



KOL HAMEVASER

The Jewish Thought Magazine
of the Yeshiva University Student Body



Jewish Education



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Editorial Torah as *Tiflut*?

BY: Gilah Kletenik

Was Rabbi Eliezer right? Is teaching women Torah really *tiflut*; are we indeed unfit for the demanding rigors of Torah study? I am not trying to pull a Larry Summers here, but sometimes I think that Rabbi Eliezer was not totally off.

The first time I sat down to seriously study Gemara was at the beginning of seventh grade, when my mother and I started to study *Berachot*. I continued to study Gemara in a classroom setting throughout high school and in the evenings I learned more scrupulously with my father. After graduating high school, I studied at Migdal Oz for a year and a half and, since arriving at Stern, have been enrolled in the Honors Advanced Talmud course. While I have been committed to Gemara study for a number of years, my skills and breadth of knowledge are not on par with a male my age who has demonstrated a comparable commitment to Talmud study. It's not just me. I've never once spoken to a woman my age who felt that her Gemara abilities were akin to those of her male peers. Why is this?

The nature of women's study institutions is crucial to understanding the perplexity at hand. There is no such thing as separate but equal. Until women and men study in the same institutions, women will continue to have less talented and knowledgeable teachers, in addition to weaker courses of study. And, while women's Talmud teachers are idealistically invested in women's learning, men's rabbim tend to have a greater engagement in the cultivation of their students. This is not to say that women's educators do not care; to the contrary, they are laudably committed to their students. Rather, yeshivot have cultures that push men to maximize their time and their Talmud study in a way that women's *midrashot* do not. This is not unrelated to the fact that women's curricula tend to include Gemara as one subject among many (although sometimes it is more heavily emphasized), while men's studies traditionally center on Gemara study.

More importantly, though, institutions do not exist in a vacuum, and women's *midrashot* and teachers must reckon with a society that does not value women's intensive Torah study the same way that it values the Torah endeavors of men. Sure, we have come far. It wasn't long ago that the phenomenon of women studying Gemara was not only rare, but non-existent. And, while women's institutions are committed to educating their students, too often the students come from homes and backgrounds wherein their studies are not valued. This creates a culture where women come to learn for a year, maybe two, and then terminate their studies shortly thereafter. As a result, women are never able to advance in their Talmudic and halakhic pursuits.

Even if a woman wants to continue learn-

ing, there's nowhere for her to really go that would give her the kind of education she would receive if her anatomy was different. And this leads to the next component that hinders women's learning – the glass ceiling. Due to the fact that women's learning is not valued and women are not encouraged to continue studying, there is a dearth of institutions on a high level that cater to women's Talmud study. Consequently, women are unable to ever advance, which means that there are few educated women who can serve as role models for younger women. Consider the fact that there are no women writing *teshuvot*, *sefarim*, or even delivering Talmud *shiurim* at the most advanced levels. Who has ever thought to turn to a woman with a halakhic question (outside of *taharat ha-mishpahah*) or even to help resolve a difficulty in learning?

Obviously, we have come a long way. I



have been offered learning opportunities that were once closed to my grandmothers and mother. Jewish women today are more educated and have greater accessibility to our texts than ever. And, while change is gradual we need not allow the progress to be kidnapped by inertia.

The women's beit midrash is often disheartening, even discouraging. I look around and see women excited and engaged in learning, but know that few are there to stay. And for those of us who want to stay, not only do we lack the options and the resources to advance ourselves, but it's hard to imagine that this is even an option, as no one has done it before us. Until we have a culture that values women's Talmud study and identical curricula and options for both men and women we will not be able to enjoy the benefits that an educated and erudite class of Jewish women leaders could offer us. And of course, we will continue to believe that women are to blame for this reality; that they will never be fit for Talmud study – that it will forever be for them *tiflut*.

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ⁱ See Mishnah Sotah 3:4

Jewish Education and the Value of Truth

BY: Yosef Lindell

One cannot overstate the value of truth. The Torah tells us that it is an attribute of God.ⁱ The Mishnah tells us that truth is one of the three pillars on which the world is sustained.ⁱⁱ The Talmud teaches that it is God's very seal.ⁱⁱⁱ

It would then seem clear that intellectual honesty must be the hallmark of any successful educational system. Yet this divine imperative for truth is not always taken seriously. From their earliest years, many yeshiva day school students are told to suspend disbelief. Religion is the inerrant word of God, and if it appears to conflict with science or history, then it is the scientists and historians who are wrong, not our understanding of the text. If the words of a prominent commentator offend a perceived tenet of Jewish belief or prevailing tradition, his words must be reinterpreted. Many students accept what they are taught, imbibing these monolithic and sometimes strained interpretations without question. But for some, the conflicts of youth are never fully resolved. They wonder: is this really truth?

negative attitude we could safeguard them from contacts with the scholarly and scientific endeavors of the rest of mankind... You will then see that your simple-minded calculations were just as criminal as they were perverse. Criminal, because they enlisted the help of untruth supposedly in order to protect the truth, and because you have thus departed from the path upon which your own Sages have preceded you and beckoned you to follow them. Perverse, because by so doing you have achieved precisely the opposite of what you wanted to accomplish... Your child will consequently begin to doubt all of Judaism which (so, at least, it must seem to him from your behavior) can exist only in the night and darkness of ignorance and which must close its eyes and the minds of its adherents to the light of all knowledge if it is not to perish."^{iv}

According to R. Hirsch, it is simply criminal to use any form of untruth in education. But how then do we "protect the truth" of Judaism and remain fully intellectually honest?

The task is not as daunting as it might seem. We need not water down our religious



This problem is not a new one. In the nineteenth century, no less a figure than R. Samson Raphael Hirsch lamented the state of Jewish education for these very reasons. R. Hirsch witnessed the Enlightenment and the attendant emancipation of the Jews and saw the polarization and fragmentation of a once unified Jewish community. Some cast off the shackles of tradition and embraced modernity, leaving what they saw as the medieval ways of their fathers for a new enlightened truth. Others reacted by insulating themselves from all outside influence, demanding that the true community of believers must shield the truth of the Torah from the falsehoods of their age. R. Hirsch sharply criticized both responses to modernity. Yet his words for those who sought to insulate their children are particularly harsh:

"It would be most perverse and criminal of us to seek to instill in our children a contempt, based on ignorance and untruth, for everything that is not specifically Jewish, for all other human arts and sciences, in the belief that by inculcating our children with such a

beliefs nor change the halakhic system. Rather, all we need are educators who hear the polyphonic voices spoken by our tradition. True answers are almost always more complex; they tend to be less black and white. And the answers to the most perplexing issues are almost always found within the Jewish tradition itself, sometimes in the words of Rabbis who are less well known or have fallen out of vogue. Often, it is frightening to look at important religious issues from new perspectives. But fear cannot hold us back. Truth can no longer be sacrificed on the altar of simplicity.

Perhaps the area that calls for the most immediate attention is that of Tanakh and Midrash. I have always found it striking that while debate, discussion, and dissecting multiple opinions is the hallmark of any yeshiva's Talmud curriculum, it is the very opposite in the study of Tanakh. Many yeshiva day schools and yeshivas of higher education only teach Nakh to women. And when they do teach Humash or Nakh, the only purpose is to give over the proper hashkafah. They start

Ramhal: Shakespearean Kabbalist?

BY: Rena Wiesen

We all have preconceived notions of our great Torah scholars. Often informed only by idyllic biographies that portray men who never do wrong and spend every moment learning Torah, we do not hear much about the other part of their education – the secular studies. Many of the great rabbinic figures were actually very well versed in secular literature, language, and philosophy – some of it surprising. Yet, those facts are often swept under the carpet. I would like to discuss one figure whose life, education, and publications contain very starkly contrasting Jewish and secular elements.

Rabbi Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto (1707-1747), often called Ramhal, is most famous for his *Mesillat Yesharim*, a survey of religious ethics. A noted Kabbalist in Padua, Italy, he

era of “prima donnas” and castrati with shrill voices.¹ Pastoral themes and sentimentalism took over the arts, as images of nature and the ideals of Rousseau and Voltaire spread through France and beyond. In Italy, pastoral poetry in particular caught on and took root. All about artificiality, the so-called “simple” shepherd life was in reality an overdone “ornamented nature,” with “unavoidable Greek woods and fountains, in whose vicinity shepherd are seen in company of nymphs, gods, and goddesses.”²

Venice in particular, located right near Padua, Ramhal’s hometown, was one of the centers of this new art form, and Jews and Christians alike flocked to the theaters. Many Jews tried to justify theater to the public by demonstrating the ethical and educational values of the theater: the bad guy is punished, the good guy is rewarded. These are certainly good moral lessons that can be learned.³ De-



authored many Torah books and led a group of devout mystics. He spent day and night immersed in study, and merited the presence of a *maggid*, a divine voice, that frequently spoke to him, revealing heavenly secrets.

This is what is generally taught about Ramhal. Yet, a lesser-known fact about this holy kabbalist is that he was also well-trained in, and a prolific writer of, poetry, literature, theater, and Hebrew language, even composing his own set of psalms as well as three dramatic plays. In his poetry and dramatic plays, there is an intricate interweaving of Italian style and influence from contemporary Italian masters as well as themes from contemporary philosophy and literature, together with Jewish kabbalistic and biblical elements. It is astounding to see how one man absorbed both the Jewish and secular knowledge of the era and incorporated it into his masterpieces. Let us further examine some of his works and the *Zeitgeist* that influenced them.

Eighteenth century Italy saw the decline of the comedy and an emergence of melodramas and operas. It was the beginning of the

spite opposition, theater became more and more popular among the citizens.

It was in this culture that Ramhal was raised and educated. Trained by tutor Isaac Cantarini, Ramhal wrote his own poetry and dramatic plays⁴ that integrated both traditional Jewish elements and themes as well as popular secular ones. As was fashionable in the day, he composed verses for weddings, funerals, and other such special occasions. A particularly noteworthy poem is the one he wrote for Cantorini’s funeral, twenty-four verses in classical Hebrew.⁵ He also composed one hundred and fifty poems in the form of the Book of Psalms. Unusual for him, he avoided all outside influences in this work and stayed strictly with the original psalm format, using only the biblical form of parallelism. Yet, on the other hand, he also penned a collection of lyrical poems, *Gelegenheitsgedichte*, in which he is “absolutely modern in both content and style.”⁶

His dramatic plays are likewise multifaceted. The first, “*Ma’aseh Shimshon*,” “The Story of Samson,” exemplifies the principles

with a predetermined goal in mind, and Hazal and the *meafreshim* are co-opted to serve that purpose. A neat anthology is presented. In this way, not only is the text itself forgotten, but the very opinions of Hazal and our *meafreshim* become ossified. According to this view, they are only there for moral guidance and occasional explanatory comments, but they do not debate the text, and they are not allowed to speak for themselves. It would seem that Hazal were a monolithic body, whose collective hashkafah corresponds perfectly to the one professed by the teacher.

But this is simply not true. Hazal were a diverse group of opinionated individuals, and they did not often agree. And our *meafreshim* are there only because they vigorously debated the meaning of the text. Viewing them as a complementary anthology insults their entire purpose.

Instead, we must read the text for itself, studying it with an open mind. We must engage in the debates of our *meafreshim*, seeing how their arguments emerge from a careful reading of the text. In our struggle for *peshat*, we accept those opinions which seem true and reverently put aside those which do not. And when nothing yet said has the ring of truth, we must not be afraid to suggest our own interpretations, or admit that we do not have a satisfactory answer.

We must realize that our biblical heroes were not always perfect—but that should not lessen our respect for them. We must talk about the complexities and multi-layered truths in the words of Hazal, cautioning that their words cannot always be taken literally. And we must deal with historical criticism, showing how the issues raised by modern scholars can be satisfactorily contained. Part of intellectual honesty is dealing with painful and difficult topics, and it is because historical questions are so potentially damaging to our faith that they must be addressed on some level.

A second realm is that of hashkafah. A good teacher can show that our tradition is not monolithic. Almost all issues have multiple strands and differing opinions, from our relationship with non-Jews to conflicts between science and Torah. While a Jew must believe certain things, questions of belief rarely have simple yes or no answers. There is depth and complexity to almost every issue.

The third realm is Gemara. In contrast to the study of Tanakh, deciphering the meaning of a talmudic text is a lively experience in most yeshivot. Debate is the key. Instead of bending over backwards to show how Rashi and Ibn Ezra really said the same thing, Gemara students are taught to make critical distinctions. Some teachers try to show how every Rishon had a different opinion, even if it is not evident from their words. But is this approach always intellectually honest? Maybe the words of the Rambam should be taken at face value. Even the Brisker methodology, which attempts to demonstrate that every dispute in a *sugya* revolves around one fundamental issue, is subject to scrutiny. Is that really what the Sages meant? Is that really the framework in which

Tosafot operated? We must be ever-vigilant in our analysis to insure that it is intellectually honest. We must never forget the text in the heat of battle. And we must sometimes apply a more critical eye to the text itself. Any interpretation, no matter how ingenious, cannot be true if it is premised on a faulty text. In his recent novel *The Search Committee*, R. Marc Angel puts this into the mouth of one of his characters:

Let us say that a scholar today becomes the world’s foremost expert of Ptolemaic astronomy. He knows all the mathematical formulae, all the rotations and orbits of the heavenly bodies as taught by Ptolemy. Some people would say that he was a great scholar, the best in the world. ... But I would say that this scholar has wasted his time. ... Why? Because Ptolemy’s system has been shown to be incorrect. Every schoolchild today knows more true astronomy than this scholar of the Ptolemaic system who still believes the earth is the center of the universe. ... My goal in studying Talmud is to get to the truth using the best methods. Usually, the least complicated and most direct route is the way to reach the correct result.⁷

I do not wish to imply that our entire method of learning Gemara is outmoded and incorrect. I only urge caution in applying the traditional methodology. One should never forget that his goal is not merely to attain religious fulfillment, but also to arrive at the truth.

I readily admit that some of these issues are not as prevalent in our day schools as in other communities. But they exist nonetheless.

I also admit that some people are not disturbed by these issues, and they happily lead upright lives of religious fervor with a more simplistic understanding of their faith. And it is hard to fault that approach. But others are not satisfied. They must be taught that there is another way, a path that traverses the narrow bridge on the road to the truth.

Yosef Lindell holds a BA in History from YC and received his MA in Medieval Jewish History from BRGS in 2008.

¹ *Shemot* 34:6.

² *Pirkei Avot* 1:18.

³ *Yoma* 69b.

⁴ *Collected Writings* 7: 415-6.

⁵ Marc Angel, *The Search Committee* (New York: Urim Publications, 2008), 98.

Toward the Development of an Effective Model for the Teaching of Gemara *be-Iyyun*

BY: Max Shichtman

Imagine the following: A basketball coach is in a gym with his team. He tells his team, "O.K. guys, today, we will practice dribbling and shooting. Here are the balls, there are the baskets, and I'll see you all in three hours." After three hours, the coach comes back and for about an hour, dribbles the ball around and makes several shots, each of which go into the basket perfectly. He then turns to his team and says, "O.K. guys, now go review." What is wrong with this picture? The answer: the coach did not coach his team.

The basketball team and its coach are a *maschal* for the manner in which Gemara is often taught. While the traditional *seider-shiur* system has worked throughout the ages, almost always those studying in yeshivot already knew how to learn before they entered their yeshivah. Thankfully, within the Centrist Orthodox community, recent years have seen the very positive development of students studying full-time in Israel before attending college. Unfortunately, many of these students do not possess the necessary skills to learn on their own. Additionally, for many, this time in Israel may be their only time which they spend in full-time, intensive learning so that if they do not develop those skills then, they may never have the opportunity to do so again. Many educators believe that the traditional *seider-shiur* system does not successfully meet the needs of these students and another system must be developed.

This article describes an alternative system, developed by leading educators and employed by Yeshivat Yesodei HaTorah (located in the Beit Shemesh area in Israel), which has produced impressive results. At Yesodei HaTorah, I was privileged to study in Rabbi Scott Kahn's shiur for almost a year. What follows is a description of his morning *seider shiur* based on my personal experience and numerous conversations clarifying his methodology.¹

To ensure that students receive the maximum amount of attention and guidance, the maximum size for a morning shiur must be limited to eight students. This enables the rabbeim to know their students well and tailor their teaching towards the students' needs. Additionally, having students with limited skills attempt to prepare a long list of sources unaided is bound to lead to frustration and wasted time. At Yesodei HaTorah, the rabbeim instead assign more realistic and smaller portions which the students will still find challenging. For example, at the beginning of the year, a rebbe might tell his shiur to break up into *chavrutot* for twenty minutes or half an hour and prepare the next two lines of Gemara. Since the students can accomplish the assignments and since the rabbeim are in the beit midrash, supervising and answering questions, little time is wasted. After the students have

finished preparing, the rebbe brings the students back for shiur.

In shiur, the rebbe has the students do as much work as possible in order to develop their skills. Instead of reading and explaining the Gemara, the rebbe has the students explain the Gemara on their own. Gemara reading and comprehension skills are developed by practicing them, not by watching someone else demonstrate his own skills. Just as watching a professional basketball player play basketball does not actively improve your own skills, listening to a rebbe explain a Gemara does not actively develop Gemara skills. In a typical shiur, the rebbe asks each *chavruta* to explain its *peshat* in the Gemara. Instead of correcting mis-translations and inaccurate punctuation, the rebbe waits for all of the *chavrutot* to explain their *peshatim* and then asks the class as a whole to decide whose *peshat* is correct. The rationale behind this method is that in order to have a complete understanding of the Gemara, one must be able to explain why the correct *peshat* is, in fact, correct and why other *peshatim* are wrong; stumbling across the correct *peshat* is hardly an indicator of advanced comprehension skills. Of course, the rebbe guides the shiur to the correct explanation when needed and asks questions to make sure the students really can read, translate, and explain the Gemara correctly.

