

B"sd

Presentation to mechanchim at the 5782 Kinus

I have put together an outline with the questions to be addressed in order. The italics are brief pointers of each topic. Throughout, I will be flashing pages on the screen showing live examples. I will bln alot time for Question/Answers toward the end. I will preface to the teachers that I am trying not to make it a sales pitch, but a learning experience for the teachers. It is self understood that I am working off the product I developed. I am thinking to spend a few minutes at the beginning to go through my background and experience to explain where the drive and knowledge came from to develop these ideas into a full fledged curriculum.

Background – Growing up in school, I had a good head, but didn't always succeed at everything. It was only a little later on that I began seeing what it takes to learn how to learn and saw success. I then began helping others in this regard. After years of working with many students of a variety of ages and abilities, I was privy to a bird's eye view of the curriculum from beginning to end. I saw what it takes for a child to become successful at learning through adulthood. This helped me develop materials that break down all the learning steps in visual format to help reach students of all abilities.

While I am known for my background in Special Ed, Chassidus teaches us that Chochmah that reaches the lowest place must come from the highest source. Or Chozer reaches Hashem's source of Chochmah. This is why Talmud Bavli was zoche to have the halachah follow them over Talmud Yerushalmi. Though their learning was more in the dark, the many questions helped them reach a deeper understanding.

Having materials to reach the potentially struggling students helps the class not trail behind. Even the children who are officially known to be bright, still benefit from such learning as there are learning steps that they otherwise might skip. The stimulation from all the visuals bring the learning to life which is something that all children need.

Those classrooms that have used these materials in their fullest covering most or all of the pages have witnessed this phenomenon first hand.

Workshop

The Mesorah and the Kloi Hashas

The Need to know the Klolim.

The authors of the Gemara didn't provide an outright instruction manual. Nevertheless, they took it for granted that those that learn the Gemara be aware of certain rules and principles. Without knowing these rules and principles, one can miss key details and pshat can become cloudy. A few examples (may not list all of them during the session):

1. *When the Gemara uses the word אלא, the Gemara is changing the pshat because of the question and not actually answering the question. Without knowing this, one will not appreciate what the new pshat is.*
2. *When the Gemara uses the word ואיך, the rule is that though we are left with an unresolved question, the original din is not changing.*
3. *There is a rule that an Amora can't argue with a Tanna since the Tannaim became accepted by Klal Yisroel which made their teachings binding and unarguable (though there is a Kesef Mishnah which explains that this concept became adopted later on and not right at Matan Torah). Without properly understanding this concept, it will be hard to understand why an Amora is being questioned.*
4. *When the Gemara brings a contradiction from a Baraisa to a Mishnah and then resolves it by saying there are two different opinions, what was the question in the first place? This is only explained by understanding the rule that we try to minimize Machlokes but two Tannaim across Mishnayos and Baraisas can argue if we can't find an alternative way of explaining things.*

The importance of the history and background of the Gemara and its development.

Many of the rules and the Gemara's system cannot be fully understood or appreciated without the historical background. For example, the Gemara is a record of discussion in the Beis Midrash with each generation building off the previous spanning across 300 years. Appreciating that helps explain why names are mentioned and others are answering questions in their name or on their behalf. It also explains why there are often two versions of a discussion which sound similar but lead to different conclusions. Even more importantly, it helps explain how the Gemara became so accepted and why future generations cannot argue with the Gemara.

This also applies to understanding of Halachah and our Mesorah as well. When halachos that are DeRabbonon have leniencies attached to them, this is not an actual leniency, rather it is built in design by the Chachamim from the outset in order that people not confuse what is Doraysa and what is a safeguard (Seyag). For example, ספק דרבנן לקולא works off this mechanism. Being strict in this can actually be breaking the rules and not enhancing them.

Children need to know where the Gemara's place in Judaism is and its importance. This helps them understand why there is such an emphasis on Gemara throughout their Yeshiva years.

Learning how the Gemara developed and how it was received in later generations helps us understand why it became the center of Halachic Judaism. The Gemara was the first full record of Torah Shebaal Peh in a single unified work. The Mishnayos still had Baraisos and other teachings (Aggadah Midrashim) that were omitted. The Gemara collected everything together and organized it into a single transcript of discussion. So much so, that any Baraisas left out of the Gemara are today considered irrelevant (See Iggeres R'Sherira Gaon P18).

The Gemara held observance of Judaism together which is why the Non Jews at many points in history tried to ban the Gemara more than any other sefer including public burnings etc.

Many children question "Why Gemara?" How does the Visual Introduction to Gemara and Torah Shebaal Peh address this question?

The question is actually asked directly in the book in the photo essay. Knowing the history, system and importance give a fresh perspective. These three elements lead to the answer which is essentially two parts.

1) The Gemaras we learn in school are just small samples to teach the system of Gemara which is at the center of Judaism for the reasons mentioned earlier (how the Gemara was the first full record of Torah SheBaal Peh and the basis for Halachah).

