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A Monastic-like Setting for the Study of Torah

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Sefer Huqqei ha-Torah (The Book of the Statutes of the Torah; hereafter referred to as *SHH*) is a detailed treatise describing a bilevel educational system. Problems in education on both the elementary and advanced levels are identified and addressed. The most novel provision of this document calls for the establishment of quasi-monastic study halls for *perushim* (lit., those who are separate), dedicated students who would remain totally immersed in their Torah studies for a period of seven years. Elementary-level students would be taught in separate structures for a period of up to seven years, in preparation for their initiation into the ranks of the *perushim*. The formal initiation took place when the student was thirteen, although it could be postponed (or perhaps renounced) until age sixteen.

SHH is extant in only one version, which consists of three sections. There is some overlap between the sections, even as a number of discrepancies of varying significance can be detected. *SHH* is never cited in subsequent medieval or modern rabbinic literature, although there are two later texts that display limited similarities.

Since the publication of *SHH* by Moritz Guedemann in 1880, more than twenty-five scholars have discussed and debated the date, provenance, and purpose of the work. The attempts to identify the place and time in which *SHH* originated have essentially employed two methods. The first was to focus on terms or phrases in the text that either ruled out or suggested a particular locale. For example, the text notes that a particular custom of Torah study on the Sabbath was in vogue in northern France (*minhag Zarefatim*), which suggests that *SHH* itself was probably not composed there. On the other hand, since *SHH* refers to unnamed *geonim* (ancient rabbinic teachers in Babylonia) as the originators of certain practices, and refers also to practices of R. Sa'adyah Gaon and the Babylonian exilarch, it is possible that the text stems from a geonic milieu.

Another method employed by scholars has been to identify institutions within the text. The *midrash ha-gadol* (great study hall), which was to be maintained by a network of surrounding communities, is akin to the *yeshivot* (study academies) of southern France as described by Benjamin of Tudela in his travelogue *Mas'at Binyamin*. Norman Golb has tried to show that the *midrash ha-gadol* existed in northern France, with one such school located in Rouen. Gershom Scholem and Isadore Twersky have identified the text as Provençal, based on the claim that the *perushim* who studied in the *midrash ha-gadol* were a prototype of Provençal talmudic scholars (and mystics) in the twelfth century.

Complicating the effort to ascertain the provenance of *SHH* is the question first raised by Y. Loeb in 1881 (in his review of Guedemann), as to whether *SHH* was actually put into effect in any community, or whether it was simply a utopian suggestion. Reflecting the general consensus of modern scholarship, Salo Baron wrote that “[*SHH*] doubtless originated in one of the northern communities under the impact of Provençal mysticism or of German-Jewish Pietism of the school of Yehudah the Pious and Eleazar of Worms.” Baron also concluded that statutes such as the consecration of the sons of *kohanim* (priests) and *leviyyim* (Levites) for Torah study, and the mandate for the establishment of a permanent group of scholars through which the community could fulfill its obligations to study “were the expression of pious wishes formulated in one or another pietistic conventicle, but [were] never formally enacted by any communal authority.”

If the document is in fact of Provençal origin, it is likely that it was actually in effect or at least representative of active institutions and practices. The educational organization outlined in *SHH* on both the elementary and advanced levels is quite similar to that of Provence in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. If, however, *SHH* is of Ashkenazic origin, the document was probably more of a theoretical blueprint. There is nothing in medieval Ashkenaz comparable to the highly organized and communally funded educational institutions described here.

Although all attempts to identify the origins of *SHH* with certainty may prove fruitless, the connection between *SHH* and the German Pietists merits further investigation. Isadore Twersky has succinctly summarized the essential provisions of *SHH* as follows:

It strives, by a variety of stipulations and suggestions, to achieve maximum learning on the part of the student and maximum dedication on the part of the teacher. It operates with such progressive notions as determining the occupational aptitude of students, arranging small groups in order to enable individual attention, grading the classes in order not to stifle individual progress. The teacher is urged to encourage free debate and discussion among students, arrange periodic review . . . utilize the vernacular in order to facilitate comprehension. Above all, he is warned against insincerity and is exhorted to be totally committed to his noble profession. (Twersky, p. 25)

Several of these measures are suggested by the thirteenth-century *Sefer Hasidim*, as well. For example, a strong concern of the German Pietists was that students

of different abilities were typically not separated within the Ashkenazic educational process. Such insensitivity could keep the brighter student from developing fully, and would certainly cause the weaker student to become frustrated. *SHH* also insists in six distinct passages that teachers not allow their own affairs to lead to distractions while they are teaching. Thus, the *melammed* (teacher) could not assume any additional employment, nor could the academy head engage in conversation when it was time for him to teach. Five sections in *Sefer Hasidim* express the same concerns, in similar terms.