Yesodei HaTorah's focus on skills in morning *seider* manifests itself in two other areas: the demand for a precise translation and the type of sources assigned. My rebbe and Rosh Yeshivah, R. Scott Kahn, has said numerous times that being able to read and translate the Gemara without being able to explain it is much better than being able to explain the Gemara without really being able to fit this explanation into the words. (The same applies to other sources such as Rashi, Tosafot, or Rashba.) There are several reasons for this. First, if one cannot fit the explanation into the words, it may very well be incorrect. Second, knowing "what the Gemara is basically saying" frequently does not help one to precisely translate the Gemara, while being able to translate the Gemara precisely is the first step in understanding exactly what the Gemara is saying. If one can translate, he usually just needs to sit and think some more to understand the meaning of the Gemara. Finally, if one cannot translate the Gemara, it is impossible to reconstruct a forgotten explanation; if one can translate it, however, one can normally arrive at a forgotten explanation.

The students' skill level also has an impact on the type of sources assigned. R. Kahn would assign sources based on their usefulness for building skills more than for their content. Thus, he would frequently look for *sugyot* tangentially related to the one we were studying but which contained hard Aramaic so that we

of rhetoric that he expounded upon in his treatise *Leshon Limmudim*, in which he uses his knowledge of classic and contemporary Italian literature.¹² Moreover, there is a hint to opera: every scene ends with an individual's song of sorts, and sometimes even a seeming duet – very similar to an aria.¹³ Often reflecting on his own life, Ramhal identifies with the tragic hero, giving a depth to the verses that is often lacking in secular drama.¹⁴

However, his most significant work is "Migdal Oz": the love story of a man who succeeds in entering a fortified castle and releasing the princess inside. In the play, the hero's effort is almost thwarted by an evil man who follows him into the castle, but the story concludes with a happy ending in which the rightful pair marries. Readers were shocked to realize that this play is almost an exact copy of famous playwright Giovanni Battista Guarini's *Pastor Fido*. In fact, Professor H.L. Fleischer criticizes this play as constituting "plagiarism."¹⁵ What is more astounding than the fact that Ramhal wrote a love drama, replete with secularism and human passions, is that he wrote this love story at the very same time that he was preparing spiritually for divine revelations from the heavenly *maggid* as well as visits from Elijah the Prophet and other divine beings. It is unclear to scholars and historians as to how he achieved these seemingly opposite feats simultaneously.

True, in his defense, Ramhal did "clean up" Guarini's play. He took out the mythological elements and much of the sensuality; the famous kiss is omitted. Instead of portraying the evil character Zifa as a high-ranking prostitute in the king's court, as does Guarini, Ramhal depicts her as a regular cheat and a scoundrel. What differentiates the two plays most of all, though, is the atmosphere of Ramhal's version and the sincerity of these elements in it: "[Ramhal] gives expression simultaneously to the Jewish people's longing for sunshine, to the nation's insatiable hunger for joy of life and song of love; a thing which cannot be said with regard to Guarini's model."¹⁶ Jewish ideals shine through in Ramhal's *Migdal Oz*, adding depth and meaning that is utterly lacking in the artificiality of Guarini's *Pastor Fido*.

Additionally, it is possible to read even more religious themes into the text. For example, an interesting element that Ramhal added to his play is the mysterious tower in which the maiden resides. Some scholars say that this is added to create a scene that hints to the paragraph in the *Zohar* in which the Torah is compared to a princess who is hidden in a tower where only her true love can find her.¹⁷ Additionally, this play about love is also appropriate for a wedding, and, indeed, it was written in honor of the marriage of his friend, Yisrael-Isaac Bassan.

Because he is famous for his kabbalistic persona, Ramhal's mastery of Italian language, literature, and drama is unexpected and rather shocking. After attempting to digest all of this, what we are left with is respect: Ramhal was able to attain greatness in both the secular realm as well as the spiritual one, somehow

finding a way to use both to their full capacities, separately, while not compromising on either one.

Rena Weisen is a fifth year student at SCW majoring in Nutrition and Communications and is a Staff Writer for Kol Hamevaser.

¹ Schirmann, Hayyim. *Le-Toledot ha-Shirah ve-ha-Deramah ha-Ivrit: Mehkarim u-Masot*. Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1979, vol. 2, p. 46

² Ginzburg, Simon. *The Life and Works of Moses Hayyim Luzzatto: Founder of Modern Hebrew Literature*. Philadelphia: The Dropsie College for Hebrew and Cognate Learning, 1931, p. 98

³ Schirmann, p. 48

⁴ He also wrote books on logic, science, and ethics, among other disciplines, but for the purpose of this article, I will only focus on the poetry and drama.

⁵ "Moses Hayyim Luzzatto." www.JewishEncyclopedia.com. 4 Dec 2008 <<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=638&letter=L&search=luzzatto>>.

⁶ Ginzburg, p. 115

⁷ Dan, Joseph and Joelle Hansel. "Luzzatto, Moses Hayyim." *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 2nd ed, vol. 13. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007, pp. 281-286.

⁸ Schirmann, p. 166

⁹ Dan and Hansel, pp. 281-286

¹⁰ *Repertorium der gesammten Literatur*. Leipzig, 1839, vol. 19, pp. 140-145. Qtd. in Ginzburg, p.96

¹¹ Ginzburg, p. 108

¹² Schirmann, p. 170

A Case for a Pluralistic Jewish Education

BY: Marlon Danilewitz

could break our teeth and learn the language. Similarly, just because Tosafot made an important point did not mean that we would learn it; if it was too hard, he might assign part of it or simply skip it. Or, if Rashba would be a good source for developing skills, we might learn his comments instead. For the most part, *mekorot* were not chosen because they were “*yesodosdik*” (though this, too, certainly did play a role), but rather primarily because they were important for developing skills.

It must be stated that regardless of what we learned, we learned it *be-iyun*. *Iyun* was not measured by the number of *mevareshim* covered but in how well they were analyzed. Learning Tosafot without analysis is not *iyun*; it is *bekiut* in Tosafot. Thus, even though the lower shiurim cover few *mevareshim*, whatever they did learn, they learned well. In *sefer*, we were expected to translate with extreme precision, question the *sevarot* behind and novel points within *dinim*, read Amoraim back into the Mishnayot and Beraivot, and pay attention to the textual strengths and weaknesses of opinions in the Rishonim. All these issues would also be discussed among the students within shiur with the rebbe exercising proper control.

This article represents an attempt to provide a modest description of some of the educational methodology utilized by Yeshivat Yesodei HaTorah in its morning *sefer*. It is my hope that this article will raise awareness of a highly effective system for teaching students how to learn and stimulate discussion amongst students planning to enter *hinnukh* about alternative teaching methods. God willing, Yesodei HaTorah and other institutions utilizing similar methodologies will lead to a growth and glorification of the Torah.

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¹ Rabbi Kahn reviewed an earlier draft of this article for accuracy.

When I explain to people that I attended Tanenbaum Community Hebrew Academy of Toronto, or, as most people refer to it, CHAT, a pluralistic Jewish high school, they are slightly taken aback. In part, I attribute the surprised reactions of my fellow peers to the reality, that by and large, denominational Jewish high-schools are the norm across North America. As I go on to further describe my high school, an open educational arena that successfully attracts about 1,500 students from all denominations, the astonished expression on the faces of my peers becomes readily apparent. It is my intention to examine the strengths, challenges and goals of a pluralistic Jewish education in this article by reflecting upon my own experience at CHAT and also by commenting on an interview that I conducted with Mr. Paul Shaviv, the headmaster of CHAT.

Before jumping into a discussion regarding the merits of a pluralistic Jewish education, it behooves one to first consider the values of a school of this nature. In a speech that Mr. Shaviv delivered in September 2005, titled “CHAT – Vision and Values Towards our first Half-century,” he quotes the words of Rabbi Kushner:

“There are only two kinds of Jews—serious Jews and non-serious Jews. Serious Jews try to do what Jews have always done...to pattern their lives on the insights of Judaism...while the non-serious Jew, it doesn’t matter what style of synagogue service he stays home from or which definition of mitzvah he ignores.”¹

Shaviv cites this quotation to address two significant pillars of CHAT’s educational philosophy. Firstly, he addresses the fact that for many, denominations cease to be the be all and end all, stating

“I do believe that for a large majority of our community – certainly of our school community- the denominational labels now hold little significance. That does not mean that theology is unimportant – quite the reverse. But once in school, it does not seem to me that either students or staff identify themselves or others by their denominational affiliations.”²

In the wake of a Jewish educational system free from the polemics of denominational theology, CHAT, as Shaviv posits, “is in the business of producing serious Jews. That is the real measure of our success. Are we graduating ‘serious’ Jews?”

The rigor and quality of the academic program at CHAT attest to just how serious CHAT expects its students to be. All students at CHAT must take four courses of Jewish Studies each year (total 12 hours). From Grade 9 - Grade 11 students take Jewish History, Hebrew, Bible, and Rabbinics/Talmud; in Grade 12 additional electives are available to students. What distinguishes CHAT, and consequently

what has prepared me well for my experience at YU, is the academic intensity of these subjects. In part this stems from CHAT’s dedication to find engaging and challenging Jewish educators. The diversity of the teachers at CHAT has helped to cultivate a unique environment which fosters serious dialogue and inquiry. In particular, the energetic Israeli “*shelihiim*” and CHAT alumni teachers have helped to engender a passionate Jewish feeling in the corridors of the school and in the hearts of the students.

Having covered the essential and general elements of CHAT’s educational program it is possible to now make the case for CHAT and pluralistic Jewish education in general. When asked about the merits of a pluralistic Jewish education, Shaviv responded that “students learn to defend their own views and learn to tolerate others.” Furthermore, Shaviv pointed out that this open educational method in which no one perspective is presented or defended is a source for CHAT graduates’ success in remaining committed to the Jewish roots. Shaviv reported that in a recent survey of CHAT alumni, 96% of alumni married Jewish spouses, 12% of graduates work in the field of Jewish education, 50% attend synagogue regularly, and 72% of CHAT students continued their Jewish education in some capacity after high school. On this note, I think it is meaningful and appropriate to mention that last year I was part of *habburah* of ex-CHATniks, with representatives from JTS, Ohalei Torah (a Chabad yeshiva in Crown Heights), and, of course, YU.

This educational philosophy, which relies on open environment were students can freely question, answer, and explore, requires a special breed of pedagogues. CHAT teachers are expected to contribute to the atmosphere of openness and respect in the school. Shaviv emphasized, “Despite the fact that CHAT doesn’t receive so many applications from non-orthodox teachers, to teach at CHAT requires a streak of non-conformity.” Along these same lines Shaviv reported that there are guidelines for teachers. “Teachers can give their own point of view if they make it known it is their own and make it known that there are other perspectives and be respectful towards these differences.”

Much of these ideas run contrary to the way that Jewish education is practiced in most conventional Jewish schools. Why should the Jewish community be interested in being open to an open and pluralistic education? Shaviv answered that a school of this nature “reflects the increasing reality of Jewish life, where fewer and fewer families buy into denominational definitions. Moreover, students respect the fact that this school is not dogmatic, not pushing one type at the cost of others. It benefits a student to be exposed to all of these views. Students appreciate multiple perspectives. CHAT intensifies the student’s Jewish

identity, while avoiding the problem of rebellion that is often encountered in denominational schools.”

It is my understanding that the strength of CHAT is the “C”, community. The school’s emphasis on serving, enhancing, and enriching the Jewish existence of the members of its community is the essential ingredient which ensures its success and warrants its praise. CHAT is a microcosm of the greater Jewish community in Toronto, the number of its Orthodox students accurately represents the ratio of Orthodox Jews in Toronto to the greater Jewish community. By creating an educational experience in which students are exposed to all of the dimensions, complexities, and challenges of contemporary Jewish life, one helps to rear a future society of leaders who are adequately equipped for the future.

When asked what distinguishes CHAT from other pluralistic schools, Shaviv pointed out several unique characteristics of CHAT: The large size of the school (1,400+ students), which allows it to operate more efficiently; the representation of all voices at the school, in particular Orthodoxy; and the tremendous support that school receives from its local Jewish Federation. All of these three reasons, in my mind, emphasize the notion of community. Personally, what I find to be the distinguishing aspect of the school is the legacy that it has manifested within its students, inspiring them to remain seriously committed to the Jewish community. What most impresses me each year are the conversations I have with ex-CHATniks who eagerly speak of one day returning, in one capacity or another, to teach at CHAT, or hearing from younger siblings about their teachers, some of whom are my fellow classmates.

Many are familiar with Hillel’s saying, “If I am not for myself, then who will be for me? And if I am only for myself, then what am I? And if not now, when?”³ This quote is famous in part because of the way it gives voice to a fundamental principle of Jewish living: It is required of one to look into himself for the answers of how one will lead one’s life, what it means to be a Jew and a person. Moreover, I believe to look into oneself requires a great deal of reflection and interaction with the community and the world in which we find and define the “self.”

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¹ Rabbi Harold Kushner, *To Life!* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1993), p. 83.

² Paul, Shaviv, “CHAT – Vision and Values Towards our first Half-century,” Delivered at a CHAT Staff Retreat, September 2005.

³ *Pirkei Avot* 1:9

Coeducation: *le-Khathilah* or *be-di-Avad*?

BY: Ruthie Braffman

Coeducation has been a hot topic in recent years, particularly in regards to Modern Orthodox high schools. Parties from both sides of the debate bring supporting evidence for their claim, sometimes even, bringing forth the same proof, namely, Rav Soloveitchik's silence on the matter.

Rav Hershel Schachter passionately feels that Rav Soloveitchik was not in favor of coeducational schooling but allowed it for Maimonides School in Boston as a lesser of two evils: "In Boston, [Rav Soloveitchik] was forced to behave this way for he only had two options; to be guilty of limiting education for girls or to be guilty of opening a coeducational school...he reasoned that given the contemporary circumstances, this decision was less problematic...in other places, where there are already schools that separate boys and girls and there is no need to act as such, it is certainly completely incorrect to do so."ⁱ Rav Moshe Feinstein also took the position in a *pesak* that coeducation is permitted, only in necessary situations and specifically limited to lower grades.ⁱⁱ

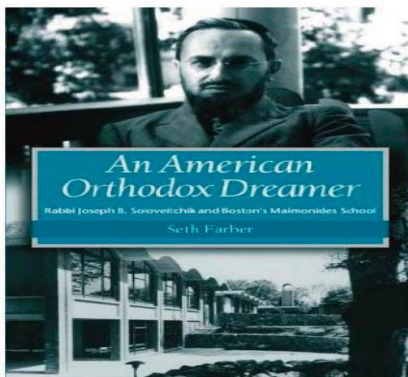
Ironically, on the other side of the debate, Benny Brama, a former teacher at Maimonides, interprets the Rav's silence on coeducation as a favorable and *le-ka-tehilah* decision: "Coeducation causes less sexual tension and brings, both within and without the yeshiva or school, a richer and healthier social life. Particularly in light of the sexual looseness that may be found all over America...Only a great thinker and halakhist like [Rabbi Soloveitchik], who understands that one should confront rather than flee from contemporary realities, could have established a yeshiva with this educational approach."ⁱⁱⁱ

The coeducation debate is not restricted to the domain of Orthodox high schools, but indeed has been a hot topic in the United States in general. This was true, specifically, in the 1960s and 1970s, a time of activism and social revolution. The leading feminists believed that the only way to stop sexism was to abandon all past conventions, including single-sex education.

Recent analysis seems to prove the opposite: research cites the academic as well as emotional benefits of single-sex education.^{iv} A pro-academic environment is fostered in female single-sex high schools because there are fewer social distractions; students are extremely focused on their work and more involved in classroom activities. Research also shows that teachers, whether male or female, tend to pay more attention to the males in the classroom. With the absence of boys, female students suffer fewer prejudices in the intimate environment of the classroom. The Australian Council for Educational Research reports that teenage boys and girls are "out of sync with each other because of differences in physiology and cognitive development" and the teachers lose class time as they attempt to control

these "wild boys." There is also data suggesting that because the administration and teachers of same gender schools have higher educational expectations from the students, the girls take on greater loads of homework and have higher achievement outcomes on math, reading, science, and civics standardized tests.^v This elevated expectation prepares the young women for a high-powered professional world.

Ironically, single-sex education has been misunderstood as a barrier to feminism, when in actuality we see from research that it is the solution to enhance academics and promote emotionally strong and healthy adolescent girls. Conceivably then, the promotion of single-sex education by Rav Schachter and like-minded *posekim* does not only adhere to halakhah, but it may also be scientifically proven as a healthier academic atmosphere for young women.



After Congresswoman Edith Green held a hearing on sex discrimination in education in 1970, five bills were introduced to ban sex discrimination in all educational facilities that receive federal funds.^{vi} Many feminists celebrated when Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972 became law. Title IX, which prohibits sex discrimination in educational institutions receiving federal funds, was signed by President Nixon on June 8th of that same year. If single-sex education was restricted, why do a small percentage of same-gender schools remain? Since the 1970s, there has been a tremendous amount of new research about education, specifically the recently proven benefits of single-sex education. Therefore, many loopholes have been implemented to Title IX to allow single-sex schooling. Single-sex schooling must have an extremely convincing justification to meet the constitutional requirements.^{vii}

The purpose of a public single-sex school serves to remedy discrimination and to allow girls and women to overcome historical barriers to equal education. This would rule out programs that "perpetuate the legal, social, and economic inferiority of women." Interestingly, Jewish education was ahead of its time with the establishment of Shulamith School for Girls in Boro Park, Brooklyn in 1929.^{viii} Yeshiva Etz

Chaim was founded in 1886 and modeled after European yeshivot; because of its innate structure "girls were simply not a consideration."^{ix} Shulamith's only-female student body did not hinder the education as the feminists of 1970s claimed, but in fact pioneered in providing an equal education for young Jewish women.

