

Text to Read

Klal Yisrael has an educational tradition evoked in Deut. 32:7 זְכוֹר יְמוֹת עוֹלָם, בֵּינוּ שָׁנוֹת דֶּר-וָדָר; שֶׁאֵל אָבִיךָ וַיְגַדְךָ, זְקֵנֶיךָ וַיֹּאמְרוּ לָךְ. Moral and character education through the family and community is described in Mishlei. Compulsory teaching, incumbent upon the father in the first instance, is ordained in *the shema* וְשִׁנַּנְתֶּם לְבַבְיֶיךָ, וְדַבַּרְתָּ בָּם, בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ בְּבֵיתְךָ וּבְלִכְתְּךָ בְּדַרְךָ, וּבְשֹׁכְבְךָ וּבְקוּמְךָ

In the times of the *beit HaMikdash* priests not only were involved in music, guarding gates, and offering korbanot but in teaching torah. Thus the injunction in Zot HaBrachah to shevet Levi: “ יִירוּ מִשְׁפָּטֶיךָ לְיַעֲקֹב וְתוֹרַתְךָ לְיִשְׂרָאֵל יִשִּׁימוּ קִטּוֹרָה בְּאַפְּךָ וְכִלִּיל עַל-מִזְבְּחֶךָ

Compulsory school attendance was decreed by Simeon b. Shetah in 75 B.C.E. and by Joshua ben Gamla in 64 C.E.

Slide 3

The oral torah (torah she be-al peh) & written torah were revealed together at Sinai as stated in mishnah Avot: מִשָּׁה קִבֵּל תּוֹרָה מִסִּינַי וּמִסֵּרָה לְיִהוֹשֻׁעַ וַיְהוֹשֻׁעַ לְזַקְנִים וְזַקְנִים לְנָבִיאִים וְנָבִיאִים לְרַבִּי עֲשֵׂה לָךְ רַב . Rashi notes the text says “torah in general” and not “ha-torah” ergo the oral and written torah were revealed coterminously .

enjoined upon Jews to connect to a living masorah throughout the periodization of history (see time line slide 4, slides 5-7 generations of tannaim, amoraim, and geonim)

Kiddushin 29a invoked A father's obligation to circumcise his son, redeem him, **teach him Torah** & an occupation, and marry him off. " האב חייב בבנו למולו, ולפדותו, וללמדו תורה, ולהשיאו אשה, וללמדו אומנות

Avot 5:1 enjoins: At age five one begins studying scripture. At ten, Mishnah; at thirteen fulfilling the mitzvot; at fifteen studying Talmud הוא היה אומר בן חמש שנים למקרא בן עשר למשנה בן שלש עשרה למצות בן חמש עשרה לתלמוד

So what textual collections might have existed in the tannaitic, amoraic, and geonic era?

Slide 8

Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi wrote down the mishna around 210 CE and Yerushalmi shekalim 13b notes When R. Abahu arrived in Teveriah his face shone. The disciples of R. Yochanan speculated that he must have found a treasure. R. Yochanan inquired of R. Abahu what dvar Torah he had just heard. R. Abahu answered that he had come across an old Tosefta [תוספתא עתיקא], whereupon R. Yochanan exclaimed (Koheles

8:1) “A Man’s wisdom lights up his face.” , חִכְמַת אָדָם תִּתְאִיר פָּנָיו,
וְעַז פָּנָיו יִשְׁנָא

Slide 9

In Maseket Shabat 6b there is recognition of the existence of **Megilat setarim**, the name of a roll supposed to have been found in the bet ha-midrash of R. Hiyya, and which contained halakot recorded by him. Three passages from it, which are maxims of R. Ise b. Judah, are quoted by Abba Arika in the Talmud (B. M. 92a) with the introductory phrase: "I found a hidden roll" **מצאתי מגלת סתרים** . According to Rashi (Shab. 6b), although it was not permissible to record halakot, the scholars were accustomed to write in rolls (which were then hidden) such sentences and maxims of various tanaim as were seldom repeated in the schools, and which were, therefore, liable to be forgotten; and he declares the Megillat Setarim was such a roll.

