Tools for
The Talmud

A clear guide on how to
learn and understand Gemara

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Tools for Talmud

PART ONE

בן חמש למקרא בן עשר למשנה

Pirkei Avos 5:21

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Introduction

Many talmidim feel that Gemara is very difficult.

In fact, many talmidim have opened Gemaras for years, sat through many shiurim, and still have not truly understood what they are learning. They may be able to follow along when someone else is explaining it, or they may recognize certain words and phrases, but they do not yet feel that they understand the Gemara clearly on their own.

And even when a talmid does understand the general idea of the Gemara, it is still a great loss if he does not know how to read the Gemara inside.

Reading the Gemara inside gives a person a much deeper connection to what he is learning. He begins to feel the words, the flow, the questions, the answers, and the tone of the sugya itself. He is not only hearing an explanation from the outside. He is beginning to see how the Gemara speaks.

Because of this, many talmidim also do not have real pleasure in learning Gemara.

This is very painful, because Gemara is meant to be understood. It is meant to be learned with clarity. And when a person begins to understand what the Gemara is doing, and begins to read it inside, learning Gemara can become a great source of enjoyment.

Baruch Hashem, I was zocheh to teach for two years in Hadar Torah, the first baalei teshuvah yeshiva for men in the United States. There I taught many students who were beginning from a very basic level. Some barely knew how to read Hebrew.

Yet, with the right approach, many of them were able to gain basic Gemara skills in less than three to four months.

The purpose of this kuntres is to explain that approach in a clear and simple way.

The basic idea is that in order to learn Gemara, a person first has to understand what the Gemara is doing.

Gemara is not just a page of difficult words. It has a structure. It has a seder. It is trying to accomplish something.

When the student understands the goal of the Gemara, and learns how to break down the structure of the Gemara, it becomes much easier to learn.

In this kuntres, we will explain how to do that.

The Proper Order of Learning

In order to understand how to learn Gemara, we first need to understand where Gemara fits in the order of Torah learning.

Chazal teach us in Pirkei Avos:

בן חמש למקרא, בן עשר למשנה, בן חמש עשרה לתלמוד

"At five years old, one begins Mikra; at ten, Mishnah; at fifteen, Talmud."

The simple meaning of this Mishnah is that Torah learning has an order.

A person does not begin with everything at once. First he learns Mikra, then he learns Mishnah, and only afterwards does he begin Talmud.

Mikra means the written Torah: the words of Chumash, the pesukim, the stories, the mitzvos, and the basic language of Torah.

Mishnah is built on Mikra. The Mishnah teaches the halachos of Torah Sheba'al Peh, but many of those halachos are based on pesukim in the Torah. Therefore, in order to understand Mishnah properly, a person needs some knowledge of Chumash.

Gemara is built on Mishnah. The Gemara comes to explain the Mishnah, analyze it, question it, bring proofs to it, and clarify its meaning. Therefore, in order to understand Gemara properly, a person first needs to understand the Mishnah.

This is the first point.

The second point is that these three stages are not only three subjects. They are also three different skills.

Mikra trains a person to read. A child begins by learning the words of Torah, the pesukim, and the language of Torah.

Mishnah trains a person to know. In Mishnah, the student learns the facts of Torah Sheba'al Peh: the cases, the rulings, the opinions, and the basic structure of the halachah.

Talmud trains a person to understand. In Gemara, the student learns how to follow reasoning, how to understand arguments, how to ask questions, how to answer them, and how a sugya develops.

This is very important for a beginner to know.

In order to learn Gemara properly, a student needs all three skills.

He needs to know how to read the Gemara inside.

He needs to know the background and facts of the sugya.

And he needs to know how to follow the logic of the Gemara.

If one of these skills is missing, the Gemara becomes much harder. A student may understand the idea, but not know how to read it inside. Or he may read the words, but not know the background. Or he may know some of the facts, but not understand the argument.

Therefore, before we explain how to learn Gemara, we must first explain how to learn Mishnah.

This is true for two reasons.

First, Mishnah gives the student the facts, cases, and halachos that he needs in order to understand the Gemara.

Second, the Gemara itself is built as an explanation and analysis of the Mishnah.

If the Mishnah is clear, the Gemara has a foundation. But if the Mishnah itself is not clear, then the Gemara will naturally feel confusing.

For this reason, this kuntres will first explain how to approach a Mishnah. Only afterwards will we explain how to approach the Gemara.

But before we explain the steps of learning a Mishnah, there is one more thing a student needs to know. Not every statement in Mishnah is the same type of teaching. Sometimes the Mishnah is giving over a teaching that was received and passed down. Sometimes it is recording a law that was derived through Torah reasoning. Sometimes it is teaching a decree or ordinance made by the Sages. If a student knows what kind of teaching he is looking at, the Mishnah becomes much easier to understand.

For a beginner, we can divide them into four basic types:

Teachings received from Sinai

Some teachings in the Mishnah were received from Moshe Rabbeinu and passed down through the generations.

This includes explanations of pesukim that were received from Sinai, and also halachos given orally to Moshe at Sinai.

These are not laws that the Sages created. They are part of the Torah that was received and preserved through Torah Sheba'al Peh.

Laws derived through reasoning

Some teachings in the Mishnah are laws that the Sages learned through Torah reasoning.

Sometimes they learned a law from a pasuk. Sometimes they used one of the thirteen middos through which the Torah is explained. Sometimes they understood the law through sevara.

In this type of law, we often find machlokes.

Why?

Because different Tannaim may understand the source differently. One Tanna may understand the pasuk one way, and another Tanna may

understand it differently. One Tanna may use a middah in one way, and another Tanna may use it in another way.

Therefore, the Mishnah often records more than one opinion.

Gezeiros

Some teachings in the Mishnah are gezeiros.

A gezeirah is a decree made by the Sages to protect a person from doing an aveirah.

This means that sometimes something may not be forbidden by the Torah itself, but the Sages saw that it could lead a person to something forbidden. Therefore, they made a gezeirah to prevent that from happening.

This is called making a fence around the Torah.

Here too, there can be machlokes.

Sometimes the Tannaim disagree about whether there is a real concern. Sometimes they disagree about how far the concern goes. One opinion may say that we need to make a gezeirah, while another opinion may say that in this case we do not.

Takanos

Some teachings in the Mishnah are takanos.

A takanah is an ordinance made by the Sages for the needs of Klal Yisrael.

A gezeirah usually comes to prevent a person from doing something wrong.

A takanah usually comes to establish something good or necessary for Jewish life.

For example, the Sages may make a takanah to strengthen a mitzvah, to help the community function properly, or to make sure something is done in the right way.

Here too, there can be machlokes.

The Tannaim may disagree about whether the takanah is needed, how it should be made, or how far it should apply.

This is important for a student to know.

When he opens a Mishnah, he should not think that every statement is the same type of teaching.

Sometimes the Mishnah is giving a teaching received from Sinai.

Sometimes it is giving a law learned through reasoning.

Sometimes it is teaching a gezeirah.

And sometimes it is teaching a takanah.

Once the student knows this, he can begin to ask a very important question:

What type of teaching is this Mishnah giving me?

That is the first step in learning Mishnah properly.

How to Learn a Mishnah

After we understand what the Mishnah is, we can now begin to learn how to study a Mishnah properly.

A Mishnah is usually very short.

Because of this, a student may think that he understands it right away. He reads the words, he sees the translation, and he thinks he knows what the Mishnah is saying.

But this is often not enough.

A Mishnah may be short, but it contains a lot inside of it. Sometimes a few words in the Mishnah include a whole case, a halachic question, a ruling, a reason, and a new idea.

Therefore, when we learn a Mishnah, we need to break it down slowly.

A good way to learn any Mishnah is to ask seven basic questions:

What is the background?

Before learning the Mishnah, we need to know the basic background.

What topic are we dealing with?
Are there any pesukim connected to this halachah?
Are there any basic ideas we need to know before we begin?

Without the background, it is hard to understand why the Mishnah is speaking about this topic.

What is the case?

Every Mishnah is usually speaking about a certain situation.

We need to ask: what exactly is happening here?

Who is the person?
What did he do?
What is the situation the Mishnah is discussing?

Before we can understand the ruling, we first need to understand the case.

What is the question?

After we know the case, we need to ask: what is the halachic question?

Sometimes the Mishnah does not ask the question openly. It may simply state a case and then give the ruling. But every Mishnah is still dealing with a halachic issue. We need to understand:

What is unclear?
What does the Mishnah need to decide?
Why is this case not obvious?

This is very important, because if we do not know the question, we will not properly understand the answer.

What is the ruling?

Now we ask: what does the Mishnah rule?

What is the halachah?

What does the Mishnah say should be done?

Is there one opinion, or is there a machlokes?

This is the basic answer of the Mishnah.

What is the reason?

After we know the ruling, we need to understand the reason.

Why is this the halachah?

Is there a pasuk?

Is there a sevara?

Is it a gezeirah or a takanah?

Is the reason explained in the Mishnah, or will the Gemara explain it later?

Sometimes the Mishnah gives the reason clearly. Sometimes it does not, and the Gemara will need to explain it.

What is the chiddush?

Every Mishnah is teaching us something.

We need to ask: what is the chiddush here?

What would I have thought without this Mishnah?

What is the Mishnah teaching me that I would not have known on my own?

This question helps the student see why the Mishnah needed to be taught.

What is the general principle?

Finally, we ask: what larger rule can we learn from this Mishnah?

Is this Mishnah only teaching one specific case?

Or is it teaching a broader principle that applies to other cases as well?

When a student learns this way, he is not just reading the Mishnah. He is understanding how the Mishnah works.

He sees the background, the case, the question, the ruling, the reason, the chiddush, and the general principle.

Once the Mishnah is clear in this way, the Gemara becomes much easier to understand.

This is because the Gemara is coming to explain and analyze the Mishnah. If we already know what the Mishnah is saying, we are ready to begin understanding what the Gemara is doing.

When a student first gets used to these seven steps, it is very helpful to learn Mishnayos with a clear biur.

This can be done with Kehati, ArtScroll Mishnayos, or another Mishnayos that has a good explanation. The main thing is not only to read the translation, but to notice how the Mishnah is being explained.

Usually, the biur will first give the background to the Mishnah. It will explain the pesukim, the topic, or the basic halachos that a person needs to know before beginning.

Then, when the student reads the Mishnah itself, he will usually find the main case and the ruling. If there is a machlokes, the Mishnah will usually bring the different opinions of the Tannaim.

The biur will help explain the words of the Mishnah: what the case is, what the halachic issue is, and what each opinion is saying.

Sometimes the reason for the ruling is stated clearly in the Mishnah. But many times, the Mishnah gives the ruling without explaining the reason fully. In those cases, the Gemara will later explain the reason.

The chiddush and the general principle are also not always clear right away. Sometimes they can be seen from the Mishnah itself, but very often the Gemara is needed to bring them out.

This is an important point.

When a student learns the Mishnah carefully before learning the Gemara, he often begins to notice some of the questions that the Gemara will later discuss.

He may ask: What is the reason for this ruling? What is the machlokes really about? What is the Mishnah coming to teach us?

These questions are often the beginning of the sugya.

This is one of the great rules in learning: a person understands and appreciates an answer much more when he first has a good question.

Therefore, when the Gemara later asks its question or explains its answer, the student understands it much better. He already felt what needed to be explained, and now he can see how the Gemara explains it.

Applying the Seven Steps: Berachos 1:1

After learning the seven steps, we now need to see how they are used in an actual Mishnah.

As is known, המעשה הוא העיקר — the main thing is the actual practice.

It is not enough to know the steps in theory. A student needs to see how to use them when he opens a real Mishnah.

Therefore, we will begin with the first Mishnah in Shas, the first Mishnah of Maseches Berachos.