Education is more than about learning content; schooling involves emotional development as well. Some researchers believe that the single-sex environment produces unhealthy results claiming it is too overprotective, nurturing girls who are ill prepared for coed situations. Angie Young,^x an avid feminist, reports that her experience in a single-sex school was detrimental, with little guidance from the school on how to experience adolescence with "any sense of self-esteem or empowerment."^{xi} She also found her single-sex school to be "extremely oppressive and patriarchal experience

48 percent of the girls in coed classrooms passed the same test. During the same years, Myrtle Avenue Middle School in Irving, New Jersey also divided their classrooms by gender. As predicted, test scores increased, and the environment was filled with a new enthusiasm for learning.

The newly established high school, Young Women's Leadership Academy of East Harlem, was initially instituted as a single-sex school. The school provided excellent education and healthy environment for African-American and Hispanic females in the community. New York's National Organization for Women, and the American Civil Liberties Union, filed complaint to the federal government that Young Women's Leadership Academy of East Harlem violated Title IX. The director of the National Organization for Women (NOW) declared that the school must be closed because "separate but equal is not ok."^{xii} The women of Harlem responded that this was "middleclass women interfering with a situation that they don't understand." Despite the protests, the first graduating class of Young Women's Leadership Academy of East Harlem graduated in June 2001. All of the girls were accepted to 4-year colleges except one who joined the Air Force.

In the past twenty years, Title IX has progressed because of the favorable research about single-sex education for girls. In 1998, Texas republican Senator Kay Bailey Hutchinson, offered an amendment legalizing single-sex education in public schools.^{xiii} In response, Ted Kennedy denounced this idea as sinister and unconstitutional. However, New York's Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton joined Texas's Senator Kay Hutchinson in a second attempt to legalize single-sex education in June 2001. Upon seeing the success of the Young Women's Leadership Academy of East Harlem, Senator Clinton commented: "Public school choice should be broad as possible...certainly there should not be any obstacle to providing single-sex choice within the public school system. School districts should have the opportunity to spend federal educational funds on promoting single-sex opportunities so long as they are consistent with applicable law."^{xiv} Additionally, on May 8, 2002, the Bush Administration encouraged single-sex schooling and created more flexibility with Title IX.^{xv} As a result, millions of dollars in federal grants were designated to help districts establish single-sex public schools.

Whether one interprets the Rav as an advocate for coeducation or not, research demonstrates that all-female academic environments encourage intellectual pursuits, and foster academic achievement, and healthy self-esteem among young women. Halakic opinions on the matter only enhance and support single-sex education.

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Proximity and Distance: A Halakhic and Experiential Analysis of Rebbe-Talmid Interactions

BY: Ephraim Meth

Editor's note: This article was adapted from the author's Kuntres Sha'ashvei Ephraim on the laws of kevod rabbo ve-talmidei hakhamim.

Rabbeim and their *talmidim* are universes apart. The rebbe is distant, an authority figure, an intellectual giant. He is literally a "rav," a master, a great one. In contrast, the *talmid* is a servant, an intellectual dwarf. Halakhah often emphasizes this abyss between rebbe and *talmid*: "All tasks that a servant performs for his master, a *talmid* performs for his rebbe."ⁱ

Yet rabbeim and *talmidim* are bonded by their joint participation in preserving and transmitting the *masorah* of Torah knowledge. The rebbe is proximate; he is a father to his *talmidim*, and the *talmidim* carry their rebbe's legacy. This rebbe-*talmid* relationship bridges the gap in intellectual stature between rebbe and *talmid*.

There emerges a dialectic of distance and proximity that governs the interaction of rebbe and *talmid*. The laws of *kevod rabbo*, one's rebbe's dignity, do not only emerge from and contribute to the chasm between rebbe's and *talmid's* stature; these laws are also a function of, and are designed to enhance and strengthen, the bond between the two parties. Timeless proximity thrives in transient distance; the *talmid* internalizes his rebbe's values forever by momentarily humbling himself before his rebbe. (Physicists are familiar with the concept of proximity within distance from the phenomenon of wormholes.) Mutual love develops from delivery and receipt of respect and awe.

Most halakhot governing rebbe-*talmid* interactions equally emphasize each element of the distance-proximity dialectic. Some halakhot, however, place disproportionate emphasis on one element over the other. This article will analyze four areas where the choice of whether to emphasize the gap in stature (the distance) or the rebbe-*talmid* relationship (the proximity) impacts directly on halakhah. It will conclude by applying this analysis to thriving on the experience of *talmid-hood*.

Moreh Halakhah bi-Penei Rabbo

The Talmud in *Berakhot* 31b states that any "student" who issues a halakhic ruling in front of his "teacher" deserves death. This statement is derived from an account wherein Shemuel ha-Navi, the "student", issued a halakhic ruling in front of Eli ha-Kohen, the "teacher," and was indicted for doing so.

The *Sefer Mitsvot Katan* (Semak)ⁱⁱ defines "student" as one who has learned something from his "teacher," and defines "teacher" as one who has taught the student something. Had Shemuel not learned something from Eli, he would not have deserved death. According to

Semak, the rebbe-*talmid* relationship created by giving and receiving knowledge is critical to the definition of "student" and "teacher" in this halakhah.

In contrast, Tosafotⁱⁱⁱ define "student" as anyone who is not a *Gedol ha-Dor*, and "teacher" as *Gedol ha-Dor*. Alternately, Tosafot define "student" as one who has arrived to learn (but who needs not yet have learned), and "teacher" as one who is ready to teach (but who needs not yet have taught). According to Tosafot, the relationship created by giving and receiving knowledge is peripheral to the definition of "student" and "teacher" in this halakhah. Rather, Tosafot hold that the rebbe's intellectual superiority, or his relative authority over the student, is critical to the definition of "student" and "teacher."

Ordinary Interactions with One's Rebbe

Rambam never equates the laws governing rebbe-*talmid* interaction with those governing ordinary person-*Gedol ha-Dor* interaction. Presumably, Rambam (like Semak) believes that the statuses of "rebbe" and "talmid" are a function of the relationship engendered by direct transmission of knowledge. Hence, these statuses do not result from the more diffuse relationship between ordinary people and the *Gedol ha-Dor*. Textually, Ram-

ban's superiority and authority over his students grant him special stature, a *gedol ha-Dor's* superiority and authority over ordinary people certainly grant him that stature. Textually, R. Isserlein is projecting the definitions of "rebbe" and "talmid" from the laws of *paskning* in front of one's rebbe to all laws governing rebbe-*talmid* interactions.

Rebbe Muvhak

Rambam^{iv} defines "*rebbe muvhak*" as the rebbe responsible for over half of his *talmid's* knowledge. A rebbe remains "*muvhak*" even if the student later gains more knowledge than his rebbe.^v According to Rambam, the relationship created by transmitting knowledge is sufficient for the definition of "*muvhak*."

In contrast, R. Yosef Kolon (Maharik)^{vi} adds that a "*rebbe muvhak*" must also be intellectually superior to his *talmid*. A rebbe does not remain "*muvhak*" if his knowledge level dips below his *talmid's* knowledge level. According to Maharik, a relationship is not sufficient to give a rebbe "*muvhak*" status; intellectual superiority is equally necessary.

Making a Berakhah on a Place Where One's Rebbe Was Saved



bam probably feels that the *aggada* about Shemuel and Eli did not mean to offer formal definitions of "rebbe" and "talmid." Rather, it meant only to emphasize that *paskning* halakhah in front of one's rebbe is an extremely serious offense.

In contrast, Tosafot R. Yisrael Isserlein^{vii} equates the laws governing a rebbe-*talmid* relationship with those governing an ordinary person-*Gedol ha-Dor* relationship. For Tosafot, the statuses of "rebbe" and "talmid" are not a function of a relationship forged via transmission of knowledge. Hence, a rebbe is no better than the *Gedol ha-Dor*. Rather, Tosafot hold that the statuses of "rebbe" and "talmid" are functions of intellectual superiority and authority; hence, if a rebbe's intellec-

tual superiority and authority over his students grant him special stature, a *gedol ha-Dor's* superiority and authority over ordinary people certainly grant him that stature. Textually, R. Isserlein is projecting the definitions of "rebbe" and "talmid" from the laws of *paskning* in front of one's rebbe to all laws governing rebbe-*talmid* interactions.

Rabbeinu Asher^{viii} resolves this question by a *kal va-homer*: if one must make a *berakhah* upon observing the place where an *adam mesuyyam*, a celebrity (with whom one does not necessarily share a close relationship) was miraculously saved, surely a student must make a *berakhah* upon observing the place where his rebbe (with whom he shares a close relationship) was miraculously saved. According to Rosh, the requirement to recite a *berakhah* increases proportionally to strength of relationship. This indicates that such a requirement is a function of relationship.

ⁱ Farber, Seth. *An American Orthodox Dreamer: Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik and Boston's Maimonides School*. Hanover, N.H.: University Presses Marketing, 2004. p. 76.

ⁱⁱ *Iggerot Moshe*, *Yoreh De'ah* 1:137; 4:28.

ⁱⁱⁱ Farber, p. 77.

^{iv} Datnow, Amanda and Lea Hubbard. *Gender in Policy and Practice: Perspectives on Single Sex and Coeducational Schooling*. New York: Routledge Falmer, 2002, p. 17.

^v Ibid, p. 13.

^{vi} Sax, Leonard. "Single Sex Education: Ready for Prime Time?" *The World & I*, August 2002, pp. 257-269, at p. 2.

^{vii} "Single Sex Education", American Association of University Women (AAUW), March 2004, p. 1. View the website at: <http://www.AAUW.org/print>.

^{viii} *Encyclopedia of Women and Religion in North America*, ed. Rosemary Skinner Keller and Rosemary Radford Ruether. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006, p. 566.

^{ix} Ibid.

^x Young, Angie. "Insidious Oppression: All-Girls Education without Feminist Vision", *Off Our Backs*. September/October 2003: 9/10, pp. 27-29.

^{xi} Young, p. 28

^{xii} Ibid.

^{xiii} AAUW, p. 4.

^{xiv} Datnow and Hubbard, p. 19.

^{xv} AAUW, p. 4.

^{xvi} Sax, p. 5.

^{xvii} See: <http://www.now.org/issues/constitution/index.html>.

^{xviii} Sax, p. 5.

^{xix} Ibid.

^{xx} Starr, Linda. "Girls and Boys Together?" *Education World*, April 14, 2002, p. 2. See: www.Education-world.com/A_issues/issues315.shtml.

In contrast, Ramban⁴ resolves this question with a different *kal va-homer*: if a son must make a *berakhah* upon observing the place where his father (who is not necessarily his intellectual superior) was miraculously saved, surely a student must make a *berakhah* upon observing the place where his rebbe (who is his intellectual superior) was miraculously saved. According to Ramban, the requirement to recite a *berakhah* increases proportionally to intellectual superiority. This indicates that the intellectual superiority of the rebbe, not his relationship to the *talmid*, determines when the *talmid* must make a *berakhah*.

The experience of *talmid*-hood is rewarding, yet intense and often difficult to bear. Who can describe the thrill of grasping a *hiddush* or participating in the give-and-take of *shiur*? Yet we are intimidated by our rabbeim's intellectual superiority, by the scarcity of their time, and sometimes by their dignified demeanor. We wrestle with ourselves to approach them and to wait patiently in line; we sometimes wrestle with others for the privilege of taking their time. On occasion, we wish ourselves bolder, or them more outgoing and accessible. We may feel, erroneously, lonely or abandoned.

These feelings of timidity and recrimination need not be and often are not negative and sterile; they can be positive and productive. They can motivate us to more boldly seek Torah from our rabbeim, and to attach ourselves to community rabbanim and kollel members who are more readily available than our rabbeim. They encourage us to explore areas of Torah that capture our rabbeim's interest, and to delve into their written works. Hence, the superficially negative dimensions of *talmid*-hood motivate us to channel our energy outwards, in pursuit of Torah.

Moreover, all of us benefit inwardly from these feelings. Our timidity, reinforced by our rabbeim's conduct, keeps wanton creativity and individualism in check. Our struggle to approach our rabbeim is no less than the struggle to approach the Torah and Hashem, the struggle to approach a conflagration. This struggle reinforces our sense of the power and value of our rabbeim, of what they teach and what they stand for. The confrontation with our rabbeim's relative inaccessibility incubates independence and acceptance of responsibility for our actions. Our desires to receive more of their attention make us treasure exponentially the attention we do receive. Hence, the experience of *talmid*-hood motivates us to channel our energy inwards as well, to refine and augment our bonds with our rabbeim.

Both the halakhot and the experience of rebbe-*talmid* interactions are characterized by a dialectic of proximity and distance. Both poles of this dialectic are often embodied in a single halakhah, or in a single experiential feeling. Just as the Semak claims that the relationship between rebbe and *talmid* prohibits the *talmid* from *paskning* halakhah in front of his rebbe, we can try to grow closer to our own

rabbeim by humbling our opinions before theirs. Rambam restricts the statuses of "rebbe" and "talmid" to interconnected links in the chain of *masorah*, to the exclusion of more distant links. He also believes that "muvhak" status is solely a function of rebbe-*talmid* relationships. Similarly, we may view our awe of rabbeim as seeds and flowers of love and linkage. Finally, just as Rosh roots in relationships the *berakhah* on our rebbe's miraculous salvation, we can and should share our rebbe's triumphs and joys. By reflecting on these halakhot and their relevance to our personal experience, we can discover and thrive on the proximity hidden within the distance.

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ⁱ Shulhan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 242:19

ⁱⁱ Semak, cited by Beit Yosef, Yoreh De'ah 243)

ⁱⁱⁱ Berakhot ibid. s.v. "moreh"

^{iv} Ibid.

^v Mishneh Torah, Hilkhos Talmud Torah 5:9

^{vi} For example: if a rebbe has 60 knowledge units and teaches 50 to his *talmid* and the *talmid* goes on to learn 20 knowledge units from someone else, the rebbe is still defined as "muvhak" due to the 5:7 ratio, even though the rebbe knows 60 and the *talmid* knows 70.

^{vii} Maharik, *shoresh* 169

^{viii} Berakhot 9:1

^{ix} Rosh, cited by the Beit Yosef, Orah Hayyim 218

^x *Torat ha-Adam, Inyan ha-Meihush*

An Interview with Rabbi Yona Reiss

BY: Alex Ozar

What are the educational goals of this yeshivah? How would you describe a successful RIETS graduate?

A successful RIETS graduate achieves his fullest potential in learning and mastering Torah: in learning the skills necessary to be able to study Gemara and Halakhah properly, live a full life of an educated, observant Jew, understand how to decipher Torah texts – both *Torah she-bi-Kesav* and *she-be-Al Peh* – have a conceptual grounding in what is being studied, and make sense of not only the individual units but the totality of what is being learned. He should understand how to properly develop a healthy rebbe-*talmid* relationship as well as be able to learn independently, and be able to fully utilize *havrusah*-style learning as well. He should know how to be a *talmid*, how to be a rebbe, how to be a *talmid hakham*, and how to be a *balabos*.



Do you think the yeshivah is successful in achieving these goals?

I hope we are successful, but I think that no institution can be complacent and just assume that it is successful. It's important to make our system and structures as good as they can potentially be, and that requires constant evaluation and analysis.

What role should bekius learning play in a yeshivah education?

The Gemara at the end of *Berakhos* presents a *mahaloket* about whether *Sinai* (one has great breadth of learning) or *oker harim* (one who has great analytical skills) is *adif* (preferable), and concludes that *Sinai* is *adif*. So it sounds like the emphasis should be on *bekius*. But those who are more geared to *iiyun* will explain that that's not what the Gemara really means. Essentially, there is a place for both approaches in learning. There is a necessity to be acquainted with the entire picture in order to really appreciate the component parts. It's like

looking at a magnificent landscape. If you want to understand and appreciate any part of the landscape, you have to understand its place in the broader picture. At the same time, if one only learns superficially – though this is, according to the Gemara in *Shabbos*, certainly appropriate for one's first foray through *Shas* – one would be left with a nonfunctional understanding of what one has learned. There is a need for rabbeim to instruct his *shiur* with respect to how to use his *derekh ha-limmud*, how to analyze Gemara texts and *sugyos* in *Shas* to gain a higher level of understanding, and also how to receive the *masorah* regarding how certain texts fit in the general scheme, which has to be passed down from rebbe to *talmid* in each generation.

In 1955, Rav Soloveitchik wrote the following to Dr. Belkin: "It is imperative to establish the proper balance between quality and quantity and to eliminate extravagance and irresponsibility. To spend a full school year on

the study of fifteen pages of text, sacrificing thus an entire masekhta for the sake of ingenious scholastic debates, borders, mildly speaking, on the ridiculous. In a word, we should try to unlock for the average student the halakhic world – a world teeming with life, beauty, and grandeur – instead of burying his soul in the sands of sterile argumentative casuistry. The training must not depend upon mere chance or arbitrariness but should follow a well-integrated program which should serve the purpose of providing the student with the quintessence of certain halakhic disciplines which are indispensable for his intellectual advancement." Is this yeshivah living up to the Rav's directives?

The yeshivah does provide a broad range of different types of learning. As far as the points of *bekius*, there are a number of programs, incentives, and *bekius* competitions offered in the yeshivah. I am somebody who has always been a strong, vocal supporter of learning *bi-bekius*, but I also recognize the value of in-depth analytical learning, provided it is at a

genuine level and not one which is itself superficial.

