

**JEWISH TEXTS: THE OWNER'S MANUAL**  
**LEARNER'S VERSION**  
by **Rabbi Judith Z. Abrams, Ph.D.**

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Goals: To make learner aware of classic Jewish texts. To give learner the skills he/she needs to use those texts.

Objectives: Learner will be able to

...look up a chapter and verse in the Tanach.

...identify the basic contents of each book in the Tanach, each order of the Mishnah and each volume of the Mishneh Torah and Shulchan Aruch.

...tell the difference between midrash, aggadah and halakhah.

...trace an idea through the major Jewish sources.

**Materials you will need:**

A Chumash: A book of the first five books of the Bible; the Torah.

A Tanach.

The Mishnah, translated in one volume by Danby, or in seven volumes with Hebrew, English Translation and Commentary by Philip Blackman, Judaica Press.

The Talmud, Soncino Translation (or other, e.g., The Steinsaltz Talmud (Random House) or the Artscroll Talmud). Davka (1-800-621-8227/www.davka.com) has the Soncino Talmud on CD and it also includes the Tanach and Mishnah in English.

A Jewish calendar that lists the Torah portions for each week.

The following materials are desirable, but not necessary for this course:

The Mishneh Torah of Maimonides, translated into English, Yale Judaica Series.

Midrash Rabbah, translated into English, Soncino Press, also on CD.

Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, Francis Brown, S.R. Driver and C.A. Briggs, Oxford.

The Concordance to the Tanach by Even-Shoshan in Hebrew.  
The Encyclopedia Judaica, also on a CD.

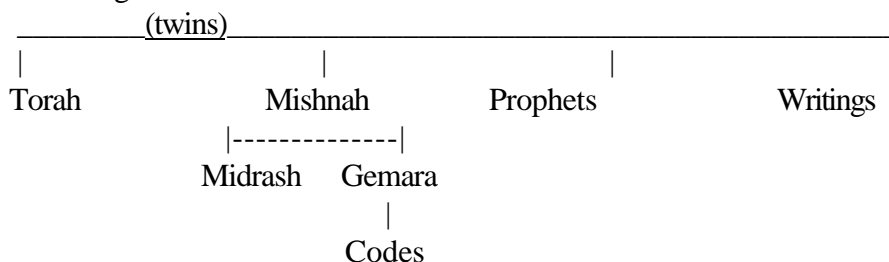
## INTRODUCTION: THE TWO TORAHS

Have you ever been listening to your rabbi talk, or reading a Jewish book and encountered the words Tanach, Mishnah, Gemara or Midrash? If you have, you may have wondered why these things seem so important when you do not even know what they are, or understand them only vaguely, and probably don't know how to use them. This can result in a kind of bad feeling: as if there are "expert Jews" who know what these things are, and there are "ignorant Jews" who do not know what these things are. It's like being in the wrong clique in school if you are in the second group.

You might hesitate to make that jump from the "ignorant" group to the "expert" group for several reasons. The Hebrew names given to all these kinds of literature (which is what they are) can be daunting; especially since many of these words tend to sound the same. There are simple skills that you need to learn to be able to use these books, but without those skills these great Jewish classics are almost impossible to use. And you might hesitate because, not having looked in these books yourself, you might wonder if there is anything in them for you. There is. The two Torahs, the Written one and the Oral one, are filled with beautiful stories and poems; insights that can help you be more popular, more peaceful and help you get what you want more easily; glimpses into the ancient history of our people and the power to discover why we do what we do as Jews.

You may have thought there was only one Torah, but there are two. Tradition has it that God whispered the laws and customs contained in the Oral Torah to Moses on Mount Sinai at the same time God gave Moses the Written Torah. (The Written Torah consists of the Torah, the first five books of the Bible, the Prophets and the Writings.) The Oral Torah completes our understanding of the Written Torah. Though it was originally passed from generation to generation without being put in writing, it was finally written down around 200 C.E. You will learn how to use both kinds of Torahs in this workbook.

To help you keep these different major Jewish works straight, it might be helpful to think of them as a family. We can think of Torah and Mishnah as fraternal twins who have, as younger siblings, the Prophets and the Writings. Mishnah has two children, the Gemara and Midrash, and one grandchild, the Codes through the Gemara. The family tree would look something like this:



If Torah were a person, we would say she was an individual with many interests. She would be interested in history and family, social justice and ritual laws, just to mention a few topics. She would also be able to take into account many different views on the same topic.

(For example, there are two creation stories, two versions of the Ten Commandments, two versions of the Golden Calf story, etc.)

Mishnah, Torah's fraternal twin sister, would be more one-dimensional as a person: her interests are basically legal and philosophical. Both sisters would share a certain style of talking: beautiful Hebrew spoken with few, but carefully-chosen, words.

The Prophets, the younger sibling of Torah and Mishnah, would probably be described as having characteristics often attributed to males: an interest in war, conquest and politics. If the Prophets were a person, he would also have a strong interest in theology: the way God works through history. He would see God at work through politics and warfare.

If the Writings were a person we might say that he would be a poet who was also strongly interested in history. He would also differ from his older brother, the Prophets, in that he would be a bit more cynical; a touch less sure of God's role in history. Yet he would be more hopeful, too. As the youngest sibling in the family, he would live to see more hopeful times than his older brother who would have witnessed a great deal of violence and destruction.

The Gemara, Mishnah's child, would, like so many children, rebel against his parent. Where Mishnah would be a person of few words and basically two interests, Gemara would be talkative and interested in a wide variety of topics. Where Mishnah is rather authoritarian, often stating things in no uncertain terms, the Gemara would take many points of view into account and often adopt a point of view which contradicted his mother.

Of course, what comes around goes around, and the Codes, Gemara's children, would, as persons, be more like their grandmother Mishnah, than their father Gemara. They, like Mishnah, would be interested in a clear statement of law, expressed in beautiful Hebrew.

## **WRITTEN TORAH**

### **TANACH: TORAH, PROPHETS AND WRITINGS**

#### **What's in a name?**

Tanach is the Hebrew name for the Bible or Holy Scriptures. The word Tanach is an acronym, i.e. a word formed from first letters of three other words: Torah (the first five books of the Bible), Nevi'im (the Prophets), and Ketuvim (the Writings). This is the Jewish name for the Bible. We do not call the Tanach the Old Testament, since this implies that there is something new and improved that comes after it.

