

Torah Talk: How to Learn Torah Properly

A Structured Path to Real Growth

Learning Torah isn't just about collecting information—it's about building clarity, internalizing truth, and knowing how to live as a Jew. But today, many people are confused about where to begin or how to move forward. This guide lays out a clear, traditional path for serious Torah growth.

1. Start with Tanach and Language Mastery

The foundation of all Torah learning is **Tanach**. Every Jew must know it well—not just stories, but the words, the structure, the depth.

- Follow **Shnayim Mikra ve'Echad Targum** every week: read the weekly Torah portion twice in Hebrew and once with Targum Onkelos. It is the most important part of the Torah. At the same time it sharpens your Hebrew and introduces Aramaic.
- Read through **Nevi'im and Ketuvim (Na"ch)**, ideally with **Metzudot** commentary, which provides clear and concise explanations.

This step also builds fluency in the language of Torah and gives you the foundational knowledge needed to understand everything else.

2. Learn Shas in Bekiut Before Deep Analysis

One of the most ignored but crucial principles in Torah study is:

“Ligmor ve'Hadar Lisvor” – First complete the material, then analyze it.

This rule appears in the Talmud and is emphasized by the **Shlah HaKadosh** and **Orchot Tzaddikim**. **Rav Kahana in Masechet Shabbat** describes this path: complete the learning broadly before breaking it down deeply.

- Ideally, **every man should finish Shas in bekiut**—quick, wide learning to see the full scope of Torah Sheba'al Peh.

- Don't get stuck analyzing before you understand what the sugya is even about.
- Once you've covered ground, then go back to analyze key sugyot in depth (*iyun*).

This is how real Torah scholars are built.

3. Add Mussar and Machshava Early On

While building technical knowledge, don't neglect inner growth. Here are some examples. These sefarim are essential:

- **Mesilat Yesharim** – for ethical and personal clarity.
- **Chovot HaLevavot** – for inner thought and service of Hashem.
- The **Mada section of the Rambam's Mishneh Torah** – for foundational knowledge about faith, character, and mitzvot.

4. Kabbalah Only Comes Later

Kabbalah is holy—but not helpful when misused. You should only begin learning Kabbalah:

- After mastering Tanach and Shas, and
- Only if your motives are pure and grounded.

Most who jump to Kabbalah early are driven by ego or mystical escapism. Torah isn't magic—it's discipline, clarity, and connection.

5. Build Halachic Literacy with Basic Tools

To navigate Halacha broadly and practically:

- Learn **Chayei Adam** – a great overview of everyday halacha.
- Browse the **Rambam’s Mishneh Torah** when you want clarity on structure or topics. It’s organized and lucid.

These are great tools for orientation and reinforcement.

6. How to Learn Gemara Le’Halacha – The Full Chain of Psak

Everything prior to this, ultimately leads to this next step. When you're ready for serious halachic learning, follow this proven structure—the one used by classic poskim and leading yeshivot for Halachah:

A. Understand the Sugya

- Learn the Gemara carefully with Rashi.
- Use Tosafot only when halachically relevant or cited by poskim.
- Ask key questions: What’s the source? Is this *de’oraita* or *de’rabbanan*? What’s the derivation?

Avoid “OCD learning.” Not every line of every commentary needs to be read. Focus on clarity and halachic relevance, not encyclopedic mastery.

B. Study the Rishonim – Focus on the Rosh

As you go through each sugya, make sure to **learn the Rosh**. He’s a halachic summary of the Gemara and a core voice in the development of halacha.

- After completing the sugya with Rashi, learn the Rosh—he is essential because the halachic system of the Beit Yosef is built primarily on the Rosh, Rif, and Rambam.
- You don’t need to learn the Rif and Rambam inside every time. The Beit Yosef will bring them in, compare them, and guide you to their opinions. When needed, you can look them up inside—but they’re not part of your primary sugya learning.

The key is to understand the halachic development—not to memorize every line. The Beit Yosef will serve as your platform for comparing the three pillars of psak.

C. Learn Tur and Beit Yosef

- The **Tur** organizes halacha topically.
- The **Beit Yosef** is essential—it compares all the Rishonim and justifies the ruling of the Shulchan Aruch. It teaches how the halacha is formed.

D. Then Go to Shulchan Aruch and Nosei Keilim

- See the **Shulchan Aruch's** codified ruling.
- Use **Nosei Keilim** (Taz, Magen Avraham, Bach, Gra, etc.) only when necessary.
 - If you're with a Rebbe, let him guide which ones matter.
 - If alone, browse and stop only where the commentary adds real insight.

Don't try to read everything. Efficiency and focus matter.

E. Mishnah Berurah vs. Aruch HaShulchan

- **Mishnah Berurah** is respected but sometimes overly complex and not definitive.
- **Aruch HaShulchan** is often clearer, more practical, and includes real-world application.

If you want to use the Aruch HaShulchan, use it only at the end, after you've gone through the sugya and formed your own opinion. Don't use it as a shortcut—it should confirm your thinking, not replace it.

F. Use Teshuvot Sparingly

- Don't collect responsa just to collect.
- If a sugya leads you to a teshuvah on point, read it.
- But use it to refine your thinking, not bypass it.

G. Train Yourself to Think Like a Posek

- Don't just memorize rulings. Understand how psak is developed.
- After each sugya, write:
 - The major halachic issues (2–4)
 - A summary of the sugya
 - What you would pasken—and why

Then compare to common practice. Ask why if it differs. Talk it through with someone experienced. This is how poskim are trained.

Conclusion: Torah is Within Reach

If Gemara hasn't clicked yet, don't give up. Don't assume you're not cut out for it. Change how you approach it:

- Make it relevant.
- Learn with the goal of living Torah.
- Connect it to halacha and real life.

If Gemara is too confusing and complicated for you, read Mishneh Torah of the Ramba"m instead. That's why it was written. Skip the parts that are completely irrelevant, if you like.

“Lo baShamayim hi” – The Torah is not in Heaven. It's in our hands.
The privilege is ours. The responsibility is real. Let's learn it properly—with integrity, sequence, and clarity.