

BET MIDRASH REFERENCE GUIDE

svara סבִּירָא

a traditionally radical yeshiva

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Learning at SVARA

SVARA's learning happens in the bet midrash, a space for study partners (*chevrutas*) to build a relationship with the Talmud text, with one another, and with the tradition—all in community and a queer-normative, loving culture. The learning is rigorous, yet the bet midrash environment is warm and supportive. Learning at SVARA focuses on skill-building (learning how to learn), foregrounding the radical roots of the Jewish tradition, empowering learners to become “players” in it, cultivating Talmud study as a spiritual practice, and with the ultimate goal of nurturing human beings shaped by one of the central spiritual, moral, and intellectual technologies of our tradition: *Talmud Torah* (the study of Torah).

The SVARA method is a simple, step-by-step process in which the teacher is always an authentic co-learner with their students, teaching the Talmud not so much as a *normative* document prescribing specific behaviors, but as a *formative* document, shaping us into a certain kind of human being. We believe the Talmud itself is a handbook for how to, sometimes even radically, upgrade our tradition when it no longer functions to create the most liberatory world possible.

All SVARA learning begins with the CRASH Talk. Here we lay out our philosophy of the Talmud and the rabbinic revolution that gave rise to it—along with important vocabulary and concepts for anyone learning Jewish texts. This talk is both an overview of the ultimate goals of the Jewish enterprise, as well as a crash course in *halachic* (Jewish legal) jurisprudence. Beyond its application to Judaism, CRASH Theory is a simple but elegant model of how all change happens—whether societal, religious, organizational, or personal. We build on this conceptual framework as we unpack our understanding of all the texts we study.

Our mission is to open up Talmud learning to the *other* 99% of Jews who have been shut out of the bet midrash for two millennia. SVARA is for you, whether you did or didn't go to day school or summer camp, you're queer in any number of ways that give you the valuable insight of the outsider, you're a woman who was told that Talmud wasn't for you, you are or aren't observant, whether you're Jewish or not, or your relationship with Judaism does or doesn't match traditional expectations. SVARA students bring their real-life experiences to bear on the text & tradition, making them and the world better for it.

In every SVARA bet midrash learning is structured in three phases. Each bet midrash session begins with chevruta learning: sitting with your chevruta (your study partner), your text, and your dictionaries and preparing the text. At SVARA, we never use translations. Your text is in the original Hebrew or Aramaic, no matter your learning experience. More experienced learners will have the chance to go beyond the gemara into Rashi, Tosafot, legal codes, and mefarshim (medieval commentaries). Everyone has the same amount of time to work through the text, and whether you prepare five words or five lines, your learning is valuable and will contribute to the vibrancy of the discussion and your own growth as a “player” and human being.

After everyone's spent a period of time, usually several hours, deciphering a section of text, we come together as a group to unpack what we've learned and discuss it—that's called *shiur*. Your teacher will guide everyone through fully translating and discussing every word of the text and hold space for you to share your questions and insights. After shiur, you'll return to chevruta for chazara (review) of that session's text to the point of deep understanding, ownership, mastery, and memorization. At SVARA we use the process of memorization as both a diagnostic tool to check our own understanding and as a way to ensure that everyone truly owns the tradition. Finally, every student will have a chance to recite all the material they've come to own—and everyone who recites gets clapped up, no matter how much they were able to do. We find learning in this way a magical, empowering, life-changing experience and we hope you love it as much as we do!

Crash Theory

- **Hypothesis #1: All human beings share the same basic “big questions” of life.** Every tradition comes into being for one and only one reason: to answer those very questions. And it does so by means of a **Master Story**.
- As long as your master story is working for you, you’re not even aware that you have questions: You know how you got here. *It tells you.* You know if there is a God. *It tells you.* You know what you’re here to do. *It tells you.* Etc.
- **But...Hypothesis #2:** All master stories will ultimately, and inevitably, **CRASH!**
- One of three things will have happened: Your master story will either have come into contact with a) a conflicting master story, b) a historical event which makes it impossible for some of the answers in the master story to work, or c) *you’ve changed*, and your master story’s answers will no longer seem true. **This is a CRASH.**
- There are **three and only three possible responses to a crash.** Which one you choose will determine the kind of person you’ll become, the kind of life you’ll live, and the kind of world you’ll create.
 - **Option 1:** Deny the crash and revert to your master story. You’re likely to build a “wall” around it—either physical, social, or otherwise—to be sure nothing challenges it.
 - **Option 2:** Accept the crash and reject your master story in its entirety. This is the baby-with-the-bathwater option. You are jumping off into a new story here (you always live “in a story”)— the story of the “crash material” which seems more plausible to you now than your master story. But remember: all stories will ultimately and inevitably crash, and this one will, too.
 - **Note:** Both Option 1 and Option 2 are opposite sides of the same coin: they’re responses to the mistaken belief that master stories are fixed, unchanging, and immutable—and that any crack in them signals a full collapse, one denying this crack, the other accepting it.
 - **Option 3:** Accept the crash, go back to your original big questions, revisit the master story, and retell your master story in light of the crash, bringing into your retelling those parts of the master story that still work and innovating new components, so that you have a new set of working answers to those original animating questions.
- **The Rabbis went Option 3.** A couple hundred years after the beginning of their crash (which, by the way, began well before the Temple was actually destroyed), their retelling became written down in what became the Mishna (and later continued in the Gemara, and all the rest of what we now call “Oral Torah”).
- The Rabbis knew that crashes were going to keep happening and embedded into their retelling *the rules for how to retell* your Jewish Master Story so that the resulting story would still be Jewish—i.e., regardless of the *forms* of practice advocated by the new story, the ultimate goals of the Jewish enterprise would still be the achieved.
- There were many “mishnahts” after the destruction of the Second Temple (including Christianity). Ours is merely one.

The Five Sources of Jewish Law

Kra (קרא) Torah verse

Minhag (מנהג) Custom

Ma'aseh (מעשה) Precedent

Takanah (תקנה) Legislation

Svara (סברא) Informed moral intuition

A Definition of the Concept 'Svara'

Svara: “informed moral intuition”—a talmudic term of Jewish law that reflects the 2,000-year-old rabbinic notion that the most powerful source of truth is that insight which grows out of the experience of our own lives *informed by Jewish learning*.

According to Menachem Elon, Former Deputy President of the Supreme Court of Israel, *svara* “involves a deep and discerning probe into the essence of halakhic and legal principles, an appreciation of the characteristics of human beings in their social relationships, and a careful study of the real world and its manifestations.”¹ Elsewhere, Elon defines the term more succinctly: “legal reasoning that penetrates into the essence of things and reflects a profound understanding of human nature.”²

Svara is one of five sources of Jewish law, among which, of course, is a verse in the Torah itself. Just as any law which grows out of a Torah verse is understood to have the higher status of *d'oraita* (“toraitic,” or “straight from God”) rather than merely *d'rabbanan* or “rabbinic,” a law whose source is *svara* is also *d'oraita*! What’s more, when one’s *svara* and a verse in the Torah conflict, *svara* has the power to trump even Torah in the determination of law, when that *svara* is understood to more accurately reflect the deepest foundational principles of the Jewish tradition.

¹ *Jewish Law: History, Sources, Principles*, p. 987.

² *Jewish Law (Mishpat Ivri): Cases and Materials*, p. 97.

The Requirements for Being a “Player”

Hint: Rabbinic ordination is *not* one of them. Many of the “Rabbis” of the talmudic era were never ordained and had no titles. In fact, the only thing the title “Rabbi” grants is indemnity against financial damages in the event that you make a halachic decision that turns out to be wrong. In that event, you are protected against being sued. (Sanhedrin 5a)

Gamirna and Savirna

The two requirements for being a “player” in the game of interpreting Jewish law and transforming the tradition are: being “gamirna” and being “savrna” (Sanhedrin 5a, Horayot 2b). For a detailed explanation of what each term means, see Sota 20a and Eruvin 13a, particularly Rashi, d.h. “gamar gemara” and d.h. “savar svara.”

Being “gamirna” means knowing your “learning”—the root gimel/mem/resh, in Aramaic, means “to learn.” In the Talmudic era, it meant, simply, knowing your mishnahs backward and forward, word for word, just as they had been passed down to you from your teacher and to your teacher from his (it was always a “he” back then) teacher, etc. To be “gamirna” in the Talmudic era didn’t require even knowing gemara/Talmud—because, of course, it hadn’t been written yet! So being gamirna required mastery of a relatively small canon of Jewish knowledge. [An important question for us today is: what does it mean today for someone to be gamirna? How much would they have to know? And of which genres of Jewish literature? All of them? Only some of them? How much Talmud would I need to know to be gamirna? How much midrash? Codes, etc., etc. Are there other things, expertise in which, would make me gamirna? I don’t know the answer to this... but I think it’s an interesting and very important question.]

“Savrna” refers to the acknowledgement that one possesses svara. And, paraphrasing Menachem Elon’s definition: svara is one’s informed moral intuition, based on a broad range of experience, exposure to people different from yourself, insight into human nature and an understanding of the human condition. It is *what your kishkes tell you is right* if, and only if, you are steeped in Jewish values and principles, and an understanding of Jewish texts—i.e., if you are gamirna.

