Women and the Study of Torah in the Thought of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

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"If your Torah had not been my delight (שעשעי), I would have perished in my poverty." Psalms 119:92

Introduction

Anyone who has tasted the joy of deep immersion in Torah study, knows well the meaning of that verse. Many women have yearned for that delight, and many have merited, especially in our generation, to experience it. This volume itself testifies to the great advances women have made in Torah study. These have not, of course, always come easily. Nor are the arguments about the permissibility and scope of Torah study for women resolved. If one would query a range of observant Jewish women about their obligation in Torah study, the answers would vary from, "women have no *mitzva* to engage in Torah study," to "women are obligated to know the practical laws that relate to them such as *kashrut*, Shabbat, *nidda*, but only men have an obligation to study Torah for its own sake and continuously" to "women can and should engage in the highest levels of Torah learning." The halakhic history is long and complex, and the struggles of contemporary Jewish women have

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* I dedicate this essay to the remarkable women who have made it possible for me and so many other women to search the depths of Torah, who have founded the Torah institutions in Jerusalem where I have studied, and who have taught me their Torah and helped me make it my own: Malkah Binah, the founder of Mattan, Chanah Henkin, the founder of Nishmat, and my female teachers at these *yeshivot* who have also become dear friends: Bryna Levy, Simi Peters, Aviva Zornberg. And to my *chavruta*, Gilla Rosen, with whom I have had the privilege to share many moments of Torah as a wondrous *shashua*, pleasure.

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re-opened them. But this, too, is part of the very delight of Torah—its continuous renewal.

With so many opportunities to pursue serious Torah study now available to women, one might wonder what need there is for another essay on this subject. But in the service of Torah, and as part of its delight, I hope to add here a new facet to the subject. The text I want to examine in depth is part of the legacy of the late Lubavitcher Rebbe, R. Menachem M. Schneerson (1901–1994) whose general position on Torah study for women has become fairly well known: he endorsed teaching Oral Torah and Talmud to women, stressed the importance of their seriously learning Jewish philosophy and *chassidut*, and supported the establishment of many schools for women.

The essay which I introduce is untranslated and known mostly only to scholars of Chabad. The material comes from part of two extensive public talks in the years 1970 and 1971 during traditional large chassidic gatherings connected to the holiday of Shavuot. His oral discourses at these gatherings were then transcribed, edited, and published.[1] This analysis, unlike his more popularly known other statements on the subject, is carried out strictly within the framework and technical internal logic of the halakhic system. It does not appeal to sociology, psychology, philosophy, politics, history, or polemics. It engages the classical rabbinic sources, and centers on a rigorous discussion of the way his predecessor, the first Lubavitcher Rebbe and founder of the Chabad movement, R. Schneur Zalman (1745–1813) codified the *halakhot* of *talmud Torah* in his own well-known and authoritative Code of Jewish Law, the *Shulchan Arukh haRav*. R. Schneerson will argue *that despite the differing sources of the obligation to learn Torah, women's Torah study is not halakhically secondary; it attains its own independent status and identity as intrinsic Torah study, and connects to the same essence of Torah as does men's study, with all the same spiritual effects and deep connection to God that such study entails; the difference is the* halakhic *catalyst by which they each reach talmud Torah. Moreover, her obligation to study is continuous, just as a man's.* I

[1] This text is found in Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, *Likkutei Sichot*, vol. 14 (Brookyln, NY: Kehot Pub. Society, 1978) 37–44 and then was reprinted with extensive footnotes and sources in his *Chiddushim uViurim leShas*, vol. 1 (Brooklyn, NY: Kehot Pub. Society, 1979) 217–23. There are many intricate arguments in the footnotes. I only include a few of them here. I refer the reader to the original for the fullest understanding of the argument in the footnotes and sources.

assume that the readers of this essay will vary widely in background and familiarity with halakhic texts. Nevertheless, I have decided to closely follow the intricacies in reasoning of the original and not to pre-digest or simplify the material. For one thing, simplifications in presenting halakhic issues are often very misleading. For another, I find the fascination of halakhic thought to be its intellectual depth, its subtle and flexible modes of reasoning, its sharp inner debates, its surprising conclusions. I have, however, eased the reader's way somewhat by presenting the final results and conclusions of R. Schneerson's analysis at the beginning of the major sections. The halakhic process, of course, works the opposite way, beginning not with a thesis but rather through the presentation of questions, counter-questions, examination of sources, logical analysis, proofs and counter-proofs until a conclusion can be reached.

In writing this paper, I have chosen to blend my voice more or less into the style and tone of classic halakhic commentary—a different rhetorical genre than Midrash or Bible commentary, or philosophical hermeneutics, but no less creative in its own intricate way.[2] It has required me to work within the constraints of the internal logic of the halakhic system, a system to which I am also personally fully committed. Yet the boundaries are vast; from the discourse of the Sages of the Talmud, to the halakhic codifiers and commentators from medieval to modern Europe, from Spain to France to Poland. And finally it leads to a contemporary theological and historical understanding of women's intensive participation in Torah study as part of a redemptive-messianic process.

For all contemporary women in search of their connection to Torah, I hope to show how the way forward begins first with the way back, back into the sources. The subtlety of this analysis will require the reader's patience, but this forbearance, will be rewarded, I hope, since R. Schneerson makes some striking innovations in understanding the nature and scope of Torah study for women. One must labor to work one's way through the material, but this labor is also the source of the ultimate pleasure of Torah study. And only through

[2] For my philosophic reflections on rabbinic methods of analysis and commentary, see my *The Slayers of Moses: The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory* (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1982) and *Fragments of Redemption: Jewish Thought and Literary Theory in Scholem, Benjamin, and Levinas* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1991).

this labor, does one make the Torah her own, as in the talmudic midrash from *Avoda Zara* 19a:

> "But only in the Torah of God is his desire, and in his Torah he meditates day and night" (Psalms 1:2). Rava said that at the beginning of this verse, the Torah was called after the name of the Holy One blessed be He ("Torah of God"). But at the end of the verse, it is called "his Torah" i.e., after the name of the student who has studied it.

I. The Issue

We start at the beginning, with one of key classical rabbinic sources on the issue of the nature of women's obligation in Torah study, the Talmud, *Kiddushin* 29b. The larger context is a discussion of the obligation of parents towards their children, and children towards their parents.

> How do we know that she [the mother] is not obligated to teach her children? Because it is written [Deut. 11:19] *velimadetem* ["and you shall teach"], which also can be read *ulemadetem* ["and you shall study"]: hence whoever is commanded to study is also commanded to teach; whoever is not commanded to study, is not commanded to teach.
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> And how do we know that she is not obligated to teach herself? Because it is written, "*velimadetem* (and you shall teach)," "*ulemadetem* (and you shall study)": the one whom others are commanded to teach is commanded to teach himself; and the one whom others are not commanded to teach, is not commanded to teach himself. How then do we know that others are not commanded to teach her? As it is written in Scripture "And you shall teach them to your sons [*velimadetem et baneikhem*]"—your sons but not your daughters [*benoteikhem*].

A contemporary woman reading this statement without much knowledge of the talmudic and halakhic processes, might well be taken aback. Firstly, it is critical to remember that the text is speaking here about the *legal* nature of religious obligations and their consequences. As is well known, there are other sources in the Talmud and Halakha which probe the question of whether this is a *prohibition*, or only an *exemption*, and if the latter, to what extent women may indeed be obligated or voluntarily take upon themselves to learn Torah The history of halakhic codification and interpretation takes its own interesting

course, which in the interests of space and coherence, I relegate mostly to the footnotes.

Since his analysis will be strictly halakhic, R. Schneerson begins by citing parts of his predecessor, R. Schneur Zalman's codification of the *halakhot* in the section of the "Laws of Torah Study" in his *Shulchan Arukh haRav, Yore De'a*, (1:14) which begins with the sentence,

> *Isha eiyna bemitzvat talmud Torah, shene'emar velimadetem et beneikhem velo et benoteikhem.*
>
> אשה אינה במצות תלמוד תורה שנאמר ולמדתם אותם את בניכם ולא את בנותיכם.

I pause here to note the difficulty in translating the beginning of this sentence from Hebrew. Literally, it would read: "*A woman is not in* [i.e., *does not have*] *the mitzva of talmud Torah, as it says*, '"*you shall teach them to your sons...*" *and not to your daughters.*'"

First, if this sentence were intended to mean that women are completely *exempt* from the study of Torah, he could have simply and clearly phrased it that way, based on the classic precedent of Maimonides' ruling (12^{th} c.) at the beginning of his own codification of Laws of *talmud Torah* in his authoritative *Mishne Torah* (1:1): "Women, slaves, and children are exempt (פטורים) from *talmud Torah*."

Here, the word *patur* unequivocally denotes "exempt." But again, exemption does not mean prohibition, and Maimonides goes on to say that a woman who chooses to study on her own is rewarded, and makes a further distinction between the prohibition of a man's teaching his daughter the Oral Torah and the permissibility of teaching her the Written Torah.[3]

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[3] See *Hilkhot Talmud Torah* of the *Rambam* 1:13 where he writes: "A woman who studies Torah is rewarded, but not to the same degree as a man, for she is not commanded and anyone who does that which he is not commanded to do does not receive the same reward as one who is commanded, but only a lesser reward. However, even though she is rewarded, the Sages commanded that a man must not teach his daughter Torah. This is because the mind of most women is not disposed to study, and they will turn the words of Torah into words of nonsense according to their limited understanding." He then refers to the well known statement of R. Eliezer in the Talmud (*Sota* 21b): "anyone who teaches his daughter is as if he taught her trivial things (*tiflut*). What were they referring to? The Oral Torah. However the Written Torah should not be taught before the fact (*lekhatchila*)" but he continues, "if he has taught her [the Written Torah], it is not considered as if he had taught her *tiflut*."

