

Facilitator Script: Shabbat 31a

7-10 minutes open | 12 minutes chavruta | 8 minutes share-back

0:00 • Welcome (1 min)

"We are sitting in a beit midrash in Poland, about to learn a page of Talmud together. For many of you, this is the first time. For some of you, it is one of many. Both are exactly the right way to be here. In the next thirty minutes, you are going to do something Jews have been doing for two thousand years, and you are going to do it here, in this beit midrash, on this soil."

1:00 • What is the Talmud? (2 min)

"The Talmud is the central text of Rabbinic Judaism. It is the record of how our tradition interpreted Torah and built a way of life.

- It has two layers. The first is the Mishnah, the Oral Torah written down around the year 200 CE in the Land of Israel by Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi. The Mishnah is short, terse, and arranged by topic.
- The second is the Gemara: centuries of rabbis, in the Land of Israel and in Babylonia, arguing about what the Mishnah means. The Babylonian Gemara was edited around the year 500 CE.
- Mishnah plus Gemara together is what we call the Talmud.
- It is not a law code. It is not a rulebook. It is a record of argument. Majority and minority opinions are preserved side by side. Disagreement is not a failure; it is the form the tradition takes.
- The Talmud has sixty-three tractates and roughly 2,700 two-sided pages. For about fifteen hundred years, Jews have been opening these pages and arguing back. When you open one today, you are not reading about the conversation. You are joining it.

If asked: The Hebrew you see on the page is actually a mix. Hebrew is used for the Mishnah. Aramaic is used for the Gemara. Both appear on the daf we are learning today.

4:00 • What is chavruta? (1 min)

We are going to learn in pairs, in Chavruta. Chavruta comes from the Aramaic word chaver, which means friend or companion.

A chavruta is a study partner. Traditional Jewish learning is almost never solitary. You learn in pairs, out loud, together.

A beit midrash is a house of study, and it is meant to be loud. When fifty women are learning in chavruta, you will hear it. That is the sound of Torah.

6:00 • Your Handout, and the Teachers You Are About to Meet (2 min)

Hold up the handout and walk them through it:

- "On the front of your handout you'll see three short stories. All three come from one page, one daf, of Talmud, Masechet Shabbat, daf 31a."
- "The image on the first page IS the page itself, in the Vilna edition Jews have been studying from for over a hundred years. You do not need to read it this way today. I just want you to see it. The highlighted passage is our three stories. Everything else on that page is commentary and cross-references layered on top over the centuries."
- "Now, to the 3 stories we will learn today. They begin on page 3. Each story is about a stranger who walked up to a rabbi and asked to become Jewish. Each one went first to Shammai, and then to Hillel."
- "Hillel and Shammai lived in the generation before the destruction of the Second Temple, in the late first century BCE into the early first century CE. They ran the two great schools of the period. Across the Talmud, they disagree about hundreds of questions. Both are preserved. And today, you get to meet them!"

9:00 • Launch Chavruta (1 min)

"Here's how this will go: Turn to the person next to you. Introduce yourselves. Then read the three stories aloud to each other on pages 3 & 4. Take turns. One of you reads Story 1, the other reads Story 2, switch again for Story 3. You have the English and the Hebrew – read whatever is most comfortable for you. After you read, pick a question from Page 2 to ask each other – or just start talking about what came up for you!

You have twelve minutes. I will give you a warning at ten. After 12 minutes, we will come back together and a few groups can share what they discussed.

Now - BEGIN!"

Part 2: Chavruta (10:00 to 22:00)

What to do

- Circulate quietly. Listen for one or two insights you can surface in the share-back.
- Do not rescue pairs who are quiet at first. The conversation will come.
- If a pair is stuck, offer one light prompt: "Which convert caught your ear?" Then walk away.
- If a pair is deep, leave them alone. Mark them in your head to call on later.

Time cues

- At 20:00 (10 minutes in): "Two more minutes."
- At 22:00: call them back. Wait for the room to quiet.

Part 3: Share-back, Inspire, and Close (22:00 to 30:00)

22:00 • Surface insights (5 min)

Call on two or three pairs. Use names you noted while circulating. Prompts if the room is shy:

- "Which question did your chavruta land on?"
- "What did your partner say that surprised you?"
- "Where in your life have you meet a Shammai? A Hillel?"

No need to reply to every answer. Nod, repeat of a phrase, "thank you" - their words hold the room.

NOTE TO SELF: If you get a hard question you cannot answer: "That is a real question. Let's hold it and keep learning." You do not need every answer.

27:00 • Tie it together (2 min)

"In closing, I will draw your attention to Page 4 – the English in **bold**. The three converts meet later and say: **Shammai's impatience sought to drive us from the world; Hillel's patience brought us beneath the wings of the Divine Presence.**

What brought them beneath the wings of the Divine Presence? **Not** Hillel's teachings. His **patience**. The way he took *each* stranger seriously.

In the last twelve minutes, **you** did that for *each other*. You took the woman next to you seriously. You gave her your attention. You argued with her kindly. **THAT** is the Torah this page is trying to teach.

And you just did it, here, in Poland."

"Fifty Jewish women, from different places, different backgrounds, different amounts of learning, just learned a page of Talmud together in chavruta, in Poland. Our ancestors argued over this exact page for fifteen hundred years. Now you have too. You are not an audience to this tradition. You are part of it."

"You learned a daf of Gemara in chavruta. Mazel tov!"