SHH advises that academy heads should not conduct their classes in their own home but rather in the dormitory of the *perushim*, lest they remain constantly in the presence of their wives. The academy heads should remain with the *perushim* for the entire week and return to their homes on Friday. After the Sabbath, they should again return to the abode of the *perushim*. This procedure was to be adopted so that the academy heads could avoid sexual thoughts while they were teaching. In *Sefer Hasidim*, the *rav* (rabbi) is advised to set up a *beit midrash* (study hall) on the far side of his home. This arrangement is suggested to prevent the students from gazing at the female members of the household as they enter and leave the home. If this precaution is not taken, "their Torah study will be accomplished through sinning." Although the section in *Sefer Hasidim* is designed to shield the student from sexual thoughts, and the section in *SHH* seeks to protect the teacher, the problem addressed and the solution offered are essentially the same. Indeed, the arrangement in *Sefer Hasidim* would also prevent the academy head from being in his wife's presence, just as the separate dormitory for the students described in *SHH* would prevent them from gazing at women.

Sefer Hasidim advocates that the children of *kohanim* and *leviyyim* in particular be sent away to study Torah for a lengthy period of time, until they have learned enough to answer all questions and to resolve all doubts. These notions are based on *Sefer Hasidim's* interpretation of Deuteronomy 33:9–10, "[The Levite] . . . will not recognize his parents or his brothers or his sons, since for so many years he has remained with his teacher. . . . They will remain [with their teachers] until 'They shall teach Your statutes to Jacob and Your Torah to Israel.'" *SHH* is, to my knowledge, the only other medieval text that interprets these verses in this fashion, and advocates a similar ideal. The beginning passages of *SHH* direct that the sons of *kohanim* and *leviyyim* are to be consecrated as youngsters to study Torah and to become *perushim*. They are to remain separated from everyone including their families for seven years, while they study. One of the two *gematria* (numerical exegesis) derivations in *SHH* is also found in *Sefer Hasidim*.

Another possible key to the origin of *SHH* that has not been probed sufficiently lies in the practices and phrases that appear to be similar to Christian monastic ideals. The *perushim*, who are chosen originally through some form of parental consecration, ensconce themselves in their fortresses of study away from all worldly temptations. They devote all of their time to the holy work of God (*melekheth shamayim*), and serve as representatives of the rest of the community in this endeavor. It is possible that *SHH* represents an attempt to recast the discipline

and devotion of Christian monastic education, which was certainly known to, and perhaps admired by, Jews, in a form compatible with Jewish practices and values.

SHH is found in Oxford Bodleian Opp. 342, fols. 196–199 (Neubauer 873). The manuscript was copied in 1309, in a German hand, and our translation has been made from the manuscript. The Hebrew text of *SHH* was published by M. Guedemann, *Geschichte des Erziehungswesens und der Cultur der abendlandischen Juden während des Mittelalters* (Vienna: A. Hoelder, 1880), vol. 1, pp. 91–106; Meir Ish-Shalom in *Beit ha-Talmud* 1 (1881): 61–62, 91–95; Simcha Assaf, *Meqorot le-Toledot ha-Hinnukh be-Yisra'el* (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1954), vol. 1, pp. 9–16; Nathan Morris, *Le-Toledot ha-Hinnukh shel Am Yisra'el* (1960; reprint Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, 1977), vol. 2, pp. 417–23 (with punctuation, and a photo-offset of the manuscript); Norman Golb, *Le-Toledot ha-Yehudim be-Ir Rouen Bimei ha-Benayim* (Jerusalem: Dvir, 1976), pp. 181–84; and in my *Jewish Education and Society in the High Middle Ages* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992), pp. 106–115.

