**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

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**Deracheha: Women and Mitzvot**

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In loving memory of Rabbi Dr. Barrett (Chaim Dov) Broyde ztz"l

הוֹלֵךְ תָּמִים וּפֹעֵל צֶדֶק וְדֹבֵר אֱמֶת בִּלְבָבוֹ

Steven Weiner & Lisa Wise

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**Learning Torah, Part IV:**

**What to Study**

**What areas of Torah may, and should, women study? How?**

**By Deracheha Staff; Laurie Novick, Director**

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**What Torah texts should women study?** When Chafetz Chayim gives his approval to women's *talmud Torah*, he provides a brief description of what he has in mind: Tanach, Pirkei Avot, and Menorat Ha-maor, "in order that the matter of our holy faith be authenticated." (See [here](https://etzion.org.il/en/learning-torah-iii-openings-study) for more.) This leaves us with a major question: Are all Torah texts open to women, or only the ones he mentions?

The discussion centers on men teaching women Torah and on school curricula, because the halachic justification for women to study independently goes back long before Bais Yaakov.

Rabbinic rulings on these issues acknowledge that women have a portion in Torah and that textual access to that portion must expand. The question is how radically it should expand, especially in schools, and how active a role men should take in the process.

Following Rambam, we split this question into categories. In the following section we look at Written Torah, and in the next two, at Oral Torah.

# **Written Torah**

Nearly everyone (except for Satmar chasidim and other small groups) agrees that women should learn Written Torah. Long before Chafetz Chayim enters the scene, Rambam says the chief restriction on women's study is Oral Torah, not Written Torah. Additionally, the Torah itself commands women to hear the Torah reading at *hakhel*.[[1]](#footnote-1)

What of learning Written Torah with commentaries? A few modern authorities, most notably Shevet Ha-levi,[[2]](#footnote-2) have opposed women learning Tanach with traditional commentaries.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Why is this at issue? In the [previous installment](https://etzion.org.il/en/learning-torah-iii-openings-study) of this series, we saw that Taz questions whether women should study Written Torah in depth. Chafetz Chayim does not mention traditional Bible commentaries among the texts for women to study. Most important, the commentators draw from Oral Torah. A Talmudic passage quoted by Rashi is still a Talmudic passage. That poses a problem if constraints on women's study of Oral Torah remain in place.

Once Bais Yaakov becomes established, however, calls to restrict access to Written Torah and its commentaries never regain traction. Rabbinic Judaism interprets Written Torah through the lens of our sages. Today, across the Jewish world, girls learn Tanach with commentaries.

# **Oral Torah**

Teaching Oral Torah to women remains more contentious than teaching Written Torah. Why? Precedent. Rambam singles out men teaching women Oral Torah as a problem, and Maharil and Semak debate women learning even practical Halacha from texts.

More than that, how far to take Chafetz Chayim's approbation depends on two related questions: How much has the world changed, and what Torah do women need now in light of that change?

**Limited Approbation** Generally speaking, there are no bars on women learning foundational theological or ethical Torah texts, even if they belong to the category of Oral Torah.

Pirkei Avot is a prime example. Chafetz Chayim explicitly endorses women learning it. So does Rav Moshe Feinstein, the most prominent American halachic authority of the twentieth century, in a responsum.

Responsa Iggerot Moshe Y. D. 3:87 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…

Rav Moshe advocates teaching women Pirkei Avot, for the sake of "ethics and good conduct," but "only Pirkei Avot," not any other Mishnaic tractate. This leaves Talmud, which builds on Mishna, beyond the pale. In a private letter sent on Rav Moshe's behalf by his grandson, Rav Moshe agrees that women may learn other Mishnaic tractates, from each other. He doesn't permit men to teach them to women.[[4]](#footnote-4)

What is Rav Moshe's concern? *Tiflut*. Chafetz Chayim's permissive ruling may refer only to a limited set of works of Oral Torah deemed necessary for 'authenticating faith,' not all of Oral Torah. Rav Moshe sees no necessity for women to learn more of it. (This position resembles that of Rav Hirsch, featured in our last shiur.)

