

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION
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TALMUDIC METHODOLOGY

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DIVIDING ONE'S TIME FOR TORAH STUDY

The gemara in Kiddushin describes the strategy for managing a daily schedule vis-a-vis the mitzva of Talmud Torah. The gemara recommends a three part division of the hours spent learning Torah: A third is to be spent learning 'mikra,' (Tanakh) a third studying 'mishna' and a third studying 'talmud.' As the gemara asserts "le-olam yashlich adam shenotav' a person should divide his learning in three...." This article will explore the dimensions of this halakha and particularly the discrepancy between the gemara's recipe and our actual Torah schedule.

The Rishonim were quick to note the aforementioned discrepancy. If indeed the gemara campaigns in favor of an equal three part division, why do we, in practice, dedicate so much of our time to Torah she-be'al peh at the expense of 'mikra'? The various suggested answers cast light upon how the different Rishonim understood this halakha.

The Beit Yosef (Yoreh De'ah 246) cites two opinions which defend our actual practice. According to Rabeinu Yerucham, the gemara proposes a broad educational agenda rather than a daily routine. Torah education should be built upon a solid three-legged foundation of mikra, mishna and talmud. Once, however, this foundation is entrenched, most of one's time should be spent learning talmud. Obviously, talmud knowledge without corresponding mikra knowledge is deficient. However, once a solid footing is gained in mikra (whatever that level may be) resources should be reserved for talmud.

Similar sentiments are expressed by the Rambam (Hilkhos Talmud Torah 1:11). Prior to understanding his position, however, we must consider his translation of the three different categories. The gemara spoke of mikra, mishna and talmud. The Rambam reevaluated these categories as:

1. SCRIPTURE

2. ORAL LAW - mishna AND gemara

3. ANALYSIS - to "analyze and apprehend a logical consequence and its source, to infer one idea from another, comparing one element to another he must understand the logical foundation (literally the thirteen exegetical laws by which the oral law is deduced from the written)" .

The Rambam refers to the last category as 'gemara' (notice also the shift from the term 'talmud' which the gemara in Kiddushin employed to the term 'gemara' which the Rambam views as more inclusive).

In terms of time management he continues: "The gemara in Kiddushin only speaks of one's initial period of learning; once he achieves 'chokhma' and must no longer acquire knowledge in the fields of Torah she-bikhtav or Torah she-be'al peh, he should periodically review these so that he won't forget but should essentially spend the majority of his time pursuing 'gemara' - the ability to creatively adduce and understand the foundation of the Halakhic system." Again the Rambam as the Rabenu Yerucham does not see the gemara in Kiddushin as prescribing a balanced diet but rather ensuring that Torah study and Torah education be holistic and all-encompassing. Ultimately, though, the 'ends' of learning should be Torah she-be'al peh or the Rambam's notion of 'gemara'.

A similar approach is taken by the Ramah cited in the same Beit Yosef. He justifies the gemara's plan based upon a student for whom a third of his daily study is sufficient to assure proficiency in talmud. However for most people this meager allotment is not sufficient to master the complexity of gemara. Hence more time must be allotted to gemara learning even at the expense of mikra and mishna. A similar but slightly different tact is adopted by the Ran in Avoda Zara (5b in the pagination of the Rif) who claims that the gemara's time strategy was never intended literally; the gemara in Kiddushin never asserted that equal time be spent on mikra and gemara. Obviously, for most people gemara learning demands greater time investment (just as mishna requires more investment than mikra - something the Ran himself is aware of). The gemara's statement merely encourages us to facilitate the meaningful learning of each of the three component by apportioning appropriate blocks of time for each. Whereas the Ramah understands the gemara in Kiddushin literally, but ascribes its schedule to a select group (those who can master gemara learning in less time) the Ran interprets the gemara in a non-literal

fashion. Both, however, reach the same conclusion: More time must be allotted to gemara learning simply because its demands are greater.

There is a common thread which runs through Rabeinu Yerucham, the Rambam the Ramah and the Ran: Gemara learning as an ends is to some degree deemed more 'valuable'. The Rambam states quite clearly that the ends of learning are 'gemara'. Chazal by suggesting this tri-part division are merely assuring that gemara learning will be built upon a solid and broad foundation. According to the Ramah, time may be channeled from mikra and mishna learning and utilized for gemara learning. To one degree or another they all perceive within our practice a reevaluation of the three segments of Torah and they all reinterpret the gemara in Kiddushin so as to limit it. This notion of the superiority of gemara learning (as an ends) emerges from an interesting gemara in Bava Metzia (33a). The gemara refers to one who studies only mikra as possessing 'midah ve-eino midah (a good trait but only in part), one who studies mikra and mishna has achieved the level of midah - an unqualified 'good trait'. Finally about one who studies gemara as well the gemara announces 'no one has traits which surpass this'. The simple reading of this gemara suggests a prioritization of gemara learning over other bodies of Torah. (see afterward for a discussion of Rashi's reinterpretation of this gemara).

SUMMARY:

We have witnessed several Rishonim who assume some 'superiority' to gemara learning and endeavor to cast the gemara's equation in a different light.

