

Gemara Marking System

## **THE MARKINGS EXPLAINED**

The Gemara Marking System is an innovative method that visually highlights a sugya by placing geometric lines and shapes onto the daf. This provides structure and clarity to the flow of the Gemara, enhancing one's understanding, retention, and effective review.

### **Instructions:**

Print out this entire document,  
so that you can see the SAMPLES  
while reading the commentary.

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U.S. phone: (718) 614-8494

Israel phone: (052) 530-0710

# Gemara Marking System: Key Sheet

## Sources

Mishnah or Baraisa

Tana

Amora

## Key Points

Indicates key words, complementary phrases, or contrasting points

Dot underline



Small-dot underline



Squiggle underline



Slash underline



Double underline



Firebox



*highlights a key or controversial statement that the Gemara gives extensive analysis*

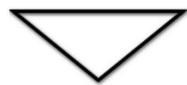
## Long Points

קושיה	שאלת	תשובה/ תירוץ	דחיה	נקודה
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## Series Markings



Triangle



Inverse Triangle



Diamond



Bowtie



House



Mountain

## Punctuation

// end of sugya

{ } tangential point

→ matches with similar point elsewhere

ר' read as single phrase

— Connector – continue reading without pause

— Comma-Connector – pause but don't stop

. , : ? standard usage

## Key Sheet

*The Gemara Marking System uses five types of markings.*

### 1 – SOURCES

In the Gemara Marking System, any text that is of a Tannaic source – i.e. a Mishnah or a Baraisa – is enclosed within a box. We do this because when learning Gemara, it is crucially important to distinguish between a source said by a Tanna, and that said by an Amora. That's because a Tannaic source has superior power – an Amora can never argue with it (unless he has another Tannaic source to back him up). So distinguishing between Tannaic and Amoraic sources is basic to understanding any piece of Gemara. Thus a box is put around any Tannaic source – a Mishnah or a Baraisa.

Furthermore, where it assists in understanding the Gemara, the actual name of a Tanna will be circled – to make it stand out and for ease of reference. (The Tanna's name is circled because the circle shape contrasts nicely with the box that surrounds the actual Tannaic text.)

Similarly, the name of a key Amora is put in a box. This is particularly useful when a lengthy sugya is based on a machlokes Amoraim, as the boxed names provide a quick point of reference.

### 2 – KEY POINTS

In the Gemara Marking System, a variety of underlinings are used to highlight or contrast a particular word or phrase. These words can be highlighted with either a dot underline, a small-dot underline, a squiggle underline, a slash underline, or a double underline.

For example, if the Gemara brings a source saying that a certain action is permitted (*mutar*), and then 20 lines later a different source says that same action is forbidden (*usser*), we will dot-underline those two words – usser and mutar – to emphasize the precise point of contrast between the two sources. Despite the distance between the two sources, and despite all the intervening information, the two sources are neatly tied together with an intuitive visual reference.

One special "key point" marking is the Firebox. This is used on rare occasions, to indicate a key or controversial statement to which the Gemara devotes extensive analysis. The use of a Firebox will be discussed more in the upcoming sample sugyas.

### 3 – LONG POINTS

A special marking is used when the Gemara makes a point that extends over many lines of text – either a long question, a long answer, or a long piece of information. This is indicated in the margin of the Gemara, using a circled letter (denoting Kuf for Kasha, Tav for Teretz, etc), followed by a vertical dotted line extending the length of that particular point.

This marking is very helpful because the Gemara can sometimes take a rather "winding road" before getting to the conclusion of a point, and it can be confusing to know exactly where things start and stop. The long-point marking signals to keep reading and to let the Gemara fully develop its point.

### 4 – SERIES MARKINGS

In the Gemara Marking System, a repeating series of points is marked by a geometric form – triangles (or inverse triangles), diamonds, bowtie shapes, shapes of houses, or "mountains" (triangles with a filled-in cap). These shapes could designate a series of kashas on a particular statement of the Gemara, or could indicate a series of teachings by one particular sage. The purpose of these geometric shapes is to highlight where each point of the series starts, in order to give structure to the sugya and to provide a quick visual reference.