The ambiguous syntax of R. Schneur Zalman's *isha eiyna bemitzvat talmud Torah* will become extremely significant later on. It will support R. Schneerson's contention that women are *not* exempt from *talmud Torah*, but indeed *obligated* in it; their obligation, however, is not rooted in the *mitzva of talmud Torah* per se but in their obligation in *other mitzvot*. This distinction, which seems at this point rather subtle, is extensively developed by R. Schneerson

For further explanations of this—as a reference to a young daughter or to one who has not shown wisdom—as well as a list of many women through the ages who have been very learned in Torah (usually the products of great rabbinic households), see R. Katriel Tchorsh "*Zekhuyot haNashim le'Or haTorah*" (esp. pages 145–46) and R. Moshe Dov Willner "*Arikhat Chidonei Tanach veHishtatfut baHem*" (esp. pages 194–99) both in *BeTzomet haTorah vehaMedina*, ed. R. Yehudah Shaviv, vol. 2 (Alon Shvut: *Makhon Zomet*, 1991).

One of the ideas behind the greater reward for one who is commanded and performs the *mitzva* is that one's inner negative impulses fight more strongly against what one is commanded to do than against what one voluntarily takes upon oneself, and also that one is more careful about what one is commanded.

For further analysis of Maimonides' views and later sources, see *Gidrei Chiyuv Ktanim veNashim beMitzvat Talmud Torah* by R. Binyamin Rakover, in *BeShemen Ra'anan: Sefer Zikaron leRav Shalom Natan Ranan Kook*, ed. R. Ben Zion Shapiro, vol. 2 (Jerusalem: HaRav Kook, 1991) 478–99. Warren Zev Harvey also notes that in Maimonides' *Hilkhot Yesodei haTorah*, women are not exempt from the commandments involved in *Pardes*, the knowledge of God and His unity, and the love and fear of God. The *Pardes* for Maimonides also includes physics and metaphysics. The prerequisite for studying these realms, Maimonides says, is to first "fill one's belly with bread and meat," i.e., the knowledge of what is permitted and forbidden, and talmudic arguments such as the debates of Abaye and Rava. Maimonides concludes by saying that this prerequisite knowledge is available to all, "man and woman" alike (*Hilkhot Yesodei haTorah* 4:13). This implies a very large scope of Torah study for women and their ability to grasp it.

Harvey resolves the apparent contradiction between this statement and what Maimonides writes in the Laws of Torah Study by interpreting Maimonides to mean that women *do* have an obligation of Talmud and Torah study, "even though this obligation is not within the framework of the commandment of *talmud Torah*." "Women are in *one* sense required to study the Written and Oral Torah, but in *another* sense they are not required to study them." He speculates, based on Rav Soloveitchik's distinction between *mussar avikha* ("the instruction of your father") and *torat imekha* ("the teaching of your mother") (Proverbs 1:8), that Maimonides does not require women to study Written and Oral Torah for the purpose of carrying on the legal tradition of Halakha, but rather for the purpose of attaining *chokhma*—to enter the *Pardes* of knowledge, love, and awe of God. Her study comes via the commandments of *Pardes*, rather than through the commandment of *talmud Torah*. Warren Zev Harvey, "The Obligation of Talmud on Women According to Maimonides" *Tradition* 19.2 (Summer, 1981): 122–30.

and has profound ramifications. For now, suffice it to say that halakhic distinctions in the nature of men and women's obligation in Torah study have historically been interpreted in many ways: some have led to women's near exclusion from this realm; others have relegated their learning to minimal practical information, and discouraged or prohibited women from advanced study except in special cases; and others have sought to explore and develop the scope of their study. R. Schneerson's analysis falls into the latter category.

Let's return to the continuation of the wording and order of R. Schneur Zalman's *Shulchan Arukh*. R. Schneerson cites the following part of it:

> And just as she does not have a *mitzva* of *talmud Torah* for herself, so also does she not have a *mitzva* of teaching Torah to her children, and she is exempt from having to pay for their tuition... Nevertheless, if she assists her son or husband personally or materially to engage in Torah study, she divides the reward with them, and her reward is great since they are commanded and accomplish it through her.

At the end of the paragraph, R. Schneur Zalman (*Hilkhot Talmud Torah* 1:14) concludes:

> ומכל מקום גם הנשים חייבות ללמוד הלכות הצריכות להן לידע אותן כמו דיני נדה וטבילה ומליחה ואיסור יחוד וכיוצא בהם וכל מצות עשה שאין הזמן גרמה וכל מצות לא תעשה של תורה ושל דברי סופרים שהן מוזהרות בהן כאנשים.
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> In any case, women are also obligated to learn the laws that pertain to them, to know them, such as the laws of *nidda*, *tevilah*, *melicha*, forbidden intimacy, and so forth, and the positive mitzvot not dependent on specific time, and all the negative *mitzvot* of the Torah and of the words of the Scribes, in which they are prohibited just as men.

This last statement about women's obligation to learn the "laws that pertain to them" is not new to R. Schneur Zalman. It has a long, important and interesting halakhic history, which I again summarize in the footnotes for the sake of holding onto the thread of R. Schneerson's argument.[4] Before I summarize the

[4] It's important to clarify that this description of which *mitzvot* women are obligated to study encompasses most of the 613 *mitzvot* of the Torah: all the 365 negative *mitzvot*, and all but a handful of the 248 positive *mitzvot* excluding only those which are called "time-dependent." These are *mitzvot* such as sitting in the *sukka*, waving the *lulav*, hearing the shofar, wearing *tzitzit*, laying *tefillin*, from which women are exempt (*Kiddushin* 29a;

key questions R. Schneerson asks about the internal order, logic, and verbal formulations of R. Schneur Zalman's text some important prefatory comments are necessary: the methodology that R. Schneerson will use may seem strange to readers unfamiliar with rabbinic methods of interpretation and commentary. Suffice it to say briefly that—as with all literary and legal writings—the text is assumed to be pregnant with meaning which requires deep searching out and analysis to be revealed. Apparent surface meanings are often only that—just the surface. Meaning is a result of ongoing questioning and interpretation through logic, dialectic, comparison with other sources, attention to nuance and seeming contradictions, dialogue with the history of other interpreters, and application to new situations. That holds true for biblical commentary as well,

33b). Many women have customarily taken upon themselves several of these, and (according to ashkenazi tradition) they are permitted to make a blessing (Blessed are You... who has sactified and commanded us to...") when they perform them.

In this chapter of his *Hilkhot Talmud Torah* 1:14, among the sources R. Schneur Zalman cites are the *Agur* (*Hilkhot Tefilla* 2:5), and the introduction to the *Smak* (*Sefer Mitzvot Katan* of R. Yitzchak of Corbeille, 13th c.) and the *Sefer Chasidim* 313. See also the *Smag* (*Sefer Mitzvot Gadol* by R. Moshe of Coucy, 13th c.) Positive *Mitzvot* 12, and *Beit Yosef*, OC 47; *Rama* on YD 246:6 et al.

R. Yosef Caro (16th c.) in his *Shulchan Arukh*, YD 246:6 quotes Maimonides on the issue but the *Rama* (R. Moshe Isserles, 16th c.) *adds* in his gloss on this passage "Nevertheless, a woman is obligated to learn the laws that apply specifically to women." Earlier sources for this Halakha are in the *Sefer Chasidim* and the *Sefer Mitzvot Katan* in the introduction, written by his students.

According to the *Sefer Chasidim* 313, a man is obligated to teach his daughters the *mitzvot* as basic *piskei halakhot*, i.e., digested *halakhot*. R. Eliezer's statement that whoever teaches his daughter is as if he taught her *tiflut*, refers to the depth of the Talmud, the rationale of the *mitzvot*, etc. But the *Sefer Chasidim* maintains the father does indeed need to instruct her in the laws of *mitzvot*: "For if she does not know the laws of Shabbat, how could she possibly be able to observe it; and the same holds true for the rest of the *mitzvot* in order for her to be able to fulfill and be scrupulous about them."

This is the meaning, the *Sefer Chasidim* continues, of Deut. 31:12 "Assemble all the people, the men, the women, and the children... that they may *hear* and that they may *learn* [to observe the Torah]": the women come to learn digests of the laws in order to know how to observe them. This is also the interpretation of R. Eliezer in *Chagiga* 3a, cited by the *Tosafot* on *Sota* 21b "Ben Azai *omer*." See also *Sota* 3 in the Jerusalem Talmud: R. Eliezer interprets the verse from Deuteronomy to mean that the men came to "study" and the women to "hear" in order to know how to perform their *mitzvot*, yet this does not constitute any type of Torah study that brings them the merit of Torah study per se.

of course, and that indeed is part of the delight of Torah study and the obligation to find new insights, *chiddushim*, in Torah.

