



## Introduction

Dear School Administrator / Judaic Studies Teacher,

Welcome to the Torah iTextbook Project.

The project was designed to allow you and your students to embark on a journey which will not only satisfy your need to give students life-long skills and appreciation for the study of gemarah but will also help you and /or your teachers achieve a high level of self-satisfaction in teaching.

Experienced teachers have dedicated many hours to produce the iTextbooks included in the curriculum library. Their goal was to create an educational program that will serve as a positive foundation of gemarah learning for students of all backgrounds and educational levels.

Please review this information carefully so that you can see how this program will make an indelible positive impact on your school's Judaic studies program.

Sincerely,

Rabbi Dr. Mordechai Smolarcik  
Project Director  
Torah iTextbook Project

## Instructional Objectives

The Torah iTextbook Project was created to address specific challenges faced by teachers whose responsibility it is to teach gemarah to middle and high school students. The following paragraphs include a breakdown of each of these challenges and an explanation of how the project addresses them.

### Relevance

One of the project's core beliefs is that the entirety of Torah She'Bichtav and Torah She'Baal Peh is as relevant to our lives today as it was when it was received at Har Sinai. While the understanding of Hashem's will through the study of Torah is a key element in any learning program it is obvious that the relevance of a particular sugyah or Torah topic is dependent on the situational aspect of the material being learned. Some sugyot are relevant to the times of the Beit HaMikdash, others to living in Eretz Yisrael while others may be relevant to those who practice law, medicine or entrepreneurship. It is our belief that today's students will learn with a higher level of interest and engagement when they are presented with Torah issues that are obviously relevant to their own lives. Chazal understood this when they began the Hagaddah Shel Pesach with a series of questions designed to make the Pesach Seder relevant to all of the participants.

The Torah iTextbook Project curriculum committee has chosen sugyot that are directly relevant to the lives of students in middle and high school grades. In this way we have addressed the challenge of presenting Torah to students in a manner that allows them to see the relevance of Torah on their developmental level.

The iTextbooks in this program contain important elements which drive home the relevance of the sugyot. Each iBook begins with an introductory video and other introductory material that present a particular ethical or behavioral dilemma. The students analyze the dilemma

before having had the benefit of learning the Torah material. Once the students have been exposed to the dilemma they then go through the Torah sources to help them answer the questions proposed in the dilemma.

In addition to the introductory material, the iTextbooks include the halachic decisions made by prominent Rishonim and Achronim based on the pesukim, mishnayot and gemarah contained in the iTextbook sugyah. This material acquaints the students with the behavioral applications of the sugyah and encourages them to translate





what they have learned into practice.

Finally, in the "It's a Wrap" assignment at the end of each iTextbook, the students are required to answer questions that encourage them to apply the Torah's values to real-life situations.

The use of the relevancy portions of the sugyah in your classrooms will motivate your students, engage them in the application of Torah material to their everyday behaviors and encourage them to continue the learning of Torah as a relevant life-guide for many years to come.

The following are some examples of life-relevance contained in the iTextbook sugyot;

#### **HaBah BeMachteret -**

- The value of a human life
- Dealing with the aggression of others
- Assessing probabilities
- Judging others on the probability of how they will act in the future
- Our responsibility towards protecting ourselves and others

#### **Kibbud Av V'Aim -**

- Parent-Child relationship

- Appreciating what others do for us
- Appreciating what Hashem does for us
- Being a link in the chain of the Mesorah
- Purposeful existence
- Sowing what we reap

#### **Kiddush HaShem -**

- Life priorities
- Is your life worth more or less than another's
- Self-sacrifice
- Being Jewish in a hostile world
- The value that our predecessors placed on Mitzvah observance

#### **Eilu V'Eilu Divrei Elokim Chayim -**

- Taking another's perspective
- Influencing others
- Hashem's and man's role in the halachic process
- The importance of listening to others
- Recognizing our own limitations

## **Skill Building**

One of the challenges of teaching Torah She'Baal Peh is that much of it is written in a language and style that is new to young learners. When faced with this language barrier students express frustration and some may decide that learning mishna or gemorah is just "not for

them". In order to address this challenge, it is important that the teacher give the students a skill set to enable them to easily maneuver through the complex language and style inherent in the study of Torah She"Baal Peh.

The Torah iTextbook project address this issue in four ways;

### 1. Key Words

Key words are those words found throughout Torah She'Baal Peh that serve a particular function. They are used by Chazal to introduce a statement, a question, an answer, a supporting or contradictory source, a logical argument, and to conclude a discussion. Some examples of key words are, **מיתבי, ורמינהו, תניא** and **דכתיב**.

The iTextbooks in this program include tools to introduce and reinforce these key words. Each mishna and gemarah text studied highlights the key words as they appear in the text. The key words are then presented in tables which include the word's translation, function and context within the mishna or gemarah studied. Finally, the students are presented with interactive assignments to match the key words to the translations and functions.



### 2. Common Words

Common words are words that are commonly found throughout Torah She'Baal Peh. They constitute the core vocabulary list that one needs in order to understand the text. Some examples of common words are, **נמי, חייב, והתם**.

The iTextbooks in this program include tools to introduce and reinforce these common words. Each mishna and gemarah text studied highlights the common words as they appear in the text. The common words are then presented in tables which include the word's translation. Finally, the students are presented with interactive assignments to match the common words to their translations.