As for the Rav, speeding through *Shas* superficially certainly was not what he had in mind, and was not the way that he in fact taught. He covered ground and also tried to understand the bigger picture. Whenever the Rav learned a *sugya*, he tried to fit everything into a broader conceptual analysis, to understand what every *kashya*, *teiruts*, and *shitah* was getting at, what were the underlying assumptions, and what were the underlying

pages. So why not read through Tanakh?

This yeshiva is primarily shiur-oriented. What place is there for students who wish to learn independently?

The rebbe-talmid relationship is a core part of our *masorah*, as is set forth in the first Mishnah of *Pirkei Avos* which states that “*Moshe kibbel Torah mi-Sinai u-mesarah li-Yehoshua*” (“Moshe accepted the Torah at Sinai and transmitted it to Yehoshua”). This mandates that the Torah has to be transmitted



themes. Once one understood the underlying assumptions, one was able to build a much bigger picture of the entire *sugya* and how that *sugya* related to other *sugyos* and thus achieve a greater understanding of the totality of Torah.

What role does Tanakh have in the yeshiva program?

A *talmid hakham* is compared to a *kalah mekushetes* (adorned bride) with *khaf-daled takhshitin* (twenty-four pieces of jewelry), which are the twenty-four *Sifrei Tanakh*. This has not always been emphasized to the greatest degree. We rely to some degree on the *shi'ah* of Rabbeinu Tam that one can cover his Tanakh learning obligation through in-depth learning of Gemara. If done rigorously and carefully, there is certainly a tremendous amount of Tanakh learning that one can gain just from going through Gemara texts. On the other hand, there is much to be gained by carefully going through the texts of Tanakh themselves.

There are styles of thought and teaching that have been set forth by Radak and others over the centuries which can and should be learned by the *talmidim*. It certainly should be inconceivable for any *talmid* of the yeshiva not to have at least read through the *Sifrei Tanakh* by the time he leaves. People read in high school the entire text of Tom Jones, which is over 900

from rebbe to *talmid* in every generation. This is an important part of our learning. The concept of *ve-yehi einakha ro'os es morekha* (“your eyes should see your teachers”) is fundamental to us, in terms of understanding Torah not only as a text but as an oral tradition which passes through people and personalities. In fact, the *Torah she-be-Al Peh* was not to be committed to writing, and part of the reason for that is that it has to be not only learned but also experienced; it is not only the Torah learning but the Torah personality, so that the Torah personality is an integral part of Torah learning. We seek to create Torah personalities through our imbibing the Torah from other Torah personalities and picking up the Torah content so it will be infused within us, as part of us. We become walking *Sifrei Torah*. The way in which a rebbe passes down the Torah to a *talmid* may depend upon the rebbe's style, the *talmid's* style, and upon different types of communication and transmission that are appropriate for different *talmidim* and different types of relationships. But regardless of the amount of time a student will sit across the table from a rebbe, or in a large shiur room with a rebbe, or learning a text by himself, it all needs to be predicated upon a transmission from one generation to the next. So even when it is appropriate for an individual *talmid* to spend time in

an independent study because he learns very well in that fashion, there has to be a rebbe in the picture.

What would you say makes this yeshiva special?

I have a passionate love for this yeshiva because I believe that this is a yeshiva that has great faith and conviction that Torah learning has to be predicated on *yerat shamayim* (“fear of Heaven”) and tremendous *emunah* in *ha-Kadosh Barukh Hu*, and that *emunah* is manifested in a trust that everything *ha-Kadosh Barukh Hu* has provided in this world and created in this universe is meant to enhance our understanding of Him, our closeness to Him, and our understanding of Torah. What this institution stands for is a confidence that all worldly wisdom and all worldly knowledge is meant to contribute to our greater understanding and appreciation of *ha-Kadosh Barukh Hu* and enhance our study of Torah.

What challenges are unique to this yeshiva?

Whenever you embark on an ambitious mission, the potential fruit of that mission are going to be counterbalanced by additional challenges that will present themselves. There are the opportunities for everybody to prepare for life in terms of gaining wisdom in all sorts of areas and preparing for professional life, while at the same time learning Torah in a yeshiva environment and thereby creating a tremendous holistic Torah personality with all of the desirable trimmings that go along with that. Obviously, that still does pose a challenge because it is a struggle to achieve the right balance. But it is a struggle that is part of a normal life experience. Part of the philosophy of this yeshiva is that each person is able to navigate that struggle in the halls of the yeshiva and the battei midrashos and in communication with their Rashei Yeshiva and with appropriate role models.

Is there room for academic methodology in the yeshiva?

There are certain words that are perceived as catchwords for dangerous agendas, and the important thing to remember is that any kind of intellectual endeavor which is characterized by *yerat shamayim* and unyielding faith and belief in *ha-Kadosh Barukh Hu* and *Torah mi-Sinai* is legitimate if embarked upon to enhance one's Torah understanding, and that includes utilizing any available texts, literature, and knowledge. “The more knowledge, the better” is our general attitude. *Ha-Kadosh Barukh Hu* put knowledge in the world for us to take advantage of it, to have a greater awareness and greater bonding with Hashem. What types of study are embarked upon by different *talmidim* depends on their level of readiness

and commitment and a variety of different factors, but taken as an objective matter, knowledge is certainly a good thing.

How would you describe the state of communication between the yeshiva and the College?

I think it is very good at this point in time. I cannot speak to the historical relationship, but right now there is very good communication between the leadership of the Yeshiva and the leadership of the College, in order to work together towards common goals and our common vision. We have spoken to college officials about having regular programming between the Yeshiva and the College in which we can have discussion forums on different issues of intersection so that everyone can be exposed to the issues and dilemmas in different types of study and professional training. We can bring all the issues to the fore because it is a healthy exercise; it is part of the reason for the existence of this institution to discuss all of the tensions and explore different ways – and there may be a multitude of ways – of grappling with these tensions. To bring together academicians, *talmidei hakhamim*, deans, and professionals to discuss these issues, whether it is the parameters of studying art or philosophy or doing experiments on animals in a biology laboratory, is a worthy project. I think this would be a true realization of the Torah u-Madda philosophy of the Yeshiva that students come here to experience.

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The *Hovot ha-Levavot* on the Educational Value of a Torah u-Madda Philosophy Over One of Torah u-Parnasah

BY: Shlomo Zuckier

A high school rebbe of mine once made the following claim (or something similar to it) against Torah u-Madda: "True, the Rambam believes in Torah u-Madda, but he's just a *shitas yahid* [minority opinion]. And don't say that you want to be *mahmir* for all the *shitos*, because if you are *mahmir* for the Rambam by learning *madda*, that is taking away from learning Torah, which other *shitos* would oppose." Now, leaving aside most of the assumptions he makes (1. There is a concept of *pesak* in the realm of *mahshavah*; 2. The *pesak* in such cases follows the majority opinion; 3. Studying *madda* cannot be seen as beneficial to learning Torah), I would like to take issue with his assertion that Rambam is a *shitas yahid*. In general, R. Sa'adyah Gaon, R. Yehudah ha-Levi, Ibn Ezra, Rambam, and Rama all have indicated in one place or other their extensive study of non-Torah disciplines in the medieval period,ⁱ and this essay will attempt to add another name to the list as well as some interesting, relevant points.

I would like to focus on the opinion of R. Bahya ibn Pakuda (eleventh century), author of the *Hovot ha-Levavot*, on this issue. The book is considered to be among the most basic *sifrei musar* in the yeshivah world, and its opinions are normally accepted, thus establishing its authoritative status. (Of course, most students learn only the non-philosophical parts of the *sefer*, but I do not believe that this is due to any perceived deficiency in R. Bahya's authority on these matters, just a matter of prioritization.) His support of Torah u-Madda and disdain for Torah u-Parnasah are clear, and his opinion is ironically a woefully neglected one among those who generally revere him as a religious thinker.

R. Bahya affirms his support for the study of knowledge outside of Torah and characterizes it as comprising a central part of one's *avodat Hashem* in several places in *Hovot ha-Levavot*. He avers that philosophical study is useful, even necessary, in forming an intelligent and accurate opinion regarding such issues as the proof of God's existence and nature.ⁱⁱ He also promotes the study of the natural sciences and psychology, as they provide a prism through which one can see God and the beauty of His creation.ⁱⁱⁱ He even goes so far as to say that remembering the wonder of God's handiwork helps Man avoid straying from the religious path and that it enforces a strong belief in, and commitment to, God.^{iv}

That R. Bahya supports the study of *madda* for the purpose of better appreciating God and His world is clear, then. However, he goes even further than mere support. At several points in *Hovot ha-Levavot*, R. Bahya actually attacks those who have some other approach to the study of secular disciplines. This hostility has been fleshed out and explained by Dr. Bezalel Safran^v as an attack by R. Bahya against the courtier class that was

powerful in his time in Spain and other parts of the Muslim world, as we will expand upon below.

R. Bahya^{vi} denigrates the following form of *madda* study (which he presents as being promoted by the *yetser ha-ra*):

Do not preoccupy your mind with any studies except those through which you can ingratiate yourself into the favor of your contemporaries and through which you can become acceptable to the great ones of your generation... [Study] the unusual features of language... the principles of grammar and po-



etry; choice anecdotes, exotic parables and strange tales.

This approach, which is preferred by the "*yetser ha-ra*" and which one must therefore avoid, apparently was the basic philosophy of many Jews of the courtier class in Muslim Spain at that time. Prevalent then was a Muslim theory of education called *adab*, which called for a minimal level of knowledge in a broad range of areas, specifically focusing on aesthetic values. Particularly, it demanded the cultivation of poetic, writing and speaking talents, as well as the acquisition of a knowledge of history. (Consider the types of things that take place at pseudo-intellectual cocktail parties.) These were the fields of knowledge that were seen favorably by the ruling powers, and people possessing the skills of *adab* would be likely to succeed in political positions.

R. Bahya opposes this method of *adab* for several reasons. His main opposition seems to be that people do not take this whole approach *li-shemah*, for the right reasons. The study of knowledge under *adab* is not undertaken for the sake of strengthening one's religious commitment (as R. Bahya's system calls for) but for the pragmatic benefits of advancement in the court.^{vii} This results in both an uncalled-for focus on the material (a problem sharpened by the fact that R. Bahya in general puts great store in *bitahon* and not in *hishtaddelut*) and a distraction from the positive things that secular knowledge can bring to a thinking, religious person.

This is R. Bahya's overall problem with the approach, but he also has more specific

problems with the areas of study focused on by the *adab* philosophy. Poetry is a good example of something that fails in this regard: it may be aesthetic, but it has little-to-no religious value, which makes it hard for R. Bahya to justify studying it. Also in this category is the field of astrology. Apparently, at that time astrology was an important area of knowledge for those serving in the royal courts to be familiar with. However, R. Bahya had two problems with it – the Torah's multiple injunctions against telling the future and the loss of faith that claiming knowledge of the future can cause. Thus, claims R. Bahya, those pursuing the educational method of *adab* find themselves in error on two main issues – the issue of intent and goal in learning the secular material, as well as the question of what to study.

In our time, we have somewhat different classifications of opinions regarding learning secular knowledge. The question of Torah u-Madda versus Torah u-Parnasah has accompanied Yeshiva University for a long time,^{viii} and even though there has been nary a debate about the personal educational policies of government courtiers in this respect, I still think that R. Bahya would have something to say about the current situation. It is possible to identify and distinguish two groups that would fall under the banner of Torah u-Parnasah, learning studies outside of Torah only in order to succeed materially. One is the group that openly denies the existence of any value in secular studies, opting to go through the motions of non-Torah education just to qualify for a vocation. R. Bahya rejects this approach openly, as stated above, because it ignores the study of many fields which would reinforce one's belief in God. However, there is another group of people who can be identified with Torah u-Parnasah. These people pay lip service to the notion that secular studies are important for one's *avodat Hashem* and pursue them actively, but, at the end of the day, their main allegiance is to the job market and not the *Ribbono Shel Olam*. And this is where the really powerful and carping criticism of R. Bahya comes in. A person who subscribes to such a philosophy, he would claim, as he does regarding *adab*, lacks *emunah* in God, may be studying the wrong things (including dangerous things), and is acting in the way that the *yetser ha-ra* would propose.^{ix}

In conclusion, R. Bahya believes not only that it is important to learn secular studies, but also that, when they are studied, it should be done for purposes of *avodat Hashem* and not for goals of career advancement. It is unfortunate to note that while R. Bahya is a widely accepted *musar* writer and theologian, his thoughts on the issue of secular education are generally ignored. It might be a good idea for those who study the *musar* of R. Bahya to study his views on Torah u-Madda as well, in order to gain a full appreciation for the man himself and understand his precise view of the

maximal form of *avodat Hashem*.

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ⁱ These names are selections taken from a list compiled by R. Dr. J. J. Schacter in his "Torah u-Madda Revisited: The Editors Introduction", in the first issue of *The Torah u-Madda Journal* (1989).

ⁱⁱ This is discussed in p. 80 of R. Yosef Kafih's edition of *Sefer Torah Hovot ha-Levavot*, Jerusalem, 1973. All references to *Hovot ha-Levavot* are to this edition.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid, pp. 104, 124

^{iv} Ibid, p. 366

^v His article, "Bahya ibn Paquda's Attitude Toward the Courtier Class", appears in *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature* Vol. I, ed. Isadore Twersky, (New York: Harvard UP, 1980). It expounds on several areas in which R. Bahya attacks the courtier class. In addition to presenting the theory that I have put forth, he also provides the reader with a concentrated look at the places where R. Bahya analyzes several issues, including this issue of the study of secular disciplines.

^{vi} *Hovot ha-Levavot*, p. 254

^{vii} Ironically, the system itself claimed to foster spiritual growth (Safran, p. 157), but in practice it was just used as a stepping-stone.

^{viii} For a good survey of a fairly recent debate about this issue in Yeshiva University circles, see many of the articles in *The Torah u-Madda Journal*, volumes 1 and 2.

^{ix} As R. Bahya mentions regarding the courtier class, there is also, most probably, a lack in these people's Torah studies, which is undertaken solely for the purposes of making oneself a viable part of his or her Jewish community and not for reasons of *avodat Hashem*.

Women of Intellect: A New Reality

BY: Sarit Bendavid

Today, many young women in the Jewish community opt out of attending Stern College for Women and instead choose the easy way out of college, such as two-year community colleges or online universities. It appears that receiving a well-rounded liberal arts education is not a priority for these women, who often come from more religiously right-wing communities. For those of us who have chosen the more rigorous and worldly path offered at Stern, shall we understand this phenomenon simply as a critique of our more liberal religious views? Is this only a question of ultra-Orthodoxy versus its more modern counterpart? Let us delve into the historical background of women's education in order to answer these questions, thereby enabling us to better understand what our own institution for women fundamentally represents.

Before the 19th century, women were not exposed to the world of academia in the way that they are today. Frances Power Cobbe, who reflects upon her experiences as a student in a fashionable and expensive boarding school in England in the early 19th century, recalls her education as follows: "Nobody dreamed that any of us could in later life be more or less than an 'ornament of society.'" Women during this period were taught how to raise children and run a household, but any form of further training of the mind, many feared, would interfere with their female responsibilities. They were expected to be docile and obedient; too much intellect in a woman was considered vulgar.

The well-known 18th century philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau posits in *Emile*, his work on education, the concept of "relative education:" "The whole of women's education ought to relate to men. To please men, to be useful to them, to make herself loved and honored by them, to raise them when young, to care for them when grown, to counsel them, to console them, to make their lives agreeable and sweet—these are the duties of women at all times and they ought to be taught from childhood."ⁱⁱ In this system, there is no inherent value in the intellectual instruction of women. Numerous 19th century doctors such as Marc Colombat attacked the education of women from a medical standpoint, claiming that cultivating their intellect has deleterious effects on them and especially endangers their reproductive functions.ⁱⁱⁱ

Education for women began to take force in the 19th century, but with many limitations. Respectable fields of study for a woman were teaching, nursing, social work, and secretarial work. Women were to be mere dilettantes in subjects such as science and mathematics, with the study of Greek and Latin being especially taboo. Furthermore, the 19th century sage writer John Ruskin asserted that women should be educated in every area, except in the sphere of theology, deeming it too perilous for a woman's mind.^{iv}

Many women responded with passionate and fiery protest. Higher education for women had minutely taken form already in the 1700's, but it was an area predominantly dominated by men. In the 1830s, numerous institutions called "Ladies' Academies" opened as preparatory schools for women entering the teaching field. In 1833, Oberlin College was founded as the first college to accept women (and African-Americans). But the progress was not quick enough for the most spirited feminists, and the negative response to their reformist movement incited them to action. In 1848, the leading activists for women's rights held a momentous conference in Seneca Falls, N.Y. and drafted a list of grievances that they called *The Declaration of Sentiments*. One of their grievances concerning females was that "as a teacher of theology, medicine, or law, she is not known. He [man] has denied her the facilities for obtaining a thorough education - all colleges being closed against her." The fire and vigor of these stalwart feminists spread, and the remainder of the 19th century continued to

first-rate levels of education in the secular world, and that the Jewish community must respond accordingly with their own system. While this step taken supported the revolutionary concept of schooling for women, it was meant as a reactionary measure to counter the effects of the new feminist movement by providing a religious shelter for young Jewish girls.^v

The growth of Jewish education for women gained momentum, following in the footsteps of Sara Schenirer and the Bais Yaakov movement. In 1954, Stern College for Women opened up its doors. Dean Karen Bacon, in her official message on the Stern website, describes the momentous event as follows: "When Stern College opened in 1954, it began a quiet revolution, the creation of an academic model that challenged women to pursue higher Jewish education. Over the years, this model developed, the program grew, the students came, and the idea caught on." The newly emerging institution encouraged women to explore the world of academia and cultivate their intellect as an ideal, emphasizing secular

them. But what must be recognized is that Stern College did not just develop out of thin air; it owes its existence to the efforts laid down previously by staunch supporters of women's education that started in the secular world and extended to the Jewish community.