These three sections of the Tanach, Torah, Prophets and Writings, are arranged in a descending order of holiness. Torah is considered most holy, then the Prophets and then the Writings. A book which contains only the Torah is sometimes called a Chumash, from the Hebrew word "five", or Pentateuch, derived from the Greek word for "five", for the five books it contains.

## **TORAH**

### **The Names of the Books in the Torah**

How did each book of the Torah get its name? The Hebrew name for each book in the Torah is the same as the first significant word in that book. For example, the first word of the Torah is

Bereishit, which means, "In a beginning", and this is also the Hebrew name of the first book of the Torah.

**Exercise:**

Using a Hebrew Torah book, look up the Hebrew names of the other books of the Torah and write them down.

1. Second book (hint, the name is the second Hebrew word).
2. Third book (the first Hebrew word).
3. Fourth book (the name is the fifth Hebrew word).
4. Fifth book (the name is the second Hebrew word).

The English names reflect the contents of each book.

Genesis: a beginning of the world.

Exodus: leaving Egypt

Leviticus: the laws of the priests and Levites

Numbers: the book of the Jewish census

Deuteronomy: "The Second Saying", so called since Moses repeats much of the material that is contained in the three preceding books.

**Exercise:**

Match the Hebrew and English names of each book of the Torah.

Exodus	Bereishit
Deuteronomy	Bemidbar
Leviticus	Shemot
Genesis	Devarim
Numbers	Vayikra

Write down the Five books of the Torah in order in either Hebrew or English.

**CONTENTS OF THE FIVE BOOKS OF THE TORAH**

Below is a very brief summary of the contents of each book of the Torah. (The English abbreviation of each book's name is also provided.)

**Bereishit/Genesis (Gen., Gn.):** The creation of the world, Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah's Ark, the Tower of Babel, stories of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebecca, Jacob, Rachel and Leah, Joseph and his brothers.

**Shemot/Exodus (Ex.):** Enslavement in Egypt; Moses and the burning bush; the ten plagues; the crossing of the Red Sea; the battle with Amalek; the ten commandments; the Golden Calf, details of building the tabernacle in the desert.

**Vayikra/Leviticus (Lev. or Lv.):** Laws regarding sacrifices, ritual purity and leprosy and the priesthood; "The Holiness Code" (a summary of the Ten Commandments; contains the verse "Love your neighbor as yourself" and ways laypersons observed Jewish practice).

**Bemidbar/Numbers (Nu.):** The wandering of the Children of Israel in the desert for forty years; the census of the Children of Israel; the priestly benediction; the sending of spies to look at the land of Israel and Korach's rebellion against Moses.

**Devarim/Deuteronomy (Dt.):** Three speeches given to the children of Israel by Moses just before they enter the Land of Israel. Contains the Shema and V'ahavta and the Ten Commandments. The death of Moses.

**Exercise:**

Write down which book of the Torah you would look in to find the following stories:

1. Joseph and his coat of many colors.
2. Moses breaks the tablets of the law when he sees the golden calf.
3. Laws regarding atonement sacrifices.
4. Isaac is almost sacrificed by his father, Abraham.
5. Moses' death.
6. Korach's rebellion.
7. The laws regarding leprosy.
8. The Ten Commandments

**FINDING A CHAPTER AND VERSE IN THE TANACH**

Each book of the Tanach is divided into chapters, which are numbered. Each chapter is divided into verses, which are also numbered. Therefore, you can find any sentence in the Tanach if you know the chapter number and verse number. The complete name of a verse is listed as BOOK

NAME CHAPTER NUMBER COLON VERSE NUMBER, e.g. Genesis 1:1 is the first verse in the whole Torah.

**Exercise:**

Look up the following verses. Identify them.

1. Deuteronomy 6:4-9
2. Exodus 20:1-14
3. Deuteronomy 5:6-18
4. Exodus 15:11
5. Numbers 6:24-26
6. Numbers 15:37-41

**PARSHIOT/TORAH PORTIONS**

Each book of the Torah is divided into parshiot (portions; parshah, singular) that are read each week in synagogue. The parshah's name is the first significant word of that parshah. The parshiot divide the Torah text into meaningful units. The system of parshiot is older than the system of numbered chapters and verses. Each parshah is further divided into seven portions called aliyot ("going up", aliyah, singular). When a Jewish year does not have a leap-month (i.e. is shorter), some of the Torah portions are combined and read together on one Shabbat. Regardless of how long the year is, the whole Torah is read during it.

We begin reading the Torah in the Autumn at Simchat Torah. We read it all year long and complete the reading of Deuteronomy in the Autumn.

**Exercise:**

Name the Books of the Torah (Genesis, Exodus, etc.) that we would read in synagogue during the seasons of the year. (Some seasons may have two books read during them): (Use a Jewish calendar for this exercise.)

1. Autumn
2. Winter
3. Spring
4. Summer

The following is a list, and translation, of the names of all the parshiot.

## GENESIS

Bereishit: "In the Beginning"

Noach: "Noah"

Lech-lecha: "Go You!"

Vayeira: "God Appeared"

Chayei Sarah: "The life of Sarah"

Toldot: "Generations"

Vayeitsei: "And he went out"

Vayishlach: "And he sent"

Vayeishev: "And he sat"

Mikeits: "At the end"

Vayigash: "And he drew near"

Vayyechi: "And he lived"

## EXODUS

Shemot: "Names"

Va-eira: "And I appeared"

Bo: "Come"

Beshalach: "When he sent"

Yitro: "Jethro"

Mishpatim: "Laws"

Terumah: "An offering"

Tetsave: "And you will command"

Ki Tisa: "When you take up"

Vayakheil: "And he gathered"

Pekudei: "The accounts"

## LEVITICUS

Vayikra: "And God called"

Tsav: "Command!"

Shemini: "The eighth"

Tazria: "She conceived"

Metsora: "The leper"

Acharei Mot: "After the death"

Kedoshim: "Holy Ones"

Emor: "Say!"

