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The Significance of Learning As Reflected in Talmudic
Literature, with Special Consideration of The Halachic Aspects

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the
Master of Hebrew Letters Degree
and Ordination

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שחרת על לבי אחבת היחדות

Digest

In this thesis the writer has dealt with the Rabbinic concept of adult education. Throughout Jewish history our people have been constantly exhorted to broaden their knowledge and make study a vital part of their lives. Learning was not to be restricted to any one group of people, but was urged for all as a prerequisite to a mature understanding of life.

We are told that learning helps make man good. The Kala is in many ways similar to our attempt to establish adult education institutes, whereby laymen can study various subjects and help broaden themselves with new knowledge.

Going to school for enjoyment and not merely for course credit is implied where you are told to like learning for learning's sake. This would seem to have special meaning for adults who register in adult institutes.

We have seen examples of scholars who though poor have achieved fame in learning. Men like Hillel have forever made their mark in Judaism. Though there is much scholarly opinion regarding the teaching of women, the majority seems to oppose the idea of teaching them.

We have learned that a teacher needs patience and understanding. He should indulge in a continuous search

for self growth and must be of sound ethical and moral character,

The student is enjoined to ask questions when he has them and not to remain silent because of embarrassment. We learn that the Rabbis encouraged the use of all kinds of study aids, while also encouraging group study. It is difficult to draw any definite attitude regarding the acceptance of fees for teaching though there is universal agreement as to the spiritual reward.

Introduction

This thesis deals with the Rabbinic concept of adult education. That the Rabbis were preoccupied with this problem is evident throughout the Talmud. It will be my task to gather their comments and analyze their attitudes as it relates to the various aspects of this very important question.

Though I have concentrated primarily on Talmudic sources in this work, I will also make references to the Codes. This offers us an excellent opportunity to see how Jewish practice determined by the Talmud, is made formal in the Codes. The Codes dealing with adult education are found in "Hilkoth Talmud Torah," which is Chapter 246 of the Yoreh Deah. I have used the references of the Beer Hagola, by Moses Ribkes of Amsterdam, as the main source for the Talmudic material. I consulted secondary literature, e.g. "History of Jewish Education," by Nathan Drazin, the most recent English work on this subject. I was unable, however, to use this material for this thesis.

Our age is very interested in all phases of psychology. Especially is there great concern with the problems involved in both teaching and learning. Many colleges and universities have developed distinguished departments which are primarily devoted to research in these fields. In light of this interest, it is highly significant to

note the attitude of the Rabbis of old to these problems.

The role of the woman in Judaism has always been a subject of considerable interest. In recent years it has been a matter of great importance for Reform Judaism. Their discussion regarding women not only tells us much about the status of women in Talmudic times, but gives us a deep understanding of the Rabbinic mind as it grappled with the problem of teaching women.

The Rabbis were vitally interested in impressing all Jews with the importance of learning. We are told that all men should study, regardless of their rank or profession. In amplifying their thinking on this matter they enable us to gain a great deal of information concerning the personal and economic status of some of the great Talmudical personalities.

In light of the present day emphasis on adult Jewish education it is interesting to see what steps the Rabbis proposed many centuries ago, to assure the preservation of Jewish learning and of Judaism.

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Chapter 1

The Importance of Learning

Judaism has always laid great stress upon learning. Our literature abounds with exhortations to parents to teach their children, as well as to all adults to constantly learn and study the Tora. The great maxim, " And the study of the law is greater than them all,"(1) is the symbol and basis of this preoccupation with learning.

The Rabbis felt that the most acceptable way to please God was through the learning of Tora. From a discussion in Makkoth we read: " Said the Holy blessed be he to David: Better to me one day spent in study of Tora than a thousand sacrifices that your son Solomon will (some day) offer me on the altar"(2)

The great respect in which study was held can clearly be seen from the following. R.Shesheth said: " Whoever teaches the Tora in this world will be privileged to teach it in the next, as it is written: ' And he that watereth shall water again too.' "(Having watered,i.e. taught in this world, he will do so in the next too.)(3)

The Jew was urged to study zealously and to devote sufficient time to his learning in order to become well acquainted with his literature. The Rabbis deprecated the sciolistic approach. Superficial knowledge was not the intention of the Rabbis, rather a deep rooted and thorough understanding was their goal. R. Meir said: " Study with

all thy heart and with all thy soul to know my ways and to watch at the doors of my law. Keep my law in thy heart and let my fear be before thy eyes."(4) That this statement is typical of Rabbinic feeling concerning learning is further evidenced from another source. R. Phineas B. Jair said, "Study leads to precision, precision leads to zeal, zeal leads to cleanliness, cleanliness leads to restraint, and restraint leads to purity."(5)

It was the duty of the Jewish father to teach his son Tora and to assure him a basic elementary education. The Rabbis knew well that the youngster could not be expected to get an education by himself, and so they made it incumbent upon his parents to teach him, although they made the provision that if the parents failed in this duty, the son was obliged to study by himself.

The Rabbis viewed very gravely any situation in which a person deliberately separated himself from study. For one who sets himself aside from study they said: "None can be called crooked excepting one that was first straight and afterwards became crooked; and who is this? A disciple of the sages who forsakes the study of the law."(6) The students who leave the study of Tora also can expect to pay for their error. R. Levi said: "Whoever leaves off the study of Tora and occupies himself with idle talk, he is made to eat coals of broom. (This is figurative for

Gehinnom). For it is said: They pluck salt -wort through idle talk (wormwood) and the roots of the broom are their food." (7)

There was a great concern and apprehension on the part of the Rabbis for those who refused to study the Tora. They spent much time bemoaning the fate of these." Our Rabbis taught that the Holy One blessed be he, weeps over three persons every day. Over him who can occupy himself with the study of Tora but does not study, him who cannot occupy himself with the study of the Tora but does, and over a leader who domineers the community." (8)

The Rabbis felt that a man was first judged for study and then for the remainder of his deeds. We are told in Kiddushin (40b) that " just as learning preceeded practice, so does the judgement thereof (in the next world) take precedence over that of practice. (One is first judged for learning and then in respect to the fulfillment of precepts) in accordance with Rab Hamnuna. For Rab Hamnuna said: The beginning of man's judgement is in respect of study (words of the Torah alone) for it is said, ' The rejection of water (he who frees himself of the Tora) is the beginning of judgement.' "

The scholars of old felt that a man could gain a complete and deep understanding of life through a mastery of Tora. There was no doubt whatsoever in their minds that if a

man was steeped and trained in law, he would at the same time be able to handle all other human problems. This is tersely summed up in the famous epithet of Ben Bag Bag.

" Turn it and turn it again for everything is in it, and contemplate it and grow grey and old over it and stir not from it; for thou canst have no better rule than it." (9)

It was also felt that one versed in the law would be better prepared to face the vicissitudes of life and less likely to falter. In Kiddushin (40b) we read, " He who is versed in Bible, Mishnah and secular pursuits (industry) will not quickly sin. For it is said: and a three fold cord is not quickly broken. But he who lacks Bible, Mishnah and secular pursuits does not belong to civilization."

