



## **Methods of Talmud Study and Teaching at the Central Schools of Learning in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Eastern Europe and Germany**

Métodos de estudio y enseñanza del Talmud en las Escuelas Centrales de Aprendizaje en el siglo XIX en Europa del Este y Alemania

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**Abstract:** This article deals with the various methods of teaching the Babylonian Talmud, utilized at the central schools of Jewish learning in Eastern Europe and Germany about one hundred and fifty years ago. We shall present the various methods of teaching characteristic of these schools of learning and ways of teaching Talmud, features of the methods, from that period to the modern method in the first academic institutions in Berlin. The modern teaching method took the innovative form of academic research, which was taking its initial steps but in practice laid the foundations for academic research conducted to this day.

**Keywords:** Jewish studies. Education. Religion

**Resumen:** Este artículo trata sobre los diversos métodos de enseñanza del Talmud de Babilonia, utilizado en las escuelas centrales de aprendizaje judío en Europa del Este y Alemania hace unos ciento cincuenta años. Presentaremos los diversos métodos de enseñanza característicos de estas escuelas de aprendizaje y formas de enseñar Talmud, características de los métodos, desde ese período hasta el método moderno en las primeras instituciones académicas en Berlín. El método de enseñanza moderno adoptó la forma innovadora de investigación académica, que estaba dando sus primeros pasos, pero en la práctica sentó las bases para la investigación académica realizada hasta el día de hoy.

**Palabras clave:** Estudios judíos. Educación. Europa. Religión.

### **Introduction**

Teaching of the Babylonian Talmud has utilized various methods from the time of the Talmud to the present. Already in the Talmud itself, there is a tannaitic controversy over the best way of teaching for students.<sup>1</sup> In this controversy two opinions were presented, referring to two types of students: "Sinai", meaning a well-read scholar, and

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<sup>1</sup> HORAYOT, 14a.



"he who uproots mountains", meaning a keen dialectician. The first is known for his considerable knowledge and is proficient in halakhic traditions handed down by previous generations. The second is known for his excellent intellectual ability and understands the inner logic of the halakhic traditions received from previous generations.<sup>2</sup> The controversy about the types of students alludes to another controversy concerning the ideology underlying the teaching methods, concerning which method is most preferable or desirable. It is apparent from the latter controversy that the ideology professed by the one opinion gives preference to the teaching method based on wide proficiency and conveying as much material as possible. In contrast, the ideology underlying the second opinion gives preference to the teaching method based on thorough study, even if this involves a lack of proficiency in other sources.

From the time the redaction of the Babylonian Talmud was concluded (sometime between the 6<sup>th</sup> and early 7<sup>th</sup> centuries), it was studied using different teaching methods. For instance, the method utilized in medieval Spain mainly constituted "reviewing the Talmudic text and knowledge of the consequent halakha [...]", and in Ashkenaz "they stressed debate and in-depth study of the Talmudic sugyot". In 15<sup>th</sup> century Spain, a teaching method evolved based on the Sephardic *iyyun* (thorough study), following the method of R. Isaac Kanfanton (Spain, 1360-1463), which ascribed significance and emphasis to the method of thorough study and to discerning each word in the Talmudic text and its structure.<sup>3</sup> In Ashkenaz, a teaching method based on the *hilukim* (divisions) of R. Jacob Pollak (Poland, 1470-1541) spread, continuing the sharp and perceptive method of the Ashkenaz schools of learning (*yeshivot*).<sup>4</sup>

In early 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe, a significant development occurred in methods of teaching the Babylonian Talmud. In 1803, the Volozhin Yeshiva was founded in Lithuania. This was the first modern school of learning. Until this time, European schools of learning were communal and served residents of each town and its environs, with no teachers and no organized study program. The Volozhin Yeshiva was an inter-regional rather than a communal school and it attracted many students from all over Europe. Its significance was evident in the organized study program, with classes on different levels and teachers who taught different groups of students.

This school of learning had a clear-cut method of teaching influenced by its founder, R. Chaim of Volozhin (Lithuania, 1746-1821) and, consequently, other schools of learning were established all over Europe where different innovative teaching methods evolved. In Lithuania, as stated, the teaching method that developed was based on the the literal meaning. In the next generation, two other teaching methods evolved concurrently at the Volozhin Yeshiva. R. Naftali Zvi Berlin (Lithuania, 1816-1893) developed a method of teaching based on wide proficiency. R. Chaim

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<sup>2</sup> RASHI, Horayot 14a.

<sup>3</sup> BREUER, 2003, p. 179, 181, 184.

<sup>4</sup> GREENSPAN, 1955, p. 15.



