

Talmud/Daf Yomi Study Temple Beth Elohim Wellesley, Massachusetts

Daf yomi is an international practice to read the entire Babylonian Talmud in seven and a half years at the rate of one page a day. Tens of thousands of Jews study daf yomi worldwide, all on the same page each day, following a schedule fixed in 1923 in Poland by Rabbi Meir Shapiro, who envisioned the whole world as a vast Talmudic classroom connected by a global network of conversational threads.

Our Talmud study at Beth Elohim does not follow the daily worldwide readings, but focuses on topics we find interesting and meaningful. We pick a theme to study and focus on one tractate on that subject and/or look at what the Talmud rabbis said about that subject. Rabbi Mitchell prepares all in advance and shares her screen, so there is no homework or preparation required. Some participants ask questions and some tend to listen, however, it is a very talkative group and usually the discussions are fabulous. The weekly group is 14-20 people, so we are all on one screen on Zoom. We plan to continue in a Zoom format.

In the past few months, we looked at the history and traditions around the mezuzah, wearing a tallit, the order of Torah readers and reading from a Torah scroll verses a Chumash. Earlier this year we did a multi-month study of the history and traditions around burials and mourning practices. In past years we focused on the festivals and holy days.

Rabbi Mitchell sends out an email each Wednesday reminding the group of the Friday morning study and the topic for discussion. We have become a wonderful group of adult learners and we truly have become friends. We would love to welcome more people to our study. Please join us, or join for a few weeks and decide if Talmud study is right for you.

Please contact Rabbi Mitchell by email to add your name to the Wednesday Talmud study announcements. You can find this link of the TBE weekly updates or on the Adult Learning portion of the TBE website.

For those of you who are interested in more about the history of the Talmud, please read on.

A Talmud page is actually a double-sided page comprised of multigenerational conversations among the rabbis of the first few centuries of the Common Era, dealing with the topic at hand and their meanderings.

The Talmud is divided into 37 volumes, known as tractates, each of which deals with different aspects of Jewish law and life, from vows to marry to the logistics of offering sacrifices in the ancient Temple. The Talmud is made up of the Mishna and the Gemara.

The Mishnah consists of six orders (sedarim), each containing 7–12 tractates (masechtot), 63 in total. Each tractate is divided into chapters and then paragraphs. The word mishnah means

a single paragraph, the smallest unit of structure; the plural being Mishnayot, for the whole body of work.

The six orders are:

- Zeraim ("Seeds"), dealing with prayer and blessings, tithes and agricultural laws (11 tractates)
- Moed ("Festival"), pertaining to the laws of the Sabbath and the Festivals (12 tractates)
- Nashim ("Women"), concerning marriage and divorce, some forms of oaths and the laws of the nazirite (7 tractates)
- Nezikin ("Damages"), dealing with civil and criminal law, the functioning of the courts and oaths (10 tractates)
- Kodashim ("Holy things"), regarding sacrificial rites, the Temple, and the dietary laws (11 tractates) and
- Tohorot ("Purities"), pertaining to the laws of purity and impurity, including the impurity of the dead, the laws of food purity and bodily purity (12 tractates).

Rabbinic commentaries on the Mishnah from the next four centuries from Israel and Babylonia were eventually redacted and compiled as well. The commentaries are known as Gemara. The Mishnah in its original structure, together with the Gemara comprise the Talmud. There is a Babylonian Talmud, generally used worldwide, and a Jerusalem Talmud.

The term "Mishnah" is related to the verb "shanah", to teach or repeat, and to the adjectives "sheni" and "mishneh", meaning "second". It is thus named for being both the written authority (codex) and secondary only to the Torah as the basis for laws and opinions. The rabbis who contributed to the Mishnah are known as the Tannaim. The Mishnah was assembled during the first and second centuries CE. Judah the Prince (Yehuda Ha Nasi) is credited with the final redaction and publication of the Mishnah. The Talmud is believed to be written and codified between 200 and 500 CE.

Rabbi Mitchell has been teaching Talmud at Temple Beth Elohim since 2018. She also served as a Hospice Rabbi and Chaplain for 15 years and officiates for all life-cycle events. After moving to Boston from New York, Rabbi Mitchell became a management consultant and later co-founded Mitchell and Company, a strategy consulting firm. She became a Bat Mitzvah at TBE and was ordained in 2006.