R. Schneur Zalman also followed certain other rules in composing his *Shulchan Arukh*, which itself is a specific genre of halakhic writing. Since it was intended to be an updated collective codification of authoritative Jewish law for the broad community, he did not seek to impose his own innovative insights in Halakha. Any innovation, moreover, is valid only if it has support in precedents. So his novel understandings of Halakha are not explicitly stated here; but subtle nuances of phrasing or organization of material hint at these new ideas. One needs to examine the text carefully to extract them; their subtle and indirect expression does not impose them upon everyone. In a different rhetorical situation, by contrast, in *she'elot uteshuvot*, when directly asked for his opinion on halakhic issues, he writes openly what his personal opinion and innovations in Halakha might be.

R. Schneerson proceeds to scrutinize these indirect subtleties in order to reveal and develop these halakhic innovations. R. Schneerson's own novel interpretations are also subtly woven into the complexities of *his* own argument. In other non-halakhic analyses, he speaks far more directly and sweepingly, in the historical and theological senses, about the nature of women's learning, statements which I will examine at the end of this essay. Both these approaches, the subtle and the overt, the halakhic and theological, are necessary and complement each other.

II. The Questions

The Order of the Text

R. Schneerson begins with a very close look at the wording of R. Schneur Zalman's text and his ordering of the three sections.[5]

[5] It is interesting and significant that R. Schneerson, in analyzing the text of R. Schneur Zalman, omits entirely the middle passage of the paragraph in which R. Schneur Zalman refers to Maimonides' ruling that if a woman does learn, she is rewarded, but still a father should not teach her because women's mind are not disposed to study and they turn the words of Torah into nonsense. R. Schneerson does address this issue directly in the discourse of 1990 which I discuss at the end of this piece, where he declares that this characterization of women's minds is no longer historically accurate. Also in a discussion with the Belzer Rebbe, in a transcript in Yiddish from 4 Adar, 5741 (1981) R. Schneerson

1) "A woman is not in/does not have the *mitzva* of *talmud Torah*."
2) "Nevertheless, if she assists her son or her husband personally or materially to engage in Torah study, she divides the reward with them, and her reward is great since they are commanded and accomplish it through her."
3) "In any case, women are also obligated to learn the laws that pertain to them and to know them."

Logically speaking, he says, it seems that R. Schneur Zalman should have reversed his order of the different aspects of women's Torah study: he should have put #3, the most inclusive and universal obligation—i.e., that women are obligated to learn the laws relevant to them, to know them—*before* #2 the more limited case of those women who assist their husbands or children in Torah study and share the reward with them. For the last sentence, "women are obligated to learn the laws that pertain to them" constitutes he maintains, *talmud Torah itself* for women, and applies to *every* single woman.

By contrast, the woman who helps her son or husband is not in the category of "study" but rather "assistance"; and her connection is to the *reward* of the Torah study of her *son or husband*. This category is further limited by applying only to those women who have sons or husbands, and only to those who are in need of their wives' or mothers' assistance. Nor do these attributes of helping and being rewarded constitute any Halakha unique to women; women simply are included here in the larger category of *anyone* who gives assistance to those obligated in Torah study. In fact, in R. Yosef Caro's (16th c.) authoritative *Shulchan Arukh, Yore De'a*, "Laws of Torah Study" (246:6), the order indeed is reversed: (1) "Nevertheless, a woman is obligated to study the laws that apply specifically to her" is placed *before* the statement (2) "But if she assists her husband or children in Torah study, she divides the reward with them."

The Relation of the Morning Blessing over the Torah to the Obligation to Study

argues that in recent generations the situation has changed, women have had the opportunity to make great intellectual strides, are learned in secular studies, and now all women are able to study Oral Torah and should be taught in an intellectually challenging way, including Talmud; if one keeps their learning on a minimal level, *that* is teaching them *tiflut*, trivia.

There is a further important piece of halakhic information about women's relation to Torah study. In the set order of daily prayers, among the morning blessings which women recite are those over the Torah, including the words... "Who has sanctified us with his commandments and commanded us to engage in the words of Torah (*la'asok bedivrei Torah*)." What do these mean? R. Schneur Zalman in his *Shulchan Arukh, Orach Chaim* "Laws of the Morning Blessings" (47:10) writes: "Women make the blessings over the Torah because women are obligated to study the *mitzvot* that pertain to them, to know how to perform them..."[6] And then he adds some additional reasons.

From the fact that women say the blessings on *the Torah* over their study, we have a proof, maintains R. Schneerson, that their study of the laws pertaining to them is itself a matter of learning *Torah* and not simply a preparation for the *mitzvot* (*hekhsher mitzva*) they perform. This is a *critical* distinction. In halakhic terminology, *hekhsher mitzva*, is any act which is a

[6] The *Beit Yosef*, (R. Yosef Caro's commentary on the *Tur*) OC 47 on the "Laws of Morning Blessings" cites the *Agur* who writes in the name of the *Maharil* (R. Yakov haLevi Molin, early 15th c.) that women *do* say the blessing over the study of Torah in the morning ("Bless be You, Lord our God and God of Our Fathers Who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to engage in Torah—*la'asok bedivrei Torah*") even though they are *not* obligated in Torah study and even though there is the talmudic opinion that one who teaches his daughter Torah is as if he taught her *tiflut*. This prohibition must then apply only to teaching her Oral Torah, but not to Written Torah... even though the text of the blessing "who has commanded to us to engage (*la'asok*) in Torah" implies the deep study that characterizes Oral Torah. "One nevertheless doesn't change the text of the blessing" he concludes.

The *Beit Yosef* adds a secondary justification from the *Maharil* for women's saying the blessing over the Torah: in the liturgy of the morning prayers, women, like men, recite passages that contain portions of the Torah dealing with the order of the Temple Sacrifices, and this entitles them to recite the *birkat haTorah*. And there is a general principle that the prayers were established to correspond to, and substitute for, the Temple Sacrifices. Women are obligated in prayer, and are therefore obligated in the reading of these portions of the Written Torah dealing with the sacrifices. He adds, "Even stronger are the words of the *Smag* who wrote that women are obligated to learn the laws connected to them."

R. Schneur Zalman, in his codification of the Laws of Morning Blessings, also adds as his *second* reason the above rationale of the *Beit Yosef*: that women say this blessing over Torah study due to their reading the portions in the prayer book taken from the Torah having to do with the Temple sacrifices. His *first and primary* reason, however, is that women are obligated to study the specific *mitzvot* that pertain to them, to know how to perform them. For those who oppose this line of reasoning, see n8 below.

prerequisite to the fulfillment of a *mitzva*, but does *not* constitute the *mitzva* itself. For instance, one needs to *build* a *sukka* in order to perform the *mitzva* of *sitting* in it, but we do not say a blessing on building the *sukka*; the blessing is said when the *sukka* is completed and we sit in it, and is formulated "Who has command us to sit (*leishev*) in the *sukka*." (There is, however, an interesting debate about this issue, and the extent to which certain kinds of preparations to perform *mitzvot do* indeed become part of the *mitzvot* themselves, which R. Schneerson will apply to the issue of whether a woman's obligation in learning is only a preparation to perform her *mitzvot*, but not actual Torah study itself, or becomes independent study.)

In other words, the issue here is the exact nature of the blessings women say in the morning liturgy over Torah study: exactly which portions of Torah are they making these blessings over, (Written or Oral); and is this blessing *obligatory* or only *permitted*? For being *obligated* to make the blessing would also imply that women also have an *obligation* to study Torah. And if so, does this obligation entail only the *mitzvot* that apply to them, or to something more, and also what manner and scope of study? For R. Schneerson, if women are saying the blessing over learning Torah, it means that their learning is itself *Torah study* and not just a preparation to perform the practical *mitzvot* that pertain to them such as *kashrut* or Shabbat. He will attempt further halakhic proof later on.

But now, if this is the case, if R. Schneerson wants to argue that women are indeed saying a blessing over their obligation and engagement in independent Torah study, he must first contend with other fundamental sources which appear to contradict this idea. He now raises the counter-arguments.

Contradictory Sources

1) Where is the source in the Gemara itself that women's study of the laws pertaining to them is something independent, a matter of *Torah study* and not just a preparation to fulfill the *mitzvot* in which they are obligated? The clear and simple meaning of "teach your sons, and not your daughters" seems to be that women do *not* have a category of independent Torah study—as R. Schneur Zalman himself writes at the beginning of the paragraph on the Laws of Torah Study in his *Shulchan Arukh* "A woman is not in/does not have a *mitzva* of *talmud Torah*."

2) This interpretation also appears to contradict the well known saying of the Rabbis in the Gemara *Berakhot* 17a and *Sota* 21a: "How do women *attain merit*? By bringing their sons to study Torah in school and sending their husbands' to study in the *beit midrash* and waiting for them until they return home";—that is, *not* by their own Torah study, but by facilitating and fostering the study of their sons and husbands. If their obligation to learn the laws pertaining to them were a matter of a *mitzva* for its own sake, of *talmud Torah*, then they would acquire merit from that endeavor, and the Gemara would have included it in the answer. What, then is the meaning of the question "How do they attain merit?"

3) Furthermore, in the tractate *Sota* (21a), there is the famous discussion about the nature of women's Torah study in the context of the *sota*, the suspected adulteress who proclaims her innocence. Following biblical law, she must endure a test of drinking the special bitter waters the priest gives her (Numbers 5:11–31). If she is innocent, the waters do not harm her, but if she is guilty, they cause her a painful death. The Mishna (*Sota* 3:14) explains, however, that in certain cases, even when she is guilty but has certain "merits," the lethal effect of the waters can be "suspended" for up to three years.[7]
On the phrase, "If she has merit, it [the punishment] is suspended for her," the Gemara asks: "What kind of merit? If you say, 'the merit of Torah' she is not commanded and rewarded [in the study Torah]..."; it then follows up with a statement similar to *Berakhot* (17a) citing the merit a woman does have when causing her children to study, and waiting for her husband to return from his learning, and thus dividing the reward with them.