Being gamirna is a prerequisite to being savirna (although the opposite is not true). In other words, you can be full of “gemara”/Jewish learning, but have no insight into human nature, no empathy, no experience with people different from yourself, etc. You would then be gamirna, but not savirna. But you cannot be savirna unless you are already gamirna. In other words: you can’t be an ignoramus and claim that “what your kishkes tell you” is svara. It isn’t.

Svara implies a profound sensitivity to and deep moral empathy toward others, the courage to take action on an issue even when it is not popular or might cost you, and the knowledge and confidence to carry it out *in a Jewish way*—i.e., playing by the rules of the Jewish game, basing yourself on the sources of Jewish law, and the mechanisms of authentic Jewish change.

The Four Steps of the SVARA Method

1 | Prep in Chevruta

WHAT IS CHEVRUTA?

- A framework for intimate connection with another human being, with the text, and with the tradition (“chevruta” refers to both the partnership and the people in the partnership!)
- A spiritual technology for developing radical empathy and interdependence
- Interactive, engaging, busy, immersive, with both chevritas feeling totally present to the relationship and the learning
- When done with rigorous and clear expectations of text mastery, chevruta becomes a profoundly meditative and empowering experience

How Do We Learn in Chevruta

Start with a check-in. Take turns, and share with your chevruta how you are, what’s on your mind, whatever you need them to know about you right now so that you can become fully present.

Dedicate: In the Jewish tradition, learning is believed to carry within it the power to repair, to heal, and to transform. It is our custom at SVARA, as it has been the custom in many yeshivas in the world for thousands of years, to begin our learning by directing that power to someone or something in need of healing, strength, or encouragement. Or you might dedicate your learning to someone in whose honor or memory you would like to learn, perhaps someone whom you think would be very proud to know that you’re learning in this moment. Hold the person, people, or community you’d like to dedicate your learning to, in your mind and heart, and then say “I’d like to dedicate my learning today to ____.” Feel free to explain to your chevruta or your learning comrades why this dedication is on your mind.

Bless: The blessing for Torah study closes dedications and elevates learning into the realm of mitzvah, the language that the Rabbis used for what mattered most to them.

Learn: Now you’re ready to start learning!

- Pick a “driver”:** You and your chevruta are going to be working through the text, word by word. It helps to have one of you be the “vocalizer”– the person saying out each word or phrase (making just a rough guess at the proper pronunciation), just to make sure you both know which word you’re both working on at any given moment, and are always both looking up the same word at the same time. You can periodically switch who’s being the “driver.”
- Look up every word!** Oftentimes we *think* we know what a word means based on previous learning or experience. At SVARA, everyone looks up *every* word to uncover hidden meanings, nuances, suggestive resonances, connections, and etymologies that are present in the words of the text and help us go deeper in our learning.
- Holler out the page number when you find it!** Each chevruta has their own set of dictionaries and should be looking up the same word at the same time as their chevruta. When looking up words, whoever finds the entry first should call out which dictionary they found the word in, the

page number, left or right column, top or bottom of the column, *or* direct their chevruta to the entry.

- D. **Keep it collaborative.** Learning is not a race, or a competition! Talmud study—and *all* learning—should be a collaboration between learners who understand that they’re on the same team. Remember: **You are responsible for your chevruta’s learning, and your chevruta is responsible for your learning.**
- E. **Take your time!** Don’t worry if other learners are ahead of you in the text, behind you, or anywhere else! Wherever you and your chevruta are is just plain perfect.

2 | Shiur

WHAT IS SHIUR?

- The group discussion section during which **the text is unpacked, word by word**
- Careful attention is paid not only to what each word means but **how each word means what it means**
- **Larger ideas and implications of the text** are also explored in a freewheeling discussion

HOW DOES SHIUR WORK?

The teacher will call upon a student to “read.” “Reading” is done in three steps: “Read,” “Inside Translation,” and “Outside Translation.” “Read, Inside, Outside. Read, Inside, Outside” is the mantra that keeps the learning focused on deep ownership of the text rather than a mere cursory, surface-level drive-by of what’s going on in the text.

It is important to take really good notes during shiur (on everything you can, including pronunciation, roots, grammar notes, meanings of words, etc.) so that you can refer to these during your next chevruta session when you are reviewing the text unpacked in shiur during Step 3: Chazara!

- A. **Read—in the original Hebrew/Aramaic, in small chunks:** If you are called upon to read, you will read out loud a short chunk of text, making your best guess at pronouncing the one, two, three, or maybe four or five words which make up the smallest meaningful idea in each phrase or sentence. Your teacher will help you as you go along.
- B. **Inside translation:** You will then go back and make your best guess as to the “inside” translation, i.e., the hyper-literal translation, of each word, in the order in which the words appear, following the syntax of the original. When you’re giving an inside translation, it will sound quite choppy and not flow in a smooth, colloquial translation.

Every single prefix and suffix should be represented in an inside translation (i.e., החובל בחברו would be translated as the one who injures in his friend). Nothing that isn’t represented in the letters of each word should appear in one’s inside translation. For example, rabbinic literature often implies an “if” at the beginning of a case: “if one injures his friend.” But that implied “if” should not appear in the inside translation.

- C. **Outside translation:** After giving your inside translation of each phrase, go back and give your best guess at the “outside” translation—a colloquial translation that flows smoothly in modern English, and sounds like something you’d actually say, in the way you’d actually say it. Then, if necessary,

explain out what the phrase means, adding any additional background information that would be necessary to help an uninitiated imaginary listener understand what's going on in that phrase.

Every reader gets enthusiastically clapped up before the next reader is called on!

- D. **Unpacking:** Along the way, ask yourselves: What does the text say? What does the text mean? And what might the Rabbis have been trying to tell us in saying what they said in the way in which they said it? Beyond the surface content of the text, what might the text be conveying on a meta level about how you, as the learner, are being taught to see the tradition and how it works? How does the text affect how you see yourself as a leader and your role vis-à-vis the received tradition and the future of Judaism? How is your process of learning this text helping you gain insight into yourself and the world around you?

3 | Chazara

It's all about chazara! This is where the magic happens.

Chazara serves, first, to help you diagnose where the weak points in your understanding of the text are, and then to deepen your understanding of the text beyond where you even realized it could have been deepened! This is where the text's molecules and your molecules come together. This is where you try to gain complete clarity of understanding (which, of course, will always be temporary and enhanced the next time you learn the text). Here's where you come to own the text, and own the tradition! *Without chazara, text study can actually reinforce a sense of powerlessness.* If you don't achieve absolute clarity on the meaning of the text—which can only happen through *chazara*—*the teacher will remain the only one in true possession of a) the text, b) most of the "smart ideas" about what the text is saying, and c) the tradition itself.*

STEPS IN THE CHAZARA PROCESS

- A. **Read Inside/Outside:** While looking at the text, the stronger chevruta (let's call them chevruta a) goes first, reading out loud through the text, phrase by phrase, with proper phrasing and pronunciation, and translating both "inside" and "outside," talking out any necessary explanatory or background information as if teaching the material to an uninitiated listener. Partner (b) should monitor and check *very carefully* and correct any mistakes immediately.
- a. **Switch roles:** Now chevruta (b) does the same thing while chevruta (a) monitors and corrects. *Note:* At the end of this step, both (a) and (b) should understand every individual word, inside and outside, and as many details about each word and phrase as their Hebrew level will allow. →**See What It Means to Own a Text**, page 17.
- B. **Talk it out:** Chevruta (a) should close their masechet and talk out the text, *in English*, from memory (without looking at the text at all), in a good, colloquial outside translation, *but staying fairly close to the inside translation*, moving through the text phrase by phrase, sentence by sentence, to make sure they're not missing any nuance of the text's "moves." The translation should follow the original words of the text closely enough that your chevruta should be able to know, at every point, where you are in the text. Chevruta (b) should be careful to monitor whether they think chevruta (a) *really gets it* or may not, at every given point. If chevruta (b) suspects there may be a gap or misunderstanding in chevruta (a)'s understanding, they should ask for clarification from chevruta (a). Remember: You are responsible for your chevruta's learning! And they are responsible for yours.
- a. **Switch roles.** Now chevruta (b) does the same thing, while chevruta (a) monitors.

C. Recite from memory: Chevruta (a) then starts the memorization/internalization part of *chazara*, reciting the text out, in the original Hebrew/Aramaic, still without looking at the text. You are now *producing* the text, from within yourself, from your deep understanding of it. This is not a rote recitation. The text should be naturally emerging from inside of you! As soon as a mistake is made, even the most minor, chevruta (b) should correct you by simply saying *correctly* the word which was mispronounced or missed, and return you “Back to the top!” to begin reciting again, from the beginning. **This “Back to the top!” step is very important in the internalization process.** Student (a) is not finished until they can recite the entire section without error. Remember: memorization is primarily a means to an end (deep, integrated understanding), not an end in itself (the ability to rattle off a lot of words).

Switch roles. Now chevruta (b) goes through the same process of recitation from memory with (a) monitoring.

4 | Recitation

WHAT IS RECITATION?

- Sharing, out loud, the text you’ve come to own—in the original, in perfect rendition of the original but voiced through you
- The last step of the chazara process
- The first thing that happens in each shiur before the new material is unpacked

HOW DOES RECITATION WORK?

