

FOREWORD

The Babylonian Talmud, the work of the yeshivot of Babylon, which brings forth the *Yetzirah* of the sages of Babylon and the Land of Israel over the course of a number of generations is a complex creation. A *sugia* of Talmud is comprised of sayings originating from different times: Biblical passages, Tannaic sources, as well as the words of the Amoraim and *stam* Talmud. Thus, the *sugia* contains various literary forms – interpretation of the words of earlier sages, debate and independent sayings. The Talmud itself – despite being made up of *sugiot* – is not a formless mixture, rather it is structured in a rational and organised way.

This multi-faced creation is presented to the learner in different editions that were published as one piece. As a general rule, there is no differentiation between the different *sugiot*, and within the *sugiot*, there are no punctuation marks or anything else to help define the different portions of the *sugia*. The beginner will find it hard to follow the structure of the *sugia* and its process, to distinguish between foundation stones and commentary, and how the different sections of the *sugia* are linked together. He must be skilful and well-versed in the many Talmudic terms in order to understand all the parts of the *sugia*, and to be aware of the way that the *sugia* was edited in the tractate. As early as 120 years ago, Rabbi Meir Ish-Shalom had already this problem: “Indeed, this Talmud that we are accustomed to is a mix of commentaries, additions, additions upon additions, innovations, and additions on innovations... how will someone who has not grown up with them from his youth, understand them?”

In this sample booklet, we have tried to solve some of the difficulties lying in the path of the learner. In each *sugia*, we have distinguished between the different sources from a chronological/literary perspective, Tannaic sources, Amoraic sayings and *stam* Talmud. With the Amoraic sayings, we have provided the name of the Amora in boldface type, and with the title describing a Tannaic source being in larger type.

In addition, separation between lines is based on the distinction between different parts of the *sugiot*, from the perspective of their function (e.g. questions, answers, proofs, explanations).

As well as the above, we have seen a need to emphasise the literal structure of the *sugia* and its components. A strong link exists between form and content in every *sugia*. The format of the *sugia*, its architecture, forms an important ingredient in capturing its essence. At times it is not possible to understand the *sugia*'s (or part of its) meaning without paying attention to its linguistic formation. In part, the punctuation will assist reading with better pronunciation, although we can never be certain of the correct pronunciation of the Aramaic and the Mishnaic Hebrew. Pronunciation differs mildly between various traditions. We have only tried to focus here on the different approaches that have been developed and applied in different fields.

G-d willing, in future publications, we will expand further and explain our unique approach.

“TRACTATE” CHANUKKAH

The primary targets that stood before us when we began to arrange the text brought here were these:

1. To make it easy for the learner by dividing the text into *sugiot*, and by visually separating the different parts of the *sugia*.
2. To give the learner the tools to acquire the skills to understand the *sugia* and its structure while paying attention to its content and form.

It is acceptable to see the Talmud as a work which rolls from *sugia* to *sugia* in an associative manner. It is thus possible to understand the place of *sugiot* relating to Chanukkah in the Tractate Shabbat. From the shabbat candles the Talmud moves onto Chanukkah candles, and from there to the other aspects of Chanukkah. By using the title “Tractate” Chanukkah, we have expressed our opinion that it is not a random collection of *sugiot* that have been gathered together with no pattern, rather it is a separate Tractate that has its own internal logical structure that was placed inside Chapter 2 (“Bameh Madlikin”) even though the mishna itself does not mention Chanukkah.

The numerical division of *sugiot* defines the area of each *sugia* and acts as a help to understanding the overall structure.

We have established a title for each *sugia*, although we are aware that there were other options, and at times it may be referred to by more than one title.