

הלכות תלמוד תורה • פרק ראשון

Learned like the daf, the literal words in bold, flowing with the elucidation

CHAPTER PREVIEW

In this chapter, we begin our journey into Hilchos Talmud Torah, learning about the fundamental obligation of teaching and studying the Torah. We will explore who is obligated in this great mitzvah, focusing on the exemption of women, slaves, and minors, while highlighting a father's sacred duty to teach his young son the words of the living Torah.

We will also see how this beautiful chain of transmission extends beyond one's immediate children. The Rambam guides us through the obligation of teaching one's grandchildren and, indeed, teaching any student who wishes to learn, establishing the proper order of precedence and the father's responsibility to hire a teacher for his son.

All introductions, summaries, and contextual notes are the editor's commentary and are not part of the original text.

הלכה א

Halacha 1 • Exemption of Women and Slaves and the Father's Obligation to Teach His Son

נשים ועבדים וקטנים

Women, and Canaanite slaves, and minors

פטורים מתלמוד תורה.

are exempt from the mitzvah of study of Torah.

אבל קטן

But regarding a minor boy,

אביו חייב ללמדו תורה

his father is obligated to teach him Torah,

שנאמר דברים יא יט "ולמדתם את בניכם לדבר בם".

as it is said in the Torah in Devarim 11:19, "And you shall teach them to your sons, to speak in them."

ואין האשה חייבת ללמד את בנה.

And the woman is not obligated to teach her son,

שכל החיב ללמד חייב ללמד:

for anyone who is obligated to learn himself is obligated to teach others, and since a woman is not commanded to study, she is not commanded to teach.

כַּשֵּׁם שֶׁחַיִּב אָדָם לְלַמֵּד אֶת בְּנוֹ

Just as a man is obligated to teach his son Torah,

כֹּךְ הוּא חַיִּב לְלַמֵּד אֶת בֶּן בְּנוֹ

so is he obligated to teach his son's son,

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר דְּבָרִים ד ט "וְהוֹדַעְתֶּם לְבָנֵיכָה וּלְבְנֵי בָנֵיכָה".

as it is said in the pasuk, "And you shall make them known to your sons and to your sons' sons."

וְלֹא בְנוֹ וּבֶן בְּנוֹ בְּלֻכְד

And this obligation does **not** apply to his son and his son's son alone;

אֲלֵא מִצְוָה עַל כָּל חָכָם וְחָכָם מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל

rather, it is a mitzvah upon every wise man of Israel

לְלַמֵּד אֶת כָּל הַתְּלָמִידִים אֲף עַל פִּי שְׂאִינָן בָּנָיו.

to teach all students, even though they are **not** his biological sons,

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר דְּבָרִים ו ז "וְשִׁנַּנְתָּם לְבָנֵיכָה"

as it is said, "And you shall teach them sharply to your sons."

מִפִּי הַשְּׁמוּעָה לְמַדּוֹ

From the mouth of the tradition the Sages learned that

"בָּנֵיכָה" אֵלּוּ תְלָמִידֵיכָה

"your sons" in this context refers to your students,

שֶׁהַתְּלָמִידִים קְרוּיִין בָּנִים

for students are called "sons,"

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר מַלְכִּים ב ב ג "וַיֵּצְאוּ בְנֵי הַנְּבִיאִים".

as it is said, "And the sons of the prophets went out"—meaning the disciples of the prophets.

אִם כֵּן לָמָּה נִצְטָוָה עַל בְּנוֹ וְעַל בֶּן בְּנוֹ.

If so, why was he specifically commanded concerning his son and concerning his son's son?

לְהַקְדִּים בְּנוֹ לְבֶן בְּנוֹ

To give precedence to his son before his son's son,

וְכֵן בְּנוֹ לְבֵן חֲבֵירוֹ:

and to give precedence to his son's son before the son of his fellow student.