Recitation is always the last step of the chazara process done in chevruta. But a typical shiur at SVARA always begins with a selection of students being called on, one at a time, to recite the material they mastered during chazara. After each student recites, the room explodes into boisterous applause!

How to Figure Out What Your Word Means

The process for figuring out the meaning of a word begins by breaking it down into its components and then building it back up to its full definition. Most words in Hebrew have a three-letter root. This root encodes a core nugget of meaning but on its own, it is not a word. Imagine a root is like a person with a core identity. Depending on what role a person is inhabiting at any given time, they may dress in clothing appropriate to that role. Roots become words by getting dressed up with vowels and affixes (this is an umbrella term that includes prefixes, suffixes, and infixes!) appropriate to the meaning they communicate.

1. **Make your best guess at identifying the root** by eliminating prefixes, suffixes and infixes. At SVARA, we're all about finding roots!

→ See **Hints for Finding the Root**, page 11 for a guide!

If you're stuck trying to identify the root letters, an alternative approach is to look up the word as is. Jastrow includes entries for nouns listed under their singular form and lists the root of the noun in parenthesis. You may have to remove a plural suffix (or a prefixed preposition) to use this approach. Always look up the root of every word, even if you've found the definition of the entire word exactly as it appears in the text.

Finally, don't be reluctant to use your hint sheet, which may guide you to your root or suggest an alternative approach to tricky words.

2. **Look up your root in the Jastrow dictionary** (remember, Jastrow is organized by root!) and identify your root's core meaning.

→ See **Jastrow and Frank Primer** (page 13) and **Anatomy of Jastrow Entry** (page 14) for more on how to use these dictionaries!

3. **See what you can learn from the affixes.** Is there a prefixed preposition that explains how the word relates to its context? Is the word a noun or a verb? If it's a verb, what binyan is it in? What tense is it? Who or what is the subject?

→ See **Basics of Binyanim**, page 16.

4. Remember: The Talmud is an Oral Tradition. It is not meant to be fully understood merely from the words written down. Don't spend too much time trying to figure out exactly what the sentence means as you look up words. Translate as many words as you can during chevruta time, and we'll put the pieces of the puzzle together during shiur.

Hints for Finding the Root

Roots usually have 3 letters. Eliminate prefixes, infixes and/or suffixes to find your 3-letter root. These letters are always root no matter where they appear in the word: **ר צ פ ע ס ת ז ג** (ט is very rarely an infix)

1. Eliminate prefixes, infixes, suffixes:

Suffixes		Prefixes	
א-	Aram. conjugation: past or present	Aram. preposition: 'on, about'	-א
ה-	Heb. conjugation: past, 'she did' or present 'I/you/she is'	Aram. binyan: af-el	-א
ה-	Heb. pronoun: 'her, hers'	conjugation: future, 'I will'	-א
הם-	Heb. possessive pronoun: 'their (m.)'	Aram. binyan: itp'-el and itpa-al	-אי
הן-	Heb. possessive pronoun: 'their (f.)'	Aram. binyan: itp'-el and itpa-al	-את
ו-	Heb. conjugation: past, 'they (m.) did' or future, pl.	preposition: 'in, with'	-ב
ו-	Heb. Poss. pronoun: 'him, his'	Aram. preposition: 'that, of'	-ד
ות-	Heb. conj: present 'we/y'all/they (f.) are' or Noun: pl. f.	Heb. article: 'the'	-ה
י-	Heb. conjugation: future, 'you (f) will'	Heb. binyan: hif-il, past	-ה
י-	Heb. pronoun: 'me, my'	Heb. binyan: hitpa-el, past	-הת
י-	Heb. noun: pl. m. in construct state	conjunction: 'and'	-ו
י-	Aram. noun: pl. m.	conjugation: future, 'he will, they will'	-י
יה-	Aram. pronoun: 'him, his'	preposition: 'like, as'	-כ
יו-	Heb. pronoun: 'him'	preposition: 'when'	-כש
ים-	Heb. conj: present 'we/y'all/they (m.) are' or Noun: pl. m.	Heb. binyan: nif-al, past and present	-נ
ין-	Heb. conj: present 'we/y'all/they (m.) are' or Noun: pl. m.	conjugation: future, 'we will'	-נ
ך-	Heb. pronoun: 'you, your (singular)'	preposition: 'to, for'	-ל
כם-	Heb. pronoun: 'y'all, y'all's (m.)'	Heb. conjugation: infinitive	-ל
כן-	Heb. pronoun: 'y'all, y'all's (f.)'	Aram. conj: future or jussive, 'he will, we will'	-ל
נא-	Aram. conjugation: present, 'I am'	preposition: 'from'	-מ
נו-	Heb. conjugation: past, 'we did'	Heb. & Aram. conjugation: present	-מ
נו-	Heb. direct object: 'him' or 'us'	noun-ifier	-מ
ני-	Heb. direct object: 'me'	Heb. binyan: hitpa-el, present	-מת
ת-	Heb. conj: past, 'you (singular)' or present 'I/you/she is'	Aram. emphasis marker for participles	-ק
ת-	Heb. noun: singular, f. in construct state	Heb. preposition: 'that, of'	-ש
תי-	Heb. conjugation: past, 'I did'	conj: future, 'you will, y'all will, she will'	-ת
תם-	Heb. conjugation: past, 'y'all (m.) did'	noun-ifier	-ת
תן-	Heb. conjugation: past, 'y'all (f.) did'		

Infixes

- ך - - passive participle pi-el gerund	- - ך - pa'al, present tense pu'al	- ך - - hif'il most Aramaic binyanim	- - ך - pi-el gerund
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2. Only **two letters left**? The following letters are weak and tend to fall out: ך ם ן ף ץ. They typically fall out from the following positions:

3rd position	2nd position	1st position
ך - -	- ך -	- - ך
ן - -		- - ן
ם - -		- - ם (only in Aramaic)

In addition to the weak letters above, words built from roots of the form **פלל** (in which the second and third root letter are the same) often drop one of the repeated root letters. These are called **geminate roots**.

3. Eliminated everything and still have **four letters left**? A small number of Hebrew and Aramaic words have four-letter roots.
4. Still stuck? Look up the word as you find it in the text. If you find your word, make note of its root (Jastrow marks the root with a √), which you should then look up as well.

Jastrow and Frank Primer

Jastrow

- What's inside:** Every word in Rabbinic literature
- Organized by:** Roots. Find the root of the word you're looking for (see "Hints for Finding the Root," below); then you can find it in Jastrow. You can also sometimes find words in Jastrow, particularly nouns, as they appear in your text with prefixes and suffixes removed.
- Direction:** Left to right (like English)

Jastrow Tips:

Often there are multiple entries for the same three letter root in Jastrow—make sure you start with the first one and take a look at them all. Note what language you're working in—Hebrew or Aramaic—and make sure you are looking at the right entry. Jastrow marks Hebrew entries with b.h. and Aramaic entries with ch.
→ See **Anatomy of a Jastrow Entry**, page 14.

Clues that you're in Hebrew: You're in a Mishna or a Baraita (Baraitas will be introduced by ת"ר or some other form of the word תניא)

Clues that you're in Aramaic: (1) You're in the gemara—not a mishnah—particularly unattributed sections of gemara (2) You see lots of these: prefixes: —ד Suffixes: א— or יה—

Frank

- What's inside:** Technical terms and other *very common*, mostly Aramaic, words and phrases. Plus: a great list of acronyms in the back.
- Organized by:** Whole words or phrases, alphabetically, *not by root*.
- Direction:** Right to left (like Hebrew)
- Frank Tips:**
- Be sure to take a look at the entries immediately before or after the one where you've found the word from your text. Frank defines common phrases and often a word will appear in several phrases, one after another in the dictionary. Skim through all entries with your word to find your phrase or phrases that include your word to find out more about what it might mean.
 - Most of the words in Frank are Aramaic. He gives a Hebrew definition for the word as well, immediately to the left of the entry.
 - Headwords are in bold.
 - Frank explains how the word works, i.e., not just the literal definition of the word, but what it implies and how it is used in the Talmud as a rhetorical device. This is why we love Frank.
 - Read the whole entry! Read the examples! They can help you understand how the words fit together in context and what moves the Rabbis are making.

Anatomy of a Jastrow Entry

The Jastrow Dictionary has a whole lot of information! Often the answers we need are somewhere in the entry, and the trick is knowing where and how to find them. Below you'll find the common features of a Jastrow entry explained through two sample entries, one verb and one noun. We'll start with the entry for **לָמַד I לָמַד** found on page 712. This is our verb!