Behar: "In the mountain"

Behukotai: "In My Laws"

## NUMBERS

Bamidbar: "In the desert"

Naso: "Take the sum"

Beha-alotecha: "When you take up"

Shlach: "Send!"

Korach: "Korach"  
 Chukkat: "The Law"  
 Balak: "Balak"  
 Pinchas: "Pinchas"  
 Mattot: "Tribes"  
 Massei: "Journeys"

#### DEUTERONOMY

Devarim: "Words"  
 Va'etchanan: "And I besought"  
 Eikev: "Therefore"  
 Re'eh: "See!"  
 Shoftim: "Judges"  
 Ki Teitsei: "When you go out"  
 Ki Tavo: "When you come"  
 Nitsavim: "Commanded"  
 Vayeileich: "And he went"  
 Ha-azinu: "Pay attention"  
 V'zot Habracha: "And this is the blessing"

#### **Exercises:**

(You might want to divide your class into five groups and have each group do this exercise with a different book of the Torah.) Starting with the beginning of a book of the Torah skim through three Torah portions and briefly outline their contents.

Answer the following questions using the list, above or a Tanach or Chumash.

1. What was the Torah portion for your Bar or Bat Mitzvah? If you have not had a Bar or Bat Mitzvah, which Torah portion would you choose to read?
3. Which Torah portion contains the story of creation?
4. Which Torah portion contains the story of Moses' death?
5. We read the story of the binding of Isaac Genesis 22:1-19 on Rosh Hashanah. What Torah portion is it in?
6. Which Torah portion is the Shema, Deuteronomy 6:4-9, in?
7. Which two Torah portions contain the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-14 and Deuteronomy 5:6-18)?

#### **READING THE TORAH TEXT**

The stories in the Torah require a special kind of reading skill. This method of reading is called "Pardes", which means "the orchard" or "paradise". It is a four-leveled way of reading the text.

1. **Peshat**, "The Simple Meaning", is the straightforward meaning of the text.
2. **Remez**, "Hint", is the meaning hinted at in the text through numerology and puns.

Just as Roman letters are also numerals, so Hebrew letters have numerical values. (The volume *The Spice of Torah Gymmatría* by Gutman G. Locks, is an invaluable aid in searching out these hinted-at meanings. A fun exercise is determining the numerological value of each learner's name and then looking up all the words in the Torah that also have that value.) The following is a list of the numerical values of the Hebrew letters of the alphabet:

aleph=1	yud=10	kuf=100
bet=2	caf=20	reish=200
gimel=3	lamed=30	shin=300
dalet=4	mem=40	tav=400
hey=5	nun=50	
vav=6	samech=60	
zayin=7	ayin=70	
chet=8	pey=80	
tet=9	tsadi=90	

Thus, for example, the letters of the word "chai", life, chet and yud, add up to eighteen. The number 613 would be spelled tav-reish-yud-gimel. Sometimes numbers, such as this one, become used as words. Thus, these letters are pronounced "taryag" in the phrase "taryag mitsvot", the 613 commandments.

### Exercises:

What do the following combinations equal in numerological value?

1. caf-hey
2. lamed-vav
3. kuf-samech-chet

What numerological value do the following words have?

1. Bereishit
2. Shemot
3. Vayikra
4. Bemidbar

## 5. Devarim

3. **Drash**, "Exposition", is the meaning the rabbis derived from the text. You will learn more about this in the section on the Oral Torah.
4. **Sod**, "Secret", is the secret mystical meaning of the text. These interpretations are contained in the Zohar, a mystical commentary to the Torah and other works. Traditionally, one does not study at this level in public and until one is mature and married.

The first letter of each of these words spell the acronym "**Pardes**" which means "Paradise" or "The Orchard".

Try reading Genesis 1:1-2:2:3 with this method, using the following guidelines.

1. Peshat: How does God create things? How many Creators are there in this story? What is the order of things created? How many days does creation take?
2. Remez: Count the number of times the following words occur in this passage:

Elohim (God) =

Shamayim (heavens) =

erets (earth) =

Count the number of Hebrew words in the first and second sentences of Genesis.

What message do you think this conveys?

3. Drash: What role did you think the Torah played in the process of Creation
4. Sod: Why does the entire Tanach begin with the letter bet?

## PROPHETS/NEVI'IM

The Prophets were men and women who were privileged to transmit God's word to the Jewish people. These words are called prophecies (prophecy, singular). A prophet in Hebrew is a Navi (plural: Nevi'im, the name of this section of the Tanach). Sometimes these prophets were also military leaders and were called Judges. This section of the Tanach covers the period from when Joshua entered the land of Israel, through the history of Saul, David and Solomon, the split of the kingdoms of Judea and Israel, the destruction of Israel in 721 B.C.E. the destruction of the Temple in Judea 586 B.C.E and the captivity of the Jews in Babylonia which followed, that is, the period from approximately 1190-520 B.C.E. The following is a listing of each of the books in this section and a brief summary of their contents. (\* indicates Haftarah portion(s) are taken from this book.)

\***Joshua (Jos.):** The conquest of the land of Israel by Moses' successor. Includes the tumbling of the walls of Jericho (Chapter 6).

\***Judges (Ju.):** The conquest of the land of Israel; includes the stories of Samson, Deborah and others.

\***Samuel (S. or Sam.)** (two books): The story of Hannah, her son, the prophet Samuel; Saul, the first king of Israel, and David, his successor. Approximately 1000 B.C.E.

\***Kings (K.)** (two books): The death of David, the succession of his son Solomon to the throne, stories of Elijah and Elisha. Includes the "cut the baby in half" story (I Kings 3:15-28), and the "still small voice" story (I Kings 18:46-19:21).

\***Isaiah (Is.):** A book of the prophecies of Isaiah, who lived in Jerusalem in the eighth century B.C.E. and/or in Babylonia during the 6th century B.C.E. This book contains some of the most beautiful poetry in the Bible.

\***Jeremiah (Je. or Jer.):** Jeremiah was the most inward of the prophets. He foresaw Jerusalem's destruction and was jailed for predicting this. He was taken into exile in 586 B.C.E and died in Egypt.

