Modern Orthodoxy in the 21st Century:
Lecture VII: Women in Halacha:
Advanced Torah study
Rabbi Moshe Shulman
Shaarei Shomayim Congregation, Spring 5766

Selected Bibliography
- Torah Knowledge for Women, Rabbi M. Meiselman, Jewish Woman in Jewish Law, Ktav, 1978
- A Tribute To The Rebbitzin Of Telne, Rabbi J. B. Soloveitchik, Hesped for Rebbitzin Rebecca Twersky, Jan. 1977, Tradition, 17.2 1978,
- Talmud Study by Women, Rabbi Yehuda Henkin, Responsa on Contemporary Jewish Women’s Issues, Ktav, 1978
- A Tribute To The Rebbitzin Of Telne, Rabbi J. B. Soloveitchik, Hesped for Rebbitzin Rebecca Twersky, Jan. 1977, Tradition, 17.2 1978,

INTRODUCTION: The Rov’s Mother

People are mistaken in thinking that there is only one Masorah and one Masorah community; the community of the fathers. It is not true. We have two masoret, two traditions, two communities, [two] shasnoth ha-kabbalah — the masorah community of the fathers and that of the mothers. Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob (= the women) and tell the children of Israel (= the men) (Exodus 19:3). “Hear my voice the instruction of thy father (masor avikha) and forsake not the teaching of thy mother (torat imekhah)” (Proverbs 1:8), connected the old king. What is the difference between those two masorot, traditions? What is the distinction between masor avikha and torat imekhah? Let us explore what one learns from the father and what one learns from the mother.

One learns much from father: how to read a text — the Bible or the Talmud — how to comprehend, how to analyze, how to contemplate, how to classify, how to infer, how to apply, etc. ... One also learns from father what to do and what not to do, what is morally right and what is morally wrong. Father teaches the son the discipline of thought as well as the discipline of action. Father’s tradition is an intellectual-moral one. That is why it is identified with masor, which is the Biblical term for discipline.

What is torat imekhah? What kind of a Torah does the mother pass on? I admit that I am not able to define precisely the masoretic role of the Jewish mother. Only by circumserpitation I hope to be able to explain it. Permit me to draw upon my own experiences. I used to have long conversations with my mother. In fact, it was a monologue rather than a dialogue. She talked and I “happened” to overhear. What did she talk about? I must use an halachic term in order to answer this question: she talked ne-inaya de-yama. I used to watch her arranging the house in honor of a holiday. I used to see her recite prayers; I used to watch her recite the Amidah every Friday night and I still remember the nostalgic tone. I learned from her very much.

Most of all I learned that Judaism expresses itself not only in formal compliance with the law but also in a living experience. She taught me that there is a flavor, a scent and warmth to mitzvot. I learned from her the most important thing in life — to feel the presence of the Almighty and the gentle pressure of His hand resting upon my frail shoulders. Without her teachings, which quite often were transmitted to me in silence, I would have grown up a soulless being, dry and insensitive.

The laws of Shabbat, for instance, were passed on to me by my father, they are a part of masor avikha. The Shabbat is a living entity, as a queen, was revealed to me by my mother, it is a part of torat imekhah. The fathers knew much about the Shabbat; the mothers lived the Shabbat, experienced her presence, and perceived her beauty and splendor.

The fathers taught generations how to observe the Shabbat; mothers taught generations how to greet the Shabbat and how to enjoy her twenty-four hour presence.
I. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS


Ethical considerations also prompted the Rav's refusal to participate in granting a heter me-a rabbanim to husbands whose wives were unwilling to accept a get. The Rav explained that his policy was based upon the realization that, if the shoe were on the other foot, corresponding procedures would not be available to the wife.

Especially revolutionary was his pioneering of the intensive study of Gemara by women. He was convinced that under contemporary conditions, it was necessary to confront the challenge of modernity, and therefore Jewish women must be provided with the intellectual resources needed to appreciate the meaning of halakhic Judaism. Mere familiarity with the do's and don'ts of religious observance would no longer be adequate, especially at a time when mothers rather than fathers exercise the strongest influence upon children. If Jewish mothers were to provide proper guidance to their children in an era when relatively few Jews abided by halakha, they had to possess a real understanding of the halakhic process, since without knowledge of halakha one could not possibly acquire a genuinely Jewish perspective. It was for this reason that the Rav insisted that girls receive thorough instruction in Gemara at his Maimonides Day School in Boston. Many years later, Stern College and some other institutions followed suit, and, despite the traditional aversion to instructing girls in the halakha, observance, but also of the theoretical underpinnings of the practical aspects needed for proper education in terms of religious awe and Torah life. It seems to me to be the recommended approach regarding the women of our generation.

III. Controversy over Studying the Oral Torah

Mekor Baruch. “Chochmat Nashim, Chapter on Mrs. Rayna Batya, daughter of R. Izele Volozhiner, granddaughter of R. Hayyim Volozhiner and first wife of the Netziv

There are additional things that contribute to education: discussions are extremely important, the atmosphere within the school contributes, there is a need to create an environment where Torah is part of his very essence, a living personality, so that a woman would be able to see before her eyes an individual for whom Torah is part of his very essence, a person with whom one can relate and identify. All of these must be combined. Learning is not only cognitive awareness of Torah and halakha, or personal ethics and faith. All of these need to be symbiotically intertwined.