Bais Yaakov and many other girls' schools generally follow the cautious approach of Rav Moshe's published responsum. Their students encounter a very carefully curated set of Oral Torah texts, such as Pirkei Avot and midrash, even when women are teaching.

**Full Access** Other rabbis across the halachic spectrum acknowledge that there is no halachic barrier to women studying freely, and permit men to teach women Oral Torah more widely.[[5]](#footnote-5) This view becomes so pervasive that Rav Mordechai Eliyahu, late-twentieth century Sefardi Chief Rabbi, treats it as the consensus of "halachic authorities."

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 in the past, and it is preferable for her to study holy matters than to read forbidden or frivolous matters.

Rav Eliyahu takes Chafetz Chayim's argument to its logical conclusion. Once we say times have changed for women's *talmud Torah*, they have changed for *any* type of Torah.

Women now have easy access to a wide range of reading materials, and Rav Eliyahu realizes it. Perhaps in Rabbi Eliezer's day Torah study threatened *tiflut*. Nowadays, the true threat is the reverse. If a woman *doesn't* learn Torah, chances are that she will occupy herself with "frivolous matters."

### ● Does bitul Torah (not wasting time away from Torah) apply to women? (See Appendix One.)

How important is the study of Oral Torah for women? Is it necessary when the alternative is more substantial than *tiflut*? Is it desirable when not necessary? Rabbi Eliyahu does not say.

Many Torah institutions for women occupy similar ground. They offer some study of Oral Torah to women without promoting it or clarifying its purpose. Rather, they prioritize in-depth study of Tanach and Jewish thought, because they are confident that these texts address their students' needs and interests.

For example, note how Mrs. Shira Smiles, a distinguished contemporary educator, describes the goals of her *parasha* classes for women:[[6]](#footnote-6)

"People: Shira Smiles" 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.

Mrs. Smiles meets these goals with a breathtaking range of sources. Sometimes she brings a selection from Mishna Berura or discusses an interpretation of a Talmudic passage, but she emphasizes Written Torah, Jewish thought, and Chasidut – and women flock to her classes.

# **An Imperative**

Some rabbis consider women's study of Oral Torah to be imperative, and the facilitating of this study equally imperative. Let's explore who says this and why.

**An Absolute Imperative** Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik takes a bold stance on Oral Torah. He writes in 1953 that teaching girls Oral Torah is more than an option; it's "an absolute imperative."[[7]](#footnote-7)

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*.

Rav Soloveitchik advocates teaching girls just as we teach boys. For over a millennium, traditional Judaism has insisted on teaching each gender differently. Now Rav Soloveitchik calls "this policy of discrimination" a *threat* to "traditional Judaism." Changing tradition is the only way to save it.

Why does he say this? He is quoted as presenting two key rationales:[[8]](#footnote-8)

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.

First, women need to understand Halacha in order to "consent" to Halachic conduct. Halacha must be more to women than a rulebook.

Second, rapid societal and technological change creates "complex problems." Where there is no precedent, women and men need to learn deeply in order to determine how to observe Halacha.[[9]](#footnote-9) This relates to a broader idea of Rav Soloveitchik's, that people capable of sophisticated thinking should experience the full conceptual depth of Torah in order to know how to apply it to the problems of modern life.

Rav Soloveitchik puts his ideas into practice. He founds the coeducational Maimonides School in the late 1930’s and, in 1977, he delivers the inaugural *shiur* in Talmud at Stern College for Women. Schools following his approach are typically Modern Orthodox, either coeducational or featuring a full Talmud curriculum in a girls' only track.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Today, many women center Torah study on Talmud, drawn by its rich combination of intellectual rigor and spiritual depth.

**A More Moderate Imperative** Rav Soloveitchik's student and son-in-law, Rav Aharon Lichtenstein, both elaborates on this vision and moderates it.

Rav Lichtenstein explains in more detail why teaching of Oral Torah to women must aim high.[[11]](#footnote-11)

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 assure 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 Lichtenstein insists that there is no sense in teaching Oral Torah to women unless we teach it seriously. Torah demands earnest and passionate study.