הלכה ג

Halacha 3 · The Obligation to Hire a Teacher for One's Son and the Precedence of Study over Action

וְחַיֵּב לְשׂוֹכֵר מַלְמֵד לְבְנוֹ לְלַמְדּוֹ.

And a father is obligated to hire a teacher for his son to teach him Torah.

וְאִינוֹ חַיֵּב לְלַמְדּוֹ בֶּן חֲבֵירוֹ אֶלָּא בְּחִנָּם.

But he is not obligated to teach the son of his fellow except for free, as a mitzvah, but he does not have to pay for a teacher for another person's child.

מִי שֶׁלֹּא לָמַדּוֹ אָבִיו

One whose father did not teach him Torah when he was young,

חַיֵּב לְלַמְדּוֹ אֶת עַצְמוֹ כְּשֵׁיכִיר

is obligated to teach himself when he understands and gains intellectual maturity,

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר דְּבָרִים הֵא "וְלִמַּדְתֶּם אֹתָם וְשָׁמַרְתֶּם לַעֲשׂוֹתָם".

as it is said in the Torah (Devarim 5:1): "And you shall study them, and you shall safeguard to perform them."

וְכֵן אֵתָּה מוֹצֵא בְּכָל מְקוֹם שֶׁהַתְּלָמוּד קוֹדֵם לַמַּעֲשֶׂה

And so you find in every place in the words of Chazal that study precedes action in importance and priority,

מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהַתְּלָמוּד מְבִיא לִידֵי מַעֲשֶׂה

because study leads to action, as one cannot perform the mitzvos properly without knowing how,

וְאִין הַמַּעֲשֶׂה מְבִיא לִידֵי תְלָמוּד:

and action does not lead to study.

הלכה ד

Halacha 4 · Priority in Torah Study Between a Father and His Son

הֲיָהּ הוּא רוֹצֵה לְלַמַּד תּוֹרָה

If he wants to study Torah himself,

וְיֵשׁ לוֹ בֶּן לְלַמַּד תּוֹרָה

and there is to him a son who also needs to study Torah,

הוּא קוֹדֵם לְבְנוֹ.

he takes priority over his son, and he should study first.

וְאִם הָיָה בְּנוֹ נָכוֹן וּמִשְׁכִּיל

And if his son was understanding and wise,

לְהָבִין מָה שִׁי' לִמּוֹד יוֹתֵר מִמֶּנּוּ

with the capacity to comprehend what he will study more than him,

בְּנוֹ קוֹדֵם.

his son takes priority, and the father must support the son's learning first.

וְאִף עַל פִּי שֶׁבְּנוֹ קוֹדֵם

And even though his son takes priority,

לֹא יִבְטֵל הוּא.

he should not neglect his own learning entirely.

שְׁפָשֵׁם שְׁמִצְוָה עָלָיו לְלַמֵּד אֶת בְּנוֹ

For just as a mitzvah is upon him to teach his son,

כִּי הוּא מִצְוָה לְלַמֵּד עַצְמוֹ:

so he is commanded to teach himself.

הִלְכָה ה'

Halacha 5 • The Precedence of Torah Study Over Marriage

לְעוֹלָם יִלְמַד אָדָם תּוֹרָה

Always should study a person Torah

וְאַחֵר כִּי יִשָּׂא אִשָּׁה

and after that marry a wife,

שָׂאָם נָשָׂא אִשָּׁה תַּחְלָה

for if he marries a wife first,

אֵין יָדְעָתוֹ פְּנוּיָה לְלַמֵּד.

not is his mind free to study because of the burden of earning a livelihood.

וְאִם הָיָה יִצְרוֹ מִתְגַּבֵּר עָלָיו

And if was his evil inclination overcoming him

עד שנמצא שאין לבו פנוי

until it is found that not is his heart free to concentrate on his learning due to his thoughts,

ישא ואחר כך ילמד תורה:

he should marry and after that study Torah in purity.

הלכה ו

Halacha 6 · The Age at Which a Father Must Begin Teaching His Son Torah

מאימתי אביו חייב ללמדו תורה.

