

חָכָם

wise, intelligent, smart ; (colloquial) fool, idiot (sarcastic) חָכָם  
<http://www.morfix.co.il/en/%D7%97%D6%B8%D7%9B%D6%B8%D7%9D>

**Chachmal, Chachmiel** One of the seventy childbirth angels.  
<http://www.angelfire.com/journal/cathboduua/Angels/Cangels.html>

# Talmid Chacham

See also: **Hakham**

**Talmid Chacham** (Hebrew: תלמיד חכם, “wise student” ; pl. *Talmidei Chachamim*; in Talmudic Hebrew **Talmidh Hakham** and **Talmidhe Hakhamin** ) is an honorific title given to one well versed in Jewish law, in effect, a Torah scholar.

Prizing Torah knowledge above all worldly goods, *Talmidei Chachamim* in Jewish society were afforded many privileges and prerogatives as well as duties. In the Middle Ages the *Talmid Chacham* was consulted by the Jewish community not only in spiritual matters, but also in worldly affairs. Even when he held no official position in the community, he supervised religious activities, determined the time and form of prayers, verified weights and measures, etc. To enable him to devote himself entirely to study, Jewish legislation exempted him from the payment of taxes and from performing any specific duties.

A *Talmid Chacham* is expected to uphold his rank and not to compromise his dignity. As in the case of a king, he is not permitted to allow any one to omit the performance of any public act of reverence due to him, to the effect that the *Talmid Chacham* acts as a facilitator, because in him the Halakha is honored or slighted. There are, according to the Talmud, six acts a *Talmid Chacham* must avoid:

1. to go abroad in perfumed garments;
2. to walk alone at night;
3. to wear shabby shoes;
4. to converse with a woman in the street, even if she is his wife;
5. to sit in the society of an ignoramus;
6. to be the last to enter the *beth midrash*.

With regard to association with an ignoramus, the Talmud says: “The *Talmid Chacham* is first likened by the ignoramus to a vase of gold; if he converses with him, he is looked upon as a vase of silver; and if he accepts a service from him, he is regarded as a vase of earth” (Talmud, tr. Sanhedrin). Among the privileges of the *Talmid Chacham* is the right of declining to present himself as a witness in suits concerning money transactions before a judge who is his inferior in knowledge.

The *Talmid Chacham* was expected to be familiar with all branches of Torah study, and even all branches of general

human learning. “He who understands astronomy,” says Rabbi Yochanan, “and does not pursue the study of it, of that man it is written: 'But they regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of His hands' extquotedbl (Isaiah). Rabbi Yochanan also says that only someone able to answer all Halakhic questions, even those which deal only with the insignificant treatise **Kallah**, is a *Talmid Chacham* worthy to be appointed leader of a community (Talmud, tr. Shabbat). In accordance with this view, some later rabbinical authorities assert that in modern times no one deserves to be called by this epithet.

The principles with which the *Talmid Chacham* must live are enumerated in the first chapter of the work *Derekh Eretz Zutta*, opening with the following sentence: “The way of the wise is to be modest, humble, alert, and intelligent; to endure injustice; to make himself beloved of men; to be gracious in his interactions even with subordinates; to avoid wrong-doing; to judge each man according to his deeds; to act according to the motto 'I take no pleasure in the good things of this world, seeing that life here below is not my portion.' Wrapped in his mantle, he sits at the feet of the wise; no one can detect anything unseemly in him; he puts relevant questions, and gives suitable answers.”

Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel is quoted in the Mishnah of Pesachim<sup>[1]</sup> as having said: לעולם יעשה אדם עצמו לטלמיד חכם extquotedbl

- This section of the Mishnah roughly translates as “A person should always turn himself into a Talmid Chacham.”

## 1 References

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[1] [http://he.wikisource.org/wiki/%D7%9E%D7%A9%D7%A0%D7%94\\_%D7%A4%D7%A1%D7%97%D7%99%D7%9D\\_%D7%93\\_%D7%94](http://he.wikisource.org/wiki/%D7%9E%D7%A9%D7%A0%D7%94_%D7%A4%D7%A1%D7%97%D7%99%D7%9D_%D7%93_%D7%94)

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