He adds that, "Not only respect for Torah requires this of us, but respect for women as well." So much of the halachic discussion of women learning Torah has focused on women's perceived vulnerability. Rav Lichtenstein refocuses our attention on women's strengths – women's "abilities," "commitment," and "potential." How well we teach someone Torah is a measure of how much we respect them.

For all their agreement, Rav Lichtenstein still moderates Rav Soloveitchik's vision. He displays some ambivalence about pressing women to pursue more theoretical Talmud study:[[12]](#footnote-12)

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*.

On the one hand, Talmud should be "an integral part of the [girls'] school curriculum." On the other hand, Rav Lichtenstein recognizes Halachic and social differences between men and women "in this matter" that affect intensive study, and he *doesn't* call them "the downfall of traditional Judaism."

Although Talmud study is critically important to many women, and some measure of Talmud study should be pursued by all women, he remains "not convinced" that *intensive* Talmud study should be pressed upon every woman.

### ● Why don't more women study Torah, especially Oral Torah? (See Appendix Two.)

Many of the men who pioneer teaching Torah to women are students of Rav Soloveitchik or Rav Lichtenstein. Rav Lichtenstein himself guided the founding of Beit Midrash Migdal Oz, at which he personally taught intensive Talmud classes to highly motivated women.

Over the past four decades, Torah institutions for women of every stripe have emerged and flourished, in Israel and abroad. Many of them offer intensive Talmud study. More and more women are learning Torah in more and more ways.

**A Step toward Redemption** Outside of Rav Yosef Soloveitchik's sphere of influence, what halachic authorities consider women's study of Oral Torah an imperative? Most prominently, Rav Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the late Lubavitcher Rebbe.

Rav Schneerson agrees that women must learn Oral Torah, and adds a Chasidic twist to our discussion.**[[13]](#footnote-13)**

R. M.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.

Rav Schneerson writes that we "must teach" women Oral Torah "according to the rationale of this very halacha", i.e., to prevent *tiflut*. He recasts the "cunning" that accompanies knowledge and once led to concerns about *tiflut* as Torah "senses and skills."

How we got here no longer matters. Rav Schneerson puts the reluctance to allow women to learn Torah far behind us. Women's learning is "a positive new development" that "we have merited." It adds to the overall amount of Torah study in the world.

This idea fits into broader Chabad theology about the "preparation for the time of redemption."[[14]](#footnote-14) Women's *talmud Torah* is more than good for a particular woman or particular time – it is final and redemptive.

### ● How does a woman's Torah study affect the people around her? (See Appendix Three.)

# **Purpose**

We began this series by looking at how *talmud Torah* is an essential form of serving God, that goes beyond the confines of the formal mitzva. We have seen that women have always learned Torah informally, to know how to keep *mitzvot* and to build faith. Formal study was once discouraged, but now women learn Torah from texts because text study answers current needs. What women study depends on how we assess those needs.

Rav Lichtenstein brings many of these points together:

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 ensure 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.

Unsurprisingly, Rav Lichtenstein recognizes that a woman has an obligation to study Halacha in order to observe it in her daily life. He next suggests that a woman must study Halacha with "depth of intensity" in order to *commit* to observe it. The goal of Halacha study is not just to know how to keep Halacha, but to become committed to keeping it. Women's Halacha study might need no practical justification beyond that. Rav Lichtenstein adds that, "within the modern context," a woman's *text* study in general, even study of Torah "far, far remote" from the practical, serves this purpose: to help her become "an *ovedet Hashem*," a servant of God.[[15]](#footnote-15)

### ● Isn't becoming a scholar a purpose of study? (See Appendix Four.)

How does Torah transform the individual into a servant of God? The Talmud reports that Rabbi Yosef would take particular pains to celebrate Shavuot. He explains his rationale poignantly:

Pesachim 68b If not for this day [Shavuot] that caused it, how many Yosefs would there be in the marketplace?

If not for Shavuot and receiving the Torah, what would distinguish Rav Yosef from anyone else? Torah makes him who he is.

What can this look like for a woman? In a recent article, Deracheha contributing editor Shayna Goldberg expresses what learning Torah means to her:[[16]](#footnote-16)

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.

