

**TOOLS
FOR
TOSAFOS**

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TARGUM/FELDHEIM

Introduction

What Is Tosafos?

Tosafos is a collection of the interpretations and explanations of the Gemara by the group of sages known as "*baalei haTosafos*," i.e., the Tosafos masters. The *baalei haTosafos* (also known as "Tosafists") were sages of the Jewish communities in France and Germany (with a few in other European countries) in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Some of them officiated as the halachic leaders of the community and functioned as representatives to the gentile authorities. Some ran yeshivos, where disciples would devote all their time to studying Torah.

The *baalei haTosafos* lived in a time that is regarded in Jewish history as the period of the Rishonim. "Rishonim" (literally "first") is the collective term given to the sages who lived in Europe and North Africa after the time of the Geonim (who lived in Babylon). This period extended until the Tur or R' Yosef Karo (who compiled the *Shulchan Aruch*), after which the period of the Acharonim began.

Not all the sages who lived in these areas during this time period are called Tosafists, however. The term "Tosafist" applies to those who learned the Gemara in a certain way. The way the *baalei haTosafos* learned is, in effect, the focus of this work.

At this point, we can say that a sage who constantly compared and attempted to consolidate differences in the Talmudic text, and who wrote his commentary in a dialectic form, would be termed a Tosafist.

A deeper observation is that, in essence, Tosafos is an extension of the Talmud itself. Tosafos, when analyzing the Talmudic discourse, uses the same methods the Talmud does when analyzing a Mishna or a statement of an Amora. The questions and answers Tosafos asks are of the same style as found in the Gemara. Tosafos's discourse is mainly in Aramaic, which is the language of the Gemara. In essence, Tosafos picks up a topic where the Talmud left off. Sometimes Tosafos picks up where Rashi's commentary left off. This means that if one can study Gemara and Rashi, one should also be able to study Tosafos.

The major early *baalei haTosafos* did not leave us organized edited material containing their ideas. Most of the material in Tosafos was written by disciples who took notes during the lectures given by the *baalei haTosafos*; they wrote them on the margins of the Gemara and sometimes on pieces of paper or notebooks. These quotes of the major *baalei haTosafos* were collected by later sages, who arranged them according to the tractates in the Talmud. A few great later *baalei haTosafos*, such as R' Shimshon of Sens, wrote collections of their Tosafos themselves.

The original printers of the Talmud took some of these collections and arranged them on the outside column of the page of the Talmud. This is reminiscent of the way the actual notes were written on the margins of the Talmud. Tosafos appears in this form in the earliest known printed editions of the Talmud, as well as in the first complete printed Talmud.*

* This edition is known as the Bomberg edition, printed in Venecia, Italy, 1520-1523.

Since then, most printings of the Talmud have contained Tosafos's commentary. The famous Warsaw and Vilna editions contain Tosafos printed as described above and are the basis for the vast majority of contemporary editions of the Talmud.*

Why the Name "Tosafos"?

The origin of the name "Tosafos" for the commentary on the Gemara by the French and German rabbis is unclear. We know that within the lifetimes of the *baalei haTosafos* themselves they referred to each other's notes as "Tosafos." There are accounts that the later generations of the *baalei haTosafos* also related to their notes of their teacher's lectures as such.**

"Tosafos" is literally translated as "additions." The tradition I heard from my rabbis is that they called their commentaries by this name to mean a supplement to the Talmud. This name was chosen out of modesty. They saw their work as secondary to the Talmud itself and only supplementing or adding to it. However, some think that the Tosafists called their work "Tosafos" because they saw their commentary as an extension of Rashi's commentary. Wherever Rashi did not comment or

* For more information about different editions of the Talmud with and without Tosafos, see R. Rabinowitz, *Ma'amar Al Hadpasas HaTalmud* (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 5712).