The Mishnah says:

מֵאֵימָתַי קוֹרִין אֶת שְׁמַע בְּעַרְבִית? מִשָּׁעָה שֶׁהַכֹּהֲנִים נִכְנָסִין לֶאֱכֹל בִּתְרוּמָתָן, עַד סוֹף הָאַשְׁמוּרָה הָרִאשׁוֹנָה — דִּבְרֵי רַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר. וַחֲכָמִים אוֹמְרִים: עַד חֲצוֹת. רַבָּן גַּמְלִיאֵל אוֹמֵר: עַד שֶׁיַּעֲלֶה עַמּוּד הַשַּׁחַר.

"From when may one recite the evening Shema? From the time when the Kohanim enter to eat their terumah, until the end of the first watch — these are the words of Rabbi Eliezer. The Sages say: until midnight. Rabban Gamliel says: until dawn."

We will now explain this Mishnah according to the seven steps.

The Seven Steps in This Mishnah

1. Background

Before learning this Mishnah, a student needs to know the basic background.

The Torah says that we must recite Shema:

בְּשָׁכְבְּךָ וּבְקוּמֶךָ

"when you lie down and when you rise."

From here we know that there is a mitzvah to recite Shema at night and in the morning.

Our Mishnah is discussing the nighttime Shema.

A student also needs to know a little bit about terumah.

Terumah is food that belongs to the Kohen. If a Kohen became tamei, he was not allowed to eat terumah until he became tahor. After going to the mikvah, he would wait until nightfall, and then he could eat terumah.

This is why the Mishnah speaks about the time when the Kohanim enter to eat their terumah. It is using that time to tell us when night begins for the mitzvah of evening Shema.

2. The Case

The case of the Mishnah is simple.

A person needs to say Shema at night.

The Mishnah is asking: from what time may he begin saying the nighttime Shema?

3. The Question

The question of the Mishnah is:

When does the time for evening Shema begin?

Since the Torah says בְּשָׁכְבְּךָ, "when you lie down," we need to understand how to define that time.

Does it begin when people are able to go to sleep, meaning once night begins?

Or does it begin only later, when people actually go to sleep?

This is the question the Mishnah is coming to answer.

4. The Ruling

The Mishnah answers:

מִשָּׁעָה שֶׁהַכֹּהֲנִים נִכְנָסִין לֶאֱכֹל בִּתְרוּמָתָן

"From the time when the Kohanim enter to eat their terumah."

This means that the time for evening Shema begins at nightfall, when the Kohanim who had been tamei are allowed to eat terumah again.

Then the Mishnah brings a machlokes about how long the time lasts.

Rabbi Eliezer says: until the end of the first watch.

The Chachamim say: until midnight.

Rabban Gamliel says: until dawn.

5. The Reason

The basic reason is connected to the words of the pasuk:

בְּשָׁכְבְּךָ

"when you lie down."

The mitzvah of evening Shema must be said during the time that is called the time of lying down.

The Tannaim disagree about how to define that time.

Rabbi Eliezer understands that the main time of lying down is only the beginning part of the night.

The Chachamim say until midnight.

Rabban Gamliel says that the time continues until dawn.

The Mishnah itself does not explain everything fully. The Gemara will later discuss the source and reasoning behind these opinions.

6. The Chiddush

The chiddush of the Mishnah is that the mitzvah of evening Shema is not limited only to the exact moment when night begins.

Once the time begins, it continues into the night.

There is also another chiddush.

Even though the Chachamim say that Shema should be said only until midnight, the Mishnah later shows that this is a safeguard. On the basic level, the time can still continue until dawn.

This teaches the student that sometimes the Sages give an earlier time in order to protect a person from pushing off the mitzvah and missing it.

7. The General Principle

From this Mishnah, we learn a general principle.

Sometimes the Torah gives a person until dawn to do a mitzvah.

But the Sages may say that it should be done earlier, in order to keep a person away from transgression.

This is why the Mishnah later says:

כָּל מַה שֶּׁאָמְרוּ חֲכָמִים עַד חֲצוֹת — מִצְוָתָן עַד שֶׁיַּעֲלֶה עַמּוּד הַשַּׁחַר

"Whatever the Sages said may be done until midnight, its mitzvah really applies until dawn."

The Sages said "until midnight" in order to distance a person from sin.

What Type of Teaching Is This Mishnah?

On the simple level, this Mishnah shows us two ideas that we discussed earlier.

The first idea is sevara.

The Torah says that Shema must be said בְּשָׁכְבְּךָ, "when you lie down." The Mishnah is teaching us how to define that time.

There are two parts to this.

First, when does the time begin?

The Mishnah answers: from the time when the Kohanim enter to eat their terumah.

Second, how long does the time continue?

Rabbi Eliezer says until the end of the first watch.

Then we have the opinion of the Chachamim and Rabban Gamliel.

According to Rabban Gamliel's explanation, the Chachamim also agree that the basic time of the mitzvah continues until dawn.

If so, what is their machlokes?

The machlokes is about a gezeirah.

The Chachamim say that even though the mitzvah can really be done until dawn, a person should read Shema by midnight. This is in order to keep him away from missing the mitzvah.

Rabban Gamliel says that if a person did not read Shema by midnight, he may still read it until dawn.

So in this Mishnah, the student sees two things.

First, he sees sevara: how the Tannaim define the time of בְּשָׁכְבְּךָ.

Second, he sees gezeirah: whether we say that a person must read Shema by midnight as a safeguard, even though the basic time continues until dawn.

Tools for Talmud

PART TWO

בן חמש עשרה לתלמוד

Pirkei Avos 5:21

Using ArtScroll the Right Way

When a student first begins learning Gemara, I believe it is often very helpful to use an ArtScroll Gemara.

Some yeshivos are against this. They say that ArtScroll becomes a crutch.

There is truth to that concern. If a student only uses ArtScroll and never learns how to read the Gemara inside, then he will remain dependent on the translation.

But this is not a reason to reject ArtScroll completely.

A crutch is not a bad thing when a person cannot yet walk properly. If a person is weak or wounded, the crutch helps him begin moving. The problem is not the crutch. The problem is if nobody helps him become strong enough to walk without it.

The same is true with Gemara.

A beginner often needs help. He may not yet know the words. He may not yet know how to break up the sentence. He may not yet understand the flow of the sugya.

ArtScroll can help him enter the Gemara right away.

It teaches him the basic meaning of the words. It shows him the flow of the Gemara. It allows him to begin enjoying the sevara and discussion of the sugya, even before he is fully able to read the Gemara on his own.

This is very important.

If a student has to wait until he can read every word perfectly before he is allowed to enjoy the Gemara, he may never develop a love for Gemara. ArtScroll can give him the taste of understanding right away.

At the same time, the student must know that ArtScroll is not the final goal.

The goal is to learn how to read the Gemara inside.

There is a special pleasure that comes from reading the Gemara itself. When a student can read the words inside, he begins to feel the movement of the sugya more deeply. He hears the question, the answer, the proof, and the resolution from the words of the Gemara itself.

Also, deeper iyun usually requires learning the Gemara inside. A translation can explain the basic meaning, but the exact words of the Gemara often carry the depth of the sugya.

Therefore, ArtScroll should be used as a tool, not as a replacement for learning inside.

Here there are two mistakes that a yeshiva can make.

One mistake is to ban ArtScroll, but not give the student the support he needs to learn without it.

If a yeshiva does not want a student to use ArtScroll, then it must teach him how to read the Gemara himself. It must show him how to break up the sentence, how to recognize the common words, how to follow the question and answer, and how to understand the flow of the sugya.

Otherwise, the yeshiva has taken away the crutch, but has not taught the student how to walk.

The other mistake is to rely on ArtScroll because the yeshiva does not have enough time, patience, or teachers to teach the student properly.

That is also wrong.

ArtScroll cannot replace a rebbi. It cannot replace real teaching. It cannot replace a person showing the student how to think, how to read, and how to slowly become independent.

The right approach is to use ArtScroll as a bridge.

In the beginning, it helps the student enter the Gemara. It gives him access to the words, the flow, and the sevara.

But at the same time, the rebbi has to give him the tools to grow beyond it.

This means teaching him how to read the words, how to recognize common phrases, how to break up the Gemara, and how to follow the structure of the sugya.

The notes in ArtScroll can also be very helpful, especially when a student wants to begin tasting iyun. But here too, he should use them with order. In the beginning, he should focus on the notes that help him understand the main sugya, and not get lost in every detail.

In short: ArtScroll is a very good beginning, but it should not become the end.

It helps the student enter the Gemara.

Then the rebbi must help him learn how to walk inside the Gemara himself.

Additional Note: The Need for a Maggid Shiur in Girsa

There is another important point that should be mentioned.

Many yeshivos get stuck between two bad options.

Either they allow the bochurim to use ArtScroll because the bochurim are not able to learn the Gemara on their own, or they ban ArtScroll because they do not want the bochurim to become dependent on it.

But in my opinion, the real problem begins earlier.

The mistake is the assumption that most bochurim should be able to learn Gemara on their own during Mesivta.

In many cases, this is simply not true.

Many bochurim still need a maggid shiur for girsa throughout the Mesivta years. They need someone to take them through the Gemara, show them how to read the words, explain the flow of the sugya, and teach them how to move through a Gemara properly.

If a yeshiva expects bochurim to learn on their own before they have these skills, then the bochurim will naturally feel stuck. Then one of two things usually happens.

Either the bochurim insist on using ArtScroll because they need help, or the yeshiva bans ArtScroll because it is afraid they will use it as a replacement for learning.

But the very fact that the ArtScroll question becomes such a major debate often shows that many bochurim are not yet able to learn Gemara independently.

The solution is not only to allow ArtScroll or to ban ArtScroll.

The solution is to teach girsa properly.

Based on my own experience, and from seeing yeshivos where much more time is spent on Gemara, I believe that a maggid shiur for girsa is needed throughout the Mesivta years.

This does not mean the bochur should never learn on his own.

It means that during these years, he still needs a guided structure. He needs a rebbi who helps him build the skills slowly, until he can learn with more and more independence.

I have seen this approach be very successful.

When a bochur has a maggid shiur for girsa, he is not just being carried. He is being trained. He learns how to read, how to follow the Gemara, how to keep the shakla v'tarya, and how to become a real learner.

That is much healthier than either leaving him alone with an ArtScroll or taking away the ArtScroll without giving him the tools to learn.

What the Gemara Is Coming to Do

After a student begins learning Gemara, he needs to know what the Gemara is coming to do.

The Gemara is not just a long discussion.

It has a purpose.

The Mishnah gives us the teachings of the Tannaim in a short way. The Gemara comes afterwards and opens up the Mishnah. It explains the Mishnah, asks questions, brings proofs, answers difficulties, and teaches us how to understand the halachah properly.

For a beginner, we can explain the purpose of Gemara in four simple parts.

To explain the Mishnah

The Mishnah is usually very short.

Many times, the Mishnah gives us a ruling, but it does not explain all the details. It may not explain the reason. It may not explain the source. It may not explain the exact case.

The Gemara comes to explain what the Mishnah means.

It asks: What is the Mishnah talking about? What is the case? What is the reason? What is the source? How should we understand the words of the Mishnah?

This is the first purpose of Gemara.

To clarify the halachah

The Gemara does not only explain the Mishnah. It also clarifies the halachah.

Sometimes the Mishnah brings more than one opinion. Sometimes there are different opinions in a Beraisa. Sometimes one Mishnah seems to say one thing, and another Mishnah seems to say something else.

The Gemara discusses these opinions and sources. It brings Mishnayos, Beraisos, statements of Amoraim, proofs, questions, and answers.

Through this discussion, the Gemara teaches us how the halachah is clarified.

The student begins to see how Torah law is not just stated, but worked through carefully.

To apply the Mishnah to new cases

The Gemara also takes the Mishnah further.

Once we know the ruling of the Mishnah, the Gemara may ask: What about a different case? Does the same law apply there? What if one detail changes? What if the case is similar, but not exactly the same?

In this way, the Gemara develops new cases and new ideas.

It teaches the student how to think beyond the exact words of the Mishnah, while still staying connected to the Mishnah.

To teach Aggadah and Yiras Shamayim

The Gemara also includes Aggadah.

