A Set Table, Part I
Sarah Zager

I Conflicts Between Childcare and Torah Learning

Yevamot 63b:17-18

Rabbi Ya’akov says: It is as though he diminishes the Divine Image, as it is stated: “For in the image of God He made man” (Genesis 9:6), and it is written immediately afterward: “And you, be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 9:7). Ben Azzai says: It is as though he sheds blood and also diminishes the Divine Image, as it is stated: “And you, be fruitful and multiply,” after the verse that alludes to both shedding blood and the Divine Image. They said to ben Azzai: There is a type of scholar who expounds well and fulfills his own teachings well, and another who fulfills well and does not expound well. But you, who have never married, expound well on the importance of procreation, and yet you do not fulfill well your own teachings. Ben Azzai said to them: What shall I do, as my soul yearns for Torah, and I do not wish to deal with anything else. It is possible for the world to be maintained by
others, who are engaged in the mitzva to be fruitful and multiply.

Mishneh Torah, Marriage 15:2-3

When is a man obligated in this mitzva? From the age of seventeen. Once he reaches [the age of] twenty years and has not married, he has transgressed and neglected a positive commandment. However, if he is involved in Torah and engrossed in it, and he fears that if he marries, he will have to busy himself with supporting a wife and thereby come to neglect Torah study, then it is permissible for him to delay [marriage]; for one who is involved in a mitzva is exempt from another mitzva – all the more so regarding Torah study.

(3) One who is in love with Torah and studies it and cleaves into it always, as Ben Azzai did, commits no sin thereby.
Mishnayot, 'En-Ya’akov, various midrashim, Menorat ha-Ma’or, Kav ha-Yashar, Zemah Shevet Yehudah and many other books of this nature, including volumes of Aggadah. All of her focus and concentration [was]...in the books—her hand hardly moved from them! But the maintenance of the household, she knew little, almost nothing.

II Conflicts Between Economic Need and Torah Learning

Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De’ah 246

(1) Every Jewish man is obligated in studying Torah, whether poor or rich, whether completely healthy or suffering, whether young or very old. Even a poor man who frequents doorways (to beg) and even one with a wife and children is obligated to set a time for himself to study Torah, by day or by night, as it says, "And you shall meditate on it day and night."

(And in a pressing time, even if he only reads a few pages [of Torah] a day for the sake of livelihood, the streets, and a wife and children, he is obligated to set aside time to study the Torah, day or night, as it says, "And you shall meditate on it day and night."
read Shem"a in the morning or evening, it is called "It shall not be moved..."

And one that it is impossible for him to learn because he does not know how to at all or because of troubles that he has, should support others who study.

Menachot 99b:17

Rabbi Yoḥanan says in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Yoḥai: Even if a person recited only the recitation of Shema in the morning and in the evening, he has fulfilled the mitzva of: “This Torah scroll shall not depart from your mouth.”

Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 246:21

REMA: ....one should make his Torah fixed and his work contingent, and should reduce business and engage in Torah. He should put aside temporary pleasures from his mind and do work all day for his livelihood if he does not have enough to eat, and the rest of the day and the night he should engage in Torah. And it is a great quality to
generate one's sustenance from the work of his hands, as it says, "The product of your hands you shall surely eat" (Ps. 128).

Arukh HaShulchan, Yoreh De'ah 246:7

And therefore, every person in Israel is obligated in the study of Torah, whether poor or rich, whether abled or disabled, whether young or old. Even a poor person, who goes and begs in doorways, even with a wife and children, is obligated to set times for the study of Torah day and night, as it says, "And you shall meditate on it day and night," meaning some during the day and some at night. And even though the simple meaning of the verse is that one should be learning all the time, for the entire day and the entire night, as it says "Let not this Torah cease from your lips, and you shall meditate..." However, this is not possible for a person who struggles to provide for their basic needs, this applies only to some exceptional people in that generation. As the sages of Blessed Memory say, "The Torah was only given to those who ate the manna." And therefore, there will never be a generation as knowledgeable as the generation that wandered in the desert,
because they were not struggling to provide for their basic needs. But for those like us, there is an obligation to set specific times for Torah, a time during the day and a time at night.

III Who Can Do Keviat Itim?

Indeed, the Torah modified the civil and religious demands it made upon Jewish women, to assure that no legal obligation could possibly interfere with her performance of that particular role. If a woman elected to discover her fulfillment in the relation to her husband and children and in the shaping of a home no law would stand in the way of her performance of that trust.

Menachot 99b:17
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Sarit Kattan Gribetz Time and Difference in Rabbinic Judaism (2020)
Close analysis of Mishnah Berakhot’s rules regarding the recitation of the Shema and tractate Niddah’s discussion of menstrual purity laws demonstrates that rabbinic sources develop both practices as ones that mark daily time. While these two rabbinic sets of rituals refer to biblical passages as their ostensible origins, the rabbinic texts transform previous practices into daily rituals, and ones that were, moreover, designed to function as rituals that marked transitions between day and night. Deuteronomy 6 and 11, the
passages that serve as the biblical basis for the rabbinic *Shema* prayer, suggest a call to constantly express one’s devotion to God. Rabbinic sources reinterpret these passages differently, as mandating daily ritualized recitations of the biblical verses at the start of each evening and morning. Likewise, the menstrual purity laws of Leviticus 15 ostensibly dictate monthly time and other units of time, such as seven-day periods, but rabbinic laws impose additional practices that transform the biblical concern for maintaining purity writ large into a daily concern that entailed, in addition, a ritual performed, similar to the *Shema*, each evening and morning. These two sets of rituals (*Shema* and Niddah), as they are reconceived in tannaitic rabbinic texts, mark, on a daily basis, the temporal transition between days as well as from day to night and from night to day.

Ohr Yisrael 6:8

*Limmud Musar* is an obligation [hovah] for all people, and especially for a person who is busy [tarud] with his work. A person suffers from a great illness with respect to service of the Holy Blessed One, and it is not easy to make use of the cure of *Limmud Musar*; one needs a very strong treatment in order to cure such a significant illness.

Ohr Yisrael 3:1-2

My dear friend! I have thought and judged... that Limmud Musar is not like other kinds of study. There is no other kind of study whose obligation extends to all people. Women are exempt from Talmud Torah, and there is also ample room.
to exempt those who are
downtrodden from their work, and
who are not of sound mind because
of their horrible occupations, God
forbid—each person can be
exempted from his obligation
according to his situation. And one
case is not like another. And as a
person’s condition improves, so his
obligation grows; and may this
increase...Limmud Musar is not like
this—it is a strong obligation for all
souls.

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