

# PREPARING SHIURIM AND SOURCE SHEETS

## PART 1

מכללת מבשרת ירושלים

### THE 4 STAGES OF SHIUR PREPARATION

- 1 - CHOOSING A CONCEPT AND TOPIC
- 2 - FINDING THE SOURCES
- 3 - LEARNING THE SOURCES
- 4 - PREPARING THE SOURCE SHEET

#### 1. CHOOSING A CONCEPT AND TOPIC

- Know your audience
  - beginner or advanced: Jewish knowledge, intelligence and learning skills could all be very different eg. College campus vs high school vs shul ba'alei batim
  - understand what 'presses the buttons' - 'hot topics'
  - know what NOT to talk about
  - NOBODY wants fluff any more (did they ever?)
  - talk up to people and not down
  - too advanced is not good, but is better than too basic
  
- Know your time-slot
  - things ALWAYS take longer to say in a shiur than you think they will
  - will they ask questions? No questions means you need more material
  - ideas on most topics can be communicated in 5 mins, 20 mins, or 60 mins but the presentation will differ
  - source sheets are only helpful if shiur is 20 mins +
  - how long can your audience focus? (older = more focus. Over 70's are the BEST!)
  
- What topic
  - something you're interested in. BUT will it interest other?
  - something you heard in a shiur. BUT will it transfer to THIS audience and THIS time slot?
  - 'inyanei deyoma' - current events - communal, world events, chagim etc - often work well. BUT will it translate realistically into a shiur with mekorot?
  - use other people's presentations to give you inspiration - good DTs on the web, good sources for articles. Know where to find the 'juicy' stuff
  - use classic mefarshim for inspiration if you are comfortable with them
  - TIP 1: avoid politics - you're bound to leave some people unhappy
  - TIP 2: if on parsha, start looking from the END of the parsha and work back. People hear most divrei Torah on the first few lines of each parsha
  - TIP 3: try to choose things that people don't normally talk about
  - TIP 4: you don't need to avoid 'controversial' issues, as long as you know how to present things with the right 'nusach'

## 2. FINDING THE SOURCES<sup>1</sup>

### (a) Articles/Essays

- Advantages
  - usually present a self-contained topic in a short digestible format (10-30 pages)
  - will have footnotes in Hebrew or English giving mekorot, which you can look up
  - footnotes will cross-reference other articles
- Concerns
  - accuracy - check the mekorot in the original - there may be partial quotes or mistakes in the article
  - is the author 'kosher'? Contributors to reputable publications will be acceptable eg Tradition, Journal of Halacha
  - is the author reliable? Does it present the whole story? Is there a hashkafic agenda? You may need to read around on the topic to get a broader picture
- Recommended Sources
  - Tradition Magazine - <http://traditionarchive.org/archives/> : RCA publication with 1000+ articles available free on-line
  - Journal of Halacha and Contemporary Society: 300+ articles in print, some available on line
  - Hakira<sup>2</sup>: 250+ articles available free on line at <http://www.hakirah.org/> and archives at <http://173.203.154.59/rhsweb/hakirahbrowsedb.asp>
  - VBM Torah from Har Etzion - <http://etzion.org.il/en>
  - YU Torah<sup>3</sup>
  - for a much longer list of on-line sites for articles see the links page on my website and the pdf document you can access from that page

### (b) Sefarim

- Entire sefarim cannot normally be condensed into shiurim! But many sefarim have chapters with useable independent articles-type presentations, especially in halacha.
- There are even sefarim JUST of mekorot for sugyot
- Recommended Sources
  - Contemporary Halachic Problems - 5 volumes Rabbi J David Bleich
  - Rabbi Ari Enkin has a set of 7 sefarim, each containing 100+ well-presented and sourced halachic topics
  - Gray Matter - 4 volumes by Rabbi Chaim Jachter

### (c) Blogs/Websites

- Blogs and personal websites come with a health-warning. They are not usually subject to any kind of 'institutional' editing or quality control. Some are fantastic. Others are mediocre, misleading or downright heretical!
- Many Rabbis and educators have personal websites with their shiurim and source sheets. Almost all are totally free to download
- There are websites dedicated to lists of mekorot - eg hamakor.org

1. In this section I'm dealing with choosing which sources to use, rather than finding the actual text to insert into a source-sheet. That will be covered in section 4

2. Note that Hakira has a more Modern Orthodox and academic stance and does accept articles from a broader range of contributors

3. Mostly audio but some articles

- Recommended Sources
  - Torah Musings
  - www.rabbimanning.com
  - www.rabbibelovski.com
  - see my links page for many more

#### (d) General Web Research

- Google is a fantastic resource for finding material, including well-sourced authentic Torah material
- BUT the range of material out there is enormous and much of it is totally useless to you. So you need to develop some personal 'filtering' skills to tell the difference between the precious metals and the dross. Here are some tips:-
- TIP 1 - Use general web research primarily as a means to collect sources, which you can then look up and use. Don't just present arguments and analysis that you read on the web unless you know the source to be reliable
- TIP 2 - Get used to searching IN HEBREW as well as English. The 'Torah-Web' out there in Hebrew is much bigger and more 'Torani' than the English material. Although it may be a stretch at first to browse in Hebrew, it will be worth it! If you're researching a specific Hebrew phrase (eg מדת כנגד מדת), English searching will be of fairly limited use
- Spending time browsing and getting a feel for the 'Torah-Web' is the best use of your random internet browsing time. It's constantly growing and improving and it takes a long time to find your way around.
- See the pdf document on my links page for more hundreds of sites and links to links to links ....

#### (e) Searching Torah Databases

- There are a tens of thousands of digital sefarim available which can be searched to find new sources on a specific topic
- Some are free and on-line. Most of the 'classic' Torah texts are available on line (more about this in section 4) but the search facilities are often not so great
- Recommended on-line sefarim:
  - hebrewbooks.org
  - daat.ac.il
  - seforimonline.org
  - kodesh.snunit.k12.il/i/tr/t0101.htm
  - mechon-mamre.org
  - see my links document for many more
- You can buy disk-on-key databases with thousands of sefarim. These become cheaper and better over time. the advantages are (i) access to sefarim that you can't get on line and (ii) great search engines. Disadvantages are (i) cost and (ii) portability - some need to be plugged in as USBs.
- TIP: You probably don't need to buy anything at this stage. If you become a 'serious' magid shiur you can pick it up then!
- Recommended data-bases
  - Bar Ilan responsa project. [www.biu.ac.il/JH/Responsa/](http://www.biu.ac.il/JH/Responsa/). You can pick it up on sale at the Mercaz sefarim sale for around \$300. If you're giving a lot of shiurim, it's worth it.

- Otzar HaChochma - [www.otzar.org/otzaren/indexeng.asp](http://www.otzar.org/otzaren/indexeng.asp) This is the 5 star package and has everything you could imagine. It is VERY expensive - the full version is over \$3000! However you can get on-line access to the entire package quite cheaply. It's only \$8 for a one-day pass - perfect if you're organized enough to know everything you need to look up in one go.