Soloveitchik (Lithuania, 1853-1918) developed a teaching method based on the analytical method. In Hungary, at the Pressburg Yeshiva, R. Moses Sofer (Hungary, 1762-1839) developed a teaching method based on division into different types of classes. In Lithuania, at the Telshe Yeshiva, R. Shimon Shkop (Lithuania, 1859-1939) developed a teaching method based on comprehension. In Russia, at the Lida Yeshiva, R. Isaac Reines (Russia, 1939-1915) developed a teaching method based on logic. In Germany, at the Rabbinical Seminary he established in Berlin, R. Azriel Hildesheimer (Germany, 1820-1899) developed the academic teaching method. In Poland in this period, instruction proceeded in the tradition of the division method, utilized since the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

The following are the basics of the methods of Talmud teaching at the schools of learning mentioned above, from the establishment of the Volozhin Yeshiva until the outbreak of the Second World War.

## 1 The *hilukim* (division) method

In 19<sup>th</sup> century Poland there were no formal schools of learning, rather students gathered in groups and studied at local communal schools, also called "kloizim".<sup>5</sup> These were usually associated with Hassidic congregations. Teaching was based on the division method developed by R. Jacob Pollak.<sup>6</sup> This method of teaching was utilized in 19<sup>th</sup> century Poland at many schools of learning.<sup>7</sup>

The division method is based on "internal" instruction of the text, local study that delves deeply into the language and style and continuity of the Talmudic text.<sup>8</sup>

The term "*pilpul*" (casuistry) means prominent use of logical reasoning to clarify and explain the text.

R. Shimon Sofer (Hungary, 1820-1883) explains the ideology underlying the division method, which is "to liken one thing to another"<sup>9</sup> or to show students the "*hiluk*", i.e., the difference between things that appear similar at first, in order to hone students' minds.

The explanation of the term "*hiluk*" (division) is that it is a "super structure" supported by casuistry. Casuistry is a small unit that encompasses a problem and a solution. Students separate the talmudic text into its parts and the division is the rebuilding of all the parts that comprise the text.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> ETKES, 2006, p. 163.

<sup>6</sup> GANZ, 1878, p. 55.

<sup>7</sup> WUNDER, 1992, p. 95-96.

<sup>8</sup> BREUER, 2003, p. 195.

<sup>9</sup> SOFER, 2007, p. 24.

<sup>10</sup> DIMITROVSKY, 1975, p. 118.



## 2 Features of the method

This method is characterized by teaching the text independently, unaffected by the commentaries of Rashi and the Tosafot. Then, restricting the study to commentators such as Rashi and the Tosafot and setting boundaries is within the limits of the Talmudic text.

The ideology underlying this teaching method is teaching the text in its literal form with no interpretive influences and debating all details of the topics discussed within the text, including its language.<sup>11</sup>

R. Shmuel Segal Landa (Austro-Hungary, 1750-1834) set two ideological goals for instruction in the division method: teaching complex ways of thinking and honing students' minds. These goals were intended to motivate students, to increase their desire to study, and to improve students' memory of their studies.<sup>12</sup>

In summary, in the teaching method based on division it is first necessary to teach the text as is with no later interpretations or additional references. This method gives priority to teaching that is based on mental ability and logic, where the underlying ideology is to develop the student's mental abilities through in-depth instruction of the material.

## 3 The *pshat* (literal) method

The teaching method based on the literal meaning of the text was developed by the Vilna Gaon – R. Eliyahu Kramer (Lithuania, 1720-1797) – at the Volozhin Yeshiva in Lithuania, and implemented by his student, R. Chaim Itzkowitz (Lithuania, 1749-1821). This method completely rejects the division teaching method that preceded it.

The literal teaching method is based on comprehensive knowledge of the sources and understanding the text in its literal form based on accurate sources,<sup>13</sup> with no redundant questions in the talmudic texts.

The Vilna Gaon applied the literal method by emending the accepted text of the Mishna, Tosefta, Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmud, and all places where he believed that the original wording had become distorted. The search for the exact version has occupied many sages, but he excelled in it due to the scope of his emendations,<sup>14</sup> which were noted as short comments on the talmudic texts that related to clarifications regarding the correct wording. This fact attests to his method of study, which followed

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<sup>11</sup> DIMITROVSKY, 1975, p. 117.

<sup>12</sup> LANDA, 1969, p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> KRAMER, 1977, p. 1a-b.

<sup>14</sup> ETKES, 1998, p. 44.



the literal meaning because he did not wish to add his own interpretations to the Babylonian Talmud.

The Vilna Gaon calls Talmud instruction – casuistry, and he distinguishes between positive and negative casuistry.<sup>15</sup>

Positive casuistry is teaching in order to clarify the halakha or desirable ways of conduct. Negative casuistry is study that is not linked to practical actions.<sup>16</sup> As stated, R. Chaim Itzkowitz applied the Vilna Gaon's method in a teaching method based on the literal meaning, which was manifested in the attempt to understand the text in light of the Rishonim's interpretations with no unnecessary casuistry.<sup>17</sup> The ideology underlying the study method based on the literal meaning is to strive for the truth as reflected in the literal meaning of the text.

