

And All Your Children Shall Be Learned: Women and the Study of Torah in Jewish Law and History

Shoshana Pantel Zolty



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One picture that often comes to mind when one thinks of Torah study is a group of bearded men clad in long black coats and hats huddled around a table piled high with texts. Women do not appear in this image; if anywhere, they are in the kitchen preparing a meal, keeping the children from disturbing their fathers, or working to support the family so that their husbands can devote their energies to learning. Such is a common view as to "the role of women" in Torah study. In And All Your Children Shall Be Learned: Women and the Study of Torah in Jewish Law and History, Shoshana Pantel Zolty helps dispel this myth. Through an analysis of halakhic literature, the Mishnah, the Talmud, and other classical texts, as well as Jewish and general world history, Zolty explores the evolution of Jewish education for women. In each period, from biblical times through to the twentieth century, we find exceptional women, usually of rabbinic families, some of whom are cited as authorities in certain areas of Jewish law, and some of whom may have mastered the entire gamut of Torah study. The book traces the development of the legal literature pertaining to the instruction of Torah to women and the various issues surrounding it. It also discusses the twentieth-century initiative of Sarah Schenirer, the founder of the Bais Ya'akov Schools, and analyzes the place of the study of Torah by women in Orthodox settings. Throughout the work, ample footnotes and source material document the veracity of the claim that women have been and are permitted to become learned. Zolty sifts through history to accord women their rightful place in the history of Jewish education. Along the way she presents the basic philosophy of education, the role and status of women in traditional Judaism, and the attitudes of scholars with respect to the religious roles of women. For women who think that traditional study is closed to them, or for men who feel that wome

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