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הי"ן

WOMEN LEARNING TORAH

WARMTH & WISDOM

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DO THE GLOVES COME OFF?

Three distinguished scholars were walking home from shul on a Shabbos afternoon, one of them carrying several *seforim* under his arm. The city of Pozen's well-established Jewish community had an *eruv* that any *talmid chacham* would be proud of. Reb Baruch *Batlan*, his son Reb Binyamin, and his son-in-law Reb Shneur Zalman made use of it, strolling together as their wives followed behind. These were the illustrious forebears—including the namesake—of the Alter Rebbe; Reb Shneur Zalman and his wife, Rebbetzin Rochel, were the Alter Rebbe's paternal grandparents.

As they walked through the streets, an urgent message spread through the city, causing them to stop in their tracks: the *eruv* had suddenly become *passul*. What now?

The men, all seasoned scholars, be-

gan to deliberate, quoting *Gemara* and *Rishonim* from memory. Reb Binyamin was carrying *seforim*—should he stand in place until Shabbos ended? The women, as was the local custom, were wearing gloves in honor of Shabbos. Were they allowed to continue walking while wearing them?

The discussion continued, scholarly and inconclusive.

Reb Baruch *Batlan*, great-grandfather of the Alter Rebbe, turned to his daughter. “Nu, Rochel, you are clear in *Shulchan Aruch* and know how to *pasken*; what is the *halacha*?”

Her husband, Reb Shneur Zalman, looked up, surprised. It wasn't customary for women in those days to be well-versed in *halacha*, beyond the practical laws passed down from mother to daughter. His wife—a scholar? Issuing a *psak*?! Was his father-in-law serious,

נשי
ובנות
חב"ד
N'SHEI
U'BNOS
CHABAD

or just teasing?

But this was Rochel's well-kept secret. Her father had taught her Torah from a young age: first *Chumash* and *Nach*, then *Mishnah* and *Gemara*. In time, she progressed to *Rambam* and *Shulchan Aruch*, which she studied with particular diligence. Until now, only Reb Baruch, her father and teacher, knew this.

But stranded roadside in the middle of Shabbos, the secret was out. The men could deliberate for hours, but someone had to give a clear ruling so the group could go home and enjoy their Shabbos meal.

Without hesitation, Rochel responded from memory: the gloves should stay on. *B'dieved*, we can rely on the women to remind one another if someone accidentally removes a glove and begins carrying it. As for the *seforim*, they should be passed from man to man, with no individual carrying them more than four *amos* at a time, and a non-Jew should carry them into the *reshus hayachid*.

As soon as they were again within reach of a *Shul-*

chan Aruch, Reb Shneur Zalman and Reb Binyamin checked her ruling and found that Rebbetzin Rochel had indeed *paskened* correctly.¹



Reb Shneur Zalman had good reason to be surprised at his wife's knowledge—and she had good reason to keep it a secret. Women, of course, always meticulously kept *halacha* and knew the laws of the *mitzvos* unique to them. But proficiency in *Shulchan Aruch* and extensive Torah prowess? That was well beyond the norm.

In telling this story, however, the Rebbe points to it as an example of what women today should strive for. “We see today,” the Rebbe said while addressing *N'shei Chabad*, “that from generation to generation, women's Torah studying intensifies—even as unmarried girls. Sometimes, the husband or older brothers will have to ask the women in the family what to do when a new situation arises.”²

A MOTHER'S TOUCH: TEACHING AND STUDYING TORAH

Adapted from *Sicha of Shabbos*
*Parshas Emor 5750*³

FROM SIDELINES TO CENTER

The Rambam and the Alter Rebbe both begin their *Hilchos Talmud Torah* with a father's obligation to teach his children. The woman's role, for generations, has been understood as supportive.

The Gemara⁴ says women receive reward for “bringing their children to learn Torah, sending their husbands to study...and waiting for their husbands to return,” and, as Rashi explains, for giving them permission to travel far to study.

But, the Rebbe emphasized, one of the best ways a woman can actively support her husband's and sons' Torah study is by *studying along with them*.

With their warmth, emotional depth, and gentle approach, women can inspire in their children an even greater excite-

ment for learning Torah. A father customarily sits down on Shabbos to learn with his son, testing him on his studies and making sure he uses his time in *cheder* wisely. But a mother? She can review with her son what he learned in *cheder* in her own warm, nurturing way, cultivating a deeper *geshmak* for Torah that only a mother can instill.