The feeling prevalent among the scholars was one of doing things in wise proportion. Fully aware of the evils of concentrating upon one pursuit to the utter exclusion of anything else they wisely added the following saying. " Excellent is the study of the law together with a worldly occupation, for toil in both of them puts sin out of mind. But all study of the law without (worldly) labour, comes to naught at the last and brings sin in its train." (10)

It was felt that the Tora could help overcome man's greatest suffering and be of help to him even in time of illness. We are reminded of this over and over again in Talmudic literature in statements such as this. R. Joshua

B. Levi said: " If a man feels pain in all his body, let him engage in the study of Tora since it is said, ' and healing to all thy flesh.' " (11)

The Rabbis felt that the Tora could endure only if the people were truly zealous in their devotion to it. R. Johnathan said: " One should never abstain from the Beth Hamidrash and from Tora, even in the hour of death, for it is said, ' This is the Tora when a man dieth in a tent.' Even in the hour of death one should be engaged in (the study of) Tora. Resh Lakish said: The words of the Tora can endure only with him who sacrifices himself for it, as it is said, ' This is the Tora, when a man dieth in a tent.' " (This Tora can live only when a man is prepared to die for it, tent is taken to mean a place of study). (12)

To the Rabbis it was learning and scholarly ability which determined a man's worth rather than rank or affluence. " If a bastard is learned in the law and a high priest is ignorant of the law, the bastard that is learned in the law preceeds the high priest that is ignorant of the law." (13)

An interesting discussion among the Rabbis gives us insight into their thinking concerning the all important matter of study and practice. " R. Tarphon and the elders were once reclining in the upper story of Nithza's house in Lydda when the following question was raised before them. Is study greater or practice? R. Tarphon answered

saying: Practice is greater. R.Akiba answered saying, study is greater, for it leads to action. (This was a practical problem during the Hadrianic persecution when both study and practical observance were forbidden and the question was for which should risks sooner be taken)."(14)

The story of Rabbi Eleazar B.Simon provides us with a striking example of loyalty and devotion to learning. He was in great mental anguish because he feared that he had betrayed innocent people to Roman authorities. He welcomed pain and suffering to help dispel his feeling of guilt, giving his pain up only at the time of study. " Every evening they spread sixty sheets for him, and every morning sixty basins of blood and discharge were removed from under him. In the mornings his wife prepared him sixty kinds of pap (made of figs) which he ate, and then recovered. Yet his wife did not permit him to go to the schoolhouse, lest the Rabbis disturb him. Every evening he would exhort them (his pains and sores personified). ' Come my brethren and familiars. ' Whilst every morning he exclaimed, ' Depart, because ye disturb my studies.' " (15)

The Jewish people has been called the " Am Hasefer." This appellation has been more truly descriptive of past generations than of the present. It is apparent that the words of the Rabbis made a great impression upon past generations of our people. " If thou hast studied much

in the law, much reward will be given thee, and faithful is thy taskmaster who shall pay thee the reward of thy labor. And know that the recompense of the reward of the righteous is for the time to come." (16)

Footnotes to Chapter 1

- 1 Peah 1:1
- 2 Makkoth 10a
- 3 Sanhedrin 92a
- 4 Berachoth 17a
- 5 Aboda Zara 20b
- 6 Hagiga 1:7
- 7 Hagiga 12b
- 8 Hagiga 5b
- 9 Aboth 5:22
- 10 Aboth 2:2
- 11 Erubin 54b
- 12 Shabos 83b
- 13 Horayoth end
- 14 Kiddushin 40b
- 15 Baba Mezzia 84b
- 161Abboth2:16

Chapter 2

Places and Times of Learning

Judaism has always placed a great importance on learning. Wherever Jews have lived they have had their academies of learning which have been charged with the task of passing on the teachings of Jewish past to the future generations. Whether it be Palestine or Babylon, Spain or the United States the Jewish community has always sponsored and maintained its higher institutions of learning. This is part and parcel of Jewish history and of Judaism. In this chapter we shall discuss some of the institutions of learning which have been such a great part of the Jewish past.

With the completion of the Mishnah in 200 CE and the redaction of the Talmud in 500 CE these books became definite courses of study both in Palestine and Babylon. The academies had a dual nature, for they were both school and court and the participants both students and judges. These schools served both as Yeshiva (house of session) and beth din (court). This unique duality helped not only to give the academy student an unusual kind of training, but what is of even more importance it kept the academy close to the people, unlike most of the educational institutions of the other peoples of the time.

Among the great academies in Palestine was the Yabneh academy which fixed the text of the eighteen benedictions

and gave its sanction to Onkelos's translation of the Bible. This academy was forced to move to Usha because of the destruction following the Bar Kochba revolt. It is the same academy which was later presided over by Rabbi Jehuda Hanasi, the compiler of the Mishnah, although by that time it had moved to Sepphoris. Rabbi Judah presided over this academy during the last seventeen years of his life.

Babylon remained subordinate to Palestine till the third century. The main seats of learning in Babylon during the Tanaitic period were Nehardea and Nisbis. In Nisbis the academy was conducted by R. Juda B. Bathyra and this was probably at the same time when the temple of Jerusalem was still in existence. He was probably a descendant of the family of Behe Bathyra who were leaders of the Sanhedrin under King Herod and who resigned that office in favor of Hillel. (1)

The codification of the Mishna and the emergence of the two great Babylonian scholars, Abba Areka, (Rab) and Samuel, who had been trained in Palestine, made the third century the turning point in the history of Babylonian Jewry. Samuel took over the rectorship at the ancient school at Nehardea in which Rab had served as meturgeman. It was the duty of the meturgeman to translate the lecture into Aramaic, which was the language of the people.

Thus he would stand beside the Rabbi who taught in Hebrew and immediately translate the lecture into Aramaic.

The Talmud Yoma records a very interesting experience that happened to Rab while serving as meturgeman. " Rab came to the place of R.Shila, when there happened to be no interpreter to stand next to him and interpreted ' Keriath Hageber ' as the ' call of the man.' R.Shila said to him, Would you, sir, interpret it as Cockrow. Rab replied, ' A flute is musical to nobles, but give it to weavers, they will not accept it.' (Fools would criticize where men of taste admire.) When I stood before R. Hiyya and interpreted ' Keriath Hageber ' as the ' call of the man ' he did not object to it and you say to me: Say perhaps the cock's crow, Shila answered, Sir you are Rab, would you sit down sir. (Do not continue as my interpreter, you are too big to serve me.) Rab replied, People say if you have hired yourself away to someone to pull his wool. (Having undertaken the task, I will complete it, unconcerned about the question of dignity.) Some say, thus did he reply to him. One may promote a man in holy things, but not demote him. (The next interpreter may know very little and it would be a sort of disgrace for you to have to put up with an ignoramus after my service. The emphasis is on ignoramus, not on any implied self praise." (2) Thus we see that a Semi Tana as great as Rab once held the lower position of

meturgeman, while working his way up the ladder to scholarly leadership in Babylon.

Rab went to southern Mesopotamia and founded the academy at Sura in 219 CE while Nehardea flourished under Samuel as never before. Sura also attained immediate popularity and the grounds ~~xxxx~~ ^{around} it were crowded with eager students, many of whom for lack of lodging were compelled to spend the night in the open bank on the canal.

It was here that the Kallah was established. (3) The Kallah rendered Jewish learning accessible to large sections of people who could never have devoted themselves exclusively to study. It assembled twice a year, once during the month of Adar and once during Elul. The sages gathered at the Yeshivas and hundreds of students joined them for a month of study. The Gaon would announce at each meeting the name of the tractate of the Talmud to be studied in preparation during the succeeding five months, which would therefore be the special subject of study at the next Kallah.

It was at the Kallah also that discussions took place which later became an integral part of the Babylonian Talmud. At the Kallah gatherings, they would correct texts which had been garbled in copying. Three of the four weeks of the month were given to study and discussion. The fourth week was devoted to examination of students.

At the Kallah the sages were organized into a Sanhedrin, of seventy members. Students came not only from Babylon, but also from Greece, Spain and Italy. There was also a Beth Din present which decided questions of law. For those students who were not well prepared there was a special gathering known as " Tarbitza " where each student studied whatever tractate he wished. In later years the Responsa of the Gaon were prepared in writing at the Kallah. They would be sent to the distant communities in answer to their questions.

