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ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

Deracheha: Women and Mitzvot

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Chinuch

WHAT IS CHINUCH FOR MITZVOT? WHO IS OBLIGATED? AT WHAT STAGE?

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Primary Chinuch

We can broadly define *chinuch* as an extended initiation into how to live in service of God. In his commentary on a verse that mentions Avraham's disciples (*chanichav*), Rashi clarifies this essential meaning of the term:

Rashi Bereishit 14:14

Chanichav [Avraham's disciples] – it is written "*chanicho*" [his disciple]; this is Eliezer, whom he educated in *mitzvot*. This term [root *chet-nun-chaf*] denotes the initial entry of a person or vessel to the craft which in which it will ultimately be established, thus (*Mishlei* 22:6) "educate the youth," (*Bamidbar* 7:11) "the dedication of the altar), (*Tehillim* 30:1) the dedication of the house, and in French we call this "*initier*."

For Jews, Torah values and *mitzvot* naturally play a central role in *chinuch*, on a few different levels:

Religious education can be deliberate and ritually-oriented—a parent putting children to bed with Shema or washing their hands in the morning.

Religious education also occurs more organically when children observe their parents living their religious commitments. Day-to-day moments, like children seeing their parents pray or accompanying them to bring food to an ill neighbor, can have a deep impact on their religious development. The Lubavitcher Rebbe describes this type of education:

"Success in Education," in *At Alit: Collection of Sichot from the Lubavitcher Rebbe to Women and Girls*, ed. Moshe Shilat (Kfar Chabad, 2014), chapter 20.

The influence on another is primarily through being a living example. For thus, even those who are not occupied with the field of *chinuch* (at least officially, and even unofficially), they also must certainly occupy themselves with *chinuch*. And similarly with the *chinuch* through the "air" that is in the room and in the home in which they live, so that it is permeated with true goodness and sanctity and Judaism.

Beyond setting a personal example, the Rebbe speaks of active engagement in education and creating a certain atmosphere through which a child imbibes Yiddishkeit mimetically, imitatively. Educator Slovie Jungreis-Wolff expresses this very concretely:¹

Slovie Jungreis-Wolf, "Make a Good Child Great," *Yated Ne'eman*, November 5, 2014.

Children are sponges. They absorb every action, every conversation, and every word exchanged between parents. Even the smallest toddler will take a parent's phone and mimic the interactions he's seen and heard. We, parents, are our children's most effective role models. Greater than any speech about honesty is the moment a child witnesses his parent disclosing the truth about his children's ages when paying the admission for a Chol Hamoed outing. More powerful than any lecture about kindness is the way a child observes his parents helping one another and giving an extra hand. If we want our children to feel connected to the words in their siddurim and place them in their hearts, it is certainly not enough to say, "Shaah!" and point to the page. Our children need to observe us taking our davening seriously, not allowing others to distract us, and showing that we truly believe in the power of tefillah. Our homes are the most potent classrooms...When we parent our children, we parent ourselves. We are forced to look at the way we speak, dress, interact with others, converse at our Shabbos table, greet Yomim Tovim, and deal with daily challenges. Even the way we wake up in the morning and go to sleep at night becomes a lesson for our children.

We've discussed transmitting Jewish tradition mimetically [elsewhere](#) in more general terms.

There's another aspect of *chinuch*, that goes beyond modelling and molding, and follows from the unique nature of each child. Rav Aharon Lichtenstein explains:²

Rav Aharon Lichtenstein, "On Raising Children," *sicha* delivered at Yeshivat Har Etzion, July 1, 2007.

There is a second, more relational aspect of the broad sense of chinukh. This entails developing what the Greeks called *paideia*, eliciting from the personality of the child that which is already there; moreover, this means developing not powers, but rather attitudes, relationships, commitments, involvement, and engagement...You cannot start being an involved parent too early...who works at parenting out of the depth of his love and commitment: the love of the child, the love of the family, and the love of God.

¹ Available here: <https://yated.com/make-a-good-child-great/>

² Available here: <https://etzion.org.il/en/philosophy/great-thinkers/harav-aharon-lichtenstein/on-raising-children>

This type of *chinuch* relates to a parent's ongoing, loving attention to a child's growth, from the very beginning of life.

Mothers

Mothers have long been assumed to be primary caregivers, especially in a child's first years. In its discussion of minors and the mitzva of *sukka*, the mishna recognizes that at certain stages in life, children simply need their mothers, and that such a need can be of halachic consequence:

Mishna Sukka 2:8

...Minors are exempt from *sukka*. A minor who does not need his mother is obligated in *sukka*...

In the Middle Ages, Rabbeinu Yona argues that a mother is chiefly responsible for all children's connection to Torah and fear of Heaven:³

Rabbeinu Yona, *Iggeret Ha-teshuva*, Day 6 Rule 1:2

...For they [mothers] send their sons to school, and keep an eye on their sons that they occupy themselves with Torah, and care for them when they come from school, and attract them with good things that they be desirous of Torah, and watch out that they do not desist from Torah, and teach them fear of sin in their childhood. For it is said "Educate the youth according to his way; even when he grows old, he will not stray from it." And hence, refined women bring about Torah and awe...

In formulating this argument, centered on mother and son, Rabbeinu Yona lists both a mother's prodding to study Torah formally and her more affective acts of care. Rav Shmshon Raphael Hirsch makes a similar argument in the nineteenth century:

Rav Shmshon Raphael Hirsch, "Educational Talks I," in *Judaism Eternal*, ed. & trans. Dayan Dr. I Grunfeld (London: Soncino, 1956), 224, 231.

Eim is the term for mother in the Divine tongue...But "*eim*" is also "*im*", the "if", the *sine qua non*, the indispensable, primary "condition" for the physical and spiritual nature of the child.For already when *yisa ha-omen et ha-yonek*, at the time when the nurse takes up the infant, does the business of upbringing begin.

Education is implicit in even the most basic acts of caring for a child, as the child picks up on a parent's speech, behaviors, outlook, and attributes over time. Modern theologian Dr. Mara Benjamin elaborates on how nurturing an infant can be seen as the foundation of Torah study:⁴

Dr. Mara Benjamin, "On Teachers, Rabbinic and Maternal," in *Mothers in the Jewish Cultural Imagination*, eds. Jane L. Kanarek, Marjorie Lehman, and Simon J. Bronner

³ This piece is loosely based on this midrash:

Shemot Rabba 28b

"So shall you say to the house of Ya'akov," These are the women...Why to the women first?...In order that they lead their children to Torah.

