to rejoice on festivals, and He, may He be exalted, said: “And you shall rejoice on your festival.” ...And the first matter hinted at in this command is that one should in any case sacrifice a peace offering (*korban shelamim*). And these peace offerings are in addition to the festive peace offerings (*shalmei chagiga*), and in the Talmud they are called peace offerings of rejoicing (*shalmei simcha*)...The statement “and you shall rejoice on your festival” includes what [the Sages] said also, “rejoice in all types of rejoicing.” And this includes to eat meat on festivals, and to drink wine, and to wear new clothes...All this is included in the statement “and you shall rejoice on your festival.” And of these, drinking wine alone is more obligatory, because it is more specifically associated with rejoicing...

To Rambam, the Torah’s definition of rejoicing includes partaking in the sacrifice but is not restricted to it. Any act of rejoicing can count as fulfillment of the Torah-level mitzva. Rav Soloveitchik explains how this works conceptually:

שיעורים לזכר אבא מרי עמ' קפח שהמצב הנפשי של האדם ברגל הוא עיקר מצות שמחה, אלא שהתורה ציותה איך לקיים שמחה שבלב וקבעה מסמרות להלכה, כי בזמן הבית, שמחה זו מתגשמת ע"י [=על ידי] אכילת קדשים, ובזמן הזה ע"י [=על ידי] תענוגים שונים...

Shiurim Le-zecher Abba Mari 186

For a person’s emotional state during the festival is the essential mitzva of rejoicing, but the Torah commanded how to fulfil rejoicing of the heart and formalized the Halacha thus: at the time of *Beit Ha-mikdash*, this rejoicing was realized through eating sacrificial meat, and today through various pleasures...

Eating the sacrifice, or feasting with meat or wine, is indeed the external fulfillment of an act of rejoicing, but the fundamental mitzva is to achieve an emotional and spiritual state of *simcha*, through these means and others.

## Obligation

Are women obligated in the mitzva of *simchat Yom Tov*?

On the one hand, both the daughter and the widow are mentioned as rejoicing on the festival in *Devarim* 16:14. On the other hand, rejoicing on the festival would seem to be a positive, time-bound commandment from which women are typically exempt.

The Talmud lists rejoicing on the festival as one of the exceptions to the rule – a positive time-bound commandment in which women are obligated.





קידושין לד. ... הרי מצה, שמחה, הקהל – דמצות עשה שהזמן גרמא ונשים חייבות

#### Kiddushin 34a

Behold *matza*, rejoicing, and *hakhel* – [each is] a positive, time-bound mitzva, and women are obligated

Later on, however, it presents a challenge to that idea in the name of Abbaye:

קידושין לד: .. ואדילפינן מתפילין לפטורא נילף משמחה לחיובא אמר אביי אשה בעלה משמחה.  
אלמנה מאי איכא למימר? בשרויה אצלו.

#### Kiddushin 34b

...Rather than deriving from *tefillin*, to exempt [women from positive time-bound mitzvot], derive it from rejoicing, to obligate [women in these mitzvot]. Abbaye said: A woman – her husband causes her to rejoice [so we cannot derive it from the mitzva of rejoicing]. What about a widow? Through whoever she is with.

Abbaye suggests that the mitzva for a woman to rejoice on a festival is incumbent on her husband, not herself. At first glance, we might think that the verse's reference to the widow, who has no husband, refutes this idea. However, Abbaye explains that the widow is mentioned in order to obligate the head of the household that she joins for the festival to cause her to rejoice.

A tosefta, paraphrased in both the Talmud Bavli and the Talmud Yerushalmi, states that a man has a mitzva to cause his wife (and children) to rejoice on the festival, as by giving them wine or whatever suits them:

תוספתא מסכת פסחים (ליברמן) פרק י הלכה ד מצוה על אדם לשמח בניו ובני ביתו ברגל במה משמחן בין דכת[יב] ויין ישמח לבב אנוש ר' יהודה און[מר] נשים בראוי להם וקטנים בראוי להם

#### Tosefta Pesachim (Lieberman) 10:4

It is a mitzva for a person to cause his children and members of his household to rejoice on the festival. How does he make them rejoice? With wine, as it is written: "And wine gladdens a person's heart." R' Yehuda says: women with what is appropriate for them, and children with what is appropriate for them

The tosefta does not indicate whether the husband is required to support his wife's independent obligation to rejoice, or whether he alone is obligated in her rejoicing.

The Talmud quotes Rabbi Zeira as assuming that women **are** obligated to rejoice on a festival. The discussion revolves around *bal te'acher*, the prohibition to delay bringing a sacrifice as vowed beyond a single cycle of three festivals. Does the prohibition apply to women, who are not obligated to make a pilgrimage to *Beit Ha-mikdash* on the festivals?<sup>2</sup>

ראש השנה ו: בעי ר' זירא אשה מה היא בבל תאחר מי אמרין הא לא מיחייבא בראיה או דלמא הא איתה בשמחה.

#### Rosh Ha-shana 6b

Rabbi Zeira asks: A woman, what is she [obligated or not] in the mitzva of *bal te'acher*? Do we say that since she is not obligated to appear [in *Beit Ha-mikdash* on the festival, she is not obligated in *bal te'acher*? Or perhaps, since she is obligated in rejoicing [on a festival, she should be obligated in *bal te'acher*]?

In yet another Talmudic passage, though, Abbaye himself seems to espouse the view that women are obligated in *simchat Yom Tov*. Here, the context is a discussion of how independently mobile a child needs to be in order to be obligated to appear at *Beit Ha-mikdash* for a festival:<sup>3</sup>

חגיגה ה:ו. אמר ליה אביי עד הכא דמיחייבא אימיה בשמחה אייתיתיה אימיה...

Chagiga 5b-6a

Abbaye said to him [Rabbi Zeira]: Until here [Yerushalayim]. Since his mother is obligated in rejoicing, his mother brings him.

Tosafot resolve the apparent contradiction in a way that understands Abbaye as exempting women from an independent obligation of *simcha*.<sup>4</sup>

תוספות ראש השנה ו: ומפרש ר"ת בעלה משמחה שהחיוב על בעלה ולא עליה לפיכך לא קרינא בה ובאת שמה והא דקאמר בחגיגה דמיחייבה אמה משום בעלה ולא משום היא

Tosafot Rosh Ha-shana 6b s.v. Isha

**Rabbeinu Tam** explains "her husband causes her to rejoice," that the obligation is on her husband and not on her....and this that was said in Chagiga, that his mother is obligated [in rejoicing] is obligation because of her husband and not because of herself.

Ritva, however, suggests a different resolution of Abbaye's statements:

חידושי הריטב"א קידושין לד: ...אשה בעלה משמחה. פירש רש"י ז"ל אין אשה חייבת בשמחה אלא שחייב בעלה לשמחה, ולא נהירא דהא מנינן לה לעיל בהדי מצוות דנשים חייבות, ותו דאביי גופיה אמר במסכת חגיגה (ו' א') דאשה חייבת בשמחה...ונראה לפרש דהכי קאמרינן דמשמחה ליכא למגמר דשאני שמחה שלא חייבה תורה בה הנשים אלא על ידי בעלה מה שאין כן באידך דלא תלו בבעל כלל, כן נראה לי.

Ritva Kiddushin 34b

...A woman, her husband causes her to rejoice. Rashi explains "A woman is not obligated in rejoicing; rather, her husband is obligated to cause her to rejoice." This is not clear, for we count it above among the *mitzvot* in which women are obligated, and furthermore, Abbaye himself says in Tractate *Chagiga* that a woman is obligated in rejoicing...It seems that we should explain that we say thus: That we cannot derive from [the mitzva of] rejoicing [a rule to obligate women in positive time-bound mitzvot], because rejoicing is different, since the Torah only obligated women in it through the means of her husband, which is not the case for other [mitzvot], which are not dependent on the husband at all. So it seems to me.

Ritva writes that a woman would typically rejoice by partaking in her husband's peace offering, or otherwise have her rejoicing facilitated by her husband. This does not detract from her own obligation to rejoice. It does mean, however, that the mitzva of rejoicing cannot serve as a basis for learning about other *mitzvot*.

According to this line of thought, Abbaye and Rabbi Zeira would agree that a woman who isn't a member of a male-headed household is independently obligated to rejoice on a festival. Rabbi Zeira, however, would disagree with Abbaye about the prominence of the husband's obligation in the wife's fulfillment of her own. Me'iri spells this out:

בית הבחירה למאירי קידושין לד: אשה חייבת בשמחה כמו שביארנו ומה שאמר כאן אשה בעלה משמחה לא להפקיעה מחיוב שמחה אלא שעקר חיובה מצד שמחת הבעל ומכל מקום לענין פסק אף אשה שאין לה בעל חייבת בשמחה:

Beit Ha-bechira Kiddushin 34b

A woman is obligated in rejoicing as we have explained. What he [Abbaye] said here, "a woman – her husband causes her to rejoice" is not to release her from the obligation of rejoicing. Rather, her primary obligation is through the husband's rejoicing. Nevertheless, regarding the practical halacha, even a woman without a husband is obligated in rejoicing.

A husband and wife's rejoicing are intertwined. If a woman is married, her husband has a mitzva to facilitate her rejoicing, but all women also have an independent obligation to rejoice.<sup>5</sup>



Rambam seems to follow this view:<sup>6</sup>

משנה תורה, הלכות חגיגה א:א וְהִשְׁמַחָה הָאֲמוּרָה בְּרִגְלִים הִיא שִׁיקְרִיב שְׁלָמִים יִתֵּר עַל שְׁלָמֵי חֲגִיגָה. וְאֵלּוּ הֵם הַנִּקְרָאִים שְׁלָמֵי שִׂמְחַת חֲגִיגָה שְׁנֵאֲמַר (דברים כז ז) “וְזָבַחְתָּ שְׁלָמִים וְאָכַלְתָּ שָׁם וְשִׂמַּחְתָּ לִּפְנֵי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ.” וְנָשִׁים חַיְבוֹת בְּמִצְוָה זוֹ:

Mishneh Torah, Chagiga 1:1

The rejoicing referred to on festivals is that one should offer peace offerings (*shelamim*) in addition to the festival peace offerings (*shalmei chagiga*). These are called peace-offerings of festival joy (*shalmei simchat chagiga*), as it says (*Devarim 27:7*): “You shall sacrifice peace offerings (*shelamim*) and eat them there and rejoice before the Lord your God.” Women are obligated in this mitzva.

משנה תורה, הלכות שביית יום טוב ו:יז שִׁבְעַת יְמֵי הַפֶּסַח וְשִׁמּוֹנַת יְמֵי חֲגִיגָה עִם שְׂאֵר יְמֵים טוֹבִים כָּל־אֲסוּרִים בְּהִסְפָּד וְתַעֲנִית. וְחַיִּב אָדָם לִהְיוֹת בְּהֵן שִׂמְחָה וְטוֹב לֵב הוּא וּבָנָיו וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וּבְנֵי בֵּיתוֹ וְכָל הַנָּלוּיִם עָלָיו שְׁנֵאֲמַר (דברים טז:יז) “וְשִׂמַּחְתָּ בְּחִגְגְךָ” וְגו'. אֲףִי עַל פִּי שֶׁהִשְׁמַחָה הָאֲמוּרָה כָּאן הִיא קְרִיבָה שְׁלָמִים כְּמוֹ שֶׁאֲנוּ מְבָאֲרִין בְּהִלְכוֹת חֲגִיגָה יֵשׁ בְּכָל־אוֹתָהּ שִׂמְחָה לְשִׂמְחָה הוּא וּבָנָיו וּבְנֵי בֵּיתוֹ כָּל אֶחָד כְּרָאוּ לוֹ:

Mishneh Torah, Shevitat Yom Tov 6:17

The seven days of Pesach and the eight days of Sukkot, along with the other festivals, are all forbidden for eulogizing and fasting. And a person is obligated to be joyful and of a good heart on them—he, his children, his wife, the members of his household and all who accompany him. As it says (*Devarim 16:14*), “And you shall rejoice on your festival, etc.” Even though the joy that is mentioned here is [referring to] peace offerings (*shelamim*)—as we explain in the Laws of the Festival Offering—included in that joy is for him, his children and the members of his household to rejoice, everyone according to what is appropriate for him.

The view that women are obligated in *simchat Yom Tov* is widely accepted as Halacha:<sup>7</sup>

שולחן ערוך אורח חיים הלכות יום טוב תקכט: ב חייב אדם להיות שמח וטוב לב במועד, הוא ואשתו ובניו וכל הנלוים אליו. כיצד משמח, הקטנים נותן להם קליות ואגוזים; והנשים קונה להם בגדים ותכשיטין כפי ממונו; וחייב להאכיל לגר, ליתום ולאלמנה עם שאר עניים.

Shulchan Aruch OC 529:2

A person is obligated to be joyous and of good heart on the holiday, he and his wife and his children and all who join him. How does he cause them to rejoice? He gives the children toasted wheat and nuts; and buys the women clothing and jewelry according to his means; and he is obligated to feed the stranger, the widow and the orphan along with the other poor people.

משנה ברורה תקכט:טו (חייב אדם להיות שמח [וטוב לב במועד] וכו' – והוא מ"ע [=מצוות עשה] מן התורה דכתיב ושמחת בחגך ונוהגת גם בנשים:

Mishna Berura 529:15

A person is obligated to be joyous – This is a Torah-level positive commandment, as it is written “you shall rejoice on your festival,” and it also applies to women

Rav Moshe Sternbuch adds that even those who maintain that women are exempt from rejoicing on festivals apply the exemption only to concrete actions (e.g., eating meat, drinking wine, and wearing new clothes). According to all opinions, however, women are obligated in achieving the emotional state of *simcha* on Yom Tov because it is a mitzva performed with the heart:

מועדים וזמנים השלם ז:יא ונראה דנשים שפטורות משמחה ורק בעלה משמחה עמו, לאביי...בחלק הזה של שמחה שהוא שמחת הלב גם נשים חייבות....במצוות התלויות בלב גם בזמן גרמא נשים חייבות.