From when is his father obligated to teach him Torah?

משיתחיל לדבר

From when he begins to speak,

מלמדו "תורה צוה לנו משה"

he teaches him the verse, "Torah commanded us Moshe,"

ו"שמע ישראל",

and the verse, "Shema Yisrael,"

ואחר כך מלמדו מעט מעט פסוקים פסוקים

and after that he teaches him little by little, verses by verses,

עד שיהיה בן שש או בן שבע

until he is a son of six or a son of seven years old,

הכל לפי בריו.

everything according to his health and physical strength.

ומוליכו אצל מלמד התינוקות:

And then he brings him to a teacher of the children for structured learning.

הלכה ז

Halacha 7 · Permissibility of Payment for Teaching Written Torah and Prohibition for Oral Torah

היה מנהג המדינה לקח מלמד התינוקות שכר

If the custom of the province was for a teacher of the children to take payment,

נותן לו שכרו.

the father gives to him his payment,

וְחַיֵּב לְלַמְדוֹ בְּשָׂכָר עַד שִׁיקְרָא תּוֹרָה שְׂפָכֶתָב כָּלָה.

and the father is obligated to teach him, even with payment, until he can read the Written Torah in its entirety.

מְקוֹם שֶׁנֶּהֱגוּ לְלַמֵּד תּוֹרָה שְׂפָכֶתָב בְּשָׂכָר

In a place where they accustomed to teach the Written Torah with payment,

מִתֵּר לְלַמֵּד בְּשָׂכָר.

it is permitted to teach it with payment.

אָבֵל תּוֹרָה שְׂבָעַל פֶּה אָסוּר לְלַמְדָּה בְּשָׂכָר

But as for the Oral Torah, it is forbidden to teach it with payment,

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "רְאֵה לַמִּדְתִּי אֶתְכֶם חֻקִּים וּמִשְׁפָּטִים כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוֵּנִי ה'" וְגו'

as it is said in the pasuk, "Behold, I have taught you statutes and ordinances, as Hashem commanded me," etc.

מָה אֲנִי בַּחֲנָם לְמִדְתִּי אַף אַתֶּם לְמִדְתֶּם בַּחֲנָם מִמֶּנִּי

This teaches us: Just as I learned for free from Hashem, so you learned for free from me.

וְכֵן כְּשֶׁתִּלְמְדוּ לְדוֹרוֹת לְמַדוּ בַּחֲנָם כְּמוֹ שֶׁלְמַדְתֶּם מִמֶּנִּי.

And so, when you teach to the future generations, teach for free, just as you learned from me.

לֹא מֵצֵא מִי שֶׁיִּלְמְדוּ בַּחֲנָם יִלְמְדוּ בְּשָׂכָר

If a person did not find someone who will teach him for free, he must have others teach him even with payment,

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר אֱמֶת קְנֵה.

as it is said in the pasuk, "Buy truth."

יְכוּל יִלְמַד לְאַחֵרִים בְּשָׂכָר.

One might think that because he had to pay, he may likewise teach to others with payment.

תִּלְמוּד לומר "וְאַל תִּמְכֹּר".

Therefore, the teaching says, "And do not sell."

הָא לְמִדְתִּי שֶׁאָסוּר לוֹ לְלַמֵּד בְּשָׂכָר

Behold, you have learned that it is forbidden for him to teach with payment,

אַף עַל פִּי שֶׁלְמְדוֹ רַבּוֹ בְּשָׂכָר:

even though his teacher taught him with payment.

כָּל אִישׁ מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל חַיב בְּתִלְמוּד תּוֹרָה

Every man of Israel is obligated in the study of Torah,

בֵּין עָנִי בֵּין עָשִׁיר

whether he is poor or whether he is rich,

בֵּין שָׁלֵם בְּגוּפוֹ בֵּין בַּעַל יְסוּרִין

whether he is whole in his body or whether he is a possessor of suffering,

בֵּין בָּחוּר בֵּין שֶׁהָיָה זָקֵן גָּדוֹל שֶׁתִּשְׁשׁ כָּחוֹ

whether he is a youth or whether he was an elder of great age whose strength has weakened.