⁴ Available here:

https://www.mtholyoke.edu/sites/default/files/acad/jewish/docs/Benjamin_Mothers_in_the_Jewish_Cultural_Imagination.pdf

(Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017), 371.

...Imagine that parents' bodies, actions, and movements are the Torah that their children absorb. The parent—engaged in ordinary, quotidian duties of care and responsibility, whom we can speak of historically, but not normatively, as 'the mother'—then becomes the sage, the 'living scroll' whose embodied Torah is precisely what the child learns to 'read'. This parental teaching is not, as in the historical model of the sage, to be superseded by the teaching of the sage, but is rather the teaching itself, and simultaneously the foundation upon which all later learning builds.

The significance of caretaking imbued with educational value is often left implicit in our sources, though there is some acknowledgement that an apple often doesn't fall far from the tree. That, for example is how Rabbi Akiva's wife, Rachel, and her daughter are described:

Ketubot 63a

For people say: a ewe [*recheila*] goes after a ewe. Like the deeds of her mother, so are the deeds of a daughter...

As children grow, mothers pass on traditions and impart advice and wisdom. Abbaye cites his foster mother's medical lore. He also quotes her statements on children's Torah study and initiation into *mitzvot*. (We'll address her topic of age-appropriate *chinuch* later.)

Ketubot 50a

Abbaye said: Mother said to me, a six-year-old [should begin to study] Scripture, a ten-year-old [should begin to study] Mishna, a thirteen-year-old [should begin to observe] a 24-hour fast, and for a girl, a twelve-year-old.

Dedication to children's religious and moral education can be a decisive factor in their growth. The Talmud ascribes Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak's moral development to his mother's intervention:

Shabbat 156b

From Rav Nachman bar Yitzhak also, [we learn that] astrology does not apply to Israel. For Chaldean [astrologers] said to the mother of Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak, your son will be a thief. She did not allow him to uncover his head. She said to him, cover your head in order that fear of Heaven should be upon you, and pray for mercy. He did not know why she said this to him. One day, he was sitting and studying under a palm tree and the cloak fell off his head. He raised his eyes and saw the palm tree. His impulse overcame him, and he climbed up and cut off a bunch of dates with his teeth.

Now that we've seen how the sources emphasize the importance of a parent's nurturing guidance throughout childhood, let's examine the formal halachic parameters for education.

The Obligation

Halachic discussion of education focuses primarily on clearly defined *mitzvot* and not

on more informal, but formative, parent-child interactions. To start with, the formal, Torah-level mitzva of Talmud Torah is understood as obligating a father to teach Torah to his sons, and exempting mothers and daughters. (See more [here](#).)

Kiddushin 29b

She [a woman], whence [do we know] that she is not obligated [to teach Torah to her child]? As it is written "and you will teach" [in this spelling, looking like] "and you will learn." Anyone who is commanded to learn, is commanded to teach. And anyone who is not commanded to learn, is not commanded to teach. She [a woman], whence [do we know] that she is not obligated to learn herself? As it is written "and you will teach" [in this spelling, looking like] "and you will learn." Anyone whom others are commanded to teach, is commanded to teach himself. And anyone whom others are not commanded to teach, is not commanded to teach himself. Whence [do we know] that others are not commanded to teach her? As the verse says, "And you shall teach them to your sons" and not your daughters.

[Elsewhere](#), we've discussed ways in which women can and should take part in learning and teaching Torah, and a woman's [obligation](#) to learn the *halachot* relevant to her.

Rema YD 246

In any case, the woman is obligated to learn laws that apply to a woman.

Since text study is only one aspect of internalizing what it takes to serve God as a Jew, there is more to Jewish education than textual Talmud Torah. Our discussion of women's role in transmitting Jewish tradition in the [Introduction to Deracheha](#), elaborates on Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik's description of the mother as setting the tone for the experiential aspects of Judaism in the home.

To be sure, there are also halachic recognitions of a mother's role in *chinuch* in a broader sense. For example, eight hundred years ago, Rav Yoseph Migash ruled that a mother who had cared for her young daughter in her ex-husband's absence should be awarded custody, because a mother has a unique role to play in transmitting tradition to her daughter:

Responsa Ri Migash 71

For the mother in any case takes care of her [the daughter] more than the father, and she teaches her and guides her in what girls need to learn and to become accustomed to, like spinning and supervising the needs of the home and the like, and to teach her the way of women and their customs....

Even so, formal halachic definitions of *chinuch* are more narrow. Only a subset of educational activities is formalized as the obligation of *chinuch*, initiation into performing *mitzvot*.

The Talmud, in its discussion of a *katan* (minor) going up to Yerushalayim on the three *regalim* (pilgrimage festivals), refers to *chinuch* as a **rabbinic**-level obligation:

Chagiga 4a

Master said: "All of your males" (*Shemot* 23:17 et al.)—to include the minors [in

pilgrimage to Yerushalayim]...a minor who has reached the age of *chinuch* is a [matter of] rabbinic law! Granted, and the verse is a mere mnemonic device [linking the idea to the Torah text].

Sources

The passage above finds a hint at the rabbinic-level obligation of *chinuch* in the Torah's discussion of the three *regalim*.⁵ Several other Biblical verses emphasize the significance of *chinuch*.

A number of authorities, including Rashba, cite *Mishlei* 22:6, which exhorts us to take children's dispositions into account when educating them. (Rashba here calls *chinuch* a *chumra*, a stringency, a point to which we'll return.)

Rashba Megilla 19b

...A minor who has reached the age of *chinuch*, which is a stringency to accustom him ahead of time so that he will be accustomed to *mitzvot* when the time comes, and as the matter that is written: "Educate [*chanoch*] the youth according to his way; even when he grows old he will not stray from it (*Mishlei* 22:6).

More recently, in the mid-nineteenth century, Rav Meir Simcha of Dvinsk suggests that the fundamental obligation of *chinuch* for performing *mitzvot* is derived from the Torah, specifically, from God's praise of Avraham training his children and household in God's ways.

Bereishit 18:19

For I have known him, that he will command his children and his household after him and they will keep the way of God to perform *tzedaka* and law....

Meshech Chochma, Bereishit 18:19

...The source of the mitzva of *chinuch* for positive commandments, its source is in this verse from Avraham Avinu, who commanded his children in their youth about *mitzvot*. The verse of "educate the youth according to his way" (*Mishlei* 22:6)...is [on the level] of *divrei kabbala* [a type of rabbinic law anchored in the Prophets or Writings], but the essence is from Avraham...