Mo'adim U-zmanim 7:11

It seems that women are exempt from rejoicing, and only her husband causes her to rejoice with him, according to Abbaye...in this aspect of rejoicing, which is rejoicing of the heart, women are also obligated....in mitzvot that depend on the heart, even if they are time-bound, women are obligated.

### Why is the husband responsible for his wife's simchat Yom Tov?

*Simchat Yom Tov* is a combination of an internal spiritual and emotional state with the external objects and actions that foster and reflect that state of joy. A husband or father's mitzva of *simchat Yom Tov* includes responsibility for contributing to his household's rejoicing.

In earlier generations, purchase of the new clothing or festive foods that would help spur a household to happiness depended in a practical sense on funds controlled by the male head of the household.

תורה תמימה הערות דברים פרק טז הערה סו ...והענין הוא ע"פ [=על פי] המבואר ביבמות ס"ב ב' כל שאין לו אשה שרוי בלא שמחה דכתיב ושמחת אתה וביתך, א"כ [=אם כן] בשמחת החג דכתיב ג"כ [=גם כן] כזה א"א [=אי אפשר] לו לקיים לבדו מצוה זו, והסברא נוטה דאם היא אינה נוטלת חלק בשמחתו אין שמחתו שלמה ולכן חייבת גם היא בגללו...

Torah Temima Devarim 16:66

...The matter is according to what is explained in *Yevamot* 62b, "whoever does not have a wife dwells without joy, as it is written "you shall rejoice, you and your household." if so, regarding rejoicing of the festival where it is also written like this, it is impossible for him [the husband] to fulfill this mitzva on his own. Logic tends to say that if she does not take part in his rejoicing, his rejoicing is incomplete, and therefore she is also obligated on his account...

Taken more broadly, *simcha* is mutually reinforcing. Whatever the household makeup, every household member, regardless of gender, contributes to every other member's rejoicing.

## In Practice

We saw above that wine is suggested as a means of rejoicing, especially when there is no sacrifice of which to partake. Should women's rejoicing on Yom Tov include drinking wine as well? What other acts might be seen as fulfillments of the mitzva of *simcha*?

Both the Talmud Bavli and the Yerushalmi list a few examples of what a husband might do to help his wife rejoice, in the name of Rabbi Yehuda:

תלמוד ירושלמי (וילנא) מסכת פסחים י:א תני צריך הוא אדם לשמח את אשתו ואת בניו ברגל במה משמחן ביין. רבי יודה אומר נשים בראוי להן וקטנים בראוי להם נשים בראוי להן כגון מסנים וצוצלין וקטנים בראוי להן כגון אגוזין ולוזין.

Yerushalmi Pesachim 10:1

It is taught: A person needs to cause his wife and his children to rejoice on the festival. With what does he make them rejoice? With wine. Rabbi Yehuda says: Women with what is appropriate for them, and children with what is appropriate for them. Women with what is appropriate for them, like shoes and bells. And children with what is appropriate for them, like nuts and hazelnuts.



**פסחים קט.** תנו רבנן חייב אדם לשמח בנו ובני ביתו ברגל שנאמר ושמחת בחגך במה משמחם בין רבי יהודה אומר אנשים בראוי להם ונשים בראוי להם בין ונשים במאי תני רב יוסף בבבל בבגדי צבעונין בארץ ישראל בבגדי פשתן מגוהצין

Pesachim 109a

The Sages taught: A person is obligated to cause his children and the members of his household to rejoice on a festival, as it is stated: "And you shall rejoice on your festival" (*Devarim 16:14*). With what should one make them rejoice? With wine. Rabbi Yehuda says: Men with what is appropriate for them and women with what is appropriate for them. Rabbi Yehuda elaborates: Men with what is appropriate for them, with wine. And women, with what? Rav Yosef taught: In Babylonia with colorful clothes and in Eretz Yisrael with pressed linen clothes.

It is not clear from either source if Rabbi Yehuda means to reject wine as a means for women to achieve simcha or simply add to it. Nor is it clear if anyone, man or woman, needs to eat meat in the absence of *Beit Ha-mikdash*.<sup>8</sup>

In his presentation of this halacha, Rambam seems to imply that women need not drink wine or eat meat (without the sacrifice), since he lists these as male modes of rejoicing:

משנה תורה שביתת יום טוב ו: יח והנשים קונה להן בגדים ותכשיטין נאים כפי ממונן. והאנשים אוכלין בשר ושותין יין שאין שמחה אלא בבשר ואין שמחה אלא ביין.

Mishneh Torah, Shevitat Yom Tov 6:18

For the women he buys new clothes and beautiful jewelry according to his means. And the men eat meat and drink wine, since there is no *simcha* except with meat, and no *simcha* except with wine.

Though does not specify meat and wine when he lays out what a man should provide for a widow in his household to facilitate her rejoicing, Rashi does list food and drink, and wine was the preeminent drink of his day:

רש"י מסכת קידושין לד: ד"ה בשרויה...ונצטוה מי שהיא שרויה אצלו לשמחה משלו במאכל ומשתה וכלי פשתן.

Rashi Kiddushin 34b s.v. Bi-shruya

And the person with whom she is staying is commanded to cause her to rejoice from his own resources, with food and drink and linen garments.

Similarly, Rabbi Akiva Eiger notes that women are obligated in *simchat Yom Tov*, and fulfill the mitzva through meat and wine,<sup>9</sup> though he argues that women are not obligated as a matter of *simcha* to eat bread on Yom Tov:<sup>10</sup>

שו"ת רבי עקיבא איגר מהדורא קמא סימן א דהיא מחוייבה בשמחה, מ"מ [=מכל מקום] היינו דאסורה בהספד ותענית, ולהיות לה שמחה בשתיית יין ובשר אבל מ"מ [=מכל מקום] נראה דאינה מחוייבת באכילת פת דנראה דאכילת פת אינו מצד חיוב שמחה

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For she is obligated in *simcha*, in any case, that means that she is forbidden in eulogizing and fasting, and should have *simcha* with drinking wine and with meat, but in any case, it seems that she is not obligated in eating bread, since it seems that eating bread is not based on the obligation of *simcha*





Other authorities, however, including Rabbeinu Asher, do include eating bread as a fulfillment of *simchat Yom Tov*:

רא"ש ברכות פרק ז:כג הלכך נראה לרבינו יהודה דחייב אדם לאכול פת ביום טוב משום שמחה

Rosh Berachot 7:23

Therefore, it seems to Rabbeinu Yehuda that a person is obligated to eat bread on Yom Tov because of *simcha*.

In practice, women eat meat and drink wine on Yom Tov, so long as it adds to rejoicing, and men are obligated to enable their wives to make joyful purchases for the holiday, while a single woman attends to her own happiness. These purchases need not be restricted to clothing or ornament. Rav Shmuel Halevi Wosner gives some examples:

שו"ת שבט הלוי חלק ח סימן קכד וכן בגדים וכה"ג [=וכהאי גוונא] או ריקדה או טיול לכב[וד] השמחה של היום שגורם הרחבת הדעת, אבל נתינת ספר שגורם אמנם חדוה ושמחה אבל אינו קשור עם שמחת היום דוקא, וכן מכשיר אלקטרי של שיחת נשים בעלמא שאינו פוטר מיסודי שמחה של היום כגון בגדים ומיני מתיקה וכהאי גוונא.

Responsa Shevet Ha-levi 8:124

And similarly clothing and so forth, or dancing or an excursion in honor of the *simcha* of the day that causes gratification. But giving a book, which indeed causes delight and *simcha* but is not connected specifically to the *simcha* of the day, and similarly an electronic device of mere women's chatter, which does not exempt from the foundations of *simcha* of the day, like clothes and sweets and so on.

In Rav Wosner's chassidic community, women's formal learning opportunities are more limited. For women who do learn Torah, purchase of a book for Talmud Torah could well be a fulfillment of rejoicing on Yom Tov.

In a modern twist, Rabbi Eliezer Melamed notes that the married woman of today is free to make purchases for herself:<sup>11</sup>

הרב אליעזר מלמד, פניני הלכה, ספר מועדים א:י אמנם כיום שסוגי הבגדים והתכשיטים נתרבו לאין שיעור, והבחירה נעשתה מורכבת, במשפחות רבות מקובל שהאשה בוחרת לעצמה את הבגד או התכשיט, כאשר התקציב לכך נקבע על ידי שני בני הזוג לפי רמת הכנסתם (כמבואר להלן יב). וכדי להיות שותף במצווה, ראוי שהבעל יעודד את אשתו לקנות את הבגד או התכשיט לקראת החג, ועל ידי כך הוא יחשב כמתנה ממנו אליה והשמחה שבו תתרבה.

Rav Eliezer Melamed, Peninei Halacha, Laws of the Festivals, 1:10

In contrast, now that there are so many types of clothing and jewelry available, choosing has become complicated. In many families, it is the accepted norm for the wife to choose clothes or jewelry for herself, and for the budget to be set by the couple in accordance with their means (as explained below in section 12). In order for the husband to participate in the mitzva, it is appropriate for him to encourage his wife to buy an item of clothing or jewelry for the festival. This way it can be considered a gift from him to her, which will increase her *simcha*.

Writing to a new widow, Rabbanit Anat Novoselsky suggests that a woman determine for herself what will best enable her to rejoice before God:<sup>12</sup>

רבנית ענת נובוסלסקי, "חובת נשים בשמחה ברגל", מה שאלתך אסתר ותעש, עמ' 35 על כל אישה לשמוח בסעודת חג, בבגד או בתכשיט חדש או בכל מה שמשמחה, ואין הכרח להטיל זאת דווקא על הבעל. אף ראוי להקפיד על בגדי החג יותר מאשר על בגדי השבת, ולהימנע מדברים הפוגמים בשמחת הלב.







.. חפשי את הדרך שבה תוכלי לשמח עצמך באופן הטוב ביותר, ותזכי לקיים את המצווה "ושמחת בחגך והיית אך שמח".

Rabbanit Anat Novoselsky, 'The Obligation of Women in Rejoicing on a Festival,' in Ma She'eilateich Esther Ve-te'as, p. 35

Each woman must rejoice at the festive holiday meal, with a new item of clothing or jewelry or whatever causes her to rejoice, and it is not necessary to impose this obligation specifically on the husband. It is even fitting to be more particular about festival clothing than Shabbat clothing, and to avoid things that mar the joy of the heart... Seek the way that you will be able to cause yourself to rejoice in the best way possible, and you will merit to fulfil the mitzva, "and you shall rejoice in your festival and be only joyous."

Research by Hannah Abrams and Sara Krishtul



# Shavuot: A Genuinely Human Holiday

Shayna Goldberg  
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## 1. תלמוד בבלי מסכת פסחים דף סח עמוד ב

דתניא, רבי אליעזר אומר: אין לו לאדם ביום טוב אלא או אוכל ושותה או יושב ושונה. רבי יהושע אומר: חלקהו, חציו לאכילה ושתיה וחציו לבית המדרש. ואמר רבי יוחנן: ושניהם מקרא אחד דרשו, כתוב אחד אומר "עצרת לה" אלוקיך" וכתוב אחד אומר "עצרת תהיה לכם." רבי אליעזר סבר: או כולו לה' או כולו לכם. ורבי יהושע סבר: חלקהו, חציו לה' וחציו לכם. אמר רבי אלעזר: הכל מודים בעצרת דבעינן נמי לכם. מאי טעמא - יום שניתנה בו תורה הוא.

## 2. ר' יהודה עמיטל, עשיית מצוות בדרך טבעית

ידועים דבריו של הר' מקוצק על הפסוק "ואנשי קודש תהיון לי" (שמות כ"ב, ל) - לקב"ה יש מלאכים בשפע, הוא לא רוצה שנהיה מלאכים, אלא שנהיה אנשים. אסור לנו לאבד את התחושות האנושיות. יש אנשים שמנסים להתעלם מתחושות צער, וגם אם קורה להם אסון חלילה, ומישהו קרוב אליהם נפטר, הם מנסים לדכא את הצער ולמצוא נקודות חיוביות במה שאירע, כגון לומר שהדבר הועיל לעם ישראל וכד'. זוהי התנהגות פסולה לחלוטין. התורה אינה רוצה שנדכא את תחושותינו, אלא שנעבוד את הקב"ה מתוך התחושה הטבעית שלנו.

## 3. תלמוד בבלי מסכת שבת דף פח עמוד ב

אמר רבי יהושע בן לוי: בשעה שעלה משה למרום אמרו מלאכי השרת לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא: רבוננו של עולם, מה לילוד אשה בינינו? אמר להן: לקבל תורה בא. אמרו לפניו: חמודה גנוזה שגנוזה לך תשע מאות ושבעים וארבעה דורות קודם שנברא העולם, אתה מבקש ליתנה לבשר ודם? "מה אנוש כי תזכרנו ובן אדם כי תפקדנו ה' אדנינו מה אדיר שמך בכל הארץ אשר תנה הודך על השמים!" - אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא למשה: החזיר להן תשובה! ...