לָמַד I לָמַד	Headword. This entry is for the verb derived from the root לָמַד. The headword of a verb entry is typically the verb conjugated in the past-tense, third person, masculine singular of Binyan Pa'al—i.e. the 'he did it' form. You can tell it's a verb because the definitions are all infinitives (i.e. they begin 'to...'). (If this were a noun rather than a verb entry, the headword would be immediately followed by an m. f. or c. See the section below for a tour of a noun entry!)
(b. h.)	Language. (b. h.) indicates Biblical Hebrew. (ch.) stands for Chaldaic—an old-fashioned name for Aramaic.
Pi.	Binyan label. Roots can be transformed to derive several related but distinct verbs. Each of these distinct verbs is said to be in a different binyan and each binyan transforms the roots meaning a characteristic way. Jastrow devotes one paragraph to each binyan and begins each paragraph with an abbreviation of the binyan's name. Unless noted otherwise the first paragraph is always binyan pa'al. → See Basics of Binyanim , page 16.
לָמַד, לִימַד	Vocalization. The verb conjugated in the past-tense, third person, masculine, singular of the specified binyan (in this case pi-el).
1) <i>to join; to arrange...</i> —2) <i>to train, to accustom.</i>	Definition. The meaning of the verb in the specified binyan. Definitions in Jastrow appear in italics. Often Jastrow lists multiple definitions for the same word, and will begin each definition with a number, 1) 2) 3)... Each subsequent definition is set off with a —. Sometimes, in place of a definition, you will find the word <i>same</i> , which indicates that your word has the same meaning in multiple binyanim or has the same meaning as the previous entry.

Next, we'll take a look at the entry for **תְּלָמוּד** which you'll find on page 1672. This is a noun!

תְּלָמוּד	Headword. This entry is for the noun derived from the root לָמַד. The headword of a noun entry is given in the singular form.
m.	Grammatical gender. The indication of a grammatical gender communicates that the entry is for a noun. m. stands for masculine; f. for feminine; c. for common gender (i.e. the noun is used with both masculine and feminine verbs).
(לָמַד)	Root. Typically Jastrow lists the root of a noun in parentheses.
B. Mets. 33 ^b ; Ab. IV, 13 הוי זהיר בת' ששגגת ת'	Usage example. A quotation from Rabinic literature that illustrates a typical use of the word. The bulk of most dictionary entries is a series of usage examples.

'וכ be careful in teaching, for an error in teaching &c.	Sometimes you find a usage example that quotes from the very text you are learning—we call this a Jastrow bonus. Usage example can be broken down into several parts.
B. Mets. 33 ^b ; Ab. IV, 13	Citation. Where the example comes from. In this case the same passage appears both on Bava Metzia 33b and in Mishnah Avot Chapter 4, Mishnah 13. Usage examples may be quoted from the Bavli, the Mishnah, the Yerushalmi (indicated by Y. before the masechet name), and other rabbinic texts.
הוי זהיר בת' ששגגת ת' וכ	Quotation. The actual example of the word's use in context. Jastrow often abbreviates words and truncates the quotation. In this example 'בת' is an abbreviation for בתלמוד. Truncated quotations end in 'וכ', and abbreviation for 'וכל' which means 'etc.'
be careful in teaching, for an error in teaching &c.	Translation. Beware: the Jastrow dictionary was published in 1903 and was written in Victorian English! The translations Jastrow provides are very 'outside'—they can give you a sense of the nuance of a word, but you should be sure to distinguish the meaning of your word from the meaning supplied by the context.
a. fr.	Frequency. After a citation, an indication of how often the word is used in this way. A particular usage may occur in the corpus 'and very frequently,' 'and frequently,' or 'and elsewhere.'
— ת' תורה	An idiomatic phrase. Just like before a numbered definition, the '—' here indicates a section break within the entry. Here, the new section lists a common phrase using the headword. Often Jastrow will define the phrase and a citation for where it can be found in use.
v. תורה	Vide. V. is an abbreviation for <i>vide</i> , Latin for 'see,' which directs you to a different entry in the dictionary. In this example Jastrow is telling you the the preceding phrase is defined within the entry for תורה.

Basics of Binyanim

As we learned above, most words in Hebrew have a three-letter root. For a Hebrew root to become a verb it must get dressed up in one of seven outfits (patterns of prefixes, suffixes, infixes, and vowels) which transform the meaning of the root in characteristic ways. These outfits are called *binyanim* (בִּנְיָנִים).

Binyanim transform the meaning of a root in two ways:

1. The action communicated by the verb can be in active, passive, or reflexive voice .
 - **Active** verbs communicate that a subject performs an action—for example "Sally wrote a letter."
 - **Passive** verbs communicate that the subject receives the action—"A letter was written."
 - **Reflexive voice** describes a special case when the subject both performs and receives the actions—"Sally dressed herself."
2. The action communicated by the verb can either be simple, intense, or causative. Consider the following sentences:
 - "Sally wrote a letter" is **simple**.
 - "Sally engraved an invitation" is **intensive**.
 - "Sally dictated a memo (Sally caused a memo to be written)" is **causative**.

The seven binyanim in Hebrew simultaneously transform a root in both of these qualities.

	Active	Passive	Reflexive
Simple	pa·al - פָּעַל (no abbrev.)	nif·al - נִפְעַל (nif.)	hitpa·el - הִתְפַּעֵל (hithpa.)
Intensive	pi·el - פִּיעַל (pi.)	pu·al - פֻּעַל (pu.)	
Causative	hif·il - הִפְעִיל (hif.)	huf·al - הֻפְעַל (hof.)	

When you're looking through a Jastrow entry for your root, you'll notice that Jastrow devotes one paragraph to each binyan. Figuring out the specific binyan entry for your word will help you get a deeper and more precise inside translation. (The binyan name is abbreviated at the beginning of the paragraph as above.

→ See **Anatomy of a Jastrow Entry**, page 14.) Most roots do not go into every binyan—so when you look up a root, make note of which binyanim it can dress up in, and take note of the ways in which meaning of the verb changes in different binyanim. To make a guess at which binyan your root is dressed in, look for tell-tale markers of the binyan (see "Hints for Finding the Root") and check out examples in Jastrow to see if you can find an example of your word exactly as it appears in your text.

What It Means to “Own” a Text

“Owning a text,” even though it sounds like something you do once and for all, is an iterative process. When you “own a text,” you must feel confident that you “own it 100%”—you can recite it in your sleep and teach it to someone who’s never learned a page of Talmud and they’ll totally get it—*yet...* the next time you learn the same text, you’ll slap yourself on the forehead and say, “Oh, *now* I see what’s going on here!” and realize that *now* you *really* own it...until the next time you learn it, when you’ll get it at an even deeper level, and on and on. That’s the way Talmud works. Life, too.

As a starter set for this iterative process, the lists below provide a guide to the core components of each word and sentence in your text.

On the word level, know *from memory* these 15 things about each word:

1. Language—Hebrew or Aramaic
2. Root letters
3. Core meaning of root
4. Prefixes
5. Suffixes
6. Part of speech—noun, verb, adjective, preposition, etc.

If it’s a verb:

7. Tense
8. Person
9. Number—singular or plural
10. Gender
11. Binyan
12. Grammatical mood—command, jussive, stative, etc.

13. Inside (literal) translation
14. Vocalization/pronunciation
15. Outside (contextual) translation

On the sentence level, know *from memory* these 8 things:

1. Inside and outside translations, as well as an expanded, yet concise, explanation, where necessary
2. How to recite the text fluently, with correct phrasing and punctuation
3. The technical terms and how they work
4. Who’s speaking? (i.e., Which side of the argument does each utterance represent?)
5. The historical period of each utterance—i.e., Is the utterance a tannaitic teaching? a mishnah? a baraita? a memra? the stamma?
6. Is the utterance a statement, question, challenge, resolution, etc.?
7. How does each utterance relate to what came before?
8. Articulate all implicit antecedents for every pronoun.

Masechtot (Tractates) of the Mishnah, Bavli & Yerushalmi

Total Masechtot: Mishnah: 63 | Bavli: 37 | Yerushalmi: 39

Y	B	Masechet	סדר Seder
✓	✓	Bava Kama בבא קמא	נזיקין Nezikin
✓	✓	Bava Metzia בבא מציעא	
✓	✓	Bava Batra בבא בתרא	
✓	✓	Sanhedrin סנהדרין	
✓	✓	Makot מכות	
✓	✓	Shevuot שבועות	
		Eduyot עדיות	
✓	✓	Avodah Zarah עבודה זרה	
		Avot אבות	
✓	✓	Horaiyot הוריות	
	✓	Zevachim זבחים	קדשים Kodashim
	✓	Menachot מנחות	
	✓	Chulin חולין	
	✓	Bechorot בכורות	
	✓	Arachin ערכין	
	✓	Tmurah תמורה	
	✓	Kritut כריתות	
	✓	M'ilah מעילה	
	✓	Tamid תמיד	
		Midot מדות	
		Kinim קינים	טהרות Tohorot
		Keilim כלים	
		Oholot אהלות	
		Negaim נגעים	
		Parah פרה	
		Taharot טהרות	
		Mikvaot מקואות	
✓	✓	Nidah נדה	
		Machshirin מכשירין	
		Zavim זבים	
		Tvul Yom טבול יום	
		Yodayim ידים	
		Uktzin עוקצין	