2) There is an obligation to learn Gemara as outlined in Hilchos Talmud Torah. Within this, there is the famous argument between the Rambam and the Rosh in interpreting 'Shlish BeTalmud' whether this is to just learn things in depth or to know the reasons behind the halachos at least briefly. Interestingly, the Shulchan Aruch paskens like the Rambam and the alter Rebbe like the Rosh. The Alter Rebbe's Shulchan Aruch was written according to this method as well.

After mastering all the Halachos of Torah Shebaal Peh, everyone agrees there is an obligation to spend majority of one's time learning Gemara in depth. When encouraging people to write Ha'aros, the Rebbe pointed out how according Pirkei Avos, the Zohar and the Alter Rebbe in Tanya, there is an obligation for every Jew to reveal the unique portion in Torah assigned to their neshamah that no one else will get to. The study of Gemara helps develop that ability.

Why do we not find the Klolim being taught not now and not in past generations

The Rebbe on Parshas Mishpotim 5746 asked the same question and gave two answers. 1. People feel it is for simple people and not as important as actual sugya learning. 2. People will learn it on their own

and it isn't something to waste time on in Yeshiva. The Rebbe expressed a wish that he hopes this will ultimately be corrected since one cannot learn correctly without full understanding of the klolim.

A quiz was made with some basic fundamental questions that everyone should really know. 2000 people took the quiz mainly bochurim and adults. 8 Multiple choice questions out of 25 randomized questions were given. The quiz could be taken again for more questions. The average score out of 8 was 1.5. These questions were not written to trick anyone. Someone who learnt the information would get it right away. The reality is that much of this information come from seforim that aren't typically learnt in yeshiva. (will bln show a sample on screen)

Why is the Mesorah of Torah Shebaal Peh a subject that needs to be taught. Isn't much of it something students end up learning as it comes up?

As Mechanchim, we know that it demonstrates professionalism when we teach things according to structure and not assume things will happen on their own especially when it comes to fundamental topics such as this one. After spending three years of research to create a 192 page book, I can personally say the Mesorah is a delicate fundamental topic that requires much exploration and discussion. There are so many details that many are not aware of and the students likely will never get to. The Visual Introduction to Gemara and Torah Shebaal Peh is a serious attempt to organize everything to give a clear perspective. It also addresses the many mechanisms of our Mesorah which people don't pick up on. The quiz mentioned earlier highlights this.

Why is Gemara at the center of our learning system and how does the history and Klolim address that?

As mentioned earlier, the Gemara was the first full record of Torah Shebaal Peh in a single thorough work and became the basis for practice of Halachah once people moved further into exile. The Gemara is what held Judaism together through the golus. Future Halachic interpretation would be based off the Gemara. The history is necessary to appreciate that and to understand the mechanisms of the klolim as mentioned earlier. Being that the Gemara didn't always state conclusions clearly, the klolim are needed to understand how Halacha and the Shulchan Aruch derived everything from the Gemara. Without the klolim, it can be hard to see how the discussion played in the Gemara led to the conclusion in the Shulchan Aruch.

While Gemara cannot be taught alongside Shulchan Aruch in the younger years, this theme needs to be taught when the children learn Gemara in elementary school so that they develop this awareness through yeshiva and eventually when they run their own home.

How does the Visual Introduction to Gemara and Torah Shebaal Peh work and what is the best way for it to be used? Is it for the classroom or the home?

The book is a great book that belongs in every Jewish home. It is obviously interesting and informative for children (and adults including teachers) who read this in their spare time.

The best way for the book to be used, is for the teacher to use a digital file on a projector with each student having their own copy. The teacher either reads the words out loud or has the students take turns to read each paragraph for the rest of the class. It isn't a quick read. Each page can be used as a springboard for discussion. This would require the teacher to read the pages beforehand. At the end of every chapter, there are detailed questions which are a form of review rather than as an assessment. It is more effective for the class to work through them together, though some teachers prefer to have them be done independently.

After completing the book, the students can be given a test using the questions from the book. I can be contacted for a transcript of all the questions.

The most optimal way is that after completing the book, it is used as a continuous point of reference when learning actual Gemara.

What age is it for?

Ideally, children should learn this before learning Gemara and then again after a few years of experience learning Gemara before moving up to the level of learning commentaries such as Tosafos. This is because they will likely forget some of the information and will better appreciate it after experiencing actual Gemara for a few years. The book is something that can be continuously referenced by Gemara teachers.

Word to the teacher: *Read through this book carefully yourself. You will discover a great amount about what the Gemara is all about and how it works, the same way I did when I researched this topic. Your experience teaching Gemara will be greatly enhanced.*

What made me develop such a product

I have witnessed the heavy emphasis on Gemara in our chinuch system. I have also witnessed many students finding it hard to be at peace with this throughout their yeshiva years. I saw that what's missing is for Gemara to be taught visually and broken down similar to the Children's Chumash. I have so far published one volume. When beginning that volume, I realized how many of the concepts will not be appreciated without a thorough introduction to Gemara in general. At first, I thought it would take me one month and be a few pages at the beginning of that volume. After diving into this subject, I realized that I would have to dig across multiple Seforim and make something more comprehensive. This ended up taking 3 years and led me to publish it into a complete book of its own.