... אמר לפניו: רבוננו של עולם, תורה שאתה נותן לי מה כתיב בה - "אנכי ה' אלוקיך אשר הוצאתיך מארץ מצרים." אמר להן: למצרים ירדתם, לפרעה השתעבדתם, תורה למה תהא לכם? שוב מה כתיב בה "לא יהיה לך אלהים אחרים," בין הגויים אתם שריון שעובדין עבודה זרה? שוב מה כתיב בה - "זכור את יום השבת לקדשו," כלום אתם עושים מלאכה שאתם צריכין שבות? שוב מה כתיב בה - "לא תשא," משא ומתן יש ביניכם? שוב מה כתיב בה "כבד את אבך ואת אמך אב ואם יש לכם?" שוב מה כתיב בה "לא תרצח לא תנאף לא תגנב," קנאה יש ביניכם, יצר הרע יש ביניכם?

מיד הודו לו להקדוש ברוך הוא, שנאמר "ה' אדנינו מה אדיר שמך וגו'" ואילו "תנה הודך על השמים" - לא כתיב. מיד כל אחד ואחד נעשה לו אוהב, ומסר לו דבר, שנאמר "עלית למרום שבית שבי לקחת מתנות באדם," בשכר שקראוך אדם לקחת מתנות.

## 4. משך חכמה שמות פרק כ פסוק יז

יש להתבונן מה ואיזו השתלמות היה למשה בקבלת התורה - כי האיש משה היה גדול קודם מתן תורה שנשתלם וזכה למעלתו - ובאיזה דרך פעלה בו קבלת התורה. והענין כי דרך הפילוסופים אשר השלימות של האדם הוא במחויב ובהכרח, וזה כשיתעצם נפשו במושכלות, ומשכל היולי ישיג הנקנה ויזכה לשכל הנאצל והאלקי. ומצד שנפשו דבוקה למושכלות



יתדבק אל שכל הפועל ויהיה קשור מעדנות אליו תמיד, ובזה יקנה הנצחיות בנפשו. ולפי זה לא יגיעו להשלמות רק אחד  
!בכמה דורות. וכן לפי זה למה להם חיים, הלא החומר חוצץ בין המושכלות להנפש

רק כל מה שעשה היה להראות לישראל כי הוא שליט בטבע, והמציאות ברא וחידיש במכוון לפניו לכתלית ההטבה לנבראים.  
אם כן אם יהפכנה לאין והעדר, את מי יראה כי הוא שליט?! וכיון שהעולם ברא ברצון, הרי יכולת ביד השי"ת לגזור נצחיות  
לנפש ברצון, ושכר רוחני והשגה אלקית ברצון, ובמה? כאשר יעשו כל חוקי העולם והיותיו על פי חוקי תורתו הקדושה, ככה  
ינהגו בעולם המעשה. אם כאשר יגבירו בחירתם על חוקי הטבע מסיבת רצון השם יתברך, אז יבוא להם השלימות האמיתית.  
וזה עיקר התכלית, כמו שאמרו ז"ל במדרש שוחר טוב מזמור ד: אדם פושט ידו לקערה ומצא בה איסור, מי נשכו נחש או  
עקרב עקצו?! וכן אדם בא אצל אשתו ואמרה לו כשושנה אדומה ראיתי, מיד פורש, מי עקצו ומי נשכו – הוי "סוגה  
בשושנים" (שיר השירים ז, ג). הרי תאות האכילה ותאות המשגל למשחק לאיש הישראל להתגבר עליהם מחמת רצון  
השי"ת ותורתו, הלא זה ההתקרבות היותר נמרץ להשי"ת, ועבור זה משיגים השלימות האמיתית

וזה ש'בעצרת הכל מודים דבעינן לכם' (פסחים סח, ב), דזהו תכלית מן התורה שכולם יזכו ויזכנו החומר וכוחותיו על פי  
התורה אשר תישר כל צעד בעולם המעשה

#### 5. R' Aharon Lichtenstein: Interview with R' Yitzchak Ben David De'ot 5, April 2011

There are those *Chachmei Musar* that want a person to go to sacrifice his son as if he was sacrificing a chicken...I do not think like this, I do not understand one who thinks like this, and I have not the slightest doubt that the Torah, *Chazal*, and our medieval scholars did not see it this way. I do not see this as an ideal. I do not yearn to be like this; I do not yearn for my children be like this; not for my students to be like this, not for my neighbors to be like this, and not for the Jewish nation to be like this.

Moreover, I do not see in this greatness. Were I to believe that our forefather Avraham related to the *Akeida* as if he were slaughtering a chicken, I would not revere him more. I would revere him less.

This we don't need — we have many people that can slaughter [a chicken].

#### 6. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "The Redemption of Sexual Life," *Family Redeemed*, p. 75

"The miraculous metamorphosis which the body undergoes in its ascent from blind compliance with mechanical instincts to purposeful selective conduct is the fount out of which *kedushah* uninterruptedly streams. Disciplining the body, interfering with its pleasure-seeking drives, organizing them into a meaningful whole, and relating them to a higher frame of reference by refusing to yield to the powerful push of the flesh and by resisting the rush of primitive lust . . . represent the dynamics of holiness."



### 7. ויקרא פרק כג

(יז) ממושבתכם תביאו לחם תנופה שנים שני עשרנים סלת תהיינה חמץ תאפינה בכורים ליקוק:  
(יח) והקרבתם על הלחם שבעת כבשים תמימים בני שנה ופר בן בקר אחד ואילם שנים יהיו עלה ליקוק ומנחתם ונסכיהם  
אשה ריח ניחח ליקוק:  
(יט) ועשיתם שעיר עזים אחד לחטאת ושני כבשים בני שנה לזבח שלמים:

### 8. זבחים קטו. - קטז. (ע"פ שטמ"ק)

דתני': עד שלא הוקם המשכן - הבמות מותרות, ועבודה בבכורות, והכל כשירין להקריב בהמה חיה ועוף, זכרים ונקבות,  
תמימין ובעלי מומין, טהורין אבל לא טמאין, והכל קרבו עולות. . .

. . . אמר מר: והכל קרבו עולות. עולות אין, שלמים לא? והא כתיב: "ויזבחו זבחים שלמים לה' פרים!" אלא אימא: לכל  
קרבו עולות.

### רש"י שם

לכל - בין לישראל בין לבני נח קרבו עולות אבל שלמים לא קרבו לבני נח ומשעת מתן תורה שנבחרו ישראל קרבו להם  
שלמים.

### 9. R' Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man*, pp. 45-46

When halakhic man pines for God, he does not venture to rise up to Him but rather strives to bring down His divine presence into the midst of our concrete world . . . Holiness, according to the outlook of Halakhah, denotes the appearance of a mysterious transcendence in the midst of our concrete world, the "descent" of God, whom no thought can grasp, onto Mount Sinai, the bending down of a hidden and concealed world and lowering it onto the face of reality.



## The Halachic Subtext of Megillat Rut

Rachel Weber Leshaw  
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### Part I - What is the Purpose of Megillat Rut?

#### 1. רות רבה (וילנא) פרשה ב:טו

א"ר זעירא מגלה זו אין בה לא טומאה ולא טהרה ולא איסור ולא היתר ולמה נכתבה ללמדך כמה שכן טוב לגומלי חסדים.

#### 2. זוהר חדש כרך ב (מגילות) מגילת רות

א"ר יוסי בן קסמא תמיה אני אם מגילה זו לא באה אלא כדי ליחס זרע דוד שבא מרות המואבי'... אלא כולא איצטריך בגין צדקת זו שבאה להתגייר ולחסות תחת כנפי השכינה ולהודיע ענותנות' וצניעות שבה וצדקותה.

#### 3. Dr. Yael Ziegler, Ruth: From Alienation to Monarchy p. 26.

The marriage of Ruth and Boaz represents an attempt to design a line of kingship where altruistic *hesed* is the underlying principle, thereby eliminating corruption and leading Israel to the fulfillment of its glorious goals.

#### 4. ספר אבודרהם תפלות הפסח

וגם בחג השבועות נהגו לקרות רות מפני שכתוב בו (רות א, כב) בתחלת קציר שעורים והוא זמן הקציר. ועוד טעם אחר לפי שאבותינו לא קבלו את התורה ולא נכנסו לברית אלא במילה וטבילה והרצאת דמים כדאיתא בפרק החולץ (מו, ב). ורות גם היא נתגיירה שנאמר (רות א, טז) כי אל אשר תלכי אלך וגו' מתוך תשובת רות אנו יודעין מה אמרה לה נעמי שאמרה לה

### Part II - "Disproving" R' Zeira

#### 5. תלמוד בבלי מסכת כתובות דף ז עמוד ב

תנא: מניין לברכת חתנים בעשרה? שנאמר: ויקח עשרה אנשים מזקני העיר ויאמר שבו פה. ורבי אבהו, בהאי קרא דרב נחמן מאי דריש ביה? ההוא מיבעי ליה למידרש: עמוני - ולא עמונית, מואבי - ולא מואבית, דאי סלקא דעתך לברכה, לא סגי' דלאו זקנים? ואידך? אי סלקא דעתך למידרש, לא סגי' דלאו עשרה? אין, לפרסומי מילתא.

#### 6. תלמוד ירושלמי (וילנא) מסכת כתובות פרק א

אף על גב דתימר לא התקין לאלמנה כלום טעונה ברכה מבוועז דכתיב [רות ד ב] ויקח בועז עשרה אנשים מזקני העיר ויאמר שבו פה וישבו. אמר רבי אלכסנדר מייכאן שאין קטן רשאי לישב עד שיאמר לו הגדול שב. אמר רבי פינחס מייכאן לבית דין שאין ממנין זקנים בבתי משתיות שלהן. אמר רבי לעזר בי רבי יוסי מייכאן לברכת חתנים שהיא בעשרה

#### 7. תלמוד בבלי מסכת מכות דף כג עמוד ב

גופא, א"ר יהושע בן לוי: שלשה דברים עשו ב"ד שלמטה והסכימו ב"ד של מעלה על ידם, [אלו הן]: מקרא מגילה, ושאלת שלום [בשם], והבאת מעשר... ושאלת שלום, דכתיב: והנה בועז בא מבית לחם



ויאמר לקוצרים ה' עמכם, ואומר: ה' עמך גבור החיל. מאי ואומר? וכי תימא, בועז הוא דעביד מדעתיה, ומשמיא לא אסכימו על ידו, ת"ש: ואומר ה' עמך גבור החיל.

#### **8. תלמוד בבלי מסכת בבא מציעא דף מז עמוד א**

כתנאי: זאת לפנינו בישראל על הגאולה ועל התמורה לקים כל דבר שלף איש נעלו ונתן לרעהו. גאולה - זו מכירה, וכן הוא אומר בלא יגאל. תמורה - זו חליפין, וכן הוא אומר גלא יחליפנו ולא ימיר אותו, לקים כל דבר שלף איש נעלו ונתן לרעהו. - מי נתן למי? - בועז נתן לגואל. רבי יהודה אומר: גואל נתן לבועז.

### **Part III - Hilchot Gerut in Megillat Rut**

#### **9. תלמוד בבלי מסכת יבמות דף מז עמוד ב**

אמר מר: גר שבא להתגייר, אומרים לו: מה ראית שבאת להתגייר? ומודיעים אותו מקצת מצות קלות ומקצת מצות חמורות.

ומודיעים אותו עון לקט שכחה ופאה ומעשר עני.

ואין מרבים עליו, ואין מדקדקים עליו. אמר רבי אלעזר: מאי קראה? דכתיב: ותרא כי מתאמצת היא ללכת אתה ותחדל לדבר אליה, אמרה לה: אסיר לך תחום שבת! באשר תלכי אלך. אסיר לך יחוד! באשר תליני אליך. מפקדינן שש מאות וי"ג מצות! עמך עמי. אסיר לך עבודת כוכבים! ואלהיך אלהי. ארבע מיתות נמסרו לב"ד! באשר תמותי אמות. ב' קברים נמסרו לב"ד! ושם אקבר. מיד, ותרא כי מתאמצת היא וגו'

#### **10. רות רבה (וילנא) פרשה ב**

כב [טז] ותאמר רות אל תפגעי בי לעזבך לשוב מאחריך, מהו אל תפגעי בי, אמרה לה לא תחטא עלי לא תסבין פגעיך מני, לעזבך לשוב מאחריך, מכל מקום דעתי להתגייר אלא מוטב על ידך ולא ע"י אחרת כיון ששמעה נעמי כך התחילה סודרת לה הלכות גרים, אמרה לה בתי אין דרכן של בנות ישראל לילך לבתי תיאטראות ולבתי קרקסאות שלהם, אמרה לה אל אשר תלכי אלך, אמרה לה בתי אין דרכן של ישראל לדור בבית שאין שם מזוזה, אמרה לה באשר תליני אליך, עמך עמי, אלו עונשין ואזהרות, ואלהיך אלהי, שאר מצות.

### **Part IV מואבי ולא מואבית**

#### **11. תלמוד בבלי מסכת יבמות דף עו עמוד ב**

מתני'. עמוני ומואבי אסורים ואיסורן איסור עולם, אבל נקבותיהם מותרות מיד.  
גמ'. מנא ה"מ? א"ר יוחנן, דאמר קרא: וכראות שאל את דוד יוצא לקראת הפלשתי אמר אל אבנר שר הצבא בן מי זה הנער אבנר ויאמר אבנר חי נפשך המלך אם ידעתי, ולא ידע ליה?  
א"ל דואג האדומי: עד שאתה משאל עליו אם הגון הוא למלכות אם לאו, שאל עליו אם ראוי לבא בקהל אם לאו. מ"ט? דקאתי מרות המואבית. א"ל אבנר, תנינא: עמוני - ולא עמונית, מואבי - ולא מואבית... הכי קא אמר ליה: הלכה נתעלמה ממך, צא ושאל בבית המדרש. שאל, אמרו ליה: עמוני - ולא עמונית, מואבי - ולא מואבית.  
...אמר רבא: מלמד, שחגר חרבו כישמעאל ואמר: כל מי שאינו שומע הלכה זו ידקר בחרב. כך מקובלני מבית דינו של שמואל הרמתי: עמוני - ולא עמונית, מואבי - ולא מואבית.