** See the sources brought in E. E. Auerbach, *Baalei HaTosafos* (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 5715), chapter 1, comments 25-33. Especially important is the fact that Ri, in the Tosafos for tractate *Avodah Zarah* 57b, refers to the "Tosafos" (or "Tosefta") of the students that were learning in front of Rabbeinu Tam. We see that Ri, who was one of the early great *baalei haTosafos*, was already using the term "Tosafos" (or "Tosefta") when referring to the notes of the disciples of another *baal haTosafos*. In comment 33 there is another source, in which Rabbeinu Tam refers to the Tosafos of Riva using the term "Tosafos."

where he commented briefly or, in the *baal haTosafos's* opinion, inaccurately, Tosafos adds to his commentary. This opinion also maintains that the *baalei haTosafos* gave their commentary this name out of modesty — not presuming to compare their commentary to Rashi's, just to add to it.

From the extensive way the *baalei haTosafos* quote Rashi, we can see that they did not know that Rashi's commentary and their Tosafos would be printed on the same page. They also do not assume that the reader of their commentary is familiar with Rashi's commentary. How, then, would they call their commentary Tosafos to Rashi? With all the honor they had for Rashi, they did not hesitate to disagree with him. This indicates a certain amount of independence from Rashi. I prefer the opinion that they saw their commentary as a modest addition to the Gemara, perhaps indicating that they felt their commentary was humble compared to Rashi's commentary, which commented on the Talmud line for line.*

“Our” Tosafos and Other Tosafos

The commentators refer to the Tosafos printed next to the Talmud text as “our” Tosafos. There are different collections of Tosafos as well. Most well known are the “*Tosafos Yeshanim*”

* According to Auerbach, page 19, the name is a result of the close affiliation the *baalei haTosafos* felt to Rashi's commentary, that they saw their work as additions to Rashi. His proof is not explicit or conclusive. It consists of expressions of awe that Rashi's disciples have regarding his commentary. These expressions have nothing to do with the Tosafos, nor do we find them written in Tosafos. In a recent book, *Early Sages of France* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1995), pp. 439–454), A. Grossman brings additional proof contradicting Auerbach's claim. He shows how sages wrote in the Tosafos style in the time of Rashi!

(old Tosafos), which are often printed in the margins outside our Tosafos. The term “old” (*yeshanim*) was probably given to these pieces by the printers, who believed that these manuscripts were of a more ancient source than those they printed on the page. They are usually shorter than the regular Tosafos.

Other collections of Tosafos are printed in separate books: *Tosafos Rash MiShantz*, *Tosafos Chachmei Anglia*, and others. Their common denominator is that they relate the teachings of the Talmud scholars in Western Europe who lived between 1105 (Rashi's death) and the end of the thirteenth century, and who learned the Gemara in the distinct style of the *baalei haTosafos*.

“Tosafos” — Singular or Plural?

The word “Tosafos” is used to refer to the entire Tosafos commentary. “Tosafos” is also used to refer to a specific paragraph or comment within the larger work. Even though it was written by a group of sages, I have chosen to refer to the authors of Tosafos in the singular (“he” rather than “they”). This is because there was only one sage who physically wrote the Tosafos on each portion of the Talmud.

Also, although the word “Tosafos” in Hebrew is plural, I have chosen to refer to the entire work as “it.” It is true that Tosafos is composed of many individual comments, but later generations view it as a single, integrated work.

In general, these were arbitrary decisions made because of the need to have a standard view of the word “Tosafos” as either singular or plural.

What Does Tosafos Do for the Talmud?

Comparing, Contrasting, and Consolidating Texts

Rashi explains the Talmud's text so that one can understand the language and the development of the *sugya* (the discussion in the Talmud surrounding one topic). Tosafos reexamines the Talmudic texts, discovers inconsistencies and contradictions, and resolves them, thus making the Talmud into a perfect work fit to be the basis for all Jewish law. The inconsistencies are found where one line seems to contradict another in a particular discussion; the contradictions are between statements and rulings in two altogether different tractates. Tosafos also points out problems when a halachic ruling on a certain case contradicts a ruling brought in another.

Although the consolidation of differences and contradictions in the Talmudic text is not the only interest of Tosafos, as we will see, nevertheless it is the bulk of Tosafos's discussion, and it is what this commentary is known for. However, because Tosafos reexamines the text of the Talmud in a critical fashion, his commentary deals with many other issues that confront the student.