This is not just an educational tool; by teaching their children, women also increase their own Torah study.

HISTORY ON OUR SIDE

“Though she will receive a reward (for learning)...a person should not teach his daughter Torah” writes the Alter Rebbe,⁵ echoing the Gemara, *poskim*, and thousands of years of precedent. Of course, this never applied to *halachos* relevant to women, which comprise large and diverse areas of Torah.

But women as Torah scholars in their own right, studying Torah *lishma*?

Even this, the Rebbe points out, has precedent going all the way back to the times of the Tanna'im. Brurya, wife of Rabbi Meir, is one shining example. The Gemara⁶ teaches that she once studied three hundred *halachos* from three hundred

different teachers in one day. In another incident,⁷ she rebuked a student for reciting his studies quietly, teaching that one who exerts himself in Torah study is guaranteed to retain the knowledge.

What better example than our own Rebbetzins? From the women in the Alter Rebbe's family⁸ to the way Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka was educated by her father, the Frierdiker Rebbe, special *nashim tzidkaniyos* throughout the generations were proficient in Torah study.

SIGN OF THE TIMES

While in generations past such women were the exception, today they have become the norm. The shift is not incidental. Evidence shows that *gedolei Yisroel* established schools for women and girls to learn Torah, beyond the *halachos* relevant to them. The justification is understood; girls are no longer educated solely at home and are subject to influences beyond the holy walls of a Jewish home, including from other subjects that they study. Thus, Torah study, and schools that teach it, are not just permitted for women but have become essential.

Beyond just studying the *what*, women should also learn the *why*; the reasoning behind doing what we do and the discussions surrounding the *halacha*, adding feeling and *geshmak* in their commitment to actualizing what they study.

A TASTE OF THE FUTURE

Although the necessity for women to study may be a byproduct of *yeridas hadoros*, the outcome has been a net gain—an increase in *limud hatorah*.

Why now? It is a sign of Moshiach's imminent arrival, when knowledge of Torah will flourish. Women studying Torah today, and with increased vigor, is more than a trend. It's a sign of the power of the times, and a taste of the *geulah* soon to come. Just as in the days of *Geulas Mitzrayim* the redemption came through the merit of righteous women, so too today, the merit of the righteous women of our generation will bring the *geulah*. **1**

1. Sefer Hazichronos vol. 2, ch. 93. Sefer Hamamarim 5709 p. 42.

2. 28 Iyar 5748. Toras Menachem 5748 vol. 3, p. 368.

3. Sefer Hasichos 5750 vol 2., p. 455ff. The Rebbe edited this portion of the Farbrengen to be printed on its own, under the heading "Regarding The Women's Obligations in Education and Torah Study".

4. Brachos 17a.

5. *Hilchos Talmud Torah* 1, 14.

6. Pesachim 62b.

7. Eruvin 53b.

8. See sources in fn. 1.

ADDITIONAL INSIGHT:

- » "Boys begin studying Chumash with Rashi at five years of age. Girls, however, possess greater mental acuity, as reflected in the fact that they become obligated in mitzvos a full year earlier than boys, and can therefore begin even earlier."⁹
- » "When a husband and wife study Torah together, it is not just the husband learning with his wife—it is possible that the wife teaches her husband as well. This is especially true today, when women possess greater knowledge."¹⁰
- » "According to some opinions, Rashi had no sons. It was his daughters who served as his study partners and transcribed his teachings."¹¹
- » The renowned chossid and friend of *beis harav*, Reb Shlomo Aharon Kazarnovsky, related that "[Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka] is well-versed (*"klohr"*) in the Alter Rebbe's Shulchan Aruch."¹²



A Class of Their Own: The Rebbe's encouragement for women to study Torah.



My Good Fortune to Lead Women to Torah Study.

9. Shabbos Parshas Tzav 5746. Toras Menachem 5746 vol. 2, p. 790.

10. Shabbos Parshas Ekev 5750. Toras Menachem 5750 vol. 4, p. 162.

11. Ibid.

12. Heard by his granddaughter, Mrs. Vivi Deren. As told at an event marking his 40th *yahrtzeit*.