This becomes particularly valuable when a number of concurrent series occur within this same sugya. In such a case, two different geometric shapes are used. For example, the sugya might have one series marked with triangles, interwoven with a series marked by diamonds. This brings out multi-layered facets of the sugya, while enabling one to keep straight a complex cheshbon.

In any one instance, the particular geometric shape has no inherent significance. What is significant is that each shape is part of a series that has some logical connection. As we proceed to the sample sugyas, it will become clear exactly how this works, and how the various shapes help to unlock the flow of the sugya.

### 5 – PUNCTUATION

Finally, the Gemara Marking System utilizes some punctuation marks to help maintain the flow of the sugya, and to prevent mistakes that might arise from a misreading of the Gemara.

- A double-slash denotes where one sugya ends and the next begins.
- Brackets denote text that is tangential to the main flow of the sugya.
- An arrow in the margin of the Gemara directs readers to a similar point elsewhere. For example, if the Gemara mentions Rebbe Yossi, but doesn't indicate that it is referring to a shita of Rebbe Yossi that was discussed two amudim earlier, this can generate a lot of confusion. The arrows will link up the current mention of Rebbe Yossi with his statement earlier, providing an easy cross-reference.
- Right-angle markings indicate to read a series of words as a single phrase. This is useful when the Gemara is re quoting part of a Mishnah or Baraisa, or when stating a concept that needs to stand out amongst the rest of the Gemara text.
- A "connector" marking, as well as the "comma-connector," assist with the flow of the reading. Examples of their usage will be given in the sample sugyas.
- Finally, standard elements of punctuation – periods, commas, colons and question marks – are used to help with the flow of the reading.



## Triangles

*Triangles are used to indicate a series.*

The first sample Gemara is from Eruvin 15a. Without knowing anything about this sugya, we can immediately see from the gray box on the right side of the page that the נושא (topic) is לחי העומד מאלוי. This is also reflected in the Gemara text itself, where on the top line those same three words – לחי העומד מאלוי – are double-underlined, to indicate the main theme of the amud. In learning through this amud, those double-underlined words continuously serve as a helpful anchor-phrase.

Near the top of the amud, two names appear in boxes – indicating that the main protagonists of this sugya are Abaye and Rava. In the Gemara Marking System, not every name has to be boxed, but when those names are revisited throughout the sugya, it is important to be able to quickly locate and identify the key shitas.

Next, as we scan down the Gemara text, we see a series of 7 triangles. Each of these designates a Ta-shma. In the thin margin to the right of the Gemara text (between the Gemara and Rashi) correspond 7 small triangles (numbered 1 through 7) - giving a clear view of where these 7 Ta-shma's are located on the amud.

What do these triangles signify? The second gray box on the right side of the page – entitled מבנה (structure) – explains that each of these triangles represents another kasha on Rava.

Back in the Gemara text: Each of the triangled Ta-shma's is followed by a few lines of boxed text. Boxed text always indicates a Tanaic source (either a Mishnah or a Baraisa). This is valuable information because a most basic facet of Gemara learning is that (generally) an Amora cannot argue on a Tana. When learning a sugya it is therefore crucial to clearly distinguish between text that is of Tanaic origin, and that which is not.

Although a Ta-shma almost always introduces a Tanaic source, notice that triangle #7 is not followed any boxed text, because the Gemara there presents a maase of Rav – i.e. a kasha on Rava that is of Amoraic origin.

At this point, the form and structure of the Gemara is clearly defined – and that's half the battle. What remains is to start plugging in the specific information that comprises this sugya. And it is so much easier once a solid framework already exists.