May our study on Deracheha help shape us as servants of God.

### ● Appendix One: Does bitul Torah (not wasting time away from Torah) apply to women?

*Halacha requires men to prioritize Torah study over frivolous pursuits, because men have an obligation in the mitzva of* talmud Torah*. A man should not casually waste time he could spend learning (i.e., engage in* bitul Torah*).*

*What about women? In the absence of the obligation of* talmud Torah*, is free time a free-for-all?*

*Rav Ya'akov Ariel, a National-Religious Israeli halachic authority, writes that* bitulTorah *does, in a sense, apply to women.[[17]](#footnote-17)*

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.

*To Rav Ariel, a day without Torah is a blow to anyone's character. Women, too, have "spiritual character" and should be wary of* bitul Torah.

*Women don't have a free ticket to watch hours of television or mindlessly surf the internet. What does exemption from the mitzva of* Talmud Torah *mean then? That women have more flexibility than men in deciding how to study Torah and how much Torah to study.*

### ● Appendix Two: Why don't more women study Torah, especially Oral Torah?

*Even in communities that view women's study of Oral Torah as permissible, most women do not pursue it.*

*Why not? Here are some common contributing factors:*

*1. The wider community's ambivalence to women's Torah study, especially Talmud study, can undermine it. It can be difficult to make the effort to study without external validation.*

*2. Many women lack female role models who balance serious study with other religious commitments. Role models provide inspiration and a sense of what is possible.*

*3. Many communities do not offer attractive or accessible frameworks for women's* talmud Torah. *Without opportunities, women won't learn. Talmud study, in particular, demands a high level of training.*

*4. Many women (and men) are most attracted to Torah study that connects directly to matters of faith or to practical Halacha. Scholars who teach primary texts often focus on more arcane subjects or intricate styles of study. That may discourage some women, especially women with less background in Torah study, from learning at all.*

*Communities can surmount these challenges by supporting women's* talmud Torah*, welcoming female teachers, offering frameworks for women's study, and encouraging a range of study topics and styles.*

*Possibilities for encouraging women's Torah study abound: Fathers can learn every Shabbat with their daughters; schools can expand their Torah curriculum for girls; family friends can give the bat mitzva girl religious books; parents can send their daughters to learn in Israel; dating prospects can agree to meet a 'girl who learns;' Rabbis can be more accepting of more institutions of learning; communal initiatives for women can incorporate study; couples can make an effort to set aside time for the woman to learn; and local batei midrash can open their doors to women. (For more suggestions specific to Talmud study, see* [*here*](https://www.thelehrhaus.com/commentary/how-can-the-modern-orthodox-community-fulfill-the-rav%E2%80%99s-vision-for-women%E2%80%99s-talmud-study/)*.)*

### ● Appendix Three: How does a woman's Torah study affect others?

*When a woman engages in formal Torah study, it clearly benefits her. How does that affect the people around her?*

*The Talmud teaches that a woman's merit for Torah study is indirect:*

Sota 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?

*Ravina lives before women study Torah formally. According to him, women receive reward for Torah study by helping husbands and sons to study. Shulchan Aruch agrees.[[18]](#footnote-18)*

*Rav Schneerson points out that, in our generation, women can also facilitate children's and husbands’ study by* teaching *them.[[19]](#footnote-19)*

Rav Menachem M. Schneerson, "Partnership in Study" The children tell their mothers about their studies, both in Scripture and in Mishna, 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.

*Here Rav Schneerson reinforces his idea that women's* talmud Torah *is a net gain for everyone. A woman's active involvement in discussing Torah with her family or friends enhances their learning and enriches their religious lives.*

*Women can share or teach Torah in broader contexts as well, and contribute to Torah and communal policy at a high level.*

*Everyone stands to benefit when women learn Torah. Halacha recognizes this, too. For example, a woman can make a public siyum with the full status of a* se'udat mitzva*.[[20]](#footnote-20)*

*Women's Torah study elevates the entire Jewish community.*

### ● Appendix Four: Isn't becoming a scholar a purpose of study?

*Rosh Beit Midrash of Migdal Oz (and Rav Lichtenstein's daughter) Esti Rosenberg, an adviser to Deracheha, discusses an additional goal of study: becoming a scholar. She writes that midrashot often confront the following question:[[21]](#footnote-21)*

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?