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[7] This Mishna then quotes the famous dispute between Ben Azzai and R. Eliezer over the merit of women learning Torah: "Hence, said Ben Azzai, 'A man should teach his daughter Torah so that if she must drink she may know that the merit will suspend her punishment.' R. Eliezer says 'If a man teaches his daughter Torah, it as though he taught her *tiflut*.'" Here *Rashi* understand *tiflut* to mean immorality; i.e., if she is taught Torah, she will acquire clever wisdom and know how to conduct immoral affairs without discovery.

See the interesting interpretation of this *sugya* by Lea Rosenthal in the journal *Pardes Revisited*, of the Pardes Institute in Jerusalem (Summer, 1995) that beyond the specific issue of women, these two positions also represent two ways of understanding the general intellectual and moral advantages and disadvantages of acquiring advanced knowledge. On the one hand, advanced knowledge can help one to negotiate the dangers of the world, but there is also always a cost and danger to gaining sophistication—that of losing one's innocence and moral integrity, becoming cunning instead of wise.

4) Women's obligation to study the laws relevant to them is, in the phraseology of R. Schneur Zalman, in order to "*know them*," "*to know how to perform them*." If so, it would seem that a woman who has already become expert in her knowledge of all these laws would *not* have any further obligation of study. And in that case, she would also *no longer* be obligated to say the morning blessing over Torah study. There are, indeed, some great halakhic commentators who argue precisely that way.[8]

If that is so, why does R. Schneur Zalman cite women's obligation to study the *mitzvot* relevant to them, to know how to perform them, as the *first and primary reason* for women making the morning blessing over the Torah? For this condition is not relevant to *all* women. (In any case, he could have cited it as additional or supplementary, but not the primary reason.)

III. The Explanation

This section attempts to resolve these difficulties by proving that women's study of Torah does indeed acquire its own independent status. The halakhic catalyst for their reaching the same essence of Torah study as men is different,

[8] See the *Birkhei Yosef* of the *Chida* (R. Yosef Chaim David Azuli, 18th c.) on OC 47:7: who says that women's obligation to learn is *not* by virtue of the *mitzva* of *talmud Torah*, for women are exempt, but they are obligated "for the sake of knowledge of their practical laws, and if they have attained expertise in these laws, they have no further obligation at all to study."

This returns us to the debate over the nature of the blessing women say over the Torah. Another line of thinking maintains that this blessing is neither *obligatory*, nor does it imply that women's study of their relevant laws constitutes independent Torah study. Among these who argue this way are the Vilna Gaon (18th c.) and the *Beit haLevi* (19th c.). The Vilna Gaon interprets women's blessing over the Torah to be merely permitted, not obligatory, just as women are permitted to say blessings when they choose to perform any of the *mitzvot* from which they are exempt, the category of "positive *mitzvot* dependent on specific times" (*mitzvot asei shehazman grama*).

See also the opinion of the *Beit haLevi*, *She'elot uTeshuvot* 1:6 Men have a positive *mitzva* to *study*, including those subjects that are not immediately relevant to them. Women's obligation, is only to "know" the *mitzvot* which apply to them, but this does not constitute *study*. Women's study is just a means to acquire the knowledge; and women are not commanded to *study their mitzvot*. Consequently, if a woman would acquire expertise in her *halakhot*, she would no longer be obligated to study them at all.

but the effect is the same. The case is made through a series of examples, analogies, and halakhic proofs.

#1: The Case of the Torah Study of the non-Jew

The first analogy is to someone else who also does not have a direct *mitzva* of *talmud Torah*, but nevertheless is obligated to study: the non-Jew. About a non-Jew who studies Torah, the Gemara says:

> R. Meir said: "From where do we know that even a non-Jew who engages in Torah is like a High Priest?" As it is written in Scripture [Lev. 18:5]: "[you shall therefore keep my laws and judgments] which if a *person* [*adam*] shall do them, he shall live in them." It does not say "priests, Levites, Israelites" who will do them but "a person." This teaches that even a non-Jew who engages in Torah is like a High Priest, referring to the seven *mitzvot* in which non-Jews are specifically commanded. (*Sanhedrin* 59a; cf. *Bava Kamma* 38a; *Avoda Zara* 3a)

Notes R. Schneerson, the status of being "like a High Priest" which the non-Jew who studies Torah acquires, is attained specifically by virtue of his or her learning *Torah*. As the *Tosafot* in the Gemara (*Bava Kamma* 38a; *Avoda Zara* 3a) comment on the striking use of the term "High Priest":

> As it is written, 'More precious is it than pearls' (*yekara mepninim*) (Proverbs 3:15) and this is explicated (*Horayot* 13a): 'More than the High Priest who enters into the inner sanctuary (*mekohen gadol hanikhnas lifnai velifnim*).

This is a word play on the similarity of the Hebrew words for "pearls" *pninim* and "deeply inside" *lifnai velifnim*—for entering before God into the "inner of inners," the Holy of Holies, the province of the High Priest. The image is striking indeed: it implies this learning elevates the non-Jew to one of the highest levels of closeness and intimacy with God—the level attained by the High Priest in the Temple on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year, when the High Priest entered the holiest of places.

On the other hand, there is a possible contradiction, for the same source in *Sanhedrin* 59a also cites the opinion of R. Yochanan that "A non-Jew who studies Torah is liable to the death penalty." The Gemara helps resolve it by saying that although the Torah is given as an inheritance to Israel alone, non-Jews *are* permitted to study it because they are commanded to fulfill their

special seven *mitzvot* (the prohibitions against theft, murder, illicit sexual relations, idolatry, blasphemy, eating a limb cut from a live animal, and the commandment to observe and set up courts of justice). Consequently, they need to study these laws *in order* to know how to perform these *mitzvot*.

But this still would not be enough to explain the talmudic statement that through his or her Torah learning the non-Jew becomes like the High Priest. For that implies they acquire the distinctive spiritual elevation of *engaging in Torah*, and that is quite different from practical performance of *mitzvot*. A Jew who performs *mitzvot*, for example, is never compared to the High Priest. We can infer, then, that the non-Jew's Torah study of the seven *mitzvot* is not *originally* (*lekhatchila*) learning for its own sake, but rather is done for another purpose, that of fulfilling the seven *mitzvot*; however since this learning is a *necessary and essential* preparation (and kind of training), it attains its own *independent* status, is *independent Torah study of its own* (*limud haTorah mitzad atzmo*). And that is indeed why the Gemara cited above can say that the non-Jew who studies Torah becomes "like the high Priest."

#2: The Case of Bringing a Sacrifice

The next example also comes from the realm of the Temple, from the *halakhot* of sacrifices. The Mishna in *Zevachim* (13:1) discusses the four steps involved in carrying out a sacrifice: slaughtering, receiving the blood, carrying of the blood, and sprinkling the blood on the altar. R. Shimon holds that one could perform the sacrifice without the carrying of the blood to the altar: one could, for example, slaughter it directly at the side of the altar and sprinkle the blood there without the intermediate act of carrying. R. Eliezer, however, holds that an incorrect thought or intention one has while in the process of carrying the blood to the altar invalidates the entire sacrifice (for example, that he would eat of the sacrifice after three days instead of immediately). Maimonides codifies R. Eliezer's opinion as the Halakha in his *Hilkhot Pesulei ha-Mukdashin* 13:4.

How can this possibly apply to women and Torah study? R. Schneerson cites the explanation of this Halakha by the Rogatchover Gaon (R. Yosef Rosen, 20th c.): even though carrying the blood to the altar is a preliminary step, taken *in order for* the act of sprinkling the blood that follows, it acquires its own distinctive and independent significance, to the extent that an incorrect

thought at this stage invalidates the entire sacrifice. The carrying becomes its own critical, independent act. The principle: *something which is a necessary means/cause to accomplish a certain result, attains its own independent identity and essence.*[9]

Now here R. Schneerson makes his critical and intriguing innovation in understanding the nature of women's Torah learning. *The same principle, he maintains, applies to women's Torah learning: their obligation to learn the laws relevant to them is for the sake of "knowing how to perform them" and not due to the mitzva of talmud Torah for its own sake. But this type of study is nevertheless a* necessary *means/condition* for *fulfilling their practical mitzvot. And thus, their learning attains its own independent significance and reality.*

So when women recite the daily morning blessings over Torah study, they are doing so over the *Torah itself*. R. Schneerson here stands clearly in opposition to the opinion of the Gaon of Vilna and *Beit haLevi* who argue that women are *not* obligated to say this blessing since they are exempt from the *mitzva* of Torah study; and that women's study of the laws pertaining to them does *not* constitute independently significant Torah study. In the strong words of the Gaon of Vilna commenting on the *Shulchan Arukh, Orach Chaim* (47:14): "The Torah shouts to us 'And you shall teach your sons' and not your daughters.' So how could women possibly say the blessing 'Who has commanded us [to engage in Torah] and 'Who has given us the Torah'?"

For R. Schneerson, however, women are fully entitled and *obligated* to say the entire blessing. And there is a further step: since their learning the *halakhot* of their special *mitzvot* attains its own independent significance, becomes its own goal of independent Torah study, this learning is therefore *not limited only* to the time that "she needs to know how to perform them" in practice. So a woman who already knows all the laws relevant to her and "how to perform them" still has a connection to study of Torah and is able to make the blessing.