## Inverse Triangles

**An inverse triangle indicates that the Gemara is now exploring the opposite position from that represented by a regular triangle.**

This example, from the first amid of Pesachim, is similar to the previous example:

Immediately following the Mishnah, **two names appear in boxes** – indicating the main protagonists of the sugya, Rav Huna and Rav Yehuda.

The gray boxes on the right side of the page indicates that the **גדרה של "אור" נושא** (topic) is "what is the definition of the word 'ohr' that is used in the Mishnah."

Below that, the gray box entitled **מבנה** (structure) explains that a triangle indicates whenever the Gemara is bringing a kasha against Rav Yehuda's opinion that "ohr" means night. And an "inverse (upside-down) triangle" indicates a kasha against Rav Huna's opinion that "ohr" means day.

Thus in the Gemara text itself, the **first 3 triangles** – which are right-side-up – denote kashas on Rav Yehuda, while the 4th triangle – which is inverted – indicates that the kasha is now going the other way, against Rav Huna. For the fifth kasha, the triangle is right-side-up – i.e. another kasha on Rav Yehuda.

Besides giving a clear picture of the basic structure, these markings provide a constant reinforcement of the primary building blocks of the sugya. Anytime one begins to lose track of the back-and-forth flow of the sugya, a quick glance at the gray box **מבנה** tells us that this right-side-up triangle is a kasha on Rav Yehuda's opinion that "ohr" means night.

In the thin margin between the Gemara and Rashi are **5 small, numbered triangles**. These numbers assist greatly in a shiur setting or learning with a chavrusa: When wanting to refer back to one particular kasha, it is much easier to say, for example, "Look back at triangle #3"; everyone can immediately locate the line of Gemara under discussion, and put it in proper context as a kasha on Rav Yehuda. This saves time, and ensures that no one gets left behind.

Note, by the way, that there is no "boxed text" following each of these triangles. That's because the source of these kashas are not Tanaic statements, but rather brought from p'sukim.

In this sugya – the machlokes between Rav Huna and Rav Yehuda – the series of triangles continues for 3 amudim, for a total of 15 back-and-forth questions, all numbered for easy reference. What would otherwise be a rather long and intimidating sugya suddenly becomes far more manageable.

In a shiur setting, a rebbe could give over all the main markings when beginning the sugya, to set up the big picture and give students an expectation of how this sugya is structured. Alternatively, students could use a pre-marked Gemara which would display the general and flow ahead of time. This is like looking at a road map before starting out on a journey. Becoming familiar with the total distance of the journey, as well as the landmarks along the way, adds an invaluable degree of confidence and security during the course of the journey itself.



## Diamonds

*Diamonds are used to indicate a series.*

This Gemara, from the 19th perek of Shabbos (Rebbe Eliezer d'Milah) is discussing the famous machlokes between Rebbe Eliezer and Rebbe Akiva as to what extent Milah overrides Shabbos: Is it only the actual Milah itself, or even מכשרין מילה - the preparatory steps (e.g. preparing a Milah knife).

Here, the Gemara brings 5 short baraisas where Rebbe Eliezer's rule – מכשרין דוחין את השבת applied to various mitzvahs: Lulav, Sukkah, Matzah, Shofar and finally, Milah.

This information is indicated in the **gray boxes** on the right side of the page. The gray **box entitled נושא** (topic) – מכשרין דוחין את השבת is “preparatory steps override Shabbos.” And the **box entitled מבנה** (structure) notes that the Gemara will bring 5 examples of Rebbe Eliezer's shita. The **small diamond** in the gray box indicates that this series of examples will be marked with diamonds.

Scanning down the page, we see that each of these key words – Lulav, Sukkah, Matzah, Shofar and Milah – is marked with a **diamond**.

Further, if we look in the thin margin to the right of the Gemara text (between the Gemara and Tosfos), the **five small diamonds** (number 1 through 5) give a clear and unobstructed view of where these 5 examples are located throughout the amud.