Choosing the Correct Wording

Tosafos works at deciding the correct wording of a text, choosing the wording of one manuscript over another. Tosafos may disagree with Rashi or other sages over the proper wording of the text. The wording must fit into the flow of the local *sugya* and be consistent with information derived from other *sugyos* as well. Although Rashi also deals with the correct wording of the *sugya*, Tosafos reassesses Rashi's conclusions based on additional sources and proof from the Talmud itself.

Deciding Halachah

Tosafos does not make it a rule to discuss the halachic conclusion of every *sugya* commented on. Nevertheless, in some cases where there is disagreement, Tosafos is also interested in deciding the halachah. Furthermore, when dealing with issues that were of practical significance for the Jews of that time, Tosafos may expound on the topic and not only discuss how to conclude the halachah of the issue debated in the Gemara, but address adjacent halachic issues as well.

Identifying Talmudic Personalities

Tosafos also identifies the Tannaim and Amoraim referred to in a certain discussion if there is difficulty ascertaining precisely whom the Gemara is referring to. Precise identification helps Tosafos resolve difficulties and contradictions in the data concerning this specific sage.

Rationalizing the Order of the Tractates and Chapters

Tosafos seeks the reason the tractates were placed in their specific order, usually by exposing a connection between the end of the previous tractate and the beginning of the next. At times, Tosafos is interested in the order of chapters within the tractate as well.*

Questions of Logic

Tosafos also raises questions on the logic behind what the Talmud is saying, but only rarely (perhaps when the logical problem with the statement of the Gemara is crystal clear). Tosafos does not usually ask questions on the Gemara based on his own logic, but rather he uses discrepancies in the text

* In his introduction to the Mishna, the Rambam explains the order of the tractates in the Mishna based on the subjects they discuss as a whole.

to introduce special conditions to the problematic statement that will eliminate the logical difficulty. However, the *baalei haTosafos* do use logical arguments when evaluating other commentaries on the Talmud, as will be explained. The Sephardic sages, on the other hand, did ask and answer their own logic questions about the Gemara relatively freely; the Ramban, Rashba, Ran, and Ritva are good examples.

Another central topic of Tosafos's commentary is the careful scrutinization and criticism of the work of earlier commentators (principally Rashi) if their commentaries cause inconsistency and contradiction in the local *sugya* or if there is a difficulty in a commentary's logic. Also, Tosafos may dismiss Rashi's commentary based on proof from another *sugya*, the Jerusalem Talmud, or the *Tosefta*.^{*} Tosafos will disagree with Rashi if according to his commentary the Talmudic statement seems illogical, and another way of explaining the statement makes more sense. Tosafos does not give early commentators the immunity from criticism that he gives the Talmud itself. The *baalei haTosafos* argue even with sources from the period of the Geonim, and certainly with the commentaries of Rashi and Rashbam, whom some early Tosafists saw in their lifetimes. When dismissing Rashi's commentary, Tosafos sometimes brings in another early commentary he agrees with, such as Rach (Rabbeinu Chananel) or the *Aruch*, or presents the opinion of one of the *baalei haTosafos* who explains the issue differently than Rashi. Tosafos may then proceed to explain a whole *sugya* and a host of entries from different tractates based on the new interpretation he has presented.

* The *Tosefta* is a collection of material from the time of the Tannaim. One version of it is printed in the back of the Vilna and Warsaw printings of the Talmud.

Filling in Gaps in Rashi's Commentary

Tosafos also fills in gaps in the commentaries of Rashi (and Rashbam). If they don't explain something in the *sugya*, whether it is a question, an answer, or another stage of the discussion, Tosafos often fills in the void. Tosafos also gets involved in word translation; when Rashi doesn't translate, Tosafos will do so. Often Tosafos will bring different opinions for translations to prove which translation is better.

This Work

This work is an attempt to explain the basic components of Tosafos's discourse to the beginner, and to organize and arrange the knowledge of the intermediate learner. Even though Tosafos seems to use many different forms and phrases, there are certain themes and expressions that recur throughout his entire commentary. I will introduce these themes and expressions to the student, thus creating "landmarks" in the text of the Tosafos. When the student meets these landmarks in his study, he will then "feel at home." By using these landmarks to give him the basic structure of the Tosafos, the student will understand the Tosafos better.