Aggadah includes many different kinds of teachings. Sometimes the Gemara brings derashos on pesukim. Sometimes it brings stories of Chazal. Sometimes it teaches history, hashkafah, emunah, ideas about Hashem and creation, lessons in middos, or guidance in avodas Hashem.

These teachings are not separate from Torah. They are part of the way the Gemara teaches a person how to understand the world and how to live as a Yid.

It is also important to know that Aggadah must be learned carefully.

Aggadah is true, but not every Aggadah is meant to be understood in the most literal way.

Sometimes Chazal speak in a mashal, or in a deep form of expression, in order to teach a true idea.

For example, if someone says, “One drop of ink destroyed one hundred cities,” it does not necessarily mean that a physical drop of ink drowned cities. It can mean that one signature, written with ink, caused a decree that destroyed or expelled entire communities.

The statement is true, but the truth is not always in the simple literal picture.

This is an important rule when learning Aggadah. We must take the words of Chazal seriously, but we also need to understand the way Chazal are speaking.

So when a student opens the Gemara, he should know what he is looking for.

Sometimes the Gemara is explaining the Mishnah.

Sometimes it is clarifying the halachah.

Sometimes it is developing a new case.

And sometimes it is teaching Aggadah, hashkafah, and Yiras Shamayim.

If the student knows this, the Gemara becomes much easier to follow.

He is no longer just reading one line after another. He begins to ask: what is the Gemara doing here?

That question itself gives him a clearer way to learn.

The Structure of the Gemara

Now that we explained the main purposes of Gemara, we can begin to understand how the Gemara is built.

A beginner often sees the Gemara as one long discussion. He reads one line after another, but he does not always know what each line is doing.

This makes the Gemara hard to follow.

Therefore, the student needs to learn how to break the Gemara into steps.

When he knows the steps, he begins to see that each line has a job. One line may be giving the main statement. Another line may be asking a question. Another line may be bringing a difficulty, resolving it, or proving an idea.

The words of the Gemara are like guideposts. They tell the student what the Gemara is doing now.

Therefore, when learning a Gemara, the first thing is to notice the general step the Gemara is taking.

Is this a statement?
Is this a question?
Is this an answer?
Is this a difficulty?
Is this a resolution?
Is this a proof?

These are the six basic steps.

Within each step, there are many different types. There are different types of questions, different types of answers, different types of difficulties, different types of resolutions, and different types of proofs.

With Hashem's help, we will discuss many of these common types later in the appendix.

For now, we will explain the six basic steps.

The Six Basic Steps

1. Statement — מאמר / מימרא

A statement is the starting point of the discussion.

It may be a Mishnah, a Beraisa, or a statement of an Amora.

For example, the Gemara may say:

אמר רב יהודה אמר שמואל

"Rav Yehudah said in the name of Shmuel..."

This means that the Gemara is bringing a teaching.

Another common example is:

תנן

"We learned in a Mishnah..."

This means the Gemara is bringing a Mishnah as the starting point of the discussion.

Before asking questions or bringing proofs, we first need to know what was said.

2. Question — שאלה

After the statement, the Gemara may ask a question.

There are different types of questions.

For example, the Gemara may ask:

מאי טעמא?

"What is the reason?"

This means the Gemara wants to know the reason behind the law or opinion.

Or the Gemara may ask:

מנא הני מילי?

"From where do we know this?"

This means the Gemara wants to know the source.

Another type of question is:

איבעיא להו

"They asked the following question."

This usually introduces a question where the answer is not yet clear.

The question shows the student what still needs to be explained.

3. Answer — תשובה

An answer comes to explain the question that was asked.

If the Gemara asked מנא הני מילי, "From where do we know this?" the answer may be:

אמר קרא

"The pasuk says..."

This means the Gemara is bringing a pasuk as the source.

If the Gemara asked מאי טעמא, "What is the reason?" the answer may be:

משום ד...

"Because..."

Or:

קסבר...

"He holds..."

This means the Gemara is giving the reason behind the law or opinion.

A student should notice that the answer depends on the question.

If the Gemara asks for a source, the answer will usually bring a source. If the Gemara asks for a reason, the answer will usually explain the sevara.

4. Contradiction or Difficulty — קושיא

Sometimes the Gemara brings another source or argument that seems difficult.

This may be another Mishnah, a Beraisa, a pasuk, or another teaching of Chazal.

For example, the Gemara may say:

ורמינהו

"And we ask a contradiction..."

This usually means that one source seems to contradict another source.

Another common phrase is:

מיתיבי

"They raised a difficulty from a Beraisa..."

This means the Gemara is bringing a Beraisa that seems to challenge the statement or explanation.

A קושיא shows that something does not yet fit.

5. Resolution — תירוץ

A תירוץ explains how the difficulty is settled.

Sometimes the Gemara says that the two sources are speaking about different cases. Sometimes it says that each source follows a different opinion. Sometimes it explains that we misunderstood the statement at first.

For example, the Gemara may say:

לא קשיא

"It is not difficult."

This means the Gemara is about to explain why the two sources do not really contradict each other.

Another common example is:

הכא במאי עסקינן

"What are we dealing with here?"

This usually means that the Gemara is defining the case in a specific way in order to answer the difficulty.

A תירוץ shows the student how the Gemara solves the problem and allows the sugya to continue.

6. Proof — ראיה

Sometimes the Gemara brings a proof to support an idea.

The proof may come from a pasuk, a Mishnah, a Beraisa, or from sevara.

For example, the Gemara may say:

לימא מסייע ליה

"Let us say that this supports him."

This means the Gemara is bringing a source that may support the statement or opinion that was said earlier.

A ראיה shows that the explanation is not just possible, but has support.

These six steps do not always appear in the same order, and not every sugya has all of them.

But once a student learns to recognize these steps, he can begin to understand what the Gemara is doing.

He is no longer only translating the words.

He is following the movement of the sugya.

Applying the Six Steps to a Gemara

After learning the six basic steps of Gemara, we now need to see how they work in an actual sugya.

As we said before, המעשה הוא העיקר — the main thing is the actual practice.

It is not enough for a student to know the words statement, question, answer, kushya, terutz, and proof. He needs to see how these steps appear inside a real Gemara.

For this example, we will use the Gemara in Taanis that discusses why we mention rain in the second berachah of Shemoneh Esrei, the berachah of תחיית המתים.

First, we will bring the Gemara itself. Then we will bring a simple translation. Afterwards, we will go back and break it apart according to the six steps.

The Gemara

מַזְכִּירִין גְּבוּרוֹת גְּשָׁמִים בִּתְחִיַּית הַמֵּתִים.

מַאי טַעְמָא?

אָמַר רַב יוֹסֵף: מִתּוֹךְ שֶׁשְּׁקוּלָה כִּתְחִיַּית הַמֵּתִים, לְפִיכָךְ קְבָעוּהָ בִּתְחִיַּית הַמֵּתִים.

וְאָמַר רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר: כָּל אָדָם שֶׁיֵּשׁ בּוֹ דֵּעָה — כְּאִילּוּ נִבְנָה בֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ בְּיָמָיו. דֵּעָה נִתְּנָה בֵּין שְׁתֵּי אוֹתִיּוֹת, מִקְדָּשׁ נִתַּן בֵּין שְׁתֵּי אוֹתִיּוֹת.

מַתְקִיף לַהּ רַב אַחָא קַרְחִינָאָה: אֶלָּא מֵעַתָּה, גְּדוֹלָה נְקָמָה שֶׁנִּתְּנָה בֵּין שְׁתֵּי אוֹתִיּוֹת, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "אֵל נְקָמוֹת ה'"!

אָמַר לֵיהּ: אִין, בְּמִילְּתַהּ מִיהָא גְּדוֹלָה הִיא.

וְהַיְינוּ דְּאָמַר עוּלָּא: שְׁתֵּי נְקָמוֹת הַלָּלוּ לָמָּה? אַחַת לְטוֹבָה וְאַחַת לְרָעָה.

Translation

The Mishnah says:

> *"We mention the might of the rains in the blessing of the resurrection of the dead."*

The Gemara asks:

> *"What is the reason?"*

Rav Yosef said:

> *"Since rain is compared to the resurrection of the dead, therefore they placed it in the blessing of the resurrection of the dead."*

Rain gives life to the world. When the ground is dry, the plants cannot grow. When rain comes, the world receives new life. Therefore, Chazal placed the mention of rain in the berachah of תחיית המתים, the resurrection of the dead.

The Gemara then continues with a related teaching.

Rabbi Elazar said:

> *"Any person who has understanding, it is as if the Beis Hamikdash was built in his days."*

The Gemara explains:

> *"Understanding was placed between two names of Hashem, and the Beis Hamikdash was placed between two names of Hashem."*

Meaning, both דעה, understanding, and the מקדש, the Beis Hamikdash, are described in pesukim in connection with names of Hashem. This shows the greatness of דעה.

Rav Acha Karchina'ah challenged this:

> *"If so, should we also say that vengeance is great, since it too is placed between two names of Hashem, as the verse says, 'G-d of vengeance, Hashem'?"*

He answered him:

"Yes. In its proper place, vengeance is great."

Meaning, vengeance is not always good. But when it is Hashem's justice against evil, then it has a proper place.

And this is what Ulla said:

"Why are these two expressions of vengeance mentioned? One is for good, and one is for bad."

This means that there is a kind of vengeance that is negative, and there is a kind of vengeance that is proper, when it is used for Hashem's justice.

Breaking Down the Gemara

Now that we saw the Gemara and its translation, we can go back and see how the six steps appear inside the sugya.

It is important to notice that the first part of the Gemara is a short halachic discussion about rain and תחיית המתים. Afterwards, the Gemara moves into a related Aggadic discussion about דעה, the בית המקדש, and נקמה.

Even though the discussion moves into a new topic, we can still see the same basic Gemara structure.

1. Statement — מאמר

The first statement is the Mishnah:

מַזְכִּירִין גְּבוּרוֹת גְּשָׁמִים בִּתְחִיַּית הַמֵּתִים

"We mention the might of the rains in the blessing of the resurrection of the dead."

This is the starting point.

The Mishnah teaches that משיב הרוח ומוריד הגשם is said in the berachah of תחיית המתים.

Before the Gemara asks or answers anything, it first brings the teaching that needs to be explained.

2. Question — שאלה

The Gemara then asks:

מַאי טַעְמָא?

"What is the reason?"

This is a שאלה.

The Gemara is asking: why did Chazal place the mention of rain specifically in the berachah of תחיית המתים?

This is not a question asking for a source. It is a question asking for the reason.

3. Answer — תשובה

The Gemara answers:

אָמַר רַב יוֹסֵף: מִתּוֹךְ שֶׁשְּׁקוּלָה כִּתְחִיַּית הַמֵּתִים, לְפִיכָךְ קְבָעוּהָ בִּתְחִיַּית הַמֵּתִים

"Rav Yosef said: Since rain is compared to the resurrection of the dead, therefore they placed it in the blessing of the resurrection of the dead."

This is the תשובה.

The Gemara asked why rain belongs in תחיית המתים. Rav Yosef answers that rain is similar to תחיית המתים, because rain gives life to the world.

Now the first part of the sugya is clear.

Statement: rain is mentioned in תחיית המתים.

Question: why?

Answer: because rain itself is like תחיית המתים.

4. Kushya — קושיא

The Gemara then continues into a related Aggadic discussion.

Rabbi Elazar says:

כָּל אָדָם שֶׁיֵּשׁ בּוֹ דֵּעָה — כְּאִילּוּ נִבְנָה בֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ בְּיָמָיו

"Any person who has understanding, it is as if the Beis Hamikdash was built in his days."

The Gemara explains that דעה is placed between two names of Hashem, and the מקדש is also placed between two names of Hashem.

Then Rav Acha asks:

אֶלָּא מֵעַתָּה, גְּדוֹלָה נְקָמָה שֶׁנִּתְּנָה בֵּין שְׁתֵּי אוֹתִיּוֹת

"If so, should we also say that vengeance is great, since it too is placed between two names of Hashem?"