The Jewish schooling system for women in our communities today undoubtedly reflects and is largely representative of the secular revolution that occurred in the 19th and 20th centuries concerning equal opportunities for women in education.

Dean Bacon sums up the scholastic philosophy of Stern College in her "Message from the Dean" found on the Stern website: "The students of today have access to splendid academic programs that respond to their broad interests. They seek to study art and history, literature and psychology, biology and physics, political science and mathematics, and they want to know how these intellectual interests can prepare them to enter the workplace...Now, as we begin our sixth decade, we celebrate the fact that Stern College is the college of choice for women who wish to speak forcefully and effectively to the shared responsibility we all have for the future of the Jewish people, women who will make a difference in the world." This institution promotes the cultivation of women's minds and the development of their intellect for the betterment of society.

Many women, especially ones from a more right-wing religious camp, do not put a high value on the academic ideal that Stern fundamentally represents. Jewish communities that are religiously to the right of Stern still support the notion that women should be no more than good wives and mothers; there is no merit for them in the world of academia. Furthermore, they assert that the expansion of women's intellectual faculties may even have detrimental effects on their domestic female duties. It is for this reason that many women choose to secure a professionally lucrative degree in the quickest way possible without a liberal arts component. Their objection to Stern is not simply based on Stern's more modern form of orthodoxy; it is based on an ideological question created in the last few centuries that ultimately asks how far the Jewish community should acquiesce to the feminist revolution.

However, what must be realized is that, just like Stern students, these women are also deviating from the Jewish tradition, for before the 19th century, no women received formal education. If women's education is already so established that its revolutionary aspect is disregarded even by right-wing Judaism, then why are these communities still clinging to the traditional feminine ideal and not accepting the new "intellectual woman" to be ordinary as well? It is a double standard to offer women formal schooling, but restrict them to mere mediocrity. In contrast, Stern believes in educating women in a challenging and demanding



claim the founding of many women's colleges.

The Jewish community could not completely fortify itself against the raging reforms happening around it, and the effects of the feminist movement soon permeated it as well. The world was changing, and the Jewish community could not remain blind to it for long. Jewish girls were already attending the public school system and quickly assimilating into the gentile culture. In 1917, Sarah Schenirer founded the Bais Yaakov network of schools for women in Krakow. This break with the traditional exemption of women from formal Torah learning was backed by the *Hafets Hayyim*, Rabbi Yisrael Meir ha-Kohen. The *Hafets Hayyim* overruled the traditional prohibitions against advanced Jewish education for women and supported a serious women's learning institution; he realized that Judaism must face the reality that women are receiving

studies in addition to Judaic studies. It differed from the Bais Yaakov movement in which the schooling for women was established strictly as a protective measure to shelter and safeguard the *Yiddishkayt* of Jewish girls.

In its online self-description, Stern College asserts that "The rigorous Stern College curricula prepare women for careers, graduate study, and leadership in their communities."

No longer are women only trained to be "ornamental." The "unwomanly" studies of math and science are now requirements in Stern College, both of them popular majors today. Stern College offers a wide array of theology classes, proudly exposing its female students to this realm of study which was previously thought to be "dangerous." Women in Stern College may choose from a plethora of majors and professions without realizing that only 100 years ago, many of these subjects were off-limits to

Women's Talmud Torah: A Man's Perspective

BY: Michael Kurin

In the "Derekh Ha-Limmud" issue of last year's *Kol Hamevaser*, Shoshana Samuels wrote in her article "Why I learn: A Woman's Perspective" that "being met with general skepticism about women's learning, is very painful." I would like to explain what I feel is the basis for that skepticism. To clarify in advance, the contents of this article do not necessarily reflect my personal opinion on this issue. It is certainly not my place to tell others how to live their lives, especially when they are supported by some of our most revered rabbim. I was merely bothered by the fact that critics of women's learning programs were, in the article, being dismissed without anyone first understanding what their criticism really is. I hope to show that those who criticize or are skeptical do have legitimate reasons and demonstrate how they might respond to some of Samuels' arguments.

There are several organizations for women's learning whose motives are, in my opinion, questionable. I do not believe that the Graduate Program in Advanced Talmudic Studies at YU (GPATS) is one of them. Samuels wrote, "All I can say is that it's not an agenda, not a political statement; it's just a will to know and serve my Creator." I trust that this is true with most, if not all, of those studying in GPATS. However, the motive for the learning is only a prerequisite. Once a proper motive for learning has been assumed, the critical question is not whether or not the learning is beneficial to one's *avodat Hashem*, but whether or not it is the *ideal avodat Hashem*. Similarly, there are people who oppose secular studies on the basis that such studies carry with them negative values. However, holding aside potential issues of heresy within those studies, one who makes such a claim about another's attempt to understand God's world lacks much support in the sources. Those who acknowledge the positive value of worldly knowledge but argue that time should not be spent on its pursuit since the time could be better spent on Torah study, however, do have a legitimate claim and their criticism should be taken seriously. The same applies here: several years spent exclusively on amassing in-depth knowledge of the Talmud is certainly beneficial, no matter the gender of the one who is studying. The criticism that should be taken seriously, however, is from those who wonder if such a pursuit is the best option for young women. Those who are apprehensive about intensive women's learning do not deny the benefits that Talmud study can have for women, but rather believe that their focus on other mitzvot or other important endeavors would probably be more useful, more practical, and more beneficial to the Jewish people as a whole.

Each person has different tastes, and different individuals have tendencies towards different types of learning. I do not doubt that

many women have an honest leaning towards Talmud. Women taking time to study Talmud during their time in Israel or choosing many Talmud courses in their Jewish Studies at Stern should not upset anybody, and, for the most part, it does not. However, the skepticism arises when the study becomes full-time and post-graduate. With the tremendous increase in the number of people learning in *kollel* that has occurred over the last century, we sometimes forget that spending several years in full-time learning is a tremendous sacrifice. At least in YU circles, the majority of those men who learn full-time after college will be making practical use of their knowledge by acquiring rabbinic ordination, entering the Rabbinate, teaching, or becoming a community leader. And the minority who make the sacrifice without one of these long-term goals in mind have placed a great significance on their *hiyyuv* to learn and become a *talmid hakham*. *Kollel* study is undoubtedly beneficial to anyone's *avodat Hashem*, and to some it may seem reasonable to suggest that everybody interested should pursue such an idealistic endeavor. The decision to take years for learning, however,

decides that the benefits are worth the sacrifice, this may not have happened had he not had a *hiyyuv* to learn and become a *talmid hakham*, or had the practical option of becoming a rabbi been closed off.

In contrast, these crucial benefits of intensive Talmud study do not exist for women. In an ideal situation – where a woman is already married, is being supported by wealthy parents, and hopes to make practical use of her knowledge by teaching Talmud in high schools or seminaries – the benefits of years of learning to the woman's *avodat Hashem* are well worth the significant sacrifices of time and money. However, such situations are rare.¹ Therefore, since women do not have the *hiyyuv* in *talmud Torah* that men have, one could legitimately argue that their years could be better spent instead doing *hesed*, making a *parnasah*, spending extra time raising children, undertaking projects of *tikkun olam*, etc. What is best for one's own spiritual growth is not necessarily the same as what is best for him or her to pursue at any stage of life.²

One of the main issues that Samuels discusses in her article is summed up by her state-



does not take place in a vacuum. I will illustrate this with a theoretical example. Consider a YU student who wishes to go to medical school. Before applying, however, he wishes to take several years to complete YU Semichah, since he feels this will strengthen his *avodat Hashem* and his learning skills, make him a better person, contribute to the fulfillment of his goal to become a *talmid hakham*, and help him contribute better to the Jewish community. This pursuit will add several years onto an already lengthy amount of time until he will complete his education, and, as his parents would be sure to frequently remind him, will result in a loss of two years' worth of income for himself, as well as for the wife and kids that he eventually hopes to have. The significance of this student's sacrifice must be weighed against the benefits that he hopes to gain from his *semichah* education. Even if he

ment: "I cannot understand how [women] could be so well-accomplished in one area of G-d's world and so ignorant about her Judaism." She argues that the knowledge gained in women's learning programs helps women live an "authentic" Jewish life. This, I believe, is simply not true in the contemporary Modern Orthodox world. Women are encouraged to obtain the same 16 years of pre-graduate Jewish education that men receive, and are exposed during those years to all areas of Torah. This learning is usually not the subject of criticism. Moreover, the fact that women's exposure to in-depth Talmud study is significantly less than that of men may not affect at all their development as *ovedei Hashem*. Tanakh, Jewish philosophy, Jewish history, *musar*, *mahshavah*, halakhah, and Talmud all provide their own particular benefits to a student's *avodat Hashem*. Might it not be, then, that knowing

manner, wholeheartedly aligning itself with the female educational revolution.

As members of the Stern community, we should be aware of the ideals that our institution represents and the opportunities that it provides for women. In addition, we must appreciate the efforts taken in the past few centuries that enable us to claim an institution like Stern College our own – efforts within and outside of the Jewish community alike. And never complain about burdensome requirements – just be grateful that the world of academia is at our fingertips, craving and yearning to be explored.

Sarit Bendavid is a sophomore at SCW and is as yet Undeclared.

¹ Cobbe, Frances Power. *Life of Frances Cobbe as Told by Herself* (London, 1904), pp. 63-64.

² Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Emile: or On Education* tr. Allan Bloom (New York, 1979), p. 365.

ⁱⁱⁱ Dr. Marc Colombat writes the following: "It is likewise very important that they should abstain, during the presence of the discharge, from all intellectual labour, and from severe study, which, by establishing high cerebral excitement, determine an unequal distribution of the vital forces, and cause an afflux towards the brain of the blood which ought to flow towards the genital apparatus." See Colombat, Marc. *A Treatise on the Diseases and Special Hygiene of Females*, tr. Charles Meigs. (Philadelphia, 1850), p. 547.

^{iv} Ruskin asserts that "There is one dangerous science for women—one which let them indeed beware how they profanely touch—that of theology." He then claims in accordance with female stereotypes that women will turn the concept of God into "ugly dolls of their own—spiritual dolls, for them to dress according to their caprice; and from which their husbands must turn away in grieved contempt, lest they should be shrieked at for breaking them." See Ruskin, John. *Sesame and Lilies* (London, 1896), p.117.

^v Glaberson, B.C. *Educating our Daughters, Why?* (New York, 2000), p. xxii.

JEWISH EDUCATION

how to teach one's children *Humash* and having studied the laws of Shabbat and *kashrut* are more important learning goals for women than knowing Rav Hayyim's explanation of Rambam's view of *shetarot*?

Perhaps most important in this discussion is the issue of feminism. Without sexism or discrimination, precautions are often taken to avoid disasters to *Yiddishkayt*. For example, the academic study of Bible, including biblical criticism, has the potential to strengthen one's *emunah* and *yir'at shamayim* in the long run, provide a deeper understanding of Tanakh and Jewish history, and result in *hiddushei Torah*. It even has the practical benefits of "knowing what to answer [a heretic]." Nonetheless, many Jews abandon religiosity after being "enlightened" by the teachings of biblical criticism. Given these circumstances, one must weigh the benefits of such study against its dangers.

These precautions are clearly applicable to feminism as well. Even though *talmud Torah* is definitely positive in general, under some circumstances it may need to be limited. We no longer live in a time or a community where hordes of religious women are abandoning their Judaism due to a lack of opportunities to gain knowledge. Instead, we are living

in a time when women are flocking to so-called "Orthodox-egalitarian" services (such as those of Kehillat Shira Hadasha in Israel), women's *tefillah* groups, and other such innovations, which, although technically Orthodox, are legitimately opposed by most of the Orthodox world. While there are many women who leave Orthodoxy or refrain from joining it due to their view that Orthodoxy is restrictive for women, it is not clear whether providing them with opportunities for higher learning in a style similar to that of men will resolve this problem. It may, in fact, add to it by giving them a feeling of entitlement to new roles in the Jewish community that they may not halakhically be able to have. Moreover, the complaints of these women usually center around synagogue practice rather than the lack of Talmud study. It is unclear, therefore, whether creating more opportunities for women's Talmud study will convince more of them to stay Orthodox, and, it may, in fact, contribute to a feminist push that opposes halakhic Judaism.

Even GPATS has not totally evaded this problem. Although, as I said at the outset, I trust the motives of those studying in the program, that has not stopped others from claim-

ing GPATS as a part of their own agenda. In an article in *The Jewish Tribune* (a Canadian Jewish newspaper), several feminist groups, including the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance (JOFA), endorsed GPATS as a step in the right direction towards greater involvement of women as Jewish leaders. Although it was not explicit, a hope for the future ordination of "Orthodox" female rabbis could be sensed therein. The critics of women's learning programs may legitimately argue that sometimes idealistic and beneficial pursuits should be sacrificed to prevent the possibility of a community-wide crisis like this one. Similar legitimate arguments have been made regarding the restriction of secular studies and academic Jewish studies, despite their many benefits, as to avoid the possibility of heresy within our community.

The purpose of this response was to explain why many, even in YU circles, are skeptical about women's learning programs. It is not meant to isolate or condemn anybody. The issue remains debatable, with compelling arguments on each side. I hope, however, that after reading this article nobody should feel shocked at anyone's skepticism concerning this controversial and significant issue.

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¹ Indeed, most Modern Orthodox day schools do not employ female Talmud teachers at all. And, more to the point, if the goals of the majority of students enrolled in these graduate programs were mainly to teach Jewish studies, the programs would be better described as teacher's colleges, and their curricula should not, as they often do, focus exclusively on Talmud.

² I know this is a loaded statement, but I do not have the space to elaborate on it here. I hope to one day write an article on why I feel this way, how this clarifies a big misconception that many people have, and what this concept's implications are.

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Hinnukh in the Talmud and Rishonim

BY: Meira Levinson

It is natural to look to the Mishnah, Talmud, and Rishonim for guidance in daily life, and the topic of education – specifically, parental education regarding mitsvot and Torah learning – is no exception. *Hinnukh* is a core, underlying facet of our community continuity; one would expect to glean pearls of wisdom from our foundational texts.

When it comes to pedagogic philosophies, however, the texts are somewhat sparse. At first, this may not seem to be the case. The Talmud is rife with discussions of *hinnukh*, both in terms of Torah learning and regarding children's obligations to perform mitsvot. The Rishonim, in their commentaries on the Talmud as well as in their responsa, discuss technical issues of daily educational challenges at length. Questions of educational philosophy, however, are not the norm – or, at least, are not usually discussed explicitly in the text. It is possible, however, to derive fundamental pedagogic principles from certain Rishonim's comments.

Various talmudic texts and Rishonim bring up questions of *hinnukh* in some detail. "*Hinnukh*," as used in the rest of this article, will refer to one of two educational topics: the study of Torah, or the performance of mitsvot by minors. Regarding the former, the Talmud and Rishonim discuss questions such as who is obligated to study Torah, who is obligated to teach, and what is the ideal curriculum.

The Talmud raises the question of who has the obligation to educate children in Tractate *Nazir*.ⁱ The Mishnah states that a father can make a vow that causes his child to become a *nazir*, while a mother cannot. The Talmud asks why this is the case. One opinion, that of R. Yohanan, is that this is simply a specific law relating to the laws of *nezirut*. R. Yehoshua b. Lakish's opinion, however, is that this law stems from the general laws of *hinnukh*. When asked why, therefore, this law excludes women (under the initial assumption that if the reason this works in the case of a father is because of *hinnukh*, then this should definitely apply in the case of the mother as well), the Talmud answers that men are obligated in the commandment to educate their sons while women are not. (The Talmud then comes to the conclusion that daughters are not obligated to receive education – as opposed to sons – by the same logic.) Tosafotⁱⁱ quotes Ri as saying that the obligation to educate one's children only falls on the father, and does not fall on anyone else. It is unclear whether Ri meant that the mitzvah of educating a child falls solely on the parent, as opposed to an outsider, or whether he was differentiating between a father and a mother. Considering the context of the Talmud immediately preceding his statement, it is entirely possible that Ri was excluding the mother from this obligation as well. This view (that the mother is not obli-

gated) is stated explicitly in *Tosafot Yeshanim*.ⁱⁱⁱ Rabbi Israel ben Petahyah Isserlein, however, interprets Tosafot's view differently, and says that, according to Tosafot, the mother is also obligated to educate her children.^{iv} R. Isserlein bases this opinion on the Tosafot in Tractate *Eiruv*, which states that a child at the age of six is included in the *eiruv* of his mother. He says that Tosafot's general opinion as to whether or not a mother is obligated to educate her child goes according to the view expressed in *Eiruv*, rather than the view promoted by the *Tosafot Yeshanim*.^v

Aside from the question of whether "parent" means only the father or also the mother, one can ask whether the obligation to teach one's children can be fulfilled via the parent only, or can also be fulfilled through a teacher. Regarding this issue, it was common practice in both medieval Spain and Ashkenaz for par-

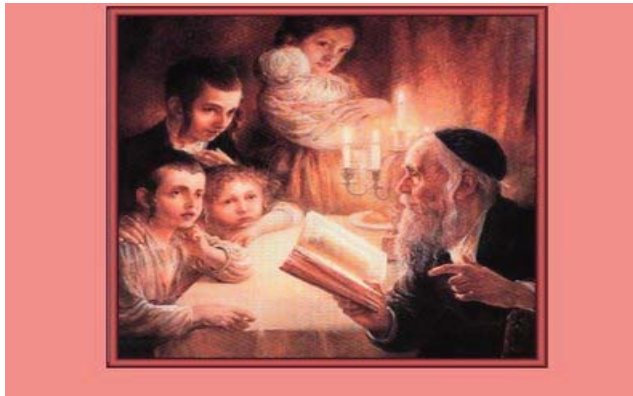
b. Hurkanus' words at face value. For example, Rambam held that one should not teach his daughter any Oral Law, for doing so would be considered "*tiflut*."^{vi}