Thus the Kallah which is so very like our present day institutes on Judaism, helped to clarify matters of Jewish importance during these short term courses. It was also able to influence many communities through the returning scholars who had attended in person, and through the written responsa sent to the communities which had not sent personal representatives.

After the death of Rab in 247, the work at Sura was continued by his successors, the most famous of whom was Rab Ashe. He was made President of this academy at the age of twenty and was compared by his contemporaries to Judah Hanasi as possessing both learning and worldly greatness.

There are several Talmudical references regarding his brilliance. We are told in Gitin that R. Aha, the son of Raba thought very highly of his ability. " He said, I too

say that between Rabbi and Rab Ashe there was no one who was supreme both in Tora and in worldly affairs. Is that so, he was asked. Was there not Huna B. Nathan (The Exilarch in the time of R. Ashe according to Sherira's Epistle). We do not count Huna B. Nathan because he used to defer to R. Ashi." (4) R. Adda B. Ahabah pays similar tribute to R. Ashi in Sanhedrin 36a.

His contemporaries called him by the distinguished title Rabbana (Our Teacher). He spent most of his life sifting and arranging the vast material which had grown up around the Mishnah, and thus laid the groundwork for the compilation of the Gemara.

Pumbeditha was founded by Juda Ben Ezekiel a pupil of both Rab and Samuel. Samuel used to call him "Shinena" the sharp minded. Pumbeditha developed a highly analytical dialectic which sometimes degenerated into hair splitting, so that it was commonly said that its students could make an elephant pass through the eye of a needle.

We are told of a debate which took place in Nehardea between R. Amram and R. Shesheth regarding the inheritance of property. "During the course of the discussion R. Amram said to R. Shesheth, perhaps you are from Pumbeditha where they draw an elephant through the eye of a needle. (The scholars of the Pumbeditha Academy were extremely keen and subtle in their learning.)" (5)

The climax of Pumbeditha's prestige came under Judah's second successor, Rabbah Bar Nachmani. He attracted large numbers of students by his ingenious method of teaching. The Persian government alarmed at wholesale defection from the ranks of industry and farming charged that many of his hearers attended his lectures in order to evade the poll tax.

When the Arabs conquered Babylon in 640 the period of the Gaonate emerged in Jewish history. The schools of Sura and Pumbeditha remained the focal center of Jewish learning giving birth to the great period of legal activity known as Responsa literature. Following the decline of these schools and the shift in Jewish population, new schools opened up in new Jewish centers. Thus academies of learning were established for Jews of Spain at Cordova, Jews in France looked to Mayence which helped produce the great French Tosaphists. While the Jews in Central Europe had a great academy at Prague, it was in Vilna where the great Elijah Gaon and innumerable students studied the literature of their ancestors in one of the great academic eras of Jewish history.

Judaism imposes certain restrictions for those who wish to learn. During the week of Shivah, study is limited to the Books of Job, Lamentations, certain chapters of Jeremiah and regulations for mourners. Outside

of these four sections all learning and study is prohibited by Jewish law during the week of Shivah.

Private fasts were frequent among Jews from the earliest times. One may fast on certain days either in memory of certain events in his own life or in expiation of sins or in times of trouble to arouse God's mercy. The Rabbis however did not encourage such fasts. They positively forbade it in the case of a scholar who through his fasting would be disturbed in his study and unable to concentrate. They also prohibited a teacher from engaging in this kind of fast feeling that it would prevent him from doing his work effectively. (6)

In the traditional Jewish pattern study is not an optional activity left to the choice of the individual. It is a mitstva, a divine command and to observe a mitstva is blessed. Out of the six hundred and thirteen commandments incumbent upon the Jew, the first ten define the direct obligations toward God, while the eleventh is the mitstva of learning. ✓ *Source*

Jewish communities throughout the generations have not only attempted to live up to the command "Teach thy Children" but have earnestly sought to make it possible for all to fulfill the maxim, "And the study of the law is greater than them all." (7)

Footnotes to Chapter 2

- 1 Mielziner, Moses, Introduction to The Talmud, 27
- 2 Yoma 20b
- 3 Suka 26a
- 4 Gitin 59a
- 5 Baba Mezia 38b
- 6 Taanith 11a
- 7 Peah 1:1


Democracy in Learning

In Judaism, all men are expected to study the law regardless of the state of their health, economic position or the degree of their religious education. In keeping with the Biblical injunction "And these words which I command thee this day shall be upon thy heart," (1) the Rabbis made it clear throughout the Talmud that the learning of Tora was never meant to be the avocation of a select few. We are repeatedly told that every man must learn Tora. The old synagogal study groups, e.g. Chevrah Mishnayoth and the various Talmudic study groups are the best evidence of the fulfillment of this injunction.

The dedicated scholar of Talmudic times did not permit even the most abject poverty to deflect him from his pursuit of religious learning. There are numerous examples throughout Talmudic literature of scholars who were greatly afflicted by poverty. Cited below are several vivid descriptions of the grinding hardship suffered by great men and their families.

There is the very striking passage concerning R. Hanina Ben Dosa. "Every Friday his wife would light the oven and throw twigs into it so as not to be put to shame. She had a bad neighbor who said, I know that these people have nothing, what then is the meaning of all this (smoke). She went and knocked at the door. (The wife of Hanina) feeling humiliated at this retired into a room. A miracle happened and (her neighbor) saw the oven filled with loaves

of bread and the kneading trough full of dough. She called out to her: you, you bring your shovel, for your bread is getting charred; and she replied, I just went to fetch it. A Tana taught; she actually had gone to fetch the shovel because she was accustomed to miracles." (2) In the same section, we are told that Rabbi Hanina had some sheep and the Gemara makes the following comment, " And Rabbi Hanina Ben Dosa, whence did he acquire goats, for lo, he was a poor man." Thus we see that even though the great Hanina was poverty stricken, he yet continued to learn and study.

The following is an illustration of another nature. On a certain occasion, Rabban Gamliel went to see Rabbi Joshua to apologize to him concerning some misunderstanding. He said to him: " From the walls of your house it is apparent that you are a charcoal burner (smith). R. Joshua replied: Alas for the generation of which you are the leader, seeing that you know nothing of the troubles of the scholars, their struggles to support and sustain themselves. He said to him: I apologize, forgive me. He paid no attention to him. Do it, he said, out of respect for my father. He then became reconciled to him." (3) The Gamliel mentioned here is Rabban Gamliel  President of the academy at Jabne, and grandson of Gamliel the Elder. He frequently engaged in bitter debates with R. Joshua Ben Chananiah.

It is apparent from here that Rabban Gamliel lived comfortably. He was not aware that other scholars were less fortunate, and this point becomes clear to him only upon visiting Joshua. This illustration seems to clearly indicate that some scholars encountered great economic hardship in their attempt to sustain themselves.

There is a vivid example in the Talmud Yoma of one who deeply yearned to acquire an education, and who was forced by meager circumstances to resort to very drastic means. It is the story of Hillel, the Elder, who used to work and earn one tropik, half of which he would give to the guard at the house of learning, the other half being spent for his food and for that of his family.