This is a קושיא.

Rav Acha is challenging the logic. If being placed between two names of Hashem proves greatness, then נקמה should also be called great.

The question is not just asking for information. It is showing a difficulty in the reasoning.

5. Terutz — תירוץ

The Gemara answers:

אִין, בְּמִילְּתַהּ מִיהָא גְּדוֹלָה הִיא

"Yes. In its proper place, it is great."

This is the תירוץ.

The Gemara accepts the point. It says that נקמה really can be great when it is in its proper place.

This does not mean that anger or revenge is always good. It means that when נקמה is Hashem's justice against evil, it has a proper and holy place.

So the difficulty is answered.

Being placed between two names of Hashem does show greatness. The case of נקמה is not a contradiction, because נקמה also has greatness when it is used properly.

6. Proof — ראיה

The Gemara then brings support from Ulla:

וְהַיְינוּ דְּאָמַר עוּלְּא: שְׁתֵּי נְקָמוֹת הַלָּלוּ לָמָּה? אַחַת לְטוֹבָה וְאַחַת לְרָעָה

"And this is what Ulla said: Why are these two expressions of vengeance mentioned? One is for good, and one is for bad."

This is the ראיה.

Ulla teaches that there are two kinds of נקמה. There is a kind that is bad, and there is a kind that is good.

This supports the answer of the Gemara.

The Gemara had answered that נקמה can be great in its proper place. Ulla's teaching supports this, because he also says that there is a type of נקמה that is for good.

What the Student Should Notice

From this example, the student can see that the Gemara is not moving randomly.

Each line has a job. One line gives the statement, another line asks what needs to be explained, another line answers, and later the Gemara challenges and resolves an idea.

This is the main point.

When a student learns Gemara, he should not only ask, "What do these words mean?"

He should also ask, "What is the Gemara doing now?"

Once he begins to ask that question, he is no longer just translating words.

He is following the movement of the sugya.

Tools for Talmud

PART THREE

ליגמר איניש והדר ליסבר

Shabbos 63a

How to Start Reading the Gemara Inside

After the student understands the basic shakla v'tarya of the sugya, and after he understands which steps the Gemara is taking, he can begin working on reading the Gemara inside.

This is an important stage.

Until now, the student may have understood the Gemara from a rebbi, from ArtScroll, or from another explanation. He may know what the sugya is saying. He may understand the question, the answer, the kushya, and the terutz.

But now he needs to begin seeing these ideas in the words of the Gemara itself.

Generally speaking, by this point the student should already know a certain amount of basic Gemara words. But there is an important point to understand.

The Gemara is not written like a regular spoken language.

It is not like a regular conversation, where every sentence may use new words and new expressions. The Gemara has its own style. It uses many of the same words and phrases again and again.

This is especially true because Gemara is a language of learning. It is a language of questions, answers, proofs, difficulties, and resolutions.

Therefore, many of the same words appear many times.

A student does not need to know every Aramaic word before he begins reading Gemara inside. But he does need to become familiar with the most common words and phrases.

For this, a Gemara Card can be very helpful. A student can also use a Talmudic Aramaic dictionary. But for a beginner, it is usually better to begin with a Gemara Card, because it gives him the common words in a simple and organized way.

There are also sefarim today that list the harder words for each daf, so that the student does not have to search for every difficult word in a dictionary. These can also be very helpful.

The practical way to begin is as follows.

The student should take a printed copy of the Gemara, with the tzuras hadaf.

He should choose a Gemara that he already learned well. He should know the meaning of the Gemara before he begins this exercise. This should not be the first time he is seeing the sugya. He should already have learned it, understood it, and know the basic flow.

Then, on the printout, he should begin marking the Gemara.

He can add commas, periods, and question marks.

He can mark where the statement begins, where the question begins, where the answer begins, and where the Gemara moves to the next step.

When he comes to easier words, especially common Gemara words, he should use the Gemara Card.

He does not need to write the English translation above every word.

In fact, writing every word can make the page too crowded. Then the student may have so many notes on the page that it becomes harder to read the Gemara itself.

Therefore, it is usually better to use the Gemara Card for the easier and more common words, and to write short English translations only above the harder words.

This keeps the page clear, while still giving the student the help he needs.

After this, he should begin reading the Gemara inside.

At first, he may read slowly. That is normal.

The goal at this stage is not speed. The goal is to begin seeing how the Gemara works inside the words.

As he reads, he should notice what the Gemara is doing. Here the Gemara is making a statement. Here it is asking a question. Here it is giving an answer. Here it is bringing a kushya. Here it is giving a terutz.

In this way, the student begins to connect three things together:

The words of the Gemara.

The meaning of the sugya.

And the structure of the shakla v'tarya.

This is an important step toward becoming independent in learning.

In my experience, if a student can learn one daf this way properly, he has gained a very important key. Once he knows how to break down one daf, read it inside, and understand how it works, he can begin to approach other dapim in Shas as well.

Of course, this takes practice.

After the student works through the daf with notes, translations, and markings, he should review it several times.

Then, when he feels that he knows it well, he should test himself.

He should take a clean tzuras hadaf, without his notes, commas, translations, or markings, and try to read it inside.

It is even better if he can read it to a rebbi or teacher.

The rebbi can see if he is reading the words correctly, if he understands where the sentences break, and if he is following the shakla v'tarya properly.

This is how the student slowly moves from understanding the Gemara from the outside to reading the Gemara inside.

Making a Leining

After a bochur knows the basic shakla v'tarya of a sugya, and after he has learned how to read a basic Gemara inside, the next stage is learning how to make a leining.

A leining means that the bochur prepares the sugya before shiur in an organized way.

This is already a more advanced stage. It should not be expected from a student who still cannot read a basic Gemara inside. First, he needs to know how to follow the Gemara, how to recognize the basic steps, and how to understand the words with some independence.

But once he has those skills, he can begin learning how to prepare a leining.

In my experience, if bochurim are taught properly, and if they are trained with the methods we described earlier, many bochurim can begin making a leining with some support around shiur beis mesivta. In a lesser level yeshiva, they can often begin earlier with guidance, and by the end of shiur beis they should be able to make a more consistent leining.

In some yeshivos, this may only begin in shiur gimmel mesivta. But in general, a bochur should not be going much later than that without beginning to learn how to make a leining, unless the yeshiva has a different kind of program, such as a trade-school structure.

The purpose of a leining is not that the bochur should understand every detail perfectly before shiur.

The purpose is that he should come into shiur already knowing the basic flow of the sugya. He should know what the Gemara is discussing, where the main questions are, where the answers are, and what needs to be understood better.

Then the shiur can build on something.

A leining can be done in four stages.

1. First look: the general flow

First, the bochur should look over the Gemara in a general way.

At this stage, he is not trying to understand every detail. He is trying to see the subject of the Gemara and the general flow of the sugya.

What is the Gemara talking about?

Where does the sugya begin?

What seems to be the main issue?

Where does the Gemara seem to be going?

This first look should be quick. It does not need to be fancy. Often, five to ten minutes is enough.

The goal is only to get a first picture of the sugya.

2. Second time: line by line

After that, the bochur should begin learning the Gemara line by line.

Now he should go more slowly.

He should try to understand each piece of the Gemara on its own. What is this line saying? Is it a statement, a question, an answer, a kushya, a terutz, or a proof? What is this part trying to do?

At this stage, he is not yet focusing mainly on the whole sugya as one unit. He is focusing on each piece by itself.

He does not need to understand everything perfectly. But he should try to understand each part decently well.

3. Third time: how the pieces connect

After he understands the parts, he should learn the sugya a third time.

This time, the focus is on how the pieces connect to each other.

It is not enough to know that the Gemara asked a question and then gave an answer. He needs to ask: how does the answer answer the question?

If the Gemara brings a proof, he should ask: why is this really a proof?

If the Gemara brings a kushya, he should ask: what exactly is difficult?

If the Gemara gives a terutz, he should ask: how does this remove the difficulty?

At this stage, he is no longer only asking what each line says. He is asking how the sugya works.

This is a very important part of making a leining.

4. Fourth time: the whole sugya together

After this, the bochur should learn the whole piece again in one flow.

This is similar to the first step, where he looked for the general picture. But now it is different, because he already worked through the details.

Now he can try to see the whole sugya with understanding.

He should ask himself:

What is the sugya about?

What is the main movement?

How does it begin?

How does it develop?

What is the conclusion?

This gives him the bird's-eye view of the sugya, after he has already gone through the details.

Writing down questions

While making a leining, the bochur will often have questions.

This is normal, and it is a good thing.

But he has to be careful not to lose the whole leining because of one question.

If he gets stuck on a question and spends too much time on it, he may lose the flow of the sugya.

Therefore, when he has a question, he should write it down on a piece of paper.

Then he can continue learning.

Later, he can ask the question to his maggid shiur.

This way, he does not ignore his questions, but he also does not allow them to stop the whole leining.

The goal is to come into shiur prepared.

He may not understand every detail yet, but he should know the basic sugya. He should know what is clear, what is unclear, and what questions he wants to ask.

That is the purpose of making a leining.

A Note to Mechanchim and Maggidei Shiur

It is important for mechanchim and maggidei shiur to understand that making a leining is not only about learning the words of the Gemara.

Making a leining is an art.

A bochur has to learn how to understand a piece of Gemara in a way that prepares him for shiur. He has to learn what is a good question and what is not really a question. He has to learn what needs to be discussed in the leining and what does not need to be discussed yet.

He also has to learn how to read the words of the Gemara in a way that brings out the shakla v'tarya. He is not only reading words. He is trying to understand what the Gemara is doing, where the sugya is moving, and what needs to be clarified.

Therefore, when a yeshiva tells bochurim to make a leining, it is very important that there should be a meishiv available.

This is especially true during iyun seder.

The meishiv has to be able to answer the bochurim's questions. But more than that, he should help guide them in how to make the leining itself.

After a bochur has looked over the Gemara a little bit, the meishiv can go over to him and read with him. He can ask him to explain what the Gemara is saying. He can ask simple questions that help the bochur notice what the Gemara is trying to do.

Sometimes, through these questions, the bochur will realize on his own what the main issue in the sugya is.

Other times, the bochur will bring his own questions. The meishiv

can then decide how to respond. Sometimes he can give a short answer. Sometimes he can say, "That is a good question, and this is something we will discuss in shiur."

The point is not to turn the leining into the whole shiur.

The point is to train the bochurim to become familiar with what a leining is.

Another thing a maggid shiur can do is give a leining shiur.

This means that he gives a shiur in which he models how to prepare the sugya. He shows the bochurim how he looks at the Gemara, what issues he notices, what questions need to be asked, and how the parts of the sugya connect to each other.

In such a shiur, the maggid shiur is not only teaching the sugya. He is teaching the bochurim how to prepare a sugya.

This can be very helpful, because many bochurim were never shown what a real leining is supposed to look like.

At the same time, even when the bochurim are making their own leining, it is still important for the maggid shiur to go over the Gemara clearly in shiur.

This is especially true when learning Tosafos, but it is also true with the Gemara itself.

A bochur may have a general idea of the sugya from his leining, but that does not mean that he understood every word properly. He may have understood the basic flow, but missed an important phrase, a detail in Rashi, or the exact meaning of a line.

That is okay.

The purpose of the leining is not that every bochur should come

into shiur already knowing everything perfectly.

The purpose is that he should come in prepared enough that the shiur can build on his preparation.

When the maggid shiur then goes through the Gemara clearly, the bochur can hear the shiur much better. He already has the basic picture, and now the shiur helps him sharpen it, correct it, and understand it more deeply.

A Short Note About Learning Rashi

This kuntres is mainly about learning Gemara itself. Therefore, we will not explain at length how to learn Rashi and Tosafos.

However, a few points about Rashi should be mentioned.

Rashi's main purpose is to explain the simple meaning of the Gemara. He helps the student understand the words, the case, the flow, and the basic meaning of the sugya.

At the same time, Rashi is very exact. His words are written with great precision. Therefore, even though Rashi is coming to explain the simple meaning, a student should know that every word of Rashi matters.