### 3. Shaklah V'Taryah

Understanding the "Shaklah V'Taryah" or the logical flow of a piece of text is dependent on a student's ability to decode each phrase and then combine the phrases into a "back and forth" discussion which has a logical flow.

The iTextbooks include assignments in which the students are asked to answer questions based on the logical flow of the text. Students are also presented with a block of text and are challenged to select particular phrases that answer a question based on the text's logical flow. In addition, students



are sometimes presented with flow charts which demonstrate the logical flow of the particular mishna or gemarah studied.

#### 4. Key Concepts

A particular sugyah will often introduce a concept that is commonly found throughout Shas. An example of this is the concept of **עשה דוחה לא תעשה** or **תדיר ושאינו** or **תדיר תדיר קודם**. The iTextbooks include essays on these concepts that include explanations of the concept and applications of the concept in other places in Shas.

#### Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is defined as the extent or strength of one's belief in one's own ability to complete tasks and reach goals. If we are to create a future generation of Torah learners then it is essential that we inculcate our students with the belief that they can, in fact, study a Torah text on their own.

The iTextbooks include an especially designed interactive self-study text assignment in which the students are presented with a gemara text and are able to follow the text phrase by phrase while being supported with both nikud and translation. When the students are allowed to work out the text of a particular

mishna or gemarah independently, they develop the belief that they can, in fact, accomplish this difficult task.

Only after they have worked out the text are they then asked to read the text to the teacher without the benefit of nikud and translation. The successful accomplishment of this task greatly increases a student's self-efficacy in Torah study.



#### Student Assessment

Students understanding and skills are assessed throughout the iTextbooks using interactive



assignments. After completion these assignments are sent via email to the class teacher.

#### Classroom Management

In addition to standard classroom management techniques, the use of the iTextbooks requires unique classroom procedures. This is primarily due to the fact that the students will be spending much of their time in independent study. In this section we will be breaking down the particular teaching skills required to successfully manage the program in the classroom.

### 1. "Guide on the Side"

One of the fundamental differences between traditional teaching and teaching using this program is that the teacher will be spending more time assisting individual students and less time lecturing from the front of the classroom. A majority of time in class will be used to allow the students to work on the iTextbook assignments individually or in small groups. In pilot classrooms using this program we have found that students gain much more when they are allowed to work out the texts and answer questions on their own. The teacher will have ample opportunities to lead class discussions and whole class reviews of the material but the majority of time will be spent guiding individual students through the material. In pilot use of these materials, we have found that the classroom will take on more of a Beit Midrash feel.

### 2. "Sage on the Stage"

Our experience in the pilot teaching using this program is that there are important points during the learning of a particular sugyah where the teacher teaches to the entire class. This serves to review and reinforce the material that the students have covered independently and allows for classroom discussions that promote critical thinking and listening skills.

## Supporting Data

Approximately one and one half years after the inception of this project, after it had been used in the classrooms of Hillel Day School of Boca Raton, Dr. Shani Bechoffer of Shani Bechoffer Consulting, conducted a limited study of the students who had used the iTextbooks in their gemara classes. 83 seventh and eighth grade students took part in an extensive survey and their responses were collected and summarized. The initial study of the survey data showed the following;

- 88% said that they put effort into gemara class because the learning was enjoyable
- 70% said that they prefer course material that arouses their curiosity, even if it is difficult to learn.
- 90% agreed that mastering gemara content, ideas and skills will help them become better Jews.
- 72% said that they like learning gemara.
- 72% said that gemara is highly relevant to their lives
- 80% said that when they finish a sugyah they really know it well.

While further study with a larger sample size is warranted, this early data shows the potential for realizing the objectives of a foundational gemara curriculum.

## Technical Considerations

The iTextbooks currently run on any iPad version 2 and higher. They also run on any Macbook or iMac running OS X version 10 (Mavericks) and higher. We are currently actively converting the material for online use across all platforms and will notify you when this work is completed. In addition we have established a partnership with Gemara Berura which will allow Gemara Berura schools to use our material within the Gemara Berura application.

Distribution of the iTextbooks is currently accomplished using the Dropbox system. Each teacher and student will receive an email which will include the Dropbox link to each specific iTextbook. When the link is clicked or touched the iBook will download onto the device. You may need to click or touch on the "share" button in the Dropbox application and then click on the "Open in" button to open the iTextbook in the iTextbooks application.

It has proven to be extremely helpful for the teacher to be able to project the pages of the iTextbook from the iPad onto a screen, whiteboard or Smartboard. This can be accomplished by purchasing an adaptor that connects the iPad, Macbook or iMac to the VGA plug on a projector. The downside of this method is that the teacher's movement

will be restricted by the length of the cable physically connecting the device to the projector. An alternative is to purchase an Apple TV Device and a HDMI to VGA converter. This allows for a wireless connection between the device and the projector allowing the teacher and their device to move freely throughout the classroom.

When using iPads, the guided access feature allows the teacher to lock down the devices to a particular application. This is extremely helpful to keep the students from being distracted by other applications that they may have on their devices. This can be accomplished by changing the settings on each individual iPad to allow for guided access (a time consuming task) or by using a Device Management system that allows for guided access to be turned on and off on multiple devices from a single computer. For more information on this please have your school's IT professional contact Rabbi Smolarcik at [rabsmo@me.com](mailto:rabsmo@me.com).

For more information and to purchase this program for your school through an annual subscription please contact:

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