

RABBINIC BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

Jewish Text

Just like information stored in a computer, every piece of Jewish legal literature has its own access codes so that the rulings it contains can be indexed, accessed and retrieved. Most of these codes contain three elements: the name of a book, the number of a chapter, and the number of a section (e.g., sentence, verse, law, or paragraph).

Ex. 20:12 is from the Bible, book of Exodus, chapter 20, verse 12.

San. 4.3 is from the Mishnah, tractate Sanhedrin, chapter 4, mishnah 3.

O.H. 295:3 is from the Shulhan Arukh, the portion called Orekh Haim, chapter 295, law 3.

While the basic formula of book, chapter, section is consistent, it is only of limited help. First, many of the book codings are given in abbreviations. These are not always easy to decode. Both “Ex.” And “Exod.” Are frequently used to abbreviate Exodus. Second, most of these titles are in Hebrew and are reproduced in transliteration. Different works use different systems of transliteration. “O.H.” is the standard abbreviation for the portion of the Shulhan Arukh known as the Orekh Haim. In various books you will find this name spelled Orekh Hayim, Orech Chaim or other variations. Without a chart, or without knowing in advance which “books” go with which “major works” there is no way to tell a Mishnah from a Biblical verse.

The **Bible** is made up of 39 books divided into three sections: Torah, Prophets and Writings. Each book’s name can be abbreviated. We access a section of Torah by book, chapter, and verse. The Hebrew Bible is sometimes called the Tanakh (TaNaKh refers to Torah=Law, Nevi'im=Prophets, Kituvim=Writings), Old Testament, Mikra (proclaim), Katuv (written), or Scripture (Latin=writing). Within the Bible the Torah is called the Five Books of Moses, Pentatuch (Greek=5), or Humash (Hebrew=5).

<u>Torah</u>	<u>Prophets</u>	<u>Writings</u>
Genesis	Joshua	Joel
Exodus	Judges	Amos
Leviticus	I Samuel	Obadiah
Numbers	II Samuel	Jonah
Deuteronomy	I Kings	Micah
	II Kings	Nahum
	Isaiah	Habakkuk
	Jeremiah	Zephaniah
	Ezekiel	Haggai
	Hosea	Zechariah
		Malachi
		Psalms
		Proverbs
		Job
		Song of Songs
		Lamentations
		Ecclesiastes
		Esther
		Daniel
		Ezra
		Nehemiah
		I Chronicles
		II Chronicles

The **Pseudepigrapha** (false writing) are writings falsely attributed to Biblical characters, alleged to have been written in Biblical times, but never accepted as canonical.

The **Hagiographa** (sacred writing) are the Writings - all of the Old Testament not in the Torah or the Prophets.

The **Septuagint** (seventy) is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, so named for the 72 scholars who, according to tradition, simultaneously produced identical translations in 72 days while separated from one another in the 3rd c. BCE

The **Apocrypha** (hidden, secret) are books found in the Septuagint, but not included in the Hebrew Bible.

Tobit	Susanna
Judith	Bel and the Dragon
Additions to the Book of Esther	I Maccabees
Wisdom of Solomon	II Maccabees
Ecclesiasticus	I Esdras
(Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach)	Prayer of Manasseh
Baruch	Psalm 151, following Psalm 150 in the
The Letter of Jeremiah	Greek Bible
The Additions to the Book of Daniel	III Maccabees
Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Jews	II Esdras
	IV Maccabees

The **Dead Sea Scrolls** date from the Second Temple period (100 BCE), and were found at Qumran in 1947.

The **Targum** (translation) are the various Aramaic translations of the Hebrew Bible.

The **Vulgate** (common) is the Latin translation of the Hebrew Bible prepared by St. Jerome for the Roman Catholic Church in the 4th c. CE

The **Peshitta** (simple) is the Syriac translation of the Hebrew and Christian Bibles.

The **Mishnah** (repeat, pl. Mishnayot) is the Oral Law codified by Judah HaNasi in 200 CE. It is divided into 6 Sederim (orders), which are further subdivided into masechtot (tractate). The six orders are not used in the reference citation given to a piece of Mishnah. The Mishnah is usually bound in six volumes, one for each order. The citation for a piece of Mishnah is tractate, chapter, and mishnah. A single paragraph found in a particular masechet is referred to as a “mishnah.”