Even if *chinuch* isn't formally commanded in any verse in the Torah, it is impossible to imagine a Jewish family or community without *chinuch*. The Jewish people exist only because the patriarchs and matriarchs and their descendants took care to educate their children, even before the Torah was given.

Who is Obligated?

Chinuch is a rabbinic-level obligation. Is it incumbent solely on the parents, who must educate their children? Or also on minor children, who must observe *mitzvot* from which the Torah exempts them?

⁵ Another Talmudic passage speaks of a similar hint regarding the mitzva of *sukka*. See note 10.

The verses that we've seen give the strong impression that the obligation of *chinuch* falls on the parents. This stands to reason, because the minor (*katan* or *ketana*) is considered exempt on a Torah level from *mitzvot*. A mishna invokes this principle, employing it to explain that a *katan* is not old enough to be considered a *ben sorer u-moreh* (rebellious son):

Mishna Sanhedrin 8:1

The minor is exempt, for he has not reached inclusion in *mitzvot*.

Children lack maturity and thus cannot be held fully responsible for their actions. That's part of why *chinuch* is necessary to begin with!

Nevertheless, when rabbinic literature refers to *chinuch* obligations, it's not always clear who is obligated. Take, for example, the following passage:

Chagiga 6a

Abbaye said: wherever an adult is obligated on a Torah level, we also educate a minor on a rabbinic level. Wherever an adult is exempt on a Torah level, a minor is also exempt on a rabbinic level.

This passage conveys an essential message about *chinuch*: we educate children for those *mitzvot* that will apply to them when older. This is a sort of halachic version of the adage, 'start as one means to go on.' It also means that one is not obligated in *chinuch* for *mitzvot* that [one performs as an adult voluntarily](#), though it is customary to train minors in such *mitzvot*. So, for example, it is customary for girls to receive *chinuch* in *mitzvot* such as [hearing shofar](#), which women are careful to fulfill despite exemption from the obligation.

Though the Talmud's message here is clear, its language is not. At first, it tells us that "we" provide *chinuch* to the minor, but then it refers to the **minor** being exempt from *mitzvot* that won't apply in adulthood. One is left wondering on whom the obligation of *chinuch* falls, the parent alone or also the child? This question is subject to halachic debate.

Parent and Child A simple reading of this Talmudic statement seems to indicate that an obligation falls on the child.

A child does not have the full *da'at*, cognizance or agency, required to be subject to *mitzvot* on a Torah level, and a parent bears responsibility for a child. Nevertheless, this passage seems to recognize some degree of agency as a child develops. Perhaps for this reason, many early halachic authorities understand *chinuch* as including a rabbinic-level obligation on the child to perform certain *mitzvot*.

A mishna raises the possibility that a minor can discharge an adult's obligation in megilla, implying that *chinuch* imposes an obligation on the minor:

Mishna Megilla 2:4

All are fit to read the megilla, except for a deaf person, one with impaired cognition, and a minor. Rabbi Yehuda considers a minor fit.

Tosafot explain that *chinuch* is a rabbinic-level obligation on the minor that can, in some cases, enable a minor to discharge an adult's obligation. However, in cases such as megilla, a minor may **not** be able to discharge an adult's obligation, because the minor's *chinuch* obligation is not equivalent to an adult's rabbinic-level obligation in a standard mitzva.

Whereas a standard rabbinic-level mitzva entails one rabbinic decree when performed by an adult, it entails two when performed by a minor—the base mitzva and the obligation of *chinuch* for it—further distancing it from Torah law:

Tosafot Berachot 15a s.v. Ve-Rabbi Yehuda

We say that a minor who has reached the age of rabbinic-level *chinuch* is like an adult, and can discharge a rabbinic obligation... But here, where regarding a minor there are two rabbinic [factors], for [reading] megilla is rabbinic and the minor [performing *mitzvo*] is on a rabbinic level, he cannot discharge [the obligation of the adult], where there is only one rabbinic [factor].

Some of those who understand performative *chinuch* obligations as incumbent on a minor describe this level of obligation as less than that of a standard rabbinic-level commandment. We saw earlier that Rashba considers the obligation of *chinuch* to be a stringency. He argues that this is why a minor cannot discharge an adult's standard rabbinic-level obligations.⁶

Rashba Megilla 19b

For whenever the essence of a mitzva is rabbinic, like megilla and *Hallel*, it is stringent and the mitzva of *chinuch* is more lenient and therefore he [the minor] does not discharge [the adult's obligation].

According to the view that *chinuch* obligations, whatever their halachic weight, are incumbent upon a child, the parent would still presumably have to guide or instruct the child in such obligations.

Only the Parent Alternatively, the obligation of *chinuch* may fall squarely on the parent. According to this understanding, mentions of rabbinic obligations pertaining to a minor should be read as shorthand for parental obligation. A statement in the Talmud Yerushalmi makes this point succinctly:

Yerushalmi Berachot 3:3

Rav Acha said in the name of Rabbi Yossei son of Nehorai: whatever they said regarding a minor is in order to educate him.

⁶ This idea is also implied by Tosafot, referring to a discussion of a child discharging an adult's obligation in *birkat ha-mazon*:

Berachot 20b

...In reality, they said: a son recites *birkat ha-mazon* on behalf of his father... and according to your reasoning, a minor is subject to obligation? Rather, what are we dealing with here? [A case] such as when [the adult] ate a measure [of food that obligates him in *birkat ha-mazon*] on a rabbinic level, so a rabbinic obligation [of *chinuch*] comes and discharges a rabbinic obligation.

Tosafot Berachot 15a s.v. Ve-Rabbi Yehuda

One can say that *birkat ha-mazon* is different, for it is a great stringency beyond the Torah-level [mitzva to recite it over a smaller amount] and it is easy to discharge it...

A number of early authorities, including Ramban and Rashi,⁷ follow suit and view *chinuch* obligations as exclusive to the parent. Here is Ramban's explanation:

Ramban Kiddushin 31a

I say that the reason that [the obligation regarding] a minor is rabbinic is because *chinuch* is a mitzva of a father and our sages obligated him in *chinuch*. But a minor is not subject to performing a mitzva, and this matter is correct and its rationale is good.