Further Reading

For a brief assessment of the main provisions of *SHH* and the problems inherent in identifying its origins, see Yosef Dan, “Sefer *Hukkei ha-Torah*,” *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. 14, pp. 1099–1100, and Simcha Assaf, *Meqorot le-Toledot ha-Hinnukh be-Yisra'el*, vol. 1, pp. 6–9. Assaf also notes the possible reflections of *SHH* in subsequent rabbinic literature. The suggestion that *SHH* originates in the geonic period is made by David Kaufmann in his *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 2 (Frankfurt: J. Kaufmann, 1910), pp. 208–15.

Isadore Loeb's discussion of whether *SHH* is a theoretical blueprint or a description of a series of actual practices is found in *Revue des études juives* 2 (1881): 159–60. For further consideration of this issue, and for an analysis of the affinities between *SHH* and Provençal institutions, see Isadore Twersky, *Rabad of Posquières*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society 1980), pp. 25–29. The ascetic nature of *SHH* and the parallels to Provençal mystical circles was also noted by Gershom Scholem, *Reshit ha-Qabbalah bi-Provence* (Tel Aviv: 1948), pp. 84–91, and see also Salo Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1958), vol. 6, pp. 140–41, 395.

For the possible northern French and German dimensions of *SHH*, see M. Guedemann, *Geschichte des Erziehungswesens*, vol. 1, pp. 264–72; Norman Golb, *Toledot ha-Yehudim be-Ir Rouen*, pp. 36–40. My *Jewish Education and Society in the High Middle Ages*, pp. 40, 55–56, 101–5, 128–29 n. 46, 151 n. 68, focuses on the affinities to German Pietism in particular, as well as the monastic aspects. Regarding Christian influence on *SHH*, see also Ivan Marcus, *Rituals of Childhood* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), p. 154 n. 84; David Berger, *The Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society,

1979), 27 n. 71; and Lynn Thorndike, "Elementary and Secondary Education in the Middle Ages," *Speculum* 15 (October 1940): 400–8.

The Book of the Statutes of the Torah

[Rhymed Preamble.] This is the Book of the Statutes of the Torah by the ancients, dedicated to the students and to the rabbinic teachers, as delineated by the early scholars. These are the statutes and the laws and the teachings, to understand and to instruct, since "the words of the Lord are pure words" [Ps. 12:7]. They were instituted by the wise men of yore, fearers of the Lord, with the approbation of the geonim, in regard to the Torah, to prepare it and to support it, and to increase it in Israel and Judah. And they shall be received by the children of Jacob the unblemished as an eternal law, for all their generations.

The first statute. It is incumbent on the priests and the Levites to separate one of their sons and consecrate him to Torah study, even while he is still in his mother's womb. For they were commanded this at Mount Sinai as it is written, "they are given to Me" [Num. 8:16], that is, from their mothers' wombs. And it is written, "they shall teach your statutes to Jacob" [Deut. 33:10], and it is said "they will teach my people knowledge" [Ezek. 44:23], and it is said "for the priest's lips should keep knowledge" [Mal. 2:7]. Similarly, all the children of Israel shall separate [one] from among their sons, because Jacob made such a separation, as it is written, "all that You shall give to me I will surely give the tenth [double verb] to You" [Gen. 28:22]. The verse speaks of two tithings, a tithe of money and a tithe of sons. And so said Ezekiel [23:37], "also they have caused their sons, whom they bore to me, to pass to them to be devoured." This teaches that they would consecrate from among their sons, when they were in their mother's womb. "Whom they bore to me" means to my Name.

Statute Two. To establish a study hall for the separated students (*perushim*) who accept upon themselves the yoke of Torah near the synagogue. This house would be called the great study hall. For just as cantors are appointed to discharge for the many their obligation in prayer, full-time students are appointed to study Torah without end, to discharge for the many their obligation in Torah study, and the work of heaven will thereby not fall behind. *Perushim* are those students who have been consecrated to Torah study. They are called *perushim* in the language of the Mishnah, and nazirites (*nezirim*) in the language of the Bible, as it is said "and I raised up of your sons for prophets, and of your young men for nazirites" [Amos 2:11]. And separation leads to purity as it is said, "Sanctify yourselves, therefore, and be holy" [Lev. 20:7], and it says "he cleansed it and he hallowed it" [Lev. 19:19].

