The Mishnah

Mishnah refers to a collection of decisions and traditional laws embracing all aspects of civil and religious legislation. This code, which several generations of masters called Tannaim worked on, was given its final form by Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi, around the second century CE. It is divided into six parts (or orders), which are in turn subdivided into tractates, chapters, and paragraphs. The part is called Seder, the tractate Masekhet, the chapter Perek; the smallest paragraph of the collection bears, like the collection itself, the name Mishnah.

In all, there are 63 Mishnah tractates, which contain a total of 524 chapters.

The Six Orders of the Mishnah: The "Shas"

The six orders of the Mishnah correspond to six themes:

1. The earth: order entitled Zera'im, literally "Of the sowing"
2. Time: order entitled Mo'ed, literally "Times of appointments"
3. The feminine: order entitled Nashim, literally "Of women"
4. Society: order entitled Nezikin, literally "Of damages"
5. The sacred: order entitled Kodashim, literally "Of sacrifices"
6. Death: order entitled Taharot, literally "Of pure things"

In Hebrew, the six parts are called Shishah Sidrei, abbreviated as "Shas," a term that is often used to refer to the whole of the Talmud.

The Sixty-Three Tractates of the Mishnah and descriptions of the each tractate:

Zera'im, "Sowing"

1. Berakhot, "blessings." These are rules concerning the liturgy.
2. Pe'ah, "corners." Questions raised by the laws dealing with the "Corners of fields" (Leviticus. 19:9).
3. Demai, "doubtful." About seeds, etc., acquired by someone suspected of not having paid tithe to the priests.
5. Shevi'it, "seventh." Law about the sabbatical year (Exodus 33:11; Leviticus. 25:2f.)
6. Terumot, "gifts for the priests." Law about offerings (Num. 18:21f.).
7. Ma'aserot, "tithes." Law about the tithe for the Leviticusites (Num. 18:8f.).
9. Hallah, "dough." The portion of dough to be given to the priests, according to Num. 15:21.
10. Bikktsrim, "firstfruits." The firstfruits to be offered at the Temple (Deut. 26:1 f.).
11. Orla, "uncircumcision." Law about fruits of trees during the four first years after their planting (Leviticus. 19:23).

Mo'ed, "Festivals"

2. Eruvin, "putting into community." Notion of community: the territorial limit not to be crossed on the Shabbat; how it can be extended.


4. Shekalim, "shekels." The annual tax for the Temple treasury (Exod. 30:12f.).

5. Yoma, "the Day." Rituals on the day of Atonement (Kippur) (Leviticus. 16).

6. Sukkah "booth." Observance of the feast of Tabernacles (Leviticus. 23:34f)


8. Rosh ha-Shanah, "New Year." Observance of the festival that marks the beginning of a new year.


11. Mo'ed Katan, "small festival." Days between the festival of Passover and the feast of Tabernacles.

12. Hagigah, "festival sacrifices." Sacrifices offered during the three annual pilgrimages (Deut. 16:16f.).

Nashim, "Women"

1. Yevamot, "Leviticus irate marriage." About the law concerning marriage with a childless sister-in-law (Deut. 25:5f.). Degrees of kinship that exclude the possibility of marriage (Leviticus. 18).


3. Nedarim, "vows." How they are made and annulled, particularly those concerning women (Num. 30:3).


5. Sotah, "supposed adultery." About the woman suspected of adultery (Num. 5:12).

6. Gittin, "divorces." Laws annulling marriage (Deut. 24:1f.).


Nezikin, "Damages"

1. Bava Kamma, "the first door." Damages to goods, injuries to persons.

2. Bava Metzia, "the middle door." Land, lease, sale, renting, lost property.


7. Eduyyot, "accounts." All the accounts of rabbis concerning the decisions of the ancient authorities.


9. Pirkei Avot, "chapters of the fathers." Moral tractate consisting of a compilation of the favorite maxims of the Tanaaim.
Appendix: "The Chapter of Rabbi Meir on the Acquisition of the Torah."

10. Horayot, "rulings." Sins committed unknowingly after receiving erroneous advice from the religious authorities.

Kodashim, "Holy Things"
2. Menahot, "meal offerings." On offerings of flour and drinks (Leviticus. 2).
5. Arakin, "vows of valuation." On the estimated value of persons and things vowed to the Temple (Leviticus. 27).
6. Terurah, "substitution." Tractate on the exchange of animals offered in sacrifice (Leviticus. 27:10-33).
8. Me'ila, "encroachment." On the sacrilege involving the property of the Temple.
9. Tamid, "daily sacrifices" (Num. 28:3-4). Description of the daily ritual of the Temple.

Toharot, "Pure Things"
1. Kelim, "utensils." On the impurity of containers (Leviticus. 11:33f.).