Other opinions, however, differed with Rambam. For example, the German Pietists were strong advocates of women's education, ruling "that a man is *obligated* to teach his daughter halakhic rulings in codified form."^{vii} This is a marked difference from the way many rabbis viewed women's education. The German Pietists interpreted R. Eliezer's statement differently; they read him as prohibiting teaching women either deep study of the Talmud (*pilpul*) or mystical secrets of the Torah.^{viii} They encouraged fathers to teach their daughters practical halakhah that the girls would need, a sentiment echoed by R. Yitzhak of Corbeil.^{ix} Maharil (R. Jacob Moellin) allowed "women to recite the blessings over the Torah

Regarding the appropriate content of educational curricula for minors, it seems that elementary curricula consisted of basic Hebrew reading and writing skills, some knowledge of Scripture, a little bit of Mishnah and Talmud, as well as practical halakhah. However, we do have a few rabbinic sources that actually delineate the ideal curriculum. One of these is *Sefer Hasidim*. Here, the German Pietists give a detailed critique of contemporary education, ranging from warnings against abuse of the dialectic methodology to encouraging more study of Tanakh. While, as mentioned above, Bible was studied in one's elementary education, it was neglected in the institutions of higher learning, the focus there being on Talmud and Halakhah. *Sefer Hasidim* deplores this neglect and encourages scholars to engage in serious biblical study alongside study of the Talmud. More specific to our topic, *Sefer Hasidim* also comments on the proper mode of teaching Bible in elementary education: "When he teaches Scripture, the teacher must be able to make the student grasp religious issues such as respect for the Torah and awareness that God is the source of all sustenance. When the student grows older, he should be taught about divine reward and punishment."^{xvii} From the fact that *Sefer Hasidim* specifically advocates teaching Bible as a basis for moral and religious thought, one can infer that common practice in elementary education was not to do so; rather, Bible was taught in a technical fashion, in order to give students basic reading skills and a rudimentary knowledge base that they could later apply to Talmud. The German Pietists, therefore, were promoting a very different pedagogic theory – instruction in Scripture for its own sake, both in elementary and advanced education.^{xviii}

All of the above sources imply a rich dialogue regarding the proper mode of Jewish education. And, while many of the texts, particularly responsa, seem specific to their times, we in modern times definitely can and do extrapolate educational approaches from them, whether regarding the ideal yeshiva curricula, women's education, or other issues. However, the question of pedagogic hashkafah, i.e. how one should teach said material, or, more to the point, progressive educational models that parents can utilize for, say, uninterested children, is glaringly missing.

Partly, the reason for this is simply anachronism – the mishnaic, talmudic, and early medieval authors did not live in a modern society, and therefore did not have the prevailing notion of progressive, child-centered education that exists today. Furthermore, defection from Judaic tradition was not as prevalent as it is in today's society – and, therefore, coming up with methods as to how to instill a love for and observance of Torah and mitsvot within one's children was simply not a forethought in many cases. One exception to this may be the concept of *Maggid* at the



ents to hire *melammedim*.^{vi} Exceptional students, or those whose families could financially afford it, were often sent away to study at the feet of Talmudic giants. Some examples of this are Ra'avyah, who started studying under his great-grandfather R. Elyakim when he was less than ten years old, and Maharam, who began studying with the *Or Zarua* when he (the Maharam) was around ten years of age, as well.^{vii} Additionally, responsa show that medieval rabbis, particularly ones who were community leaders, often dealt with problems parents had with *melammedim* (i.e. payments for *melammedim* who gambled, etc). Examples of this can be found in the responsa of Rashba, Maharam, and R. Isaac b. Moses, the author of the *Or Zarua*.^{viii}

Another basic question regarding obligations of *hinnukh* for *talmud Torah* is whom is one obligated to teach – only sons, or daughters as well? The primary source in the Talmud cited as an argument against teaching women Torah is the statement of R. Eliezer b. Hurkanus that one should not teach a woman Torah, for if he does, it is considered "*tiflut*" (lightheadedness).^{ix} Medieval rabbis respond to this in various ways. Some take R. Eliezer

recited prior to study, and thought that the prohibition against teaching Torah to women applies to the father, but that the woman is permitted to study Torah by herself, and that she receives a reward for this, like a person "who is not commanded but does it".^{xix}

The medieval rabbis debate not only whether the mitzvah of *talmud Torah* is biblical or rabbinic and who is obligated to teach and to learn, but ideal curricula and structure thereof. Regarding the proper age at which to start education, the main rabbinic source is from the Mishnah in *Avot*, which reads: "A five-year-old begins Scripture; a ten-year-old begins Mishnah; a thirteen-year-old becomes obliged to observe the commandments; a fifteen-year-old begins the study of Gemara...."^{xv} Although this was not followed as a strict code by any means, existing texts testify that children did, apparently, start learning Scripture when they were around five or six. One text, from the *beit midrash* of Rashi, says that at four years of age, a child should be "put to the book" ("*ya'amiduhu al ha-sefer*") or should be taught by heart some of the verse "*Torah tsiv-vah lanu Moshe*", and that by his fifth year, he should be taught Scripture.^{xvi}

The Jewish Camping Experience

BY: Daniel Elefant

It is estimated that 70,000 campers attend 150 non-profit Jewish camps every summer especially in the United States (Slutsky). After a strenuous year of memorizing and internalizing academic subjects, students need to have an outlet where they can have fun and make lasting friendships with new people from all over the country. Of course, sending kids to camp is also a relief for overworked parents who spend the other ten months of the year working both outside and inside the home. It is possible that the reason that there are so many Jewish summer camps and that they're so successful is very simple – everyone just needs a good, relaxing break. However, such

powerful tool of Jewish education? Why do they succeed where schools that take up ten months a year fail?

The sad reality is that in many Jewish day schools, students learn about our heritage the same way they learn about math and science. This could be a reason why most modern orthodox students care more about getting an A in the class than thinking intellectually about the Jewish principles being taught. Normally, students that don't attend Orthodox schools do not have a significantly deeper attachment to their Jewish roots and traditions. Whether they went to the Jewish day schools or just regular public school, in many areas these campers have the same feelings towards religious, traditional practices.



Photo Courtesy of Jordan Katz

an attitude completely misunderstands the purpose of Jewish camps.

My personal experience has been as a camper and counselor at Camp Stone, a Jewish camp located in Sugar Grove, Pennsylvania. I have seen and heard about many campers in years past who grew religiously because of experiences they have had in camp. For example, after looking back at her experience over six years at Camp Stone, Elizabeth Kirshner reflects that "camp gave me a true pride and understanding of who I am and made me treat my roots as more than a secondary priority." Furthermore, it has been noted by the Foundation for Jewish Camp that recently, Jewish philanthropists have been investing significant amounts of money into Jewish summer camps. For example, the Harold Grinspoon Foundation has developed a program helping some 50 camps throughout the northeast strengthen their fundraising capabilities. As Grinspoon explains, "The more you can gather Jewish kids around a campfire for a Jewish experience, the more you can keep the tribe together" (Slutsky). What makes camps such a uniquely

The key to a continued Jewish existence may lie in continuity itself. One of the biggest foundations of Judaism is the transfer of the tradition. This tradition has been passed down from father to son, generation-to-generation dating all the way back to Moses at Mt. Sinai. As long as the tradition is strong, the Jewish people are strong. No matter how bad the persecution is, be it crusade or holocaust, with our tradition we prevail.

The problem arises when our spiritual backbone starts to deteriorate as well. The Westernization of the world brought many wonderful things, but the Jews weren't entirely prepared to incorporate it into their lives while still remaining dedicated and committed Jews. The assimilation rate for Jews in America rises every year. As Jews become more and more ignorant of their tradition, they see no difference in living their lives like all the rest of the world. What grandma and grandpa did was their choice and we chose differently. Slowly but surely the tradition falls through the cracks and is forgotten. I've been in towns in Pennsylvania such as Titusville and Oil City that used to

Passover Seder, a process that is extremely child-oriented, and, depending on one's views of the meaning behind the four sons, can even be interpreted as advocating a differential teaching method.

However, I would like to point to two texts within the context of our earlier discussion regarding rabbinic views of *hinnukh* itself, specifically "*hinnukh*" as it applies to the concept of preparing a child for mitsvot observance.

Regarding the question of parental and filial obligations for *hinnukh* in mitsvah performance, the Talmud and Rishonim discuss many of the same questions that arose regarding *hinnukh* of Torah learning. Questions of who is obligated to learn how to perform the mitsvot, at what age different obligations exist, and who is obligated to teach mitsvah performance appear throughout numerous texts. One specific question is whether the rabbinic obligation of *hinnukh* for a child "*she-higi'a le-gil hinnukh*" – one who has reached the age of *hinnukh* (precisely what this means is also discussed) – falls upon the child himself or upon the parent. Rashi writes that the obligation falls solely on the father, while Tosafot hold that it falls upon the child (although this does not nullify the father's obligation to educate his child).^{xix}

It is possible to view this debate as simply a practical one, with purely technical ramifications. However, it is also possible to view this debate as stemming from a more fundamental philosophical difference when it comes to educational pedagogy. One can view Tosafot's position, that the child him or herself actually has a rabbinic obligation to perform certain mitsvot, as saying, in essence, that the child himself is truly responsible – i.e. all the normal consequences of failing to perform positive commandments, or transgressing negative commandments, apply. It is not difficult to read into this a more severe, disciplinarian mentality when it comes to child education: by the time the child reaches the age of *hinnukh*, that child will soon be a bar/bat mitsvah – and really will be responsible for these obligations, on a biblical level. Therefore, what the child does now – even though he or she is, in point of fact, still a child – has consequences, and transgressions and failures to fulfill mitsvot are to be taken seriously and disciplined accordingly.

One can read Rashi, however, as having a fundamentally different approach. Rashi holds that while the child is rabbinically obligated to perform these mitsvot, the obligation, at the end of the day, falls on the parent. In other words, a child's performance or non-performance of mitsvot is certainly important, especially in the years immediately prior to his or her coming of age. However, if that child does not succeed with a given commandment, the responsibility itself falls upon the parent, not upon the child. This understanding of the nature of the obligation leaves room for a much more progressive educational mentality. Such a mentality would focus more on creating for the child a positive environment and association with Torah and mitsvot, even if that means

refraining from punishing specific transgressions.

While Rashi does not state this ramification in his texts, and while it is probable that he himself would not even have intended this approach (which is an attitude that stems largely from a modern societal perspective), the very fact that his halakhic stance regarding the *hinnukh* obligation leaves room for this interpretation is significant. In essence, Rashi's stance opens the possibility for an educational philosophy that advocates creating a loving, positive association for children with Judaism, even in light of resistance – a pedagogic philosophy that can be extremely helpful to contemporary Jews.

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ⁱ Nazir 28b

ⁱⁱ Tosafot to Nazir 28b, s. v. "*beno in, bitto lo*"

ⁱⁱⁱ Tosafot Yeshanim to Yoma 82a, s.v. "*ben she-monah, ben tesha*"

^{iv} Kehillot Ya'akov to Berakhot, siman 24

^v Ibid.

^{vi} Morris, Nathan. *A History of Jewish Education*. Rubin Mass: Jerusalem, 1977, p. 24; Kanarfogel, Ephraim. *Jewish Education and Society in the High Middle Ages*. Wayne State University Press: Detroit, 1992, p. 19.

^{vii} Kanarfogel, p. 18.

^{viii} Morris, p. 25.

^{ix} Sotah 21b

^x Grossman, Avraham. *Pious and Rebellious: Jewish Women in Medieval Europe*. Brandeis University Press: Waltham, Massachusetts, 2004, p. 161.

^{xi} Ibid.

^{xii} Ibid.

^{xiii} Ibid.

^{xiv} Grossman, p. 165.

^{xv} Pirkei Avot 5:25

^{xvi} Morris, p. 119.

^{xvii} Kanarfogel, p. 90.

^{xviii} Ibid.

^{xix} Kehillot Ya'akov to Berakhot, siman 24

be huge thriving Jewish communities and now we can only visit the local carpentry shop to see the remnants of what was the town synagogue. The modern world poses a tremendous obstacle to the formal passing of the tradition in a classroom setting.

This brings us to the informal environment that is provided by Jewish summer camps. Every day, campers from ages 9 to 15 run around playing, swimming, eating, sculpting, etc. Their counselors, of course, run along with them in all these fun activities, but many of them really view this as a four to eight week window of opportunity to instill Jewish values and principles into these campers. The biggest advantage to the educational methods of summer camp is the lack of teacher or disciplinary roles. The relaxed atmosphere allows for skits and games to act as teaching tools that leave a lasting impression. In this way, the tradition that is passed on to the campers enters their minds as enjoyable memories as opposed to more textbook information required for a test.

In the maintenance of our tradition, the bond created between staff and campers is just as important as the activities throughout the day. The first relationship a counselor makes with a camper is a lasting friendship. It is always easier to transfer and receive information from a friend rather than from an authoritative figure. Campers feel a closeness allowing them to express themselves in ways they never have before. The influence of such a friendship may not truly be seen until years down the road. This gives the campers the chance to look back at their summer experiences and realize for themselves that one can live in the modern world, have fun and still uphold the Orthodox Jewish tradition. An experience with this large an impact couldn't even be dreamt of in a formal school setting.

At the end of the day, parents found a great place to drop off their kids for the summer, kids found a great place to hang out for one or two months, and the staff members take advantage of that place to try and change as many Jewish lives as they can. Of course the basketball and boating are a lot of fun, but it seems there is a much deeper purpose behind it all. In the words of Yehuda Rothner, director of Camp Stone, "We push them physically, mentally, and spiritually to the max. That is what we do."

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BY: Ben Greenfield

Editor's note: The following is the first of two parts of the author's article on the topic of shiur. It will continue with the second part in the coming edition of Kol Hamevaser.

The next stage in the development of Talmud Torah has emerged before our eyes. This revolution lies not in method, like the modern emergence of the *Brisker Derekh*, but in mode: welcome to the Golden Age of the shiur! Before elaborating on the significance of this transformation, an attempt at definition is in order. Shiur bears several definitive traits:ⁱ it follows a preparatory period where key texts are reviewed; it takes place in a classroom-style setting, outside the beit midrash,ⁱⁱ complete with desks or other writing surfaces facing a central speaker; that speaker is not a peer, but an esteemed expert, with both sides recognizing the intellectual and social divide between master and student; the teacher dominates conversation, addressing his audience with only minor interruption; he is expected to abstract the studied texts into a topic-based presentation, at the same time critically analyzing the sources, introducing new documents, and offering innovative explanations;^{iv} the shiur occurs on a consistent basis, between two and six times a week, continuing for consecutive weeks and months; individual sessions are, to some degree, part of a larger and cumulative whole where one session's main topic might persist into the next day's lecture and where students are expected to recall and incorporate previously covered information. Anything else might be called *talmud Torah*, but it bears not the name "shiur." A lecture without a mandated preparatory period, or delivered by a classmate, or consisting of guided group discussion or responsive questions and answers, leans towards an entirely separate social-educational category, the "*habburah*." Likewise, if it occurs only once, or never refers back to previous information, or takes place in a theater-style auditorium, or limits itself to explicating a specific text without abstracting to a broader topic or introducing innovative explanations, one might call it a "speech," a "shiur on X," or a "*bekiut shiur*," but it should not be confused with the subject of this essay.

The revolution in Torah to which I refer lies not in the substance or structure of shiur, but in students' relationship to it: Today, in the minds of contemporary yeshiva students, attending, and understanding shiur represents the central task of a person's daily talmud Torah. For example, when reviewing one's curricular history, a *talmid* might recall how he studied this or that tractate, but he is almost as likely to think, "first I was in this Rav's shiur, then that Rav's shiur, etc." When asked by a relative, "what do you do for learning?" he might very well respond, "I'm in X's shiur" or "we are learning *Gittin*." The individual study time, the

principal contact with primary sources, goes by the name *hakhanah*, and to a significant degree it is just that: mere preparation for the truly essential. While these phenomena relate to mindset, they produce (or perhaps derive from) practical implications. If forced, under extenuating circumstances, to attend either *seder* or shiur, most students will opt for the latter.^v When confronted in *seder* by a complex question, many learners will simply "move on," attempting not to understand the material at hand, but to scan enough texts to prepare oneself for shiur. To the great frustration of initiates, many shiurim actually discourage questions: a firmer understanding of the material prepared fails to justify an interruption in the more valuable shiur experience. Seated and attentive, many students produce copious notes on shiur, yet few prepare reviewable notes on information covered in *hakhanah*. However, perhaps the strongest signal emerges at the end of *zeman*, during the performance of *hazarah* (review). This is an especially telling moment, as *hazarah* unveils how a student organizes and perceives the Torah he acquired. Only the most determined of *talmidim* review the actual sources, using their notes (and shiur in general) as a window from which to better organize and understand the original texts. Instead, many students simply re-visit the shiur notes, seeing in them the substance of a *zeman's talmud Torah*. Therefore, it is of little surprise that RIETS *Semikhah* does not officially require proficiency in a list of *inyun* top-

ness Rambam's responsa and *Yad ha-Hazakah*, yet no "*Shiurim Maimoniyim*" a la "*Reshimot Shiurei ha-Gedol Soloveitchik*" survives. Even though a medieval shiur presumably existed (albeit not in the exact form described above), neither the Rishonim nor their students saw in it as the pillar of their learning. One can even look to Volozhin, that prototype of contemporary yeshivot, for a surprisingly subdued approach to formal lectures.^{vi} Out of approximately three hundred students, perhaps one hundred visited the daily "shiur."^{vii} Yeshivat Etz Hayyim contained no secondary rooms to host the class—it took place in a noisy and cavernous beit midrash obviously built for more individualized study. Attendance was completely voluntary, and students would drift in and out depending on the topic or lecturer. Despite the high level of instruction, attendance actually implied a relatively low rank in the yeshiva's social-intellectual community. At various points in Volozhin's history, two *Ramim* delivered the lecture, partitioning the week into three day units and rotating in where the previous master left off. Presumably, these "shiurim" lacked the cumulative and consistent quality today's students take for granted. Regardless of the teacher, shiur participants experienced something "very much a contact sport":^{viii} biting questions interrupted the lecturer, students initiated extended monologues, shiur's contents were critiqued and debated while class was still in session. For a particularly colorful - if perhaps exaggerated - illus-



ics, but instead demands four semesters of shiur attendance. Shiur is today's learning of record.