\***Ezekiel (Ezek.):** Ezekiel lived in Babylonia during the sixth century B.C.E (when the Jews were exiled there). A mystic and visionary, his prophecies include the vision of the dry bones coming to life (Ezekiel 37: 1-14).

### THE TWELVE (MINOR) PROPHETS

These Prophets are called minor not because they are unimportant, but because of the relatively short length of their prophecies. Consequently, they were written together on one scroll and thus were grouped together.

\***Hosea (Ho., Hos.):** Hosea lived in the Northern Kingdom (Israel) in the eighth century B.C.E. He characterized the Jewish people's relationship with God as that of a wife and husband.

\***Joel (Jo.):** Joel prophesied about repentance and the End of Days.

\***Amos (Am.):** Amos was a Judean shepherd and farmer in the eighth century B.C.E. He was an advocate of social justice.

\***Ovadya (Ob.):** The shortest book in the Tanach, it may have been composed around 587 B.C.E. Ovadya talks of the evil fate that will overtake Edom.

\***Jonah (Jon.):** This book contains the story of Jonah, the reluctant prophet who is to bring God's word to Ninveh but resists. It is the Haftarah for Yom Kippur afternoon.

**\*Micah (Mi.):** Micah, a contemporary of Isaiah, prophesied in the late eight century B.C.E. He witnessed destruction of Northern Kingdom (Israel) and predicted a similar fate for Judah and Jerusalem unless they mended their ways. The verse “Do justly, love mercy, walk humbly with your God” is Micah 6:8.

**Nachum (Na.):** Nachum prophesied after 663 B.C.E. The book was probably composed in 612 B.C.E. He was more a poet than a prophet.

**Habbakuk (Hab.or Hb.):** This book contains only three chapters. Habbakuk’s dictum (Habbakuk 2:4), “the righteous shall live by his faith,” is said to encompass all 613 commandments (Makkot 23b-24a).

**Zephaniah (Zp.):** A Judean prophet who was a distant relative of King Josiah, during whose reign he prophesied (640-609 B.C.E). Living and prophesying in Jerusalem, he urged Jewish people to turn away from foreign customs and religions.

**Haggai (Hg.):** A Prophet of the post-exilic period, his prophecies deal mainly with the construction of the Temple. Only 38 verses of his prophecies are in our hands. They date from 520 B.C.E.

**\*Zechariya (Ze.):** A Prophet in The Land of Israel after the Jewish exiles had returned from Babylonia, he urged the people to rebuild Temple.

**\*Malachai (Mal.):** Malachai was a contemporary of Nehemiah, who rebuilt the Temple after the Jewish people's return from exile in the middle of fifth century B.C.E.

### **Exercises:**

Which book in Nevi'im would you look in to find the following passages:

1. The story of David and Goliath.
2. Jonah and the whale.
3. Elijah hears the still, small voice.
4. Samson and Delilah (hint: he was a Judge).
5. Tumbling of the walls of Jericho.
6. Deborah's song of triumph (hint: she was a Judge).

Below are a list of books from Prophets. Check those that belong to the Twelve, or Minor, Prophets.



## WRITINGS/KETUVIM (HAGIOGRAPHA)

The Ketuvim, "Writings" (also called the Hagiographa) are the third portion of the Tanach and are considered to have a lower level of holiness than do the Torah and Prophets although they are still Holy Writings. Five of the books in this section are called The Five Scrolls, or Megillot. They are read on five different holidays throughout the year. The following is a listing of each of the books in this section of the Tanach and a brief summary of their contents. (Hagiographa comes from hagio/holy and grapha/writing.)

**Tehillim/Psalms (Ps.):** 150 hymns, laments, thanksgiving songs, poems, songs and prayers. This book is often divided into five smaller books (Psalms 1-41, 42-72, 73-89, 90-106, 107-150). Many psalms are recited during worship services. Seventy-three of the psalms are attributed to King David.

**Mishlei/Proverbs (Pr. or Prov.):** Proverbs, which is ascribed to Solomon, is a manual for the moral and religious instruction of the young. One of the three books of "Wisdom Literature" in the Tanach (Ecclesiastes and Job are the other two). Wisdom in this tradition means embracing an ethical lifestyle. It contains the poem "A Woman of Valor" (31:10-31).

**Job (Jb.):** The story of how a righteous man, Job, suffers. This book attempts to explain the suffering of the righteous. An example of Wisdom Literature, it contains some of the most beautiful poetry in the Tanach.

**Shir HaShirim/Song of Songs (Ct.):** One of the five scrolls. This book, also known as Canticles, is read on Pesach. It is a collection of love poems, and was interpreted as a love song between God and Israel.

**Ruth (Ru.):** One of the five scrolls. This book is read on Shavuot and tells how Ruth, a Moabite, became a Jew. It also provides a genealogy of King David, Ruth's descendant. Ruth 1:16 contains the famous speech which begins, "Whither thou goest, I will go..."

**Eicha/Lamentations (La.):** One of the five scrolls. Contains five poetic chapters lamenting the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E. This book is read on Tisha B'Av, the Jewish Memorial Day.

**Kohelet/Ecclesiastes (Ec.):** One of the five scrolls. Its title means "Convoker" in Greek (the Hebrew root kuf-hey-lamed, the basis of this book's Hebrew name, means the same thing.) Attributed to Solomon, this book contains many famous passages such as, "A season is set for everything...a time to be born, and a time to die...(3:1-8)" This book of Wisdom Literature teaches that human life is unpredictable and that there is no sure formula for success. It is read on Sukkot.

**Esther (Est.):** One of the five scrolls. Esther, which is read on Purim, tells the story of how Esther saved the Jews of the Persian empire.

**Daniel (Dn. or Dan.):** Daniel is a book of two parts: Part One (chapters 1-6, six stories of the trials and triumphs of Daniel, told in the third person) and Part Two (chapters 7-12, Daniel's apocalyptic revelations, told in the first person). This book contains such stories as Daniel in the Lion's Den (Daniel 6).

