

Going Outside the Lines

So like every year, before the Chidon HaTanach, once again the usual questions come out – how do we study?

Do we read all the material over again a couple of times? It didn't work last year... and really, why should it work this year?

As the International Adult Chatan HaTanach, I remember the first time I approached the Youth Chidon HaTanach ten years ago, representing the public school where I learned, and I felt that it wouldn't matter how much I might know, the participants from the religious schools would always know it better, because they know how to memorize many verses, or because they work with them at their school in a more intensive manner, and all I wanted was just to pass the National public school level. I didn't hope for more than this. In the Regional level I actually made it to the honourable second place, but in the Nationals, I was knocked out in the first round of questions. Disappointment. With the passage of years, I understood that I hadn't had the right study tools at the time, but after I won the Internationals and began new study methods, I thought that if someone had told me, ten years ago, that this is how I need to study, I certainly would have made it to the more advanced levels.

With the passage of a decade, I understood how much my initial assumptions about the differences between the public schools and the religious schools were wrong. Against me were adult participants who knew how to memorize full books of the Tanach, and of course I thought that they knew more and that I didn't have a chance against them, but as we advanced through the levels, I recognized that what had been difficult for them on the tests had been easy for me. And then I understood the biggest secret, that would change my whole understanding of studying for Chidon in general – **even if someone knows the Tanach very well, it is not certain that they know how to study for the Chidon!**

This is because the Chidon calls for expertise with the little details, which evade the sight of the big experts... these are tiny, delicate nuances, and if you do not prepare well for them, the path is quick to trip you up.

At the moment, I want to share with you the secrets of how to study properly, as I learned them the hard way. But I do have a condition – be open to exploring new ideas for how to study, and let me taste them, too... help each other, and together we will create a learning community that is united around the Book of Books.

Remember that with all the tools that you will receive here, there is no replacement for reading the Tanach itself. What appears there cannot be replaced with any tool, and it is important to read the actual chapter in the Tanach, even if we are learning with the help of the tables and the notes that we have prepared for ourselves.

I want to take this opportunity to thank **Doron Kadosh**, the National Chatan HaTanach from the public schools from 2015, for his intelligent suggestions and illuminations that helped in improving this

collection, and the benefit is all yours.

With the blessing of Shlomo, the wise king, in the book of Mishlei (Proverbs): “Instruct a wise man, and he will grow wiser.”

Itzik ben-Avi

In charge of Chidon HaTanach

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At the start of studying, A little faith – make the decision!

Starting the process of studying for something as big as Chidon HaTanach is often accompanied by concerns and weighing the value of the endeavour – is it worthwhile to me to invest effort in this? Do I even have a chance of succeeding? Make the decision that you are taking upon yourselves to invest as much effort as you can, and believe that you really can do it. This is the first step to everything, believing and deciding.

So before we start with the question “How do we study?” let’s first start asking: “What are we studying? What is the material? The whole Tanach??? That will go on forever!”

No fear. You aren’t being tested on the whole Tanach, or even on most of it. There are a number of books and chapters that are divided up into sections, with more material added after each section. I feel it’s right to present here the whole material, in its entirety:

Materials for study for the Chidon

Bereishit (Genesis): the entire book

Shmot (Exodus): Chapters 1-20, 24, 31-34

Vayikra (Leviticus): Chapters 19, 23, 24

Bamidbar (Numbers): Chapters 10-17, 20-25, 27, 32

Devarim (Deuteronomy): Chapters 12-14, 17-18, 30-34

Yehoshua (Joshua): Chapters 1-11, 14, 20, 22-24

Shoftim (Judges): the entire book

Shmuel Aleph (I Samuel): the entire book

Shmuel Bet (II Samuel): the entire book

Melachim Aleph (I Kings): the entire book

Melachim Bet (II Kings): the entire book

Yishaiyahu (Isaiah): Chapters 1-12, 60-66

Yirmyahu (Jeremiah): Chapters 1-2, 18-33

Yechezkel (Ezekiel): Chapters 1-4, 17-20, 27-28, 37-39

Hoshea (Hosea): Chapters 1-3, 11-14

Yoel (Joel): the entire book

Amos: the entire book

Yonah (Jonah): the entire book

Micha (Micah): the entire book

Chavakook (Habakkuk): the entire book

Chagai (Haggai): the entire book

Zechariah (Zachariah): Chapters 1-4, 7-14

Malachi: the entire book

Tehillim (Psalms): Chapters 80-90

Mishlei (Proverbs): Chapters 20-31

Iyov (Job): Chapters 1-2, 42

Rut (Ruth): the entire book

Kohelet (Ecclesiastes): 1-4, 11-12

Ester (Esther): the entire book

Ezra: Chapters 1, 3, 7, 9, 10

Nechemia (Nehemia): 1-6, 8-10, 12-13

Divrei Hayamim Bet (II Chronicles): Chapters 28-36

And now, once we are filled with faith and recognition in our ability to succeed in the Chidon, after we have taken upon ourselves the task of the Chidon, we turn to the next question – what can they ask in the Chidon?

In Chidon HaTanach, most of the questions are simple to understand. You won't find questions like you get in Tanach class, incorporating different commentaries, or all sorts of hidden ideas to expound on from the text. We think more simply!

There are questions that include a verse (or a piece “cut” from a verse), and some sort of question about the verse:

who said to whom?

about whom was it said?

to whom was it said?

For example: About whom does it say: **“swift of foot, like a gazelle in the open field”**?

Other questions ask about numbers, places, or characters. For questions like these, you need to really remember exactly where each event took place; if a number appears in the text – you need to remember the number and in what context it appears; and you need to remember every character who took part in a given event.

Example of a question about places: Where did the war between Absalom's and David's men take place?

Example of a question about numbers: For how many months was the Ark of God in the territory of the Philistines?

Example of a question about characters: Who was the King of Salem? or, Who was the son of Joash

the Abiezrite?

Another type of questions asks about an event, but without bringing a quote. In a situation like this, an event that took place is described using modern language, and without a quote from a verse, we need to identify the event being described, and answer the question.

For example: Before a war against enemies of Israel, a fleece of wool was squeezed out to fill a bowl with water. This event served as a sign that Hashem would save Israel in the upcoming war. What is the war being described?

We must be also ready for questions that will ask us about two or more events. For example: The angel that encounters Gideon greets him and tells him that the Lord is with him. Who else was greeted in a similar way, in a different story?

Naturally, there are other different types of questions, which require understanding of an event or familiarity with specific details in the story. But these are the most common types of questions in the Chidon.

In this compilation, we will now present you with a toolbox that will help you to succeed in the Chidon calmly and enjoyably.

Tool 1: Preparing mapping sheets

Tool 2: Table of comparisons

Tool 3: Text patterns that repeat in the verses

Tool 4: Understanding what you read

Tool 5: Create your own questions!

Tool 6: Find the unique style

Tool 7: Songs and stories

Tool 8: Re-order the chapter

Tool 9: The “Rishon b’Chidon” app

Tool 10: Listening by ear

Tool 1: Preparing mapping sheets

This tool will be very useful to you in the study process, and its main idea is very simple. This is a tool for remembering details. When we open the book of Bereishit, for example, we immediately see many characters, things being said between them, names of places, names of people that we are meeting for

the first time, and, in short, details upon details. What I suggest doing is to prepare a number of pages (recommended to use landscape orientation) and to enter all the details there, down to the last one.

Isn't it better to read the chapters out loud or just summarize the chapter?

Actually, not at all! The most important thing to preserve when studying for Chidon is the original language used in the Tanach; questions with quotes asking "Who said to whom?" take an honourable place, if not the absolute central role, in the Youth Chidon. **The goal of preparing this mapping table is to ensure that there is not a single detail in the Tanach that I didn't take note of, that I don't recognize.** How do we know what to add to the columns? Do we add in every single verse? This will never end!