#### 4 Features of the method

This teaching method is characterized by teaching by lesson types. The first type is lessons on innovations stemming from the talmudic text, which is studied independently. Students skip texts that contain no innovations. The second type is teaching the studied tractate and instruction of the innovations relevant for the studied topics. When there are no innovations, instruction commences according to the simple meaning of the text. The third type is teaching the text in its simple form combined with the methods of the commentators.

The ideology underlying the teaching method based on the literal meaning is to teach the entire Babylonian Talmud from beginning to end, to learn everything and to know everything, meaning, to seek straightforward understanding and to strive for the truth in the way of the Vilna Gaon.<sup>18</sup>

In summary, the guiding principles of the teaching method based on the literal meaning are to emend sources that became distorted over time by various scribes. It is necessary to understand the literal meaning of the text by means of logical analysis with no casuistry<sup>19</sup> in order to understand the halakha and the desired course of action. In addition, to study everything without lingering over texts that include no innovations and to learn the text in its simple meaning in light of the Rishonim commentators and to understand its contents.

#### 5 The *beki'ut* (proficiency) method

This teaching method, based on *beki'ut* (wide proficiency), is manifested in the aspiration to acquire wide knowledge of the entire talmudic literature. This means

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<sup>15</sup> KLEINERMAN, 1963, p. 15-16.

<sup>16</sup> BEN-SASSON, 1966, p. 39-86, 197-214.

<sup>17</sup> ZEVIN, 1958, p. 18.

<sup>18</sup> ZEVIN, 1958, p. 7.

<sup>19</sup> LAMM, 1972, p. 34.



teaching the entire Babylonian Talmud, Jerusalem Talmud, parallel texts, midreshei halakha, the teachings of the Geonim, and the commentaries of all the Rishonim and Aharonim. According to this method, it is important to become familiar with the entire array of rabbinical literature and knowledgeable of the sages' writings. However, the Babylonian Talmud remains the main object of instruction, which must be taught as thoroughly as possible.

This method was developed by R. Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin of Volozhin and it has at its base the literal method of the Vilna Gaon and his student, R. Chaim Itzkowitz. In fact, R. Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin of Volozhin also engaged in clarifying the exact wording of the various texts and wrote new interpretations of the talmudic texts based on different versions and reviews of ancient manuscripts. He was almost the only religious leader of his generation to verify the wording of the various texts in the Talmud based on different manuscripts.<sup>20</sup> His son, R. Meir Bar Ilan, related that his father often travelled to the National Library of Russia in St. Petersburg in search of manuscripts, and sometimes this led to interpretive innovations on the Torah, Talmud, and halakha.<sup>21</sup>

R. Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin of Volozhin formulated the teaching method based on wide proficiency in light of his interpretation of the verse "*eshdat lamo*" (Deut. 33:2). He divided the word "*eshdat*" in two: "*esh*" (fire) and "*dat*" (law). These two components indicate two methods of Talmud teaching. "*Esh*" is a teaching method based on investigation of the studied material, and "*dat*" is a teaching method that notes the essence of the study in short, similar to the decided and clear-cut halakha.

The ideology underlying this teaching method is to connect the core of concise study to investigation of the study matter. Therefore, the purpose of the method is to include a wide scope in the teaching and to charge the student with knowledge in all branches of talmudic literature in order to reach optimal understanding of the Talmud.

R. Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin of Volozhin focused on the teachings of the Geonim and composed the "*Ha'mek She'ela*" commentary on the book "*She'iltot de-Rav Aḥai Gaon*" (R. Aḥai Gaon of Shabḥa, Babylonia, 680-752). This occupation of his reflects two principles of the teaching method based on proficiency. The first is teaching the Talmud in light of the Geonim's writings, meaning clarifying the correct version and correctly understanding the interpretation. The second is knowledge of the Scriptures and stressing the association between the written Torah and the oral Torah.<sup>22</sup>

Emphasizing the coherent association between the written Torah and the oral Torah as an essential part of the method of Talmud teaching was also a response to the questioning of the written Torah's essence and sanctity by the *maskilim* (members of

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<sup>20</sup> ZEVIN, 1958, p. 22.

<sup>21</sup> BAR-ILAN, 1942, p. 34.

<sup>22</sup> MIRSKY, 1956, p. 16.



the Enlightenment Movement). In addition, it was also in response to those who deny the absolute authority of the oral Torah and those who see the Holy Scriptures from a secular perspective, lacking faith in the Divine source and unity of the Torah.<sup>23</sup>

R. Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin noted that he often relinquished "entire constructions" (theories) in the talmudic text in order to uphold the truth, to keep it from becoming subjugated to the student's desire to innovate.<sup>24</sup>

## **6 Features of the method**

This method has three main foundations. The first is wide knowledge of the sources; instruction must include an extensive array of all Talmudic sources. The student is charged with gathering and accumulating (like a hard-working ant. Prov. 6:8) all this considerable knowledge so that further on in his studies he will be able to utilize that which he gathered in order to reach a true understanding of the studied material.