" One day he found nothing to earn and the guard at the house of learning would not permit him to enter. He climbed up and sat upon the window (an aperture in the roof looking down to the ground floor) to hear the words of Shemayah and Abtalion. They say, that day was the eve of Sabbath in the winter solstice and snow fell upon him from heaven. When the dawn arose, Shemayah said to Abtalion: Brother Abtalion, on every day this house is light and today it is dark, it is perhaps a cloudy day. They looked up and saw the figure of a man in the window. They went up and found him covered by three cubits of snow. They removed him, bathed him and anointed him and

placed him opposite the fire and they said: This man deserves that the Sabbath be profaned on his behalf." (4)

Hillel though poor was determined to educate himself, refusing to be denied. Today, however, no Jewish institution of learning deliberately turns away a student who desires to study, because he lacks the financial support to pay for his education. Jewish institutions of learning are continuously seeking new ways and means to accomodate needy students, and help them in achieving their goals.

One of the lowliest jobs in early society was that of water drawer. Yet one of the great personalities of the Talmud, Rab Huna who was President of the Academy at Sura, was engaged in this kind of work. We are told that when a lawsuit was brought to R.Huna, he used to say to the litigants: " Provide me with a man as a substitute who will draw water (for the irrigation of my land) in my place, and I will pronounce judgement for you." (5) Here we have the case of a great scholar earning his livelihood, as a worker and laborer, and not from his scholarly ability.

Regardless of their position in society, Jewish men throughout the ages have been regarded as equals at the table of learning. Judaism has striven to ensure a spirit of democracy in its system of education and has constantly urged and exhorted all to study and develop their intellectual capacities. Of course, it is more difficult

for the ill and economically handicapped to learn than it is for others more fortunately situated. However, we have seen evidence of men, who have fulfilled the commandment despite great handicaps.

Footnotes to Chapter 3

- 1 Deuteronomy 5:10
- 2 Taanith 25a
- 3 Berachoth 28a
- 4 Yoma 35b
- 5 Ketuboth 105a

Chapter 4

Women and Learning

The Talmud has been accused by some scholars of deliberately overlooking the rights of women by denying them equality with men in certain religious activities. Numerous tracts have been written concerning the rights of women in Judaism, with plenteous reference to Rabbinic sources. Concerning the teaching of women, the Rabbis expressed some interesting viewpoints, which will be explored in this chapter.

The Rabbis taught in a Baraita that it is incumbent upon the father to teach his son Tora. In investigating this question further, they come to the role of women in teaching the law. The question is asked: How do we know that the mother has no duty (to teach her children)?

Because it is written

וְיָלְדוּ בְנֵיכֶם וְיִלְּמוּ (and ye shall

teach) which also reads

וְיִלְּמוּ בְנֵיכֶם (and ye

shall study). Hence whoever is commanded to study is commanded to teach, while whoever is not commanded to study, is not commanded to teach. And how do we know

she is not bound to teach herself? Because it is written

וְיָלְדוּ בְנֵיכֶם (and ye shall teach).

וְיִלְּמוּ בְנֵיכֶם

(and ye shall learn). The one whom others are commanded to teach is commanded to teach one's self, and the one whom others are not commanded to teach, is not commanded to teach one's self. How then do we know that others are not commanded to teach her? Because it is written, ' And

ye shall teach them your sons, but not your daughters.' " (1)

Thus the Rabbis use the grammatical form

פוסקין

to show us that we must only teach boys and not girls.

An even stronger opposition to teaching women was voiced by Rabbi Eliezer who said: " If any man gives his daughter a knowledge of the law, it is as though he taught her lechery." (2) This however seems to be directed against the teachings of the oral law and the higher branches of study only. For this view of Eliezers was not universally accepted, because we know that Ben Azai regarded it as a positive duty to teach Tora to one's daughters.(3)

A point of view strongly favoring the role of women in learning is obtained from Tractate Sanhedrin, which in describing the ideal state ascribed to Hezekiah, informs us that at that time women were well educated. We are told that " Hezekiah planted a sword by the door of the schoolhouse and proclaimed, ' He who will not study Tora will be pierced with the sword.' Search was made from Dan unto Beer Sheba and no ignoramus was found, from Gabbath unto Antipris and no boy or girl, man or woman was found who was not thoroughly versed in the laws of cleanliness and uncleanness." (4) The Rabbis understand this incident as proof that in the ideal Jewish state women also must be educated. Rabbi Moses Isserles in commenting upon the laws of teaching women states that it is incumbent upon women to learn those legal sections

which pertain to them. (5)

A negative view with one qualification is seen from the following. The legal code seems to imply that when a woman learns Tora, she receives a reward, but the reward is not equal to that given a man. In discussing this matter Hanina stated, that " He who is commanded and fulfills (the command) is greater than he who fulfills it though not commanded." (6) Here too we see that man is commanded to study and not women, yet at the same time if she does learn Tora she receives a reward but not equal to that of man. Commenting on the question of obedience to God's law, Lazarus states that " The moral act finds its sure basis only when it is conceived as prompted by the command of God. When man acts in obedience thereto the merit is greater." (7)

We know of several women who were very well learned in Talmudic lore. Beruria, the wife of R. Meir, was a brilliant scholar in her own right. The Talmud relates many of her achievements. R. Simlai in rebuking a student who desired to take on too great of an assignment said to him. " Beruria, wife of R. Meir and a daughter of R. Hanina B. Teradion , who studied three hundred laws from three hundred teachers in one day, could nevertheless not do her duty (study it adequately) even in three years, yet you propose to do it in three months." (8)

The learning of Tora by women is discussed at length in Sota where the Mishna states: " A man is under the obligation to teach his daughter Tora, so that if she has to drink (the water of bitterness), she may know that the merit suspends its effect." (9) Here the Mishna informs us that women should study just in case they do wrong (as for example, commit adultery) for the fact that they have studied will make the sentence less severe.

Commenting upon the Mishna, Rabbina agrees that women are not commanded to learn, but he adds, " When they have their sons taught Scripture and Mishna and wait for their husbands until they return from the schools, should they not share (the merit with them). (10) Rabbina feels that women should share in the reward of study just as they share in the act of creating children and in the sharing of companionship.

The Rabbis were quick to acknowledge that women play an important part in the education of children. For even though they are not directly obliged to teach them, their encouragement and moral support is necessary for the children's success. R. Moses Isserles sums up their feeling on this matter when he says, " At any rate if a woman aids her son or husband in obtaining Tora, she should share in their reward." (11)

Rabbi Judah Hanasi was of the belief that women had more understanding than men. R. Hisda stated: What is Rabbi's reason. Because it is written in Scripture: " And the Lord God built the rib (wayiben and the rib made he) which teaches that the Holy One blessed be He, endowed the women with more understanding." (12) The Talmud tells us that Wayiben has the same root as Bina and Bina means understanding, hence his reason that women had more understanding.

Rabbi Judah also commented that a son reverences his father more than his mother, because he teaches him Tora. Therefore (he added) " The Holy One, blessed be he, puts the fear (reverence) of the mother before that of the father." (13) This was done in order to equalize the balance, and thus emphasize the equal responsibility of both mother and father in educating the child.

It is interesting to compare the attitude of the Rabbis concerning women in respect to learning with their attitude concerning women regarding the fulfilling of commandments. We read that " All affirmative precepts limited to time (caused by time) which are performed at particular times or seasons, men are liable and women are exempt." (14) This commandment applied to ritual ceremonies like the putting on of tephilin, and is in a sense similar to the spirit of the laws concerning teaching. It appears then

that though some Rabbis feel that women should be accorded every right in learning, the majority feeling is that they should not indulge in learning.