Back in the Gemara text, we see that each diamond is followed immediately by a Baraisa – which is **boxed** – indicating that these 5 examples are all Tanaic sources. With the boxes, we know where each Baraisa begins and ends – and where the Gemara's Amoraic discussion begins. Also, the boxes enable us to easily see how each Baraisa ends with the name “Rebbe Eliezer” – the author of the shita under discussion, מכשרין דוחין את השבת.

The diamond markings lift these five key words off the page, giving a visual snapshot of the Gemara structure and clarifies pshat. Yet this is much more than simply highlighting words for emphasis; it is also an invaluable aid for chazara and memorization. If you close the Gemara and try to remember 400 words on a page, only the gifted have a realistic chance. But with a visual image of the structure and a few key words, the entire amud can be readily reconstructed from memory.

For this sugya, why were diamonds in particular selected as the marking? Often there will be multiple series' on the same amud, and although there is no inherent difference what geometric shape is used to mark a series, we like to reserve the triangle shape for times when opposing shitas need to be indicated with triangles and inverse triangles. So in this instance, diamonds are a good alternative. And in the event that additional series markings are necessary in the same sugya, we can use any other geometric shape that is easily distinguishable – e.g. the bowtie, house or volcano.



## Dot Underline

**A dot-underline is used to indicate a key word or phrase.**

This sugya, from the second perek of Bechoros, begins in the middle of the amud – following the double-slash, which indicates the start of a new sugya.

In this sugya, Rav Sheses makes an assertion that **אין מתפיסין לכל זבח שירצה**. The name **Rav Sheses** is **boxed**, in order to provide an anchor reference to the main character in this sugya, and the words **אין מתפיסין** are **dot-underlined** to highlight it as the main point.

נו<sup>שא</sup> **אין מתפיסין לכל זבח שירצה** – is also indicated in the gray box **entitled** (topic) on the right side of the page.

The Gemara brings a Baraisa to support Rav Sheses. The **Baraisa** is **boxed**, to designate it as a Tanaic source.

This is a long Baraisa – 11 lines and 137 words – most of which is tangential to our discussion. Accordingly, anyone learning this sugya will find it challenging to locate the key point that is needed to support Rav Sheses.

**אין מתפיסין לכל-** **זבח שירצה**. This provides absolute clarity on the few words that proves the point under discussion. It also links up with the same phrase that was dot-underlined prior to the Baraisa, when Rav Sheses initially made his assertion.

This enables a more confident and secure reading of the entire Baraisa, sparing the frustration of constantly trying to plug Rav Sheses into other points that are not directly relevant to our discussion.

Now look at the last Rashi on the amud. Rashi refers to those same 5 dot-underlined words – **אין מתפיסין לכל זבח שירצה** – and points out that those are the key words which prove the point of Rav Sheses. In essence, the phrase that we dot-underlined in the Baraisa actually takes Rashi's explanation and applies it visually to the Gemara text itself. (This is colloquially referred to as a "marking Rashi.")

The words of Rashi are also **dot-underlined**, showing a quick and clear link between the key dot-underlined words in the Baraisa, as well as the dot-underline in the original statement of Rav Sheses itself. This 3-pronged linkage becomes even more helpful in the context of the larger sugya, as more information is added, and the danger arises that this key point of Rav Sheses – and its location on the amud – could become obscured.



## Firebox / Long-point Marking / Squiggle Underline

- A **Firebox** highlights a key or controversial statement to which the Gemara gives extensive analysis.
- A **Long-point Marking** signals to keep reading and let the Gemara completely develop its point.
- A **Squiggle Underline** indicates complementary phrases or contrasting points.

At the beginning of the third perek of Meseches Shabbos, the Gemara is discussing the Mishnah's statement that one may not place (לֹא יתַּעֲשֶׂה) food on a kirah unless it is טוֹב וְקָרֵא. The Gemara wonders whether the Mishnah's directive of לֹא יתַּעֲשֶׂה reflects the view of Chananyah who forbids "returning" food to the kirah (while permitting one to merely "leave" food on the kirah), or perhaps our Mishnah means to say that even "leaving" food on the kirah is also prohibited. The Gemara proceeds to bring a number of proofs both for and against the notion that our Mishnah reflects the view of Chanayah.