#### **12. תלמוד ירושלמי (וילנא) מסכת יבמות פרק ח**

אלא על ידיה נתחדשה הלכה עמוני ולא עמונית מואבי ולא מואבית





### **13. שפת אמת שבועות תרנ"ב ד"ה בענין שתי הלחם**

וזה ענין רות בעצרת דכתיב אשרי אדם עוז לו בך פירוש עיקר קבלת התורה שנקראת עוז כשמקבל האדם דברי תורה להיות מסילות בלבבו שישאר אצלו רשימות וחקיקות בתורה וזהו נקרא עוז לו בך כמו שבארנו לעיל שנעשה בן תורה וכל מעשיו תורה. וכן היה בבועז... וכן נראה מלשון מדרש רות שנאמר כל פעם שנתחדשה הלכה עמוני ולא עמונית נראה שבכח מעשיהם נתחדש הלכה זו.

## **Part V - Reexamining Chessed**

### **רות פרק א**

(ח) וַתֹּאמֶר נַעֲמִי לְשֹׁתִי כִלְתִּיהָ לִכְנָה שִׁבְנָה אִשָּׁה לְבֵית אֹמִי יַעֲשׂ יִקְנֹךְ עִמָּכֶם חֶסֶד כַּאֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתֶם עִם הַמֵּתִים וְעִמָּדִי:

### **רות פרק ב**

(כ) וַתֹּאמֶר נַעֲמִי לְכֻלְתָּהּ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לִיקְנֹךְ אֲשֶׁר לֹא עָזַב חֶסְדּוֹ אֶת הַחַיִּים וְאֶת הַמֵּתִים וַתֹּאמֶר לָהּ נַעֲמִי קְרוֹב לָנוּ הָאִישׁ מִגְּאֻלָּנוּ הוּא:

### **רות פרק ג**

(י) וַיֹּאמֶר בְּרוּכָה אַתְּ לִיקְנֹךְ בְּתִי הַיְטַבְתְּ חֶסְדְּךָ הָאֲחֵרוֹן מִן הָרִאשׁוֹן לְבִלְתִּי לָכֶת אַחֲרֵי הַבְּחוּרִים אִם דָּל וְאִם עָשִׁיר:



## Megillat Rut – Questions for Independent Learning

### Perek Alef

#### Pesukim 1-6

- How does Megillat Rut set the stage for the story in these verses? What mood does it create?
- Whom do we meet? What do and don't we know about them? How do we know it?
- Does this opening remind us of any other Biblical narratives? How?
- Based on its introduction, what would we think Megillat Rut is really about?

#### Pesukim 7-22

- Why does Naomi want her daughters in law to go back? How does she envision their futures? What does she think a woman's life is about?
- What motivates Naomi, Orpa, and Rut?
- How does this section of the megilla relate to the first six verses?

What do the following sources tell us about how Chazal answered these questions?

א:א-ו

- 1 תלמוד בבלי מגילה י:** ויהי בימי אינו אלא לשון צער. חמשה ויהי בימי הו: ויהי בימי אחשורוש, ויהי בימי שפט השפטים, ויהי בימי אמרפל, ויהי בימי אחז, ויהי בימי יהויקים.
- 2 מדרש רבה פרשה א ויהי בימי שפוט השופטים** אוי לדור ששפטו את שופטיהם ואוי לדור ששופטיו צריכין להשפט...
- 3 בבא בתרא טו:** מהו שפוט השופטים? אמר ר' יוחנן, דור ששופט את שופטיו, השופט אומר לו טול קיסם מבין שיניך, משיב לו הוא טול קורה מבין עיניך

א:ו-כז

#### מדרש רות רבה (וילנא)

- 4 יג [ח] ותאמר נעמי לשתי כלותיה לכנה שובנה אשה לבית אמה, לבית אומתה
- 5 טו [ט] העוד לי בנים במעי והיו לכם לאנשים וגו' וכי יש אדם מיבם אשת אחיו שלא היה בעולמו?
- 7 יז כי יצאה בי ובבני ובבעלי יד ה'.
- 8 כב [טז] ותאמר רות אל תפגעי בי לעזבך לשוב מאחריך, ...מכל מקום דעתי להתגייר אלא מוטב על ידך ולא ע"י אחרת כיון ששמעה נעמי כך התחילה סודרת לה הלכות גרים, אמרה לה: בתי אין דרכן של בנות ישראל לילך לבתי תיאטראות ולבתי קרקסאות שלהם, אמרה לה: אל אשר תלכי אלך, אמרה לה: בתי אין דרכן של ישראל לדור בבית שאין שם מזוזה, אמרה לה באשר תליני אלין. עמך עמי, אלו עונשין ואזהרות. ואלהיך אלהי, שאר מצות.
- 9 פרשה ג ו [יט] אשתו של בעז מתה באותו היום ונתכנסו כל ישראל לגמילות חסדים וזיל כל עמא לגמילות חסדא, נכנסה רות עם נעמי, והיתה זו יוצאת חו נכנסה ותהום כל העיר עליהן ותאמרנה הזאת נעמי, זו היא שמעשיה נאים ונעימים, לשעבר היתה מהלכת באיסקפטיאות שלה ועכשיו היא מהלכת יחיפה ואת אמרת הזאת נעמי, לשעבר היתה מכסה בבגדי מילתין ועכשיו היא מכסה בסמרטוטין ואת אמרת הזאת נעמי, לשעבר היו פניה מאדימות מכח מאכל ומשתה ועכשיו פניה מוריקות מן רעבון ואת אמרת הזאת נעמי.



10 ז [כא] אני מלאה הלכתי וריקם השיבני ה', מלאה הלכתי בבנים ומלאה בבנות, ד"א אני מלאה הלכתי שהייתי מעוברת...

### Perek Bet

#### General Questions:

- Break down the scenes in the perek as if it were a play. – the scene changes when the venue and main characters change. Think about how each scene drives the plot forward.
- Pay attention to people's descriptions, especially when they're extraneous. For example, when is Rut called a Moabite? Why is it pointed out in those verses?
- Through descriptions and dialogue the text hints to how different people view and treat Rut – what picture do you get?

#### Pesukim 4-5

- What do we learn about Boaz from the first time we see him? Why does Boaz ask about Rut?

#### Pesukim 6-7

- Read these verses carefully. How does the servant view Rut? Why is it important that she is about to go home? Connect this with what Boaz does and says in the next verse.

#### Bonus Commentaries on Perek Bet:

As you learn, pay attention to the following questions:

- What are the commentaries asking?
- Which commentaries do you think more closely reflect pshat? Why?
- Which commentaries more closely reflect drash? Why? What are they picking up on and/or teaching?
- How do the two commentaries present the impression Rut makes? How does this affect your reading of this chapter, and the whole megilla?

#### רש"י רות ב:ה

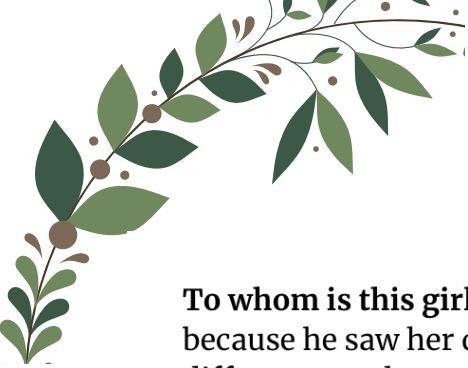
**למי הנערה הזאת.** וכי דרכו של בועז לשאול בנשים? אלא דברי צניעות וחכמה ראה בה: שתי שבליים לקטה שלשה אינה לקטה, והיתה מלקטת עומדות מעומד ושוכבות מיושב כדי שלא תשחה:

**To whom is this girl?** Does Boaz normally ask about women? Rather he is asking about the modesty and wisdom he saw in her. She would pick up two sheaves but not the third, and she would gather the standing ones when standing and the ones lying down sitting so as not to bend down (from the waist).

#### אבן עזרא רות ב:ה

**למי הנערה הזאת.** חשב שהיא אשת איש אולי שאל את הנער כי ראה לבושה כלבוש ארצה גם הצורות משתנות בעבור האויר ודרך הדרש ידוע:





**To whom is this girl?** He thought she was married, or perhaps he asked the boy because he saw her dressed in the fashion of her country, styles change because of different weather, and the midrash is well known.

### **Perek Gimmel**

There's a fair amount of action and of talk about action in this perek – including several instances of the Hebrew root ה.ש.ע. (“do”) – and also some deliberate inaction.

As you read the perek, consider:

- Who chooses each action?
- Who does each action?
- What motivates each decision/action?
- Who waits? For what, and why?

We also see a lot of conversation in this perek – between Rut and Naomi, and between Rut and Boaz.

- How do you think Naomi and Boaz each view Rut?
- How do they each address/describe her?
- What tone do you hear in what they say to her?
- Describe Rut's tone in talking to each. How do you think she sees Naomi? How does she see Boaz? How does she see herself?

More specifically:

- List the statements Boaz makes to Rut in response to her request (demand?) in verse 9.
  - Does the order make sense?
  - Why do you think he says what he says in the order that he says it?
- Twice in this chapter (verses 9 and 16), Rut is asked “מי את” – “Who are you?” (English translations may paraphrase differently, but the Hebrew is the same.)
  - Who asks her each time?
  - Do they really not know who she is?
  - Compare/contrast Rut's answers to each. (Does she answer the question?)

### **Perek Daled**

#### **Understanding Piloni Almoni**

- What is the meaning and significance of Piloni Almoni's appellation?
- Why isn't he really named here?
- What motivates him?
- How does that compare to the motivations of Boaz and Rut?

#### **Happily Ever After?**

- Why doesn't the megilla end with the wedding berachot to Rut?
- Whose baby is it?
- How do these questions relate to the themes of the megilla?

Questions by Laurie Novick, Debbie Zimmerman and Sarah Rudolph



## Talmud Torah for Women

Here we bring you the In-Brief summaries from our four part series on Talmud Torah for women, followed by the sources from our longer articles on the topic, which can be accessed at [www.deracheha.org](http://www.deracheha.org).

### LEARNING TORAH I: EXEMPTION

#### What is talmud Torah?

Talmud Torah, formal and informal Torah study, includes specific mitzvot such as hakhel, in which the entire community assembles to hear the Torah read, and the general aspiration for Torah to be the central focus of all our lives.

#### Why is it important?

Talmud Torah deepens faith, lays the groundwork for proper mitzva observance, shapes our consciousness, and brings us close to God.

#### What is the mitzva of talmud Torah?

The formal mitzva of learning Torah is only one element of the broader concept of talmud Torah. At minimum, the mitzva entails studying a few passages of Written and Oral Torah each day. At maximum, it is all-encompassing.

#### Where does the mitzva come from?

The Torah: “And you will teach them [words of Torah to] your children [beneichem]” (Devarim 11:19).

#### Why are women exempt?

The midrash on this verse reads the word “beneichem” as “your sons,” to the exclusion of daughters, meaning that a parent has no Torah-level obligation to teach daughters Torah. The Talmud quotes the midrash and concludes that, since a female need not be taught Torah, she is not obligated in the Torah-level mitzva to teach or learn it.

#### Does the exemption exclude women from talmud Torah?

No. The broader concept of talmud Torah still applies to women. Women have an exemption specifically from the obligation of formal Torah study. Exemption is not the same as prohibition. What does it mean in practice? Learn on!

### SOURCES

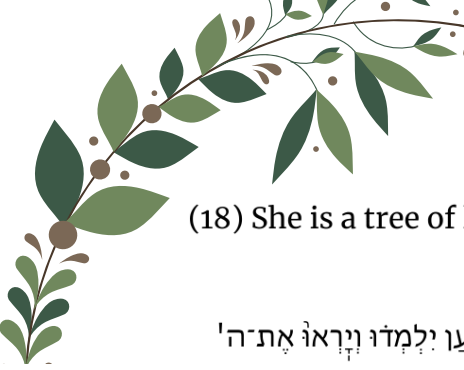
משלי ג' י"ח

(יח) עֵץ חַיִּים הִיא לְמַחְזִיקִים בָּהּ וְתַמְכִּיהָ מֵאִשָּׁר: (פ)

Proverbs 3:18







(18) She is a tree of life to those who grasp her, And whoever holds on to her is happy.

#### דברים ל"א:ב

(יב) הִקְהֵל אֶת־הָעָם הָאֲנָשִׁים וְהַנָּשִׁים וְהַטָּר וְגֵרְךָ אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ לִמְעַן יִשְׁמְעוּ וְלִמְעַן יִלְמְדוּ וְיִרְאוּ אֶת־ה' אֱלֹהֶיכֶם וְשָׁמְרוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת־כָּל־דִּבְרֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת:

#### Deuteronomy 31:12

(12) Gather the people—men, women, children, and the strangers in your communities—that they may hear and so learn to revere the LORD your God and to observe faithfully every word of this Teaching.

#### דברים ה'א'-ב'

(א) וַיִּקְרָא מֹשֶׁה אֶל־כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־הַחֻקִּים וְאֶת־הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי דֹבֵר בְּאָזְנֵיכֶם הַיּוֹם וְלִמְדֶתֶם אֹתָם וְשָׁמְרֶתֶם לַעֲשׂוֹתָם: (ב) ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ כָּרַת עִמָּנוּ בְּרִית בְּחֹרֵב:

#### Deuteronomy 5:1-2

(1) Moses summoned all the Israelites and said to them: Hear, O Israel, the laws and rules that I proclaim to you this day! Study them and observe them faithfully! (2) The LORD our God made a covenant with us at Horeb.