Gender in Chinuch

We've seen that the formal mitzva of Talmud Torah applies only to father and son, but not to mother and daughter. What about the rabbinic requirement of *chinuch*? Is there an obligation to educate daughters? Are mothers obligated in children's *chinuch*?

A few Tannaitic passages mention daughters or mothers in contexts directly relevant to *chinuch*. On a simple reading, they support the view that females are obligated in *chinuch*, as would seem to maximize initiation into a life of *mitzvot*.

Daughters

Let's look at some Tannaitic examples of *chinuch* of daughters:

I. Berachot Ordinarily, a person may recite *ha-motzi* for others only if the reciter will also partake of the meal. However, an adult who isn't partaking in a meal may recite *ha-motzi* for the purpose of *chinuch*:

Rosh Ha-shana 29b

Our rabbis taught [in a baraita]: A person should not break up a piece of bread [i.e., recite *ha-motzi*] for his guests unless he eats with them, but he breaks it for his sons and for the members of his household in order to train them [*le-chanchan*] in *mitzvot*.

The phrase "members of his household" in addition to "sons" implies that *chinuch* is relevant for both male and female family members.

II. The Pesach According to the Mishna, a father can have his children race to acquire a portion in the Pesach offering. Rabbi Yochanan explains that this is a device to inspire zealotry for *mitzvot*, a sort of *chinuch*. A baraita then notes that girls would sometimes participate in this competition (and win it).

Pesachim 89a

Mishna: One who says to his children: I am slaughtering the Pesach on behalf of whoever among you goes up to Yerushalayim first—As soon as the first one has brought in his head and majority [of his body], he acquires his portion and acquires for his siblings along with him. Gemara:...Rabbi Yochanan said: He said it in order

⁷Rashi *Nidda* 46b

For a minor is not subject to accepting rabbinic enactments upon himself.

Rashi *Berachot* 48a

Regarding a minor who has reached educability...he is not obligated even rabbinically, for it is cast upon his father to educate him....

to spur them on to *mitzvot* ...A baraita also teaches thus: A story where the daughters came before the sons, and it was found that the daughters were speedy and the sons were inferior.

III. Fasting on Yom Kippur Rav Huna describes a multi-year sequence for educating male and female children in the positive commandment to afflict themselves on Yom Kippur by fasting.⁸ Though much of this selection is phrased in the masculine, it is understood to refer to females:⁹

Yoma 82a

Rav Huna said: An eight-year-old and a nine-year-old, we educate in hours [of fasting]. A ten-year-old and an eleven-year-old, complete [the fast] [as a matter of] rabbinic law. A twelve-year-old completes the fast on a Torah level—[the above] with respect to female children...Rabbi Yochanan said: There is no completing the fast rabbinically. A ten-year-old, an eleven-year-old, we educate in hours. A twelve-year-old completes it on a Torah level.

Mothers

Let's turn now to examples of Tannaitic mentions of mothers engaging in *chinuch*:

I. Establishing an Eiruv In a tosefta, Rabbi Meir states that mothers would educate their young sons and daughters in *mitzvot* by enlisting their help in establishing an *eiruv*.¹⁰

Tosefta Eiruvin 2:11

Rabbi Meir said: The daughters of Israel did not keep themselves from sending their [foods to establish an] *eiruv* in the hand of their minor sons and daughters in order to educate them in *mitzvot*...

II. Sukka As we saw in the mishna above, a *katan* who no longer needs his mother is obligated to dwell in the *sukka*. The Talmud describes this as *chinuch*.¹¹ The Talmud thus seems to view the *sukka* of Queen Heleni as an effort on her part to facilitate the

⁸ In practice, *chinuch* for fasting part of the day on Yom Kippur typically becomes obligatory from age nine or ten, but children are not expected to complete the fast before reaching bar or bat mitzva:

Shulchan Aruch OC 616:2

A (Rema: healthy) child of age nine or ten, we educate them for hours [of fasting]...

Mishna Berura 616:9

That which we are not particular nowadays to have any child fast in the twelfth year is because nowadays weakness has come into the world and presumably a minor is not considered healthy in this respect unless it is known that he is healthy and strong enough to bear it. And the words of Eliya Rabba imply that even in the thirteenth year we do not have the custom of making him [a male] fast as long as he has not completed the thirteenth year.

⁹ See Rashi ad loc., who phrases his comments on this passage in the feminine.

¹⁰ Tosafot view another case in *Eiruvin* as potentially an example of a mother's engagement in *chinuch*:

Tosafot Eiruvin 82a

A minor aged six is discharged through the *eiruv* of his mother—even though we only make an *eiruv* for a matter of mitzva, in any case...with a minor there is also the mitzva to educate him.

Sukka 28b

Master said: "all" includes minors. But we learned in a mishna, "Women, and bondsmen, and minors are exempt from *sukka*!" This is not difficult, Here, [the one included] is the minor who has reached educability. There with a minor who has not reached educability. A minor who has reached educability is rabbinic[ally obligated]. It is rabbinic, and the verse is a mere mnemonic.

chinuch of her sons:

Sukka 2b

...Rabbi Yehuda said: A story of Queen Heleni in Lud, whose *sukka* was taller than 20 cubits, and the elders would come in and out of there and did not say anything to her. They said to him: From there is a proof [regarding a *sukka's* height]? She was a woman and exempt from *sukka*! He [Rabbi Yehuda] said to them: And did she not have seven sons? And further, she only did all of her deeds in accordance with the sages. Why should I teach "And further she only did all of her deeds in accordance with the sages"? Thus he said to them: If you say they were little children and minors are exempt from *sukka*, since there were seven, it is impossible that there wasn't one among them who "did not need his mother." And if you say a minor who does not need a mother is obligated rabbinically, and she [Queen Heleni] did not pay heed to rabbinic law, come and learn, "And further she only did all of her deeds in accordance with the sages."

Ritva derives an important principle of *chinuch* from this discussion of Queen Heleni, that a parent is obligated to enable a child to perform a mitzva correctly, down to its details:

Ritva Sukka 2b

"Rabbi Yehuda said: A story of Queen Heleni" etc...until "she only did all of her deeds in accordance with the sages." From this we learn that a minor whom we educate in *mitzvot* [one needs] to make the mitzva in full fitness for him as with an adult, for we bring a proof in our Talmudic passage from the *sukka* of Queen Heleni, since it is impossible that there would not be among her sons one who had reached educability, which would require a fully fit *sukka*. Scripture states a full verse [on this]: educate the youth according to his way...