Statute Three. The *perushim* may not leave the house for seven years. There they will eat and drink, and there they will sleep, and they should not speak

in the study hall. Wisdom will not reside in the student who comes and goes, but only in one who exerts himself in the tent of Torah, as it is said, "This is the Torah, when a man dies in a tent" [Num. 19:14]. And one who speaks of idle things in the synagogue and study hall transgresses a precept, as it is written, "you must revere my sanctuary" [Lev. 19:30]. Just as a person consecrates one of his assets to heaven, so too he should consecrate one of his sons to Torah study. If the *perushim* leave the study hall before seven years, they must pay a set fine. A support for this policy is "and they that handle [lit., restrain themselves in] the Torah knew me not" [Jer. 2:8], which teaches that they imprison themselves in order to know the statutes of the Almighty and his teachings.

Statute Four. To collect from all Israel twelve deniers a year for the service of the study hall, in place of the half-shekel that our forefathers brought for the service of the Temple and for the purpose of the sacrifices. So too, we are obligated to bring a donation to support the study hall each year, to support the students and to pay the rabbinic teachers and assistants (*meturgemanim*) and to purchase books. Just as the sacrifices brought peace to the world, so do Torah scholars, as it is said, "And all your children shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of your children" [Isa. 54:13], and it is said, "Those who love your Torah have great peace, and nothing can make them stumble" [Ps. 119:165].

Statute Five. To appoint a supervisor over the students who will evaluate their studies, and assess their intelligence and indolence. For the [elementary-level] teachers (*melammedim*) are comparable to workers who yearn constantly for the falling of the shadows of the evening. And this is a proper custom, to fulfill "and you shall be guiltless before the Lord and before Israel" [Num. 32:22]. Therefore, the *melammedim* should not teach in their homes, but only in the study hall for the [purpose of fulfilling the] precept. This house is called the small study hall. This supervisor is called to [assist] the *melammedim*. And if the supervisor sees amongst the youths a young man who is difficult and dense, he should bring him to his father and say to him: "The Lord should privilege your son to [do] good deeds, because he is too difficult for Torah study," lest the brighter students fall behind because of him. And his money should not be taken gratuitously, lest he [the *melammed*] be considered like a thief, and perhaps the young man might go to a different *melammed* and succeed there with him.

Statute Six. The *melammedim* should not accept more than ten students in one class. Even though the rabbis said [*Bava Batra* 21a] that a teacher of children teaches twenty-five, that was only in the land of Israel, whose atmosphere makes people wise, and at a time when Israel was securely in its land and they had the upper hand. For a free intellect is high and strong and clear, and can receive intelligence and wisdom since it is not subjugated to another. But an intellect that is subjugated is low and weak and dry, and cannot receive intelligence and wisdom. Since it is subjugated to hard and stubborn masters, all

its efforts go to a person "who does not take care of it" [Jon. 4:10], and it is constantly burdened by difficult tasks. They cast fear and dread on it, and anger drives out wisdom. Therefore, the *melammedim* are warned not to accept more than ten children. Support for this policy [comes from] "The Almighty stands in the congregation of God" [Ps. 82:1]. A congregation is ten, as we learn from "in all places where I cause My Name to be pronounced, I will come to you" [Exod. 20:21]. The *gematria* equivalent of [the Hebrew word] "I will come" is ten. Just as the rabbis made boundaries and reinforcements for the words of the Torah, so too the geonim made boundaries for all the words of the rabbis.

Statute Seven. It is incumbent upon the *melammedim* not to teach the children by heart, but from the written text [of the Pentateuch], so that they can translate for them the Aramaic translation of the Pentateuch into the vernacular, just as they translate the Hebrew [text of the Pentateuch itself] into the vernacular, in order to facilitate the reading of the Talmud and to enter them into [a discussion of] the *halakhah* [law]. Onkelos translated the Torah into Aramaic because the residents of Babylonia spoke it, and he wished to impart the Torah to them in their language. So too, R. Sa'adyah Gaon explained the Torah in Arabic in order that they might understand, because they did not understand the holy tongue. The scholars who were students of the Exilarch were accustomed to reading the [weekly Torah] portion on the Sabbath, the biblical text two times, and the [Aramaic] translation once. The biblical text was read twice because of the belovedness of the Torah, since every beloved thing is read twice. The Aramaic translation was read once in order to cause the Torah to be heard by women and the unlearned, so that perhaps awe [of the Divine] would enter their hearts. Similarly, the custom of northern France was to read the portion on the Sabbath two times, and to translate once in the language of the land.