Slide 10

An interesting remark of Rabbi Simon b. Gamaliel in BT. Shabbat 13b is found with regards to the authors of Ta’anit, a text which uncharacteristically was written down in the 2nd temple times before 70 CE. Rabbi Simon says that the redactors

of Ta'anit “embraced troubles” and with regards to other tractates we would not be able to write them down (**ein anu maspiqin**).

Slide 11

Jewish education in the medieval ages was punctuated by pervasive orality based on sugyot in **Gittin 60b and Temurah 14b**. In the Tannaitic, Amoraic, and Geonic era rabbinic sages were walking text memory-banks and the oral torah cast a spell of the hegemony of oral transmission over written transmission. The expression **haka garsinan** meaning “thus we repeat by rote” was meant literally in the oral culture.

Slide 12

The relative paucity of discovered “library collections” from the early medieval ages may be due to the Rabbinic ideology of “pervasive orality” that proscribed the writing down of oral torah. Gittin 60b notes that teachings that were given to you orally you are not permitted to transmit in writing; and teachings that were given to you in writing i.e. The Five books of Moses, you are not permitted to transmit orally... [דברים]
שבכתב אי אתה רשאי לאומרן על פה דברים שבעל פה אי אתה
[רשאי לאומרן בכתב]

In Temurah 14b R. Abba the son of R. Chiya bar Abba said in the name of R. Yochanan- Those who write down the laws of the torah are like one who burns the torah

והא אמר רבי אבא בריה דרבי חייא אבא אמר רבי יוחנן כותבי הלכות כשרוף התורה

Slide 13

Rabbi Yochanan said : The Holy one Blessed is He, established a covenant with Israel- only on the basis of the oral teachings- As the verse states- for on the basis of these words- I have established a covenant with you- and with Israel: .

א"ר יוחנן: לא כרת הקב"ה ברית עם ישראל אלא בשביל דברים שבעל פה, שנאמר: הכי על פי הדברים האלה כרתי אתך ברית ואת ישראל

Midrash Tanhuma brings down in the name of Rabbi Judah ben Shalom that “when the Holy one Blessed by He- said to Moses “write down” Moses asked that the Mishnah be written, but because the Holy One blessed be He- knew that the nations of the world will translate the Torah and read it in Greek and say “We are Israel.” [כשאמר הקב"ה למשה כתב לך בקש משה]

שתהא המשנה בכתב ולפי שצפה הקב"ה שאומות העולם עתידין לתרגם את התורה ולהיות קוראים יונת והם אומרים אנו ישראל

Slide 14

Pervasive orality was the norm in the Geonic period as two responsa of the 10th century Academy of Pumbeditha attest. R. Aaron Sarjado speaks of “the recitation (**girsā**) of the entire academy and it is known that the recitation is from the mouths of the Masters, and most of them do not know what a book is-”. In the *Epistle of the Sherira Gaon* sent to Jacob b. Nissim and to the men of Kairwan (987 CE), he answers the question, “How were the Mishnah and Talmud written?” and explains: “The Talmud and the Mishnah were not written but rather composed and the Rabbis are careful to recite it orally, but not from copies.

Slide 15

Idiomatic expressions show the emphasis on orality and oral transmission.

Slide 16

The aftermath of tragedy and persecution led to writing texts down. The *mishne, tosefta, and tannaitic midrashim* came after the bar Kochba revolt and Hadrianic persecutions. The *Yerushalmi* was composed after persecutions following the Christianization of the Roman empire. The *Bavli* was put to writing because the Yeshivoth were closed and scholars martyred. The *glossiata of Rashi and Tosaphists* similarly arose after the Crusade of 1096. Jewish communities of Mayence, Worms, and Cologne were devastated. The act of writing was to save from oblivion rabbinic learning that had been transmitted orally before catastrophe struck. Essentially breaking the law in order to save the law.