From Talmud to Practice

Based on what we've seen and on the obvious importance both of educating girls in *mitzvot* and of a mother's role in child-rearing, we might assume that *chinuch* obligations would apply irrespective of gender. Another Talmudic passage, however, complicates matters:

Nazir 28b-29a

Mishna: A man makes a nazirite vow for his son, but a woman does not make a nazirite vow for her son...Gemara: A man yes, but a woman no. What is the reason? Rabbi Yochanan said: it is a halacha [transmitted to Moshe from Sinai] of *nazir*. And Rabbi Yosei son of Rabbi Chanina [said] Reish Lakish said: In order to educate him in *mitzvot*. If so, even a woman as well! He thought that a man is obligated to educate his son in *mitzvot* and a woman is not obligated to educate her son. This [mishna] makes sense [according to the opinion] of Rabbi Yochanan, who said this is a halacha [transmitted to Moshe from Sinai] of *nazir*, it brings him to [conclude] thus, his son yes, his daughter no. But according to Reish Lakish: [Shouldn't a father be able to make the vow] even [for] his daughter? He thought that one is obligated to educate his son, one is not obligated to educate his daughter.

The mishna here states that a mother cannot vow to make her minor son a nazirite

(*nazir*), and Rabbi Yochanan and Reish Lakish disagree as to why that should be the case. Rabbi Yochanan seems to read this as a law unique to *nazir*, perhaps because *nazir* is a voluntary ascetic practice, outside the parameters of *chinuch*.¹² Reish Lakish, though, explains this halacha as reflecting a general principle of *chinuch*, that the obligation of *chinuch* does not apply to mothers or daughters.

According to this understanding of the passage, since Halacha typically follows Rabbi Yochanan over Reish Lakish,¹³ we would conclude that *chinuch* obligations apply fully to mothers and daughters.¹⁴

It is theoretically possible, however, that Rabbi Yochanan would agree that *chinuch* does not apply to mothers, or even to daughters, in cases other than *nazir*.

Early halachic authorities attempt to reconcile the discussion of *nazir* with the other sources, in different ways.

I. Daughters Exempt Some halachic authorities, including Rabbeinu Nissim, draw on this passage to mitigate the obligation of *chinuch* for daughters in general:¹⁵

Ran Yoma 3b (Rif pagination)

For the essence of *chinuch* for a child is as we said in *Nazir* (29a): "His son, he is obligated to educate him in *mitzvot*; his daughter, he is not obligated to educate her."

II. Mothers Exempt Others accept that *chinuch* applies to daughters, but question its application to mothers. For instance, Tosafot Yeshanim (prepared by Rav Moshe of Coucy under the tutelage of Rav Yehuda Sirleon) treat *nazir* as a special case in which *chinuch* does not apply to daughters, and accept the obligation to educate daughters in other cases. At the same time, Tosafot Yeshanim quote the position of Ri, who considers a father to have a unique obligatory role in *chinuch*, distinct from a mother's:

Tosafot Yeshanim Yoma 82a s.v. An eight or nine year old we train but with children...

This presents a difficulty for him, for we say in *Nazir*...A man makes a nazirite vow

¹² Mishna Avot 3:13

Rabbi Akiva says:...Vows are a fence [to ensure] asceticism...

Rosh on the Talmud, Nazir 29a

In order to educate him in the mitzva of *nazir*, which is a fence [to ensure] asceticism...

¹³ *Yevamot* 36a

Rava said: the halacha is like Reish Lakish [only] in these three [matters]...

Halachot Gedolot 31

For we rule that wherever Rabbi Yochanan and Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish disagree, the halacha is in accordance with Rabbi Yochanan, aside from these three which are in accordance with Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish.

¹⁴ *Birkei Yosef* OC 343:7

If so, these teachings were decided in accordance with Resh Lakish. But for Rabbi Yochanan, who thought that this is halacha [transmitted to Moshe from Sinai], we found grounds to say that a woman is also obligated to educate her son, and both son and daughter are included in *chinuch*...For the language of the gemara ... indicates that Reish Lakish thought thus, and the halacha is not in accordance with him....

Milchemet Hashem Yoma 4a

One should not be more stringent with the females in *chinuch*, for the essence of *chinuch* is for the lad.

for his son. According to Resh Lakish, who said [this is] in order to educate him in *mitzvot*, his son yes, his daughter no, for he is not obligated to educate his daughter. And one can say that there it only applies specifically regarding *nazir*, but certainly regarding the rest of the *mitzvot* he [the father] is obligated to educate her...And Rav [Yitzchak (Ri Ha-zaken)] says that *chinuch* only applies to a father, but doesn't apply for another person ...And the story of Queen Heleni who dwelled with her seven sons in the *sukka*, perhaps they had a father and he educated them in this, and even if they did not have a father, she educated them as a mere mitzva. [Reviewed] from the mouth of my teacher.

Tosafot Yeshanim present two explanations for how the case of Queen Heleni can fit with Ri's view of a father as uniquely obligated. Either her *sukka* was built at the behest of the children's father or "she educated them [her children] as a mere mitzva." The phrase "a mere mitzva" is subject to varying interpretations, and might mean "stringency."¹⁶

III. Fathers Primary Me'iri presents a different interpretation of how the discussion of the *nazir* affects our understanding of who is obligated in *chinuch*. He suggests that the *nazir* discussion, though it uses the term "*chinuch*," does not really refer to standard *chinuch* obligations, because becoming a *nazir* is fully optional.

He thus views both mothers and daughters as subject to *chinuch* (a point that we'll see more explicitly below in our discussion of prohibitions). However, he sees a father as having primary responsibility for a child's *chinuch* in positive commandments when he is available:

Meiri Nazir 29a

Just as a man is obligated to educate his son in *mitzvot*,... so with his daughter he is obligated to educate her in what is appropriate for her as well, as was stated explicitly regarding fasting on Yom Kippur regarding their [children's] education for hours [fasting for part of the day]. And similarly, if they don't have a father, the mother is obligated in this. And the intention is only to habituate the children in the *mitzvot* and to establish the matter of *mitzvot* in their hearts, each one according to what is suitable for them....And in any case, these matters are all regarding *mitzvot* that entail an obligation, but regarding *mitzvot* that depend on a person's desire and generosity of his heart, such as *nazir*, there is no obligation of *chinuch* upon him. Rather, if he wants, he should act in the way that we explained and our mishna

¹⁶ Maharam seems to understand it as indicating that Heleni simply acted out of stringency, since a mother is exempt from *chinuch*, much as she is exempt from other *mitzvot* that fall on the father (such as teaching Torah):

Responsa Maharam of Rothenberg (Cremona) 200

Regarding his mother, that she is not obligated to educate and to separate [from sin], there is a great proof...since she [a mother] is not commanded to circumcise him [her son] or to redeem him or to teach him Torah and in all the *mitzvot* for a son incumbent on a father, whatever our sages enacted was enacted along the lines of the Torah law. And this [story] of Queen Heleni in the first chapter of *Sukka*, that she would dwell [in the *sukka*] with her seven sons, she was being stringent on herself. Alternatively, they had a father.

