

What is the Mishna?

1. Torah is divided into three parts: תורה שבעל פה (AKA מקרא), תורה שבעל פה (AKA גמרא)¹.
2. Difference between תורה שבעל פה and גמרא: Content vs. implications/ applications/ derivations.²
3. Writing down תורה שבעל פה was forbidden.³
4. Learning of תורה שבעל פה was exclusively based on memorizing sayings (called mishna with a “lowercase m”). Individual scholars did keep private written notes (מגילות סתרים), which were kept hidden.⁴ Perhaps this was only done by the leaders of the generation.⁵
5. Problem arose during time of Hillel & Shammai: explosive divergence of traditions until it was “as if there were two Torahs” because of the students’ failure (inability) to שמשו כל צרכן.⁶
6. Problem festered for generations until R’ Yehudah HaNasi (AKA Rebbe) assembled the leading scholars of his generation and worked to formalize a single definitive set of teachings of תורה שבעל פה which became known as *The Mishna* (“capital M”) in approximately 189CE, and was ultimately written down, either by Rebbe⁷, or in a subsequent generation.⁸
7. R’ Meir’s set of teachings became the primary basis of the Mishna and when his phraseology was consistent with the halacha (according to Rebbe and his Beis Din), it appears as the anonymous Tanna in a Mishna⁹ (סתם משנה), which in turn was based on R’ Meir’s tradition from R’ Akiva.¹⁰
8. Rebbe intended for the anonymous opinion to define the Halacha¹¹ and included minority opinions to confirm that such traditions were considered by his Mesivta/Beis Din and were rejected.¹²
9. Teachings from the Tanna'im not included in the Mishna have come to be called בריתות (typically introduced by תניא or רבנן) and should not necessarily be conflated with the Tosafot (typically signified by the use of תניא עליה or תניא) which R’ Chiya assembled as a direct supplement to the Mishna itself.¹³

¹ Bava Metzia 33a; Rambam Hil. Talmud Torah 1:9

² Hil. Talmud Torah 1:10; Rashi Bava Metzia 33a ד"ה גמרא

³ Gittin 60b

⁴ Rashi, Bava Metiza 92a. NB: R’ Chiya was Rebbe’s Talmid (i.e. after Rebbe’s Mishna)

⁵ Rambam Intro to Yad

⁶ Sanhedrin 88b

⁷ Rambam Intro Yad

⁸ בימי רבבי, Rashi Bava Metzia 33b s.v. אגרת רב שרירא

⁹ Sanhedrin 86a; Eruvin 13b

¹⁰ Sanhedrin 86a

¹¹ Bava Metzia 33a

¹² Eduyos 1:6

¹³ Sanhedrin 86a