For a beginner, the easiest way to begin learning Rashi is usually to first learn the Gemara well.

If a student is using ArtScroll, he should understand that ArtScroll is often trying to explain the Gemara according to Rashi. One of the reasons ArtScroll is helpful is because it tries to give the student the Gemara as Rashi understands it, in clear English.

Therefore, the student can first learn the Gemara with ArtScroll and make sure he understands what the Gemara means according to Rashi.

After that, he can open the Rashi inside.

At that point, he is not seeing Rashi for the first time with no background. He already knows what Rashi is coming to explain. Now he can try to read Rashi inside and see how Rashi says it.

This is a very helpful way to begin learning Rashi.

The same method that we explained earlier for Gemara can also be used for Rashi.

If there are hard words in Rashi, the student can write short English translations above those words. He does not need to write above every word, because that can make the page too crowded. But for words that he does not know, writing a short translation can help him read the Rashi more smoothly.

Over time, the student should begin to move beyond this.

Just as we explained earlier that the student should slowly learn to read the Gemara inside without relying on ArtScroll, the same is true with Rashi.

At first, he may use ArtScroll to understand how the Gemara reads according to Rashi. But eventually, he should begin learning the Gemara together with Rashi inside, without first looking in ArtScroll.

This takes practice.

First, he learns the Gemara with help.

Then he reads the Rashi inside and sees how Rashi explains the Gemara.

Then, slowly, he begins learning the Gemara with Rashi on his own.

The goal is that Rashi should not remain something outside the Gemara. Rashi should become part of the way the student learns the Gemara itself.

This is an important step in becoming more independent in learning.

A Note About Learning Tosafos

Just as we mentioned with Rashi, this kuntres is not coming to explain at length how to learn Tosafos.

The main purpose of this kuntres is to help a student learn Gemara itself.

However, one basic point about Tosafos should be mentioned.

Rashi and Tosafos are doing two different things.

Rashi helps the student understand this Gemara.

Tosafos helps the student understand this Gemara as part of Shas.

This is the main point.

Rashi usually explains the simple meaning of the Gemara in front of us. He explains the words, the case, the flow, and the basic pshat of the sugya.

Tosafos goes further.

The word Tosafos means "additions." In a simple way, Tosafos takes the Gemara and opens it up into the larger discussion of Shas.

Earlier, we explained that the Gemara does this with the Mishnah.

The Mishnah gives the halachah in a short way. The Gemara then explains the Mishnah, asks questions on it, compares it with other Mishnayos and Beraisos, brings statements of Amoraim, develops new cases, and clarifies the halachah.

Tosafos does something similar with the Gemara.

Tosafos shows that a Gemara cannot always be understood only from the few lines in front of us. Sometimes this Gemara has to be compared with another Gemara. Sometimes one sugya seems to say one thing, and another sugya seems to say something else. Sometimes the pshat that works in one place has to be tested against other places in Shas.

Therefore, Tosafos often asks questions from other Gemaras.

He may ask that our Gemara seems to contradict another Gemara.

He may answer that the two sugyos are speaking about different cases, or different opinions, or different levels of explanation.

He may explain our Gemara differently because of a difficulty from another sugya.

He may discuss whether Rashi's explanation fits with other sugyos, or whether another explanation is needed.

And many times, Tosafos also helps clarify the halachah that comes out of the Gemara.

This is why Tosafos is difficult for a beginner.

Tosafos is not only explaining the line in front of him. Tosafos is showing how this Gemara fits into the larger world of Shas.

That is also why Tosafos is so important.

A student who learns only Rashi may understand the local sugya. He may know what this Gemara is saying.

But when he begins learning Tosafos, he begins to see that every sugya is part of a larger Torah discussion. The Gemara here must fit with the Gemara there. One pshat must fit the words here and also the sugya somewhere else. The halachah has to come out from the whole picture.

Therefore, Tosafos is not just an extra comment on the side.

Tosafos teaches the student to learn Gemara as part of Shas.

For those who do want to learn Tosafos more seriously, an excellent guide is the sefer Tools for Tosafos.

In my opinion, any bochur who is learning Tosafos should try to learn this sefer.

It explains the background and history of Tosafos, the language of Tosafos, the common expressions used by Tosafos, and the basic structure of how Tosafos is written. It gives the student the tools he needs in order to understand what Tosafos is doing.

The sefer is written clearly and is easy to use. It is also easy to find things inside it. Every page is coming to explain something practical and important.

For a bochur who is beginning to learn Tosafos, this can make a very big difference. Instead of seeing Tosafos as a difficult block of words, he begins to recognize the style, the structure, and the way Tosafos thinks.

I would strongly suggest that any bochur learning Tosafos should have this sefer and use it.

There are also two other resources that can be helpful.

One is Tosafos in English, and the other is Mei Menuchos.

Both can be found online as free PDFs, which makes them easy for a student to access.

Each one has its own advantage.

Tosafos in English has two major advantages.

First, it is in English. This makes it accessible even to a student who is not yet comfortable learning a long Tosafos in Hebrew.

Second, it often has many notes that bring the student deeper into the sugya. These notes can open up important points, show different ways of understanding Tosafos, and raise questions that help the student think more deeply.

At the same time, these two advantages can also bring certain difficulties.

The first difficulty is practical and aesthetic.

Since Tosafos in English is written in English, it is written from left to right, while the Gemara and Tosafos themselves are written from right to left. This can make the page feel less natural. The student is moving between two different directions, and that can sometimes make the learning feel less smooth.

The second difficulty is the style.

Gemara topics are not always easy to explain in English. Since English works differently than Hebrew and Aramaic, the explanation sometimes has to become longer. Because of this, even though the sefer is trying to make Tosafos clearer, at times the English explanation can feel complicated or hard to follow.

There is also another point.

There is no single accepted peirush on Tosafos in the same way that Rashi explains the Gemara. Therefore, Tosafos in English will sometimes explain Tosafos in a way that may be different from the way a student's maggid shiur is learning it.

For this reason, it can be very helpful, but the student should use it with seichel. He should know that it is a tool, not the only possible way to understand Tosafos.

Mei Menuchos has a different advantage.

It is written in Hebrew, and it often explains the pshat of Tosafos in a more direct way. Because it is in Hebrew, it is closer to the language and style of the sugya itself.

For many students, this can make it a better tool for understanding the basic pshat of Tosafos.

The disadvantage is that it is in Hebrew, so it may be harder for a student who is not yet comfortable reading Hebrew explanations.

Also, for a more advanced student, Tosafos in English may sometimes be more useful because it brings more notes, questions, and different ways of looking at the sugya.

Therefore, each sefer has its place.

For basic pshat in Tosafos, Mei Menuchos can be very helpful.

For a student who needs English, or for a more advanced student who wants more discussion and more points to think about, Tosafos in English can also be very useful.

The main thing is that the student should know what he is using each sefer for.

A Note to Mechanchim About Tosafos

There is another point that should be mentioned to mechanchim and maggidei shiur.

In the earlier years of mesivta, the main goal of iyun should be to teach the bochur how to understand a sugya clearly from the inside.

This means that the bochur should learn how to understand the Gemara, how to read it with Rashi, how to follow the shakla v'tarya, how to ask basic questions in pshat, and how to see the main point of the sugya.

The goal is not only that he should know the translation of the words. He needs to learn how the sugya works.

This is the foundation.

Once that foundation is strong, Tosafos can add a tremendous amount. But if the foundation is not yet strong, difficult Tosafos can sometimes confuse the bochur more than it helps him.

There are three main reasons for this.

The first reason is the language.

Tosafos is not written in the same style as the Gemara. It has its own Hebrew and Aramaic, its own grammar, and its own sentence structure. A bochur may have begun to read Gemara inside, but that does not mean he is already ready to read Tosafos easily.

The second reason is the shortness.

Tosafos often says a lot in very few words. In some ways, it can be even shorter than the Gemara. The Gemara has Rashi to explain it, but Tosafos itself does not have a Rashi on the side explaining

every word and every step.

The third reason is that Tosafos often brings in other sugyos.

Very often, Tosafos is not only explaining the Gemara in front of us. Tosafos may ask a question from another Gemara, sometimes in another masechta, which the bochur has never learned. Then Tosafos may use that other Gemara to explain our Gemara in a new way, sometimes differently than Rashi.

For an advanced learner, this is part of the beauty of Tosafos.

But for a younger bochur, it can be too much at once.

He may still be trying to understand our Gemara with Rashi. He is still learning how to read the sugya, how to follow the shakla v'tarya, and how to understand the basic pshat. If at that point the shiur spends too much time on a difficult Tosafos from another masechta, the bochur may lose the main Gemara itself.

Therefore, in shiur aleph and shiur beis mesivta, the main focus should usually not be on difficult Tosafos.

This does not mean that Tosafos should never be learned at that stage.

If there is a short Tosafos that helps explain the basic pshat of the Gemara, it can be very useful. But long and difficult Tosafos that bring contradictions from other masechtos should usually not be the center of the shiur for younger bochurim.

The main focus at that stage should be the Gemara and Rashi.

The shiur should help the bochurim understand what the Gemara is saying, why the Gemara asks its question, how the answer answers the question, how one part of the sugya connects to

another part, and what the basic point of the sugya is.

This is not a low level of learning.

This is iyun.

Iyun means that the bochur is learning to understand the sugya properly. He is not only reading words. He is learning to see what is difficult, what is being answered, what remains unclear, and what the sugya is really teaching.

Good ArtScroll notes can sometimes be helpful for this, because they often raise simple pshat-based questions on the sugya. Other Rishonim, such as the Ritva and the Meiri, can also be helpful when they explain a basic question in pshat.

It is also important to discuss some of the basic halachah that comes out of the sugya.

This helps the bochur see that the sugya is not only an abstract discussion. It is connected to a real halachic reality.

This does not mean that the shiur has to become a full halachah shiur. But some basic connection to halachah can make the sugya more real.

Lomdus also has its place.

A simple lomdishe point can sometimes help the bochur understand the conceptual "why" of the sugya. But it should be used to clarify the Gemara, not to overwhelm the talmid. The point is not to impress the bochur with brilliance. The point is to help him understand the Gemara more deeply.

Once a bochur reaches shiur gimmel mesivta, he can begin learning Tosafos more seriously.

At that stage, he should already have more grounding in Gemara and Rashi. Then he can begin learning how Tosafos connects our sugya to other sugyos in Shas, how Tosafos asks from one place to another, and how Tosafos builds a new understanding of the Gemara.

As is known, the Maharal spoke strongly about not making Tosafos the center of learning for younger students before they have a solid foundation in Gemara itself.

However one understands the exact application, the basic point is important.

Tosafos is called Tosafos because it is an addition.

The addition is precious. But first there has to be something to add to.

Conclusion: Learning Gemara with Seder

The purpose of this kuntres was to give the student a clear way to begin learning Gemara.

Gemara can feel very difficult when it is approached without seder. A student may open the Gemara and see many words, many questions, many answers, and many different ideas, without knowing how they fit together.

But Gemara has a structure.

First, a student needs to understand the Mishnah. He needs to know the background, the case, the question, the ruling, the reason, the chiddush, and the general principle.

Then he can begin to understand what the Gemara is doing. The Gemara explains the Mishnah, clarifies the halachah, develops new cases and ideas, and teaches Aggadah and Yiras Shamayim.

After that, the student can learn to recognize the basic steps of the Gemara: the statement, the question, the answer, the kushya, the terutz, and the ראיה.

Once he understands the meaning of the sugya and the shakla v'tarya, he can begin reading the Gemara inside. He can use a Gemara Card, mark the tzuras hadaf, write short translations above difficult words, and slowly train himself to see the sugya inside the words of the Gemara itself.

Then, when he is ready, he can begin learning how to make a leining. He can look over the sugya, learn it line by line, understand how the pieces connect, and then review the whole sugya together.

This is the seder.

A student does not become independent in learning in one day. It takes time, patience, chazarah, and guidance from a rebbi.