Slide 17

A sugya in Temura 14b notes They said based on this verse (from Tehillim **עַתָּה לַעֲשׂוֹת לִיקוּק הַפָּרוֹ תוֹרַתְךָ**) that it is preferable that one letter of the torah be uprooted i.e. the law that prohibits the transcribing of oral torah so that the Torah itself should not be forgotten amongst Jews , **אמרי מוטב תיעקר , תורה ואל תשתכח תורה מישראל**

Rashi comments on breaking the prohibition of writing the oral law by noting: “From here you learn that it can be written in

order to prevent the oral law from being forgotten.” [**מכאן**
אתה למד שהתלמוד ניתן לכתוב אלא מפני שהתורה משתכחת]

Slide 18-21 GENRES OF RABBINIC TEXTS

Over the course of history at least 21 genres of Rabbinic texts came into being:

- (1) The **Mishnah** (ca. Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi in 190 CE)
- (2) **Tosefta** recorded by R. Chiyva ca.200 CE
- (3) **Babylonian Talmud** (redacted by Rav Ashi (d.427 CE) and Ravina II d. 475 CE)
- (4) **Jerusalem Talmud** (R. Yose B. Bun 350 CE)
- (5) **Early Halakhic Midrashim** (Mekilta, Sifra, Sifrei) from the Tannaitic era * see slide20
- (6) **later Aggadic Midrashim** in the Amoraic and Geonic periods
- (7) The formation of the Jewish liturgy from the *the Anshei Knesses HaGedolah* and later religious prayers (**piyutim**)
- (8) **Translations into Aramaic (Targumim** by Yonassen b. Uziel and Onkelos)
- (9) Classic **mephorshim** (commentaries) on the Tanakh and rabbinic works by **parshanim** (commentators)

(10) **Talmudic novellae (chiddushim)** by Tosafists, Nahmanides, Nissim of Gerona, Solomon ben Aderet (RaShBA), Yomtov ben Ashbili (Ritva)

(11) **TaRYAG Lists** of the 613 commandments (mitzvoth)

(12) **codes of law** (*Tur, Mishnah Torah, Shulchan Arukh* etc.)

(13) **Responsa genre of text known as sheolot ve-teshuvot**

(14) Ethical works (**Sifrei ha-middot**)

(15) Philosophic works (**Sifrei Machshava**)

(16) countless mystical texts (**Sifrei Kabbalah**) from Sefer Yetzirah attributed to Rabbi Akiva who attributed it to Avraham to the Zohar of R. Shimon b. Yochai (ca. 170 CE) to 6th century Sifrei Hekhalot [(Palace texts), Shiur Komah] , to the Medieval Provencal Sefer HaBahir.

(17) Sifrei **Musar** such as the 12th century Sefer Hasidim by Judah ben Samuel of Regensburg (born 1140 in Speyer - Feb. 22, 1217[1] in Regensburg)

(18) **Historical works (Sifrei HaDorot)** post- Josephus, such as Azariah ben Moses dei Rossi's Meirat Eynaim, to Shem ha-Gedolim by Haim Yosef David Azulai ben Isaac Zerachia (1724 – 1 March 1806)

(19) **Sifrei Dikduk**, Grammatical works from The Masoretes in the 7th to 11th centuries of the ben Asher family such as Aaron

ben Moses ben Asher who refined the Tiberian vocalization to the High Middle Ages in Spain where grammatical works were composed by Judah ben David Hayyuj, Jonah ibn Janah, Abraham ibn Ezra [Moznayim (1140)] , Joseph Kimhi, Moses Kimhi and David Kimhi.

(20) Judeo-Persian, Judeo-Arabic, Ladino, and Yiddish Literature hybrid texts

(21) Letters (Iggerot) i.e. Letter of Sherira Gaon (900-940 CE) , Amulets, & Miscellanea.

Slide 22

So when did written copies of Mishnah and Talmud start to become the norm that displaced the hegemony of orality? Sussman argues this happened in the Geonic period and Yuval argues for this transition as a reaction to the rise of Islam. However Gerhard Nachon argues it was with Rashi's (1040-1105) commentary on Bavli and the subsequent **glossiata of the Tosaphot** were written. Rather than relying completely on the ear, learners would henceforth derive transmission of teachings via the eye from written commentaries.