**Ezra/Nehemiah (Ezr./Ne. or Neh.):** Originally, these two books were a single work. Ezra, a priest and scribe, oversaw the return of the Jews to the Land of Israel from exile in Babylonia. Nehemiah rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem and set the ritual reading of the Torah and worship services (Neh. 7:72-9:37).

**Divrei HaYamim/Chronicles (Ch. or Chron.)** (two books): These books describe the history of Israel from the time of David until destruction of the Kingdom of Judah. They emphasize the role of the people in Jewish history more than do the books of Kings, which cover the same period.

**Exercises:**

Match the holiday with the scroll read on it.

Purim	Ruth
Sukkot	Song of Songs
Pesach	Lamentations
Tisha B'Av	Esther
Shavuot	Ecclesiastes

Why do you think each scroll was placed with the holiday it was?

Name the three Books of Wisdom Literature in this section of the Tanach:

Name at least two books in Ketuvim that have a great deal of poetry in them:

It is often useful to know the abbreviations for the names of the books of the Tanach. Identify the full name that goes with each abbreviation, below, and tell which section of the Tanach it is found in.

Lev. or Lv.

Jos.

Pr.

Est.

Nu.

I K

Je.

Jb.

Ct.

Dt.

Ez.

Zp.

II Chr. or Ch.

Identify the section of the Tanach from which the following selections are taken:

1. "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord has anointed me to announce good tidings to the meek. God has sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound."
2. "Now the Lord said to Avram, 'Get you out of your country, and from your kindred, and from your father's house'."
3. "A Psalm of David. Ascribe to the Lord, o you might, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength."
4. "Now in Shushan the capital there was a certain Jew, whose name was Mordecai."
5. "And the Lord said to Joshua, 'See I have given into your hand Jericho, and its king and its mighty men of valour'."
6. "And the Lord said to Moses, 'Go in to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, that I might show these my signs before him.'"

### **TOOLS FOR TORAH STUDY: THE CONCORDANCE AND THE LEXICON**

There are two additional reference works that can be of great use in studying the Tanach. They are the **Concordance**, which lists every word, and every place it is used, in the entire Tanach. This can be helpful if, for example, you know one word in a phrase, but don't know where it comes from. The second useful tool is the **Lexicon**: a dictionary of all the words in the Tanach.

(In the Lexicon by Brown, Driver and Briggs, a word with a dagger beside it means that each use of the word in the Tanach is pinpointed.)

### **Exercises:**

Sometimes when a word is used very infrequently it can be a kind of signal, tying different stories together. Look up all the uses of the word *teivah*, "ark", (BDB Lexicon, page 1061, Concordance p. 1218). In how many stories is this word used? What do you think the connection between the two stories is?

The following is a list from the Concordance of all the times a certain form of the word "hineini", "Here I am!" is used in the Tanach. Look up each verse and answer the following questions. Who says "hineini"? To whom do they say it and in what situation? What impact do these people/entities have on the Jewish people? Who does not say "hineini"? Why do you think they never said it? What does this say about them?

Gen. 22:1  
 Gen. 22:11  
 Gen. 27:1  
 Gen. 31:11  
 Gen. 37:13  
 Gen. 46:2  
 Ex. 3:4  
 Sam. I 3:4  
 Sam. I 3:16  
 Sam. II 1:7  
 Isa. 52:6  
 Isa. 55:9  
 Isa. 65: 1  
 Gen. 22:7  
 Gen. 27:18

## **ORAL TORAH MISHNAH**

The word *Mishnah* is derived from the Hebrew root that means "repeat", since it was passed along orally, i.e. repeated, for generations before it was written down. (You might relate this root, shin-nun-hay to some words that the learners know, such as *shanah*, a year, which repeats itself time after time.) Thus, the *Mishnah* is known as the Oral Torah. The Oral Torah is a body of laws traditionally believed to be given to Moses on Mount Sinai along with the Written Torah and passed down orally through the generations until it was redacted around the year 200 C.E.

The *Mishnah* is divided into six major sections, called orders (*sedarim*, *seder*, singular). (You can relate the word *Seder* to the same word for the Passover *Seder*, Order of the Service.) Below, these six orders are listed, together with a summary of their contents. (For more, see Adin Steinsaltz's *Reference Guide to the Talmud*, Random House, 1989.)

**Seder Zeraim (Seeds):** Laws relating to agriculture, particularly in the land of Israel. Contains the tractate Berachot (Blessings) which deals with the recital of the Shema, Amidah and other prayers.

**Seder Moed (Appointed Time, Festival):** Laws pertaining to the Shabbat, Festivals and Fasts.

**Seder Nashim (Women):** The laws regarding marriage, divorce and making valid contracts and vows.

**Seder Nezikin (Damages):** Civil and criminal law: e.g. corporal and capital punishments, the administration of Jewish courts and rules regarding testimony. This seder contains the famous tractate Avot, the Sayings of the Fathers; a collection of sayings of the sages.

**Seder Kodashim (Holy Things):** Laws pertaining to the sacrifices offered in the ancient Temple and the laws of keeping kosher.

**Seder Toharot (Purity):** Laws of ritual purity and impurity.

**Exercise:**

Name the Seder of the Mishnah you would look in to find the following information. You may name more than one seder.

1. Laws concerning Shabbat.
2. How to write a valid contract.
3. How to obtain a Jewish divorce.
4. Laws regarding the kosher slaughter of animals.
5. Agricultural laws of ancient Israel.
6. The Jewish attitude toward capital punishment.
7. Customs of Sukkot.
8. Laws regarding the Mikveh (the ritual bath that is used to change one's status from ritually impure to ritually pure).

**FINDING A MISHNAH**

Each of these six Orders of the Mishnah are further divided into tractates, i.e. books. These tractates are broken down into chapters and the chapters are divided into smaller, paragraph-

sized segments which are numbered. These small segments are called mishnayot (plural) or mishnah (singular). (Note that the whole work of six Orders is called the Mishnah, as is a small segment of this body of literature.) So, for example, if you want to find out something about the Shema, you would first find the Order it is in (Zeraim), the tractate (Berachot), the chapter (Chapters One, Two and Three) and then the specific mishnah that deals with your topic of interest. A mishnah is cited using the tractate name, the number of the chapter, followed by a colon and the number of the exact mishnah. (Note that the Order is not listed). For the following exercise you will need a book, or set of, Mishnah.