Statute Eight. To teach the young men the text of the Aramaic translation of the Pentateuch in the vernacular, in order that they will be able to read the text of the Talmud easily and be prepared to engage in [discussion of the] *halakhah*, so that the *melammedim* will be able to work with the children on the [interpretation of the talmudic] *sugya* [legal passage], and not on the meaning [of the Aramaic words themselves], since the children will be used to the meaning of the Aramaic translation of the Pentateuch.

Statute Nine. The *melammedim* should accustom the young men to ask questions of each other every day toward evening, to sharpen them and make them intellectually agile, and to increase their knowledge, as it is said, "Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another" [Prov. 27:17]. And therefore, those young men who do not know how respond to each other properly should feel embarrassed, owing to their fear of the *melammed*.

Statute Ten. The *melammedim* should review with the young men on Friday what they learned during the week, and what they learned the prior week. On Rosh Hodesh [the New Moon], they should review what was learned in this [past] month, and in the prior month. In Tishrei, they should review what was

learned during the summer months, and in Nisan they should review what was learned during the winter months, lest they forget anything, and they should remember as much as possible. As we have been taught [*Menaḥot* 99b], one who forgets one chapter or one law violates two negative precepts, namely, “take heed of yourself and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things which your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your lives, but teach them to your children” [Deut. 4:9].

Statute Eleven. The *melammedim* should teach the young men during the winter nights, from the beginning of *Heshvan* until the beginning of Nisan, for one-quarter of the evening, since the days during the winter are short. And each and every young man should contribute his share of the oil used for lighting.

Statute Twelve. The *melammedim* should not do any [outside] work or any scribal activities during the period of their studies, lest they be distracted from their studies, and they will not be able to fulfill their commitment. They should be free, because they are obligated to do the work of heaven faithfully. The procedure for dealing with students is according to their wisdom, and according to the officers who are appointed [as supervisors] over their work.

End

The ancients ordained that a study hall should be purchased near the synagogue, and the two should be attached, a place to pray and a place for study, based on a midrash [of the verse] “They go from strength to strength, they appear before the Almighty in Zion” [Ps. 84:8]. The places of the *perushim* shall be rented, and each student (*parush*) shall contribute his share to the rental of the house, just as they contribute to the salary of the rabbinic teacher and his assistant. The house itself should be purchased [using monies] from the charity fund of the community. But it is made available to the *perushim* and to wealthy people [who wish to contribute] for a rental fee. The rental fee will go to the academy head or to pay the teaching assistant.

They also ordained that the study hall for the *perushim* should be established in the major city of a jurisdiction. All the surrounding communities should send yearly contributions for the benefit of the study hall, to support the students, and to pay the teachers and the assistants. This study hall is called the great study hall, from whence statutes and laws emanate in Israel.

They also ordained that the heads of the academies should not establish study halls in their own homes, but only in the houses of the *perushim*, lest they be found too frequently in proximity to their wives. They should remain there for all the weekdays, returning to their homes on Friday in order to celebrate [the Sabbath] with their wives and families. When the Sabbath ends, they should return to the houses of the *perushim*. And they should have changes of clothing, one to be worn in their own homes, and one to be worn while serving in holiness in the houses of study. All of this [was ordained] lest they become involved in sexual activity and have an emission. Their intention

was to speak words of Torah in purity. The academy heads should not receive homeowners [as students], because their learning was not of paramount importance to them since they also had to think about their [business] affairs, but only students with no household responsibilities, who could be involved [solely] with study. Assistants should be appointed to recite the *halakhah* two or three times, so that it should flow freely in their mouths.

And they also ordained that the academy heads not be officers, that is, if the academy head has forty students, they should appoint for him four assistants, one for ten students. When the academy head leaves the synagogue in the morning, he should come immediately to the study hall, that is, he should not speak [to anyone] in between, and he should explain the *halakhah* according to its meaning.