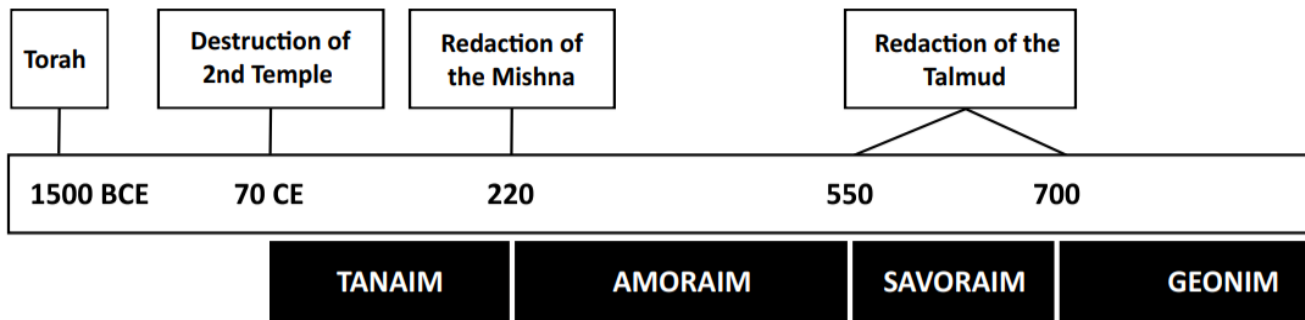
Y	B	Masechet	סדר Seder
✓	✓	Berachot ברכות	זרעים Zeraim
✓		Peah פאה	
✓		Dmai דמאי	
✓		Kilayim כלאים	
✓		Shvi'it שביעית	
✓		Trumot תרומות	
✓		Maasrot מעשרות	
✓		Maasar Sheni מעשר שני	
✓		Chalah חלה	
✓		Orlah ערלה	
✓		Bikurim ביכורים	מועד Moed
✓	✓	Shabat שבת	
✓	✓	Eiruvין עירובין	
✓	✓	Pesachim פסחים	
✓	*	Shekalim שקלים	
✓	✓	Yoma יומא	
✓	✓	Sukah סוכה	
✓	✓	Beitzah ביצה	
✓	✓	Rosh Hashanah ראש השנה	
✓	✓	Taanit תענית	
✓	✓	Megilah מגילה	נשים Nashim
✓	✓	Moed Katan מועד קטן	
✓	✓	Chagigah חגיגה	
✓	✓	Yevamot יבמות	
✓	✓	Ketubot כתובות	
✓	✓	Nedarim נדרים	
✓	✓	Nazir נזיר	
✓	✓	Sotah סוטה	
✓	✓	Gitin גיטין	
✓	✓	Kidushin קידושין	

*There is no Bavli for Masekhet Shekalim, but the Yerushalmi for this tractate is typically included in printed editions of the Bavli.

A Taxonomy of Rabbinic Texts

The Talmud is a conversation that takes place across time and space. The stamma weaves together a tapestry of texts from various time periods to create a complex, dynamic discourse between our sages and their ideologies—all in service of teaching us how to *think* as we move towards creating an Option 3 world. It is important to understand each of these layers as distinct building blocks, so that we can see how the blocks are being *used* by the stamma to create the sugya in front of us.

Texts in the Talmud typically come from one of three historical periods or groups of rabbis: (1) Tannaim, (2) Amoraim, (3) Savoraim/Stamma.



Below is a description of each of these historical groups, along with information about what texts they authored and shaped, along with how to recognize whether a text is from their time period.

TANAIM [70-220 CE]

Tannaitic texts, authored by **tannaim**, show up in the Talmud as **mishnayot** or **baraitot**. These texts are in Hebrew (sometimes featuring Greek words!). Baraitot are extra-mishnaic teachings (i.e. teachings that come from places *other* than the Mishnah). Sometimes baraitot can be found in another tannaitic text—either partially or in full—and sometimes baraitot exist only in the Talmud itself as they are quoted.

The tannaim created teachings in two different genres of what we might call “text:”

- The **Mishnah & Tosefta**, which are similarly organized as teachings that are primarily “apodictic” legal statements. The teachings of the Mishnah and Tosefta are organized by topic in a structure that has nothing to do with the Torah and are instead arranged by topic. (See “Masechtot (Tractates) of the Mishnah, Bavli, and Yerushalmi” for more on the organization of the mishnah!)
- **Midrash Halakha**, which are the tannaitic teachings (many of which have the *same* rulings / laws as what is found in the Mishnah or Tosefta) that are organized by Torah verse. It can be confusing but is worth noting that the term MIDRASH HALAKHA is used to refer to the teachings of the tannaim as organized by Torah verse / parasha because they are *halakha* (“laws”) that are taught in connection to *midrash*. Midrash is the genre, and halakha is what is being created *through* that genre.

<p>מדרש הלכה</p> <p>Midrash Halakha</p> <p><i>organized by Torah/Parasha</i></p>	<p>משנה / הלכה</p> <p>Mishnah / Halakha</p> <p><i>organized by topic</i></p>
<p>Mekhilta d'R. Yishmael מכילתא דרבי ישמעאל (שמות)</p> <p>Mekhilta d'Rashbi מכילתא דרשב"י (שמות)</p> <p>Sifra (Leviticus) ספרא (ויקרא)</p> <p>Sifrei Bamidbar ספרי במדבר (במדבר)</p> <p>Sifrei Devarim ספרי דברים (דברים)</p>	<p>Mishnah משנה</p> <p>Tosefta תוספתא</p>

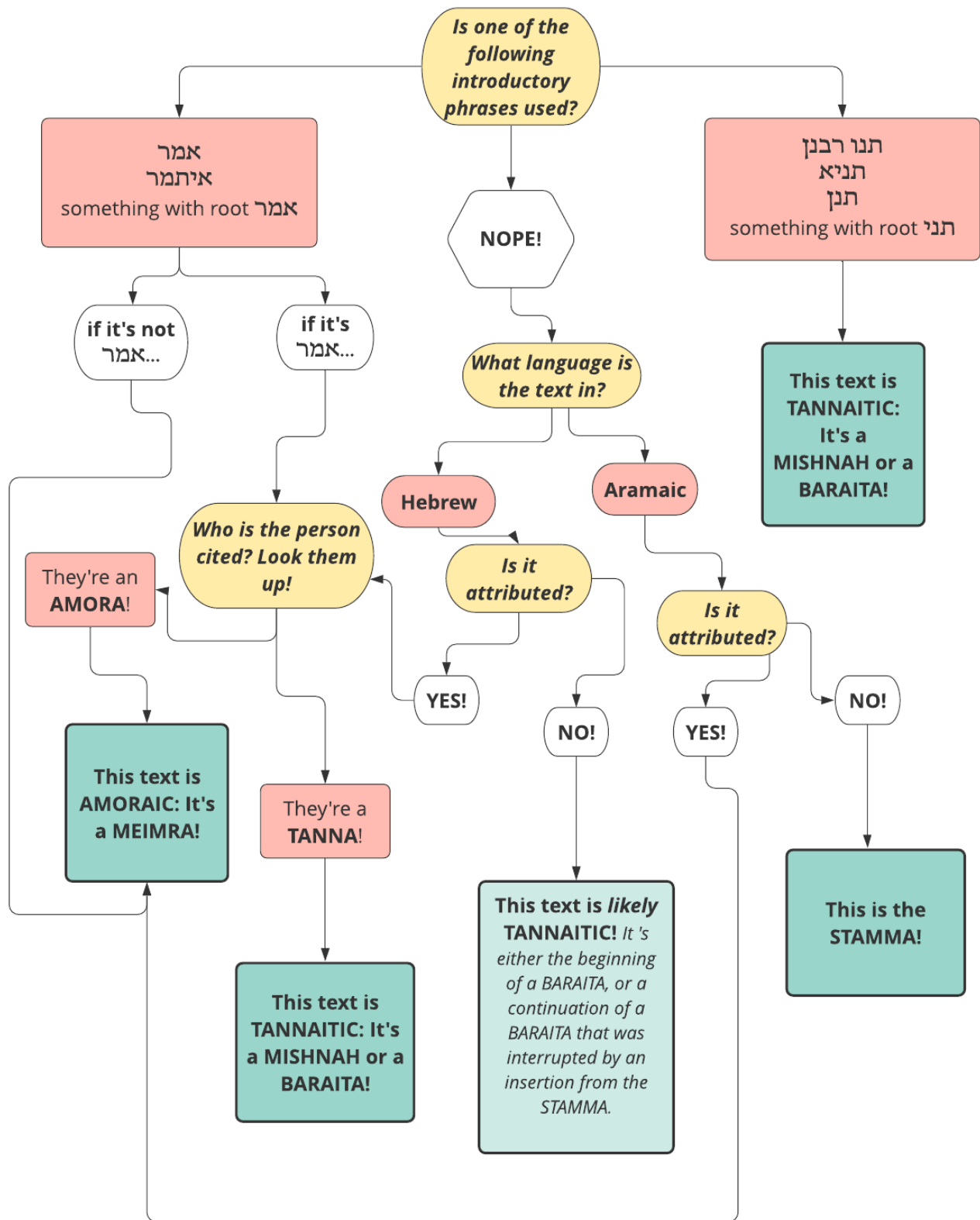
AMORAIM [220-550 CE]

Amoraim are the authors of **meimrot**, attributed statements in the **gemara**. These statements can be in Hebrew or Aramaic. Amoraim lived in both Bavel and Palestine, and meimrot are authored by both Babylonian and Palestinian amoraim. The Talmud Bavli is the only work to come out of Bavel. Palestinian amoraim authored the Talmud Yerushalmi (Palestinian Talmud, which was "sealed" in 400 CE), as well as midrashic works that were compiled and redacted into collections known as Midrash Rabbah.