An entirely different approach is staked by the Tosafists. Instead of accepting the discrepancy between the gemara's schedule and common practice they discern within our own schedule a 'reflection' of the gemara's original intention. Tosafot in Kiddushin explain that the sections which are recited prior to tefilla which contain mikra, mishna and gemara allow us to dispense with our obligation to study all three. Tosafot note that in the Siddur of Rav Amram Gaon the minhag to cite portions from mikra, mishna and gemara (the present-day section known as 'korbanot') fulfills our obligation to study all three and 'frees' us to spend the majority of our time studying gemara. The Scriptural excerpts (Shemot 30:18 describing the 'kiyor,' Shemot 30:34 describing the 'ketoret,' Vayikra 6:1 describing the 'terumat ha-deshen,' and Bemidbar 28:2 describing the daily tamid offering) and the Mishnaic excerpts (Eizehu Mekoman - the fifth perek of Zevachim

describing the exact regimen of sacrificing different korbanot) and the Amoraic excerpt known as "Beraita de-Rebbi Yishma'el" (listing the thirteen exegetical tools by which Chazal 'unzipped' the Torah) allow us to discharge the gemara's quota of mikra, mishna and gemara.

Tosafot cite a second opinion in the name of the Rabeinu Tam. He quotes the gemara in Sanhedrin (24a) which notes the use of the term "Bavli" which in Biblical Hebrew can refer to something 'mixed up' and 'assorted'. According to the gemara, the Talmud Bavli is an amalgam of mikra, mishna and gemara. Rabeinu Tam draws the natural conclusion: By exclusively studying Talmud Bavli, a person fulfills his three part quota as he encounters an admixture of the three.

In truth, many understand Rabenu Tam literally. By studying Talmud Bavli one is assured of ALSO having the occasion to read mikra and mishna and hence covers all bases. In a responsa (42) the Bach deduces from this Rabenu Tam that a verse from the Torah read without the addition of the musical notes (known as ta'amei ha-mikra or 'trup') is still halakhically considered a verse of 'Torah' (with regard to talmud Torah) After all, according to Rabenu Tam, reading a verse in THIS manner while studying gemara 'counts' as the mikra requirement. Hence, a verse read without the musical notes is considered 'mikra' in the truest sense. The Ya'avetz draws a similar conclusion about reciting a verse without using the name of God (but referring to 'Hashem'). If, according to Rabeinu Tam, reading pesukim in this manner during gemara study fulfills the daily quota of mikra, evidently pesukim read in such fashion are legitimately considered 'Torah verses'. Both the Bach and the Ya'avetz understand Rabeinu Tam literally. Through the course of gemara study, inevitably a person will read verses and recite mishnayot thereby fulfilling his daily quota of all three.

It might be possible to suggest an alternate understanding of Rabeinu Tam's position. What would happen if a person spent an entire year studying Massekhet Eiruvim - a tractate discussing the laws of Eiruvim - all of which are Rabbinic in origin. This study would not provide frequent opportunity (and certainly not daily opportunity) to recite pesukim?! Even within a massekhta with a high ratio of pesukim one can often spend weeks upon weeks analyzing a section of the gemara without encountering a mishna or another statement of Tannaitic origin. It would seem difficult to accept the Rabenu Tam at face value!!

The Rabenu Tam might have operated upon a different notion. By encouraging a three part division the gemara in Kiddushin was merely underscoring the INTEGRATED NATURE of the three parts of Torah. In theory, one could propose a study which is based upon one of three segments independently. In response to this the gemara reminds us that the three compose ONE corpus intended to be studied as such. Severing them produces an inauthentic and fraudulent portrait of the true Torah. They must be studied as one corpus and the development of mishna from mikra and subsequently gemara from mishna must be fully appreciated. The gemara in Kiddushin was never suggesting an equal time slice for all three, nor was it addressing the respective values of different segments. Rather, it was underscoring the incorporated nature of the three. According to Rabenu Tam nothing highlights this integration more aptly than the study of Talmud Bavli which weaves the three together in the course of its logical development. By studying this segment a person admits the integration of the three units. Even if practically no pesukim are recited or no mishnayot studied, a person has avowed this integration - which from the beginning was the entire purpose of the gemara's statement in Kiddushin.

We might even choose to view the first position cited by Tosafot in a similar manner. How in fact do we dispense with the three part quota merely by reading a few symbolic portion of mikra mishna and gemara in the morning? Doesn't the gemara in Kiddushin insist on a comprehensive tri-part division? In truth maybe Tosafot himself viewed the halakha cited by the gemara Kiddushin as affirming the unity of the three sections of Torah. By symbolically declaring this in the morning through the reading of selected passages , a person 'sets the tone' for the rest of his learning. Even if he spends his entire day studying gemara he has already noted the unity of the Torah.

METHODOLOGICAL POINTS:

1. Quite often a Talmudic analysis revolves around the attempts to reconcile statements made by the gemara with actual practice. Two options present themselves. One is to limit the gemara's presentation while affirming the common practice. The other choice is to redefine the gemara's intention so that our practice is in 'synch'.

AFTERWARD:

In Bava Metzia (33a) Rashi explains the preference for mishna learning over mikra and the preference for gemara study over mishna in a purely historic context. Since the oral law was still being conveyed orally, many errors in transmission occurred. Hence one who focused upon areas of oral law as opposed to Scripture was aiding the correction of the Masorah. There is no innate prioritization of mishna and gemara over mikra, merely a contextual one.