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[9] The source is the Rogatchover Gaon's *Tzafnat Paneach* on the Torah, beginning of *Parshat Masei* vol 2, 51:3; see also his commentary on Maimonides' *More Nevuchim* 1:72 and his commentary on *Devarim*, 372. In the commentary on the *More Nevuchim*, he uses the phrase: "even though this is a cause, neverthess, it is necessary and becomes like an *etzem* [essence, independent existence]." See also R. Schneerson's further analysis of the way preparation for a certain action acquires a certain independent status in Halakha in his *Likkutei Sichot*, 17:187–89.

Deeper Analysis of the Blessings over the Torah

In another essay, taken from the same series of discourses of Shavu'ot, 1970, R. Schneerson extensively analyzes the halakhic nature of the *birkhot haTorah*, blessings over the Torah. Here, too, one finds a novel understanding of women's obligation in Torah study. The essential point of his complex argument there is the following concept. The Torah blessings are different from the blessings said over performing a *mitzva*. When one makes a blessing over a *mitzva*, one must make no temporal interruption whatsoever between the moment of making blessing and the subsequent action of performing the *mitzva*. However, the halakhic obligation upon a man to learn Torah is *continuous* and *constant* throughout the day and night, and if he interrupts between the blessing and his actual study, it is not accounted as a complete cessation—*hefsek* (with certain exceptions halakhically defined as complete "removal of one's mind," such as regular nightly sleep) because even during the time one interrupts (such as to attend to one's bodily needs, or engage in business), one is still under the obligation to study, and one's mind is directed to returning to one's study (assuming one has set times for learning). *From the obligation to engage in Torah study constantly, and the way in which interruptions are not counted as disconnections, R. Schneerson infers that a man has a connection to Torah even at the time he is not engaging in it. The essence of the obligation to engage in Torah study constantly* connects *a person to the mitzva. Therefore, his halakhic obligation is to make the blessing over Torah study only* once *during the day, not each and every time he begins to study during the day or night.*[10]

[10] See the talk by R. Joseph Soloveitchik, "On the Love of Torah: Impromptu Remarks at a Siyum." He notes that one's consciousness of the *mitzva* of *talmud Torah* is connected to the fact that is is continuously obligatory the whole day. He defines this as a "latent awareness... present even when one is engaged in other matters" and makes the analogy to the continuous consciousness a mother has of her child: "even when the mother works at a job or is distracted by some other activity, there is a natural, latent awareness of her child's existence. This awareness remains throughout her lifetime and can never be extinguished" and flows from her devotion and feeling that she and the child are one, and the child is at the center of her life. The same, he says, is true for Torah; even when engaged in other necessary activities, the latent awareness of it never ceases. For it is the center of our lives and desires And that is why the text of the blessing is: *la'asok bedivrei Torah* and not *lilmod Torah*—to "engage in the words of Torah" as all encompassing involvement, rather than the phrase "to study Torah." For the blessing refers not only to the cognitive act, but to this continuous latent awareness and deep commitment and connection to Torah. *Shiurei haRav: A Conspectus of the Public Lectures of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik*, ed. Joseph Epstein (NJ: Ktav, 1994) 181–85. I thank R. Jeffrey Saks for this reference , and other insightful remarks on this topic.

But what does this have to do with women, who do not have a direct mitzvah of *talmud Torah* day and night? In fact, says R. Schneerson, it helps us explain R. Schneur Zalman's specifically writing that women recite the blessing over the Torah because they are obligated in their practical *mitzvot*, to know how to perform them. Had he not specified this as the reason, we might have inferred that unlike men, women would indeed need to make the blessing *each time* that they begin to study during the day or night, and not just *once* a day. That they are also required to make the blessing only *once* a day thus implies that there is a similar *constancy of obligation* in women's Torah study. How is this so? Just as men bless the Torah only once a day due to their *continuous and constant obligation in Torah study*, so too, the *mitzvot* which women are halakhically obligated to learn are *mitzvot* in which women are *obligated the entire day*. Consequently, they too have an obligation to learn the entire day. And so they too make this blessing only once a day.[11]

[11] See also the *Bayit Chadash* (*Bach*, R. Yoel Sirkes, 17th c.) ch. 47 on the issue in the *Tur*, YD 246:7 about the problem of women making the blessing on the Torah even though R. Eliezer says one who teaches his daughter Torah is as if he teaches her *tiflut*. He cites the *Maharshal* that "Women have a connection [*sheychut*] to the words of Torah when they study the laws that apply to them."

R. Schneerson's extensive analysis of the halakhic nature of the blessing over the Torah was published in the same volume of *Likkutei Sichot*, vol. 14, 148–55, and then later in *Chiddushim uVe'urim leShas* Chapter 2, "*Birkhat haTorah*," 3–11. The analysis deserves its own full exposition, but here is only one further key point among the many supporting arguments.

The blessings over the Torah, although included in blessings over *mitzvot*, are distinguished from them. A blessing over *mitzvot* falls into the halakhic category of "blessings of gratitude" (*birkhot shevach*) to God for "sanctifying us with His *mitzvot*" whereas the blessing over the Torah is a blessing over "the essence of Torah study," (besides the fulfilling of the *mitzvot* which this learning includes). R. Schneur Zalman in his *Shulchan Arukh*, OC 47:1 writes: "A person should ensure that the precious vessel of God in which He delights every day [*mishtashe'a*] should be so important to him that he makes the blessing over it with a joy greater than over all the pleasures of the world." This formulation indicates that this blessing is *like* (but even more than) the category of "blessings of enjoyment" (*birkhot nehenin*). For one makes the blessing even if he does not understand... it is not limited to the pleasure of understanding the Torah, but is over the joy over the

This subtle reasoning leads to quite an extraordinary conclusion: both men *and women* have an obligation to study Torah the entire day. For men the obligation comes through the direct *mitzva of talmud Torah*. That is the way it is codified in the *Shulchan Arukh* of R. Yosef Caro, *Yore De'a*, "Laws of Torah Study" 246:1: "Every man is obligated to fix times for his Torah study in the day and the evening as it is written "And you should meditate in it day and night [Joshua 1:8]." For women, this obligation of continuous study comes via the halakhic channel of the *mitzvot* she is commanded to perform.

Now this perhaps explains why R. Schneur Zalman in his codification of the laws of Torah study in his version of the *Shulchan Arukh* did not write that "women are *exempt* from *talmud Torah*" but rather that "Women are not in/do not have the *mitzva of talmud Torah*." And also why he specifically wrote that women make the blessing over Torah due to their obligation to study their

essence of the Torah itself and God's gift of it to Israel.

As to the other halakhic reason for making the blessing over the Torah only once a day—that it is like all the morning blessings in general which are said only once a day—this still supports the idea of women's continuous obligation to study. R. Schneur Zalman writes in ch. 46 of his *Shulchan Arukh*, OC, that the Sages established all these morning blessings according to the order of the world; even though the creatures enjoy and benefit from these pleasures (such as sight, walking, bodily strength, the earth and heavens) *continuously* the entire day, they bless God only the *first time* that they experience these things each day.

R. Bakshi Doron, the Chief Sephardic Rabbi of Israel writes in a recent article that the son of the *Beit haLevi*, R. Chaim of Brisk, has an interesting way of understanding the issue. R. Yitzchak haLevi, the grandson of the *Beit haLevi* quotes his father R. Chaim (the *Beit haLevi*'s son) to say that the blessing over the Torah is not a blessing over the *mitzva* of *talmud Torah*, but rather the essence of Torah itself requires a blessing. Women have no direct *mitzva* of *talmud Torah* but they have what is called in halakhic terminology, the *cheftza*, the "object" of Torah, and so they make a blessing over it as well. The blessing is over the essence of Torah learning and not over the *mitzva* of *talmud Torah*.

In this light, R. Doron, says, we can better understand the relation of the blessing over Torah study to the morning prayers and how Maimonides deals with it in chapter 7 of his *Laws of Prayer*. He points out that the blessing over the Torah is not a blessing over a *mitzva*, otherwise Maimonides woud have placed it in his section on the Laws of Bessings; rather it is part of the *mitzva* of prayer, of serving God with all one's heart. The morning blessings are also part of fulfilling the *mitzva* to love and stand in awe of God and serve Him, which is the purpose of prayer. So too, the blessing over the Torah is said before study of Torah, which itelf is the way in which one attains love and awe of God. "*Bein Birkhot haShachar VeChiyuv Me'a Berakhot Bekhol Yom*" in *Melilot: Mechkarim Toraniyim* (Kiryat Arba: Makhon leRabbanei Yishuvim, 1997) 327–28.

relevant *mitzvot* as his *first* and primary reason: for through this learning women indeed do have a connection to Torah study *in its essence* and of itself. Their learning of Torah to keep the *mitzvot* of Shabbat, for example, is not just part of the *mitzva* of keeping Shabbat, but intrinsic Torah study of its own.