This modern emphasis on shiur as the central point of learning is nothing short of a revolution. One discovers scant evidence in *talmud Torah's* expansive documentary record of diligently recorded and transcribed shiurim taking center stage in the educational conception of the students. The very format of our canonical sources – Rashi's explanations, Tosafot's glosses, Ramban's novellae, Rif's digest – testify to an organizational format quite unlike our own. There is a reason why we pos-

session, a *Ram* from the rival Kovno Yeshiva once delivered a guest shiur in Etz Hayyim. Word filtered down from R. Hayyim Volozhiner that the visitor should leave the building fully aware of its prodigious reputation. The entire yeshiva spent days preparing the *sugya* in *Shabbat*, fitting themselves with talmudic ammunition. When the fateful hour arrived, the guest from Kovno barely finished reading "*Ba-Meh Madlikin*" when the hands shot up and the interrogation began. He called it quits two hours later, having never moved past those original lines in the Gemara. Potential romanticizing aside, the very description

of the incident betrays yet again how the lectures of old – both in practice and mindset – differ from today's. The modern day emergence and centrality of shiur represents a significant schism from previous generations' *talmud Torah*.

I suggest that this phenomenon transcends basic questions of stress or focus, that something of greater philosophical significance excites this pattern: Shiur has achieved the status of a primary source. Shiur represents the actual "text" under study. To clarify the thrust of these locutions, consider two methods of elucidating a recently studied Gemara with Tosafot. Speaking with a friend, one could present the information as follows: "Tosafot discusses a case where X is the din. They ask how this could be in light of a different case where Y is the din. The first answer they give is as follows . . . but this leads to another problem, which could be answered if you . . ." The speaker does not introduce the Gemara in its own right, but in the context of the Tosafot under discussion. In effect, he quotes the Gemara so as to understand the contents of the Tosafot. At the same time, he feels it necessary to follow the original structure of the Tosafot, proceeding in the order of questions, answers, difficulties, and solutions embedded in the text. This delivery considers the Tosafot, and not the Gemara, to be the primary source, the "text" of Torah under discussion. However, one could convey the information from the reverse perspective: "The Gemara here rules that in a certain case, X is the din. We know from a Gemara in another place that a similar case produces a din of Y. Since we do not want to confront such-and-such a difficulty, the best way to explain our Gemara is to say that . . . In fact, this is the explanation put forth by Tosafot." This time around, he presents from the Gemara's point of view; the speaker cites Tosafot so as to understand the contents the Gemara. Thus, he feels no need to attribute the question to Tosafot, or to note each step in the development of their solution. If they are mentioned at all, it is often merely to attach a title to the explanation ("Tosafot's opinion") when contrasting it to the suggestions of other Rishonim, or to chivalrously grant credit where it is due. Now, Tosafot functions as a secondary source, significant only to the extent that it clarifies our real interest, the lines of the Gemara. This distinction in delivery – this question of primary or secondary source – can be asked about every stratum of Torah: Is the Gemara a primary source or a means of properly understanding the Mishnah? If the latter, one struggles to find inherent value in remembering the snake-like details of a Gemara's *shakla ve-tarya*.^x Is the Rif a stand alone text or a commentary on the Talmud? The "*Rif seder*" popular in yeshivot of old and the existence of "*Rif Shasin*," containing *mesechta* after *mesechta* of nothing but Rif with commentary,^{xi} testify to the first point of view. Is the Ari's *kabbalah* of inherent value or a secondary source to the primary *Zohar*? Immanuel Etkes has shown that much tension between *hasidim* and the Vilna Gaon revolved around this very question.^{xii} On a more ambitious

plane, one could inquire if any printed text constitutes a primary unit of Torah, or if only their abstracted ideas are worth organizing and reviewing. The form and content of *Mishneh Torah*, in its utter rejection of the typical *Shas* structure, omission of source citations, and aspiration to obviate all other records of *Torah she-be-Al Peh*, likely reflects a notion that the canon we call *Shas* consists of metaphysical ideas, not printed text. Finally, and returning to our original subject, the question may be posed of shiur: a mere aid to understanding the Gemara and Rishonim or a primary "text" in and of itself?

The prominence of shiur should be interpreted in this light. Students treat shiur as the primary source, the actual "text" under study; more often than attending shiur so as to better comprehend the Gemara, we learn the Gemara in order to better understand shiur. As such, of course a *talmid* might rush through a *daf* or even skip *hakhnanah* entirely, for the real act of Talmud Torah occurs when "learning" shiur. When conducting *hazarah*, he treats his shiur notes not as an aid to organizing and understanding various Rishonim, but as a stand-alone text: he looks up *mekorot* to better understand the notes, instead of looking up the notes to better understand the *mekorot*. Many shiurim frown upon students who ask questions, for – apart from simply depleting valuable minutes – these interruptions break and distort the authoritative "shiur text." It is the oral equivalent of a scribal error or inauthentic insertion: the text itself is now corrupt, the intended shiur experience slightly marred. However, paralleling my Tosafot example, the most blatant expression of shiur as primary source finds voice in how individuals record and convey the contents of shiur. I have attended informal review sessions where the style of presentation is nothing less than remarkable: "Rebbe opened by reading the Ramban. He then asked why it is that . . . After rejecting the first answer, Rebbe offered three different explanations." Shiur, not Ramban, is the primary source. Thus, we quote Ramban only in the context of Rebbe's words and we follow Rebbe's original presentation. If Rebbe went on a tangent, presenting information that might be better discussed towards the end of shiur, we would leave it in the original place, penned in as part of the shiur text. Rarely do students re-arrange the new information to suit an alternative criterion, for instance, the order of the *daf* or a logical progression of ideas. Instead, it is almost as if shiur had been transcribed into a gold-embossed *sefer*, which we now read paragraph by paragraph.^{xiii} Aside from oral presentations, I have witnessed note-takers typing in the same eerie, science log style: "Rebbe wants to know whether . . ." Similarly, I have glanced at desktops struggling to capture the words of shiur verbatim(!), trying to somehow record a complete shiur text, implicitly claiming in each clickety-clack of typing that each of Rebbe's paragraphs constitutes a primary source worth transcribing. The RIETS *Semikha* policy, requiring four semesters of shiur, shares this approach. We quantify Torah accomplishment in units of primary source; de-

pending on the attitude, that might mean *dappei Gemara* learned, *simanim* of *Shulhan Arukh* covered, or in our case, semester units of shiur. Thus is the standard in the Golden Age of the shiur.

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ⁱ Literally, a lecture. A brief note on the colloquial use of shiur:

Unfortunately, this one word refers to two very distinct institutions. When I use the term, I denote what is occasionally known by the misnomer "*shiur yomi*" – these formal lectures that continue over the course of several months are the subject of my article. However, "shiur" also denotes what is otherwise called a *habburah*, an educational experience less institutionalized and often more relaxed. See below for an attempt to accurately contrast the two phenomena. That said, speakers employ the term "shiur" slightly differently when alluding to *shiur yomi* or to a *habburah*. In reference to the latter, the indefinite article is applied: "On Shabbat, my friend gave a shiur." Alluding to the former, the indefinite article disappears: "after a few hours of preparation, we entered the classroom for shiur." Once again, in this essay, shiur always refers to "*shiur yomi*."

ⁱⁱ Admittedly, shiurim come in a range of flavors and styles; some will conform to this description better than others. Nonetheless, I will borrow that Lincolnian adage in stating that some of these descriptions correspond to basically all shiurim and that all of these descriptions correspond to at least some shiurim. Furthermore, those that do not perfectly match my description are often recognized by their patrons as atypical or innovative.

ⁱⁱⁱ Or at least during the *beit midrash*'s off hours, when the room is a *beit midrash* only in name.

^{iv} Shiurim display this trait using a variety of methodologies, including Brisk, Telz, *pilpul*, and academic, with varying degrees of remaining "on the *daf*" or perching "off the *daf*". ("On the *daf*" denotes a tendency to resist topics and sources not directly effecting the *daf* Gemara under study.) Little about my definition limits shiur to a particular method of analysis.

^v Or only choose *seder* after being instructed to by their rebbe.

^{vi} See Shaul Stampfer, *Ha-Yeshiva ha-Litait be-Hithavatah*, Zalman Shazar Center, Jerusalem: 1995, pp. 44, 90-98. Admittedly, these sources predate R. Hayyim Soloveitchik's tenure as final Rosh Yeshiva

of Volozhin (not to be confused with R. Hayyim Volozhiner, the founding Rosh Yeshiva.)

^{vii} As will be shown, these classes were quite dissimilar from the modern phenomenon of shiur and therefore, lacking a better term, I put the word "shiur" between quotation marks.

^{viii} R. Shalom Carmy, conversation with the author.

^{ix} Zalman Epstein, "Yeshivat Volozhin: A Forgotten Jubilee" in Etkes and Tikotsinki, eds. *Yeshivot Lita: Pirkei Zikhronot*. Jerusalem, 2004. pp. 75-76.

^x Under this model, knowledge of the *shakla ve-tarya* is useful, but only to the extent it shines light on the primary text. It should not be memorized simply for its own sake. Rambam rather explicitly takes this view in *Mishneh Torah*, Introduction 24, 41. The *Ram* under discussion was Rabbi Alexander Moshe Lapidot.

^{xi} One can find several in the Gottesman Library. Personally, I was once shocked to see a twentieth century edition in the famed used *sefarim* store of Meah Shearim.

^{xii} Etkes, Immanuel. *The Gaon of Vilna*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007, pp. 24-27.

^{xiii} Which has literally achieved fruition in the wave of "*Shiurei ha-_____*" lining the *sefer* market.

An Interview with Rabbi Jeremy Wieder

BY: Ari Lamm

How would Rav Wieder summarize the current goals of higher Jewish education? If Rav Wieder could change, or add anything to this broader vision, what would it be?

I am not sure that anyone has clearly articulated the goals of higher Jewish education. The same holds true within the context of Yeshiva. Almost half a century ago, the Rav claimed that the curriculum of Volozhin does not necessarily suit the context of the *Semikhah* Program at Yeshiva. Indeed, it is difficult to determine a comprehensive curriculum that is appropriate for a society in which higher Jewish education is no longer limited to an intellectual elite. This is an issue that has not yet been fully addressed. But it is clear to me that a proper curriculum should be built around providing tools for independent learning. In other words, students should be taught *how* to fish, not be *given* fish.

Other factors that do not seem to have been given due consideration are the different curricula required for prospective rabbanim and future *ba'alei batim*. Most of those proceeding through our educational system will not go on to get *semikhah*, but to a great extent our curriculum educates all students as if they will pursue rabbinic ordination. Even for most who are currently enrolled in MYP, the next three or four years will be the last during which they can devote half or more of their day to learning in the beis midrash. These are extremely formative years, and in order to enable our students to develop as spiritual beings throughout their lives we at Yeshiva need to impart the skills that enable our students to continue learning after they leave yeshivah. I do not know if we are as successful as we might be at doing that under the current curriculum.

Students at Yeshiva are engaged in a dual curriculum, and the majority of these students have spent most of their academic careers in institutions featuring a dual curriculum. What is the ideal way in which students should approach a dual curriculum? How should keeping a night seder affect this issue?

Ideally, we would figure out how to squeeze thirty hours into a day. But since that is not an option, we have to face the very real challenges that come along with a dual curriculum. The critical question is: do you value both halves of the curriculum? As far as I am concerned – and other may disagree – there is

great value in secular studies. And they are valuable not just for *parnasah* purposes but for enriching one's mind and one's life.

A secondary issue revolves around properly focusing one's energies. In this regard, *benei Torah* need to be aware of the potential for *hillul Hashem*. In other words, every *ben Torah* has to understand that once one agrees to participate in a dual curriculum, he must do a proper and respectable job. Even if one subscribes to the view that the study of secular material should be strictly utilitarian, one must still perform in class according to expectations.

This does not require one to perform every *hiddur*, or go *lifnim mi-shuras ha-din*, but one must do an adequate job – both in attending and preparing for class – which can demand a good deal of time.

The problem is that once this is taken care of, especially in the context of Yeshiva Col-

leged, however, is the notion that *gadol ha-metsuveh ve-oseh mi-mi she-eino metsuveh ve-oseh* ("greater is one who is commanded and performs than one who is not commanded and performs"); in other words, given that morning *seider*, in a curricular sense, is an absolute *hiyyuv*, and night *seider* is not, morning *seider* should be given precedence. If a student keeps a night *seider* that extends too long into the night and then first begins to do his college work, there is a risk that his morning *seider* will suffer as a result. This is unacceptable given that morning *seider* is a requirement, whereas night *seider* is not.

What is Rav Wieder's position on co-education? During grade school? High school? Post-high school? How should the sexes interact or relate to each other during these years?



lege, the whole day is nearly over. This is where the issue of night *seider* comes into play. There is a *hiyyuv* of *talmid Torah* at night, and relying on *keri'as Shema* is not ideal. In this sense, night *seider* is a very positive thing. But one does have to balance night *seider* against the obligations of morning *seider*, one's other studies and a social life. Unfortunately, given the demands put upon each and every student in our yeshiva, I do not think that there is a single that applies to all students in terms of how to maximize learning. Students should avoid viewing night *seider* as an "all or nothing" proposition. Some students might do well with a nightly *seider* of half an hour, others might achieve optimal benefit from slightly longer night *sedarim* two or three nights a week, while others still might be best served by focusing on learning effectively and productively during morning *seider*. What should be

stressed, however, is the notion that *gadol ha-metsuveh ve-oseh mi-mi she-eino metsuveh ve-oseh* ("greater is one who is commanded and performs than one who is not commanded and performs"); in other words, given that morning *seider*, in a curricular sense, is an absolute *hiyyuv*, and night *seider* is not, morning *seider* should be given precedence. If a student keeps a night *seider* that extends too long into the night and then first begins to do his college work, there is a risk that his morning *seider* will suffer as a result. This is unacceptable given that morning *seider* is a requirement, whereas night *seider* is not.

But putting aside all of the issues that I have mentioned, one of the pressing issues that needs to be addressed is the way in which young men and women interact around the age of marriage. This may not be directly relevant to the issue of coeducation, but the two are certainly related; indeed, we should consider the possibility that the rigid separation that is enforced during the prior educational stages does not allow young men and women to relate to each other as human beings when they are actively searching for a spouse. They will not know how to relate to each other or interact properly. Coeducation is not necessarily the answer to this problem – maybe part of the answer is to promote mixed activities within the context of communities committed to single-sex education. For some communities, in which husbands and wives are perhaps not expected to relate to each other in more than in a utilitarian way, this may not be as pressing an issue. But in the Modern Orthodox community – for better or for worse – that degree of separateness is not the norm, and therefore our young men and women will eventually have to deal with these sorts of issues.

Even if there is no issue of coeducation per se, on a practical level it may be difficult to maintain the proper harhakot. Does that enter the equation?

I think it should. Obviously in coeducation there has to be a great amount of diligence with regards to these concerns. And I think that this is one of the meta-halakhic issues that are very difficult to figure out. As a rule, we do not support policies which by definition entail violation of halakhah. But, communally speaking, we do sometimes accept policies, with the knowledge that as a result, some people may come to violate a halakhah. Clearly, if you make a communal policy and, because of the opportunities that the policy affords, you know that x people are probably going to do an *aveirah*, you have to weigh the reasons for

the communal decision against that fact and the decision is not always a simple one. Consider coeducation: when we have a good reason for it, but we know that x number of *issurim* may result, it becomes a very difficult calculation, and it's something to be careful about.

Should there be different religious curricula for men and women? Why or why not?

From the perspective of the world in which we live, certainly the Modern Orthodox community where women interact a great deal with the larger world, I do not think that there should be much of, if any difference between the two curricula. Whatever the best curriculum for preparing a young man is, for steeping him in the values and halakhos of *Torah* that he will need in life, is necessary whether for a young man or woman. Therefore, I do not see much of a difference. I suspect that the ideal curriculum for most young men would look more like the current curriculum for young women. My rebbe [Rav Hershel Schachter] has frequently commented that he wished that his sons could have received the education that his daughters did. I think that this speaks to a larger problem in the whole of *hinnukh*: that we do not teach enough *Torah she-bi-Kesav*, Mishnah, and Halakhah. It is all sacrificed for Gemara.

At the same time, I think that women should be offered the opportunity to learn *Torah she-be-Al Peh* for a number of reasons, beginning with the fact that the complex and sophisticated world that they are going to encounter requires a Judaism of a certain depth, and so we must expose them to *talmud Torah* in its fullness, but as with young men, this should not be at the expense of the basics.

Is there a place for nontraditional methodologies in teaching Tanakh in high school and post high school?

Before talking about "nontraditional" methodologies, we have to worry about teaching students the basics – how to read and translate properly the biblical text and how to read Rishonim. Once one has successfully accomplished this task, we can then discuss other methodologies.