Footnotes to Chapter 4

- 1 Kiddushin 29a & b
- 2 Sota 3:4
- 3 Sota 21a
- 4 Sanhedrin 94b
- 5 Yoreh Deah, Comment on Halacha 6, Ch. 246
- 6 Kiddushin 31a
- 7 Lazarus, M., Ethics of Judaism, 123
- 8 Pesachim 62b
- 9 Sota 20a
- 10 Sota 21a
- 11 Yoreh Deah, Comment on Halacha 6, Ch. 246
- 12 Nida 45b
- 13 Kiddushin 31a
- 14 Kiddushin 29a

Chapter 5

Rabbinic Conception of A Teacher

Today modern educators are constantly revealing new methods for improving teaching. From studies in the fields of personality development and psychology, educators are seeking to improve teaching techniques and enrich the learning experience. Our Rabbis of old had many keen insights into the psychology of teaching, which we shall investigate in detail.

Patience is a necessary virtue for one who desires to teach. Occasionally it may take a great deal of explaining and re-explaining to get over a point which students have difficulty grasping. The Talmud has some advice for teachers on the art of emphasizing a lesson. In Erubin (54b) we are told: "It is a man's duty to teach his pupil his lesson four times. For this is arrived at by means of a kal vochomer. Aaron who learned from Moses who had it from the Omnipotent had to learn his lesson four times, thus how much more so an ordinary pupil who learns from an ordinary teacher."

We are told that the impatient teacher cannot teach. (1) Sometimes it is difficult for a teacher to understand why a person cannot absorb a lesson the first time given. The teacher must explore whether the difficulty lies within him, in his approach and ability to teach, or if it lies in the student, in his readiness, emotional as well as intellectual to learn. Therefore the Rabbis felt

that it was the duty of the teacher to teach until the student mastered the subject matter.

Thus R. Akiba tells us: " Whence is it deduced that a man must go on teaching his pupil until he has mastered the subject? From scripture where it says, ' And teach thou it to the Children of Israel,' (Emphasizing teach). And whence is it deduced that it must be taught until the students are well versed in it? (Arranged in order in their mouth). From scripture where it says, ' Put it in their mouths,' Hence we see the importance of exploring the difficulty in the teacher. And whence is it inferred that it is also his duty to explain to him the reasons (that it is not enough to teach dogmatically). It has been said, ' Now these are the ordinances which thou shalt put before them.' " (2) This would seem to indicate that it is also the job of the teacher in addition to an examination of his own teaching, to prepare the student intellectually and emotionally for the material to be absorbed.

The following is an illustration of a Talmud teacher who had great patience. " R. Pereda had a pupil whom he taught his lesson four hundred times before the latter could master it. On a certain day having been requested to attend to a religious matter he taught him as usual, but the pupil could not master the subject. ' What,' the master asked is the matter today? 'From the moment,'

the other replied, ' the master was told that there was a religious matter to be attended to, I could not concentrate on my thoughts. At every moment I imagined, now the master will get up. ' Give me your attention,' the master said, ' And I will teach you again,' and so he taught him another four hundred times. A Bath Kol issued forth asking (R.Pereda). 'Do you prefer that four hundred years shall be added to your life or that you and your generation shall be privileged to have a share in the world to come?' ' That,' he replied, ' I and my generation shall be privileged to have a share in the world to come.' ' Give him both,' said the Holy One, blessed be He." (8)

Here we see an example of a student who feared that his professor would walk out on him, in order to keep an appointment. Therefore the teacher assures him with great love, understanding and patience that he will do no such thing and we see in how great esteem this approach is held by God.

The Rabbis wanted men to teach Tora. They realized, however, that men had different reasons for entering the teaching profession, nevertheless, they repeatedly stated that even if a man's reason for teaching were of an ulterior nature at the start, it would in the end be for the love of teaching.

" Raba contrasted (two verses). It is written: ' For thy mercy is great unto the heavens,' whereas it is also written, ' For thy mercy is great above the heavens,' How is this to be explained? Here it refers to those who perform (God's behest) for its own sake, (to them his mercy is great above the heavens). There it refers to those who perform it with an ulterior motive (not for its own sake). And this is in accordance with Rab Judah, for R. Judah said in Rab's name: A man should always occupy himself with Tora and good deeds, though it is not for their own sake, for out of doing good with an ulterior motive, there comes doing good for its own sake." (4) Thus we can say that teaching is one of the categories which falls into " The performing of God's command," and even though at first you might not teach for God's purpose, in the end you will.

A great problem encountered in all teaching situations is that of discipline. Modern educational practice seeks to strike a middle of the road way, in which students will feel that teachers are interested in their welfare and yet at the same time not interpret this concern as an implicit granting of license to do as they please in the classroom. Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi once expressed his opinion concerning discipline. In the last moments of his life he called for his eldest son. " When Rabban Gamliel entered he entrusted him with the traditions and

regulations of the Patriarchate. ' My son,' he said to him, ' Conduct your patriarchate with men of high standing and cast fear among the students.' " (Introduce a firm discipline in the college). (5) Thus we see that R. Judah strongly felt that the teacher should be the sole master in the classroom.

Elaborating upon the matter of discipline the text goes on to state, " But surely this (keeping scholars under a discipline which many might regard as degrading) is not proper. For is it not written in scripture, ' But he honoureth them that fear the Lord,' and the master said that this text might be applied to Jehoshapat, King of Juda, who on seeing a scholar, used to rise from his throne, embrace him and kiss him and call him, ' my master, my master, my teacher, my teacher.' This presents no difficulty: the latter attitude is to be adapted in private; the former in public." (6)

In the classroom the teacher is complete master with no opportunity for any real demonstration of student teacher friendship. Outside the classroom, however, the student can be greatly instrumental in helping to create a real warm relationship. Though Jehoshapat was king, he is depicted here as giving the same kind of respect to his former master as any other mortal.

Teachers are constantly seeking new methods of testing students. During the last few years many new plans and ideas have been advanced concerning testing. New ways of testing have been set forth, with the constant goal in mind of improving the student's understanding of the material. New pedagogical methodology seeks not so much the retention of material as the development and broadening of the conceptual processes. The Rabbis also urged the teachers to concentrate on this area. ✓ Same

The Rabbis also urged the teachers to sharpen the mind of students through testing. The Talmud Berachoth provides us with an excellent example of one teacher's manner of fulfilling this precept.

The incident here revolved around the interpretation of a Mishna in Berachoth. The Mishna reads: " If one in praying says, ' May thy tender mercies extend to a bird's nest: be thy name mentioned for the good, or we give thanks, we give thanks, ' he is silenced." (7) Here the Mishna explains that we do not tell God what to do with his mercy.

" A certain reader went down before the ark in the presence of Rabba and said. ' Thou hast shown mercy to the bird's nest, show thou pity and mercy to us.' Said Rabba: How well this student knows how to placate his master. Said Abaye to him: But we have learnt, he is silenced, he is silenced? Rabba too acted thus only to test Abaye." (8)

Here is a case where Rabba the teacher deliberately pretends to agree to a wrong interpretation of the Mishna in order to test Abaye the student.

The Rabbis did not set up a detailed set of rules with which one needed to comply in order to qualify as a teacher. However, they did state that a man needed to be of sound moral character in order to teach. If a man was not decent and humane, he was not qualified to teach, even if he were a great scholar.

This attitude is exemplified in the following passage. R. Jochanan said: "What means the text, 'For the priest's lips should keep knowledge and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is a messenger of the Lord of Hosts.' It means that if the master is like unto a messenger of the Lord of Hosts, they should seek at his mouth, but if he is not, they should not seek the law at his mouth." (9) Thus we see that the teacher should be like a messenger of God whom we assume to be ethically and morally perfect.

The teacher of old was master of his classroom at all times. We can picture him sitting up front in a diamond shaped room with all the pupils facing him. Yet at the same time he was enjoined by the Rabbis to show no deference or partiality to any group of students because of family background or special rank.