I have divided the book into chapters, each discussing one aspect of Tosafos's discourse. Besides introducing recurring themes and phrases, the book addresses the objectives Tosafos had in mind when writing his commentary and also gives an analysis of Tosafos's language and syntax, as well as strategies for the study of Tosafos for both the beginner and the intermediate student. Also included in this work is a dictionary of key words Tosafos uses in his discourse and a dictionary of abbreviations. Biographies of some of the more well-known

baalei haTosafos are also given.

This information is meant to give the student as many tools as possible to help him study Tosafos in any tractate in the Talmud, and it will help him to feel more confident in approaching Tosafos.

I am not presuming to solve all the readers' problems regarding learning Tosafos. The complexity, diverse style, and richness of expression that appear in Tosafos is impossible to encompass in the scope of this book. I merely hope to introduce Tosafos to the beginner, giving the basic background information he needs and sharing tools for analyzing Tosafos, which I have received from my rabbis as an oral tradition. For the intermediate student, this book will serve as a reference and reminder of those rules for learning Tosafos that he learned from his own rabbis.

How to Use this Book

This book is user-friendly for the beginner, but it also supplies interesting insights and ideas to any reader. In italics are paragraphs that deal with more advanced material directly associated with the topic discussed, which will offer a more complete picture of the topic. In the footnotes, I have included my sources as well as some speculative and theoretical material that will interest even the advanced student of Tosafos.

For each chapter I have included a summary, which can be used for a concise review of the chapter. Additionally, for a quick overview of the book, one can first read the summaries, and then go to the relevant chapters to explore in depth those points that are of interest to the reader.

This book can be used as a textbook, guide, reference book,

or simply for the dictionary. A systematic and diligent student can make his first steps in Tosafos by reading this book cover to cover and then studying Tosafos on the Gemara using the tools he picks up here as his landmarks for his study. When studying the Tosafos and coming across something needing to be defined and explained, one can open to the relevant chapter (with the assistance of the table of contents or the cross-reference [page 111]) and find the information needed. One can also simply use the dictionary for words in Tosafos that need to be translated.

* * *

Studying Tosafos greatly enhances a student's aptitude for learning Gemara, widens his horizons of knowledge, and deepens his understanding, putting him in a completely different class in his studies. I wish the learner lots of success and enjoyment from *Toras Hashem*.

Conclusion: Deciphering Tosafos requires a good command of the Gemara being discussed and a lot of patience. It is a slow process and requires work, but it can be very satisfying if executed successfully.

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SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 2: Tosafos's Language and Syntax

- a. The base of Tosafos's language is the Aramaic of the Talmud.
- b. Tosafos mixes some Hebrew words into the Aramaic discourse.
- c. There are Aramaic forms Tosafos is fond of that are rarely used in the Talmud.
- d. Aramaic prefixes are used by Tosafos extensively, even with Hebrew words.
- e. The syntax in Tosafos is different than that of the Gemara. It is helpful to know key words that help to recognize beginnings of sentences.
- f. Tosafos freely uses words and concepts from the local *sugya* in his discourse and mixes them with his discussion.
- g. Tosafos assumes a familiarity with concepts from the Talmud in general.

SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 3:**Tosafos's Objectives**

- a. Our first assumption when beginning to learn a Tosafos should be that Tosafos will be raising and dealing with a difficulty concerning a Gemara, since this is his primary interest.
- b. The next most common interest of Tosafos is pointing out the difficulties regarding another commentator's explanation of the Gemara.
- c. When there is no evidence of a question being raised by Tosafos, he may be interested in achieving one of his other objectives: reading the Gemara's text correctly, explaining the text, reaching a halachic conclusion, or inducing or deducing from the text.
- d. Even when the Tosafos begins with a non-argumentative objective, this is commonly a prelude to difficulties raised by that introduction.
- e. *Sometimes, even a question and an answer are laying the groundwork for the following question and answer.*
- f. *Sometimes, a whole Tosafos is part of a web that Tosafos spins in order to prove a single point.*

Chapter 13:
*Tips and Strategies
for the Beginner*

When we take our first steps in the study of Tosafos or when we instruct others who are doing so, the following strategies are recommended. (The advice given here starts with advice for the most inexperienced and proceeds to advice for the more advanced.)

