

# A Guide to the Layout of a Talmud Page

## [6] EIN MISHPAT, NER MITZVAH:

(Heb., 'Well of Justice, Lamp of Commandment') Two indices compiled by R' Yehoshua Boaz in the sixteenth century. These provide references to major Jewish law codes that report authoritative rulings on topics covered in the Mishnah and Gemara. External works referenced in this way include Rambam's (12th c., Spain and Egypt) *Mishneh Torah* (Heb., 'Repetition of the Law'), the *Shulchan Arukh* (Heb., 'Set Table') of R' Yosef b. Ephraim Caro (16th c., Israel), the *Arba'ah Turim* (Heb., 'Four Rows') of R' Ya'akov b. Asher (14th c. Spain), and the *Sefer Mitzvot Gadol* (Heb., 'Great Book of Commandments') of R' Moshe b. Ya'akov of Coucy (13th c. France).

## [9] OTHER COMMENTARIES:

Various other commentaries appear in the margins of a printed page of Talmud. None of these minor works cover the entire Talmud,

so different tractates include different commentaries in this area. Among these are the comments of Rabbenu Chananel (11th c., Tunisia), the *Sefer haMaftelah* (Heb., 'Book of the Key') of R' Nissin (11th c., Tunisia), *Tosefot Yeshanim* (Heb.: 'Additions of the Ancients') 13th c. France and Germany), the *Mainz Commentary* compiled by the students of Rabbenu Gershom b. Yehudah (11th c., Germany), the *Tosefot Rid* (Heb.: 'Additions of the Rid) of R' Yesheyahu diTrani (13th c., Italy), and the *Shittah Mequbbetzet* (Heb.: 'Gathered Interpretation') of R' Bezalel Ashkenazi (16th c., Egypt and Jerusalem).

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[4] **TOSAFOT:** *The Tosafot (Heb., 'additions') are medieval commentaries on the text of the Talmud composed mainly in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The Tosafot are not the product of a single author or school of commentators, but are rather the work of a variety of talmudic scholars living mainly in France, Germany, and Spain. While Rashi's comments focus on the plain meaning of the text, the tosafists tend to concentrate on analysis of difficult passages, exploring issues, contradictions, and problems raised by the text of the Gemara. Often the Tosafot approach a subject using the logic and style of inquiry of the Gemara. Occasionally Tosefot address an interpretation or explanation offered by Rashi to examine it more thoroughly or to present an alternative approach to the subject. On a printed Talmud page, the comments of the Tosefot are set in a semi-cursive typeface known as 'Rashi script,' and they always appear immediately adjacent to the Mishnah and Gemara in the large block of text positioned opposite Rashi's commentary.*

[1] **MISHNAH:** The Mishnah (Heb., 'repetition') is the primary record of the teaching, decisions, and disputes of a group of Jewish religious and judicial scholars, known as *Tannaim*, who were active from about 30 BCE to 200 CE, mostly in the areas now known as Israel and Palestine. Originally transmitted orally, the Mishnah was redacted into its current form and committed to writing around the year 200 CE by R' Yehudah haNasi. The language of the Mishnah is Hebrew. The Mishnah is divided into sixty-three 'tractates,' which are organized into six 'orders' according to their subject matter.

[2] **GEMARA:** The Gemara (Aramaic, 'study,') is an analysis of and expansion upon the material presented in the Mishnah. Taken together, the Mishnah and Gemara make up the Talmud. The Gemara records the oral discussions of a group of scholars, known as *Amoraim*, who were active from about 200 to 500 CE, in the areas of present day Iraq, Israel, and Palestine. These discussions often center around statements of the *Tannaim* and are structured by the anonymous voice of a redactor (or group of redactors) known as the *stam* (Heb., 'plain' or 'unattributed'). There are two versions of the Gemara. The *Yerushalmi* (also known as the 'Jerusalem' or 'Palestinian' Talmud) was compiled in what is now northern Israel around 400 CE. The *Bavli* or Babylonian Talmud was redacted about a hundred years later in the Jewish communities of Mesopotamia. Traditionally the redaction of the *Bavli* is attributed to R' Ashi and his student Ravina. The *Talmud Bavli* is the more commonly studied of the two and is considered to be more authoritative when the two offer different legal rulings. The primary language of the Gemara in both versions is Aramaic, although quoted material in Hebrew is common (mostly from biblical texts or earlier *tannaitic* material), and words in Greek, Latin, or other languages occasionally occur. In literary form, the Gemara is a complex combination of legal debate, case law, legend, textual analysis, and philosophical inquiry. Its subject matter covers nearly every imaginable facet of ancient Jewish life, ranging from religious, civil, and criminal law to biblical interpretation to speculation about and investigation of the natural world.

[3] **RASHI:** *Rashi (an acronym for R' Shlomo Yitzchaki) was an eleventh century scholar active in France. Rashi compiled the first complete commentary on the Talmud. His commentary focuses on helping students understand the plain meaning of the text. Both the Mishnah and Gemara are written in a brief, terse style, without the use of punctuation or vowel markings. Rashi's comments are therefore directed toward helping readers work their way through the text and understand its basic form and content. Rashi also offers explanations of unusual or rare vocabulary and concepts and occasionally indicates preferred readings in cases where manuscripts differ. Rashi's commentary is always set in a semi-cursive typeface called 'Rashi script,' is positioned on the gutter side of a printed page of Talmud.*

[7] **TORAH OR:** (Heb., 'Torah is Light') Compiled by R' Yehoshua Boaz (16th c., Italy), this index provides citations for biblical references.

## [5] MESORET HASHAS:

(Heb., 'Transmission of the Six Orders') An index compiled by R' Yehoshua Boaz (16th c. Italy), later expanded by R' Yesheyahu Berlin (18th c., Germany), *Mesoret haShas* provides cross references to similar passages elsewhere in the Talmud.

## [8] GLOSSES:

Most modern printed Talmud editions include short definitions, comments, emendations, and cross references from a variety of scholars active during the 17th through 19th centuries. Among the most important of these commentaries are those of R' Eliyahu b. Shlomo (the 'Gra,' or 'Gaon of Vilna,' 18th c., Lithuania), the *Hagahot haBah* (Heb.: 'Commentaries of the Bah') of R' Yoel Sirkes (17th c., Poland), the comments of R' Yesheyahu Berlin (18th c., Germany), and the *Gilyon haShas* (Heb.: 'Marginalia on the Six Orders') of R' Akiva Eger (19th c., Germany).

