

# Introduction to Rabbinic Literature

## Basic overview of major rabbinic works

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<b>Mishnah</b>	THE Oral Law. Compilation of Jewish law. Compiled by Judah HaNassi (“the Prince” or “the President”) in the mid to late second century. The word <i>mishnah</i> stems from the word <i>shanah</i> , meaning “to repeat” representative of the oral teaching (that which is learned by repetition). It is broken down into six sections called <i>Sedarim</i> (“Orders”). Each Order consists of a number of <i>Massichtot</i> (“Tractates”). There are a total of sixty-three Tractates.
<b>Tosefta</b>	<i>Tosefta</i> literally means “addition.” It is a work similar to the <i>Mishnah</i> , which runs parallel to it in many regards, but contains additional matter. One noteworthy characteristic of the <i>Tosefta</i> is its use of proof-texts, which are normally omitted in the <i>Mishnah</i> .
<b>Baraitot</b>	<i>Baraitot</i> means “outside teachings.” These are composed of the numerous, isolated <i>halakhot</i> and compilations of <i>tannaitic</i> material outside the <i>Mishnah</i> .
<b>Tannaim</b>	Pre-Mishnaic rabbis.
<b>Amoraim</b>	<i>Amoraim</i> (from <i>amar</i> , meaning to speak or interpret) were proponents of the <i>Mishnah</i> and carried its teachings forth.
<b>Gemara</b>	<i>Gemara</i> literally means “completion.” It is the commentary that gradually accumulated around the <i>Mishnah</i> and was later codified along with the <i>Mishnah</i> into the <i>Talmud</i> .
<b>Talmud</b>	<i>Talmud</i> means “to study.” It contains the <i>Mishnah</i> surrounded by a body of <i>Gemara</i> , particular to the region from which it originated. The two compilations of Talmud are the <i>Bavli</i> (“Babylonian” - the most popular and widely circulated of the two), and the <i>Yerushalmi</i> (“Jerusalem”).
<b>Yerushalmi</b>	The Jerusalem Talmud is the most succinct, yet most difficult of the two. It’s codification was over a much shorter time period than the <i>Bavli</i> , and contains materials specific to living in <i>Ha’aretz</i> (“The Land” of Israel). Unique to the <i>Yerushalmi</i> are the tractates dealing with the laws of agriculture.
<b>Bavli</b>	The Babylonian Talmud attracted a large number of scholars to help in codifying it in its final form. It is seven to eight times the size of the <i>Yerushalmi</i> and the most accessible in both availability and comprehension. It was finished around the year 499.
<b>Halachah</b>	Literally “walking.” <i>Halachah</i> indicates the way of life to be lived within the precepts of Torah. It is the legal decisions of community leaders, specifically of rabbinic authority.
<b>Haggadah</b>	Literally “telling” or “narration.” <i>Haggadah</i> is the dialog that surrounds a final rendering of <i>halachah</i> (through discussion, proof-texting, parables, etc.) in order to support the <i>halachic</i> decision.