But when he learns with seder, the Gemara becomes much clearer.

He begins to see that the Gemara is not just a page of difficult words. It is a living discussion of Torah. It has questions, answers, proofs, difficulties, resolutions, and depth.

And when the student begins to see that structure, he can begin to enter the Gemara himself.

That is one of the greatest gifts a rebbi can give a talmid: not only to explain one sugya to him, but to teach him how to learn.

Tools for Talmud

Appendix

Tools for Talmud

Part One

The Guideposts of the Gemara

Before We Begin

We will now begin discussing the basic steps of the Gemara in greater depth.

Until now, we explained the general structure: statement, question, answer, kushya, teretz, and proof. In this appendix, we will look more closely at some of the common words and expressions that tell us which step the Gemara is taking.

These words are like guideposts.

When a student sees תניא כוותיה, or מאי טעמא, מיתיבי, לא קשיא, he should not only translate the words. He should begin to recognize what they are doing in the sugya.

At the same time, this appendix is not meant to include every connector word found in Shas.

There are many expressions that will not be discussed here. Partly, this is because I wanted to publish this kuntres without delaying it until every possible term was included. Partly, it is because שגיאות מי יבין—no person can expect to include everything perfectly. And most simply, כי רבים הם—there are many such expressions, and אי אפשר לפורטן; it is not possible to enumerate all of them here.

There is also another important point.

The same connector word does not always perform the same function. Its meaning depends on the context in which it appears.

For example:

תא שמע

"Come and hear."

Sometimes תא שמע introduces a source that is being brought to answer an איבעיא. Sometimes it introduces a proof supporting a position. In another

context, the source that follows may create a difficulty or challenge an earlier statement.

The words themselves only tell us that the Gemara is asking us to listen to a source. We still have to look at the context to understand why that source is being brought.

Therefore, the examples in this appendix should not be treated as rigid rules. They show common uses of the different expressions, but the student must always pay attention to the sugya itself.

The context is more important than the label.

The purpose of this appendix is therefore limited.

It will explain the main types within each step and give many of the common expressions that help a student recognize them. It is meant to give the student a foundation, not to serve as a complete dictionary of Talmudic terminology.

Many additional words can be found on the Gemara Card. The student will also become familiar with more of them naturally as he continues learning different dapim and begins noticing how the same expressions are used again and again.

For someone who wants a more complete and systematic treatment, I strongly recommend Rabbi Yitzchak Feigenbaum's Understanding the Talmud. His book explains many of the recurring words, phrases, and structures of the Gemara in much greater depth.

The goal here is simpler: to help the student recognize the main guideposts, understand what the Gemara is doing, and begin following the sugya with greater clarity.

A Statement — מאמר

A מאמר is a statement or teaching brought by the Gemara.

Usually, the Gemara is bringing a Mishnah, a Beraisa, or a statement of an Amora. Sometimes this begins a new discussion, and sometimes it adds another teaching to a discussion already in progress.

Common expressions include:

אמר רב...

"Rav... said."

תנן

"We learned in a Mishnah."

תניא

"We learned in a Beraisa."

Sometimes the Gemara preserves more than one version of the same statement. It may introduce the second version with:

איכא דאמרי

"There are those who say."

The exact difference between the two versions depends on the context. Sometimes the wording is different. Sometimes the statement is attributed differently. Sometimes the second version changes an important detail in the teaching.

Another common expression is:

גופא

"The matter itself."

This means that the Gemara is returning to a Mishnah, Beraisa, or statement that was mentioned earlier and will now examine it more closely.

In terms of structure, a מאמר is usually one of the easiest parts of the Gemara to recognize.

But in terms of understanding, it often needs some of the most careful study.

The statement is the building block of the entire sugya. The questions, answers, kushyos, terutzim, and proofs all depend on understanding exactly what was stated.

If the student does not understand the original statement clearly, he will not fully understand what the Gemara is asking on it, how the answer resolves the question, or what the later proof is coming to support.

Therefore, when the Gemara brings a מאמר, the student should not move past it too quickly.

He should make sure that he understands the case, the ruling or teaching, and the exact meaning of the words. Everything that follows will be built on that foundation.

Two Types of Questions: A Shailah and an איבעיא

Within the general step of a shailah, it is helpful to divide the questions of the Gemara into two broad categories.

The first is an איבעיא.

In English, we can call this a dilemma.

An איבעיא means that there are two possible ways to understand the case, and both sides have a reason to be correct. The Gemara is not simply missing a piece of information. It understands the two possibilities, but it is uncertain which one should be followed.

An איבעיא will often begin with:

איבעיא להו

"They asked the following dilemma."

The Gemara may then explain the two sides:

מי אמרינן...

"Do we say...?"

או דלמא...

"Or perhaps...?"

It may then conclude the question with:

מאי? or מהו?

"What is the halachah?"

The important point is that an איבעיא contains two possible sides. The student should therefore try to understand why each side is reasonable before looking for the answer.

The second category is a regular shailah — שאלה.

A shailah is a request for information.

The Gemara already knows what it is discussing, but there is a particular piece that still needs to be explained. There are several common types of shailos.

Asking for the Source

Sometimes the Gemara knows the halachah, but wants to know its source.

It may ask:

מנא הני מילי?

"From where do we know these matters?"

Or:

מניין?

"From where do we know this?"

In this type of shailah, the Gemara is looking for the pasuk, tradition, or other source from which the law is learned.

Asking Who Said the Teaching

Sometimes the source is already in front of us, but we do not know whose opinion it follows.

The Gemara may ask:

מני?

"Who is the Tanna of this teaching?"

The Gemara is asking us to identify the opinion behind the Mishnah or Beraisa.

Asking for the Reason or Deeper Explanation

Other shailos are not asking for the source of the law, but for its logic or meaning.

The Gemara may ask:

מאי טעמא?

"What is the reason?"

Here, the Gemara knows the ruling, but wants to understand the sevara behind it.

The Gemara may also ask:

מאי בינייהו?

"What is the difference between them?"

This is usually asked when two opinions or two explanations seem to lead to the same conclusion. The Gemara wants to know the practical case in which they will disagree.

Another common question is:

פשיטא!

"It is obvious!"

The Gemara is saying that the teaching appears unnecessary. If the law is already obvious, what chiddush is the Mishnah, Beraisa, or Amora coming to teach?

Although these questions are different, they share one basic point.

The student should not see every question simply as "the Gemara is asking something." He should try to identify exactly what information the Gemara is requesting.

Is it asking for a source?

Is it asking who said the teaching?

Is it asking for the reason?

Is it asking for the practical difference?

Or is it asking what chiddush an apparently obvious statement is coming to teach?

Once the student understands the type of question, it becomes much easier to understand what kind of answer the Gemara will need to give.

The Corresponding Answer — תשובה

Every question is looking for a particular kind of answer.

If the Gemara presents an איבעיא, it is trying to decide between two possible sides. The answer therefore has to resolve the dilemma.

The Gemara may bring a source and say:

תא שמע

"Come and hear."

This means that the Gemara is bringing a Mishnah, Beraisa, or another teaching that may help decide the question.

It may also say:

תפשוט

"Resolve it from here."

The Gemara is showing that the answer to the dilemma can be learned from the source that was brought.

Sometimes the source successfully resolves the בעיא. At other times, the Gemara may reject the proof, and the question remains unresolved.

A regular שאלה works somewhat differently.

Since a shailah is asking for information, the תשובה has to provide the particular information that is missing.

If the Gemara asks:

מנא הני מילי?

"From where do we know this?"

The answer will give the source, often by bringing a pasuk or an earlier teaching.

If it asks:

מני?

"Who is the author of this teaching?"

The answer will identify the Tanna whose opinion the source follows.

If it asks:

מאי טעמא?

"What is the reason?"

The answer will explain the sevara behind the ruling.

If it asks:

מאי בינייהו?

"What is the difference between the two explanations?"

The answer will give a case in which the two opinions lead to different results.

And if the Gemara asks:

פשיטא!

"It is obvious!"

The answer will explain the chiddush and show why the statement was still necessary.

The answer therefore always has to be understood in relation to the question.

A question asking for a source needs a source.

A question asking for a reason needs an explanation.

A question asking for a difference needs a case.

And an איבעיא needs something that can decide between its two sides.

When the student understands exactly what the question is asking for, he can already begin to recognize what kind of תשובה he should expect.

A Kushya — קושיא

Generally speaking, a kushya is asked either on a statement or on someone's understanding of a statement.

There are two broad types of kushyos.

Sometimes the difficulty comes from within the source itself. The Mishnah, Beraisa, or statement may appear repetitive, unnecessary, internally inconsistent, or written in an imprecise way.

Other times, the difficulty comes from outside the source. Another Mishnah, Beraisa, pasuk, or statement may seem to contradict it. The Gemara may also ask a logical question, showing that the statement or explanation is difficult to understand based on sevara.

We will first discuss the internal type.

When the Statement Appears Repetitive

Sometimes the Gemara asks why the source seems to be teaching the same thing more than once.

It may compare the beginning and end of a Mishnah and ask:

הַיְינוּ רִישָׁא, הַיְינוּ סֵיפָא

"The first part and the last part appear to be saying the same thing."

Or it may say:

הַיְינוּ תַּנָּא קַמָּא

"This is the same opinion as the Tanna Kamma."

The Gemara may also ask:

למה לי?

"Why do I need this?"

In each of these cases, the basic kushya is the same. If the point was already taught, what is the additional statement coming to add?

When the Statement Appears Unnecessary or Unclear

Sometimes the source is not repeating itself exactly, but the Gemara still does not understand why the point needed to be stated.

It may ask:

מאי קא משמע לן?

"What is this coming to teach us?"

The statement appears obvious or unnecessary, and the Gemara wants to know its chiddush.

It may ask:

מאי נפקא מינה?

"What practical difference comes out of this?"

Here, the Gemara wants to understand why the distinction matters.

Or it may ask:

היכי משכחת לה?

"How can such a case be found?"

The Gemara is asking whether the case described by the source can actually occur, and under what circumstances.

Although these questions are somewhat different, they are all asking whether the statement is necessary, meaningful, and relevant.

When the Statement Appears Internally Inconsistent

Sometimes one part of the source seems to contradict another part.

The Gemara may say:

הא גופא קשיא

"This itself is difficult."

Usually, this does not mean that the two parts directly contradict each other. Rather, an inference from the first part seems to lead to one conclusion, while an inference from the second part leads to the opposite conclusion.

The source therefore appears internally inconsistent and needs to be explained.

When the Statement Could Have Been Written More Precisely

Sometimes the Gemara accepts the basic ruling, but asks why the source was written in that particular way.

It may say:

ליפלוג וליתני בדידה

"Let it make the distinction and teach it within that case itself."

The Gemara is asking why the distinction was not stated more precisely within the original case. Very often, writing it that way would not only be clearer, but would also teach a greater chiddush.

The Gemara may also begin:

אדקתני...

"Instead of teaching..."

It then suggests a different formulation that would have expressed the point more clearly or more strongly.

Here, the kushya is not necessarily that the ruling is wrong. The difficulty is that the source could seemingly have been written in a more accurate way and taught us more.

Kushyos from Outside the Source

Other kushyos do not come from a difficulty within the statement itself. They come from something outside it.

There are two broad types.

A Logical Kushya

Sometimes the Gemara challenges a statement or explanation based on sevara.

The statement may be understandable on its own, but another Amora sees a logical difficulty in it.

A common expression is:

מתקיף לה

"He challenged it."

The Gemara will then explain what is logically difficult with the statement or explanation.

This type of kushya is not based on another Mishnah or Beraisa. It is based on the claim that the position itself does not make sense, or that it leads to a difficult conclusion.

A Kushya from Another Source

Other times, the Gemara challenges the statement from an earlier source.

If an Amora makes a statement and a Mishnah or Beraisa appears to contradict him, the Gemara may say:

מיתיבי

"They raised an objection."

Or:

איתיביה

"He raised an objection to him."

The Gemara then brings the Mishnah or Beraisa that seems to contradict the Amora's statement.