However Rashi's commentary – the *quntres*- along with the authoritative text of the B.T. were kept by a limited number of scholars. Rashi's grandson Rabbenu Tam writes, **בדקתי בשספרים שלו** (I have checked in Rashi's own ms.) he emphasizes the rarity and uniqueness and exceptional value of his written sources in a culture of pervasive orality.

Slide 24

With the addition of tosaphot to Rashi's commentary the essentially oral culture of the Jews became more based on writing although the passage from orality to written tradition happened slowly in the realm of custom, and the school where the masters handed down halakhah to students orally

An exception to the norm of orality is given by Rabbi Yosef b. Meir ha-Levy ibn Megas, a Spanish 12th century authority who quotes the case of an autodidact, “a man who has never read halakha with one master and does not know the way of halakha nor its commentary, nor its reading, but he saw many of the responsa of the Geonim and the books of laws.... [איש שלא קרא מעלם הלכה עם רב ואינו יודע דרך הלכה ולא פירושה ולא קריאתה [אלא שהוא ראה הרבה מתשובות הגאונים ז"ל וספרי הדינים

Slide25

In the Yeshiva of Rabbi Samuel of Dampierre it is said **60 masters learned before him (Issac b. Samuel of Dampierre) each of them understood the halakhah he said and also each of them learned one treatise of the Talmud that his fellow had not learned. They revised orally and our master Issac did not say one halakhah that was not in their mouth together. So the whole Talmud was put before their eyes during the lesson up to the solution of all the doubts of the Talmud, the whole halakhah and ruling, tanna or amora where contradiction appeared in another place. He sat down and corrected as is clear for whoever saw their tosafot, their questions and answers and commentaries and hassagot that they obtained from their grandfather Rabbenu Shlomo i.e. Rashi**

Slide26

In the Tosaphot to Yebamot 84a R. Juda b. Yom tov from the 12th century Paris explained the oral pedagogy : “he reviews them again briefly in order that they should be filed on your hand and kept upon the mouth and in the heart. [דכן דרך התנה]
לאחר שפירש הלכות מהמסכתא חוזר ושונה אותם בלשון קצר כדי
שיהיו מסדרים בידך ושמורים בפה ובלב

Slide 27

A young student learnt his first tractates from a local teacher. Then continued his study in a Yeshiva under a more advanced teacher. But every tractate he had to learn from the mouth of some teacher. In his commentary on the Talmud Rashi informs us that he received knowledge “from the mouth of his teacher.” Whatever the student did learn, he had to repeat many times, and to review systematically at frequent intervals in later years, in order not to forget it. Rashi on Avodah Zarah 19a comments

לעולם ילמד אדם תורה ואחר כך יהגה

Slide 28

The tosaphot of Megilla 32a “for they were in the habit of repeating the mishnaïot with music because people learned them by heart and in such a way they remembered more.”

שהיו רגלין לשנות המשניות בזמרה לפי שהיו שונים אותם על פה [ועל ידי כך היו נזכרים יותר]

Slide 29

Thus composition of tosafot was the result of discussions held in the rabbinical schools and the recording took place before לפני the master and with his **hashgamah**. Only what the master agreed to was allowed in script. “And the commentary of our master Samuel b. Meir did not agree at all to R. Isaac b. Samuel de Dampierre therefore I did not write it down”: **ופירוש רבינו שמואל אין נראה לרבי יצחק כלל לכך לא כתבתיו**

Slide 30

In conformity with the Brisker tradition we see that the practice of writing little goes back to the Middle Ages for even the great tosaphist R. Isaac b. Samuel of Dampierre “wrote little. At the end of a rabbinical commentary we find two letters: **מ"ר** which means **מפי רבי** “ from the mouth of my master