As already mentioned the Rabbis felt that the truly gifted teacher would grow with each new teaching experience.

They felt that his worth increased with each passing day because of the constantly developing insights which he gained. To their minds a mature teacher was one who found new meaning and import in his material.

This observation is born out in the following statement by R. Hiya B. Abba. Speaking in the name of R. Johanan he said: " With reference to the scriptural text: ' whoso keepeth the fig tree shall eat the fruit thereof.' Why were the words of the Tora compared to a fig tree? As with the fig tree (since all its fruits do not ripen at the same time) the more one searches it the more figs one finds in it. So it is with the words of the Tora, the more one studies them, the more relish he finds in them." (10) The Rabbis thus felt that the longer a teacher works with his material the greater would be his understanding of it.

Another aspect of teacher growth was cited by Rabbi, who said; " Much Tora have I learnt from my masters, more from my fellow students and from my disciples most of all. # (11) The teacher who is willing to learn from his students, even though they are younger than he and less experienced, has within him the capacity for great growth.

Footnotes to Chapter 5

- 1 Aboth 2:6
- 2 Erubin 54b
- 3 Idem
- 4 Pesachim 50b
- 5 Ketuboth 103b
- 6 Ketuboth 105b
- 7 Berachoth 33b
- 8 Idem
- 9 Moed Kotān 17a
- 10 Erubin 54b
- 11 Makkoth 10a

Chapter 6

The Duties and Responsibilities of A Student

There are certain rules of decorum and courtesy to which students are expected to adhere, when in the classroom. The Rabbis of old formulated some general principles which they felt should guide the conduct of students. Many of their sentiments were sound not only for their time but are of real value today.

The Rabbis have always insisted that respect and courtesy be shown to all regardless of the time and situation. Aware of the fact that classroom situations can sometimes get out of hand in the heated discussion of the moment, they were extremely careful in considering the problem of classroom behavior. They urged students to be respectful while debating with the teacher and never to shame him, " Said R.Hiyya to Rab, Son of Illustrious ancestors, have I not told you that when Rabbi is engaged on one tractate you must not question him about another, lest he be not conversant with it. For if Rabbi were not a great man, you would have put him to shame, for he might have answered you incorrectly. Still now he has answered you correctly." (1) Here we see that even a man as great as Judah Hanasi might not be able to recall a point of law upon sudden questioning.

The Beer Hagola refers the student to Tosephta Sanhedrin, Chapter 7, Tosephta 7, which he feels lends light on this subject. There we are told that this

admonition enjoins us not to question the master even on the subject under discussion, but confine it to the particular phase of the question. For example, if the subject is concerning the Sabbath and the chapter deals with carrying things from domicile to domicile, he shall not be asked what to do if a barrel breaks open on the Sabbath. (2)

Since this Tosephta is closely related to the material under discussion, I shall quote it in its entirety. (3)

They may not ask or answer questions while standing too high up, too far away, or behind the members of the court. They may only ask relevant questions and answer to the point. They may not put a question on a matter which involves more than 3 legal decisions. If one member put a question while another speaks not asking a question, attention is given to him who puts the question. If one asks for a precedent, he must say " I ask for a precedent." If one asks a relevant question and another asks an irrelevant question, they answer him who puts the relevant question. If one asks an irrelevant question he must say, " My question is not relevant" so R. Meir; but the majority hold that the practice of the law need not be wholly bound up with what

is relevant (that is the Torah is not an utterly inelastic system). Attention is paid to what is relevant rather than to what is not relevant, to what is a precedent rather than to what is no precedent, to Halacha rather than to Midrash, to Midrash rather than Haggada, to the argument from less to greater (a fortiori argument) rather than the argument from analogy, to a member of the court rather than a disciple, and to a disciple rather than to an ignorant man. But ~~when~~ it is a case of deciding between two members of the court, or two disciples, or two ignorant men or two Halakoth, or two questions or two answers, or two precedents, the authority for the decision at such a point lies with the speaker of the court.

Though this section deals primarily with court procedure, it is partially relevant to our discussion, since it also considers the attendance of grown up students at these sessions.

The student should have respect for his teacher and respect for learning, and should not put the classroom to profane use. The Rabbis looked upon irreverences in the classroom as an insult both to the teacher and to the study hall. " Rabbi Zera said: whoever sleeps in the Beth Hamidrash his knowledge shall be reduced to

tatters. (He shall forget most of it; retaining only scraps). For it is written, ' And drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags.' " (4)

The question of interruption takes on a different aspect when faced with the need to fulfill a commandment. Ordinarily when a student began his work he was not to be interrupted for any but the most compelling reason. They frowned upon any activity which distracted the class from the business at hand. " Our Rabbis taught: if people were sitting in the Beth-Hamidrash and the light was brought in at the termination of the Sabbath, Beth Shammai says that each one says a blessing over it for himself, while Beth Hillel says that each one says a blessing on behalf of all because it says, ' In the multitude of the people is the king's glory.' Beth Hillel at any rate explain their reason, but what is the reason of Shammai? It is probably to avoid an interruption of study (one may be in the middle of a difficult part just at the moment of saying Amen). It has been similarly taught: The members of the household of Rabban Gamliel did not used to say, 'Good health ' (to someone who sneezed) in the Beth Hamidrash so as not to interrupt their study)." (5)

When a student began his work, he was to be left alone in quiet, and not to be disturbed. There are times, however, when something important and unexpected arises

during the study hour. The Rabbis discuss this possibility saying that if a man is required to fulfill a commandment during the hour of study, and no one else can be found to do it, then he must do it. (6)

There are times, however, when a student does not understand the material under consideration, but hesitates to admit this for fear of appearing incapable, thereby invoking the ire of the instructor. The Rabbis were aware of this possibility and enjoined the student to speak up. They realized that bashfulness was a hindrance to the mastery of the material and said that a student should question his instructor until the matter becomes clear in his mind. (7)

The Rabbis advised any student who angered his teacher by failing to grasp a point to say. " Rabbi, it is Tora and I must come to understand it and my capacity is limited." (8)

The student was constantly urged to use all possible means to simplify and facilitate his learning. " R. Joshua B. Karka said: Whoever studies the Tora and does not review it is likened to one who sews without reaping. R. Joshua said: he who studies the Tora and then forgets it is like a woman who bears a child and buries it. R. Akiba said, ' Chant it every day, chant it every day.' (Review thy learning with a chant. In order to aid the memory

a system of chanting was used both for study and revision)." (9)
The Rabbis felt that the verbal repetition of material was of primary importance in the learning experience.

The use of memory aids is recommended as a means for simplifying study. The fact that it is necessary to resort to special devices such as mnemonics and the like, in order to acquire a knowledge of the Tora is in line with the thoughts of R. Abdimi B. Hana. (10) While discussing the Biblical verses, "It is not in heaven, neither is it beyond the sea, but the word is very nigh unto thee," (11) he concluded that the Tora is within the grasp of all men, and that memory aids can be of immeasurable help in understanding it.

The Rabbis felt that a student should set aside a given amount of time each day for study. Knowing that learning does not come easy Hillel admonished; "Say not when I have leisure I will study, perchance thou will never have leisure." (12) Constant study is therefore a necessity for successful learning results.

Since a student had so much material to cover, the Rabbis suggest for consideration certain principles of studying. They tried to help him economize his time wisely. "Then R. Safra said on authority of R. Joshua B. Hanania; What is meant by 'And thou shall teach them diligently.' *וְלִמְדָם* unto thy children?' Read

not פרשן but פרשן (divide into three): One should always divide his years into three, devoting a third to Mikra and a third to Mishna and a third to Talmud." (13) Tosfot also tells us that each day should be divided into three. We see here that a person should divide his studying time into three parts, devoting a third each to Mikra, Mishna and Talmud respectively.

