

TALMUD TORAH 1:13

by Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

13: A woman who studied Torah receives a [Heavenly] reward but not as much as the reward of a man [who studies], because she is not commanded [to study]. And anybody who does something which they are not commanded, their reward is not the same as the reward of the one who is commanded and fulfills [the Mitzva], rather it is less. Even though she merits reward, the Rabbis commanded that a man not teach his daughter Torah. Because most women's cognitive skills are not directed towards proper learning and they corrupt the words of Torah into nonsense, according to their weak understanding. The Rabbis said: "Anyone who teaches his daughter Torah, it is as if he taught her *tiflut* (silliness, licentiousness). This only refers to *Torah sheba'al peh* (The oral tradition); but regarding *Torah shebikhtav* (Scripture), he should not teach her, but if he does, it is not considered as if he taught her *tiflut*."

Q1: Why is it the case that one who is commanded receives a greater reward for fulfilling a Mitzva than one who does it voluntarily?

SR ([Sandy Riemer](#)): One who has been commanded to perform a mitzvah is influenced by his "yetzer harah" to *not* do the mitzvah. Therefore, if one is commanded, the mitzvah then becomes more difficult to perform than one who is not commanded to perform the mitzvah yet does it for some altruistic motive. Since the commanded person now must overcome his/her "yetzer harah" in order to perform the commandment, the rewards are greater.

EF ([Ezra Frazer](#)): The reason that one who is commanded to do something receives a greater reward can be understood by looking at the average student who is serious about Torah study. He may voluntarily study in his free time, but if his teacher is absent in school he'll get excited about having a free period. When learning is optional, he feels relaxed about it, because he can do it at his own leisure. If he has free time, he will be inclined to use it learning. However, if he feels pressured that he must be learning (like in school), he will feel somewhat burdened by it, and welcome every opportunity to avoid it.

Women, who have no pressure to study Torah, get a more positive feeling towards it. As long as they have a lot of free time, they are very willing to spend it learning. Men, who constantly have the pressure of knowing that they must learn, instinctively look for every excuse not to learn. For a man to overcome this negative tendency is difficult, so if he does he gets a bigger reward than a woman, who never had to deal with the pressure of feeling required to learn Torah.

I cite as an example something from my own community, where an attempt was made to start a shiur for high-school kids. The girls mostly responded positively, and if they weren't busy, they would come. The boys made strange excuses of why they wouldn't be able to come, because they knew that they viewed the shiur as a burden.

Q2: Does this prohibition only apply to fathers teaching their daughters? What about a daughter who wants to learn on her own?

YE (Yitz Etshalom): The language of R certainly seems to be focussed on the father's teaching his daughter. As a matter of fact, there is an interesting switch in his terminology: *Even though she merits reward, the Rabbis commanded that a man not teach his daughter Torah.* - moving from her (lesser) reward for study to the Rabbinic injunction aimed at the father. There doesn't seem to be any problem with a woman studying of her own volition and motivation.

Q3: Why the distinction between Scripture and oral law?

YE: This distinction is not mentioned in the source sugya (Sota, 3rd chapter); however, R may feel that it is the specifically legalistic style of learning which is embodied in the oral law and finds its full realization in *Gemara* (in R's usage of the term - see previous postings) - which could lead to the misuse of Torah. Scripture, on the other hand, is more "powerful" in its presentation and, on a surface level, is not as given to abuse. (Serious bible students realize, of course, that anything more than a cursory look at the text raises a plethora of questions; however, it seems that R is specifically concerned about the type of student who would NOT delve deeply).

Q4: In Yesodei haTorah at the end of Chapter 4, Rambam explains that everyone is obligated to pursue "pardes" - physics and metaphysics. He explicitly obligates men and women in this pursuit, as it [according to him] is the necessary prerequisite for fulfilling the Mitzvot of believing/knowing about God, fearing, loving and unifying God. He also states that everyone must first be thoroughly familiar with Halakha before studying Pardes. Clearly, then, women are obligated to study Gemara etc. in order to be prepared to study Pardes. How can we reconcile these two rulings?

YE: As noted before, there is no prohibition mentioned in R for a woman to study Gemara; just for the father to teach his daughter. Any woman who is sufficiently motivated to properly fulfill the basic cognitive/emotional Mitzvot related to God (belief, unity, fear and love) would clearly need, according to R, to immerse herself in metaphysics. And, as R notes, she would first have to become something of a Talmidat Chachamim - a Talmudic scholar - which is, as mentioned, not a problem in R's formulation.

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