

Women's learning – Sotah 1:2 – Riaz & Mishneh Torah, Talmud Torah 1:13

אע"פ שאין האשה מצווה על תלמוד תורה... אם רצה ללמדה - הרשות בידו

Even though a woman is not commanded in Talmud Torah...if one wishes to teach her, he is permitted to do so.

Mishneh Torah, Torah Study 1:13

אִשָּׁה שֶׁלִּמְדָה תּוֹרָה יֵשׁ לָהּ שְׂכָר אֲבָל אֵינוֹ כְּשְׂכָר הָאִישׁ. מִפְּנֵי שֶׁלֹּא נִצְטְוִיתָ. וְכָל הָעוֹשֶׂה דְבָר שֶׁאֵינוֹ מְצֻוֶה עָלָיו לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ אֵין שְׂכָרוֹ כְּשְׂכָר הַמְצֻוֶה שְׁעֲשֶׂה אֲלֵא פְחוֹת מִמֶּנּוּ. וְאִם עַל פִּי שְׂיִישׁ לָהּ שְׂכָר צִוּוּ חֲכָמִים שֶׁלֹּא יִלְמַד אָדָם אֶת בִּתּוֹ תּוֹרָה. מִפְּנֵי שֶׁרַב הַנָּשִׁים אֵין דַּעְתָּם מְכוֹנֶנֶת לְהִתְלַמֵּד אֲלֵא הֵן מוֹצִיאֹת דְבָרֵי תּוֹרָה לְדַבְּרֵי הַבָּאִי לָפִי עֲנִיּוֹת דַּעְתָּן. אָמְרוּ חֲכָמִים כָּל הַמְלַמֵּד אֶת בִּתּוֹ תּוֹרָה כְּאִלּוּ לִמְדָה תְּפִלוֹת. בְּמָה דְבָרִים אָמְרוּ בְּתוֹרָה שֶׁבְעַל פֶּה אֲבָל תּוֹרָה שֶׁבְכָתֵב לֹא יִלְמַד אוֹתָהּ לְכַתְחֵלָה וְאִם לִמְדָה אֵינוֹ כְּמִלְמְדָה תְּפִלוֹת

A woman who studied the Torah receives reward but it is not comparable to the reward of a man because she was not commanded to do so, and whoever does something which is not mandatory upon him to perform is not rewarded like the reward for one who does something they are commanded to do, rather [they receive] a lesser [reward].

And, although she is rewarded, the sages commanded that a man shall not instruct his daughter in the Torah, because most women have no set mind to be instructed therein, but, on the contrary, are apt to divert matters of the Torah to nonsensical matters, of course, in proportion to the inferiority of their mind. The sages said: "Whosoever instructs his daughter in Torah, it is as if he instructed her in matters of profanity." (Sotah, 21b). With regard to what was this stated? Regarding the Oral Torah; but for the Written Torah, one should not teach it to her initially, but if one did teach it then it is not as if one has taught profanity.

A discussion on Women's Learning based on Sotah 1:2 – Riaz & Mishneh Torah, Talmud Torah 1:13

Some Textual Questions to ask Chanichim:

- Does a woman not being commanded in Talmud Torah mean that she should not learn Torah at all?
- Is the source from Mishneh Torah claiming the “inferiority of the female mind” still relevant seeing as women are now well educated?
- Why is it that one receives more reward on doing a mitzvah that they were

Some General Questions to ask Chanichim:

- Do you agree with the idea of a Yoetzet Halacha (advisory woman on issues of Niddah)? Why would this be a matter of controversy in some communities?
- Is it important for women to focus on learning certain areas of halacha relevant to them rather than others?
- Should there be a differentiation between women learning written vs oral Torah?

Some Personal Questions to ask Chanichim:

- Do you think that women should have more of a role in Judaism generally?
- Do you think the lack of priority given to women's learning has led them to have a less high-profile role within the community?
- What are your experiences with learning Torah? Do you think that women have equal learning opportunities to men?

A Related Story:

Devorah

Not long after Ruth, another ideal woman arose in Israel, the prophetess Deborah. When Ehud died, there was none to take his place as judge, and the people fell off from God and His law. God, therefore, sent an angel to them with the following message: "Out of all the nations on earth, I chose a people for Myself, and I thought, so long as the world stands, My glory will rest upon them...But they strayed from My ways. And now I will arouse their enemies against them, to rule over them, and they will cry out. Then I will send a woman unto them, and she will shine for them as a light for forty years." The enemy whom God raised up against Israel was Jabin, the king of Hazor, who oppressed them sorely...To rid Israel of this tyrant, God appointed Deborah and her husband Barak. Barak was an ignoramus, like most of his contemporaries. Deborah was in the habit of making candle wicks that would burn for a long time. Therefore, God distinguished her. He said: "Thou takest pains to shed light in My house, and I will let thy light, thy flame, shine abroad in the whole land." Thus it happened that Deborah became a prophetess and a judge. She dispensed judgement in the open air, for it was not becoming that men should visit a woman in her house.

Other sources and quotes to bring into discussion:

Mesechet Sotah:

The Mishna in Sota records the view of Ben Azzai that a man is obligated to teach his daughter Torah. Rabbi Eliezer, however, strongly disagrees. According to him, a man is forbidden to teach his daughter Torah: "Rabbi Eliezer says: 'Whoever teaches his daughter Torah, it is as if he taught her tiftut - [Sota 3:4](#). The Rambam in his commentary to the Mishna explains that the term tiftut refers to "vain and worthless words." The Yerushalmi reports in the name of Rabbi Eliezer: "Let the words of the Torah be burnt, rather than be handed over to women" (Yerushalmi [Sota 3:4](#)).

Hilchot Talmud Torah 1:13:

The Sages said: "Whoever teaches his daughter Torah, it is as if he taught her vanity." This stricture refers only to instruction in the Oral Law. With regard to the Written Law, he ought not to teach it to her; but if he has done so, it is not regarded as teaching her vanity.

Rema:

"In any event, a woman is obligated to learn the laws that are relevant to a woman"

Rav Aharon Lichtenstein:

"To my mind it is desirable and necessary, not only possible, to provide intensive education for women even from Torah she-be'al peh sources, whether resorting to the argument that since women are engaged in all professions, why should they be specifically limited regarding Torah, or because of the fact that if the Rambam can say that it is necessary to teach a convert the essentials of Judaism, an individual who grows up in a Jewish context should all the more so be afforded such an education... Women today receive a broad general education and many attend universities, and there – as well as within society in general – they come into contact with diverse worldviews and philosophies, to the point that the knowledge and values of Torah are urgently required by women.

Some Interactive Resources:

[Video](#) - Does the concept of Bittul Torah apply to women? - Nishmat Israel