**Exercise:**

Find the following Mishnayot and summarize their content.

1. Berachot 6:1.
2. Pesachim 10:4.
3. Gittin 9:10.
4. Avot 5:21

## GEMARA

The word gemara comes from the Aramaic word for "learn, study". It is commentary on the mishnah. Gemara was written in two places: The Land of Israel and Babylonia. The Talmud of the Land of Israel is called the Yerushalmi. The Babylonian Talmud is called the Bavli. It was completed in approximately 500 C.E. The Bavli is a generally more complete Gemara than is the Yerushalmi. In Jewish life, the Bavli has been more widely read, and used as a basis for Jewish practice, than has the Yerushalmi. We will deal only with the Bavli here.

A small section of Gemara is called a sugya (sugyot, plural), from the word "walking or passage". The Mishnah and Gemara together form the Talmud.

The organization of the Gemara follows that of the Mishnah. However, Gemara was not written for every tractate of the Mishnah. A book of the Talmud, like a book of the Mishnah, is called a tractate and is divided into chapters that correspond to the chapters of the Mishnah.

**Exercise:**

Match the following words which apply to the Mishnah with those that apply to the Gemara.

Match the following words which apply to the Mishnah with those that apply to the Gemara.

MISHNAH

GEMARA

a mishnah

The Gemara



**\*Ma'aser Sheni (MS or Ma'as Sh.):** "The Second Tithe". The laws of the second tithe.

**\*Challah (Hal. or Ha.):** "Dough". The laws of separating of some bread dough and giving it to the priests.

**\*Orlah (Or. or Orl.):** "Uncircumcised fruit". Outlines the prohibitions against using the fruits of trees during the first three years after planting.

**\*Bikkurim (Bik.):** "First fruits". Description of the first fruit offerings at the Temple.

### IN ORDER MOED

**Shabbat (Shab.):** "Sabbath". The laws governing Shabbat.

**Eruvin (Er.):** "Mergings". A continuation of tractate Shabbat.

**Pesachim (Pes.):** "Passover offerings". The laws of Pesach.

**\*Shekalim (Shek.):** "Shekels". The shekel contribution to the ancient Temple and how it was used.

**Yoma (Yom.):** "The Day". The observance of the Day of Atonement.

**Sukkah (Suk.):** "Booth". The laws of Sukkot.

**Beitsah (Bez.):** "Egg". The laws that apply to all festivals.

**Rosh HaShanah (R.H.):** "New Year". The laws of Rosh HaShanah.

**Ta'anit (Ta'. or Ta'an.):** "Fast". When and how public fast days were observed.

**Megillah (Meg.):** "Scroll". The laws for reading the scroll of Esther and the Torah.

**Moed Katan (M.K.):** "Minor Festival". Rules regarding Chol HaMoed, the intermediate days of a festival.

**Chagigah (Hag.):** "Festival offering". Special festival offerings. (Also some material on mysticism.)

### IN ORDER NASHIM

**Yebamot (Yeb.):** "Sisters-in-law". The laws of levirate marriage. (i.e. when a man leaves his widow childless and she marries his brother (Deuteronomy 25:5-10).)

**Ketubot (Ket.):** "Wedding Contracts". The laws regarding weddings and marriage.

**Nedarim (Ned.):** "Vows". The laws concerning vows.

**Nazir (Naz.):** "Nazirite". How to become a nazirite. (e.g. Samson was one. A person who dedicates their life to God and vows not to cut their hair and other such behaviors.)

**Sotah (Sot.):** "A Woman suspected of adultery". The laws of sotah and the priestly benediction. (See Numbers 5:11-31 for a full description of the sotah water ritual.)

**Gittin (Git.):** "Bills of Divorce". The rules governing divorce.

**Kiddushin (Kid.):** "Betrothals". Explains how a woman is betrothed.

### IN ORDER NEZIKIN

**Baba Kamma (B.K.):** "The First Gate". Civil and criminal law.

**Baba Metsia (B.M.):** "The Middle Gate". Business law.

**Baba Batra (B.B.):** "The Last Gate". Laws of partnership, inheritance, sales, etc.

**Sanhedrin (San.):** "Sanhedrin". The laws regarding capital punishment.

**Makkot (Mak.):** "Lashes". Corporal punishment.

**Shevuot (Shevu. or Shebu.):** "Oaths". Rules governing public and private oaths.

**\*Eduyot (Ed. or Eduy.):** "Testimonies". A compilation of mishnayot on several different subjects.

**Avodah Zarah (A.Z.):** "Idolatry". Rules governing relations between Jews and non-Jews.

**\*Avot (Ab.):** "Fathers". A collection of sayings of the Sages.

**Horayot (Hor.):** "Decisions, rulings". Rules of Rabbinical Courts.

### IN ORDER KODASHIM

**Zevachim (Zeb.):** "Animal Sacrifices". Deals with the offering of various animal sacrifices.

**Menachot (Men.):** "Meal Offerings". The laws of meal-offerings, tsitsit and tefillin.

**Chullin (Hul.):** "Ordinary, Unhallowed". Kosher slaughtering (Shechitah).

**Bekhorot (Bek.):** "Firstlings". The laws concerning firstborn male animals.

**Arakhin (Ar.):** "Valuations". The laws regarding dedicating items to the Temple.

**Temurah (Tem.):** "Substitution". The laws regarding substituting one sacrifice for another.

**Keritot (Ker.):** "Excisions". Those sins for which the punishment is careit, i.e. being cut off from the community.

**Me'ilah (Me'il.):** "Sacrilige". The laws regarding the unlawful use of things dedicated to Temple.

**Tamid (Tam.):** "Daily Sacrifices". The laws of the daily service in the Temple.

**\*Middot (Mid.):** "Measurements". A description of the plan of the Temple and its measurements.

**\*Kinnim (Kin.):** "Birds' nests". Laws of the sacrifices of birds.

### IN ORDER TOHAROT

**\*Keilim (Kel.):** "Vessels". This tractate discusses the various forms of ritual impurity that apply to vessels.

**\*Ohalot (Oh. or Ohol.):** "Tents". The ritual impurity of tents that contain dead bodies are discussed in this tractate.