אֲפִלּוּ הָיָה עָנִי הַמְתַּפְּרִינֵם מִן הַצְדָּקָה וּמַחֲזִיר עַל הַפֶּתַח חַיִּים

Even if he was a poor man who is supported from charity and goes around upon the doorways begging for bread,

וְאֲפִלּוּ בַּעַל אִשָּׁה וּבָנִים

and even if he is a possessor of a wife and children who must support his family, he still

חַיב לְקַבֵּעַ לוֹ זְמַן לְתִלְמוּד תּוֹרָה בַּיּוֹם וּבַלַּיְלָה

is obligated to establish for himself a time for the study of Torah by day and by night,

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "וְהִגִּיתָ בוֹ יוֹמָם וָלַיְלָה":

as it is said in the passuk, "and you shall contemplate it day and night."

גְּדוּלֵי חֲכָמֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

The great Sages of Yisrael

הָיוּ מֵהֶן חוֹטְבֵי עֲצִים

were, among them, choppers of wood

וּמֵהֶן שׁוֹאֲבֵי מַיִם

and, among them, drawers of water,

וּמֵהֶן סוּמִיִּים

and, among them, blind men;

ואף על פי כן

and even though it was so,

היו עוסקין בתלמוד תורה

they were occupied with the study of Torah

ביום ובליילה

by day and by night.

והם מקלל מעתיקי השמועה

And they are among the transmitters of the tradition,

איש מפיו איש

man from the mouth of man,

מפי משה רבנו:

from the mouth of Moshe our teacher.

הלכה י

Halacha 10 · The Obligation to Study Torah Until the Day of One's Death

עד אימתי חייב ללמוד תורה

Until when is a person obligated to study Torah?

עד יום מותו

Until the day of his death,

שנאמר דברים ד ט "ופן יסורו מלבבך כל ימי חייך".

as it is said in the pasuk in Devarim, "And lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life."

וכל זמן שלא יעסק בלמוד

And the reason for this is that all the time that a person does not occupy himself with study,

הוא שוכח:

he forgets what he has already learned.

הלכה יא

Halacha 11 · Dividing One's Study Time into Three Parts

וחייב לשלש את זמן למידתו.

And a person is obligated to divide into three parts the time of his study:

שְׁלִישׁ בַּתּוֹרָה שֶׁבִּכְתָּב.

one third of his time should be spent in the Torah that is in writing;

וְשְׁלִישׁ בַּתּוֹרָה שֶׁבְּעַל פֶּה.

and one third should be spent in the Torah that is by mouth, which refers to the Mishnah and its explanations;

וְשְׁלִישׁ יָבִין וְיִשְׁכֵּיל אַחֲרֵית דְּבָר מֵרֵאשִׁיתוֹ

and the remaining one third of his time he shall understand and conceptualize the end of a matter from its beginning, analyzing how a concept develops,

וְיוֹצִיא דְּבָר מִדְּבָר

and derive a matter from another matter,

וְיִדְמֶה דְּבָר לְדְּבָר

and compare a matter to another matter to find their common halachic principles,

וְיָבִין בַּמִּדּוֹת שֶׁהַתּוֹרָה נִדְרָשֶׁת בָּהֶן

and understand the principles of hermeneutics that the Torah is expounded by them,

עַד שֶׁיָּדַע הֵיכָּה הוּא עֹקֶר הַמִּדּוֹת

until he knows how is the essence of the principles and how they are applied in practice,

וְהֵיכָּה יוֹצִיא הָאָסוּר וְהַמֵּתֵר וְכִיּוֹצֵא בָּהֶן

and how he shall derive that which is the forbidden and the permitted, and similar to them,

מִדְּבָרִים שֶׁלָּמַד מִפִּי הַשְּׁמוּעָה.

from matters that he learned from the mouth of the tradition.