Men were advised to build up their store of knowledge slowly and painstakingly and not to try and become scholars all at once. They were admonished to do things wisely and in a reasonable way. Said Rabba in the name of R. Huna: " If one takes his studies by heaps at a time, he will benefit but little, but if one gathers knowledge little by little, he will gain much." (14)

The Rabbis felt that a teacher alone was not sufficient in helping a student learn the law. They felt that it was necessary to have someone to study with and to review with in order to insure the maximum results. Therefore R. Joshua B. Perayah said: " Provide thyself with a teacher and get thee a fellow (a disciple)." (15)

The Talmud frequently discusses the benefit of group study. We find the following comment in Berachoth. " The word קטל implies, make yourself into kittoth to study the Tora since the knowledge of Tora can

be acquired only in association with others, as stated by R. Jose B. Hanina." (16) Thus we see that they felt that group study was the best means of transferring information. This practice is still followed in Jewish life today, whenever men come together for study. For whether it is for the relaxing study on Sabbath afternoon or the more rigorous study for Rabbinical training this custom is still practiced.

The best way to study a lesson or discuss a lecture is by first reading it over carefully and only after one is acquainted with the text should one begin to analyze it for its deeper meaning. "Be silent (has) and then analyze (katteth). (First listen to the teacher and then discuss what he has said). For Raba said: A man should always first learn Tora and then scrutinize it." (17) The Rabbis here make a play on the word katteth, which means tear apart or analyze and thus we see the Rabbinical emphasis on silent study accompanied by analysis.

Often times teachers advise students to read their assignments aloud while studying them. This gives the student greater familiarity with the material and is a great help in getting him to learn the material more quickly. " Beruria once discovered a student who was learning in an undertone. Rebuking him (she kicked him). She exclaimed, ' Is it not written, ordered in all things

and sure.' If Tora is ordered in your 248 limbs it will be sure, otherwise it will not be sure." (18) Here we have an indication of a strong feeling for studying out loud.

We are told of still another case concerning the problem of studying aloud. " Samuel said to R. Judah: Shimena (keen witted) open your mouth and learn the Talmud, that your studies may be retained and that you may live long, since it said, For they (the words of the Tora which includes both written and oral law) are life unto those that find them, and a healing to all their flesh. Read not, ' to those that find them'

but ' to him who utters them with his mouth.' " (19) Here again is another example of the emphasis on reading out loud.

The Rabbis felt that a student should not let his evenings go to waste, but should utilize them in study. " Resh Lakish said: ~~Who~~ whoever occupies himself with the study of the Tora by night, the Holy One, blessed be he, draws over him a chord of lovingkindness of his protection by day, for it is said: ' by day the Lord doth command his lovingkindness,' because ' by night his song (the Tora) is with me.' " (20) Moses Isserles felt that a man gains most of his knowledge in the evening.

The Rabbis have an interesting comment concerning the season beginning in late August. Fearing the loss of

time from daytime study, because of the shortening of the days beginning with this period, they made the following statement. " From that day onwards (15th Ab) he who adds (from the night to the day). (For the purpose of study, the days shorten and the hours of study would consequently diminish unless part of the night were also devoted to the same purpose.) He will also add length of days and years for himself. And he who does not add from the night to the day decreases his years. What is meant by decreases. R. Joseph expounded: His mother will bury him (He will die in the prime of life)". (21) Here we have Rabbinical opinion which enjoins us not to decrease study just because the days are getting shorter but to make up for it by using the night.

The Rabbis were interested in seeing that the students obtained a good basic education before undertaking advanced work. They did not want a student to bite off more than he could chew. " As soon as a man goeth forth from Halachic to Scripture study he no longer has peace. (Because the Halacha provides the ultimate ruling for conduct). And Samuel said: It means one who leaves Talmud for Mishna (without Talmudic explanation and discussion the Mishna may be misleading). And R. Johanan said: even if he goes from Talmud to Talmud." (22) According to Rashi from the Palestinian Talmud to the

Babylonian, (which was more difficult) but according to Tosfoth from either to the other before the first is properly understood. This emphasizes the necessity of gradual progress from easy to more difficult material.

They also expressed their feelings concerning married students. Our Rabbis taught: " If one has to study Tora and marry a wife he should first study and then marry. But if he cannot live without a wife, he should first marry and then study. Rab Judah said in Samuel's name: The Halakha is: a man first marries and then studies. R. Johanan said: With a millstone around the neck, shall one study Tora. Yet they do not differ: The one refers to ourselves (Babylonians); the other to them. (Palestinians)"(23)

Commenting on the discussion, Rashi says that the Babylonian scholars used to travel to Palestine, the home of the Mishna. Thus they were free of household worries, and so might marry before study. But the Palestinians, studying at home and bearing family responsibilities could make no progress if married and so were bound to study first. Tosfoth reversed Rashi's interpretation.

Footnotes to Chapter 6

- 1 Shabos 3b
- 2 Glazer, S. Mishne Tora, 254
- 3 Tosefta Sanhedrin, Ch. 7, Tos. 7
Translation from: Tractate Sanhedrin; Mishna and Tosefta
by Danby, Herbert.
- 4 Sanhedrin 3a
- 5 Berachoth 53a
- 6 Yoreh Deah, Ch. 246, Halacha 18
- 7 See Page 32, Par. 2
- 8 Yoreh Deah, Chapter 246, Halacha 10
- 9 Sanhedrin 99a
- 10 Erubin 54b
- 11 Deuteronomy 30 (12-15)
- 12 Aboth 2:5
- 13 Kiddushin 30a
- 14 Avoda Zara 119a
- 15 Aboth 1:6
- 16 Berachoth 63b
- 17 Idem
- 18 Erubin 54a
- 19 Idem
- 20 Hagiga 12b
- 21 End of Taanith
- 22 Hagiga 10a
- 23 Kiddushin 29b

Chapter 7

Material and Theological Rewards of Study

The Rabbis felt that one should not use learning for material gain. At the same time when the Talmud was compiled and during the period immediately following, living conditions were entirely different. Men did not depend on teaching for a livelihood, for them teaching was a privilege.

It is only in recent times that the need for having full time Rabbis has become acute. In early times, the Sages earned their living from other means. Learning for them was a divine command and joy but they did not serve communities on a full time basis as is done today. Some of the great personalities of the Talmud were engaged in work which required the use of their hands in manual labor. Men like Lochanan the Sandlemaker, Issac the Smith and Ephraim the Tailor earned their keep from their trade, while also giving religious instruction.

The Rabbis stated that it was forbidden to teach the oral law for remuneration, although they allowed the teaching of the written for compensation. " The gemara asks, whence is it proved? (that it is forbidden to take payment for giving dedisions on Jewish law and teaching the Tora). Rab Juda reported in the name of Rab: ' Behold I have taught you,' just as I teach you gratuitously, so shall you ~~teah~~ teach gratuitously. It has also been taught to the same effect. Scripture says: ' Even as

the Lord my God commanded me ' (intimating), just as I teach gratuitously , so shall you teach gratuitously. And whence do we arrive that if he cannot find someone to teach him gratuitously, he must pay for learning? The text states: ' Buy the truth,' and whence do we infer that one should not say, ' As I learnt the Tora by paying, so shall I teach it for payment?' The text states: ' And sell it not.' "(1) Obviously there is a strong feeling against teaching for money.