**\*Negaim (Neg.):** "Leprosy". Laws regarding leprosy and its purification.

**\*Parah (Par.):** "Heifer". The laws regarding the Red Heifer. (A heifer is a cow. See Numbers 19:1-22 for the full details regarding this purification ritual.)

**\*Toharot (Tohor.):** "Purifications". This tractate contains various laws of ritual impurity.

**\*Mikvaot (Mik.):** "Ritual Baths". The laws regarding the construction, and use of, the ritual bath. (If there is a mikveh in your town, take a field trip to visit it. Ask that someone there explain it to your learners, and describe the various uses it has, e.g. for conversions, the dunking of new dishes before they are used and for women before their weddings and every month.)

**Niddah (Nid.):** "Menstruating woman". The laws regarding a menstruating woman.

**\*Makhshirin (Maks. or Maksh.):** "Preparations". Explains how foods may become ritually impure.

**\*Zavim (Zab.):** "Those suffering from secretions". The laws regarding the ritual impurity of persons with venereal diseases.

**\*Tevul Yom (T.Y.):** "Immersed during the day". The laws regarding one who takes a ritual bath during the day but is not considered ritually pure until evening.

**\*Yadayim (Yad.):** "Hands". Laws regarding the ritual washing of hands. (This is an easy ritual to demonstrate to learners in the classroom. Simply take water in a cup and pour it over the hands, having removed all rings ahead of time, then say the blessing "Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha-olam, asher kidshanu b'mitsvotav v'tsivanu al netilat yadayim." "Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe, who has sanctified us with the commandments and commanded us regarding the washing of hands.")

**\*Uktsin (Uk. or Ukz.):** "Stems". The laws of ritual impurity regarding stems and the fruits attached to them.

### **Exercises:**

Find the Talmud page number for each of the mishnayot you looked up, above and write it down here. Note which of these mishnayot have Gemara commentary on them and which do not.

1. Berachot 6:1.
2. Gittin 9:10.
3. Avot 5:21.
4. Pesachim 10:4.

What tractate(s) of the Babylonian Talmud would you look in to find material regarding the following?

1. What you can eat during Chol HaMoed (the intermediate days) of Passover?
2. What you may and may not do on Shabbat?
3. How to fairly conduct business?
4. What laws applied to Samson, the Judge, who was a Nazirite?

Match the Abbreviation with the word for which it stands:

- |      |               |
|------|---------------|
| Suk. | Nedarim       |
| Mak. | Gittin        |
| Ned. | Rosh HaShanah |

B.B.	Sukkot
Pes.	Makkot
R.H.	Avodah Zarah
A.Z.	Pesachim
Git.	Baba Batra

In which Orders are the following tractates found?

1. Avot.
2. Niddah.
3. Kiddushin.
4. Berachot.
5. Tamid.
6. Rosh HaShanah.

What do the following tractates deal with?

1. Shabbat.
2. Sanhedrin
3. Ketubot
4. Pesachim
5. Moed Katan
6. Yoma
7. Baba Metsia

### **THE CONTENTS OF THE TALMUD: HALAKHAH, AGGADAH, MIDRASH**

The Talmud contains many types of materials, but among the most prominent are

1. Halakhah--Jewish law and the discussion of it.

2. Midrash--stories that are related to a text from the Tanach
3. Aggadah--stories that are not relate to a text from the Tanach.

**Exercise:**

Identify whether the following passages are halakhah, aggadah or midrash.

1. From what time may one recite the Shema in the evening? From the time that the priests enter [their houses] in order to eat their terumah until the end of the first watch. These are the words of Rabbi Eliezer. And the sages say: until midnight. Rabban Gamliel says: until the dawn comes up. (Berachot, 2a)

2. For three years there was a dispute between House of Shammai and House of Hillel, the former asserting, 'The law is in agreement with our views.' and the latter contending, 'The law is in agreement with our views.' Then a bat kol (a voice from heaven) announced, 'Both rulings are the words of the living God, but the law is in agreement with the rulings of the House of Hillel.'

"Since, however, 'both are the words of the living God', what was it that entitled the House of Hillel to have the law fixed according to their rulings? Because they were kindly and modest, they studied their own rulings and those of the House of Shammai, and were even so humble as to mention the words of the House of Shammai before their own. (Eruvin, 13b)"

3. "And God tested Abraham...and God said, 'Take, I pray you, your son, your only one, whom you love, Isaac.'(Gen. 22:1)"

"Your son"

"[But] I have two sons!" [Abraham replied]

"Your only one"

"Each is the only one of his mother!"

"Whom you love"

"I love them both!"

"Isaac."

And why all this? [Why didn't God just say "Take Isaac."?] So that his [Abraham's] mind would not reel [from the shock of hearing this command directly]. (Sanhedrin, 89b)

### CODES

As you will have noticed by now, while the Talmud contains the foundation of Jewish law, the transmission of halakhah is not the Talmud's only goal. The Talmud describes a comprehensive system of thought, feeling, and religious spirit of which halakhah is only one part. However, it became difficult for the person who was not a Talmudic scholar to search through all the Talmud's arguments and stories to find out what he or she should do to be an observant Jew. For this reason, Codes of Jewish Law were written, so that Jews could easily find out what their obligations were under Jewish law. We will study two of the greatest of these codes: Maimonides' Mishneh Torah and Joseph Caro's Shulchan Aruch.

**Mishneh Torah ("The Second Torah"):** Moses Maimonides (also known as Rambam), the great 12th century Spanish philosopher and Jewish legal expert, wrote a comprehensive work covering all of Jewish law, even those parts that are no longer practiced (e.g. the laws concerning sacrifices in the Temple). This work is called the Mishneh Torah, which means "The Second Torah". The Mishneh Torah is composed of fourteen volumes. The number 14 in Hebrew is yud-dalet. This also spells the word "hand", and so this work was nicknamed HaYad HaHazakah, "The Strong Hand". He does not follow the order of the Mishnah in his code of law. Rather, he used his own system of logic to organize the subject matter. The following is a list of the books in the Mishneh Torah.