#### דברים ו':ז'

(ז) וְשִׁנַּנְתֶּם לְבַבְכֶּם וְדִבַּרְתֶּם בָּם בְּשִׁבְתְּכֶם בְּבֵיתְכֶם וּבְלֶכְתְּכֶם בְּדֹרֶךְ וּבְשֹׁכְבְּכֶם וּבְקוּמְכֶם:

#### Deuteronomy 6:7

(7) Impress them upon your children. Recite them when you stay at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up.

#### יהושע א':ח'

(ח) לֹא־יִמּוּשׁ סֵפֶר הַתּוֹרָה הַזֶּה מִפִּיךָ וְהִגִּיתָ בּוֹ יוֹמָם וּלְיָלָה לִמְעַן תִּשְׁמֹר לַעֲשׂוֹת כְּכָל־הַכְּתוּב בּוֹ כִּי־אִז תִּצְלִיחַ אֶת־דְּרָכְךָ וְאִז תִּשְׁכִּיל:

#### Joshua 1:8

(8) Let not this Book of the Teaching cease from your lips, but recite it day and night, so that you may observe faithfully all that is written in it. Only then will you prosper in your undertakings and only then will you be successful.

#### תניא ליקוטי אמרים פרק ה

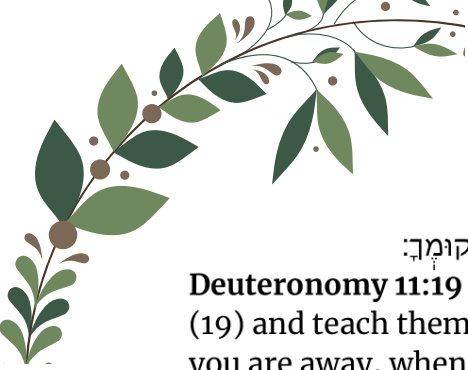
כשאדם מבין ומשיג את ההלכה במשנה ובגמרא לאשורה, על בוריה, הרי שכלו תופש ומקיף אותה וגם שכלו מלוּבש באותה שעה....הרי זה משיג ותופס ומקיף בשכלו ותופש רצונו וחכמתו של ...הקב"ה...ובידיעת התורה מלבד שהשכל מלוּבש בחכמת ה' הנה גם חכמת ה' בקרבו

#### Tanya Likutei Amarim Chapter 5

When a person understands and comprehends, correctly and fully, a halacha in the Mishna or in the Talmud, his intellect grasps and encompasses it and his intellect, too, becomes dressed by it at the same time. ...Behold he comprehends and grasps and encompasses with his intellect the will and wisdom of the Holy One, Blessed Be He....And in knowledge of the Torah, aside from the fact that the intellect is dressed in God's wisdom, God's wisdom is also within it...







### דברים י"א:ט

(יט) וְלִמַּדְתֶּם אֹתָם אֶת־בְּנֵיכֶם לְדַבֵּר בָּם בְּשִׁבְתְּכֶם בְּבֵיתְכֶם בְּדֶרֶךְ וּבְשֹׁכְבְּכֶם וּבְקוּמְכֶם:

### Deuteronomy 11:19

(19) and teach them to your children—reciting them when you stay at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up;

### ספרי דברים מ"ו

(א) ולמדתם אותם את בניכם לדבר בם - בניכם ולא בנותיכם

### Sifrei Devarim 46

(1) (Devarim 11:19) "And you shall teach them to *your sons* to speak in them": and not to your daughters

### קידושין כ"ט ב'

ואיהי מנלן דלא מיחייבה למילף נפשה דכתיב ולימדתם ולמדתם כל שאחרים מצווין ללמדו מצווה ללמד את עצמו וכל שאין אחרים מצווין ללמדו אין מצווה ללמד את עצמו ומנין שאין אחרים מצווין ללמדה דאמר קרא ולמדתם אותם את בניכם ולא בנותיכם

### Kiddushin 29b

The Gemara asks: And from where do we derive that she is not obligated to teach herself? The Gemara answers: As it is written: "And you shall teach [*velimadtem*]," which can be read as: And you shall study [*ulmadtem*], which indicates that whoever others are commanded to teach is commanded to teach himself, and whoever others are not commanded to teach is not commanded to teach himself. And from where is it derived that others are not commanded to teach a woman? As the verse states: "And you shall teach them to your sons" (Deuteronomy 11:19), which emphasizes: Your sons and not your daughters.

## LEARNING TORAH II: OBLIGATION

### Where does exemption from the mitzva of talmud Torah leave women?

The Mishna presents two rabbinic perspectives on women's Torah study, Ben Azzai's and Rabbi Eliezer's.

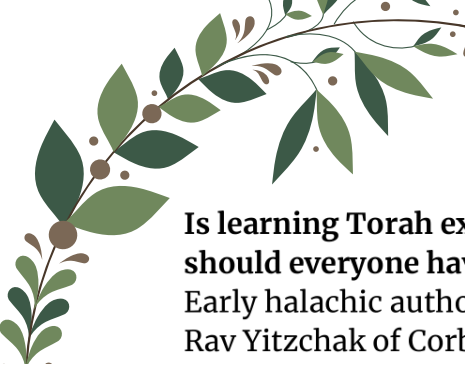
Ben Azzai says a father has an obligation to teach his daughter Torah, and that her Torah study can be beneficial.

Rabbi Eliezer strongly disagrees. He likens a father teaching his daughter Torah to teaching her tflut (lewdness, or nonsense). It's hard to know exactly what Rabbi Eliezer means by this and why he says it. But it is clear that he is not in favor of women learning Torah.

Rabbi Eliezer's position becomes widely accepted as halacha.

### If a woman can't learn Torah, how is she supposed to know how to observe Halacha?

Presumably even Rabbi Eliezer never meant to exclude women from Torah study for the purpose of learning practical Halacha. Even if he was opposed to text study, he would have at least supported women's Torah study through informal cultural transmission.



## Is learning Torah exclusively through informal cultural transmission enough, or should everyone have access to texts?

Early halachic authorities disagree on this question. As early as the thirteenth century, Rav Yitzchak of Corbeil addresses his mitzva compendium to women and men.

### SOURCES

#### משנה סוטה ג'ד'

מִכָּאן אוֹמֵר בֶּן עֲזַאי, חַיֵּב אָדָם לְלַמֵּד אֶת בִּתּוֹ תּוֹרָה, שְׁאִם תִּשְׁתֶּה, תִּדַּע שֶׁהַזְכוּת תּוֹלָה לָּהּ. רַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר אוֹמֵר, כָּל הַמְלַמֵּד אֶת בִּתּוֹ תּוֹרָה, כְּאִלוּ מְלַמְדָּה תִּפְלוֹת.

#### Mishnah Sotah 3:4

From here Ben Azai says: A man is obligated to teach his daughter Torah, for if she drinks [as a suspected-adulteress], she will know that the merit suspends it for her. Rabbi Eli'ezer says: Whoever teaches his daughter Torah is considered as if he taught her tiflut (nonsense, lewdness).

#### סוטה כ"א ב:ב'

א"ר אבהו מ"ט דר"א דכתיב (משלי ח, יב) אני חכמה שכנתי ערמה כיון שנכנסה חכמה באדם נכנסה עמו ערמומית

#### Sotah 21b

Rabbi Abbahu says: What is the reason for Rabbi Eliezer's statement? It is as it is written: "I, wisdom, dwell with cunning" (Proverbs 8:12), which indicates that once wisdom enters into a person, cunning enters with it.

#### תלמוד ירושלמי מסכת סוטה ג:ד

מטרונה שאלה את ר' לעזר: מפני מה חט אחת במעשה העגל, והן מתים בה שלש מיתות? אמ' לה: אין חכמתה שלאשה אלא בפילכה. דכת' (שמות לה) "וכל אשה חכמת לב בידיה טו". אמ' לו הורקנוס בנו: בשביל שלא להשיבה דבר אחד מן התורה, איבדת ממני שלש מאות כור מעשר בכל שנה. אמ' ליה: ישרפו דברי תורה ואל ימסרו לנשים.

#### Talmud Yerushalmi Sota 3:4

A matron asked Rabbi Eliezer: Why is there one sin in the story of the [golden] calf, but they die for it three [types] of death? He said to her: A woman's wisdom is only in her spindle, as it is written, "And every woman wise of heart wove [for the *mishkan*] with her hands" (Shemot 35). His son Hyrkanos said to him: For the sake of not answering her one matter from the Torah, you have lost for me 300 measures [roughly 360 liters] of the [Levite] tithe per annum. He [Rabbi Eliezer] said to him [his son]: [Better that] matters of Torah be burnt and they not be transmitted to women.

#### נדה מ"ה ב:כ"ה

בינה יתירה באשה יותר מבאיש

#### Niddah 45b

There is more discernment [bina] in a woman than in a man.





### חגיגה ג.

(דברים לא, יב) הקהל את העם האנשים והנשים והטף אם אנשים באים ללמוד נשים באות לשמוע טף למה באין כדי ליתן שכר למביאיהן

### Chagigah 3a

They said to him that Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya interpreted the following verse: "Assemble the people, the men and the women and the little ones" (Deuteronomy 31:12). This verse is puzzling: If men come to learn, and women, who might not understand, come at least to hear, why do the little ones come? They come in order for God to give a reward to those who bring them

### תוספות סוטה כא:

ונראה דפי' דמצוה לשמוע הנשים כדי שידעו לקיים מצוה....

### Tosafot Sota 21b

And it appears that its explanation [is] that [it is] a mitzva for the women to hear in order that they [can] know [how] to fulfill [the] command....

### ספר חסידים שי"ג

(א) חייב אדם ללמוד לבנותיו המצוות כגון פסקי הלכות ומה שאמרו שהמלמד לאשה תורה כאלו מלמדה תיפלות זהו עומק תלמוד וטעמי המצוות וסודי התורה אותן אין מלמדין לאשה ולקטן אבל הלכות מצוות ילמד לה שאם לא תדע הלכות שבת איך תשמור שבת וכן כל מצוות כדי לעשות להזהר במצוות

### Sefer Chasidim 313

A man is obligated to teach his daughters the *mitzvot*, such as halachic rulings. And that which they said, that he who teaches a woman Torah is as though he teaches her *tiflut*, that [refers specifically to] depth of Talmud and reasons for commandments and secrets of the Torah. Those we do not teach to a woman and to a minor. But the laws of *mitzvot* he should teach her, for if she will not know the laws of Shabbat, how will she keep Shabbat? And similarly all *mitzvot*, in order to perform [them and] to be careful [to observe] the *mitzvot*.

### שו"ת מהרי"ל קצ"ט

ואי משום דידעו לקיים המצוות אפשר שילמדו ע"פ הקבלה השרשים והכללות וכשיסתפקו ישאלו למורה כאשר אנו רואין בדורינו שבקיאות הרבה בדיני מליחה והדחה וניקור והלכות נדה וכיוצא בזה והכל ע"פ הקבלה מבחץ

### Teshuvot Maharil 199

And if [you suggest formal study in order] that they should know to perform *mitzvot*, they can learn the key points and the rules through received tradition. And when they have a doubt they will ask a halachic authority. As we see in our generation, that they are quite expert in the laws of salting and rinsing [meat after slaughter] and removing the sciatic nerve and the laws of *nidda* and the like, and everything through the received tradition from their environment.



### שו"ת מהרי"ל החדשות צג

הנח להן לבנות ישראל, אם אינן נביאות הן, בנות נביאות הן. ומנעוריהן בקיאתן הן על פי אימותן והורתן. ושורש רוב החומרות דרבנן, דמקילי הרבה בנות ע"ה ונשותיהן. על כן מוטל על כל חכם ות"ח להודיעם ולהפרישם מאיסור ולהדריך בדרך ישרה, ולכל הפחות בני ביתו והם יודיעו לחברותיהם...

#### New Responsa Maharil 93

Leave it to them, to the daughters of Israel, [for] if they are not prophetesses, they are daughters of prophetesses. And from their youth they are expert in accordance with their mothers and their teachings. And the root of most rabbinic stringencies is that many daughters and wives of the unlearned are lenient. Therefore, it is incumbent upon every sage and student of the sages to inform them and to separate them from that which is prohibited and to guide them in the straight path, at the least the members of his household, and they will inform their friends...

### ספר מצוות קטן, הקדמה ב'

(ב) וגם כתב עוד (לומר) לנשים המצות הנוהגות להם עשה ולא ותועיל להן הקריאה והדקדוק בהן כאשר יועיל עסק התלמוד לאנשים

#### Sefer Mitzvot Katan, Introduction 2

...He also wrote for women the *mitzvot* that apply to them, positive and negative, and they will benefit from reading and learning them precisely, just as the occupation with Talmud benefits men.

### יורה דעה רמ"ו:

הגה ומ"מ חייבת האשה ללמוד דינים השייכים לאשה (אגור בשם סמ"ג) ואשה אינה חייבת ללמד את בנה תורה ומ"מ אם עוזרת לבנה או לבעלה שיעסקו בתורה חולקת שכר בהדיהו (הגהות מה"פ"א דת"ת וסמ"ג):

#### Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 246:6

Rama: Nonetheless, a woman is obligated to study laws that are relevant to her.

## LEARNING TORAH III: OPENINGS

### What position does Rambam take on women's Torah study?

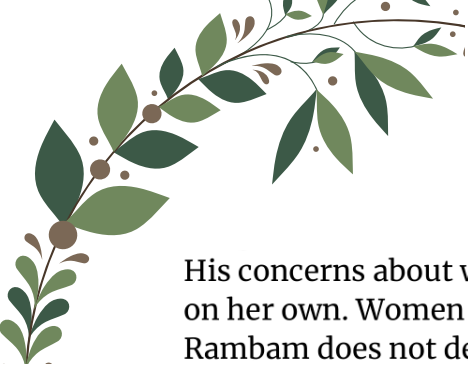
Rambam codifies Rabbi Eliezer's position, that a father is not supposed to teach his daughter Torah. But Rambam leaves room for women's Torah study in a number of ways:

Rambam limits the restriction to Oral Torah. That allows for women to learn Written Torah.