There is also a different type of contradiction, where two sources of similar authority seem to disagree with one another.

For example, one Mishnah may seem to contradict another Mishnah, or one Beraisa may seem to contradict another Beraisa.

The Gemara may introduce this with:

ורמינהו

"And they raised a contradiction."

Here, the Gemara is placing the two sources next to each other and asking how both can be correct.

Sometimes the difficulty comes from another statement that was taught elsewhere.

The Gemara may say:

והאמר...

"But did he not say...?"

For example, an Amora may explain the words of a Tanna in a certain way, but another earlier statement may appear to explain that same Tanna differently. The Gemara then brings that statement and asks how the two explanations can fit together.

In all these cases, the most important thing is to identify exactly what the kushya is attacking.

Is there a problem within the wording of the statement itself? Is there a logical difficulty with the explanation? Or is there another source that does not seem to fit?

Once the student understands where the difficulty lies, he can better understand what the teretz must accomplish.

A Teretz — תירוץ

After understanding the different types of kushyos, we can now examine the different types of terutzim.

Just as there are two broad types of kushyos, there are also two broad types of terutzim.

Sometimes the teretz answers a difficulty within the source itself.

Other times, it answers a difficulty that came from outside the source, either from sevara or from another source.

Answering an Internal Kushya

As we explained earlier, sometimes the Gemara asks why a statement was necessary. The source may appear to repeat something that was already taught, or it may seem to be stating something obvious.

One type of answer is:

מהו דתימא... קא משמע לן

"You might have thought... therefore, it comes to teach us..."

The Gemara explains that although the statement first appeared obvious, there was another reasonable possibility that we might have considered. The source was therefore needed to exclude that possibility and teach us the proper conclusion.

The Gemara may also answer:

לא צריכא

"No, it is necessary."

This means that the statement is not unnecessary. The Gemara will then explain the particular case or chiddush for which it was needed.

Sometimes, when several statements appear repetitive, the Gemara will explain:

צריכא

"Each one is necessary."

The Gemara then shows that each statement teaches something that could not have been learned from the others.

Another internal kushya may ask why the source did not express its teaching in a different way that would seem to teach an even greater chiddush.

The Gemara may answer:

לא מיבעיא קאמר

"It is speaking in the form of: not only..."

The meaning is that the source is arranged in stages. It is teaching that not only is the ruling true in the first case, but it is true even in the second case, where the chiddush is greater.

In these answers, the Gemara is showing that the source was not repetitive or poorly written. Once we understand its purpose properly, we see why its wording and arrangement were necessary.

Answering a Kushya from Outside the Source

When a kushya comes from another source, there are really three parts to the difficulty.

There is the original statement.

There is the second source that appears to contradict it.

And there is the assumption that connects the two and makes them into a contradiction.

A teretz can therefore answer the kushya in one of three ways.

It can show that we did not understand the first statement properly.

It can show that we did not understand the second source properly.

Or it can show that both were understood correctly, but that they were never truly comparable in the way we assumed.

Sometimes the Gemara reinterprets one of the statements and says:

הכי קאמר

"This is what it is saying."

The original wording remains, but the Gemara explains its proper meaning. Once the statement is understood correctly, the contradiction falls away.

Sometimes the Gemara says:

הכי תני

"This is how it should be taught."

Here, the Gemara explains that the source must be read or formulated differently from the way it was first understood.

Other times, the Gemara distinguishes between the two cases:

שאני הכא

"Here it is different."

Or:

שאני התם

"There it is different."

Both sources may be completely correct, but they are discussing different circumstances. The kushya arose only because we assumed that the two cases were the same.

The Gemara may also say:

הכא במאי עסקינן

"What are we dealing with here?"

It then explains the specific circumstances of one of the sources. Once the case is properly defined, we see that it does not contradict the other source.

The same basic method can answer a logical kushya as well. The Gemara may explain the statement more precisely, limit it to a particular case, or show that the logical comparison on which the question was based is not correct.

The purpose of a teretz is therefore not merely to make the question disappear.

It must identify exactly where the misunderstanding occurred. Was the wording misunderstood? Was the logic misunderstood? Was the case defined incorrectly? Or were two different situations compared as though they were the same?

Once the student understands which part of the kushya the teretz is changing, he can see how the difficulty has truly been resolved.

A Proof — ראיה

A proof is brought to support a statement or explanation.

The first thing a student needs to understand is that a proof is not the same thing as a kushya.

When I bring a proof to my position, I am showing that there is evidence that my position is correct. But that does not necessarily mean that every other position is impossible.

A kushya is different. A kushya shows that there is a difficulty in the other position. If the kushya cannot be answered, that position can no longer stand as it was originally explained.

A proof supports my side.

A kushya challenges the other side.

There are two main places where the Gemara may bring a proof.

Sometimes the proof supports a maamar, a statement or opinion that was said earlier.

Other times, the proof supports a teretz, showing that the answer is not merely a possible way of escaping the difficulty, but is actually the proper way to understand the source.

A Proof to a Maamar

When an Amora gives an opinion, the Gemara may bring an earlier source to support him.

There are two common forms of this type of proof.

The first is when a Beraisa states his opinion explicitly.

The Gemara may say:

תניא כוותיה

"A Beraisa was taught in accordance with his opinion."

This is a strong support. The Amora is not standing alone. We now see that an earlier Tannaitic source says the same thing.

The second type is less explicit.

Sometimes a Mishnah or Beraisa does not state the Amora's position directly, but something can be inferred from it that seems to support him.

The Gemara may say:

לימא מסייע ליה

"Let us say that this supports him."

Here, the proof is not yet certain. The Gemara is suggesting that the earlier source may be understood as support for the Amora's position.

The discussion may then accept the proof or explain why the source does not necessarily prove his opinion.

A Proof to a Teretz

A proof may also come after a teretz.

Someone asked a kushya on a statement or source, and the Gemara gave an answer. At first, the answer may appear to be only one possible way to resolve the difficulty.

The Gemara may then bring a proof showing that this answer is not merely possible. It is actually the more accurate way to understand the source.

One common expression is:

דיקא נמי

"The wording is also precise."

The Gemara examines the words or grammar of the Mishnah or Beraisa and shows that its wording supports the teretz that was given.

Another expression is:

הכי נמי מסתברא

"This also makes sense."

Here, the Gemara brings an additional reason or source showing that the explanation given in the teretz is the most reasonable understanding.

This changes the position of the teretz.

At first, the teretz was only defending the statement from the kushya. After the proof, the Gemara shows that the teretz may actually be the strongest reading of the source.

Therefore, whenever a student sees a proof, he should ask two questions:

What is this proof coming to support?

And how strong is the proof?

Is it an explicit source that agrees with the statement?

Is it only an inference that may support it?

Or is it showing that a teretz is not merely possible, but is actually the more precise and reasonable explanation?

Tools for Talmud

Part Two

Additional Tools for Learning

A Short Note About Using AI in Gemara Learning

Baruch Hashem, in our generation we have been given a new tool called AI.

As someone who writes a lot with AI, I have used it many times, both for writing and also for Torah purposes. I would like to mention a few ways that I have found it helpful in learning, especially in Gemara.

Of course, AI is changing very quickly. It is possible that by the time this kuntres is printed, or even a year or two after it is written, some of these details may already be outdated.

But for now, these are a few practical ways that I have used AI in learning.

One helpful use is for review questions.

One of the ways to review a sugya is to be asked questions on it. After a person learns a Gemara, he can put the text into AI and ask it to make questions on the sugya.

For example, he can ask it to make simple review questions.

He can ask it to test him on the shakla v'tarya.

He can ask it to make questions on the statement, the question, the answer, the kushya, the terutz, and the ראיה.

This can be a good way to do chazarah.

The better the text that is given to the AI, the better the questions will usually be.

A person can use the Gemara and translation from Sefaria or Steinsaltz. That can be useful, although in my experience it is not always the best option.

My personal impression is that if a person is using an ArtScroll Gemara, taking a picture of the section and using OCR to turn it into text can often

work better. Then he can put that text into ChatGPT and ask it to make questions, summaries, or review sheets on the sugya.

Another helpful use is simply discussing the sugya.

A person can use AI as a place to write out what he is thinking. He can write his understanding of the Gemara, ask the questions that are bothering him, and try to organize the different parts of the sugya.

Writing by hand has its own advantage, and it is not something to ignore. But AI also has an advantage, because it gives a person a place to speak through the sugya and keep his thoughts in one organized place.

This can be very helpful for notes.

It can help a person see what he understands, what he does not understand, and what questions he still has.

At the same time, AI is not a lamdan.

It is not always going to give the best lomdishe answer. It may misunderstand the Gemara, and it may give an answer that sounds good but is not really correct.

But even so, it can be useful for getting thoughts down, organizing questions, and clarifying what still needs to be asked.

Another useful tool is a mind map.

A mind map means that instead of writing the sugya only as regular notes, the main topic is placed in the center, and the different parts of the sugya branch out from it.

For example, a mind map of a sugya can show the main question, the answers, the different opinions, the proofs, the rejections, and the conclusion.

This can be helpful because sometimes a student understands the words, but he does not yet see the whole structure of the sugya.

A mind map helps him see the sugya as one picture.

AI can help create an outline for such a mind map. A person can ask AI to organize the sugya according to topics, steps, opinions, questions, and answers. Then he can either draw the mind map himself, or use a program that creates mind maps.

This can be especially useful in a longer sugya, where there are many pieces and it is easy to lose the overall structure.

So AI can be helpful in several ways.

It can help make review questions.

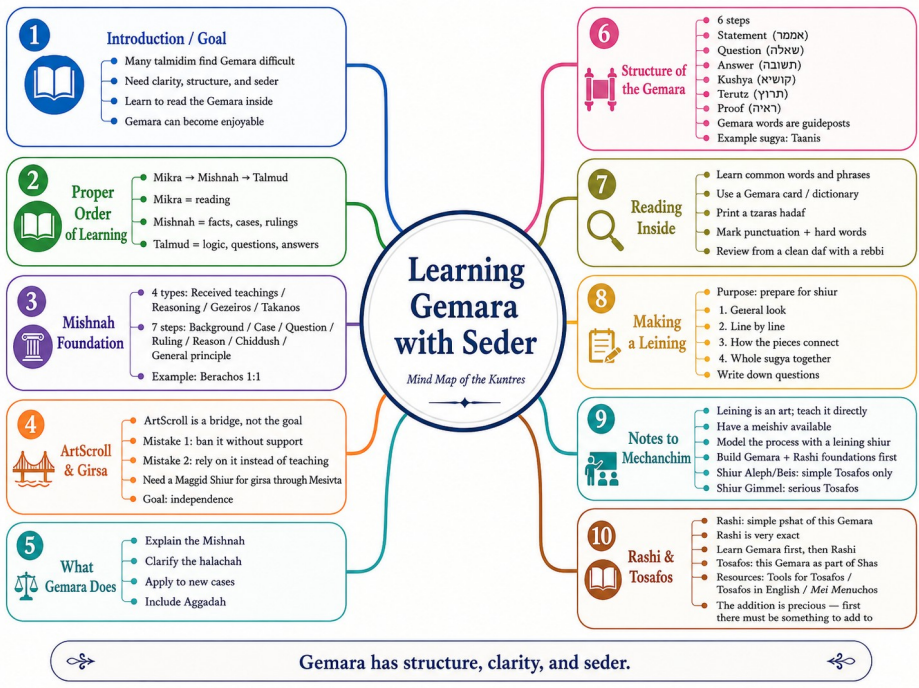
It can help a person write down and organize his thoughts.

It can help create summaries, outlines, and mind maps.

The main thing is to use it with seichel.

It is a tool for organizing, reviewing, and thinking through the sugya. It is not always reliable for the final answer, and it is not necessarily the place to get the deepest lomdus.

But when it is used properly, it can be a very helpful aid in learning Gemara.



Example of a mind map of everything discussed in this kuntres, created using AI.

Using Diagrams to Understand a Sugya

Another helpful way to keep track of a sugya is through diagrams.