Regarding those methodologies, often there is no reason why those methods cannot be used in educating children of all levels, so long as they are age-appropriate. Take for example a literary approach to the text of Tanakh; you may find the roots of this in Midrash, but it has not been developed there as fully as it has in the last half century. So, when appropriate, I see no reason why this methodology should not be utilized to teach children; in fact, this is just one more tool used in order *le-hagdil Torah u-le-ha'adira* ("to expand and beautify Torah").

In terms of the more difficult issues

(which touch on core theological matters), I think that it is very much a question of age-appropriateness and maybe even needs to be determined on a student-by-student basis. I do not think that children in elementary school or even high school should be taught about biblical criticism, though perhaps there is a need in their final year of high school to make them aware of what is out there, in terms of critical Biblical scholarship. We certainly want to prevent young men and women (who attend secular colleges) from being surprised – that is a recipe for disaster and the shattering of faith. But as a matter of general curricula I do not think that it is a good idea to teach this to students at a high school level. I think even in an institution like Yeshiva College one must still be careful. But I think that when students reach a college level they do need to be aware of the issues that are out there, and I think that Yeshiva College is a place where these things can be done in a safe environment.



All of this aside, however, I submit that using non-traditional methods, to the extent that they are not hashkafically inappropriate, can be employed to enhance *Torah she-bi-Kesav*. But I think that one of the most important factors when discussing how to include these methodologies into a curriculum – and this holds true regardless of whether the methodology is "traditional" or "nontraditional" – is the attitude of the person teaching. If the person utilizing these approaches to *Tanakh* approaches the text with the appropriate reverence, and *yerav shamayim*, then I see no problem whatsoever. But if, God forbid, the teacher lacks the appropriate reverence, then having him or her teach *Torah* to our students is problematic regardless of the methodology.

I would add a comment with regard to teaching Midrash: I do not consider myself an expert on childhood education, but one of the things I wonder about is what happens when a child matures and finds out that the story of the

kivshan ha-esh (the "fiery furnace") is not actually found in *Bereishis*. We do not want to send the message to children that a Midrash is somehow false. Instead, we have the difficult task of trying to convey that it is "true" but that it is something very different from *peshat*. If you read it literally you completely miss the *peshat* of the biblical text and you miss what Hazal are trying to teach us, but dismissing it as not "true" misses the point of Hazal and runs the risk of demeaning them. But implementing this attitude within a curricular context should be left to the experts in education.

Is there a place for non-traditional methods in Gemara in Jewish education?

First of all, I think that my comments regarding *Torah she-bi-Kesav* are applicable to *Torah she-be-Al Peh*. I would emphasize again that at elementary and high school ages the teaching of *Torah she-be-Al Peh* should focus

worth repeating the stipulation that I used earlier: if the person approaches the text with the appropriate reverence and *yerav shamayim*, then the methodology is not a problem; absent this qualification, even teaching with a "traditional" methodology is problematic. In addition, almost every single academic methodology is not new, whether it be investigating *girsav* or uncovering the layers within a text, etc. Almost every single one of those methodologies is used by Rishonim – sometimes extensively. The fact that they seem to have fallen into disuse with the advent of a fixed printed text and subsequently with the almost total emphasis on conceptual learning has not in my mind rendered them non-traditional.

To cite just one example (although this may be the least controversial of what some regard as "non-traditional" methods): if you open up the *Dikdukei Soferim* and read the approbations, and you will see that it includes Rav Yitzhak Elhanan Spektor, zt"l, and many of the *gedolim* of that generation. You can't turn to an *amud* of Gemara without seeing the Rishonim preoccupied with assembling the proper text, or working with layers in the *sugya*, and so on. So to my mind most of these methodologies existed already – they are not "academic." Sometimes there may be a difference in degree of emphasis, but the truth is that ultimately the focus in teaching should be on careful reading of the Gemara, and reading Rashi and Tosafos, that is what our ancestors in Europe did and were doing for hundreds of years.

After mastering this, if one can propose methodologies that enhance the learning of Gemara, I am all in favor.

But at what point should these methodologies enter the curriculum?

Again, I think that in grade school and in much of high school the emphasis should be on developing the proper skills. When you get to the post-high school level and collegiate level and you are dealing with the people who have acquired the skills to do whatever they want to do – whether it is the "nontraditional" methods or the conceptual – I think that students can find their own balance. I think there should be choices for people who want to put the emphasis on conceptual learning and there should be choices for people who want to put the emphasis on textual learning.

How would Rav Wieder evaluate the impact of the now nearly standard year(s) in Israel on Jewish education?

I should begin by noting that I personally did not learn in Israel. I think that there are both positives and negatives to the year in Israel. One of the unintended negatives is that it raises questions about what has been accomplished in the twelve years of education that precede it. The positive result, however, is that

many students go to Israel with very weak skills and frequently with a lukewarm commitment to Judaism, but over the course of their time there, there is a sea change in their attitudes, if not in their textual skills. I think that has definitely brought a tremendous amount of good to the community. There is today a small group of people who are committed to Torah u-Madda on the one hand and yet are very serious as *lamdanim* and as *benei Torah* – I would guess that that group was not as nearly as large before the phenomenon of going to Israel took hold. So even those who are apprehensive about the phenomena of the “shift to the right” and “flipping out” would do well to consider the very positive effects that the year or years of learning have had on – for lack of a better term – the serious, Torah u-Madda community.

There are some downsides that have come from the year or years in Israel. I would focus on two issues that are my primary concerns. One problem is the outlook, with which many students in Israel come back, that regards anything that is not Torah with an attitude of *bitul*. The most common example is the issue of secular studies. More broadly, students sometimes relate to everything outside of the *beis midrash* with a sense of arrogance and that is not healthy – both for their own spiritual welfare and for the negative attitudes it engenders towards *benei ha-beis midrash*. In some ways I think this attitude is just a natural outcome of being focused on one thing exclusively for so long. But there should be ways of addressing or remedying those concerns.

The second, more specific issue is one that I believe has caused a lot of suffering in the community, especially in the last decade. I refer to the attitudes towards members of the opposite sex that come, in large part, from the year in Israel. I do not know what implicit messages are being sent, but in some cases I know that negative attitudes are explicitly encouraged. Some young women are taught that young men see them only as sexual objects and the very same messages are being sent to young men – that young woman are dangerous sexual objects who are there to tempt them. I think that this has had detrimental consequences and contributes significantly to the current *shiddukh*/dating crisis. It must be addressed because it has caused tremendous suffering for students across the hashkafic spectrum. I am not sure that this was true fifteen years ago, but it has certainly become a problem within that time. So those, I think, are the two major downsides to the year in Israel.

One issue that I feel compelled to address relates to the concern that many have expressed regarding “flipping out to the right,” something which has caused great apprehension in the community. I do not think – and others may disagree – that this is a solely a product of the yeshivos in Israel. The phenomenon should cause us to ask what it is

about our community that might be contributing to the problem. From my perspective, when we take young men and women from the context of our community where sometimes Torah and halakhah are not taken as seriously as they should be, and put them into an environment that they perceive – sometimes correctly, sometimes not – as *kullo kadosh*, as a perfect spiritual environment, they are faced with a decision: which environment best suits their religious needs? When they choose for themselves an environment in which to make their lives – whether to remain a part of what they perceive, sometimes unfairly, as the tepid religious ways of their our communities or to continue what they saw in Israel – should we not want them to choose the pristine religious path?

I think that the only way that this will not happen on the scale that it does is if students are already located in what they perceive to be a serious Torah community – both in terms of

If you refer to those people in *hinnukh* and the values they espouse – which are often not in tune with the communal hashkafah, be these educators products of YU/RIETS or other yeshivos – that is a long-standing concern. But I do not believe that it is only those students who are exposed to these attitudes who undergo a radical metamorphosis in Israel. I think we have many fine *mehannekchim*, especially in high schools, who proudly advocate a broad engagement between the religious and secular worlds and nonetheless there is a similar effect when many of their students go off to Israel. The reason for this is that what the rebbe says for a few hours in school is one thing, while what one sees and experiences outside of the classroom has a much greater impact.

On a related note, is it important to encourage top students at YU, either in graduate school or in semikhah, or both to go into the field of Jewish education?

hashkafic orientation that they want, is that far too many parents feel that the worst thing that could ever happen is that their children will come home and say that they want to be a rabbi or a teacher – and while parents may have genuine and legitimate concerns, the attitude is quite injurious. And as long as this attitude is common, we will have difficulty finding talented, young people who are committed to a Torah u-Madda ideology to enter *hinnukh*. But it absolutely has to be a priority.

Aside from academics, what role should Jewish educators at any level play in the spiritual development of their students in areas like tefillah and middot tovot? Also, what role should educators, as opposed to parents and communities, play in developing a hashkafah within their students?

While children are still living at home, parents are generally more influential than educators, but fundamentally the only way we can make a difference in these areas is as role models. I do not think that it is bad idea to study *middos tovot* and ethics as textual and halakhic subjects – to the extent that they are such. At the end of the day, however, I think that our behavior – teachers and parents – has a far greater impact than anything we actually say. The “Do as I say, not as I do” model does not work very well. Children have a remarkable intuitive ability to sense hypocrisy. I think that is what Hazal meant in the Gemara (*Bava Basra* 12b) when they say that when the *Beis ha-Mikdash* was destroyed, *nitlah nevu’ah min ha-nevi’im ve-nittenah la-shotim ve-la-ke-tanim* (“prophecy was taken from the prophets and given to the imbeciles and children”). Many think that prophets predict the future, but when you look at the *Nevi’im Aharonim*, that is not their role. Yirmiyahu’s sermons primarily give *musar* and rebuke the people for their wayward behavior. The role of the prophet is simply to call it as he or she sees it and to look beyond the superficial piety in order to identify the underlying spiritual deficiencies. That capacity was taken from the *nevi’im* and given to the *shotim* and the *ketanim*. One sees this in the story of “The Emperor’s New Clothes,” where the only one to see that the emperor was naked was the child because a child describes it as he or she sees it. And so I think that while educators have a limited time with their students, the most effective use they can make of that time is to be better role models.

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general communal observance and in terms of their own abilities and skills in Torah learning – before they arrive in *Eretz Yisrael*. If our children come from a place of strength and go to the yeshivah setting in *Eretz Yisrael*, I think for most them this will not be a problem and will not cause them to look elsewhere for spiritual sustenance.

As a follow-up, in many cases, religious instructors prior to the year in Israel represent a Weltanschauung similar to that of the instructors in Israel. How does this affect the equation in terms of constructing a viable alternative before the year in Israel?

Absolutely. Students who are suited to be educators should certainly be encouraged to do so, as long as they are also given an honest appraisal of the benefits and downsides of a career in *hinnukh*. As one example, most students are probably aware, education is not a field that provides the financial rewards and security of a field such as investment banking (though at this particular juncture in time, perhaps not!). But as long as this and some of the other challenges, and there are any number, of a life in *hinnukh* are made clear to them, we should certainly encourage them to enter the field of Jewish education. One reason that schools have trouble finding the educators with the

Continuing the Conversation

From *Midbar* to *Medabber*

BY: Nava Billet

Editor's note: This article expands upon themes discussed in the first issue of the academic year, "Spirituality: Teshuvah and Tefillah." It is included here as a "Continuing the Conversation" piece.

Fondly called the "geologist's playground," the desert land of Eilat is a geologically tumultuous place. Generations upon generations of geological formations are intertwined in beautifully erratic ways within the desert's mountainous regions. But, as Wallace Stevens writes in the opening lines of his poem "Connoisseur of Chaos" (1938):

*A. A violent order is a disorder; and
B. A great disorder is an order.*

These two things are one.

Out of the turbulent physicality of the desert emerges an otherworldly order, which penetrates to the core of one's being and creates an oasis of peace amid a complex and, at times, frightening world.

Three years ago, I spent a year living and breathing this desert and introducing the desert's magic to others. As a tour guide for an organization called "El Artsi" ("to my land"), I led many individuals and groups – whether comprised of locals, foreigners, youth groups, or adult missions – through a holistic experience of Eilat. We hiked in the desert, learned to prepare food in the wilderness, studied survival tactics, and developed group cohesiveness. Perhaps most significantly, we read Tanakh, Midrash, and the beautiful words of Israel's poets. The vast richness of our religious and cultural traditions provides us with words and concepts that help mediate the amazing and complex experience of the desert.

The Desert as Creation and Revelation

Creation and Revelation are considered by both classical and modern Jewish philosophers to be the two most seminal events in Jewish history. The desert is a place of creation and rebirth, as well as a place of revelation and epiphany. In the desert, paradoxically, the past becomes alive while the present becomes endless. Creation – the primordial moment of the past – becomes accessible to human beings. At the same time, in the desert, time freezes as man is free to hear the voice of the desert – that everlasting sound of divine revelation.

The Mishnah states: "About mountains, hills, oceans, rivers, and deserts one says [the blessing of] 'Oseh ma'aseh Bereishit' ("who

does the act of Creation')."¹ The desert transports the individual to the beginning of time – to a period when there was only *tohu va-vohu*, vast and unending chaos. The desert undoes all of the technological and historical progress of Mankind over the ages. Man is returned to his original state of nature and is exposed to all the perils of the elements. It is for this reason that Hazal mandated the blessing of "ha-Gomel"



Photo Courtesy of Gilad Peli

for people who successfully traversed the desert.² But let us recall what emerged out of the chaos of primordial anarchy: a beautifully ordered world. Out of the state of nature, the desert traveler can recreate herself to be the person she wants to be.

The same aspects of the desert that render it a chaotic and primordial place also create an atmosphere most conducive to meditation, contemplation, prayer, and study. In the desert, complex thoughts attain a level of clarity they can have in no other place. This idea is part-and-parcel of the Jewish tradition, which begins with God's theophany at Mount Sinai. The barrenness of the desert also means that it is empty of the worldly distractions that inhibit connecting to one's spiritual side. In the desert, masks are stripped off; life is pared down to the basic necessities. The wilderness promotes both anxieties about survival and a soothing calmness of the spirit, an acceptance of life as it is bequeathed to us.

The wilderness reinforces our dependency on the generosity of the Almighty, emphasizing our vulnerability and helping to maximize our resourcefulness and creativity. In the Midrash, the Sages ask why the Torah was given in the desert. In order to receive the Torah, answer the Sages, people must render themselves as open, free, and unconstrained as the desert.³ In the desert, liberated from external attachments, Man is both listener and receiver – breathing in the letter and spirit of the divine word.

The Desert as Refuge

In the Bible, the desert is a place of refuge for those who have been forced to leave home. It is a sanctuary for those who must escape perilous situations. The vastness of the desert cushions those who are in danger from their enemies; the revelatory nature of the desert offers them a desperately needed sense of peace and clarity. My readings of the two biblical stories that follow are deeply influenced by my personal experience in the desert. I do not offer these readings as *peshat* (the plain meaning) per se, but as plausible understandings that reflect the nature of the desert.

After the birth of Isaac, Hagar, the mother of Abraham's first son Ishmael, is sent away with her child. She wanders in the Be'er Sheva desert and after some time her water supply depletes. Terrified that her child will die, Hagar "raises her voice and cries;" the child, in turn, cries out in fear and abandonment. To Hagar and her son, the vast and barren desert is a hopeless place of certain death. But God opens Hagar's eyes to see something that she could not see before: an oasis in the desert. Hagar suddenly understands that the desert is a life-affirming place of refuge and peace and clarity. She and her child remain in the desert, where Ishmael grows to become a leader of his clan.⁴

Many years later, Elijah the Prophet is exiled from his homeland Israel during a time of political unrest and idolatrous kings. King Ahab and Queen Jezebel seek to murder Elijah because of his religious zeal which was antagonistic to everything the monarchy represented. As a fugitive, Elijah seeks refuge in the desert. Desperate and resigned to a terrible fate, Elijah wishes that he will simply die in that spot in the desert. But suddenly, an angel awakens Elijah, who opens his eyes and sees his own oasis: some sustenance and a flask of water. Having regained his strength, and with the knowledge that the desert is indeed a life-affirming place, Elijah wanders forty days and nights to Horev. Here, Elijah learns the deepest divine lesson of the desert: God's revelation comes not in the majestic and glorious displays of lightning, wind, and fire, but in the small, silent voice of the desert – the *kol demamah dakah*.⁵

For Hagar and Elijah, and many other biblical figures – indeed, for the entire nation of Israel escaping the Egyptian legions – the desert speaks to them in their deepest moment of need. What the desert says to them is as follows: I may appear to be a barren wasteland, a

place of certain death; but I am in fact a rich and fertile land of wisdom and life. You need only to look closer and to listen more carefully in order to find my deepest treasures.

Perhaps the Hebrew word for desert best attests to this aspect of the desert. The word *midbar* ("desert") can be re-vocalized to spell the word *medabber* ("speaker"). The *midbar* is a place that speaks from within. It speaks the sound of silence. A fellow desert traveler in Eilat once told me that silence is ironically the loudest sound there is; because when there is silence, no other sound can be heard above the silence.

Conclusion

When I am in the desert, I feel the fusion of a universal, national, and personal narrative. Beginning with the universalism of creation, moving to the national event of mass revelation at Sinai, and culminating in the personal refuge provided by the desert – I feel that the desert embodies all of human experience. It is this holistic totality that I have always tried to impart to the groups I guided in the desert. We need to rediscover the power and meaningfulness of the desert.

A poem by a 20th century Israeli poet brings these musings in full circle:

*The desert is "In the beginning"
In the desert God created
The heavens and the earth...
Is it absurd that God revealed Himself in
the desert
To those who were destined to believe in
Him?
And if they've stopped believing in Him
That is only because a great number of
them have forgotten
The pathway to the desert.
-Amos Kenan*

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¹ Berakhot 9:2

² Gemara Berakhot 24

³ Pesikta de-Rav Kahana 12

⁴ Genesis 21

⁵ I Kings 19

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