SAVORAIM/STAMMA [550-700 CE]

The latest layer of the gemara, understood by academics to be equivalent to the "authors" of the Talmud. The stammaim wove together inherited teachings, laws, and stories to construct the mode of learning we recognize as Talmudic discourse. See "Historical Layers & the Stamma's Agenda" for more on this layer of the Talmud!

What Layer is My Text?



About Historical Layers & The Stamma's Agenda

At SVARA, we believe that the Talmud is a creation / product of the stamma and was carefully crafted from fragments of teachings, traditions, laws, norms, and ideas from earlier eras that were consciously and intentionally reworked and modified. This editorial weaving is done by the later strata of the Talmud, as they chop teachings here or there, take older texts out of context, juxtapose two historically unrelated “pieces” of the tradition to appear to be speaking to each other, all therefore reshaping each of these teachings, and weaving them into an imaginary conversation of increasing nuance and depth. This editorial project yields new teachings with respect to the received tradition / status quo:

This stratum was not produced by the Amoraim but by later—anonymous—sages whom Halivni called ‘Stammaim’ after the term for the anonymous ‘setam’ Talmud. They endeavored to explicate the Amoraic traditions they received but in many cases could not do so satisfactorily and provided forced explanations as the best effort to make sense of traditions from the distant past.

The Stammaitic stratum amounts to more than half of the Talmud, as many Talmudic sugyot contain relatively lengthy explanations of the briefer Amoraic dicta or sustained argumentation between two disputing opinions. Halivni had therefore proposed a new theory of the provenance of much of the Talmudic text, and essentially even of the Talmud’s composition or ‘authorship.’

No longer should the Talmud be attributed to the final Amoraim, the last of the named sages in the Talmud, but to anonymous author-editors who postdated the Amoraic age.³

It is this project of showing the weave-working that is the stamma’s goal and message. We believe that the stamma’im intended to make these distinct layers transparent—and their winks and forced reads and deliberate reworkings of the previous traditions—obvious to the reader because the stamma is ultimately not so much interested in showing us a conclusion it is the stamma’s ultimate goal to make transparent how an argument works, teaching us *how to do* that kind of argumentation and transforming of our traditions.

Identifying the historical layers—including the stamma’s “connective tissue” that weaves together argumentation—allows you to follow the mind/thought process of the stammaim. And it is the stamma’s voice which is telling us, through the pages of the Talmud, *how* to be traditionally radical upgraders of the tradition. and “hear his voice.” And it is the stamma’s voice which is telling us, through the pages of the talmud, how to be traditionally radical upgraders of the tradition. Here the distinction between the methods of “traditional commentators” and “academic methods” is useful:

*A **traditional commentator** can be likened to a builder, seeking to make the text most comfortable and convenient to inhabit. In a sense, [they are] building a house in which [they] (or another person) might live. A traditional commentator is not especially concerned with determining the relationship between the early stages of the text and the later ones, or even with asking whether such stages exist. Rather, he seeks to understand the logic of each part of the text and how it contributes to the overall structure and flow of the passage...It is less important to the traditional commentator how this house was built in the past; rather [they wish] to strengthen the house so that it will continue to stand strong in the future, both for [them] and others who wish to dwell within it.*

*To the **academic Talmud critic**...the first goal is to uncover when each of the individual components were built and assembled. Like an archaeologist whose interests are not limited to the building or city as it existed in its final form, a Talmudic critic wishes to understand when the*

³ Jeffrey Rubenstein, “Translator’s Introduction” in David Weiss Halivni’s *Formation of the Babylonian Talmud* (2013).

cornerstone was laid, how each generation built upon it, and what each layer can reveal to us about the people who gave it shape and dwelled within its walls.⁴

To take this metaphor one step further, at SVARA we're interested in the house and its components, and we're *primarily* interested in the methods and approaches that will help us build *new* houses, informed by the houses of the past. Our aim is to support and nurture learning that will equip and enable SVARA-niks not only to notice and appreciate what the rabbis did, but to bring attention to *how they did what they did*. We aspire to model and live out not specifically the instructions the rabbis gave us for how to live a Jewish life, but to re-enact the processes through which they themselves created a new Judaism, so that we can—in every generation, as they intended—do the same.

⁴ Jason Rogoff & Joshua Kulp, *Reconstructing the Talmud: An Introduction to the Academic Study of Rabbinic Literature* (2017)

The Five Agendas of the Gemara

WHAT IS ACCeSS AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?!

If you understand what a text is “trying to do,” it is easier to understand it. And the more complex the text is, the more helpful it is to know what its intended goal is. Think of your own experience with everyday English texts. Is this a recipe, which is trying to teach me how to cook a stew? If it’s in a cookbook, you can be pretty sure it is. Is this a shopping list telling me what items I need to buy to make the stew? If it’s sitting on the kitchen counter, likely it is. Is this a nutritional breakdown of stew? If it’s written on the back of a can of stew, and laid out in the rectangular box, that would be a good guess. Is this a restaurant review focusing on the stew the reviewer ordered? If it’s in the New York Times “Food” section, under “Restaurant Review,” that would be a good guess.

But now imagine that these various texts were all dislocated from their respective contexts—the cookbook, the label on the back of the can, your kitchen counter, the New York Times restaurant review section, etc.—and they all appeared, cut and pasted and reset in identical fonts, layout, and without punctuation, in a single bound book. If you wanted to make the stew but the fragment of text you’d deciphered was actually the shopping list, your stew may or may not turn out. If you were using the restaurant review to do your grocery shopping, you’d not likely be able to buy what you needed. If you were using the recipe to understand the nutritional content, it would require a lot of extra work, and you’d miss the opportunity to add a great stew recipe to your collection.

When you understand what the words in a complex, often opaque, text are, overall, *trying to do*, you can more easily decipher them and make better guesses about the missing words and how the words fit together to arrive at an understanding of the text on its own terms and for its own purposes, and then be able to “use” that text better.

The same is true for Talmud, a famously complex and opaque text, with lots of missing words and “connective tissue” markers, all of which force the learner to make guesses as to how the words fit together to convey the text’s intended message. As you get more experienced with the feel, vocabulary, style, and key words that indicate the structure of any given Talmud text, you’ll be able to make better and better guesses as to what that section of text is trying to do and that will help you more easily parse the text, land on better outside translations for keywords, and have the best mindset or set of mental expectations as you’re working through that text, to help you understand it and make better use of it as you’re trying to suss out the stamma’s ultimate goals.

Luckily, there are only **five** things any gemara text is ever “trying to do.” In other words, the *stamma* (or the Amoraim that the stamma is bringing down) is interrogating every mishnah with one or more of five possible questions, or areas of concern. Every piece of gemara (meaning, the smallest possible chunk you could divide a text into, even smaller than a sugya—anywhere from a single sentence to the entire sugya) is asking—and then answering—one of these five questions, doing one of five things, as it were, *to the mishnah*. We’re going to call these “agendas.”

The gemara always has one of five agendas with respect to the mishnah or, rarely, about a claim raised earlier in the gemara. (These concepts can be found in *A Living Tree: The Roots and Growth of Jewish Law*, a textbook Rabbi Elliott Dorff wrote for a course on Jewish law he taught at UCLA Law School. After reading this book, Benay came up with this snazzy acronym of ACCeSS: Author, Clarification, Conflict, Scope, and Source!)

The five agendas of the Gemara can be remembered with this mnemonic

A: Author

C: Clarification

C: Conflict

e

S: Scope

S: Source

In relationship to the mishnah that precedes it, the gemara might be asking one of the following five things:

AUTHOR

Who wrote that?! Who's the author of this or that particular claim in the mishnah? The mishnah is largely unattributed. It doesn't usually name the Tanna who authored most statements in the mishnah (and be careful not to confuse Rabbi Yehuda HaNassi as the editor and compiler of the mishnah with being the "author" of the mishnah. Sometimes Rabbi Yehuda HaNassi will be identified as the actual author of particular statements, but even as the claimed editor he is not assumed to be the author of anonymous or unattributed statements in the Mishnah.). So: "*Which tanna is responsible for originating this or that claim in the previous mishnah?*" is the agenda referred to by "author."

Why might you want to know the author of an anonymous mishnah? If the mishnah is hard to understand, it might help you to decipher it if you know the personality, politics, or primary life concerns of the person who said it. If you had an opaque, difficult-to-decipher piece of legislation about, say, "the limits of executive powers," and you found out the author was Brett Kavanaugh, you could be pretty sure that it was a piece of legislation to ensure that the president had unlimited and unchecked authority and could not be investigated or charged with crimes while in office. If you found out the author of that piece of legislation was, say, Diane Feinstein, you could be pretty sure it actually meant the opposite.

- Potentially introduced by: כמאן תנא | כמאן | מאן | etc.

CLARIFICATION

What does this word or phrase in the mishnah even mean? Sometimes a word or phrase in the mishnah will be incomprehensible to the amoraim living in a completely different reality, in a different country (in the case of those who are living in Bavel), in a different time, and (again, in the case of those living in Bavel) speaking a different language. And they will look to clarify its meaning.