See also Terumat Ha-deshen:

Terumat Ha-deshen 94

Tosafot above spoke regarding the teaching of Ri [Ha-zaken]. But 'perhaps they had a father' is said without attribution. Therefore, specifically the father himself needs to educate...

[about *nazir*, which is volitional] is not on account of *chinuch*...

IV. All Fully Obligated Rav Avraham of Montpelier rules that both mothers and daughters are fully obligated in *chinuch*, without differentiating between them and fathers and sons:

Rav Avraham Min Ha-har Nazir 29b

...For Rabbi Yochanan thought that both a father and a mother are obligated to educate in *mitzvot* both a son and a daughter.

An inclusive approach also emerges from comments by Rashi. A baraita teaches that a man may slaughter the Pesach offering on behalf of his minor sons and daughters, which Rashi explains as a function of his obligation in *chinuch* for them:

Pesachim 88a

Our rabbis taught in a baraita: “A lamb for each home,” teaches that a person brings and slaughters on behalf of his minor son and daughter.

Rashi ad loc.

On behalf of - since it is incumbent upon him to educate his son and his daughter.

Elsewhere, Rashi writes that the obligation of *chinuch* falls on both mothers and fathers:

Rashi Chagiga 2a

Even though he [the minor] isn't obligated on a Torah level - The sages placed [responsibility] upon his father and upon his mother to educate him in *mitzvot*.

In Practice

A number of authorities follow the view that obligation for *chinuch* does not fall on the mother, but that daughters may be subject to *chinuch*:¹⁷

Magen Avraham 343:1

His father is obligated. But his mother is not obligated, and so it is in *Nazir* 29 and in Terumat Ha-deshen 94. And the story of Heleni in *Sukka* 2, that she sat her sons in the *sukka* (see there), she was stringent upon herself (Respona Maharam 200), see 616. And it implies in *Nazir* that he is not obligated to educate his daughter (see there). And in Tosafot *Nazir* they raised the difficulty of how is this different from

¹⁷ Meshech Chochma *Bereishit* 18:19

And they said in *Nazir* 29a that the father is obligated to educate his son in *mitzvot*, and the woman is not obligated to educate her son in *mitzvot*. This means that it is like the positive mitzva of Talmud Torah, from which a woman is exempt. And see OC 343 in the Bei'urei Ha-Gera and Magen Avraham. And the source of the mitzva of *chinuch* for positive *mitzvot*, its source is in this verse from Avraham Avinu who commanded his children in their youth about *mitzvot*. The verse of “educate a youth according to his way” *Mishlei* 22:6), which Rambam brings at the end of the laws of forbidden foods [and there regarding prohibitions] is [on the level] of *divrei kabbala* [a strong type of rabbinic law anchored in the Prophets or Writings], but the essence is from Avraham. And here it implies that there is a mitzva upon the father even for daughters. And see Magen Avraham, that only regarding *nazir* there is no mitzva for his daughter, and the gemara implies there, and this is not the place to go on at length.

Yom Kippur, that he is obligated to educate his daughter (see there) and it is possible that all *mitzvot* are similar to Yom Kippur and one must educate them...

Others follow the view that the mother is obligated in *chinuch* specifically when the father cannot fulfill *chinuch* obligations:

Eliya Rabba 640:4

He is obligated etc. And if he does not have a father, his mother is obligated to educate him, and if he also doesn't have a mother, the *beit din* is obligated to educate him, and so regarding every positive commandment.

Mishna Berura follows the view that daughters are included, and takes care to cite the view that mothers are also obligated in *chinuch*:

Mishna Berura 343:2

But his father... - For even to educate his sons and daughters is incumbent upon him, as is written "educate the youth according to his way" and how much more so to separate them from a prohibition, which is incumbent on the father. And there are later authorities who maintain that the mitzva of *chinuch* is incumbent also on the mother.

Berachot

Chinuch for *mitzvot* includes *chinuch* for reciting *berachot*,¹⁸ including *birchot ha-mitzva*, *berachot* recited prior to mitzva performance. Earlier, we mentioned that it is customary to educate girls in *mitzvot* that women of their communities perform voluntarily.

In many communities, women recite a *beracha* over voluntary mitzva performance. In these communities, it is customary to educate girls to recite the *beracha* when performing such *mitzvot* in the context of *chinuch*:

Rav David Auerbach, Halichot Bat Yisrael, 27:6

For those whose practice is in accordance with Rema's view that a woman is permitted to recite a *beracha* over positive time-bound commandments [from which she is exempt]—it is correct to educate girls, too, to recite a *beracha* over the *mitzvot*, and so is the custom. Note 12: But the fundamental law is that there is no obligation to educate them [in *berachot* over voluntary mitzva performance], since even when they grow up. they will not be obligated in these *mitzvot*.

Negative Commandments

Until now, we've discussed *chinuch* for positive *mitzvot*, initiating children into reciting

¹⁸ For example, Shulchan Aruch rules this way regarding *birkat ha-motzi*:

Shulchan Aruch OC 167:19

...One may recite a *beracha* for minors even though he does not eat with them, in order to educate them for *mitzvot*.

Mishna Berura 167:93

But for minors - and even minors in general, whose *chinuch* does not fall upon one according to Halacha, it is also permissible to recite a *beracha* with them when they wish to take pleasure [e.g., in food] and don't know how to recite a *beracha* for themselves.

berachot, dwelling in the *sukka*, and so on. We also educate our children to refrain from prohibited activities, like eating non-kosher food or performing labor on Shabbat. In general, keeping children from doing something wrong, and inculcating what is off limits, can seem different from—and often more urgent than—introducing positive courses of action.

