

THE BASIC CATEGORIES OF TALMUDIC THOUGHT

1. What is a סוגיא?

A סוגיא is a complete unit of Talmudic discussion.

סוגיות begin either with a text (משנה, ברייתא, מימרא, or פסוק) or with a בעיא.

When the text is the opening of the local משנה, it is introduced by מתני'. The discussion of it is then introduced by גמ'. Later sections of the local Mishnah that begin sugyot are enclosed within colons.

When the text is a משנה from elsewhere, it is introduced by

תנן התם

When the text is a ברייתא, it is introduced by

תניא

תנו רבנן

X תנא דבי

X תני

When the text is a ברייתא that comments on the local משנה

תנא

When the text is a מימרא it may be introduced by

X אמר רבי

איתמר

X ואמר רבי

When a text previously cited becomes the focus of another סוגיא it is introduced by

אמר מר

גופא

When a פסוק starts a סוגיא it is generally quoted without introduction.

2. What is the סתמא דגמרא?

The סתמא דגמרא is the anonymous narrator of the Talmud. It provides the context for the texts cited in the Talmud, introducing them, explaining how they relate to other texts as ראיות or קושיות, and interpreting them. The סתמא דגמרא creates אוקימתות, poses בעיות and קושיות, and gives תירוצים, but generally provides its own halakhic opinions only at the end of a סוגיא if at all. Often, the סתמא דגמרא is in Aramaic and quoted texts are in Hebrew, so that one can identify where a quoted text ends and the סתמא דגמרא begins by looking for the transition from Hebrew to Aramaic. But Amoraim may use Aramaic, especially such Aramaic phrases as הכי קאמר or האי מאן.

3. What is a בעיא?

A בעיא is an inquiry, an information question. A בעיא may be either rhetorical, meaning that it is asked only as a literary device to reach an already known answer, or real, meaning that the answer to it is not known before the question is asked.

Phrases that introduce בעיות include

איבעיא להו

מאי קראה

בעא מיניה

מאי דכתיב

בעי

מאי קאמר

מאי בינייהו

מנא לן

מאי טעמא

מניין

מנא הני מילי

4. What is a **סתירה**?

A **סתירה** is a contradiction between two texts of equal authority.

A **סתירה** may be apparent or real, and may refer to contradictions between two verses, two anonymous mishnayot, two statements by the same Tanna or Amora, or within a single statement (**סתירה מיניה וביה**).

Common phrases that introduce a **סתירה** in the Talmud include

ורמינהו	הא גופא קשיא
רמי	למימרא
רישא . . . וסיפא	קשיא דר' פלוני אדר' פלוני

5. What is a **קושיא**?

A **קושיא** is an attack question, a claim that a text or opinion is demonstrably wrong

קושיות may be based either on reason or on texts of greater authority. For example, one may use a Tannaitic text (**בריייתא** or **משנה**) to attack an Amoraic statement (**מימרא**) or a suggestion by the **סתמא** **דגמרא**.

Common phrases introducing **קושיות** in the Talmud include

מתקיף	והכתיב
מיתיב	והא
מתיב	איני
איתיבי	ומי
והתניא	וכי
והתנן	אי הכי
והאמר	דילמא

6. What is an **אוקימתא**?

An **אוקימתא** is the case a Talmudic statement refers to.

The Talmud contains many statements of Halakhah. Often, these statements appear very general, in other words to apply in a wide range of cases. The Talmud will frequently qualify those statements, in other words say that they actually apply only to a narrower range of cases. This can be done either spontaneously or as a way of responding to a **קושיא** or resolving a **סתירה**.

Common phrases that introduce an **אוקימתא** in the Talmud include

לא שנו אלא . . . (אבל)	הכא במאי עסקינן
הני מילי . . . (אבל)	לא קשיא הא ב . . . הא
Sometimes the Talmud preemptively rejects an אוקימתא , using the phrase	לא שנו . . . ולא שנו

7. What is a **ראיה**?

A **ראיה** is a text that supports either the immediately preceding element of a **סוגיא** or else an earlier halakhic statement, in particular one side of a **מחלוקת** quoted earlier

Note that a text can serve as a **ראיה** for a **קושיא** if the **קושיא** is asked before the text is cited