Slide 32

Sefer Hasidim urges consultation with written texts of tosafot. *“if one rabbi has a tosaphot and the other rabbi has not, he may not say, ‘I will not lend to him my tosaphot so that his students will come to me in order to study’ Therefore keep the rule ‘Be the honor of your colleague beloved as your own.’ (Avot 4:13) and it is written : That shalt love thy neighbor as thyself*

אם יש לאדם תלמידים יעסוק בתקנתם וכך רב אחד טוב (Lev. 19:18)
בעיר ויש תלמידים טובים כתלמידיו יעסוק בתקנתם כמו תקנת
תלמידיו ואם יש לו תוספות ואין לרב אחר תוספות לא יאמר לא
אשאל לו ויבאו תלמידיו לפני ללמוד לכך אומר יהי כבוד חבריך
חביב עליך כשלך וכתוב ואהבת לרעך כמוך

MEDIEVAL EDUCATION

Slide 33

Rabbi Isidore Twerski has noted the purpose of the medieval Jewish education was to foster the striving for: (1) **Shlemut** (perfection) (2) **tikkun ha-nefesh** (correction of the soul) , (3) **kedushah** (holiness) , (4) **da'at torah** (Knowledge of G-d), (5) **ahavat Hashem** (love of G-d), (6) **avodat Hashem** (service of G-d).

Slide 34

Some Christian scholars admired the dedication of some Jews commitment to the principle of learning **lishma**. For instance one of Peter Abelard's students in the 12th century wrote a letter in which he noted the Jewish emphasis on educational learning lishma independent of reward in olam hazeh, exemplified by the regularity with which **Jews out of zeal for G-d and love of the law, “put as many sons as they have to**

letters, that each may understand G-d's law... “ Maimonides forbid using the torah as a spade with which to dig.

Jewish students often traveled from school to school to soak up wisdom from a variety of teachers. Rashi on Shir Hashirim 5:16 writes, "**Like doves that wander from one dovecote to the second to seek their food, so they go from the school of one scholar to the school of another scholar to seek explanations.... for the Torah**

Slide 35 (skip Mishnah avot 5:21 if said in intro)

According to the mishna in Avot 5:21 the high level of religious knowledge is conveyed when we recall “***At age five one begins studying scripture. At ten, Mishnah; at thirteen fulfilling the mitzvoth; at fifteen studying Talmud;*** at eighteen entering the bride-chamber; at twenty pursuing a calling; at thirty authority; at forty discernment; at fifty counsel; at sixty being an elder; at seventy grey hair; at eighty special strength; at ninety a bowed back; at a hundred a man is one that has already died, passed on, and departed this world **הוא היה אומר בן חמש שנים למקרא בן עשר למשנה בן שלש עשרה למצות בן חמש עשרה לתלמוד בן שמונה עשרה לחופה בן עשרים לרדוף בן שלשים לכח בן ארבעים לבינה בן חמשים לעצה בן ששים לזקנה בן שבעים לשיבה בן שמונים לגבורה בן תשעים לשוח בן מאה כאילו מת ועבר ובטל מן העולם**

Slide 36

Children often began their studies on **Shavuot** by learning the alphabet *backwards and forward* with the letters written in honey.

Rabbi Akiva learned the alphabet by pairing the first and last letter combinations (aleph-tav, bet-shin, etc.) The rabbis called this method **atbash** and the entire set of letter pairing became part of an exegetical technique in rabbinic and medieval hermeneutics. The earliest preserved Hebrew alphabet primers from the *Cairo Geniza* reflect this. Several pages include outlines of the alphabet written forwards and backwards, in the first last combinations and with opening verses from Leviticus. As documented by Simchah Assaf, in Meqorot 4:16 (no. 21) from the Cairo Geniza. **Assaf's A sourcebook for the History of Jewish Education from the beginning of the Middle ages to the period of the Haskalah**, edited by Shmuel Glick, 5 vols, NY: JTSA, 2002-6, is a major source for this subject.