To sum up the subtle distinctions: there is (1) *talmud Torah*, and there is (2) *mitzvat talmud Torah*. Or, there is (1) the obligation of *talmud Torah*, and (2) the obligation of *mitzvat talmud Torah*. Women have the obligation of *talmud Torah* (but they "are not *in the mitzva* of *talmud Torah*"); nevertheless, their study attains its own independent status as Torah and bestows on them all the distinctiveness and elevation of intrinsic Torah study. *Their not having the direct mitzva of Torah study does* not *remove them from connection to the essence of Torah study.*

Again: *The key principle is that something which is a necessary means/cause to accomplish a certain result, attains its own independent identity and essence.* All of which leads to a remarkable transformation in understanding the nature and result of women's halakhic obligation to study Torah: although the halakhic rationale is based on her need to know the *mitzvot* that pertain practically to her, she must *study Torah* to accomplish this goal; and her study, therefore, is not just a secondary category of preparation to do a *mitzva* but—as an essential and necessary cause—it attains its own independent status and identity as Torah study. In sum for both men and women, there are two channels to the same end, which is connection to the essence of Torah study: for men the halakhic rationale is the direct *mitzva of talmud Torah*; for women the halakhic rationale is the obligation to *know how to perform mitzvot* that pertain to her. Though the pathways, or "halakhic catalysts" are different, both arrive at the same place. A woman's *talmud Torah* has all the same qualities of spiritual greatness and preciousness as a man's; it is not merely an accessory or secondary form of study.[12]

[12] There are many interesting practical ramifications to this question about the nature of women's blessings on the Torah and her obligation in Torah study, and whether her learning is only a *hekhsher mitzva* or Torah study itself. For example, were women not obligated in *talmud Torah*, they would not be obligated in the *mitzva* of writing their own Torah, which is for the purpose of study. Also the question of whether a person who is not related must tear *kri'a* (symbolic tearing of the clothes) at the bedside of a woman who has died. One tears *kri'a* because a person who dies is compared to a sefer Torah that has been burned, in which case all who are present are obligated to tear as a sin of mourning. See

IV. Further Questions and their Resolution

But we can't rest here. This contention still needs to address some of the questions raised in sections two and three, and other difficulties which now arise, especially concerning the issue of the reward for study.

Question #1: The Issue of Reward. "One Who is Commanded and Performs" Versus "One Who is *Not* Commanded and Performs"

One could argue that even if women's study of their *halakhot* does entail essential Torah learning, it is still ultimately the effect of their obligation in their relevant *mitzvot*. Women do not have the direct *mitzva of* Torah study per se, and so one can not say that they would receive the reward of someone who is in the halakhic category of one who is "commanded and performs the *mitzva* (*kemetzuve ve'ose*)" of *talmud Torah*.

Explanation: In fact, this distinction now will help answer question#2 in section II above where we asked why the Gemara does not specifically say that women acquire merit by virtue of their learning the laws relevant to them. It will also help us understand that Gemara in a new way. The Gemara in *Sota* (21a) had said that a woman does not have the merit of Torah study to protect her from the bitter waters because she is "not commanded" in Torah study. We can now *re-understand* this statement to mean not that one can't find *any obligation of Torah study for women*, but rather to be about *zekhut Torah,* "the merit of Torah." In other words, it is speaking about the *reward* for the one who is commanded in the *mitzva* of learning Torah; one who is in the halakhic category of "one who is commanded and does." It is specifically that kind of reward (the merit of the *mitzva of talmud Torah*) that suffices for full protection. When she assists her husband and children in learning, concludes, the

Radbaz on *Moed Katan* 25a. If a woman is exempt from the *mitzva* of *talmud Torah*, she would not be considered as a sefer Torah. Other ramifications have to do with a woman's obligation to hear the reading of the portion of the week in synagogue. See R. Moshe Weinberger "Teaching Torah to Women" *Journal of Halacha and Contemporary Society* 9 (Spring, 1985) 32–33, n30. See also pages 36–37 about the difference it would make in a case where extra money originally designated for a men's yeshiva could be transferred to the account of a local women's yeshiva.

Gemara, and divides the reward with them, then she indeed has the specific merit of Torah, which fully protects from the bitter waters.

A woman does acquire the special elevation and preciousness of Torah in learning her relevant *halakhot*, but since she is not in the category of "one who is commanded and does," she does not acquire the special merit of Torah studied as a result of a directly commanded *mitzva*. *The* difference in reward, *though, does not disconnect her either from her obligation to study, or from the essence of Torah itself, and the spiritual elevation of those who engage in it.*

Question #2: Dividing the Reward

R. Schneerson will now proceed to also re-connect her to the reward of those who are in the category of "one who is commanded and does." When we examine carefully the end of the Gemara in *Sota* 21a, and then R. Schneur Zalman's Laws of Torah Study, we note his phrasing "if she assists her son or her husband personally or materially to engage in Torah study, she divides the reward with them, and her reward is great since they are commanded and accomplish it through her." This statement raises another question: why, in fact, *should* she divide the reward with them for *their Torah study* simply because she helps them?

If we compare it to the case of someone who gives money to a poor person, which the poor person then uses to fulfill a *mitzva* (for example, she or he buys food for Shabbat with the money), we don't find in any place that the giver of the charity then has a *part in the mitzva* the poor person fulfills with the donated money. The donor only has the reward of fulfilling the *mitzva* of giving charity.

Explanation: When someone gives charity in this situation, the money then becomes the property of the poor person. So when the beneficiary afterwards does a *mitzva* with this money, he or she is performing his or her *own mitzva*. But in our case, the woman assists her son or husband *from the very beginning* (*milekhatchila*) in fulfilling the *mitzva* of Torah study. She performs such actions as to be a partner in this *mitzva,* assists in the *essence* of

the *mitzva*, and so *divides* the reward with them; that is, she receives a portion of the reward of the husband and son.[13]

Parallel Example in the *Mitzva* of Having Children

Lest one think this is an over-reading of the text, there is halakhic illustration of this idea in the obligation to have children: The *Ran* (R. Nissim 1310–1375) in his commentary on the Talmud writes that even though a woman is not directly commanded (*metzuve*) to have children (*Yevamot* 65b) "nevertheless she has a *mitzva* because she assists her husband to fulfill *his mitzva*" (*Kiddushin* 2b). The rationale: the husband is only able to fulfill his *mitzva* in partnership with his wife, as it is written in Genesis 2:24 "and he should cling to his wife and they will become one flesh." Since her assistance is critical in the *mitzva*, "she also has a *mitzva*."

R. Schneerson now applies this explanation to women's assisting her husband or son in Torah study, to clarify why she "divides" the reward with them: when their *mitzva* of Torah study is accomplished due to her participation she, too, also has a *mitzva*.

Possible Objection: What Share of Which *Mitzva*?

But the *Ran*'s phrase "She has a *mitzva*" is somewhat ambiguous. We could read it in two possible ways:

1) "She has a *mitzva* (*stam*)": in the plain sense of a regular *mitzva*. That is, she has in fact no commandment to fulfill the obligation to have children, but since she helps her husband to fulfill *his mitzva*, she also has *a mitzva*. Yet she does not attain "the great *mitzva* (*mitzva rabba*) of be fruitful and multiply," of procreation (*Tosafot*, *Shabbat* 4a; *Gittin* 41b).
2) "She has a *mitzva*": this would mean she has a share in the *mitzva* itself of *procreation*.

This ambiguity casts doubt on the exact nature of her reward for helping her son or husband fulfill the *mitzva* of Torah study. To resolve the issue, we

[13] This is in accord with the Halakha in R. Yosef Caro's *Shulchan Arukh*, *Yore De'a* 246:1 (and also in the Laws of Torah Study in R. Schneur Zalman's *Shulchan Arukh*, Laws of Torah Study 3:4) that someone who is unable to study Torah can stipulate with his friend to learn Torah and assist him and it will be accounted as if "*he learns himself*" and "*he will divide the reward with him*."

return to the source in the Gemara *Sota* (21a), and we now understand its specific wording in a new way. The Talmud says פלגאן בהדייהו "she *divides* with him" the reward, and R. Schneur Zalman writes similarly in his *Shulchan Arukh*: "*...sheya'asok beTorah, choleket skhar imahem.*" This precise language, *choleket*, "she divides" and not the more commonly used phrase, *notelet*, "she *takes* reward"—proves that it is the second sense that she has a part in actual *mitzva of talmud Torah*. As explained before: since the husband or son, *are commanded* (*metzuvim*) in the *mitzva* of *talmud Torah* and accomplish it with her aid, she has a portion in the fulfilling of this *mitzva*, that is, a portion in the *mitzva* of *Torah study*. And therefore "she *divides*" *the reward with them*. This indeed means, says R. Schneerson, that she is sharing the reward as one who *is* in the category of "being commanded and does [*metzuve ve'ose*]."

In other words, the text in *Sota* is doing two things according to R. Schneerson's reading: (1) *not* disconnecting women from the obligation to study Torah, but only speaking of the *difference in reward* between her form of study and that of men; and (2) on the other hand, giving her access to the same reward through the path of assisting her husband and children in their study.

He has now strikingly re-read this Gemara to mean that women *do* indeed have a connection to the *mitzva* of *talmud Torah*, and a reward similar to that of men. Again, the halakhic channel is different, but she can share in that form of reward, as well as the spiritual elevation and benefit of her own independent Torah study.

Possible Objection #2

But we are now faced with another question about the rationale R. Schneur Zalman gives for women saying the blessings over the Torah. If she indeed has a *portion* in the *mitzva of the talmud Torah* of her husband and son, and she *divides* the reward with them in the highest category of "one who is commanded and does" why didn't he then cite this in his *Shulchan Arukh* section on "Laws of the Blessings over the Torah," at least as an additional reason for why women make the blessing over the Torah?