In applying the Gemara Marking System, two words at the start of the sugya – לֹא יתַּעֲשֶׂה – are double-underlined. Since the topic of our sugya is to examine the meaning of those words, the double-underline provides an anchor throughout. (This is also noted in the gray box entitled נושא on the right side of the page.)

Second, the name "Chananyah" is marked with a "firebox," a unique marking that highlights a key or controversial statement to which the Gemara gives extensive analysis. Indeed, Chananyah's statement will be subjected to a rigorous cross-examination extending for 3 amudim. The firebox marking – akin to "neon lights" – is used selectively, to give maximum emphasis to an especially key name or phrase.

Chananyah is a Tana, and thus his statement is marked with a box.

The Gemara begins its analysis of Chananyah's statement with a kasha, as denoted by the triangle. (On subsequent amudim, additional kashas against Chananyah are also marked with triangles, while sources that support his position are marked with inverse triangles.)

This is a very long kasha, extending 18 lines of Gemara, till the last word on the amud. In the thin margin to the right of the Gemara text (between the Gemara and Tosfos), there is a "long-point marking." This is a vertical dotted line, attached to a circled-letter Kuf which indicates exactly where the long kasha begins and ends. The letter kuf stands for "kasha."

Typically, when a kasha is introduced by a Baraisa, the Gemara will conclude its point within a few lines following the Baraisa. Here, the long-point marking is critical to counteract this expectation. Following this Baraisa, the Gemara first uses 8 lines to consider – and ultimately reject – the possibility that the Baraisa supports Chananyah, and only then does the Gemara explain why the Baraisa seems to contradict Chananyah. In other words, this kasha has its own internal back-and-forth, and the long-point marking is an instruction to not stop after reading after the Baraisa; do not think you know the question or have all the information before getting to the end. Keep reading and let the Gemara completely develop its point, which will culminate in a kasha far down the page – precisely where the long-point marking ends.

On this amud, another new marking is introduced: the squiggle-underline. This squiggle-underline indicates the two sections of this long kasha on Chananyah: בְּשִׁלְמָא (the possibility that the Baraisa supports Chananyah) and אֵלֹא (the ultimate kasha against Chananyah). Particularly in this case, with so many lines of text between them, the squiggle-underlines are important to visually tie the two parts of the kasha neatly together.



## Bowties

**Bowties are used to indicate a series.**

On Shabbos 15b, the Gemara asks a question: Why did Chazal make a decree that glass vessels can become *tame*? This is the topic of our sugya, and those six words – **כלי זכוכית מ"ט גזoor בהו רבנן** – are marked with a double-underline to provide an anchor throughout the sugya. (This is also noted in the **gray box** entitled **נושא** on the right side of the page.)

To answer this question, the Gemara offers two main possibilities: either that Chazal placed glass vessels in the same category as earthenware, or that Chazal placed them in the same category as metal vessels. These two main possibilities are marked with “bowties” – the first one on daf 15b around the words **ככל' חרס** (earthenware), and the second on daf 16a around the words **ככל' מתכות** (metal vessels). On the right side of the page, the **gray box** entitled **מבנה** (structure) notes that the bowtie markings indicate attempts to show what type of vessel Chazal equated with glass vessels.

In the Gemara Marking System, although bowties can be used to denote any series, they are typically reserved for more substantial points, given that bowties are visually a more substantial marking.

Following the first bowtie suggestion (**ככל' חרס**), the Gemara brings two kashas. These are marked with triangles. Similarly, following the second bowtie suggestion on 16a (**ככל' מתכות**), the Gemara brings another two kashas, which are also marked with triangles. This highlights the repeating pattern of the Gemara, and provides a visual structure that aids greatly in not only clarifying pshat, but also in memorization and review.