Zera'im <i>Seeds</i>	Mo'ed <i>Festivals</i>	Nashim <i>Women</i>	Nezeikin <i>Damages</i>	Kodashim <i>Sacred Things</i>	Tohorot <i>Purifications</i>
Brakhot	Shabbat	Yevamot	Bava Kamma	Zevahim+	Kelim+*
Pe'ah*	Eruvin	Ketubbot	Bava Metzia	Menahot+	Oholot+*
Demai*	Pesahim	Nedarim	Bava Batra	Bekhorot+	Nega'im+*
Kilayim*	Shekalim*	Nazir	Sanhedrin	Arakhin+	Parah+*
Shevi'it*	Yoma	Sotah	Makkot	Temurah+	Tohorot+*
Terumot*	Sukkah	Gittin	Shevu'ot	Keritot+	Mikva'ot+*
Ma'aserot*	Betzah	Kiddushin	Eduyyot+	Me'ilah+	Niddah
Ma'aser Sheni*	Rosh Hashanah		Avodah Zarah	Tamid+	Mokhshirim+*
Hallah*	Ta'anit		Avot+*	Middot+*	Zavim+*
Orlah*	Megillah		Horayot	Kinnin+*	Tevul Yom+*
Bikkurim*	Mo'ed Katan				Yadayim+*
	Hagigah				Uktzin+*

The **Talmud** has a different citation format. The **Babylonian Talmud** is made up of 63 tractates, though the Babylonian rabbis didn't collect a Gemara for every Mishnah. We label a piece of Talmud by the tractate, the page and the side. We are accustomed to paginating books with each side of paper having its own number. When books were first printed, each sheet of paper had a number. The first side was labeled “a” and the second “b.” That format is still used for Talmud. Any citation of Jewish text that includes a small “a” or “b” is from the Talmud. (In Hebrew citations of the Talmud the “a” is indicated by “.” and the “b” by “:.”)

The **Jerusalem Talmud**, sometimes called the **Yerushalmi**, has two different citation methods, both of which are fairly complex. You can never confuse a Jerusalem Talmud with a Babylonian Talmud because the Jerusalem Talmud is always labeled as “Jerusalem Talmud,” “JT,” or “TJ.” Both the Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmud are commentaries on the Mishnah and follow its organization. The commentary on the Mishnah is called the **Gemara** (complete), and was completed around 500 CE. In the Talmud, the Mishnah and Gemara appear together. Those books marked with a “*” in the chart

above have no Babylonian Gemara. Those marked with a “*” have no Babylonian Gemara. Those marked with a “+” are not found in the Jerusalem Talmud. In addition, seven additional tractates are added to the order Nezikin in the Babylonian Talmud. These tractates were added later and may not appear in all editions of the Babylonian Talmud: Avot d’Rabbi Natan, Sofrim, Ayvel Rabbati, Kalah, Derekh Eretz Rabbah, Derekh Eretz Zuta, and Perek Ha Shalom.

Rabbinic literature (roughly from 70 CE through the early Middle Ages) contains a number of other features. The **Tannaim** (singular Tanna) were teachers who were active in the period preceding the canonization of the Mishnah, beginning with Hillel and Shammai (1st century CE) and ending with R. Judah HaNasi (170-220 CE). The **Amorim** (singular Amora) were "discussants" who were active from the period of the completion of the Mishnah (c. 200 CE) until the completion of the Talmud (c. 500 CE). Important Amoraim include Rav, Samuel, R. Sheshet, and Rava.

The **Tosefta** is a work closely resembling the Mishnah, hence its name, which means "addition." The Tosefta is subdivided in the same way as the Mishnah, but tends to give a more detailed version of the tannaitic teachings. A **Baraita** is some Tannaitic material that did not make it into the Mishnah, and usually appears in the Gemara. It has similar weight to Mishnaic material.

The **Mishneh Torah** is Moses Maimonides’ (Rambam’s) code of Jewish law that was finished in 1187. It has two names: Mishneh Torah (the second teaching of the Torah), and Yad Ha Hazakah (the mighty hand). Rambam felt that a person who had a Tanakh and his Mishneh Torah would not need any other book of Jewish law. Yad Ha Hazakah refers to the biblical image in Deut. 34:12, *God took Israel out of Egypt with an outstretched arm and a mighty hand*. The Hebrew word Yad can also represent the number 14 – the number of books that make up the Mishneh Torah. Citations from the Mishneh Torah usually begin with the word Yad, and then list the book, the chapter, and the law.