Tip 1: Know the Gemara and Rashi Well

Before attempting to study Tosafos, it is necessary to know well the Gemara Tosafos is discussing and the Rashi on that Gemara. Therefore, it is recommended to not start learning Tosafos until we have gained a solid textual understanding of our Gemara and Rashi. Many times, we misunderstand a Tosafos because of a mistake in our understanding of the Gemara.

Tip 2: Approach Tosafos Gradually

When we are first starting to learn Tosafos, we do not need to immediately begin studying every single Tosafos on the page or finish every Tosafos we start. Here is a proposed program for the parts of Tosafos that can be omitted by the beginner.

1. Start by learning only those Tosafos that explain the *sugya* or pertain to its halachic conclusion.
2. It is not necessary to finish every Tosafos at first. In the beginning, it is sufficient to learn one question and answer, or one idea, and then to proceed with the study of the Gemara.
3. When Tosafos brings several questions on a certain topic, it is possible to learn only the question most connected to our Gemara and go straight to the answer. From there, it is possible to continue with the rest of the Tosafos or the next Tosafos, or to continue with the Gemara (see Chapter 5, page 44).
4. The beginner should start by learning only those Tosafos or parts of Tosafos that deal with our Gemara and do not introduce a quote from another one.
5. When there is a *ואין לומר*, the beginner may go straight to the answer, skipping the *ואין לומר* (see Chapter 7, page 56).
6. Once one is learning quotes from other Gemaras, one may choose to skip sections where Tosafos begins addressing difficulties primarily affecting the other Gemara and not ours.

Tip 3: Helpful Literature

In recent years, two series of books, *Mei Menuchos** and

* Nachman Kahana (Jerusalem: Machon Mei Menuchos, 5732). Thirty-three volumes already exist.

Shaarei Tosafos,* have been printed that translate Tosafos into Hebrew and explain the commentary (in Hebrew). These books also give any background material that may be necessary, and explain the content and context of the sources Tosafos quotes. These books are written on some chapters of the Gemara, especially ones that are studied in high schools. These books can be very helpful when there is an especially difficult Tosafos or when we lack the background information necessary to understand a specific Tosafos. However, students who rely on these books alone for their Tosafos study will learn the information in Tosafos but will not learn how to “learn” Tosafos.

I believe that by combining the study of Tosafos with the help of these books, and by using this volume to help gain the “tools” for the study of Tosafos, it is also possible to achieve the goal of easing and expediting the study of Tosafos and, in addition, to learn how to approach the Tosafos directly. However, most teachers recommend using books that translate and explain Tosafos only when students’ attempts to understand the Tosafos by themselves have failed.

Tip 4: Assistance from Classical Talmudic Commentaries

When Tosafos’s question or answer does not make sense to us, it is often helpful to study the words of another commentator who may ask the same question in different words, thus helping us to understand what Tosafos intends to ask.

The *Tosafos HaRosh* is a source parallel to Tosafos, commenting on the same issues Tosafos deals with. The *Tosafos HaRosh*

* David HaKohen Oxenberg (Jerusalem: Hotza’at Machon Tam, 5750). Nine volumes are already in existence in this series.

were compiled either by the Rosh himself or by his disciples and therefore differ from our Tosafos in the style of writing, and sometimes even in content. We will often find the same question asked there under the same opening quote as in our Tosafos. Since the wording may be different, this comparison may shed light on our understanding of Tosafos.*

Also helpful for this purpose are the *Chiddushei HaRitva*. The Ritva often asks Tosafos's question and even mentions that Tosafos asks it. He often brings Tosafos's answer and discusses it. The difference in style between Tosafos and the Ritva and the Ritva's comments on Tosafos's answers can help us a great deal.**

Rabbi Uziel Moshe Rothstein, zt"l, wrote up his *shiurim* on a number of tractates in a series of books called *Nachalas Moshe****. In his *shiurim*, he comments extensively on Tosafos, sometimes simply explaining Tosafos's intentions. His language is easy and flowing, and his questions on Tosafos are often questions that we ourselves would ask.