1. **Sefer HaMadah ("The Book of Knowledge"):** Metaphysics, ethics, laws of repentance.
2. **Sefer Ahavah ("The Book of Love"):** Laws regarding the Shema, daily and Shabbat prayers, tefillin, circumcision, tsitstit.
3. **Sefer Zemanim ("The Book of Seasons"):** Laws regarding Shabbat, fasting on Yom Kippur, the festivals, the shofar, Fasts, Purim and Hannukkah.
4. **Sefer Nashim ("The Book of Women"):** The laws of marriage, betrothal, divorce.
5. **Sefer Kedushah ("The Book of Holiness"):** The laws of forbidden intercourse, forbidden foods, laws of kosher slaughter of animals.
6. **Sefer Hafla'ah ("The Book of Asseverations"):** Oaths, vows, valuations.
7. **Sefer Zeraim ("The Book of Seeds"):** Gifts to the poor, offerings and tithes, laws regarding the Sabbatical and Jubilee years. (The Sabbatical year is the year of rest given to the land every seventh year. The Jubilee year falls every fiftieth year and is also a year of rest for the land.)
8. **Sefer Avodah ("The Book of Temple Service"):** Descriptions of the Temple, its vessels, the way offerings were brought daily, on special days and on Yom Kippur.
9. **Sefer Korbanot ("The Book of Offerings"):** Offerings on Pesach, Festivals and the Day of Atonement.
10. **Sefer Taharah ("The Book of Purity"):** Impurity from corpses, leprosy, etc. Laws regarding mikvaot (ritual baths).
11. **Sefer Nezikin ("The Book of Damages"):** Laws regarding damages, theft, lost property, wounding, and murder.
12. **Sefer Kinyan ("The Book of Acquisitions"):** Laws regarding sales, agents and partners.

13. **Sefer Mishpatim ("The Book of Civil Laws")**: Laws on lending and borrowing money, hiring, bankruptcy and inheritance.

14. **Sefer Shoftim ("The Book of Judges")**: Rules of evidence, courts and mourning.

**Exercise:**

Name the book of the Mishneh Torah you would look in to find information about the following:

1. How to write a ketubah (a Jewish wedding contract).
2. How to put on tefillin.
3. A description of the ancient Temple in Jerusalem.
4. What to do if you are going into business with someone.
5. The laws of mourning.
6. How to best repent any time of year.

**The Shulchan Aruch ("The Set Table")** by Joseph Caro (1488-1575). Like Maimonides, Caro codified Jewish law according to a system that does not follow the organization of the Mishnah. This work also differs from the Mishneh Torah in structure and content. For example, the Shulchan Aruch contains only those laws that can be applied to life today. Though the Mishneh Torah and the Shulchan Aruch differ in organization, they generally agree in their halakhic opinions. The Shulchan Aruch is divided into four sections:

1. **Orach Chayyim, "The Way of Life"**: Laws of everyday conduct, e.g. prayer, blessings, Shabbat and festivals.
2. **Yoreh Deah, "The Teaching of Knowledge"**: Dietary laws, laws of ritual purity, circumcision, visiting the sick, and mourning.
3. **Even HaEzer, "The Stone of Help"**: Family law; marriage and divorce.
4. **Choshen Mishpat, "The Breastplate of Judgment"**: Contains most of civil and criminal law.

**Exercise:**

Name the book of the Shulchan Aruch you would look in to find information about the following:

1. How to write a get (a Jewish divorce document).
2. How to correctly say the Shema.

3. The Jewish law regarding capital punishment.
4. The laws of mourning.

## MIDRASH

Midrash (Midrashim, plural) are literary works which expound upon verses in the Torah and/or other portions of the Tanach. Most of them have been translated into English, are easy to use and exceedingly beautiful to read.

**Midrash Rabbah ("The Great Midrash"):** This work, containing some of the oldest midrashim, comments on Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, and the Five Scrolls, Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes and Esther.

**Mekhilta ("Measure, form, rule for deducing halakha from Scripture"):** This is a commentary on Exodus 12 through Exodus 23:19.

**Sifra ("The Book"):** A commentary on the book of Leviticus.

**Sifre ("Books"):** A commentary on Deuteronomy 12-26, i.e. the strictly legal part of Deuteronomy.

**Sifre on Numbers:** A commentary on Numbers.

Other Midrashim of interest:

**Pesikta Rabbati ("The Great Section"):** a collection of homilies (sermons) for the festivals and special Shabbatot.

**Tanchuma/Yelamdeinu ("May (our Master) Instruct Us"):** A collection of midrashim on the entire Torah. (This midrash is ascribed to Tanchuma Bar Abba, a Palestinian Amora who lived in the second half of the fourth century C.E.)

**Midrash Tehillim:** Midrashim on the Psalms.

**Yalkut Shimoni ("The Collection of Simon"):** A collection of many midrashim.

## MORE JEWISH SOURCES

The development of Jewish law and thought did not end with the writing of the Shulchan Aruch. Since then, many works of responsa have been written that continue to make Jewish law relevant to today's world. Responsa are answers (teshuvot) to questions (she-eilot) about Jewish law. Responsa are written wherever Jews live.

In addition, there are many magazines and journals in which modern midrashim are published. Your synagogue or school library should have many samples of these modern midrashic and halakhic works.

### **SUMMARY ACTIVITIES**

1. Describe each of the books, or collections of books discussed, as if it/they were a person. How are they alike? How are they different? How do they form a "family" with specified roles assigned to each.
2. Draw your impression of each book, or collections of books discussed. Use color, different materials. Show the interrelationship between the different works.
3. Trace one story or piece of Jewish law through all the sources. Note how it changes through the different treatments. E.g.: the Shema, starting with the Torah, using a Concordance to find out where else it's mentioned, it's historical development in the Mishnah and Gemara, the midrashim on it and commentaries, and its treatment in the codes.

Or follow the verse, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev. 19:18) through the sources; or follow the commandment to give tzedakah through the sources.

After you have finished your research, write your own midrash on the verse.