<p>Book 1 Knowledge Fundamental of the Torah Ethical ideas Torah study Idolatry & heathenism Repentance</p>	<p>Book 2 Love of God Reading of the Shema Prayer Tefillin Mezuzah Sefer Torah Tzit'tzit Benedictions</p>	<p>Book 3 Set Times Shabbat Eruvin Yom Kippur Rest Festival rest Hametz & matzah Shofar Sukkah Lulav Shekalim Sanctification of the new moon Megillah Hanukkah</p>	<p>Book 4 Women Marriage Divorce Levirate marriage & halitzah</p>	<p>Book 5 Holiness Forbidden foods Shehitah</p>	<p>Book 6 Pledging Oaths Vows Naziriteship</p>	<p>Book 7 Seeds Gifts to the poor Priestly offerings Tithing Sabbatical year & Jubilee</p>
<p>Book 8 Temple Service The Temple Temple utensils Daily & additional offerings Sacrilege</p>	<p>Book 9 Sacrifices Pilgrim offerings Firstlings</p>	<p>Book 10 Purity Corpse defilement Leprosy Food defilement Mikvaot</p>	<p>Book 11 Damages Property Theft Robbery & lost property Assault & battery Homicide Life preservation</p>	<p>Book 12 Acquisition Sales Acquisitions & gift neighbors Agents & partners Slaves</p>	<p>Book 13 Civil Law Hiring Borrowing & depositing Creditor & debtor Plaintiff & defendant Inheritance</p>	<p>Book 14 Judges Sanhedrin Evidence Rebels Mourning Kings</p>

The **Shulhan Arukh** was written by a Sefardic scholar named Joseph Caro and finished in 1563. Shulhan Arukh means “the set table.” While the Shulhan Arukh became the authoritative code of Jewish law, it was one of two works written by Caro. The other was called the Beit Yosef (the “House of Jacob” – a pun based on one of the Torah’s names for the Jewish people). This was a commentary on the Arbah Turim (The Four Columns,” also known as the Tur), a code of Jewish law written by Jacob ben Asher in Toledo, Spain in the late 1500’s. When Caro came to organize his law code, he used the same four section structure that Asher had created for the Tur. Each section contains two or three hundred chapters. Usually, when you see a citation from the Shulhan Arukh, it will begin, “Sh. Ar.,” and then list the section, the chapter, and the law. Other times, you will see just the coding for a particular section: O.H., Y.D., E.H., and H.M. References to other books with the same section names may also appear as “Beit Yosef, HM,” or “Tur, OH.”

Moses Isserles, an Ashkenazic scholar whose name is often contracted to “Rema,” also wrote two works. The first, Darkhei Moshe (The Way of Moses), was a commentary on the Tur, and collected all the legal cases and decisions which applied to each law. Later, when the Shulhan Arukh became popular, Isserles wrote a series of “glosses” which added Ashkenazic tradition to Caro’s Sefardic code. Isserles’ commentary was called either the Rema or the Mappah, which means “the table cloth.” Citations to Isserles glosses to the Shulhan Arukh appear as “Rema, OH,” or “Darkhei Moshe, YD.”

Orekh Ha’im <i>The Way of Life</i> Daily commandments and holidays	Yoreh Deah <i>Teaching of Ideas</i> Kashrut and Purity	Even ha-Ezer <i>The Helping Rock</i> Marriage and Divorce	Hoshen Mishpat <i>Breastplate of Justice</i> Civil and Criminal Law
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Jewish legal works that codify Jewish law such as the Mishneh Torah and the Shulhan Arukh are referred to as “Codes” or “Restatements of Jewish Law.”

Rashi

- French commentator on the Talmud. Rashi's comments are always found on the side of the page closest to the binding.

Tosafot

- Rashi grandsons, descendants, and disciples who commented on Talmud.
- Always found on the outside of the page.

Midrash (explain) - Literary works containing explanation of scripture.

Cairo Geniza Fragments - Discovered in the late 19th century, these fragments date from 300 CE to 1000 CE

Responsa - Questions and answers regarding legal issues.