*As in the world of men's Torah study, there is an inherent tension between fostering an elite cohort of scholars and meeting the religious needs of the general population. In line with most of the sources we have seen, most Torah institutions for women choose to prioritize developing love of Torah over high-level scholarship, while laying the groundwork for further study.*

*Some schools, Migdal Oz among them, also offer advanced learning opportunities for women. For these women, working to become scholars "at the highest level" is a form of* avodat Hashem*.*

**Further Reading**

1. Lichtenstein, Rav Aharon, "Torah Study for Women," *Ten Da'at* III:3 (1989), pp. 7-8.

2. Lichtenstein, Rav Aharon, "Women, Talmud Study, and Avodat Hashem," *The Lehrhaus*, 30 October, 2017. Available [here](https://www.thelehrhaus.com/commentary/women-talmud-study-and-avodat-hashem/).

3. Moseson, Rav Meir, "Chinuch Ha-banot," *Ha-darom* 66-67 (Elul, 5758), pp. 65-66. Available here: <http://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=25137&st=&pgnum=68>

4. Rosenberg, Esti, "The World of Women's Torah Learning: Developments, Directives, and Objectives," in *The next Generation of Modern Orthodoxy*, ed. Shmuel Hain. New York: Ktav, 2012, p. 181ff.

Available here:

https://www.scribd.com/document/98480720/Untitled#fullscreen&from\_embed

5. Soloveitchik, Rabbi Joseph B., "Talmud Study for Girls in Yeshiva Elementary and High Schools (b)," in *Community, Covenant and Commitment*, ed. Nathaniel Helfgot, (Jersey City: Ktav, 2005), p. 83.

6. Wahrman, Rav Shlomo, *She'erit Yosef* 2:4. Available [here](http://www.torahweb.org/torah/docs/sheeris-yosef-vol2-chap4.pdf).

7. רוזנפלד, ב., עורך. **האשה וחינוכה**. כפר סבא: אמנה, 1980.

8. שילת, מ., עורך. **את עלית: אוצר שיחות מהרבי מליובאוויטש זצ"ל לנשים ונערות**, פרקים ג-ד. כפר חב"ד: מ. שילת, תשע"ד.

9. Sources gathered by Rav Dr. Aryeh Frimer:

<http://archive.bermanshul.org/frimer/SpireBW200_1S040.pdf>

1. Responsa Shevet Ha-levi 6:150. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Rav Shmuel Halevi Wosner (1913-2015), a Chasidic *posek* from Bnei Brak. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Responsa Shevet Ha-levi 6:150 There is no allowance to study Tanach with girls with the deep commentators such as the Ramban and Ibn Ezra and so forth, and even the commentary of Rashi on the Torah is overflowing [with] homilies of our sages of blessed memory – Oral Torah, from which our sages of blessed memory distanced them [girls]. [They are permitted to study] only the simple meaning of matters, alongside ethics of our sages of blessed memory and their homilies and midrashim that touch [on] fear of Heaven, ethics, modesty, or clear halachic rulings for them [women]. And I know that most girls' schools in our generation do not withstand this [demand to study more] and go beyond what is appropriate, against the Halacha….and it is a simple matter that the negative element of "as though he teaches them nonsense" will sprout, whether sooner or later. And words of Torah and their decrees [of our sages] will never change… [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Norman Baumel Joseph, “Jewish Education for Women: Rabbi Feinstein’s Map of America,” *American Jewish History* 83:2 (1995), p. 212. See also Ilan Fuchs, *Jewish Women's Torah Study: Orthodox Religious Education and Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. There is testimony that Rav Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky (the Steipler) said women may learn any part of the Mishna, placing him somewhere between this position and Rav Moshe Feinstein's. Others report that Chazon Ish and Rav Ya'akov Kaminetsky acknowledged that Halacha permits women to learn Talmud, though they discouraged it in most circumstances. See *Orchot Rabbeinu* II, p. 193, and Responsa *Divrei Chachamim*, p. 278, both available here, p. 7:

   <http://archive.bermanshul.org/frimer/SpireBW200_1S040.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. "Shira Smiles," *Jewish Action*, 76:4 (Summer, 2016), p. 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "Talmud Study for Girls in Yeshiva Elementary and High Schools (b)," in *Community, Covenant and Commitment*, ed. Nathaniel Helfgot (Jersey City: Ktav, 2005), p. 83. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Rav Meir Moseson, "Chinuch Ha-banot," *Ha-darom* 66-67 (Elul, 5758), pp. 65-66. Available here: <http://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=25137&st=&pgnum=68>. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. We might add that the internet has created a new type of informal transmission, in which we learn from our peers or faceless experts rather than our parents. In-depth study can begin to give us the tools and judgment to navigate the wealth of resources – and pitfalls – at our fingertips. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Recently, a leading student of Rav Soloveitchik, Rav Mordechai Willig, a rosh yeshiva at Yeshiva University and one of the first Talmud teachers at Stern College, has called for reevaluating widespread teaching of Talmud to high school girls (full text available [here](http://www.torahweb.org/torah/2015/parsha/rwil_ekev.html)). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Transcription of an address at the opening dedication of Ma'ayanot Yeshiva High School for Girls, November 24, 1996. Published in *The Lehrhaus*, 30 October, 2017. Available [here](https://www.thelehrhaus.com/commentary/women-talmud-study-and-avodat-hashem/). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Rav Aharon Lichtenstein, "Torah Study for Women," *Ten Da'at* III:3 (1989), pp. 7-8. Note that this is an adaptation of a Hebrew speech given in the 1970’s. In the intervening decades, the situation has changed somewhat, but not as dramatically or as pervasively as one might expect. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. *At Alit*, pp. 45-46. <http://archive.bermanshul.org/frimer/SpireBW200_1S040.pdf>, pp. 15-17. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. "Torah Learning for Women," *At Alit,* pp. 46. And one can say, that since in the future the value of "a woman of valor is the crown of her husband" (Mishlei 12:4), and "a female encircles a man" (Yirmiyahu 31:21), will be revealed – therefore, the renewal and addition in learning Torah in the last generations is with an extra emphasis regarding women. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Note that Rav Lichtenstein’s nuanced phrasing raises the question of whether *talmud Torah* for women needs an instrumental justification at all. When elaborating the reasons for women’s Torah study (i.e., to develop commitment to Halacha and to become an *ovedet Hashem*), he is careful to state that these reasons apply “even if we are not interested for the moment (if that be the case) in the knowledge per se.” [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Shayna Goldberg, "Why I Believe in Women and Their Batei Midrash," *The Lehrhaus*, January 18, 2018. Available here:

    <https://www.thelehrhaus.com/commentary/why-i-believe-in-women-and-their-batei-midrash-talmud>. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Rav Ya'akov Ariel, "*Geder Bitul Torah Gam Le-nashim*," *Be-Sheva*, March 23, 2017. Available here: <https://www.inn.co.il/News/News.aspx/342827>. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Shulchan Aruch Y. D. 246 Rema And in any case a woman is obligated to learn the laws that apply to a woman, and a woman is not obligated to teach her son Torah; and in any case if she helps her son or her husband to occupy themselves with Torah, she shares reward with them. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. *At Alit*, p. 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Rav Shlomo Wahrman, She'erit Yosef 2:4 A woman makes a siyum during the nine days [that counts to allow for eating meat].

    Available [here](http://www.torahweb.org/torah/docs/sheeris-yosef-vol2-chap4.pdf). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Esti Rosenberg, "The World of Women's Torah Learning: Developments, Directives, and Objectives," in *The Next Generation of Modern Orthodoxy*, ed. Shmuel Hain (New York: Ktav, 2012), p. 181ff. Available here:

    <https://www.scribd.com/document/98480720/Untitled#fullscreen&from_embed> [↑](#footnote-ref-21)