Let's return to the analogy of a woman sharing in the *mitzva* of procreation. The critical difference is that her assisting her husband to fulfill that *mitzva* is entirely *voluntary*. If she desires, she can choose to marry, help him and so

acquire a portion in fulfilling this *mitzva*. But she herself is not halakhically *commanded* [*metzuve*] to marry and procreate. She would only actually have a share in this *mitzva* if she decides to do so in practice. Similarly, assisting her husband and son in the study of Torah is also a *voluntary* action on her part. If she so desires, she *can* in this way participate in the *mitzva of talmud Torah* as "one who is commanded and fulfills" but she has no obligation to do so.

And *that* is why R. Schneur Zalman does *not* cite this as an additional reason for a woman's saying the blessing for Torah study. For a woman has no obligation to do so. If she did voluntarily assist them and connected to Torah study that way, her blessing over the Torah could fall in the category of the *optional* blessings women are allowed to make over *mitzvot* from which are exempt, but choose to perform. And one could not use that as a basis for why all women should be *obligated* to make the blessing over Torah study.

Now we can finally explain R. Schneur Zalman's precise wording and logical organization of his "Laws of *Torah Study*." The order was:

1) "A woman is not in/does not have the *mitzva* of *talmud Torah*."
2) "Nevertheless, if she assists her son or her husband personally or materially to engage in Torah study, she divides the reward with them, and her reward is great since they are commanded and accomplish it through her."
3) "In any case, women are also obligated to learn the laws that pertain to them and to know them."

R. Schneerson had asked at the very beginning of his analysis, why the order of #3 and #2 was not reversed, since a woman's obligation to learn all the laws that pertain to her seems more universally applicable. We have now also seen that a woman's learning also acquires its own independent identity and precious value as Torah study per se; it is not just a preparation to perform *mitzvot*. But though she connects to Torah study that way, she does not *directly* connect to the *mitzva of Torah study*; instead the connection ultimately stems from her practical *mitzvot*. And *that* is why the order is not reversed—for the order goes according to her connection to the *mitzva of talmud Torah* in the category "one who is commanded and does." Yet though she is not "in the *mitzva* of *talmud Torah*," she still *can* connect to that very *mitzva of talmud Torah* and all parts of Torah as "one who is commanded and does" and divides the reward, through reason #2 assisting her husband or son in their learning.

So in the end, R. Schneerson has analyzed the text to imply that women can have it both ways: (1) independent Torah study of the same spiritual quality and level as men, and (2) reward for Torah study as "one who is commanded and does." We have come a long way from the initial surface understanding of the Gemara's statement "you shall teach your sons and not your daughters."

The Inner Meaning of *Talmud Torah*

In the concluding paragraphs of R. Schneerson's original text, he placed his halakhic analysis in the broader framework of what he calls *pnimiyut ha'inyan*, the "inner meaning." By this, he means chassidic philosophy's understanding of the ultimate spiritual and theological goals and effects of Torah study. Ultimately, for R. Schneerson, one cannot separate the various parts of the Torah—all are part of *Torah achat* "One Torah." His methodology, however, assumes that each part of Torah has its own separate principles of interpretation, its own rules. One does not confuse these realms with one another, nor apply the analytical principles of one to the other (for example, the rules of midrashic interpretation to the rules of halakhic reasoning, or the principles for interpreting Maimonides with those for *chassidut*). One first must exhaust the analysis of a given part of the Torah on its own terms, which he has done here so far for Halakha. Only afterwards, does he then show the unity of the parts and how each reflects the other.

Moreover, I would add, that Halakha cannot and should not be discussed without reference to these ultimate inner meanings. For "Halakha," in the end, is meant to be the "path" on which we walk in this life; the word itself is derived from the Hebrew verb *halakh*, "to walk." Without the broader context, halakhic discourse might seem almost "too close" to the ground on which we are trying to walk. But when seen in context, it is indeed what enables us to move gracefully across the complicated and confusing terrain of this difficult world. So what, in the end, is this entire intricate analysis of the *mitzva* of *talmud Torah* for women all about on an "inner spiritual level"? R. Schneerson interprets as follows:

> God and Israel are often metaphorically called "husband and wife" in the midrashic and prophetic literature (the entire biblical book, the Songs of Songs is based on the metaphor of God and Israel as a pair of lovers). The ultimate purpose of the creation in the command given to the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, is to "fill the earth and conquer it" (Genesis 1:28). The Hebrew word for "world" *olam*, is associated with the word *helem*, "concealment." In

> other words, the world is, by definition, a place where God is concealed. To fill and conquer the "earth" means then, on a deeper level, to draw down into nature, the highest divine light, which can penetrate this concealment, and illuminate it.[14]

The classical interpretation of the word "conquer" in the Talmud (*Yevamot* 25b) is that "it is the way of the man to conquer, not the way of the woman" (and the *mitzva* or procreation falls only upon the man). R. Schneerson, however, now reads this metaphorically to mean that the infinite, higher power of God ("the man") is needed to accomplish this transformative task ("conquer") because finite creatures cannot change and elevate the world solely by their own natural powers; they need the power of a light higher than nature—and that is given to them through the Torah. For the Torah, as a supernal divine light, remains higher than the world even after it "descends" into the world.

That is the deeper meaning of the verse: "wisdom is better than pearls (*peninim*) and all things that are desired do not compare to it" (Proverbs 8:11). The rabbis have said that this "wisdom" refers to Torah, to which nothing can compare, even "the things of Heaven" (*Moed Katan* 9). "Things of Heaven" refers to the *mitzvot*, which are holiness enclothed in physical objects and actions, i.e., the leather straps of *tefillin*, the parchment and ink of a *mezuza*, the giving of charity with coins, even the verbal articulation of Torah study. But, concludes R. Schneerson, even after the Torah is "enclothed" in physicality, it still transcends it, as in the famous verse: "Is not my word like fire" (Jeremiah 23:29; *Berakhot* 22a). Torah is the category of "Heaven" itself. And through study of Torah, the Jews unite with Torah and so become the "masters of the world," i.e., able to bring this divine light into nature and transform the world.

Underlying R. Schneerson's reference to this union with Torah is the classical Chabad-chassidic understanding of the meaning of Torah study. Although Chabad literature is full of discussions of this subject, the basic source is R. Schneur Zalman's famous spiritual-theological guidebook, the *Tanya*, chapter five. The key idea put forth there is that when one grasps a concept intellectually, one "encompasses" it; the concept in turn is "encompassed by,

[14] *Likkutei Sichot*, 14:43.

enveloped, enclothed in" one's intellect; and at the same time one's mind is also "enclothed" in the concept. When one studies and grasps any Halakha in Torah, which is "the wisdom and will of God," the same union occurs. Writes R. Schneur Zalman in that chapter:

> One has thus comprehended, grasped, and encompassed with one's intellect, the will and wisdom of the Holy One, blessed be He, whom no thought can grasp, nor His will or wisdom, except when they are clothed in the *halakhot* that have been set out for us. At the same time, one's intellect is also enclothed in them. *This is a wonderful union (yichud nifla) to which no other union can compare, and to which there is no parallel at all in the material world—to become one and united from every side and angle.* [italics added]

And this, adds R. Schneur Zalman, defines the infinitely great superiority of the commandment to know and comprehend the Torah (*yedi'at haTorah*) over all the *mitzvot* involving action, "even the *mitzva* to study the Torah which is fulfilled by speech." In all these *mitzvot* of action or speech, one is encompassed by the divine light; with knowledge of the Torah, however, one encompasses within oneself the wisdom of God—to the extent that one grasps as much as one is able to of the knowledge of Torah, each according to their intellect and capacities. This knowledge is absorbed within, as the "bread and food" of the soul, which like physical nourishment, becomes transformed into one's very self.

R. Schneerson concludes his essay by saying that it is this union of the Jews with Torah via their study that gives them the power to change the nature of world, transform, and elevate ("to conquer") it. And thus *Benei Yisra'el* as the "woman" who "assists" her "husband" (God) in this work and this "*mitzva*"—becomes a "partner with God" (*Shabbat* 119b) in fulfilling the purpose of creation.

There are two final critical points here: First, R. Schneerson has once again taken a classical interpretation which, on the surface, seems to relegate "the woman" to a secondary role ("the way of the man is to conquer") and subtly re-read it so that "woman," (now signifying the service and strength of the entire Jewish people in their intimate relation with God), shares the position of the "man" in "conquering the world." This is the chassidic understanding of his previous halakhic analysis of the nature of woman's participation in and reward for helping a man in his *mitzva* of procreation.

Second, regardless of the halakhic channel through which one reaches the essence of Torah study, (be it through the man's direct *mitzva* of *talmud Torah* or the woman's study of her necessary *mitzvot*), the highest level is union with God through knowledge of Torah, a level higher even than the level of "*mitzva*." *It is not a question of quantification, but the transformative connection to the very essence of talmud Torah.* A woman's study involves this same "wonderful union (*yichud nifla*)." *And this, I would emphasize, ought to be the ultimate center of all our contemporary discussions of women's (and men's) Torah study, whether one is able to study only a few verses of the Bible a day, or master an entire tractate of Talmud.*

What I find striking about the path R. Schneerson has taken us on is his reading of these texts to affirm the deep connection of women to the essence of *talmud Torah*, and the assertion of their constant halakhic obligation to engage in it. I mentioned at the beginning that his conclusions are reached without recourse to historical, psychological, or sociological explanations. His argument so far has not been based on any assumptions about "women's nature" or the quality of women's minds, or educational needs of the present time in the face of feminist challenges, but on the use of acute logic. On the one hand, I find this an affirmation of the integrity of the halakhic process itself. Other halakhic commentators indeed have analyzed these texts differently. One needs to decide, finally, whose logic is most compelling. But logic itself is also compelled by and compels other considerations, is part of a larger worldview and understanding of human nature, history, and theology. So we need now to ask what are the historical, psychological, sociological and cultural implications of this reading?