The second is teaching written comprehension in its simple form, where the student is responsible to reach a good understanding of the text. Only then is it possible to continue to the next stage, which is teaching written comprehension through casuistry, problems and solutions, where the student must participate in order to internalize and delve into the study matter.

The third is that the instruction must be objectively independent and unbiased. The student must internalize and study with no deviations from his quest for the truth.<sup>25</sup> Objective independence in the studied material is only possible after the first two stages, extensive knowledge of the sources and written comprehension of the text in its simple form.

The benefit of teaching in the proficiency method is evident not only in talmudic and halakhic subjects but rather also in the description of the mishnaic and talmudic sages. This method can illuminate the entire picture and at times it has very significant implications.

An example of teaching in the proficiency-based method while examining the image of the sages, is Hillel the Elder. Hillel is known as a tolerant person who advocated love of peace and the pursuit of peace, loving the creatures and bringing them closer to Torah, as exemplified by Aaron,<sup>26</sup> and this is how his image was portrayed in the Jewish collective consciousness. But from a wider perspective, according to the proficiency method, it appears that this was not always true. There is another aspect

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<sup>23</sup> KETZ, 1990, p. 59-74.

<sup>24</sup> BERLIN, 1955, p. 36.

<sup>25</sup> KETZ, 1990, p. 65.

<sup>26</sup> AVOT 1:12.



of Hillel's character, one that is belligerent, completely contrary to the lenient and tolerant nature ascribed to Hillel's image.<sup>27</sup>

Another example is when Hillel teaches the Bnei Beteira that the Passover sacrifice receives preference over the Sabbath; they promptly appoint him religious leader (*nassi*) and he reproaches them for their laziness, and for his arrogance he is punished and forgets the halakha.<sup>28</sup> There are two other places where a different portrayal of Hillel's image is also evident.<sup>29</sup>

In summary, the guiding principles of the teaching method based on proficiency are wide and diverse knowledge of all sources pertaining to the Babylonian Talmud, understanding the text in its simple form),<sup>30</sup> followed by transition to the stage of elucidation and discussion of the text. Another principle is comparing between the Babylonian Talmud and the Jerusalem Talmud and writings of the Geonim, manuscripts, and different versions of the text, objective teaching and learning, and stressing the link between the written Torah and the oral Torah. In addition, teaching the interpretations of the Geonim to the talmudic texts.<sup>31</sup>

## **7 The analytic method**

Chaim Soloveitchik (Lithuania, 1853-1918) commenced teaching at the Volozhin Yeshiva in 1880. He developed the analytic method<sup>32</sup> of Talmud teaching, which was an innovative instruction method centering on analyzing concepts and forming definitions on topics of halakhic debate as a way of solving problems in the talmudic texts. The analytic teaching method stresses analytic analysis of halakhic categories and concepts and their foundations in order to reach their exact definition.<sup>33</sup> This teaching method is based on the premise that there is an abstract code underlying the talmudic text and this code must be deciphered and defined.

## **8 Features of the method**

This teaching method is based on the following principles. The first principle is raising initial questions that are fundamental questions requiring definition. In other words, understanding the components of the talmudic text and defining them.<sup>34</sup> The next principle is analysis of various halakhic categories in order to define them precisely. In addition, distinguishing between two laws or two foundations in a certain halakha or Torah concept, where one law refers to the topic and the other to the object of the

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<sup>27</sup> ZUR, 2003, p. 169-179.

<sup>28</sup> PESACHIM 66a.

<sup>29</sup> BETZA 20a; SHABBAT 17a.

<sup>30</sup> ASSAF, 2009, p. 222-223; SHUCHAT, 1998, p. 337-348.

<sup>31</sup> KOOK, 1984, p. 125.

<sup>32</sup> SOLOMON, 1993, p. 119-120.

<sup>33</sup> WOSNER, 2016, p. 48.

<sup>34</sup> LICHTENSTEIN, 2013, p. 9-38.



halakha. In halakhic language these two laws are called: a law involving the "*heftza*" of the object, i.e., anything related to the object or anything pertaining to a certain object and a law involving "*gavra*", i.e., anything that refers to the body of a certain object. This can also be defined as a law involving the operation itself and a law involving the subject operated upon that is related to the operation.<sup>35</sup> Yet another principle is defining basic concepts whose purpose is to understand the text as well as teaching the deep layers of the text through instruction that focuses on specific study material in a certain text. This vertical teaching is based on a small number of sources whose purpose is to uncover the abstract foundations of halakha rather than the explanations of the halakha. Finally, thoroughly investigating the conjectures within the controversy in the talmudic text by taking an overall view unrelated to the different interpretations of the commentators.<sup>36</sup>

The ideology underlying this teaching method is to teach the student to distinguish between the main points of the issue and the marginal aspects as well as between the essential foundations of the concept and less essential random variables. The analytic teaching method makes it possible to see, on one hand, that despite the external similarity between conflicting halakhas they are nonetheless different issues and therefore there is no conflict between them. On the other hand, this teaching method also makes it possible to connect two different matters by exploring the essence of these matters and understanding that they both have at their foundations a common law.<sup>37</sup>

In summary, the principles of the analytic teaching method are identifying the foundations of the talmudic text, which is based on thorough study of the text, centering as it does on conjectures rather than on wide proficiency. In this method of teaching the first stage is investigation, which is a major stage that raises initial questions related to definition of the textual components, the main principles of the text, and definition of concepts.