The ancients ordained that [a father] should consecrate his firstborn son while he is still in his mother's womb. Support for this practice [comes] from the verse, "Before I formed you in the belly I knew you, and before you emerged from the womb I sanctified you" [Jer. 1:5]. And this is the meaning of [the liturgical phrase] "He who sanctified the friend from the womb." This was Abraham, for we interpret "knowing" [in this manner]. Regarding Jeremiah it is written "before I formed you in the womb I knew you" and regarding Abraham it is written "For I know him" [Gen. 18:19], namely, [that I knew him] already. Just as later on [regarding Jeremiah,] he was sanctified from the womb, so too here he [Abraham] was sanctified from the womb. [The father] accepts upon himself and says: "If my wife gives birth to a male, he shall be consecrated to the Lord, and he will study His Torah day and night." On the eighth day, after the child has entered the covenant of circumcision, the child is placed on a spread, a copy of the Pentateuch is placed near his head, and he is blessed by the elders of the community or the academy heads. And this is how they bless him, from "And the Almighty shall grant you" until "and those who bless you shall be blessed" [Gen. 27:28–29]. The academy head shall place his hands on him and on the Pentateuch and say, "this one shall learn what is written in this," three times, and "this one shall observe what is written in this," three times, "in order that the Lord's Torah shall be in your mouth" [Exod. 13:9], "this book of the Torah shall never depart out of your mouth" [Josh. 1:8]. The father should make a festive meal, celebrating both the circumcision and the separation (*perishut*), as it is written regarding Hannah, "and he will dwell there forever" [1 Sam. 1:22].

And it was ordained regarding the *melammedim*, that a head *melammed* can gather up to one hundred young men to teach them Torah, and take in for this one hundred *litrin*. He then hires for them ten *melammedim* for eighty *litrin*, and the remaining *litrin* will be his share. He does not teach any child but is the officer and supervisor over the [other] *melammedim*, to evaluate their teaching. He rents a large house for them, so that they can teach in the rooms and attics. Each and every young man will pay his share of the rental of the house. This house is called the small study hall. They remain there studying

for seven years, [two years] the Pentateuch, two years the Prophets and Hagiographa, and three years the smaller tractates. They then go to the great study hall, which stands near the synagogue, to study the larger tractates in front of the head of the academy, and they remain there for seven years, in accordance with the statute of the *perushim*.

And they also ordained that the academy heads should not be officers. This means that if there are forty students before the academy head, four assistants must be appointed, one for every ten students. When the academy head leaves the synagogue, he should proceed immediately to the study hall, that is, he should not speak in the interim. He should explain the basic meaning of the *halakhah* and the assistants will follow his presentation, without changing the order. When the teacher concludes his interpretation, the assistants and the students will leave his presence and go to the [smaller] rooms and garrets. Each and every assistant will have the ten students for whom he is responsible, and he will repeat the *halakhah* twice for his students, after which they will go to eat. When they leave the dining table, they will review the *halakhah* a third time, and they will then return and sit before the teacher. The teacher will explain another *halakhah* to them, and they will leave his presence and, according to the procedure followed in the morning, review this *halakhah* twice. If they have the time, they will review the *halakhah* of the morning and of the evening together. This statute shall be in effect from Nisan through Tishrei. In the winter, the teacher will explain [the *halakhah*] in the morning as we have described, and once more when he leaves the synagogue at night. They will leave his presence and review twice before eating [dinner]. After they finish eating, they will review the *halakhah* a third time and they will review the *halakhah* of the morning and the *halakhah* of the evening together, and they will go to sleep. If the students wish to review their studies all night, they may do so. The rabbis said [Avodah Zarah 3b]: There is no joyous expression of Torah study except at night, as it is said, "The Lord commands his kindness in the daytime, and in night his song shall be with me" [Ps. 42:9], and it says "He gives songs in the night" [Job 35:10].

And the rabbis further ordained that the elders of the community should undertake the holy work on the Sabbath, to explicate the Torah of the Lord, to remove obstacles and eliminate pitfalls, in order to remind others of the words of the living God. And this is how the rabbis explained [the verse] "six days shall you labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to your Lord" [Exod. 20:9–10], meaning in the Name of your Lord. For the expression of resting is applicable to man, who becomes tired and weary from his activities but this condition does not exist regarding the Creator, as it written, "He does not become tired or weary, there is no searching of his understanding" [Isa. 40:28]. Therefore the explanation of "to your Lord" is "in the Name of the Lord," to be involved in the holy work, to explicate the Torah of the Almighty, to remove obstacles from the community, to increase merits and righteousness in their midst, and to lead them along the correct path. This is

the regimen of the great ones who are close to the royal court, to be involved in the work of the king for the six days of productivity and on the seventh day to be involved in Torah. They should remember the words of the living God and fulfill them, as it is said, "in order that the Lord's Torah shall be in your mouth" for at least one day of the week. And it is said, "The book of this Torah shall not depart out of your mouth, and you should meditate in it day and night."

