



General Gemara Concepts

The structure, voices, and categories that organize the Talmud

This appendix covers much of the same territory as Appendix B, but groups it by concept rather than by letter. Use **Appendix B** when you want to know what a particular word means; use **this appendix** when you want to see how the pieces fit together.

Structure and layers

Mishnah *MISH-nah* מִשְׁנָה

The authoritative compilation of the Oral Torah, written in Hebrew and organized into six *Sedarim*, sixty-three *masechtos*, and individual *perakim*. Compiled by Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi around 188 CE. It is the text on which the Gemara comments.

Gemara *gub-MAR-ab* גְּמָרָא

The Aramaic commentary and elaboration on the Mishnah, compiled between approximately 200 and 500 CE. The word derives from a root meaning "to complete" or "to learn." Together with the Mishnah, it forms the Talmud.

Bavli and Yerushalmi *BAV-lee / yub-roo-SHAL-mee* בְּבִלְי / יְרוּשָׁלְמִי

Two distinct Talmuds were compiled: the *Bavli*, in the academies of Babylonia, and the *Yerushalmi*, in Eretz Yisrael. The Bavli is regarded as more authoritative and complete, and is the default reference when "the Talmud" is mentioned without qualification.

Sugya *SOO-gyah* סוגיא

A self-contained unit of Talmudic discussion on a single topic, and the basic building block of Gemara learning. A sugya typically opens with a Mishnah or statement, raises questions, brings sources and proofs, and works toward a resolution.

Shakla v'Tarya *SHAK-lah v'TAR-yah* שקלא וטריא

Literally "give and take." The dialectical back-and-forth of Talmudic argument (questions, challenges, attempted proofs, refutations, and counter-arguments) that characterizes the Gemara's reasoning.

The historical voices

Tannaim *tab-nah-EEM* תנאים

The earliest rabbinic authorities (c. 10–220 CE) whose teachings appear in the Mishnah and *Baraisos*. Among them: Hillel and Shammai, Rabbi Akiva, Rabbi Meir, and Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi. A later authority (*Amora*) generally cannot disagree with a Tanna unless he can cite another Tanna in support.

Amoraim *ah-moh-rab-EEM* אמוראים

The "expounders" (c. 200–500 CE) whose discussions comprise the Gemara. They interpret and apply Tannaitic teachings but generally cannot contradict them outright. Among them: Rav, Shmuel, Rabbi Yochanan, Resh Lakish, Abaye, and Rava.

Stammaim *stab-mah-EEM* סתמאים

The anonymous editorial voice of the Gemara. These unnamed editors wove together earlier teachings, supplied transitions and clarifying questions, and shaped the flowing dialectical structure of the text.

Savoraim *sah-voh-rab-EEM* סבוראים

Post-Amoraic scholars (c. 500–700 CE) who made the final editorial additions to the Talmud: explanatory comments, clarifications, and the final fixing of certain passages.

Types of sources

Baraisa *bab-RYE-sab* ברייתא

A Tannaitic teaching that was *not* included in Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi's Mishnah but preserved elsewhere. The Gemara frequently cites *Baraisos* as evidence. They are introduced by phrases such as תניא ("it was taught") or תנו רבנן ("our Rabbis taught").

Tosefta *tob-SEF-tah* תוספתא

A collection of *Baraisos* organized in parallel to the Mishnah, compiled around the same time. It often provides longer or alternative versions of Mishnaic teachings.

Mechiltos d'Rabbi Yishmael and d'Rabbi Akiva *muh-chIL-tos d'rab-BEE yish-mab-AYL / d'rab-BEE ab-KEE-vah* ברייתא דרבי ישמעאל / דרבי עקיבא

Collections of hermeneutical principles (the rules by which laws are derived from Torah verses) attributed to these two major Tannaim.

Types of analysis

Peshat *pub-SHAT* פשט

The plain, straightforward meaning of the text.

Drash *DRASH* דרש

Homiletical or exegetical interpretation, derived through formal techniques.

Halacha *hab-lab-chAH* הלכה

The practical legal ruling that emerges from discussion. Literally, "the way to walk."

Aggadah *ag-ab-DAH* אגדה

Non-legal material in the Talmud: stories, ethics, philosophy, theology, history, even medicine. It is often more accessible to beginners but is considered less authoritative for purely legal purposes.

Sevara *svab-RAH* סברה

Logical reasoning. A conclusion reached through pure logic rather than through citation of a textual source. The Gemara holds *sevara* in high regard.

Gezeira Shava *gub-ZAY-rah SHAH-vah* גזירה שוה

One of the classical hermeneutical rules: deriving a law by linking two passages that share an unusual or distinctive word. A *gezeira shava* must be received by tradition; it cannot be invented at will.

Kal v'Chomer *kal v'chOH-mer* קל וחומר

An *a fortiori* argument: if X applies in a lighter case, it certainly applies in a heavier one. One of the most common reasoning patterns in the Gemara.

EXAMPLE If a child is not permitted to stay up until ten on a school night, he is certainly not permitted to stay up until midnight. The argument moves from the lighter (*kal*) case to the heavier (*chomer*): if the lesser is forbidden, the greater is forbidden as well.

Outcomes of discussion

L'Halacha *lub-bah-lab-chAH* להלכה

What the practical law is: the final ruling, as determined by the Gemara or by later authorities.

L'Maaseh *lub-MAH-seh* למעשה

In practice; how something is actually carried out.

Teiku *TAY-koo* תֵּיכוּ

A question that remains unresolved within the Gemara. Traditionally read as an acronym indicating that *Tishbi* (Eliyahu HaNavi) will one day resolve such questions. In practice, an unresolved *safek* generally leads to a stringent ruling.

D'Oraisa and D'Rabbanan *d'oh-RYE-sab / d'rab-bab-NAN* דְּאוֹרַיִסָּא / דְּרַבָּנָן

Torah law and Rabbinic law. *D'Oraisa* obligations derive directly from the Torah and carry greater stringency; *D'Rabbanan* obligations were enacted by the Sages, and they may carry greater room for leniency in cases of doubt.

Maskanah *mas-kab-NAH* מַסְקָנָה

The settled conclusion that emerges after the Gemara's back-and-forth. After raising questions, bringing proofs, and resolving objections, the Gemara often arrives at a *maskanah*, the operative understanding of the sugya. Identifying it is essential to learning a sugya well.

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