## **9 The comprehension method**

In the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Lithuanian schools of learning underwent an intellectual revolution.<sup>38</sup> R. Shimon Yehuda Hachohen Shkop introduced a new teaching method that focused on the legal area of halakha. This teaching method centered on developing analytic-conceptual thinking in order to understand the definition of the halakhic-legal terms and norms of the Talmud, with the purpose of comprehending its legal reasoning. The teaching and investigation of talmudic texts related to Jewish Law were elucidated and understood by means of comparisons,

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<sup>35</sup> ZEVIN, 1958, p. 48.

<sup>36</sup> SOLOMON, 1993, p. 119-120.

<sup>37</sup> WOSNER, 2016, p. 48.

<sup>38</sup> WOSNER, 2016, p. 40.



generalizations, induction and deduction, and understanding the talmudic dialect, which uncovered not only the ancient halakhic-legal formative process but also the intellectual sharpness and cognitive rationale, from the period of the Amoraim through the Geonim until the Rishonim and Aharonim.<sup>39</sup> This teaching method directly continues R. Chaim of Volozhin's analytic teaching method.

The innovation of the comprehension-based teaching method is the induction component, i.e., revealing the justifications for a single halakha from which a general principle can be formulated that explains the inner logic of other halakhas.<sup>40</sup> The ideology underlying this teaching method is based on logical comprehension, on the association between understanding that which is written in the talmudic text and understanding the deep rationale. This ideology is manifested in a modern teaching method now called the infusion approach,<sup>41</sup> which utilizes similar principles. The infusion approach is a teaching method where critical thinking is incorporated in creative thinking, deep understanding of the contents while nurturing thinking skills. The infusion approach was also developed and implemented as a method of Talmud teaching,<sup>42</sup> whereby the talmudic text requires students to think and study in depth while ordering and organizing their thinking and making an intellectual effort, because the talmudic text is usually arranged in a structured manner following constantly recurring terms and concepts. Familiarity with the functions and meanings of these terms and concepts helps one focus on developing thinking not by reading the text but rather through the logical principles of the text, the rationale of the problems and solutions, and the fundamental arguments that appear in the text.<sup>43</sup>

## **10 Features of the method**

The comprehension method is characterized by understanding the rationale of the conjectures underlying the distinctions and divisions in the talmudic text or the interpretations of the first commentators. Another feature is giving preference to wide knowledge, which leads to halakhic rulings. In addition, organized, structured, and graded teaching from the Torah to the Mishna, from the Mishna to the Talmud, and from the Talmud to the interpretations of the Rishonim and their rules and understanding the foundations of the law,<sup>44</sup> as well as raising questions while teaching the studied text.<sup>45</sup>

In summary, the principles of the teaching method based on comprehension are endeavoring to understand the studied text, for instance, understanding one thing

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<sup>39</sup> ETKES; IKOCHINSKI, 2004, p. 275.

<sup>40</sup> STAMPFER, 2005, p. 318.

<sup>41</sup> SWARTZ; PARKS, 1984; PERKINS; SWARTZ, 1991, p. 53-69.

<sup>42</sup> ZUR; YOGEV, 2000, p. 77-96.

<sup>43</sup> ZUR; YOGEV, 2000, p. 77.

<sup>44</sup> ZATZ, 2008, p. 103.

<sup>45</sup> BLOCH, 2001, p. 112.



based on another, comparing similar issues and distinguishing between different issues, understanding the logic of the conjectures that are at the base of the talmudic text and of the conjectures in the interpretations of the Rishonim. Another principle is understanding the halakhic-legal concepts and understanding the essential foundations of the law that is at the core of the topic under debate, including the general nucleus that guides analysis of all the text's details. Instruction in the comprehension method must utilize structured and graded teaching that begins with the words of the Torah, continues with the Mishna, and thence with the talmudic text and the interpretations of the Rishonim. One more principle is raising questions as a tool that leads to deeper understanding of the studied text and revealing the grounds for the halakha.

## 11 The method of division by type of lesson

The teaching method called *haluka le-shi'urim* (division by type of lesson) was common in Hungarian schools of learning and was developed by R. Moshe Sofer. In many Hungarian schools of learning teaching was divided into two types of lessons, the "simple lesson" and the "thorough study (*iiyun*) lesson".<sup>46</sup> When teaching a "simple lesson", two or three pages of Talmud were taught each week, with Rashi's commentary and the interpretations of the Tosafot. The emphasis was on fundamental understanding of the literal meaning of the studied text one page after another without skipping anything.<sup>47</sup> When teaching a "through study lesson" the learning was very intensive. In this method of instruction, three or four texts from different tractates were taught during a single period in the summer or winter months. Teaching in the "thorough study lesson" included all sources related to the studied topic, beginning from parallel texts of the topic studied and ending with analysis of the commentators' works and the words of the *poskim* (adjudicators).