How are young men taught, and how are the *melammedim* informed about their teaching program?

The rabbis said, "A five-year-old [should learn] Scripture" [Avot 5:21]. A person gives his son to Torah study under the direction of the melammed when he is five years old, on Rosh Hodesh Nisan, which is a propitious time for all things as the rabbis said [Midrash *Tanhuma*, *parashat Noah*], "He brings out the prisoners into prosperity" [Ps. 68:7], this is Nisan which is propitious for all things, neither too cold nor too warm. He informs the *melammed* of the extent of his teaching in explicit terms: "I am telling you that you will teach my son during this month the structure of the letters, during the second month their vocalization, during the third month the combining of letters into words, and from then on, 'let the pure one come and be involved in the study of purities, in the book of Leviticus.' If not, you will be paid as a furloughed worker. Each and every month you will add to my son's knowledge]. If my son learns half of one [Torah] portion this month, he should complete it the next month. From Tammuz to Tishrei, he should learn the portion completely, in Hebrew, each week. From Tishrei to Nisan, he should [also] learn the translation into the vernacular. This is during the child's sixth year. In the second year [of study], which is the child's seventh year, he should learn the Aramaic translation [of the Torah] from the written text and not by heart, and the Aramaic translation should be translated into the vernacular as [is done for] the Hebrew. In years eight and nine, the Prophets and Hagiographa [should be taught]."

The rabbis said, "A ten-year old [should learn] Mishnah." At that age, they should expose the young man to *Gemara*, tractate *Berakhot* and the small tractates that are listed in *Seder Mo'ed*, for three years, and "in the fourth year, it shall be holy for the Lord" [Lev. 19:24], which is the child's thirteenth year.

The rabbis said, "A thirteen-year-old for [the performance of] precepts." Their words are supported by [the verse], "I have formed this people for myself, they shall relate my praise" [Isa. 43:21]. The *gematria* equivalent of the word "this" (*zu*) is thirteen. They are worthy of being counted in a quorum of the community and to pray, and they can be counted among the numbers of the *perushim*. The father shall take his son the *parush* and encourage him with good words, "You are fortunate that you have merited to do the holy work," and he shall be entered into the house that is designated for the *perushim*. The obligation of separation (*perishut*) does not begin until he reaches the age of

sixteen. [The father] brings him before the head of the academy and he lays his hands upon him saying, "This is consecrated to the Lord." And he says to his son, "I am directing to here that which you would have consumed in my house, for I have consecrated you to Torah study." And he will remain there for seven years, to learn the larger tractates.

The rabbis also said [Avot 1:17], "the main thing is not study but deeds" and also "one who does more and one who does less [are both meritorious], as long as his intention is for the sake of heaven" [Berakhot 5b]. The explanation is that the rabbis taught these things to the masses, as a means of drawing them nearer to faith and awe. Support for their words [comes from the verse] "And now Israel what does the Lord your God require of you but to fear the Lord your God" [Deut. 10:12]. Since the people are pursuing their livelihoods, it is sufficient for them to embrace faith. But the *perushim* can wed themselves to both, to study and to deeds. The academy heads should also adhere to a teaching program. The order of *Mo'ed* [should be studied] for two years, the order of *Neziqin* for two years, and the order of *Qodashim* for two years. All of the instruction should be in Gemara, whether they are dedicated to study of the simple meaning of the text (*peshat*), or whether they are dedicated to the study of Tosafot. The heads of the academies should not linger in the synagogue for morning prayer until the prayer [service] ends, but only until the Great Sanctification (*qedushah rabbah*), so that the students will have time to review what they have learned.

*The end of the Book of the Statutes of the Torah.
Blessed be the Merciful One who has aided us.*

JUDAISM

I N P R A C T I C E

From the Middle Ages through the Early Modern Period

Lawrence Fine, Editor



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