- Potentially introduced by: מאי | etc.

CONFLICT

Wait a minute! How can this mishnah be saying this, when [fill in the blank: either the Torah, another mishnah, another tanna not included in the mishna (for example, in a baraita or the tosefta), or this very tanna who's the identified author of this mishna, elsewhere] says something contradictory?! There is an

unspoken rule in Jewish jurisprudence that is the assumption of the gemara, i.e., the assumption of the Rabbis and stamma whose opinions are recorded in the gemara, namely, that the mishnah: a) is always right (after all, as it says about itself in its very first paragraph, in Pirkei Avot “*Moshe kibel torah miSinai...*” which includes the mishnah), and b) never conflicts with any other tannaitic sources or the Torah. Having said that, the amoraim and the stamma not infrequently overturn mishnayot (while pretending they’re not, *wink, wink*) and explain away obvious conflicts between certain tannaitic texts or verses from the Torah (more *wink-wink*) when they want the obviously radically divergent mishnah.

NOTE: The mishnah is clearly a radically divergent document, both in form and substance. It overturns Torah not infrequently, and does so without even a hint of justification. It is as unapologetic and blatant an Option 3 as you might want. It is interesting to ponder what made the stamma, in his/their generation, feel the need to go back and “justify” the mishnah (though by doing so in so obviously forced a way, it is clear that the meta-message for *ha-mavin yavin*, “those who get it,” is that the Rabbis **do not need** to justify radical deviations from the Torah, and that their own authority is all they need to do so.

- Potentially introduced by: והתניא | והתנן | etc.

SCOPE

OK, but what if...? Would this misha apply in this other case? How far does this mishnah apply? This agenda is a very common agenda of the gemara. Scope is one of the most frequent agendas of the gemara, and likely occupies the highest percentage of ink spilled in the Talmud. This is, essentially, the amoraim and stamma asking: what is the scope of this or that mishnaic legislation? In which cases would it apply? Would it apply here? Here? Would it apply in this situation? That situation? What if the case were this? Or that?

The amoraim/stamma also use the agenda of “scope” to:

- severely **limit** the applicability of a Torah verse or mishna they find problematic. This is called *chakika m’tzamtzemet*; ex: *ben sorer u’moreh*,
- radically **expand** the applicability of a Torah/mishna they really like. This is called *chakika marchevet*; ex: *shabbat*,
- **innovate** a new practice altogether. This is called *chakika m’chadesh*; ex: *hanukkah*, and
- explicitly **uproot** a Toraitic norm or mandate completely. This is called *chakika okeret*, ex: *prozbul*.⁵

Note: Uprooting (*chakira*) can be done explicitly—the Rabbis themselves acknowledge that they have the prerogative to uproot the torah: “*rabbanan okrin davar min hatorah*” (Tos. Yevamot 88a, Tos. Nazir 43b, and elsewhere; Elon p. 521-533)—or can be camouflaged as interpretation.

- Potentially introduced by: הכא במאי עסקינן | במה דברים אמורים | הני מילי | etc.

SOURCE

Whoa, Mx. Mishnah, the Torah doesn’t say that—where are you getting this?! What’s your proof?? Unlike the tannaim, the amoraim and stamma seemed to feel the necessity to go back and articulate justifications and legal sources for the radical changes the mishnah made (or recorded) in its (the mishnah’s) characteristic, unjustified (no source cited), no-need-to-explain-myself style. There are five—and only five—possible answers to “What’s your source?!”

1. קרא *Kra*/Scripture (a verse in the Torah),
2. מנהג *Minhag*/Custom,

⁵ This language and framework comes from Benay’s teachers at the Shalom Hartman Institute, particularly Noam Zion.

3. מעשה *Ma'aseh*/Precedent (a previous case which was ruled upon and for which we have a record of the details of the case and a *p'sak*),
4. תקנה *Takkanah*/Legislation, and
5. סברה *Svara*/Moral intuition.

If you can identify that your gemara is dealing with the agenda of “What’s your source” (based on the give-away markers you’ve noticed), you now know that you’re looking for one or more of these five kinds of answers in the subsequent lines of text you’re trying to decipher.

- Potentially introduced by: מנין | מנא ליה לרב(י) | מנא לן, etc.

Three Components of a Kra Proof

Every proof which relies on a *kra* as its source of authority has three components:

- 1) The **claim** that’s being made
- 2) The **verse** being used to make the claim, and
- 3) The way the verse is being used by the rabbis in order to prove or support the claim. This is called the **midrash**—how, exactly, the verse proves the claim.

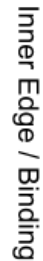
Sometimes, each of these three components is spelled out explicitly by the text. Other times, you get just the claim and the verse, and your task is to figure out how, precisely, that verse proves the claim, i.e., the *midrash*. In other instances, you’ll find the midrash and the verse together, and you’ll need to do the work to figure out what the claim is that’s being made. Finally, there are moments when the text reveals *only* the verse, and you’ll need to figure out what claim it’s coming to prove, and how, exactly, that verse proves this claim.

Our task, when we encounter a *kra* proof in our learning, is to work out—in chevruta and together in the bet midrash—all three components of every *kra* proof, whether or not they are explicit in the text. This helps us understand fully how the text is working, and will help us see more clearly how the Rabbis are using the *kra* to create meaning. When we are clear about each of these three components, we can more easily notice “winks”—the moments when the Rabbis telescope what they are *really* up to to those who can see it, appreciate it, and tolerate the implications of the radicalness—in the texts as they arise.

Once you hit a *kra* proof in your learning and you’ve translated the text inside/outside, it’s time to go deeper and make sure you are understanding and working out what’s happening in the *kra* proof.

- OK, what’s the **claim**? What are the Rabbis claiming? What is this text coming to support?
- What’s the **prooftext**? What is the citation? What is the full verse? What might it mean in its context? Look up the full verse and check it out in context.
- How does that prooftext prove the claim? What’s the **midrash** on the verse?

This map reflects a typical Vilna Shas layout of the Talmud, and indicates chronological layering from dark to light.



What's on the Daf?

HYPERLINKS

Torah Or | תורה אור

Location in Talmud: Between Talmud text and Rashi OR in a section on the inner side of the daf

Author: Rabbi Joshua Boaz Mevorakh, 16th Century in Venice, Italy

This takes you to: Tanakh verses that are cited in the Talmud text

You would go here to: look up a verse that is being cited and see it in context, *IF* you don't have the whole Tanakh memorized

*Sometimes called Mikra'ei Kodesh / מקראי קודש

Ein Mishpat Ner Mitzvah | עין משפט נר מצוה

Location in Talmud: Outside upper corner top of page

Author: Rabbi Joshua Boaz Mevorakh, 16th Century in Venice, Italy

This takes you to: the legal codification of our *sugya* - 1) Mishneh Torah, 2) Sefer Mitzvot Gadol (Smag), 3) Tur / Shulkhan Arukh

You would go here to: follow the halakhic process of our *sugya*, to see how the discussion in our *sugya* is codified by different thinkers into actionable *halakha* hundreds of years later

Masoret HaShas | מסרת הש"ס

Location in Talmud: Inside upper corner of page, always on binding side. In many editions, it goes all the way down the page. In some editions, it's all smushed in one paragraph

Author: Rabbi Joshua Boaz Mevorakh, 16th Century in Venice, Italy

This takes you to:

- 1) parallel texts in the Talmud Bavli
- 2) parallel texts in the Mishnah
- 3) parallel texts in tannaitic (1st-3rd century) material beyond the Mishnah (including: Tosefta, Midrashei Halakha),
- 4) parallel texts in the Talmud Yerushalmi

You would go here to: deepen your understanding of this issue across rabbinic literature by a) seeing how this idea, concept, or statement developed (through comparative analysis) or b) *bekiyut* (wide review) of an idea, concept or statement as it appears in the rest of the rabbinic corpus

RISHONIM & GLOSSES

Rashi | רש"י

Location in the Talmud: Inside of the page toward the binding, written in "Rashi" script.

Author: Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac (Rabbi **Shlomo** ben **Yischaki**), 1040-1105 in Troyes, France

This takes you to: a comprehensive phrase-by-phrase dictionary-like gloss and commentary to the Talmud

You would go here to: find clarification (and sometimes commentary!) on a word, phrase, or idea in the Talmud. Rashi sometimes brings in outside information about the a *sugya* to provide important context

Tosafot | תוספות

Location in Talmud: Outside of page, written in Rashi script with bigger *diburei hamatchil*

Author: Different tractates contain commentaries written by specific authors, and some tractates contain commentary written by a combination of authors. Various authors (called Tosafists or Ba'alei Tosafot), include Rabbeinu Tam (Rabbi Jacob ben Meir), Rabbi Samuel ben Meir, Rabbi Meir of Rothenburg, Rabbi Isaac of Dampierre, Rabbi Samson of Sens; 12th-13th Centuries in France & Germany

This takes you to: Tosafot Shelanu ("Our Tosafot"), Medieval commentary assembled by Rashi's descendents

You would go here to: surface questions and dilemmas that are at stake in our *sugya* or see how our *sugya* interacts with other *sugyot* that might seem to contradict or support it

Rabeinu Chananel | רבינו חננאל

Location in Talmud: Along the outer edges of the *daf* toward the bottom

Author: Rabbi Chananel ben Chushiel, 11th Century; Kairowan, Tunisia

This takes you to: Rabbeinu Chananel's commentary on the Talmud, which is a clarified summary that includes *halakhic* decisions of his own understanding of a *sugya* based on Gaonic teachings

You would go here to: read Rabeinu Chananel's summary of the core concepts and ideas found in a section of the Talmud, or to trace back the *halakhic* development of a *sugya* from a widely quoted commentator

Hagahot HaGra (Glosses of the Gra) | הגהות הגר"א

Location in Talmud: Outside middle of page

Author: Rabbi Elijah of Vilna ("Vilna Gaon" - "**HaGaon** **Rabbenu** **Eliyahu**"), 1720 - 1797; Vilna, Lithuania Haghot

This takes you to: the Gra's notes!