## 12 Features of the method

In Hungarian schools of learning that utilized the teaching method based on division by type of lesson, a general halakhic topic was selected every few weeks, which branched out into various talmudic contexts and was also discussed in the works of the *poskim* with current significance for observance of halakha.

The ideology underlying this teaching method was unique to the schools of learning in Hungary, both in its pragmatic orientation and in its successful endeavor to introduce students to different varieties within talmudic literature.

In summary, in the teaching method based on division by lesson type, teaching often focused on three or four texts, based on references that were prepared in advance and included all the sources pertaining to the studied issue, as well as the words of the commentators, including the halakhic ruling. In periods preceding festivals, texts

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<sup>46</sup> KATZBURG, 1949, p. 353.

<sup>47</sup> SOFER, 2006, p. 234.



related to laws of the festivals were taught, such as before Passover or in preparation for the festivals in the month of Tishrei (usually coincides with September).<sup>48</sup>

### **13 The logic method**

R. Isaac Jacob Reines paved a new road through his method of Talmud teaching, by which he hoped to draw to the study of Talmud the generation that he claimed had neglected it.<sup>49</sup> His method of teaching was based on logic and on general laws relevant to all topics in the Talmud.<sup>50</sup>

He developed the "way of logic" as a method of Talmud teaching<sup>51</sup> in a more "relevant" teaching style, because he felt that the gradual distancing from Talmud study was the result of the estrangement of contemporary people from the Talmud. Therefore, he concluded that to draw the people of his era to Talmud study it is necessary to translate it into spoken language and to remove all foreign barriers that prevent them from understanding the Talmud's texts.<sup>52</sup>

As he saw it, the ideology underlying the method of teaching Talmud must follow the logic method that is based on order, organization, and scientific linking of the talmudic text in a constant method that includes various organizing tools.<sup>53</sup> In addition, imparting wide familiarity with the entire talmudic literature and setting halakhic principles.<sup>54</sup>

The basic premise of his teaching method is that the sages of the Talmud interpreted the written Torah and held debates among themselves that were based on logical arguments and assumptions.<sup>55</sup> Teaching in this method, based as it is on rules of logic, helps understand the material studied and assists in internalizing and remembering the studied topic, as "The Torah can be acquired only with signs".<sup>56</sup> And in practice it is only necessary to remember the rules and the details that are short, which will attract students because conciseness helps remember the study material.<sup>57</sup> The purpose of this teaching method was to keep away unnecessary casuistry, which has no benefits, and to draw one closer to straightforward in-depth study that is based on logic, which leads directly to halakhic rulings.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> BREUER, 2003, p. 90-91.

<sup>49</sup> REINES, 1933, p. 5.

<sup>50</sup> ZINOVITZ, 1990, p. 273.

<sup>51</sup> ZINOVITZ, 1990, p. 273.

<sup>52</sup> MERTZBACH, 2012.

<sup>53</sup> REINES, 1933, p. 43.

<sup>54</sup> BAT-YEHUDA, 1985, p. 278.

<sup>55</sup> REINES, 1933, p. 43.

<sup>56</sup> ZUR, 2016, p. 1-3.

<sup>57</sup> REINES, 1933, p. 11.

<sup>58</sup> REINES, 1933, p. 43.



The logic method is comprised of six parts.<sup>59</sup> The first part is the oral Torah – the instruction must connect the written Torah with the oral Torah, based on the preliminary conception that the written Torah includes all details of the oral Torah and teaching the text reveals the link between the written Torah and the oral Torah. The second part is the value of the concepts – this teaching method examines the homiletic methods of the oral Torah and presents the rules and details that derive from them, as well as comparing similar concepts and distinguishing between dissimilar concepts. The third part is intrinsic concepts – this teaching method explains the various concepts and helps reach an understanding of intrinsic concepts, thus clarifying the inner depth of the talmudic text. The fourth part is identifying the main axis on which the text is based on order to arrange the order of instruction in a logical way. The fifth part is that this teaching method sets out the structure of the text and the ways of the mishnaic and talmudic sages. The sixth part is that the teaching method is based on the sages' homiletic rules, their linguistic thesaurus, and recognizing the significance of the talmudic rules.

#### **14 Features of the method**

In this method, the foundations of the text must first be defined, as well as the primary concepts in the text, the rules it contains, and the logic reflected in the conjectures of the studied text.<sup>60</sup> Then the set of concepts based on the first concepts that have already been defined is defined as well, one stage after another,<sup>61</sup> followed by finding a main theme within the words of the Tannaim or Amoraim.<sup>62</sup> Ultimately, the entire system of defining these concepts helps understand the text when it becomes more intricate and complex.