Common phrases that introduce a **ראיה** in the Talmud include

דאמר קרא	דתניא
דכתיב,	דתנן
שנאמר	דאמר

THE BASIC TERMS FOR DISCUSSING TALMUD

- אוקימתא – the specific case a text is talking about. The Talmud often claims that texts are discussing very narrow cases even when nothing in their language implies that they do not have broad application
- אמוראים – The Rabbis of the period following the Mishnah who are cited in the Talmud
- בעיא – information question, inquiry
- בריייתא – a text directly citing תנאים that was not included in the משנה
- גירסא – a version of a text
- סוגיא – a suggestion in the Talmud that is rejected in the course of the discussion
- פסוק – a derivation from a פסוק.
- מחלוקת – a disagreement between two authorities who are entitled to disagree with one another. For example, אמוראים may disagree with each other, and תנאים may disagree with each other, but אמוראים generally may not disagree with תנאים.
- מימרא – a formal statement by an אמורא
- הוא אמינא – conclusion. The antonym of אמינא
- משנה – the authoritative anthology of statements by תנאים. It was edited by רבי יהודה הנשיא
- נפקא מינה – the practical difference. The case in which disagreeing positions will yield different halakhic results.
- סברא – a position or argument based on logic rather than authority
- סוגיא – a complete Talmudic discussion
- סתירה – a contradiction between two elements of the same text, two statements by the same person, or two statements of equal authority that are not part of a known מחלוקת
- סתמא דגמרא – the anonymous narrational voice of the Talmud
- פירוש – an interpretation of a text
- פסוק – a citation from Tanakh
- צריכותא – explains why a text or element of a text is necessary
- קושיא – an attack question. Attack questions always prove a previous statement or suggestion wrong.
- ראיה – evidence or proof
- שיטה – a position or opinion
- תירוצא – the answer to a קושיא
- תנאים – The Rabbis of the period from the end of the Great Assembly until the editing of the Mishnah

A BRIEF GUIDE TO PUNCTUATING THE TALMUD

1. A בעיא always ends with ?
2. A קושיא always ends with either ?! or !?
3. A ברייתא, משנה, or מימרא is always introduced by : and surrounded by “”. In this edition, however, the quotation marks are generally replaced by a change in font or color:
 - a משנה or ברייתא appears in Ariel 10 Bold (or in blue)
 - a מימרא in Ariel 10 Underlined (or in green).
 - a פסוק appears in Ariel 12 (or in purple/pink) .

The סתמא דגמרא is in Ariel 10 (or in orange/yellow).
4. In a . . . אלא sequence, the אלא is always preceded by ,
5. The word אבל is always preceded by ,
6. A sentence which is neither a בעיא or a קושיא ends in either . or !

A BRIEF GUIDE TO TALMUDIC STRATA

The Talmud contains materials from at least three different historical periods. The oldest is פסוקים, or materials from Tanakh. Following that is material from the Tannaitic period, roughly from the end of prophecy until the publication of the Mishnah, which we refer to as ברייתות and משניות. Following that is material from the Amoraic period, which essentially includes all the material attributed to specific post-Tannaitic rabbis in the Talmud (although a few such statements are attributed to Rabbis who lived at the very end of the Talmudic period and may not have the same authority as their predecessors). We refer to Amoraic statements as מימרות. All these materials are framed by the anonymous voice of the Talmud, the סתמא דגמרא. The סתמא דגמרא offers only explanations and challenges, never its own opinion, until the last named rabbi has been quoted. We therefore cannot determine with certainty when most of those explanations and challenges were composed.

The Talmud is composed of four historical layers. Texts from each layer have distinctive category-names, and are introduced in the Talmud by special words. Here are the four layers, together with the category names and common introductory words.

כתיב	פסוק - פסוקים	תנ"ך
תנן	משנה – משניות	תנאים
תניא	ברייטא - ברייתות	
איתמר	מימרא – מימרות	אמוראים
		סתמא דגמרא

The סתמא דגמרא is the anonymous narrator of the Talmud, whose major job is to introduce all texts from the other three eras and explain why they are necessary.

When texts are introduced by כתיב, תניא, תנן, and איתמר, they are brought for their own sake.

Put a ד in front and create דכתיב, דתניא, דתנן, or דאיתמר, and the texts are brought to support a previous opinion or idea.

Put a והא or והא in front and create והכתיב, והא תנן, et al, and the texts are brought to contradict or attack a previous opinion or idea.