וְעִנְיָן זֶה הוּא הַנִּקְרָא גִמְרָא:

And the subject of this third area of study, it is called Gemara.

הִלְכָּה יב

Halacha 12 · Dividing One's Study Time Between Written Law, Oral Law, and Gemara

בִּיצַד.

How is this division of study applied in practice?

הָיָה בַּעַל אֲמָנוּת

If he was a master of a craft

וְהָיָה עוֹסֵק בְּמַלְאכְתּוֹ שְׁלֹשׁ שָׁעוֹת בַּיּוֹם

and he was occupying himself with his work for three hours in the day,

וּבַתּוֹרָה תִּשְׁעַ.

and occupying himself with the Torah for nine hours,

אוֹתָן הַתִּשְׁעָ

those nine hours of study,

קוֹרֵא בְּשְׁלֹשׁ מֵהֶן בַּתּוֹרָה שֶׁבְּכָתָב

he reads in three of them in the Torah that is in writing,

וּבְשְׁלֹשׁ בַּתּוֹרָה שֶׁבְּעַל פֶּה

and in three hours he studies in the Torah that is on the mouth,

וּבְשְׁלֹשׁ אַחֲרוֹת מִתְבּוֹנֵן בְּדַעְתּוֹ לְהַבִּין דָּבָר מִדָּבָר.

and in three other hours he meditates with his intellect to understand a concept from a concept.

וְדִבְרֵי קְבָלָה בְּכָלֵל תּוֹרָה שֶׁבְּכָתָב הֵן

And the words of prophetic tradition—meaning Nevi'im and Kesuvim—in the category of Torah that is in writing they are,

וּפְרוּשָׁן בְּכָלֵל תּוֹרָה שֶׁבְּעַל פֶּה.

and their explanation is in the category of Torah that is on the mouth.

וְהַעֲנִינִים הַנִּקְרָאִים פָּרְדֵּס בְּכָלֵל הַגְּמָרָא הֵן.

And the matters that are called Pardes—the deepest secrets of the Torah—in the category of the Gemara they are.

בְּמָה דְּבָרִים אֲמוּרִים

In what situation words are said?

בְּתַחֲלֵת תְּלִמּוּדוֹ שֶׁל אָדָם

In the beginning of the study of a person.

אֲבָל כְּשִׁיגְדִיל בְּחָכְמָה

But when he grows in wisdom

וְלֹא יִהְיֶה צָרִיךְ לֹא לְלַמַּד תּוֹרָה שֶׁבְּכָתָב

and not he will need not to learn Torah that is in writing because he already knows it thoroughly,

וְלֹא לְעֹסֵק תָּמִיד בַּתּוֹרָה שֶׁבַּעַל פִּה

and not to occupy himself constantly with the Torah that is on the mouth,

יִקְרָא בְּעֵתִים מְזֻמָּנִים תּוֹרָה שֶׁבְּכָתֵב וְדִבְרֵי הַשְּׁמוּעָה

he should read at times designated Torah that is in writing and the words of the oral tradition

כְּדִי שֶׁלֹּא יִשְׁכַּח דְּבַר מִדִּבְרֵי דִּינֵי תּוֹרָה

in order that not he will forget a matter from the words of the laws of Torah,

וַיִּפְנֶה כָּל יָמָיו לַגְּמָרָא בַּלְבָּד

and he should turn all his days to the Gemara alone,

לְפִי רֹחַב שֵׁישׁ בְּלִבּוֹ וַיִּשׁוּב דַּעְתּוֹ:

according to the breadth that there is in his heart and the settling of his mind.

הַלְכָּה יג

Halacha 13 · Torah Study for Women and the Distinction Between the Written and Oral Law

אִשָּׁה שֶׁלִּמְדָה תּוֹרָה יֵשׁ לָהּ שָׂכָר

A woman who studied Torah has a reward for her learning,

אָבָל אֵינוֹ כְּשָׂכָר הָאִישׁ.

but it is not like the reward of the man.

