

## Introduction to the Talmud

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“...A written document, no matter how perfect, is always open to misinterpretation”  
Maimonides, introduction to Mishnah

Imagine: A boy in India discovers an abandoned book sitting along a dirt road. It is written in English, so he rushes home to his English speaking grandfather who can tell him what knowledge this tome holds. The grandfather explains to the child that this is a book on the rules of Baseball. Curious, they meet every afternoon to sit and read from this treasure they now have. After several months they decide they are ready to play this exciting sport and gather friends around explaining to them the rules of the game; strikes, balls, hits, etc. Now, what will this game look like? Will it have even a remote resemblance to our great national pastime? Remote at best. For until they actually *see* a game of baseball played, not just read about it, they cannot fully understand and identify with what a bat is, the role of the pitcher, etc.

A scalpel in the hands of a medical student, no matter how informed that student might be, is a liability. He must first go through the necessary residency where he sees first hand what he has already learnt.

G-d in His infinite wisdom understood that to just hand over to a people a document alone, a constitution, would only sully His objective. He had to make this text ambiguous and non direct in order to bind that nation to a constant yearning for first hand knowledge from their parents and teachers. They in turn had received that same knowledge from their previous generations, thereby creating a constant unbroken chain to that awesome mass-revelation, thus thwarting any misreading. An oral tradition to complement, nay, elucidate the Divine text.

“ Keep the Sabbath holy...” , but how? Not even one of the 39 forbidden acts is clearly taught to us in the written Torah. “You shall slaughter.... as I have commanded you”, yet nowhere in all of canonized writing is any law of Shechitah (ritual slaughter) detailed. What are these Tefillin the Torah commands us to wear? What is Matzah exactly? Tzitzes? A Mikvah?

*This* is the remarkable gift that has sustained us. ***We just won't know until we ask-*** we ***can not*** do it on our own. All the movements away from Halachik Judaism are at their core a denial of the oral tradition, where the written word is open to flexible and convenient personal interpretation.

As this nation's story developed so did its sufferings. Through exiles and persecutions, their structure of laws – covering all spectrums of society life - had miraculously remained intact. Tort law; as deliberate and detailed as our American system. Property law; where liens and loans are discussed with the realism of the modern market. Family law; where divorce and inheritance are dealt with the sensitivity and complexity it deserves.

This is not to mention all the ritual law which is as multi-faceted as one would expect from the Divine.

But then the inevitable happened. Affliction spawned forgetfulness which in turn generated controversy. This new chasm had to be sealed. It was time to work for G-d (Psalms 119:126), to do the unthinkable yet the necessary:

*To preserve the life blood of this nation, the oral would have to be transformed to the written.*

But what of the tradition of transference – that secret that had sustained us?!

The Rabbis, with their knowledge of the past and sense for the future, articulated the oral tradition in a written form in a way that was nothing short of genius.

They wrote the Mishnah, and later, the Gemorah (Talmud) where all the oral laws are explicated in a most chaotic way. Riddles and purposefully lacking text collide in an explosion of the unexplained and ambivalent. Where the Sabbath and astronomy are discussed in a single breath. Where leaps must be made from pure mathematical logic to mystical esoteric thought in single page.

How does a nation study this text without aide from teachers who can prove their theories through reason as well through transmission?

*They can't.* The oral tradition has been sustained!

Today this nation is suffering again and although its body is whole its soul is calling out. So many, without standard Jewish education, want to know and understand G-d's wisdom. They may have a Torah (Bible) at home translated to their mother tongue, yet they feel almost like that Indian boy who longed to play ball yet lacked the tradition of the game.

This nation leaves no one to die in the battle field. So a plan was conceived where on top of study sessions for all different backgrounds, a separate unique one will be formed. A *Daf Yomi* (lit. folio a day) – where all Jews can discover and rediscover the intellectual marvel of the Talmud. One page a day. A “tithing” of time to G-d and his wisdom – *this nation's* wisdom.

This plan spread like wild fire. From London to Los Angeles, from Moscow to Mexico City, Jews, from around the world, once again began to replenish their souls and quench their spiritual thirst using the Talmud as their compass. What a spectacle it was last year when Madison Square Garden, Nassau Coliseum and stadiums and auditoriums from around the globe were sold out to the *hundreds of thousands* of Jews who wanted to take part of and bear witness to the tenth completion of the Talmud since *Daf Yomi's* inception. Jews - celebrating together their greatest miracle; The Oral Tradition.

Discover what is myth and what is fact in this storied faith. You will not only gain for yourself but reconnect to that chain your grandparents clung to so tightly that helped secure our future as Jews.

From Sinai to Buffalo.

*Daf Yomi takes place nightly at the Young Israel of Greater Buffalo, 105 Maple Road, after the evening services. For complete schedule call 634-0212 or visit their web site at [yibuffalo.org](http://yibuffalo.org)*