The Talmud raises an ambivalent attitude to the question of taking compensation. " Where a fee is taken it may be accepted only for Scripture, but not for Midrash. Now, why does Midrash differ, that remuneration is forbidden. Because it is written, ' And the Lord commanded me at that time to teach you,' and it is also written, ' behold I have taught you statutes and judgements even as the Lord my God commanded me.' Just as I taught you gratuitously, so you must teach gratuitously. Then should not Scripture too be unremunerated? Rab said: The fee is for guarding the children. R. Jochanan maintained: The fee is for the teaching of accentuation." (2) Though it is impossible for us to draw a clear cut conclusion as to their feelings concerning fees, the Halacha states that one who has no other means of supporting himself may accept a fee for teaching. (3)

There is a vivid passage in Nedarim which gives us clear insight into the minds of the Rabbis and their love for learning. " It was taught: 'that thou mayest love the Lord thy God and that thou mayest obey his voice and that thou mayest cleave unto him.' (This means that one should not say, I will read Scripture that I may be called a sage; I will study that I may be called a Rabbi. I will study to be an elder(member of the Sanhedrin) and sit in the assembly of elders, but learn out of love and honor will come in the end, as it is written, ' bind them upon the fringes, write them upon the tables of thine heart.' (Make it an integral part of thyself, not as something outside of thee, cherished only for its own worldly advantage)."

(4) Here the lesson enjoins us to study out of love and not for personal aggrandizement.

They also felt strongly against making use of prominence gained from learning." R.Eliezer, son of R.Zadok said, Do good deeds for the sake of their maker (God who decreed them, Ran) and speak the words of the Tora for their own sake. Make not of them a crown wherewith to magnify thyself, not a spade to dig with." (5)

The Rabbis have given ample evidence throughout the Talmud of their resoluteness that none should use his scholarship to unfair advantage. Even in extreme cases were they loathe to use eminence achieved from learning.

" R. Tarphon was found by a man eating of the figs, when

most of the knives had been folded, whereupon he threw him into a sack and carried him, to cast him in the river. ' Woe to Tarphon,' he cried out, ' whom the man is about to murder.' When the man heard this (that he was R.Tarphon) he abandoned him and fled. R.Abbahu said on the authority of R.Hananiah B.Gamliel: All his lifetime that pious man grieved over this saying, 'Woe is to me that I made profane use of the crown of the Torah.' (Over saving his life by revealing his identity). For Rabbah Bar Hanah said in R.Johanan's name: Whoever puts the crown of the Tora to profane use is uprooted from the world. (This is in accordance with the general view held that one should derive no benefit whatsoever from Tora)." (6) Even though this was an unusual case, it again clearly demonstrates the point that no one has a right to use his scholarship for personal gain, not even a scholar to save his life. The Rabbis indicate that better were he to die than use learning to save his life.

With the passage of time, some men have applied themselves solely to serving their people as Rabbis and teachers. They receive a salary from the Synagogue much as other men receive monetary compensation for their services.

Moses Isserles quoting the commentary of Abravanel in Aboth, tells us that it was the custom of all Jewish communities to give the Rabbi a certain salary. This was done so that he would not be forced to engage in manual labor before men and thereby lower the Tora in their eyes. Although our sages said: "Whosoever studies the Tora and does not at the same time acquire a manual trade, his knowledge of the Tora will be nullified and bring sin." (7) This does not apply to the Rabbis. Rabbis and communal leaders were exempted from this decree and were paid their salary as compensation for the time which they gave in the performance of their duties.

Maimonides did not oppose the remuneration of scholars. Glazer (8) tells us that he opposes paying scholars who do nothing in return for the gifts they receive. This he felt would be enjoying the fruits of the Torah in this world. Joseph Caro, the compiler of the Shulchan Aruch, however, was violently opposed to this law. (10)

While in a formal sense we no longer fulfill the Rabbinic injunction of teaching without remuneration, nevertheless in a very definite way the spirit of learning for the sake of learning is still fulfilled by Jewish scholars today. The very selection of such a career is evidence of a desire to help in the transmission of the great cultural heritage which is Judaism.

The Rabbis speak of another kind of reward, the spiritual reward for learning. " And there are some who say Resh Lakish said: Whoever occupies himself with the study of Tora in this world, which is like the night, the Holy One, blessed be He, draws over him a cord of lovingkindness in the world to come, which is like the day. For it is said: ' By day the Lord doth command his lovingkindness, for by night his song is with me.' " (10)

Perhaps the statement of R.Tanhum B.Hanilai could best be applied to the student who never fails to find time for study. He said: " He who starves himself for the sake of Tora in this world, the Holy One, blessed be He, will fully satisfy in the next, as it is written, ' They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house, and thou shalt make them drink of thy pleasures.' " (11)

We are constantly reminded that whoever labors in the study of the law will be justly rewarded. R.Meir said: Engage not overmuch in business, but occupy thyself with the law, and be lowly in spirit before all men. If thou neglectest the law, many things neglected shall rise against thee, but if thou laborest in the law, he has abundant reward to give thee." (12)

Though the Rabbis do not discuss the precise nature of the reward to be received by those who fulfill the

commandment of study, they do nevertheless, steadfastly maintain that a reward will be forthcoming. This is beautifully stated in the great epithet of Pirke Aboth. "He used to say: It is not thy part to finish the task, yet thou are not free to desist from it. If thou hast studied much in the law, much reward will be given thee, and faithful is thy taskmaster who shall pay thee the reward of thy labor. And know that the recompense of the reward of the righteous is for the time to come." (13)

Footnotes to Chapter 7

- 1 Berachoth 29a
- 2 Nedarim 37a
- 3 Yoreh Deah, Halacha 5, Chapter 246
- 4 Nedarim 62a
- 5 Nedarim 62a & b
- 6 Nedarim 62a
- 7 Aboth 2:2
- 8 Glazer, S. Hilcoth Talmud Torah, 246
- 9 Idem
- 10 Hagiga 12b
- 11 Sanhedrin 100a
- 12 Aboth 4:10
- 13 Aboth 2:21

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Montreal, 1919
- 2 Danby, Herbert, Tractate Sanhedrin Mishnah and
Teosefta, Macmillan, New York, 1919
- 3 Mishneh Tora, Judischer Verlag, Vienna, 1950
- 4 Schulchan Aruch, Yore Deah, Vilna, 1895

Summary

In this thesis I have dealt with the Rabbinic concept of adult education. Throughout Jewish history our people have been constantly exhorted to broaden their knowledge and make study a vital part of their lives. Learning was not to be restricted to any one group of people but was urged for all as a prerequisite to mature understanding.

This thesis consists of 7 chapters in which the opening chapter, " The Importance of Learning " discusses the Talmudic concept of learning in all its aspects. In this chapter we learn that no one is free from the injunction " And the study of the law is greater than them all."

Chapter 2, " Places and Times of Learning " presents a detailed history of the great academies of Palestine and Babylon. It also briefly singles out for comment some of the great teachers of the past. Here we also learn about the restriction imposed on learning because of mourning and fasts.

" Democracy in Learning" gives us some interesting and intimate facts about the lives of some of the most famous Rabbis of old.

The Rabbis had some interesting views on teaching women. There are some sharp differences of opinion in this matter though the majority are of the opinion that women should not indulge in learning.

They had a well defined picture of the competent teacher. In addition to this, they had some interesting views on educational psychology both of which are discussed in chapters 5 and 6. We have a good basis in these chapters for comparing the Rabbinic conception of adult education with that prevailing today.

Though the communal structure of our society is vastly different from that of ancient times, it is interesting to trace Rabbinic thinking regarding the material rewards of study. It enables us to learn much about the way in which the early scholars conceived of their roles as teachers. This together with the theological rewards of study forms the background for the final chapter.