

**Menahem Y. Kahana, [Mipnei Tikkun HaOlam: Talmud Bavli Massekhet Gittin Perek Revi'i](#)  
(Magnes Press)  
*Shalom Carmy, Editor Emeritus***



Yeshiva University has been studying *Gittin* this year. For an outstanding resource of Brisker learning, one need go no further than the notes of R. Joseph Soloveitchik's *shiurim* from the mid-1960s; and then, too, we have reviewed notes of R. Aharon Lichtenstein's lectures as well. What of the work produced by "academic" Talmud scholars, those who focus on the Talmud's background and whose foremost interest is the attempt to reconstruct the composition of the *sugya* before us? The Yeshiva world, in its various incarnations, takes a guarded attitude, if not a downright suspicious one of these approaches. To begin with, scholarly reconstructions often presume that modern professors know better what the primary *Tannaim* and *Amoraim* had in mind than the supposedly "blundering" editors of the Talmud. Such insouciance does not suit the reverence we bring to the study of Talmud, nor does it agree with common sense intuitions. Hence, studying this kind of scholarship may not be an attractive option for many readers.

Others, whose fundamental orientation is to the "royal road" of classic Talmudic analysis, are curious about academic Talmud, and especially eager to get acquainted with methods that may help with the substance of Talmud study, even while being skeptical of academic hypotheses, not always convincing, about the genesis of the text, or the tendency to grade the Talmudic Sages on their understanding of their sources, or to judge the motives behind the traditions. Here, as is frequently the case with academic approaches to Torah, some efforts are more helpful and more successful than others.

For those interested in studying the best among these works, and especially for those eager to examine the potential interface between "academic" and "yeshivish" pursuits, let me recommend Professor Menahem Kahana's recent commentary on *Gittin* chapter 4. This chapter opens with rabbinic enactments regarding the annulment of a bill of divorce, a topic analyzed in the Rav's lectures as well. Mostly, however, the chapter discusses rabbinic enactments in various areas,

such as the *prozbul*, allowing collection of debts despite the completion of the sabbatical year, laws concerning manumission and so forth, topics omitted from R. Soloveitchik's syllabus.

Kahana does the things we expect in academic Talmud scholarship, collating textual variants, examining the broad range of rabbinic sources including *Bavli*, *Yerushalmi*, *Tosefta*, *midreshei halakha*, paying attention to the main *Rishonim*. At certain points, he suggests that differing opinions and interpretations in a *sugya* reflect and represent the traditions and halakhic views prevalent in *Eretz Yisrael* versus Babylonia, or differences between the Babylonian *yeshivot*, Sura and Nehardea and Pumbedita. Most interestingly, he tries to identify, in the light of these factors, which *sugyot* were edited in which of the *yeshivot* and how the editorial process may reflect the halakhic bottom line which the respective editors sought to establish.

As noted, not everyone is interested in these investigations and their conclusions, and not everyone would regard this book as deserving special attention. I recommend it to those who care about these matters.

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