מִפְּנֵי שֶׁלֹּא נִצְטִוָּתָהּ.

This is because she was not commanded in this mitzvah,

וְכָל הָעוֹשֶׂה דְּבַר שֶׁאֵינוֹ מֻצְוָה עָלָיו לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ

and anyone who performs a matter that he is not commanded upon it to do it,

אֵין שָׂכָרוֹ כְּשָׂכָר הַמְּצֻוָה שֶׁעָשָׂה אֲלָא פָחוֹת מִמֶּנּוּ.

his reward is not like the reward of the commanded one who performed it, but rather it is less than him.

וְאַף עַל פִּי שֵׁישׁ לָהּ שָׂכָר

And even though that there is for her a reward for studying on her own,

צִוּוּ חֲכָמִים שֶׁלֹּא יִלְמַד אָדָם אֶת בִּתּוֹ תּוֹרָה.

the Sages commanded that a person should not teach his daughter Torah.

מִפְּנֵי שֶׁרַב הַנָּשִׁים אֵין דַּעְתָּם מְכוֹנֶנֶת לְהִתְלַמֵּד

This is **because most women, their mind is not focused to learn** with the proper depth and seriousness,

אָלֵא הֵן מוֹצִיאוֹת דְּבָרֵי תוֹרָה לְדְבָרֵי הֶבְאִי לְפִי עֲנִיּוֹת דַּעְתָּן.

but rather **they turn words of Torah to words of nonsense according to the poverty of their mind** and lack of preparation for this type of study.

אָמְרוּ חֲכָמִים כָּל הַמְלִמֵּד אֶת בְּתוּ תוֹרָה כְּאִלּוּ לְמַדָּה תִּפְלוּת.

Therefore, **the Sages said, "Whoever teaches his daughter Torah is as if he taught her foolishness."**

בְּמָה דְּבָרִים אָמְרוּ בְּתוֹרָה שְׂפָעַל פֶּה

In what words are these **said? Regarding Torah that is by mouth**, which requires deep analysis;

אָבַל תוֹרָה שֶׁבְּכָתוּב לֹא יִלְמַד אוֹתָהּ לְכַתְּחִלָּה

but as for **Torah that is in writing**, he should not teach her it at the outset,

וְאִם לְמַדָּה אֵינוֹ כְּמַלְמָדָה תִּפְלוּת:

and if he taught her, it is not like teaching her foolishness.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The chapter begins by clarifying that while women, slaves, and minors are exempt from the formal obligation of Torah study, a father is strictly commanded to teach his young son. This duty of transmission is so great that it extends to one's grandchildren and even to other students, who are cherished like sons. Finally, the halachah establishes that a father must go so far as to hire a teacher for his son to ensure he receives a proper Torah education, prioritizing his own descendants over others in this holy task.

לְמַעֲשֶׂה WHAT TO TAKE HOME

No matter how busy or overwhelmed you are with the demands of life, Hashem wants your connection to His Torah to be a permanent, daily reality. The Rambam makes it clear that every single Yid, whether rich or poor, healthy or suffering, a young bachur or an elderly man whose strength has faded, is absolutely obligated to establish a set time for Torah study by day and by night. There are no excuses. Even the greatest of our sages, the holy giants who transmitted the Torah down through the generations, were sometimes simple woodcutters and water-drawers who worked hard for their parnassah, yet they never let a day pass without their learning.

This is not just a duty; it is your life force. The Torah warns us that the moment a person stops engaging in study, he begins to forget. Torah is not a subject you finish and put away on a shelf; it is an ongoing, lifelong avodah that must continue until your very last day on this earth. When you set a fixed time for learning, you are anchoring your neshama to its source, ensuring that your daily actions are guided by the light of ratzon Hashem.

Today, make an unshakeable commitment to your daily learning. No matter what comes up, set aside at least fifteen minutes tonight and fifteen minutes tomorrow morning to learn Torah, treating this appointment as completely non-negotiable.