His choice of language may indicate that there is no clear prohibition even on women learning Oral Torah.

The restrictions on teaching a female may apply only to a father teaching his daughter.





His concerns about women's talmud Torah do not seem to apply to a woman learning on her own. Women's independent study is praiseworthy. Rambam does not deny that women have the capacity to pursue Torah study properly. Women have to in order to achieve the highest levels of faith.

### **What other openings develop?**

In the nineteenth century, Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch establishes a day school for girls. He writes that formal education is an extension of the informal study women have always engaged in.

### **What is the modern turning point in women's Torah study?**

In 1917, Sarah Schenirer observes educated women moving away from religious life. She perceives that their souls 'hunger for Torah.' Inspired by Rav Hirsch's educational approach, she founds the Bais Yaakov network of girls' schools.

### **What support does Bais Yaakov receive and why?**

Chafetz Chayim supports Bais Yaakov. He argues that historical shifts away from traditional communities and toward textual transmission of Jewish tradition mean that learning through imitation can no longer meet women's educational needs. Rabbi Eliezer's reservations no longer apply. Women now must turn to texts to learn Torah.

## **SOURCES**

### **משנה תורה, הלכות תלמוד תורה א' י"ג**

(יג) אשה שלמדה תורה יש לה שכר אבל אינו כשכר האיש. מפני שלא נצטווית. וכל העושה דבר שאינו מצוה עליו לעשותו אין שכרו כשכר המצוה שעשה אלא פחות ממנו. ואף על פי שיש לה שכר צו חכמים שלא ילמד אדם את בתו תורה. מפני שרוב הנשים אין דעתם מכוונת להתלמד אלא הן מוציאות דברי תורה לדברי הבאי לפי עניות דעתן. אמרו חכמים כל המלמד את בתו תורה כאלו למדה תפלות. במה דברים אמורים בתורה שבעל פה אבל תורה שבכתב לא ילמד אותה לכתחלה ואם למדה אינו כמלמדה תפלות:

### **Mishneh Torah, Torah Study 1:13**

A woman who learned Torah receives a reward, but it is not equivalent to the man's reward because she is not commanded, and anyone who does something that he is not commanded to do, his reward is not equivalent to the reward of one who is commanded and did, but rather less than that. And even though she receives a reward, the sages commanded that a man not teach his daughter Torah because most women's minds are not oriented to study. Rather, they transform matters of Torah into matters of nonsense in accordance with the poverty of their intellects. The sages said, 'Anyone who teaches his daughter Torah is as though he has taught her nonsense. To what does this refer? To Oral Torah. But Written Torah, he should not set out to teach her, but if he taught her it is not as if he taught her nonsense.



### טורי זהב על שולחן ערוך יורה דעה רמ"ד:

(ד) אבל תורה שבכתב... נראה לי דהתם לא דרש המלך כי אם פשוטי הדברים וזה באמת מותר אף לדין לכתחלה כמו שהוא המנהג בכל יום מה שאין כן בלימוד פירוש דברי תורה דרך התחכמות והבנה אסור לכתחלה

### Turei Zahav on Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 246:4

It seems to me that there [in *hakhel*] the king only explained the simple meaning of the matters and this is truly permissible even for us from the outset, as is the custom every day. Which is not the case in learning the explanation of matters of Torah through wise thinking and understanding, [which] they prohibited from the outset....

### משנה תורה, הלכות יסודי התורה ד"י"ג

(יג) ...שְׁבַחֲמֶשׁ מִצְוֹת הָאֱלוֹהִים שֶׁחֻכָּמִים הָרִאשׁוֹנִים קִוְּרִינִי אוֹתוֹ פָּרְדֵּס כְּמוֹ שֶׁאָמְרוּ אַרְבָּעָה נִכְנָסוּ לְפָרְדֵּס... וְאֵנִי אוֹמֵר שֶׁאֵין רָאִי לָטִיל בְּפָרְדֵּס אֶלָּא מִי שֶׁנִּתְמַלֵּא כְּרִסּוֹ לֶחֶם וּבָשָׂר. וְלָחֶם וּבָשָׂר הוּא לִידַע הָאֱסוּר וְהַמֵּתָר וְכַיּוּצָא בָּהֶם מִשְׁאֵר הַמִּצְוֹת... וְאֶפְשָׁר שֶׁיִּדְעֻם הַכֹּל קָטָן וְגָדוֹל אִישׁ וְאִשָּׁה בַּעַל לֵב רָחֵב וּבַעַל לֵב קָצֵר:

### Mishneh Torah, Foundations of the Torah 4:13

...That in these five *mitzvot* [belief in God, rejecting other gods, recognizing God's unity, loving God and having awe of God], these are the ones that the early sages call *Pardes*, as they said "Four entered the *Pardes*"...I say that the only one fit to walk in the *Pardes* is one whose belly is full with bread and meat. "Bread and meat" means to know what is prohibited and permitted, and similar matters from among the other *mitzvot*....and everyone can know them, a minor and an adult, a man and a woman, a person of great understanding and a person of less understanding.

### שו"ת מהרי"ל החדשות סימן מה

ודווקא המלמד לבתו אבל היא שלמדה בעצמה יש לה שכר... שהיא מכוונת לטוב'.

### New Responsa Maharil 45

And specifically [Rambam referred to] one who teaches his daughter, but if she learned on her own, she receives reward for she intends for good.

### פרישה, יורה דעה רמ"ו:ט"ו

(א) ...אבל אם למדה לעצמה אנו רואות שיצאו מהרוב ולכך כתב לעיל שיש לה שכר ור"ל אם למדה התורה על מכוונה שאינה מוציאה לדברי הבאי אבל האב אינו רשאי ללמדה דדילמא תוציא דבריה לדברי הבאי כי הוא אינו יודע מה שבלבה:

### Prisha, Yoreh Deah 246:15

But if she learned for herself, we see that she is an exception to the majority and therefore he [the Rambam] wrote that she receives reward, that is, if she learned Torah correctly and is not transforming it to nonsense. But the father is not permitted to teach her for perhaps she will transform its [Torah's] words to nonsense, for he does not know what is in her heart.

### Rav S. R. Hirsch Torah Commentary Devarim 11:19

...This same understanding of Jewish literature and this knowledge of the *mitzvot*,



which is demanded in order to fulfill “and fear the Lord your God and observe to perform all the words of this Torah” (below 31, 12)—this should be transferred to our daughters no less than to our sons...and so they have practiced among [the people] Israel always, and testament to that is the complete literature in Yiddish that was written primarily for the need of women in order to enable them [to have] comprehension of the Bible and of the prayers and to transfer to them common knowledge of Halacha and of ethical teachings of our sages.

### **Sarah Schenirer, Em BeYisrael, Part I pp. 39-40**

It is not in the power of secular studies to quench the flame of the Jewish soul, which only learning of Torah study has the capacity to satisfy. Secular studies are to the soul as gold to the body. Can gold satisfy physical hunger? Never!... A Jewish soul will not be satisfied from secular studies. Only sacred studies will satisfy its hunger, for only its Creator can know what nourishes it. I highly doubt that there is any student as happy, at times, to the extent that I am happy when I read our sacred texts.

### **לקוטי הלכות חפץ חיים סוטה כא**

המלמד את בתו תורה...נראה דכל זה דוקא בזמנים שלפנינו שקבלת האבות היתה חזקה מאוד אצל כל אחד ואחד להתנהג בדרך שדרכו בו אבותיו וכמאמר הכתוב, “שאל אביך ויגדך” (דברים לב:ז). בזה היינו יכולים לומר שלא תלמוד הבת תורה ותסמוך בהנהגה על אבותיה הישרים. כעת בעוונותינו הרבים קבלת האבות נתרופפה מאוד מאוד וגם מצוי שאינו במקום אבות כלל. בפרט אותן שמרגילין עצמן ללמוד כתב ולשון העמים בוודאי מצוה רבה ללמד אותן חומש וגם נביאים וכתובים ומוסרי חז”ל כגון מסכת אבות וספר מנורת המאור כדי שתאומת אצלן ענין אמונתנו הקדושה. אם לא עלול שיסור לגמרי מדרך ה’ ויעברו על כל יסודי הדת ח”ו.

### **Likkutei Halachot Sota 21**

One who teaches his daughter Torah...It seems that all this applies specifically to earlier times, when the received ancestral tradition was very strong for each and every person to act in the way of his forefathers, according to the verse: ‘Ask your father and he will tell you’ (Devarim 32:7). Thus we were able to say that a daughter should not learn Torah and she should rely in her conduct on her righteous forebears. Now in our great iniquities, the received ancestral tradition has become very, very weakened and it is also common that one does not live in the place of one’s forebears at all. Especially those [women] who accustom themselves to study writing and language of the nations [i.e. secular learning], certainly it is a great mitzva to teach them *Chumash* and also Prophets and Writings and the ethics of our sages of blessed memory such as [Mishna] tractate Avot and the book Menorat Ha-maor, in order that the matter of our holy faith be authenticated for them. If not, they are liable to deviate completely from the path of God, and to transgress all the fundamentals of the religion, God forbid.

### **רב ישראל מאיר הכהן, אגרת, כ”ג שבט תרצ”ג**

כל מי שנגעה יראת ד’ בלבבו המצוה ליתן את בתו ללמוד בבי”ס זה וכל החששות והפקפוקים מאיסור ללמד את בתו תורה אין שום מיחוש לזה בימינו אלה.







**Rav Yisrael Meir Kagan, Letter, 23 Shevat, 5693**

Anyone that the fear of God is in his heart, the mitzva is to let his daughter learn in this school. [As for] all the concerns and hesitations [arising] from the prohibition to teach his daughter Torah, there is no concern for this in these days.

## **LEARNING TORAH IV: WHAT TO STUDY**

**What happens once Chafetz Chayim gives his approbation to Bais Yaakov?**

Calls to restrict access to Written Torah and its commentaries never regain traction. Teaching Oral Torah to women remains contentious, though, because of different understandings of how much has the world changed and what Torah women need in light of that change.

**What are the opinions on Oral Torah for women?**

Opinions range from limited approbation (e.g., Rav Moshe Feinstein), to saying there is no halachic constraint (e.g., Rav Mordechai Eliyahu), to considering it an imperative (e.g., Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik).

**Is there common ground among the different opinions?**

Yes, widespread acknowledgement that:

Women have a portion in Torah and textual access to that portion must expand from what it was historically.

Nowadays, if someone doesn't learn Torah, chances are that that will lead to frivolity. The halachic justification for women to study independently goes back long before Bais Yaakov, so any debate should center more around school policy than individuals.

**What do the supporters of women learning Oral Torah advocate?**

Rav Soloveitchik advocated teaching girls Torah just as we teach boys.

Rav Aharon Lichtenstein was less certain of pressing all women to learn Talmud intensively, but believed that we must teach women all areas of Torah seriously and well, out of respect for Torah and out of respect for women.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rav Menachem Mendel Schneerson, agreed that women must learn Written and Oral Torah, and added that women's learning is a positive sign of approaching redemption.

**What is the goal of women's Torah study?**

Anyone's study of Torah should contribute to halachic observance, building moral character, and faith. Engagement with Torah can be transformative, enhancing the avodat Hashem of the individual and community.

## **SOURCES**





### שו"ת אגרות משה יורה דעה חלק ג סימן פז

עכ"פ משניות שהוא תורה שבע"פ צו חכמים שלא ילמדום והוא כאילו למדום תפלות, ולכן צריך למונעם מזה ורק פרקי אבות משום שהוא עניני מוסר והנהגות טובות יש ללמדם בהסבר לעוררן לאהבת תורה ולמדות טובות, אבל לא שאר המסכתות...

### Responsa Iggerot Moshe Y. D. 3:78

In any case, Mishnayot, which are Oral Torah, the sages commanded not to teach them [to women] and it is as though he teaches them *tiflut*. Therefore he must prevent them from this, and one should teach them only Pirkei Avot because it consists of matters of ethics and good conduct, with explanations to arouse them to love of Torah and to good character attributes, but not the rest of the tractates...

### מאמר מרדכי א יו"ד יא

כבר כתבו האחרונים שבימינו מותר לאשה ללמוד תורה, הן תורה שבכתב והן תורה שבעל פה...ואף המורה רשאי ללמדה...שבימינו אין הנשים ספונות בביתן כפי שהיה בעבר, ומוטב שתלמד דברי קודש מאשר תקרא דברים אסורים ודברי הבאי.

### Ma'amar Mordechai I Y. D. 11

The later halachic authorities have already written that in our days it is permitted for a woman to learn Torah, both Written Torah and Oral Torah...and even the teacher is permitted to teach her...for in our days women are not enclosed in their homes as was in the past, and it is preferable for her to study holy matters than to read forbidden or frivolous matters.

### רב יעקב אריאל "גדר ביטול תורה גם לנשים"

יום של ביטול תורה הוא חור באישיותה של האישה, ויש להתייחס אליו במידה מסוימת כ"ביטול תורה", "אף שאינו" ביטול תורה" במשמעות המקורית של המושג. אין כאן ביטול בידע התורני, אך יש כאן ביטול באישיותה הרוחנית של האישה....