Implications—Philosophical and Cultural

This radical understanding of women's relation to Torah study also needs to find expression in the actual lives of women, the way they are taught, the way they perceive their relation to Torah, the way men perceive women's relation to Torah study, and the life of their communities. R. Schneerson spoke about these issues in a non-halakhic framework in an extensive talk on the role of women in Jewish education given in 1990, on the holiday of Lag Ba'omer. In this talk, he refers again to the basic talmudic and halakhic sources about women's Torah study, but in a predominantly sociological, theological, and cultural context. He draws out the practical implications, exhorts women to

increase their study and teaching, and asks for the community at large to support this endeavor.[15] What is said subtly in the framework of technical halakhic analysis is proclaimed loudly in a different rhetorical situation.

A Woman's Involvement in the Education of Her Family: Enabler as Participant

Based on our first source from the Talmud (*Kiddushin* 29a), the Halakha specifies the father as the one upon whom is incumbent the *mitzva*, the formal legal obligation, to teach his children Torah. In actual practice, R. Schneerson notes, it is the mother who to a large degree, directs and guides the education and behavior of the children; he then proceeds to re-read in an innovative way, the other classical source in *Sota* (21a) about women's acquiring merit through assisting their husband's and son's learning.

At first glance, the woman's role in these sources seems quite passive; the Gemara in *Berakhot* (17a) describes it as "bringing their sons to study Torah in school, sending their husbands to study in the *beit midrash* and waiting for them until they return home." According to *Rashi*, the classic and most famous talmudic commentator (12th c.), this also means women giving their husbands permission to study in another city. On the same description in the source in *Sota* (21a), *Rashi* comments that "she does not engage in study; she takes pains that her children and husband study..."

R. Schneerson expands the definition of assistance and "taking pains" to include the *many different ways* in which women encourage and strengthen their children's study—among which are a woman's interest and involvement in the *learning of* her children (from primary school to yeshiva). Learning "of the children" becomes "learning with the children." For example, when she inquires about and asks them to review their lessons for her, she engages in a kind of learning *with* them. And, he adds, her mode of learning is often different—having more warmth and feeling than that of the father who tends more to "examine" the children. That feminine style he defines as adding a special "liveliness and enthusiasm," and as the type of education most needed and proven most successful in our generation—one emanating from "soft

[15] *Likkutei Sichot, Parshat Emor, Erev Lag ba'Omer*, 5750 (1990), "On the Obligation of Jewish Women in Education and Study of Torah," 171–75.

language" and a feeling of closeness and love rather than a hierarchical, more confrontational style.

There is also a reciprocal effect: through a woman's learning with her children, she increases *her own* study, including the parts of Torah that that she is not halakhically obligated to learn. As we saw before, she also receives a reward for that type of optional study as well, and is permitted to make the blessing of the Torah over it. But even the material she is obligated to learn, the laws necessary and relevant to her, in reality comprise such an abundance of material R. Schneerson adds, that "Would that all men were expert in all of this material women are obligated to learn."[16] In a footnote, he adds: "Since we are closer and closer to the time of final Redemption, and as Maimonides says, one must await the coming of the Messiah every day, also many of the laws of the Temple Sacrifices, etc." Also essential for her are *pnimiyut haTorah*, i.e., chassidic philosophy, and its explanations of the meaning of faith, love, awe, and the Unity of God, for women, too, are commanded "to know the God of your fathers and serve him with a complete heart." In sum, this reading of the sources has subtly redefined women's role from passive observer to active participant and model pedagogue.

Re-reading *Tiflut*

Yet what about the rest of the text in *Sota* (21a), R. Eliezer's famous opinion that the majority of women's minds are not disposed to Torah study, and that to teach them is to teach them *tiflut*. Here R. Schneerson's rejoinder is historical: in Jewish history there were many righteous woman who were expert and learned in Oral Torah from the time of *tannaim* on through succeeding generations. Many of these women debated matters of Halakha with and also edited the books of their scholarly husbands. As R. Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson (1880–1950), R. Schneerson's father-in-law and immediate predecessor as the head of the Chabad movement reports in his memoirs, the women in R. Schneur Zalman's own family were very learned, and R. Yosef Yitzchak himself educated his daughters in that manner.[17] In the

[16] See also n4 above.

[17] *Iggerot Kodesh* of R. Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn (*RaYaTZ*) Vol 5, p. 336; *Sefer Zichronot*, Vol 2, ch. 80. R. Schneerson's wife was one of the daughters of R. Yosef

recent generations, women have been able to made great intellectual advances, and the generalization that "most women's minds are not disposed to Torah study" no longer applies. It is now permissible not only to teach the select few fit for advanced study, but all Jewish women.[18]

As to the curriculum: in addition to learning their practical *mitzvot*, women are not only *permitted* to study Oral Torah, but they *must* do so, for they are also now exposed to many external kinds of study and influence. Their curriculum should not just consist of digests of the laws but also include the reasons for the laws, and the intellectual debates surrounding them. Interestingly, R. Schneerson does not make any distinction between the forms of women and men's intellectual pleasure: "For the nature of a person, male or female, is to delight in and enjoy analytical study more; and through that form of study women develop their talents and abilities (*armumiyut*—cleverness) in the spirit of the holiness of Torah." This last comment is also a creative re-reading of *Rashi*'s interpretation of R. Eliezer's use of the word *tiflut* in the context of the discussion of the merits women can acquire to suspend the punishment of the bitter waters in the case of suspected adultery. *Tiflut*, *Rashi* says, means *armumiyut*, i.e., "craftiness, cleverness, cunning." That is, if a

Yitzchak. In Vol. 4 of *Iggerot Kodesh*, there is an interesting letter from R. Yosef Yitzchak to Chaya Sima Michaelover, a young woman in the Chabad *Achot haTemimim* group in Riga around 1938. In answer to her query on her spiritual situation, he gives a long excursus on the importance and methods of intense, analytical Torah study. I thank R. Naftali Loewenthal for this reference.

[18] There is a much earlier halakhic source for the development of this view. See the *Prisha* (R. Yehoshua Falk, 17th c.) on the *Tur*, *Yore De'a* 246 [115] who wrote that if a woman taught herself and studies properly she is no longer included in the category of "most women whose minds are not adapted to be taught. There would then be no prohibition on teaching her. "

For the further development of this view by others in the modern period, and for an exhaustive review of the entire halakhic history of woman and Talmud Torah, see R. Moshe Weinberger, "Teaching Torah to Women" in the *Journal of Halacha and Contemporary Society* 9 (Spring, 1985): 19–52. See also Shoshana Zolty, "*And All Your Children Shall Be Learned*": *Women and the Study of Torah in Jewish Law and History* (NJ: Aronson, 1993). For an excellent anthology in Hebrew of all the talmudic and halakhic sources, and *she'elot uteshuvot* on the topic, see the collection edited by R. Chanan Schlesinger, *Lelo Nechama* (in memory of Nechama Leibowitz z"tzl), published in 1997 by Nishmat, the Jerusalem Center for Advanced Torah Study for Women. I am also grateful to R. Schlesinger who was one of my own Talmud teachers, for his encouragement and support of women's study of Talmud.

righteous women of our generation, may the full and complete redemption come.

I conclude with some personal remarks: As I was about to finish this essay, a building contractor wearing a *kippa*, and kissing the *mezuza* at the entrance of my Jerusalem apartment, entered to give an estimate for a job. He saw an Aramaic dictionary on a table and asked what it was for. I replied that I had been doing research for an article on the *mitzva* of *talmud Torah* for women. Jerusalem repairman are never shy about offering their opinions on Torah. "Ah," he smiled, "but there isn't any!" "Ah," I answered, "you would be surprised. Yes, there is; it's not so simple." I hope that this essay will ultimately have some effect in changing this popular attitude. I hope, too, that I have reinforced the faith of those who believe in the halakhic system, and somewhat illumined those less convinced—made them aware of its depth and creative flexibility.

The greatest advances women can make in all areas of contemporary Jewish life will come, I believe, first and foremost through *derekh halimud*, the way of serious learning—through their deeply engaging and mastering the wellsprings of all parts of Torah. Any progressive contemporary theology and politics for Jewish women must, finally, rest on a vision of the unity of Torah—on faith in and engagement with all its facets, Halakha, Kabbalah, philosophy, Midrash, Bible, Talmud. In *partnership* with God, we renew the revelation of the Torah daily, and labor to repair and redeem the world. We take delight in God's Torah... and God takes delight in ours.[23]

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[23] See the famous midrashim describing God's *shashua* with the Torah; Midrash *Tehillim* 90:4 interpreting the line from Proverbs 8:30 "then I was before Him as a nursling, delighting (*shashuim*) every day, playing before him always"; *Bereishit Rabba*, 88:2; *Tanchuma* "*Vayeshev*" 4; Zohar 2:151a. And the chassidic-kabbalistic commentary on the meaning of this pleasure by R. Schneur Zalman in his *Likkutei Torah*, *Bamidbar* 18:3. Thus too, his addition of the word *shashua* in his formulation of the blessing over the Torah.