In this sugya, the bowtie markings perform a crucial function beyond just “marking a series of attempts.” Notice that although – at the beginning of the sugya – the Gemara asks explicitly: **כלי זכוכית מ"ט גזoor בהו רבנן** (“What is the source for Chazal’s decree that glass vessels can become tame?”), this question is never stated on the next amud (16a) in introducing the answer of **ככל' מתכות**. By the time readers get to the discussion of **ככל' מתכות** on 16a, there exists a real possibility of confusion as to what the Gemara is coming to address, since the very question is unstated! Marking this as the second in a bowtie series clearly ties it back to the first bowtie of **חרס**, and the double-underlined words – **כלי זכוכית מ"ט גזoor בהו רבנן** – the original question which is thus reapplied through the distributive principle to the second bowtie on 16a, **ככל' מתכות**.

Finally, the sugya also has a long-point marking on 16a. Starting with the triangle on **אליא מעתה**, the Gemara brings a Baraisa, and then brings a second Baraisa before completing the kasha. This long-point marking indicates to keep reading after the first Baraisa, because the Gemara has not yet fully developed its kasha.

(Note: For easier graphic presentation of this example, the tzuras hadaf on the facing page has part of the Tosfos commentary removed.)



## Brackets

**Brackets separate words that are tangential to the main flow of the sugya.**

This Gemara, from **פרק אלו מציאות**, is in the midst of a long series of proofs on the topic of **יאוש שלא מדעת**. We'll focus on the middle of the amud, where a Baraisa is brought as proof for Rava, who holds that **יאוש שלא מדעת** is indeed **יאוש**. This is the tenth in a series of proofs, and is marked with a right-side-up triangle, to indicate that it supports the opinion of Rava.

(At the beginning of the sugya on 21b, a **gray box** entitled **מבנה** (structure) would indicate that the Gemara brings a total of 12 attempted proofs, and that those marked with triangles support the opinion of Rava, while upside-down triangles support Abaye.)

In the thin margin to the left of the Gemara text (between the Gemara and Tosfos), the **small triangles** numbered 9, 10 and 11 indicate the precise location in the overall context of this sugya. In this example, a Baraisa is marked with a right-side-up triangle and as **number-10** in the series. The Baraisa itself is enclosed in a **box**, to indicate that it is a Tannaic source.

The Baraisa's proof is as follows: If someone separates terumah from another person's produce, the owner's eventual consent is regarded as if he had consented at the time of the separation; so too the Gemara suggests that an owner's eventual **יאוש** on his item is regarded as if he had **יאוש** at the time the item was actually lost. Although this proof is for Rava, Rava himself rejects it - citing the possibility (three lines after the Baraisa ends) that the person who separated the terumah had been appointed as an agent by the owner of the produce.

At this point, proof number-10 has been rejected, and the Gemara could simply proceed to the next in the series of proofs, which is marked as triangle number 11, two lines from the bottom of the page. However, the Gemara – beginning with the words **ה"נ מוסתרא** – diverges into a discussion of the topic of "separating terumah through an agent," including a story that illustrates under what conditions the Amoraim relied on this principle in practice.

Consider: Given that the Gemara had already rejected Rava's proof, the subsequent discussion of "separating terumah through an agent" – is essentially tangential to the back-and-forth flow of our sugya on the issue of **יאוש שלא מדעת**. Therefore, to indicate that this section of Gemara is "outside the flow," it is marked off with **brackets** – beginning with the words **ה"נ מוסתרא**, and ending on the second line from the bottom with the words **דאםר כי**.

The brackets do not in any way lessen the importance of this information, but rather designate its function in the overall context of the sugya, and enables one to clearly see how it emerges from the primary discussion.

Immediately following the words **דאםר כי** (and the close-bracket mark), there is an **upside-down triangle**, indicating that the Gemara is now back to its regular flow – continuing with number-11 in its series of proofs on the topic of **יאוש שלא מדעת**.