In summary, the principles of the teaching method based on logic are founded on teaching that divides the studied text into six regular parts whose purpose is to clarify the various aspects of the text, and in this way the method facilitates comprehension of the topic when it becomes multiple and complex.

#### **15 The academic research method**

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Hokhmat Yisrael (Wisdom of Israel) movement was active in Europe (particularly in Germany, but also in Galicia and Russia) and it initiated academic research in Jewish studies. This research examined Jewish sources by means of scientific and critical tools. The research conclusions undermined traditional values in the name of a universal authoritative source, and the impression was that engaging in studies by Hokhmat Yisrael encompassed heretic leanings and signaled a departure from the world of Torah and mitzvot.

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<sup>59</sup> REINES, 1933, p. 44.

<sup>60</sup> AMIEL, 2005, p. 362.

<sup>61</sup> REINES, 1933, p. 57.

<sup>62</sup> BAT-YEHUDA, 1985, p. 357.



Until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the method of text criticism was a scholarly method rather than an ideological argument. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many manuscripts were discovered in all Jewish fields. Modern Jewish studies grasped the significance of these manuscripts, and textual criticism became one of the major emblems of the Hokhmat Yisrael movement and, hence, aroused the suspicions and objection of Orthodox circles. But this objection did not include all Orthodox elements.

R. Azriel Hildesheimer, who was one of the leaders of Orthodox Jewry in 19<sup>th</sup> century Germany, studied in his youth in R. Jacob Ettlinger's yeshiva (Germany, 1798-1871) in Altona. Then he studied at the University of Berlin and earned a PhD in Bible. In 1873 he founded the Rabbinical Seminary in Berlin, with one of the main goals being to provide an alternative to the Higher Institute for Jewish Studies in Berlin, led by Abraham Geiger, one of the leaders of the Hokhmat Yisrael movement and a founder of the Reform Movement.

R. Azriel Hildesheimer's ideology was that teaching Talmud would grant basic Jewish training and a higher scientific education in order to expand and enrich students to reach a true perception of Judaism.<sup>63</sup> The main part of the curriculum focused on teaching Talmud and the literature of the *poskim*. The major admission terms set by the heads of this school of learning were considerable knowledge of Talmud, i.e., full ability to explain the talmudic text, including the commentators, and exercises in explaining the final decisions of halakhic rulings. The teaching of Talmud was supplemented by other fields of instruction, such as Mishna, Midrash, Responsa of the Geonim, and aggadic literature, in the scientific spirit advocated by this school of learning. All this in addition to traditional Talmud instruction, where halakhic sources were taught in scientific ways.<sup>64</sup> David Zvi Hoffmann, who taught at the Rabbinical Seminary in Berlin, strove to create harmony between the traditional ways of teaching and teaching in the scientific method.<sup>65</sup> The research teaching method is based on a combination of both Talmud instruction and scientific research, with the purpose of endeavoring to reach an investigation of the truth that is as objective as possible.<sup>66</sup> Namely, one-sided teaching would not facilitate achievement of this goal.<sup>67</sup>

## 16 Features of the research method

Three major rules are considered characteristic of the research-oriented teaching method. The first rule is textual criticism and determining rules for clarifying accurate wordings, including explanation of textual changes. The second rule is understanding the language, understanding the meaning of the words and sentences by investigating the language and linguistic comparisons. The third rule is knowledge of the historical

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<sup>63</sup> YIDDISH PRESS NEWSPAPER, 1870, 53, p. 267.

<sup>64</sup> ASAF, 2013, p. 106.

<sup>65</sup> HOFFMANN, 1954, p. 1.

<sup>66</sup> YIDDISH PRESS NEWSPAPER, 1870, 53, p. 267.

<sup>67</sup> YIDDISH PRESS NEWSPAPER, 1870, 1, p. 22.



and realistic background, reference to historical contexts, comparison between the cultural background in Babylonia and that in the Land of Israel, and familiarity with the realistic circumstances in these places.<sup>68</sup> In light of these three rules, it is possible to characterize the research-oriented teaching method and to say that it examines talmudic literature in the context of its place and time of creation. The texts taught in this teaching method are explored following the critical approach, and it utilizes a historical philological method based on determining the wordings, understanding the language, and understanding the context, as well as distinguishing between sources, uncovering controversies, and stressing halakhic developments. In the research-oriented teaching method there is room to express doubts, uncertainty, and to offer alternatives.<sup>69</sup>

As a result of the research-oriented teaching method, three approaches were formed regarding differences in the teaching method of those learning in the research method and in the various schools of learning that existed previously. According to the first approach, in the research method the student is a researcher who seeks to reveal the historical truth, the original text, and the authentic meaning, and does not make do with solving difficulties regarding the contents. This in contrast to the traditional teaching methods where students see the very study as observance of Torah, which among other things serves as a tool for shaping their inner spiritual world. By studying they becomes part of the studying collective from the beginning of the generations to current times.<sup>70</sup> A second approach to differences in teaching method explains that the research-oriented teaching method does not endeavor to explain difficulties or to compare contradictions in the text, rather it aims to solve difficulties in the text not only based on the contents but rather also by considering the cultural historical background of that era. In other words, the purpose of the research-oriented teaching method is not to try and reach textual harmony or unity with the decisions of later *poskim*, as this teaching method has no interest in deciding halakha but rather only in clarifying the arguments in the text and not in their justification.<sup>71</sup> All this, unlike the traditional teaching methods that were prevalent until the research-oriented method evolved.