Indeed, an adult is not permitted to actively cause or instruct any child of any age to violate a prohibition:

Yevamot 114a

Come and learn: “Don’t eat them because they are detestable.” [i.e.] Don’t feed them, to warn adults regarding minors. Isn’t this that he [an adult] say to them [children]: “Don’t eat”? No, that they [adults] not feed him [a minor] directly. Come and learn: “Every soul among you shall not eat blood.” To warn the adults about minors. Isn’t this that they say to them: “Don’t eat”? No, that they not feed them directly. Come and learn: “Say and you shall say.” To warn adults about minors. Isn’t this that he says to them: “Don’t become impure”? No, that they not render them impure directly.

It makes intuitive sense that one should not willfully induct anyone’s children into behavior that will be prohibited to them. What about preventing children from violating a negative commandment of their own volition? Is this technically an aspect of *chinuch*? If so, is it unique to the parent, or also incumbent on the *beit din* (who represent the general public)?

In the passage from Tosafot Yeshanim that we excerpted above, Rav Eliezer of Metz is cited as maintaining that the specific mitzva of *chinuch* does **not** extend to teaching a child to refrain from prohibitions, and thus, that the processes of learning about positive and negative *mitzvot* are distinct.

However, Tosafot Yeshanim and Tosafot disagree with that position. Tosafot Yeshanim take the view that training a child about prohibitions is incumbent as a matter of *chinuch*, though incumbent only on the father:

Tosafot Yeshanim Yoma 82a

If you say, that which we say in every place, ‘a minor eating *neveilot* [meat that wasn’t ritually slaughtered], the *beit din* is not commanded to separate him.’ Now, we certainly educate him—is separating him from prohibitions in question? And Rav Eliezer of Metz says that *chinuch* is only applicable for performing a mitzva and not to separate [minors] from prohibition. And that which we call it *chinuch* in that we afflict him [a minor] on Yom Kippur is not separating from prohibition, that we separate him from eating, but rather it is *chinuch* that we educate him in the [positive] mitzva of “and you will afflict yourselves.” And Ri says that *chinuch* only applies to the father, but *chinuch* is not relevant for another person. Therefore they [the public] are not enjoined to separate him [the minor from prohibition].

Tosafot in Tractate Shabbat agree that training a child to desist from prohibition is a matter of *chinuch*. However, they maintain that non-family members are obligated in some aspects of *chinuch* along with the father, and thus in preventing another’s child from violating prohibitions:

Tosafot Shabbat 221a

For regarding a rabbinic prohibition, it is proven in ch. 14 of Yevamot (114a) that a *beit din* is not commanded to separate him [a minor from prohibition] and it seems that it is dealing with a minor who has not reached educability. For when he has reached educability, since one is obligated to educate him, how much more so that one must separate him [from prohibition] that he not perform a transgression...

The phrase “how much more so” here suggests that it is clear to Tosafot that the imperative to keep a child from transgressing is stronger than that of training him in positive *mitzvot*.

In practice, as above, halachic consensus is that no one may actively cause a child to act counter to a prohibition. Shulchan Aruch rules that only the father is further obligated to separate a child from prohibitions, as part of the obligation in *chinuch*. But Rema cites the more stringent view that once the minors reach educability, others, too, are obligated to prevent them from violating prohibitions. Mishna Berura adds that in his view the obligation of others only applies to Torah-level *mitzvot*, and not to rabbinic level *mitzvot*.¹⁹

Shulchan Aruch OC 343:1

A minor eating *neveilot*, a *beit din* is not commanded to separate him, but his father is commanded to castigate him to separate him (Rema: from Torah prohibitions), and to feed him directly is prohibited even in matters that are rabbinically prohibited. And thus it is prohibited to accustom him to violate Shabbat and holidays, and even regarding matters that are rabbinically prohibited. Rema: And there are those who say that all of this applies to a minor who has not reached educability, but if he has reached educability, we need to separate him (Tosafot *Shabbat*, Ch. 16). And there are those who say *chinuch* does not apply to a *beit din*, but rather to the father alone.

Those who follow the view that a mother is not obligated in *chinuch* would obligate her as one would the general public. Those who follow the view that she is obligated only when the father is unavailable would usually put the onus on the father. Those who follow the view that a mother is fully obligated in *chinuch* would obligate her here as well. Me’iri, for example, says this:

Meiri Nazir 29a

That which they [the sages] said, “a minor eating *neveilot*, a *beit din* is not commanded to separate him,” a father and mother are nevertheless commanded in this as part of the law of *chinuch*...

It is common practice for mothers to be no less scrupulous than fathers in preventing their children from violating prohibitions.

Another, related mitzva is that of reproof, in which a mother is considered obligated.

¹⁹ Mishna Berura 343:3

For with a rabbinic prohibition, if his father did not separate him [a minor from it], the *beit din* does not protest, but with a Torah-level prohibition, the *beit din* protests so that the father separates him [the minor, from it].

Kaf Ha-chayyim 225:14

The woman is also obligated to educate her son through reproof...

Stages

As we'll discuss further in our upcoming piece on Bat Mitzva, the *chinuch* relationship changes when the child reaches maturity. Rosh rules that the technical obligation in *chinuch* for a given mitzva ends when the child's full obligation in it begins:

Rosh (Talmudic commentary), Nazir 29b

For every mitzva that he [the child] is obligated in, the father is not obligated to educate him (*le-chancho*) in it.

Even so, as long as a parent exerts control over a child, there are Talmudic grounds for maintaining that some extra parental responsibility for rebuke persists:

Kiddushin 30a

Rava said to Rav Natan bar Ami [regarding the age at which parents should marry off a son]: While your hand is on the neck of your son, from sixteen until twenty-two. And some say: From eighteen to twenty-four. This is like the Tannaitic argument [regarding] "educate a youth according to his way." Rabbi Yehuda and Rabbi Nechemya [disagreed]. One said: From sixteen to twenty-two and one said: from eighteen to twenty-four.

Up to this point, we've seen the verse in *Mishlei* applied to minors. Here, it is used in a looser sense to indicate that some aspect of *chinuch*, even if not the formal obligation, remains in place through the teenage years and young adulthood, as an extension of the general obligation to reprove others.²⁰

Beginning

At what point, though, does the obligation in *chinuch* begin? A baraita indicates that the age varies from mitzva to mitzva and from child to child:

Sukka 42a-b

Our rabbis taught [in a baraita]: 'A minor who knows how to shake, is obligated in *lulav*. To wrap himself, is obligated in *tzitzit*. To care for *tefillin*, his father purchases him *tefillin*. He knows how to speak, his father teaches him Torah and Shema.' What is Torah? Rav Himnuna said: "Moshe commanded us in Torah, an inheritance of the community of Ya'akov" (*Devarim* 33:4). What is reciting Shema? The first verse...If he can eat an olive's worth of roasted [meat], we slaughter the Pesach sacrifice on his behalf...