### Rav Ya'akov Ariel, 'The Safeguard of Bitul Torah Applies also to Women'

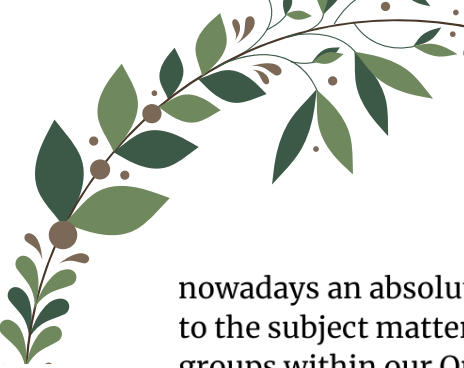
A day of *bitul Torah* [wasting time one could spend learning] is a hole in the character of a woman, and one should relate to it, to some extent, like [the halachic category of] *bitul Torah*, even though it is not *bitul Torah* in its original sense. There is no *bitul* of [obligatory] Torah knowledge, but there is *bitul* regarding the spiritual character of the woman.

### 'People: Shira Smiles, ' Jewish Action

We live in an age where women are more learned than ever before. Women want to be challenged to think, and they appreciate the intellectual rigor of an in-depth *shiur*. Yet challenging the mind without engaging the heart is too limiting. People are searching for meaning. I try, with my *shiurim*, to provide a message for life, to nurture the soul as well as the mind.

### Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, 'Talmud Study for Girls in Yeshiva Elementary and High Schools (b)'

Not only is the teaching of Torah she-be-al-peh to girls permissible but it is



nowadays an absolute imperative. This policy of discrimination between the sexes as to the subject matter and method of instruction which is still advocated by certain groups within our Orthodox community has contributed greatly to the deterioration and downfall of traditional Judaism. Boys and girls alike should be introduced into the inner halls of Torah she-be-al-peh.

**רב יוסף דב סולובייצק, ציטוט מתוך מאזעסאן, הרב מאיר, "חינוך הבנות"**

...הנשים לא יסכימו להתנהג לפי התורה אם הענין לא יהיה מובן להן ממקורו במקרא ובגמרא... יש בעיות מסובכות המופיעות בכל יום בעולם הטכני שלנו, ואם בנות לא ילמדו יסודות התורה מן החומש ומן הגמרא עם פירושי הראשונים, אז ח"ו תפסיק היהדות האמיתית שלנו

**Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, in Rav Meir Moseson, 'Chinuch Ha-banot'**

...Women will not consent to conduct themselves in accordance with Torah if the matter is not understood by them from its source in Scripture and in Gemara... There are complex problems that appear every day in our technical world, and if girls do not learn the fundamentals of Torah from the Chumash and from the Gemara with the commentaries of the early authorities, then God forbid our authentic Judaism will cease.

**Rav Aharon Lichtenstein, 'Women, Talmud Study, and Avodat Hashem'**

If Torah is to be taught [to females] at all, and be taught it must, certainly in our contexts, then it needs to be taught seriously, to ensure that indeed Torah is understood and absorbed with the seriousness and with the earnestness, with the exhilaration, with the excitement, the passion that is coming to it. But secondly, not only respect for Torah requires this of us, but respect for women as well. Respect for their abilities, their commitment, for their potential...

**Rav Aharon Lichtenstein, 'Torah Study for Women'**

Many women seem to lack the motivation, a societal support is missing and, more importantly, there is lacking a desire to be unconditionally committed to such learning in the future... I am also not convinced that it is desirable to press women to study Talmud in such an intensive form. After all, Halacha does differentiate between men and women in this matter, and their respective life roles are also different. But when one speaks about the ability to study a page of Talmud, to understand it and enjoy it, I see no reason to deny these teachings to women. And it is even necessary to establish this as an integral part of the school curriculum, an actual *shiur*.

**ר' מנחם מ. שניאורסון, לימוד תורה לנשים**

...הרי לא זו בלבד שמותר להן ללמוד תורה שבעל פה, אלא יתירה מזה, על פי טעם הלכה זו עצמה – צריך ללמדן תושבע"פ, לא רק לימוד הלכות פסוקות בלי טעמיהן אלא גם לימוד טעמי ההלכות, ועד לשקלא וטריא שבתורה, שמטבע האדם (איש או אשה) שחפץ ומתענג יותר בלימוד זה, שעל ידי זה תהיה אצלן התפתחות החושים והכשרונות ("ערמומית") ברוח תורתנו הקדושה..שענין זה הוא מהחידושים לטובה שבדורות האחרונים: אע"פ שה(היתר, ויתירה מזה) צורך בדורות האחרונים בלימוד תושבע"פ לנשים הוא מצד ירידת הדורות...הרי, התוצאה בפועל ממש (תהי' הסיבה איזו



שתהי')—היא לטובה, שע"י זה נתוסף יותר בלימוד התורה. ויש לומר שהטעם שזכינו להוספה בלימוד התורה דנשים בדורות האחרונים דוקא...כיון שבסוף זמן הגלות מודגשת יותר ההכנה לזמן הגאולה."

### **Rav Menachem M. Schneerson, 'Torah Study for Women'**

Not only is it permissible for them to learn Oral Torah, but more than that, according to the rationale of this very halacha—[one] must teach them Oral Torah, not just learning halachic rulings without their rationales but also learning the reasons behind the *halachot*, up through the give-and-take that is in the Torah, for it is the nature of a person (man or woman) to desire and take greater pleasure in this learning, through which they will develop senses and skills ("cunning") in the spirit of our holy Torah...For this matter is among the positive new developments of the latest generations: even though the (permission, and more than that, the) need in recent generations for women's learning Oral Torah is from the aspect of the decline of generations...behold, the actual result really (let the reason be what it may)—is for good, for by means of this, there is additional Torah study. And one could say that the reason we have merited an increase in women's Torah study specifically in recent generations...is because at the end of the period of exile, the preparation for the time of redemption is more emphasized.

### **סוטה כ"א א**

רבינא אמר לעולם זכות תורה ודקאמרת אינה מצווה ועושה נהי דפקודי לא מפקדא באגרא דמקרין ומתניין בנייהו ונטרן להו לגבריהו עד דאתו מבי מדרשא מי לא פלגאן בהדיהו

### **Sotah 21a**

Ravina said: ...Through...reading [verses] and repeating [mishnayot to] their sons and watching out for their husbands until they come from the *bet midrash*, do they not share the reward with them?

### **רב מנחם מ. שניאורסון, "שותפות בלימוד"**

והבנים מספרים לאמותיהם על לימודים, הן במקרא והן במשנה, וגם בגמרא...והאמהות מוסיפות להסביר ולבאר להם את לימודם, ועל דרך זה בנוגע לבעליהן...שמביעות דעתן וסברתן וכו'.

### **Rav Menachem M. Schneerson, 'Partnership in Study'**

The children tell their mothers about their studies, both in Scripture and in Mishnah, and also in Gemara...and the mothers contribute, explaining and clarifying for them what they have learned, and similarly regarding their husbands...that they express their opinions and reasoning, etc.

### **Rav Aharon Lichtenstein, 'Women, Talmud Study, and Avodat Hashem'**

There exists an obligation for a girl to study the halakhot of niddah and taharat ha-mishpahah, and also kashrut and Shabbat because these impinge on her daily life. What is intended is that we need to ensure, minimally, that the depth of intensity, knowledge, and sensitivity which are needed in order to assure commitment, even if we are not interested for the moment (if that be the case) in the knowledge *per se*, but instrumentally, as molding a woman in becoming an *ovedet Hashem*, a *keli* in serving





the *Ribbono Shel Olam*, that certainly needs to be studied. And, of course, within the modern context, that applies to areas of Torah that are far, far remote from the level of practical implementation.

**Rabbanit Esti Rosenberg, 'The World of Women's Torah Learning: Developments, Directives, and Objectives'**

Is the dream and vision underlying women's Torah learning to produce female Torah scholars who will be able to participate in scholarly Torah discussions at the highest level, or perhaps the primary goal is to raise *ba'alei batiyot* [laywomen] who are dedicated to and love the Torah?

**רב יהודה עמיטל, והארץ נתן לבני אדם, עמ' 45.**

שגם נשים, הפטורות ממצוות תלמוד תורה, חייבות בזמננו בלימוד תורה מצד מצוות עבודת ה', שכן כאמור, מרכיב מרכזי בקיום עבודת ה', במיוחד בזמננו, הוא על ידי תלמוד תורה, שהוא עבודת ה' בשכל.

**Rav Yehuda Amital, Ve-ha-aretz Natan Livnei Adam, p. 45.**

For also women, who are exempt from the mitzva of *talmud Torah*, are obligated in our time in learning Torah from the perspective of the mitzva of *avodat Hashem*. For so, as was said, a central component of fulfillment of *avodat Hashem*, especially in our time, is through *talmud Torah*, which is *avodat Hashem* through the intellect.

**פסחים ס"ח ב**

רב יוסף ביומא דעצרתא אמר עבדי לי עגלא תלתא אמר אי לא האי יומא דקא גרים כמה יוסף איכא בשוקא

**Pesachim 68b**

The Gemara relates that Rav Yosef, on the day of *Shavuot*, would say: Prepare me a choice third-born calf. He said: If not for this day on which the Torah was given that caused the Jewish people to have the Torah, how many Yosefs would there be in the market? It is only due to the importance of Torah study that I have become a leader of the Jewish people, and I therefore have a special obligation to rejoice on this day.

**Shayna Goldberg, 'Why I Believe in Women and Their Batei Midrash'**

I learn and teach Torah because it is invigorating, thought-provoking and stimulating. I learn and teach Torah because it builds my religious world and shapes its contours. I learn and teach Torah because it enriches my life and fills it with meaning. I learn and teach Torah because it brings me closer to my Creator. I learn Torah because I cannot imagine my life any other way.





## Pre-Shavuot Interview with Rabbanit Shira Sapir

### Teacher of Candidates for Conversion

#### What do you love to learn, and why?

I love learning gemara. In addition, in the past five years I have discovered the beauty of learning *halacha*. Gemara and Halacha demand different styles of learning: the former is all about opening up your mind to a multiplicity of topics, analyzing the text according to various methodologies, and just swimming in a sea of ideas while trying to get to the bottom of things. *Halacha* is very straightforward thinking – even when we start our journey from the *gemara*, the focus is on one question: what is the *Halacha* that is derived from this section? I'm not saying there are no discussions in the world of Halacha or disagreements – there are plenty. But what these two worlds of learning both bestow on me is the feeling of sitting in the *beit midrash* beside these giants of Torah learning and sort of leaning into their discussions, arguments and ways of thinking. I find it fascinating and enriching!

#### What do you like most about Deracheha?

I love Deracheha!

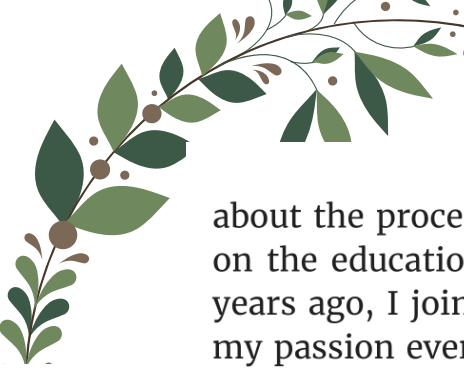
I really like the layout of the articles: the brief overview at the top, which gives you a general picture of the article before you delve into the finer points. I also appreciate the division of the articles into subsections. This layout ensures that readers do not get lost in what can sometimes be complicated material. Plus, the subsections allow you to read the article at your own pace and easily pick up where you left off

#### Who is a Jewish woman who inspires you?

I want to shout out to all those women who fight for finding themselves a word, sentence and all the more so in the *Torah*, making *Torah* study a significant part of their life. Women who are paying a social and financial price for their passion. These women, many of whom are close friends and teachers of mine, are my inspiration and motivation to continue my own personal, religious and spiritual growth through *Torah* study.

#### Can you tell us about your work teaching gerim?

It has been ten years since I became part of the world of *giyur*. At first I did very little teaching and most of my work was in the office. This experience gave me a wide and deep perspective and understanding of the world of conversion in Israel. I Learned all about the bureaucratic, technical and personal process the converts go through. I had the pleasure of passing this knowledge on to prospective converts when they called the hotline inquiring



about the process. After a few years, I decided to leave the office and focus on the educational aspect and lead the converts through the process. Five years ago, I joined the English-speaking class in Tel Aviv, which has been my passion ever since. This is an international group of people with a huge variety of backgrounds and stories. During this intensive year-long course, my students learn and experience Judaism. *Shabbat*, *Kashrut* and the year-cycle, focusing on the holidays, are just a few of the main topics we cover during the course.

### **What have you learned from the experience?**

There is a Hebrew phrase, דברים שרואים מכאן לא רואים משם, (Things that you see from here, look differently from there). I undoubtedly gained a unique insider's view that changed my perspective on the world of *giyur*, the *halachot* of *giyur* and even affected my opinion on the question of religion and state.

Growing up, I learned that a non-Jew was forbidden to keep Shabbat fully. This means that anyone who is undergoing conversion must violate Shabbat doing one *melacha* every week until they complete the process. Interestingly, there are a few opinions, less known, that actually claim that non-Jews, who are preparing for conversion and practicing *Shabbat* as part of the process, may indeed keep *Shabbat* fully to the best of their knowledge and ability. In fact, this is how the *beit din* normally instructs them if they are asked, and how I personally instruct my students.

Putting the halachic discussion aside, what I learned is that we just need to be kind. Converts don't need to be constantly reminded that they need to fulfill this specific *mitzvah* or another. They are trying hard to integrate as much as possible as an "almost-Jew" - they don't need to be constantly reminded of their otherness.