Slide 37-38 [skip if cited in intro]

According to Kiddushin 29a A father's obligation is to his son included circumcise him, redeem him, and teach him Torah &

an occupation, and marrying him off. ” **האב חייב בבנו למולו, ולפדותו, וללמדו תורה, ולהשיאו אשה, וללמדו אומנות**

*Many letters and court records from Cairo Geniza attest to the centrality of education in Jewish life for example a women from a family tried to prove in a trial that her husband did not have the rights of a husband because he did not pay for the education of his children (she paid herself). In a settlement a women confirmed that she had paid expenses associated with the education of their three children

Slide 39

The question arises what was the 1st pusek a child learned? Some Geniza documents indicate it is the pusek, “May it be your will O L-rd our G-d that Your Torah be my occupation (**omanuti**) while Midrash Vayikra 7:3 indicates that R.

Hamnuna names the pusek from Devarim 33:4 ” **תּוֹרַה צְוֵה-לָנוּ, מִשָּׁה: מוֹרְשָׁה, קְהֵלֵת יַעֲקֹב** as the first pusek. Still other historical docs. Indicate that children began with studying **Vayikra** reasoning that Korbanot are pure and children pure.

Slide 40 and 41 Ibn Ezra Synagogue (Maimonides’ synaoguge) and geniza above womens’ section.

Slide 42

Responsa in the Cairo Geniza refer to schools, teachers, and their salaries, pupils, books, teachers and tutors being appointed to small towns , and that Jewish children in synagogues learn Hebrew and Arabic script, as well as arithmetic.

Slide 43

Another source for knowledge about medieval education is Goitein's ***A Mediterranean Society*** where A letter, notes that "The teacher should be respected and the children should be sent to school in the synagogue every morning and every evening." This teacher responded this way because he received a complaint from a parent that he assigned "too much homework." Further in a business letter a Jewish merchant advises his correspondent to "make sure that his son does not interrupt his studies"; if the need arises the friend was asked to advance the school fees. One Jewish merchant criticizes his wife for "letting the children skip school and play in the streets." In the same letter he sends his brother 15 dirhams for his children's teacher and a fine piece of clothing for his son, to encourage him to attend the beit sefer.

The records from the Geniza also attest that the Jewish community made great efforts to provide education for orphans and the children of the poor. Each household in addition to school fees for their own children, had to pay an education tax. Records from Fustat, Jerusalem, Damascus, and Baghdad mention “teachers of the orphans” supported by this communal tax. A document from the Geniza also provides evidence of expenditures from individual households for their own children.

PRIMARY ARCHIVAL TEXT

“Account of the teaching of children in bet sefer of R. Nisim son of Ibrahim, community leader from Shabat Bereishit until Shabat Va-Yoseha- 16 weeks, 8 dirhams
Son of the carpenter called Chayoun the Mugarbi for 4 months- 8 dirhams
Three sons of Calaf from the town of Almachla for 12 weeks- 15 dirhams
Chayoun the Mugarbi the orphan from the month of av until Shabbat Va-Yoshea- 5 months, 10.5 dirhams
Sons of the shoemaker’s wife and a little boy of R. Yehoshua, for 10 weeks ending with Shabbat VaYoshea- 15 dirhams
Son of Mechsas the Shamash and the sons of Baha the shomer Kasthruth supervisor for 12 weeks- 12 dirhams”

Slide 44 Solomon Schechter sorting and organizing Geniza fragments

Slide 46

The re-construction of collections of rabbinic texts in the medieval ages involves complex detective work and well worth the effort as Rabbi Shimon Ben Zemach Duran author of Zohar HaRakia notes when he writes, “when the wise man lies down with his fathers, he leaves behind him a treasured and

organized blessing: books that enlighten like the brilliance of the firmament (Daniel 12:3) and that extend peace like a river (Isa. 66:12).” Might we all turn our lives into a song as Rabbi Yehudah HaLevy urges in his comment, “My pen is my harp and my library like gardens that refresh the mind and delight the soul”.

Reconstructing what constituted these early collections of texts, and how they expanded is the job of the librarian as detective historian

Slides 47- 49 Post-Script: Kabbalah and Orality? Is the term Sifrei Kabbalah and oxymoron. Or contradiction?