A third approach to teaching differences that is slightly similar to the two previous approaches explains that the research-oriented teaching method is characterized by criticism of the textual sources, gathering and categorizing the various versions in order to understand the text studied. In addition, revealing sources and manuscripts that were previously unknown, referring to the historical and realistic background, and understanding the sources in their simple form, based on the principle that texts

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<sup>68</sup> KAHANA, 1990, p. 113-142.

<sup>69</sup> KAHANA, 1990, p. 113.

<sup>70</sup> KAHANA, 1990, p. 113.

<sup>71</sup> BROWN, 2011, p. 311.



retain their literal meaning. Therefore, it is possible to comprehend the meaning of each source based on the literal meaning by means of tools that investigate the three underpinnings of research: textual version, language, and context.<sup>72</sup> Another feature of the research-oriented teaching method is that it does not limit or restrict the research to the Babylonian Talmud rather it also examines the Mishna, the Tosefta, the Jerusalem Talmud, midreshei halakha and agaddah, and the literature of the Geonim.<sup>73</sup>

In contrast, in the traditional teaching methods that preceded the research method, teaching in schools of learning accorded much significance to the talmudic text, with implications for the present and future. The talmudic text is venerated and in time it has even become sacred, canonical, and unchangeable. Instruction of the Talmud is performed with respect and awe and the contents of the talmudic text cannot be questioned. The core of the traditional teaching methods customary in schools of learning is to strive to determine the halakha, and the teaching method is harmonious, aimed at stressing the basic unity of all the sources. These teaching methods are clear-cut and certain because they are based on creative skill and visionary thinking with the purpose of solving all the problems that arise in the text studied, eventually leading to an absolute and certain result that must be accepted and cannot be questioned.<sup>74</sup>

In summary, the principles of the research-oriented teaching method see scientific teaching as a tool for instruction of the Talmud and for understanding its texts, in this way enriching and expanding knowledge in Jewish studies. The research-oriented teaching method proceeds by checking all sources with regard to the wording and language, and also examines the historical and realistic context of the text in order to reach the objective truth and to understand the text studied.

## **17 Summary**

In this article we presented the various methods for teaching the Babylonian Talmud customary at the major schools of learning in Eastern Europe and Germany from the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century until the Second World War, the ideology underlying each of the teaching methods, and their different unique features.

Defining the features of the various teaching methods is an intricate task and it is sometimes hard to define the differences between the methods because some are similar as they often developed from the same school one or several generations later until forming different unique and independent methods, and therefore it is hard to follow their features.

Notably, R. Eliyahu of Vilna and R. Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin engaged in textual criticism. R. Moshe Sofer engaged in textual criticism and also introduced the critical-

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<sup>72</sup> WALFISH, 1996, p. 375-379.

<sup>73</sup> KAHANA, 1990, p. 114.

<sup>74</sup> KAHANA, 1990, p. 113.



linguistic teaching method in the Pressburg Yeshiva.<sup>75</sup> He said that it is preferable to reach an accurate version of the text than to analyze texts<sup>76</sup> and therefore he incorporated in his school the research-oriented scientific teaching method, which examines the text's sources from a historical, philological, and empirical perspective as well.<sup>77</sup>

In a letter he wrote to R. Reines, R. Kook described the harmony formed between the teaching method in the school and that based on the research method:

A primary goal of the beit midrash is also to direct a [certain] portion of the most outstanding [students] to spiritual study, [in order] to establish, following the holy way, [the] truth of Jewish wisdom with all its parts, in its entire scope, until the wisdom of history and criticism, logic of opinions, liturgical poems, and all their branches, shall not belong to those people who wish to destroy the Torah and faith in the blessed God, rather "to those who sit before God". In this we shall earn the greatest part of what we should be doing for God's sake at this time, for the salvation of Israel.<sup>78</sup>

Therefore, it must be said that these three sages, R. Eliyahu of Vilna, R. Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin, and R. Moshe Sofer taught Talmud, whether consciously or unconsciously, also in the research-oriented method, in addition to the teaching methods they themselves developed, as stated above. Not only did they see no contradiction between the teaching methods they developed and the research-oriented method, rather they saw the research method as a harmonious method of teaching that complements those they themselves developed.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> KATZ, 1960, p. 29.

<sup>76</sup> SOFER, 2000, p. 98.

<sup>77</sup> KATZ, 1960, p. 33.

<sup>78</sup> KOOK, 1961, p. 148.

<sup>79</sup> KOOK, 1961, p. 148.



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