You would go here to: see variant readings of your *sugya* text based on the Gra's notes and ideas

Hagahot HaBach (Glosses of the Bach) | הגהות הב"ח

Purpose: Variant readings of your text

Location in Talmud: Inside middle of page

Author: Rabbi Joel Sirkes (known by name of his book: Bayit Chadash - Bach) 1561-1640; Poland

This takes you to: suggestions for textual emendations in the Talmud and Rashi from notes added by author to his copy of the Talmud. Indicated in the text by a letter in Rashi script within parentheses

You would go here to: see the Bach's suggestion for how the text *should* be read based on his own notes

Codes Cheat Sheet

Mishneh Torah | משנה תורה | ("Second to the Torah")

Rambam | רמב"ם | Maimonides (Spain 1135—Egypt 1204)

Deletes all references to opposing opinions, biblical sources, where in the gemara the issue appears, the names of the disputants, etc. Reorganizes the gemara into 14 topic-specific books (sefarim), each divided into sub-books named Hilchot X (The Laws of X), each of which is then divided into chapters, then halachot.

Rambam citation in the Ein Mishpat Ner Mitzvah:

_____ הל' -or- הלכה	_____ מהל' -or- מהלכות	_____ פ"י	מ"י
Halacha #	Halacha	Name of Halachot	MiHilchot (from The Laws of...)
Perek #	Perek	Maimonides	

Smag | ספר מצוות גדול | (Sefer Mitzvot Gadol, "Big Book of Mitzvot")

Rabbi Moshe ben Yaakov of Coucy (France 13th c)

Organizes the 613 mitzvot into "Do's" and "Don't's." Gives sources for each *mitzvah*.

Smag citation in the Ein Mishpat Ner Mitzvah:

_____	_____ עשין -or- לאוין	סמ"ג
Mitzvah #	Lavin (Don't's)	Asin (Do's)
Sma"g		

Tur | ארבעה טורים | (Arba'ah Turim, "The Four Pillars")

Rabbi Yaakov ben Asher (he was the son of the Rosh) (1280–1340)

Gives sources. Quotes original Talmudic texts extensively. Sacrifices clarity. Divided into four "pillars" or books: *Orah Hayim* (laws relating to prayer, Shabbat and holiday observance, and other rituals of everyday life), *Yoreh De'ah* (laws of kashrut, tzedakah, conversion, and other ritual matters), *Even ha'Ezer* (laws relating to marriage), and *Hoshen Mishpat* (civil law, including sections on lending money, renting and buying homes, and worker-employer relations).

Tur citation in the Ein Mishpat Ner Mitzvah:

_____ סעי' -or- סי' -or- ח"מ -or- אה"ע -or- י"ד -or- או"ח	_____ טור
Se'if #	Se'if
Siman #	Siman
Choshen Mishpat	Even Ha'Ezer
Yoreh Deah	Orach Chayim
Tur	

Shulchan Aruch | שולחן ערוך | ("The Set Table")

Rabbi Yosef Karo (Spain 1488–Tsfat 1575)

Composed, 1564

Karo called "the *mechabber*." Maintains Tur's structure of 4 divisions, with same names. Very clear. More divisions than Tur. A concise version of Karo's own Bet Yosef on the Tur (from which he deleted the sources given there). Gained wide acceptance after R. Moshe Isserles' (the Rema's) gloss, giving the Ashkenazic take on each law where it differed. His gloss called the "mapa"/tablecloth.

Shulchan Arukh citation in the Ein Mishpat Ner Mitzvah:

טושי"ע	או"ח	-or- י"ד	-or- אה"ע	-or- ח"מ	סי' _____	סעי' _____
Tur/Shulkhan Aruch	Orach Chayim	Yoreh Deah	Even Ha'Ezer	Choshen Mishpat	Siman #	Se'if #

Mishneh Torah Key

Hilchot in Number Order

1	יסודי התורה
2	דעות
3	תלמוד תורה
4	עבודה זרה וחוקות הגוים
5	חשובה
6	קריאת שמע
7	תפילה וברכת כהנים
8	תפילין מזוזה ושפת תורה
9	ציצית
10	ברכות
11	מילה
12	שבת
13	עירובין
14	שביתת עמור
15	שביתת יום טוב
16	הצן ומצה
17	שופר סוכה ולולב
18	שקלים
19	קידוש החודש
20	תעניות
21	מגילה וחנוכה
22	אישות
23	גירושין
24	ייבום והצילה
25	נערה בחולה
26	שוטה
27	איסורי ביאה
28	מאכלות אסורות
29	שחיטה
30	שבועות
31	נדרים
32	נוזרים
33	ערכים והרמים
34	כלאים
35	מתנות עניים
36	תרומות
37	מעשרות
38	מעשר שני ונטע רבעי
39	ביכורים ושאר מתנות כהונה שבגבולין
40	שמיטה ויובל
41	בית הבחירה
42	כלי המקדש והעובדים בו
43	ביאת המקדש
44	איסורי מזבח
45	מעשה הקרבנות
46	תמידין ומוספין
47	פסולי המקדש
48	עבודת יום הכיפורים
49	מעילה
50	קרבן פסח
51	חגיגה
52	בבורות
53	שגגות
54	מחוסרי כפרה
55	התורה
56	טומאת מת
57	פרה אדומה
58	טומאת צרעת
59	משמאי משכב ומושב
60	שאר אבות הטומאות
61	טומאת אוכלין
62	כלים
63	מקואות
64	נזקי ממון
65	גניבה
66	גזילה ואבידה
67	חובל ומזיק
68	רוצח ושמיטת נפש
69	מכירה
70	זכייה ומתנה
71	שכנים
72	שלוחין ושותפין
73	עבדים
74	שכירות
75	שאלה ופקדון
76	מלוה ולוה
77	טוען ונטען
78	נחלות
79	מנהדרין והעונשין המסורים להם
80	עדות
81	מפדים
82	אבל
83	מלכים ומלחמותיהם

Start Here:

Hilchot in Alphabetical Order

82	אכל
27	איסורי ביאה
44	איסורי מזבח
22	אישות
43	ביאת המקדש
39	ביכורים ושאר מתנות כהונה שבגבולין
41	בית הבחירה
52	בבורות
10	ברכות
66	גזילה ואבידה
23	גירושין
65	גניבה
2	דעות
16	הצן ומצה
70	זכייה ומתנה
51	חגיגה
67	חובל ומזיק
61	טומאת אוכלין
56	טומאת מת
58	טומאת צרעת
77	טוען ונטען
24	ייבום והצילה
1	יסודי התורה
34	כלאים
42	כלי המקדש והעובדים בו
62	כלים
28	מאכלות אסורות
21	מגילה וחנוכה
54	מחוסרי כפרה
59	משמאי משכב ומושב
11	מילה
69	מכירה
76	מלוה ולוה
83	מלכים ומלחמותיהם
81	מפדים
49	מעילה
45	מעשה הקרבנות
38	מעשר שני ונטע רבעי
37	מעשרות
63	מקואות
35	מתנות עניים
31	נדרים
32	נוזרים
64	נזקי ממון
78	נחלות
25	נערה בחולה
79	סנהדרין והעונשין המסורים להם
73	עבדים
4	עבודה זרה וחוקות הגוים
48	עבודת יום הכיפורים
80	עדות
13	עירובין
33	ערכים והרמים
47	פסולי המקדש
57	פרה אדומה
9	ציצית
19	קידוש החודש
50	קרבן פסח
6	קריאת שמע
68	רוצח ושמיטת נפש
75	שאלה ופקדון
60	שאר אבות הטומאות
30	שבועות
15	שביתת יום טוב
14	שביתת עמור
12	שבת
53	שגגות
26	שוטה
17	שופר סוכה ולולב
29	שחיטה
74	שכירות
71	שכנים
72	שלוחין ושותפין
40	שמיטה ויובל
18	שקלים
3	תלמוד תורה
55	תמורה
46	תמידין ומוספין
20	תעניות
7	תפילה וברכת כהנים
8	תפילין מזוזה ושפת תורה
36	תרומות
5	ובה

משנה תורה

- א מדע
- ב אהבה
- ג זמנים
- ד נשים
- ה קדושה
- ו הפלאה
- ז זרעים
- ח עבודה
- ט קרבנות
- י טהרה
- יא נזיקין
- יב קמיין
- יג משפטים
- יד שופטים