The timing of *chinuch* in these examples depends on a variety of factors, each related to the nature of the specific mitzva involved: motor skills, verbal abilities, eating skills, or discernment. Earlier, we saw that a boy's need for his mother was a factor in determining the parameters of *chinuch* for *sukka*. Drawing on this baraita, Tosafot

²⁰ *Vayikra* 19:17

Don't hate your brother in your heart; reprove your fellow and don't bear sin regarding him.

explain that the onset of *chinuch* depends on the child's developmental readiness to learn about a given mitzva.

Tosafot Sukka 28b s.v. Kan be-katan she-hiqi'a le-chinuch

Now reaching educability, which we refer to everywhere, not all [cases] are equal. Rather each [mitzva] as appropriate, for here we say [regarding *sukka*] it's when he does not need his mother, and regarding *chagiga*—when he is able to go up [to Yerushalayim], and in the end of *Sukka* ch. 3 (42a) regarding *lulav*, when he knows how to shake it. And regarding *tzitzit* when he knows how to wrap himself, and regarding Torah when he knows how to speak.

Mishna Berura typically considers a child from the age of five or six to be considered educable to the extent that *chinuch* obligations would apply:

Mishna Berura 128:123

...The times of education which are already at five, already at six [years]...

In practice, we tend to begin *chinuch* for many positive *mitzvot* much earlier to foster children's religious development as soon as we can. Rav Yeshaya Horovitz writes that we should begin educating children from when they can speak, though he does not suggest that this is obligatory:

Shelah, Sha'ar Ha-otiyot, Dalet: Derech Eretz

One must accustom and educate him [a minor] in good and righteous attributes from when he can speak...and should begin with him from age two or three years, to guide him in everything. And he should begin to guide him from when he is little for two reasons: First, because our sages said: "Youth is a crown of roses" (*Shabbat* 152a). What a child acquires in his soul in his youth remains thus in his nature all his days...Second, for when a father begins to reprove his son...then he [the son] will always be used to having awe of the father....

Some *mitzvot*, however, require an extra level of understanding so that the obligation of *chinuch* begins later than six years. *Chinuch* regarding negative *mitzvot* is usually obligatory even earlier than five years, from the stage at which the child can understand that something is off limits:

Mishna Berura 343:3

Know that the measure of *chinuch* in positive *mitzvot* is for every child according to his acuity and knowledge, with every matter as appropriate, such as [a minor] who knows of the matter of Shabbat, one should accustom him to hear *kiddush* and *havdala*. [A minor] who knows to wrap himself in accordance with Halacha is obligated in *tzitzit* and as above in 17. And similarly with every such thing, whether a positive mitzva on a Torah level or rabbinically. But *chinuch* in negative *mitzvot*, whether on a Torah level or rabbinic, is for every child with understanding, who understands when we say to him that this is prohibited to do or to eat. But a child who lacks any understanding, his father is not obligated to forcibly prevent him from eating prohibited foods or from violating Shabbat even regarding a Torah level prohibition, since he doesn't understand the matter, from which he is preventing and keeping him, at all. And so if he is a *kohen* he does not need to take him [his minor son] out of a house with impurity inside it unless he has understanding, then

it is a mitzva on his father to take him out in order to separate him from prohibition on account of the mitzva of *chinuch*. But to bring him into a house with impurity within it, and similarly to present him with other prohibitions, is prohibited, even with a child who does not yet have understanding...

Parents often ask when it is correct to begin different aspects of *chinuch*, from reciting *berachot*, to *tzitzit*, to dressing in line with [dat yehudit](#). While taking into account the above rules of thumb and common custom, Halacha invites a parent to look carefully at the interaction between a given mitzva and the developmental readiness of a specific child.

To have the insight to educate our children optimally, we need to develop our own wisdom and fear of God. In the beginning of the seventeenth century, Torah teacher Rivka bat Meir published a work of *derashot* and prayers, including extensive discussions of *chinuch*. In this excerpt, she reminds us of this point.

Rivkah bat Meir, *Meneket Rivkah*, Frauke von Rhoden ed. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2008), 179-182.

"...[E]very woman should make sure that she herself guides her daughter to perform good deeds...We also learn of our mother Rebekah that Eliezer saw in her many good deeds that he did not see in the other young women. He praised God, blessed be His name, that he led him on the right path, and sent him a good match who had the virtues of our Patriarch Abraham, among them, charity and hospitality...We can learn from this how one should raise a daughter...[A] woman, who merited raising her children in her household to Torah and good deeds, and proper conduct, and who wishes to fulfill her obligations to God, blessed be his name, and to all people-such a woman requires fear of God and wisdom."

What should we keep in mind when engaged in *chinuch* regarding women and mitzvot?

Just as with other aspects of chinuch, learning about women and mitzvot is a mix of the formal mitzva, care with prohibitions when a child can understand them, and developmentally appropriate introductions to obligations.

A few points to keep in mind:

I. Learning about women's halachic obligations is important for children of any gender. For example, it is no less important to help shape a boy's understanding of the language of the beracha of "she-lo asani isha" than a girl's. As we see in so many places on Deracheha, a community's attitudes and knowledge can have an important effect on how religiously engaged its women and girls are and in what ways. This starts with boys and girls being taught carefully about women's mitzva obligations and practices.

II. Children learn by example from an early age, and not just when we have in mind that we are teaching them. Children notice all kinds of subtle cues about our priorities, such as whether female family members make an effort to answer or make a zimmun, or whether the men of a family wait for women to return to the table before they recite it; whether women of the family make an effort to daven when possible, or whether

men of the family speak quietly when a female family member is davening nearby.

III. As kids get older, they are bound to have questions. This is healthy and positive. Adults don't need to have all the answers, but can teach children to be life-long learners by taking their questions, thoughts, and feelings seriously, treating them with respect, and exploring them together. To facilitate this, adults can avail themselves of educational resources (like this site). It is most effective for an adult to mix textual sources with personal perspectives in a developmentally appropriate manner.

The more we can build awareness of our own knowledge and feelings on sensitive subjects, and the more we can enhance them where we perceive them lacking, the more spiritual influence we can have. Educating children on these topics begins with educating ourselves.