Another topic is the question of motives. The *Rambam* says that we should check the potential convert to see if she/he is interested in a Jewish Man / Woman (see: *Hilchot Isurei Biah* 13:14)

In fact, most candidates for conversion nowadays already have or live with a Jewish partner, and yet the *beit din* accepts them for conversion. There is a halachic justification to this, which I will not elaborate on here. I want to focus on what I learned about "motives" during the many conversations I had with potential converts. A person may seek conversion and already have a Jewish partner, and sometimes has even been introduced to Judaism via their relationship, but the actual personal motive to convert is her/his falling in love with Judaism. In some cases, her/his interest in Judaism was the incentive to search for a relationship with someone Jewish in the first place. Likewise, there are many conversion students who have a Jewish



father or grandparent and are engaged to someone Jewish and would like to become halachically Jewish before taking the big "marriage" step.

### **How does it affect your *Shavuot*?**

Interestingly, this hasn't affected my *Shavuot*. True, I did give a few *shiurim* about *giyuron Shavuot*, but the holiday that is affected by my work is *Pesach*. It is very important that conversion candidates spend the *Seder* with a religious family and experience it fully. For some of them, it's their first *Seder* ever. Every year I find many families around the country to host my students, but I always give them an open invitation to my own *Seder*. So we've been having between 2-5 special guests every year. Last year we ended up having 15 guests! It was the biggest *Seder* we have ever hosted, with over 40 attendees in total.

### **What do you think it would be important for us to know to help fulfill the *mitzvah* of loving the convert?**

When opening our home and heart to converts, say as Shabbat guests for example, we should remember that this form of hospitality requires an open mind and a deep understanding of our differences. We grew up in very different environments, and it's not easy to break into our close-knit communities, with our social codes and expectations. Some might feel that "they" don't look like us and don't sound like us and they might never do. But it doesn't mean they aren't sincere or serious about their endeavor to become truly connected with their Jewish identity and the Jewish religion. Another point to keep in mind, which is true especially regarding my "international" class: most or all of the students in the English-speaking class (and some of the students in the Hebrew classes too) are new-*olim*. They chose to leave their family, friends and many times a successful career behind to follow their heart on the journey to Judaism. Besides all the "regular" challenges of the conversion process they are also alone in a new country. If you are a recent or not-so recent *oleh* you can probably identify with that. They are shouldering a double-burden. I think in this case, embracing them in our community and family needs to be more than just opening the gates of Jewish practice, but also giving them a warm place to feel at home.

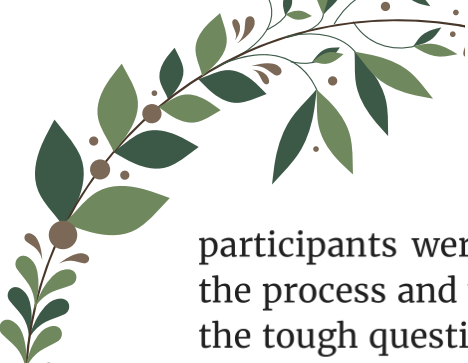
### **Any stories in particular to share?**

Here are two stories, both connected to *Shavuot*:

A few year ago, I gave a *shiur* on *Shavuot* about *Tehilim* 89 to a group of conversion students who lived on my *Kibbutz*. My *shiur* was being translated simultaneously into Spanish and Portuguese with some Italian too. The







participants were conversion candidates and converts who had completed the process and were still living here. Part of the discussion revolved around the tough questions addressed to *Hashem* by the composer of the chapter of *Tehillim*. I don't remember exactly what I was asked, but, in response, I emphasized how important it was to ask questions in Judaism, and not to be scared of questions that might be challenging or seemingly heretical. I told them that in my view this was a strong Jewish value I pointed out that in mainstream Christianity people were encouraged NOT to ask, and that people were encouraged to just accept the faith with no second thoughts. One of the participants interrupted me at that moment and said, "No, no, in Christianity, if you ask questions – you end up here," and he pointed around the room at himself and his friends...

There was an engaged man who told me at the beginning of the course that his mother was ill. Was there any chance he and his fiancée could finish the conversion process sooner so that his mother could be at their wedding? I was skeptical, the *beit din* didn't usually take these requests into account at such an early point in the process. I let the matter rest for a while. Six months later the couple's host-family called me and said that the mother's situation was really bad. The couple, themselves, had no idea that the family had contacted me. Was there anything we could do? By now I knew them much better and decided to push it forward. I called the person at the *beit din* who was in charge of the interviews before the final *beit din*. She agreed to see them immediately. They met early the following week and had their final *beit din* scheduled for two days later. They passed their *beit din*, and their wedding was scheduled for three days later. They had to get all the documents for their marriage registration, have *kallah* classes and find a rabbi to marry them – all within two days' time. Usually this whole process takes two weeks to a month. In less than two weeks they had their interview, final *beit din*, registration for marriage and all the preparations ready. They got married two days before *Shavuot* at the hospice where his mother was being treated. Two days later, on *Shavuot*, she passed away. I have seen many acts of kindness at the *beit din*, but this one, which involved many different people and lots of empathy and flexibility, was one of the most moving events.

*Rabbanit Shira Sapir is teacher and coordinator in the Ami School for Conversion and a fellow in the Susi Bradfield Women's Institute of Halakhic Leadership at Midreshet Lindenbaum.*







## Woman to Woman

By Laurie Novick, Director of Deracheha

*"Ten measures of conversation descended to the world; women took nine" (Kiddushin 49b).*

Though our sages assert that women have a special affinity for conversation, in Tanach, men do most of the talking. Even when the Tanach quotes women, it is more often in conversation with men than with each other. Only twice in the entire Torah do two women engage one another in dialogue.

In the first of those dialogues, Rachel trades a night with Ya'akov for Leah's son Reuven's *duda'im* (flowers said to enhance fertility):

*Rachel said to Leah, "Please give me some of your son's duda'im."*

*And she said to her, "Was it not enough that you took my husband, that you should also take the duda'im of my son?"*

*And Rachel said, "Then he will lie with you tonight in place of your son's duda'im" (Bereishit 30:14-15).*

With Leah's words, what might have passed for a flowery sisterly exchange reveals itself as a tense negotiation, animated by desperation and desire.

In the second dialogue, Miryam suggests her mother as wetnurse to Pharaoh's daughter:

*His [Moshe's] sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Should I go and call for you a wet nurse from the Hebrew women, that will nurse the boy for you?"*





*Pharaoh's daughter said to her "Go" (Shemot 2:7-8).*

Here, too, the dialogue tells us what actions perhaps could not. Miryam marshals resourcefulness and resilience to assertively address a monarch's daughter, in a bid to secure her brother Moshe's survival. Fittingly, Pharaoh's daughter responds with imperial command.

Tanach occasionally records one woman addressing another or a group of women (as when Lot's eldest daughter presents her plan for survival to her sister (*Bereishit* 19:31), when Sisera's mother asks her maidservants why he tarries (*Shofetim* 5:28), when two mothers vie for one live baby before King Solomon (*Melachim* 3:22), or when *Shir Ha-Shirim*'s beloved makes an oath to the daughters of Yerushalayim (3:7)). But the only true, sustained woman-to-woman dialogues in Tanach are found in *Megilat Rut*, between Ruth and Naomi. Their intimate tone is set from the first:

*And she [Naomi] said: behold your sister-in-law has gone back to her nation and to her gods. Go back after your sister-in-law.*

*And Ruth said "Don't beseech me to leave you, to turn away from behind you. For where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your nation is my nation and your God is my God...only death will part me and you (Ruth 1:15-17).*

Both the Talmud (*Yevamot* 47b) and Midrash read Ruth's insistence on remaining with Naomi as part of her conversion to Judaism, recasting Ruth's declaration as a dialogical response to Naomi's teachings.

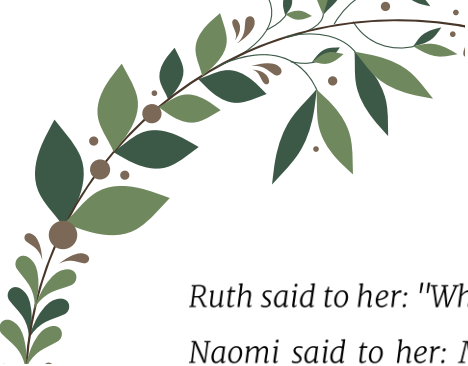
Let's look at how the Midrash reworks and extends their conversation:

*"And Ruth said 'Don't beseech me to leave you, to turn away from behind you.'"*

*...In any case, my intention is to convert, but it is better accomplished by you and not by another [woman].*

*Once Naomi heard this, she began to set out for her the laws of converts.*

*Naomi said to her: My daughter: It is not the way of daughters of Israel to go to non-Jews' theaters and circuses.*



*Ruth said to her: "Where you go, I will go."*

*Naomi said to her: My daughter, it's not the way of Israel to live in a home that has no mezuzah.*

*Ruth said to her: "Where you lodge, I will lodge."*

*"Your nation is my nation," these are [acceptance of] punishments and prohibitions.*

*"And your God is my God," [acceptance of] the remaining mitzvot (Ruth Rabba 1:16-19, 22).*

Ruth wants to be converted specifically by Naomi "and not by another." The original Midrash uses the female form of the Hebrew word for "another." Ruth is sure that she will need to learn from the example of another woman to become a Jew.

Indeed, midrashic tradition teaches us that "Avraham would convert the men, and Sara would convert the women" (*Bereishit Rabba, Lech-Lecha* 39). Only here, however, when Ruth stubbornly chooses Naomi, and clings to her, does the idea emerge that that process of teaching and learning reflects and forges a personal bond between mentor and disciple. To the Midrash, their intimate conversation is also a halachic one, and the personal and halachic combine to empower Ruth and Naomi to journey forward together.

What will shape Ruth's Jewish identity? Naomi instructs Ruth to follow "the way of the daughters of Israel," to make considered choices about where she goes, to define her home as a place of faith, and to keep all the *mitzvot*. Ruth may also long for a new husband and for progeny, like Rachel and Leah, but, fearless like Miryam, she puts her faith first as she moves toward an uncertain fate in the Land of Israel.

As the story progresses, Naomi and Ruth learn from each other in stages, conversation by conversation. Together, they forge a new future for each other and the Jewish people, and they serve as a unique and inspiring model for what women can accomplish by learning Torah and talking together.

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<https://jewishweek.timesofisrael.com/woman-to-woman/>



## In Their Bare Footsteps

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*And it was in the days of the judges' judging, there was a famine in the land, and a man went from Beit Lechem Yehuda to sojourn in the fields of Moav, he and his wife and his two sons. The man's name was Elimelech, and his wife's name was Naomi, and his two sons' names were Machlon and Kilyon.... (Ruth 1:1-2)*

"Well," my husband would say every year as Shavuot approached. "Here we are. Machlon and Kilyon in the fields of Moav..."

Moshe and I were not literally in Moav. We had moved with our two young daughters from Israel to Canada for a year, which had stretched to two years, and now three, four, five...

*To dwell outside of the Land is forbidden unless the famine is very great.... And even though it is permissible to leave, it is not pious conduct, for Machlon and Kilyon were the two great leaders of their generation and they left due to great difficulty, yet they were culpable to be wiped out before God. (Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Melachim 5:9)*

We came to Toronto to be near Moshe's family, and in the hope that the doctors there would be able to make sense of his increasingly worrying symptoms. But his medical situation deteriorated. Within a few years he was in precarious health and using a wheelchair. An arduous move back to a not-entirely-accessible apartment, in a neighborhood on a steep mountainside, seemed impossible. Or at least impractical. We settled down.

*They both died, Machlon and Kilyon, and the woman remained from her two children and her husband. (Ruth 1:1-5)*

We had arrived in Canada just before Shavuot. Two years later, Moshe was hospitalized over Shavuot with a serious lung infection. Five years after that, he passed away a few weeks after Shavuot, on Rosh Chodesh Tammuz.

*Woe to the generation that judges its judges, and woe to the generation whose judges need to be judged (Ruth Rabba 1)*

The society and political system that Elimelech and his family left, and to which Naomi and Ruth returned, was far from ideal. Moshe and I were deeply ambivalent about Zionism and enjoyed Canada's flourishing multicultural democracy. But, as Megillat Ruth reminds us so powerfully, one cannot simply leave the Land of Israel. Even great leaders, with excellent justification, paid an inconceivably high price for staying in Moav.







I could not read Megillat Ruth and remain in Canada.

*... And they [Naomi and Ruth] walked on the road to return to the land of Yehuda (Ruth 1:7)*

*This teaches that they walked barefoot (Ruth Rabba 2)*

My daughters and I landed in Israel at the end of the summer, a bit more than a year after Moshe had died. Our journey was infinitely easier than that of Naomi and Ruth; our landing much softer. Over the first few months, running from one government office to another, dealing with banks and health funds, getting the girls adjusted to a school system neither they nor I really understood, I remembered this often.

“Naomi and Ruth walked to Israel barefoot,” I would tell myself when facing a particularly thorny bureaucratic tangle or confronting an infinite pile of boxes. “I can do this.”

*Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without a redeemer (Ruth 4:14)*

A week after our first Shavuot back in Israel, I married Michael, a long-time friend of Moshe who was like family to all of us. We have two children together, and my eldest daughter is married with a daughter of her own.

I in no way presume to compare myself to Naomi and Ruth, but I am inspired by them. Motivated by profound faith and commitment to the Jewish people, they chose to return to the Land where they faced an almost certain future of poverty and isolation. They merited not only personal redemption, but to plant the seeds for national redemption through Ruth’s great-grandson, King David.

I have tried to follow, a little bit, in their bare footsteps.

# חג שנה



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Deracheha is a halachic education website and learning community for source-based study of halachot related to women, from a woman's perspective, exploring a range of voices. We seek to grant women access to halachic discourse, to build a community of learners, and to raise the caliber of halachic discussion and mitzva observance.

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