A mind map helps a student see the general structure of the sugya: the main topic, the questions, the answers, and the different opinions.

A diagram can do something slightly different. It can show how the cases relate to one another.

This can be especially helpful when the Gemara is discussing several similar cases, when one detail changes from one case to the next, or when the sugya involves a physical arrangement that is difficult to picture only from the words.

There is an excellent book called Charting the Sea of the Talmud, by Yisrael Ury, which explains how to use diagrams in learning Gemara.

When I taught, I introduced the idea of diagrams and encouraged the students to use them. The truth is that I was not always the greatest expert at constructing the diagrams myself.

One of my students, who was a mathematician, was much better at it, and he helped construct many of the diagrams.

Today, this has become much easier.

As long as a person has a general understanding of the sugya and knows what he wants the diagram to show, he can often use AI to help create it.

The student can explain the different cases to the AI, describe which details remain the same and which details change, and ask it to arrange them in a clear visual form.

In most sugyos, a simple two-dimensional diagram will be enough.

Sometimes, however, a three-dimensional diagram can also be helpful. This is usually not necessary, but it can be useful in a sugya where several physical cases or different spatial relationships have to be compared.

The main point is not to create something beautiful or complicated.

The diagram is there to help the student see the sugya more clearly.

If the diagram makes the cases easier to distinguish and helps the student remember how they relate to one another, then it has done its job.

Tools for Talmud

Part Three

Suggested Books and Resources

General Introduction and Background

ArtScroll's Introduction to the Talmud

ArtScroll's Introduction to the Talmud is something like a Swiss Army knife.

It is not devoted to only one aspect of learning Gemara. Instead, it brings together many different introductions, histories, translations, and reference materials connected to the Talmud and Torah Sheba'al Peh.

One of the most valuable parts of the book is its collection of translations of three major works.

The first is the Rambam's introduction to Peirush HaMishnayos, which explains the transmission of Torah Sheba'al Peh, the different types of teachings found in the Mishnah, and how the Mishnah was organized.

The second is Iggeres Rav Sherira Gaon, which gives the basic history of the Mishnah and Gemara and explains the generations through which they were transmitted and compiled.

The third is the Ramchal's introduction to Aggadah, which gives the student an important foundation for understanding the language and method of the Aggadic sections of the Gemara.

In addition, the book gives a basic history of the Tannaim and Amoraim and includes information about the individual Sages. This can be very useful when a student comes across a name in the Gemara and wants to know when that Tanna or Amora lived, who his teachers and students were, and where he fits into the general order of the generations.

The book contains other useful material as well, including introductions to Torah Sheba'al Peh, the major works of Chazal, and the background and structure of the Talmud.

Because it covers so many subjects, it does not necessarily go as deeply into each one as a book devoted entirely to that particular topic. But that is also its great advantage.

If someone wants to buy only one general book about the Talmud, this is probably the best choice. It gives the student useful information in many different areas and serves as a reference that he can return to again and again.

ArtScroll's From Yavneh to Pumbedisa

From Yavneh to Pumbedisa gives an excellent overview of the historical world in which the Mishnah and Gemara developed. Beginning with the destruction of the Second Beis Hamikdash, it follows the generations of the Tannaim and Amoraim and explains how Torah Sheba'al Peh was preserved, clarified, and transmitted until the sealing of the Gemara.

This background adds a great deal to a person's learning. When a student understands the historical and social setting of Chazal, the names and debates in the Gemara no longer seem like isolated statements. He begins to see the different generations, the Torah centers in Eretz Yisrael and Bavel, and the larger story in which the discussions of the Talmud took place.

The book is based on Doros HaRishonim, the classic work that gives a deep understanding of the historical and halachic development of Torah Sheba'al Peh. For someone who wants to see the larger picture before entering the details of each individual sugya, this is an excellent place to begin.

Rabbi Avigdor Miller's Behold a Nation, Volume Three

Behold a Nation, Volume Three, is not a guide to learning Gemara itself. Its value is that it gives the reader the historical and hashkafic background to the period in which the Mishnah and Gemara were formed.

Rabbi Avigdor Miller discusses the history of the Jewish people after the destruction of the Second Beis Hamikdash, with particular attention to the generations of the Tannaim and Amoraim. He explains the events of that period through the outlook of Torah and Chazal, showing how the Jewish

people survived through their attachment to Torah and through the hashgachah of Hashem.

A major theme of the book is its response to secular Jewish historians, especially Heinrich Graetz. Instead of viewing Jewish history as only the result of natural political and social forces, Rabbi Miller presents it as the history of a nation with a unique purpose and a special relationship with Hashem.

This gives the reader a deeper appreciation for the world in which Torah Sheba'al Peh was preserved, explained, and recorded. For someone who wants to understand not only what happened during the period of the Tannaim and Amoraim, but also how to view that history through the eyes of Torah, this is a very valuable book.

Understanding the Structure and Method of Gemara

Understanding the Talmud

Understanding the Talmud, by Rabbi Yitzchak Feigenbaum, is a very helpful guide to understanding the language and structure of the Gemara.

The book goes through many of the words and expressions that appear again and again throughout Shas. It does not only translate them. It explains what they tell the student about the discussion.

For example, some expressions introduce a question. Others bring a proof, reject an answer, limit a statement, or return to an earlier explanation. Once the student understands these expressions, the words of the Gemara begin to act like guideposts. They tell him what the Gemara is doing and where the sugya is moving.

This is especially helpful because a student may know the translation of each individual word and still not understand the flow. The book helps him move from translating the Gemara to following its structure and reasoning.

It also gives general rules for learning and shows how a section of Gemara can be broken down and organized.

For someone who wants to become more familiar with the common patterns of the Gemara and understand the shakla v'tarya more clearly, this is a very useful book.

Practical Tools for Reading Gemara

The Gemara Card

The Gemara Card is one of the most useful practical tools for a student who is beginning to read Gemara inside.

It brings together many of the words and pieces of information that appear again and again in the Gemara. It includes common Aramaic words, abbreviations, basic grammar, names of Tannaim and Amoraim, measurements, Gematria, and help with reading Rashi script.

Its main advantage is that everything is available in one place.

Instead of stopping every few words to open a dictionary, the student can keep the card next to his Gemara and quickly look up the basic words that he needs. Because the information is arranged clearly, he can usually find what he is looking for without interrupting the flow of his learning for too long.

As we explained earlier, I would not suggest writing the translation above every easy word on the page. That can make the Gemara crowded and difficult to read. It is usually better to write only the harder words above the Gemara and use the Gemara Card for the more common words and expressions.

The card does not replace learning the language of the Gemara. Its purpose is to help the student while he is learning it.

For a beginner who is trying to move from depending on a translation to reading the Gemara inside, it is a very valuable tool.

Talmudo Beyado

Talmudo Beyado is a very helpful tool for a student who is beginning to read Gemara inside.

Instead of working like a regular dictionary, it goes through Shas daf by daf and lists the more difficult words in the order in which they appear on the page. The student can simply turn to the daf he is learning and quickly find the translation of the words he does not know.

This saves a great deal of time. The student does not have to stop in the middle of the Gemara and search through a large dictionary, especially when he is not sure of the root or the exact spelling of the word.

It is particularly useful with the method we explained earlier. The student can use a Gemara Card for the common words and Talmudo Beyado for the harder words that appear on that particular daf.

The full edition covers the entire Shas, and there are also smaller editions for individual masechtos that can be kept inside the Gemara.

For a student who already understands the general meaning of the sugya and is now trying to learn how to read it inside, this can make the process much easier.

Organizing and Visualizing a Sugya

Charting the Sea of Talmud

Another very helpful resource is Charting the Sea of Talmud, by Dr. Yisrael Ury.

The book teaches a person how to use diagrams to organize a sugya. By using boxes, arrows, labels, and other simple markings, the student can show the different opinions, questions, proofs, answers, and conclusions in a clear visual form.

This can be especially useful in a longer sugya, where there are many cases or opinions and it becomes difficult to remember how everything

fits together. Instead of seeing only a long discussion, the student can look at the diagram and see the structure of the sugya in front of him.

The book gives a clear method for making these diagrams and shows many examples of how they can be used. Even a person who is not naturally skilled at drawing diagrams can learn the basic system and begin using it in his own learning.

Today, AI can also make this much easier. Once the student understands the sugya and knows what he wants the diagram to show, he can often use AI to help arrange the information clearly. But he still needs to understand the basic method, and this book is an excellent guide for learning how to do that.

Learning Tosafos

Tools for Tosafos

For anyone beginning to learn Tosafos, one of the books I recommend most strongly is Tools for Tosafos.

Many bochurim are expected to learn Tosafos without first being taught how Tosafos works. They may be able to translate some of the words, but they do not yet understand its language, its structure, or the different expressions that Tosafos uses.

Tools for Tosafos fills in much of that missing background. It discusses the history of Tosafos, explains its language and common leshonos, and shows the student how a Tosafos is generally built. It also explains many of the basic terms and ideas that a student needs in order to follow what Tosafos is doing.

The book is written very clearly and is easy to use. It is also arranged in a way that makes it easy to return to when a student needs help with a particular word, expression, or type of question.

What I especially like about the book is that it does not waste the student's time. Almost every page is teaching him something practical that will help him understand Tosafos better.

In my opinion, any bochur who is learning Tosafos seriously should have this book and go through it. It gives him the basic tools that are too often assumed, but never actually taught.

Tosafos in English

Tosafos in English can be very helpful for a student who needs an English explanation of Tosafos.

Its main advantage is that it makes Tosafos accessible and often includes notes, questions, and different ways of understanding the sugya. This can be especially useful for a more advanced student.

At the same time, the English can sometimes make the discussion feel longer or more complicated, and the explanation may not always follow the same approach as the student's maggid shiur.

For this reason, it is a valuable tool, but it should be used together with the shiur and not treated as the only way to understand Tosafos.

Tools for Talmud

Final Section

Conclusion: A Final Word

We have now gone together through many different tools that can help a person learn Gemara.

Some of them help a student understand the structure of the Gemara. Some help him read the words inside. Others help him review, organize a sugya, prepare for shiur, or slowly become more independent in his learning.

I do not expect every student or every maggid shiur to use every method mentioned in this kuntres.

No person learns perfectly, and no single method works equally well for everyone. One student may gain a great deal from marking the Gemara and using a Gemara Card. Another may benefit more from diagrams, review questions, or a short farher. One yeshiva may be ready to introduce leining earlier, while another may need to spend more time building the basic skills first.

The purpose of these tools is not to create one rigid system.

Their purpose is to give the student and the rebbi more ways to reach the same goal: that the student should understand what he is learning, learn how to read it inside, and gradually become more capable of learning on his own.

Therefore, my suggestion is simple.

Choose one or two of these tools and try them seriously.

See whether they help.

If they do, continue using them. If they need to be adjusted, adjust them. If one method does not work for a particular talmid, try another one.

The tool is there to serve the learning. The learning is not there to serve the tool.

Writing this kuntres is, in a certain sense, a closing of something very personal for me.

From my own years as a student, and later from my experience teaching Gemara, I have come to believe that this is one of the areas most in need of attention in yeshivos today.

There are many talmidim who are capable of understanding and enjoying Gemara, but who were never given the basic tools in an organized way. Sometimes they are expected to know skills that were never clearly taught to them. Then, when they struggle, they begin to believe that Gemara is simply not for them.

It does not have to remain that way.

I ask the talmid, the rebbi, and the mechanech to approach these ideas with an open mind.

Not every suggestion here will be right for every place. I am also not claiming that these pages contain the final word on how Gemara should be taught. They are the methods and ideas that I have found helpful, and that I have seen help others.

But when a talmid is struggling, we should be willing to ask whether another approach may help him.

Sometimes a small change in the way a Gemara is taught can open an entire world for a student.

It is my hope that the tools in this kuntres will help more talmidim find clarity, confidence, and pleasure in learning Gemara, and help more rebbeim give their talmidim the gift of being able to learn it for themselves.

Thank you.