* Rabbi Y. S. Langa (in his edition of the *Tosafos HaRosh* on tractate *Shabbos*, p. 7), says that *Tosafos HaRosh* is a collection of Tosafos made by the Rosh or his disciples. Rav Nebenzahl, *shlita*, adds that the *Tosafos HaRosh* is the collection of Tosafos that the Rosh brought with him when he immigrated from France to Spain. Rav Nebenzahl's source is a letter written by the Rosh's son.

** The Ritva was a Spanish sage. He was the disciple and successor of the Rashba. He mentions Tosafos by name more often than any other Spanish commentator.

*** Jerusalem: Published by the author from 5735-5748.

Appendix 3: *Glossary*

- ACHARON(IM) — commentator(s) who lived after the TUR or BEIS YOSEF (sixteenth century to the present).
- ACHSANIA SHEL TORAH — meeting-place for study.
- AL KIDDUSH HASHEM — lit., on the sanctity of God's name; when a Jew chooses to die rather than defy his religion.
- AMORA(IM) — sage(s) who lived in the time of the Talmud (third through sixth centuries).
- BAALEI HATOSAFOS — lit., the masters of the Tosafos; the authors of Tosafos; also known as Tosafists.
- BARAYSA — a unit of the words of Tannaim that R' Yehuda HaNasi, the author of the Mishna, did not include in his Mishna. Also known as an "external Mishna."
- BEIS MEDRASH — house of study (and prayer).
- BEIS YOSEF — commentary on the TUR, written by R' Yosef Karo in the sixteenth century.
- CHAVRUSA — study partner.
- CHILLUK — differentiation; distinguishing between two cases.

- DERASHAH — a discourse on a text from the Torah using traditional ways of interpretation.
- DIBBUR HAMASCHIL — the word or words that begin a paragraph in a book of commentary.
- GAON/GEONIM — head(s) of one of the two major Babylonian yeshivos; from approximately 589 C.E. until the death of R' Hai Gaon in 1038 C.E.
- HAGAHOS — Corrections of text, sometimes including short comments.
- HALACHAH (adj. HALACHIC) — Jewish religious law.
- MASORES HASHAS — marginal notes printed in standard Gemaras; cites parallel sources for our Gemara.
- OPENING QUOTE — the quote from the Gemara that begins every individual TOSAFOS.
- PILPUL — a method of learning Gemara by primarily raising and answering apparent contradictions.
- POSEK (POSKIM) — a HALACHIC authority.
- PESHAT — the simple understanding of a text.
- RABBEINU — our rabbi.
- RISHON(IM) — sage(s) from the period after the Geonim and before the TUR or BEIS YOSEF (eleventh through sixteenth centuries).
- SHIURIM — classes given by sages.

SHULCHAN ARUCH — code of Jewish law written by R' Yosef Karo.
SUGYA (SUGYOS) — portion(s) of Talmud that deal with one topic.

TALMID(IM) — disciple(s).

TANNA(IM) — sage(s) who lived at the time of the Mishna;
approximately 37 C.E. (Hillel) to 219 C.E.

TORAS HASHEM — the Torah of God.

TOSAFOS — commentary on the Talmud compiled by a group
of western-European sages during the twelfth and thirteenth
centuries; a section of this commentary.

TOSAFOS CHACHMEI ANGLIA — Tosafos compiled by sages who
lived in England.

TOSAFOS YESHANIM — a collection of Tosafos thought to be older
than our Tosafos. They are printed in between the "regular"
Tosafos with the notation ״״״, or they are printed in the
margin of the Gemara.

TOSAFOS HARASH MISHANTZ — Tosafos compiled by R' Shimshon
of Sens.

TOSEFTA — a specific collection of BARAYSAS that was given this
name. One version of the *Tosefta* is printed in the back of
the Vilna and Warsaw editions of the Talmud.

TUR — code of Jewish law written by R' Yaacov son of the Rosh
in the early fourteenth century.