

Talmudic Period

(500 BCE – 505 CE)

The **Talmud** (/ˈtɑːlməd, -məd, ˈtæl-/; Hebrew: תלמוד) is the central text of Rabbinic Judaism and the primary source of Jewish religious law (*halakha*) and Jewish theology. Until the advent of modernity, in nearly all Jewish communities, the Talmud was the centerpiece of Jewish cultural life and was foundational to "all Jewish thought and aspirations", serving also as "the guide for the daily life" of Jews.^[4]

The term "Talmud" normally refers to the collection of writings named specifically the **Babylonian Talmud** (*Talmud Bavli*), although there is also an earlier collection known as the Jerusalem Talmud (*Talmud Yerushalmi*).^[5] It may also traditionally be called *Shas* (ש"ש), a Hebrew abbreviation of *shisha Sedarim*, or the "six orders" of the Mishnah.

The Talmud has two components; the Mishnah (משנה, c. 200), a written compendium of Rabbinic Judaism's Oral Torah; and the Gemara (גמרא, c. 500), an elucidation of the Mishnah and related Tannaitic writings that often ventures onto other subjects and expounds broadly on the Hebrew Bible. The term "Talmud" may refer to either the Gemara alone, or the Mishnah and Gemara together.

The entire Talmud consists of 63 tractates, and in the standard print, called the Vilna Shas, it is 2,711 double-sided folios.^[6] It is written in Mishnaic Hebrew and Jewish Babylonian Aramaic and contains the teachings and opinions of thousands of rabbis (dating from before the Common Era through to the fifth century) on a variety of subjects, including halakha, Jewish ethics, philosophy, customs, history, and folklore, and many other topics. The Talmud is the basis for all codes of Jewish law and is widely quoted in rabbinic literature.

Role in Judaism

The Talmud represents the written record of an oral tradition. It provides an understanding of how laws are derived, and it became the basis for many rabbinic legal codes and customs, most importantly for the Mishneh Torah and for the Shulchan Aruch. Orthodox and, to a lesser extent, Conservative Judaism accept the Talmud as authoritative, while Samaritan, Karaite, Reconstructionist, and Reform Judaism do not.

Sadducees

The Jewish sect of the Sadducees flourished during the Second Temple period.^[93] Principal distinctions between them and the Pharisees (later known as Rabbinic Judaism) involved their rejection of an *Oral Torah* and their denying a resurrection after death.

Karaism

Another movement that rejected the Oral Torah as authoritative was Karaism, which arose within two centuries after the completion of the Talmud. Karaism developed as a reaction against the Talmudic Judaism of Babylonia. The central concept of Karaism is the rejection of the Oral Torah, as embodied in the Talmud, in favor of a strict adherence only to the Written Torah. This opposes the fundamental Rabbinic concept that the Oral Torah was given to Moses on Mount Sinai together with the Written Torah. Some later Karaites took a more moderate stance, allowing that some element of tradition (called *sevel ha-yerushah*, the burden of inheritance) is admissible in interpreting the Torah and that some authentic traditions are contained in the Mishnah and the Talmud, though these can never supersede the plain meaning of the Written Torah.

Reform Judaism

The rise of Reform Judaism during the 19th century saw more questioning of the authority of the Talmud. Reform Jews saw the Talmud as a product of late antiquity, having relevance merely as a historical document. For example, the "Declaration of Principles" issued by the Association of Friends of Reform Frankfurt in August 1843 states among other things that:

The collection of controversies, dissertations, and prescriptions commonly designated by the name Talmud possesses for us no authority, from either the dogmatic or the practical standpoint.

Some took a critical-historical view of the written Torah as well, while others appeared to adopt a neo-Karaite "back to the Bible" approach, though often with greater emphasis on the prophetic than on the legal books.

Humanistic Judaism

Within Humanistic Judaism, Talmud is studied as a historical text, in order to discover how it can demonstrate practical relevance to living today.

Present day

Orthodox Judaism continues to stress the importance of *Talmud study* as a central component of Yeshiva curriculum, in particular for those training to become rabbis. This is so even though *Halakha* is generally studied from the medieval and early modern codes and not

directly from the Talmud. A Talmudic study amongst the laity is widespread in Orthodox Judaism, with daily or weekly Talmud study particularly common in Haredi Judaism and with Talmud study a central part of the curriculum in Orthodox Yeshivas and day schools. The regular study of Talmud among laymen has been popularized by the *Daf Yomi*, a daily course of Talmud study initiated by rabbi Meir Shapiro in 1923; its 13th cycle of study began in August 2012 and ended with the 13th Siyum HaShas on January 1, 2020. The Rohr Jewish Learning Institute has popularized the "My Shiur – Explorations in Talmud" to show how the Talmud is relevant to a wide range of people.^[95]

Conservative Judaism similarly emphasizes the study of Talmud within its religious and rabbinic education. Generally, however, Conservative Jews study the Talmud as a historical source-text for Halakha. The Conservative approach to legal decision-making emphasizes placing classic texts and prior decisions in a historical and cultural context and examining the historical development of Halakha. This approach has resulted in greater practical flexibility than that of the Orthodox. Talmud study forms part of the curriculum of Conservative parochial education at many Conservative day-schools, and an increase in Conservative day-school enrollments has resulted in an increase in Talmud study as part of Conservative Jewish education among a minority of Conservative Jews. See also: *The Conservative Jewish view of the Halakha*.

Reform Judaism does not emphasize the study of Talmud to the same degree in their Hebrew schools, but they do teach it in their rabbinical seminaries; the world view of liberal Judaism rejects the idea of binding Jewish law and uses the Talmud as a source of inspiration and moral instruction. Ownership and reading of the Talmud is not widespread among Reform and Reconstructionist Jews, who usually place more emphasis on the study of the Hebrew Bible or Tanakh.

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