The rule of thumb is anything you're not sure whether or not you know it – add to the columns. Verses or details that you remember very well, and that you're certain you'll know them if tested, you don't need to add.

For example: I wouldn't add the verse "Go forth from your native land and from your father's house..." ("Lech-lecha...") to the columns, because I know very well who said this verse. But every name and place that I think I might not remember later, I need to add into its place in the columns.

Advantages of this tool:

- The act of writing things helps you remember them in an organized way
- Organizing things in this way allows me to review all the columns for an entire book
- The columns are organized based on the order of the verses, which allows me to remember the answers because I know that there is an order to the verses. If I want to test myself, I can mix up the order of the verses and organize them alphabetically.
- Useful for the following books:
- All the books with narrative chapters, i.e., less useful for Neviim Acharonim (the Latter Prophets) and Ketuvim (Writings).

Important to remember! Parts of verses also go into the table. The test might divide a verse into two and present only have a verse. Be prepared for this.

Indicate with different-coloured markers on the Tanach itself the categories that you have in the table: places in one colour, names in a different colour, numbers in a different colour, and so forth.

Whenever we re-read the chapters in the Tanach, we will see that some of the verses that we included in the columns because we thought we might not remember them are now easy for us, and we are certain that we will remember them. In this way, we will narrow down the number of entries in the table each time we go through, until there will be very few verses that we are not certain about.

You should prepare 5 pages with the title:
Tool 1: pages to fill in
Who said to whom?

Places and names to remember
In relation to what was it mentioned?

Tool 2: Comparison tables

This is one of the serious pitfalls in Chidon HaTanach: you are given a verse, and you need to say who said it. You're certain you've seen it before, but suddenly a different, too-similar verse enters your head, and now you aren't certain of your answer... ever happen to you? This is what brought us to the next tool. Read the following verses, both from Bereishit:

- "He built there an altar to the Lord and invoked the Lord by name."
- "So he built an altar there and invoked the Lord by name. ... pitched his tent there..."

Sometimes, even after we've done the first mapping as we did on the pages above, we are still in difficulty because of similar verses, and there are many like this in the Tanach. Therefore, it is important to make a table to compare the similarities. See attached for an example of this sort of table.

The two verses above both speak about someone who built an altar and invoked Hashem's name. How do we know which each verse is speaking about? That is your job. Try to find the differences and mark them, and through that, find a way to remember them. This will sharpen your knowledge and bring it into your head. Responsibility. For example, only with Avraham does it say that he died at a "good ripe age," not with Yishmael or Yitzchak. You can use Midrashim, commentaries, or be creative in order to sharpen those differences for yourself. Building a table like this will ensure that if you've seen the verse, it's impossible for it to trick you!

We generally make the comparison tables at the end, after we've mapped out all the verses in the book. In the comparison table, we'll see if any similar verses pop into our heads, and we'll organize them side by side in the comparison table.

Useful for the following books:

All of them! Torah, Neviim (Prophets), Ketuvim (Writings) – in all of them you will find similar things.

5 pages with the title

Tool 2: Comparison tables

(Make some sort of table)

Tool 3: Find repeating sentence structures in the verses and keep track of them

Patterns and structures are something the brain remembers very well. The more we find similar sentence patterns in the chapter, the better our brains will remember where it was said. For example, in the opening chapters of Yishaiah / Isaiah (which are not in your material):

“**Their land is full of** silver and gold,
There is no limit to their treasures;
Their land is full of horses,
There is no limit to their chariots.
And **their land is full of** idols;
They bow down to the work of their hands,
To what their own fingers have wrought.”

Or later in the chapter:

“For the Lord of Hosts has ready a day
Against all that is proud and arrogant,
Against all that is lofty – so that it is brought low;
Against all the cedars of Lebanon,
Tall and stately,
And all the oaks of Bashan;
Against all the high mountains
And all the lofty hills;
Against every soaring tower
And every mighty wall;
Against all the ships of Tarshish
And all the gallant barks.”

And there are many other examples. At times, it can be one word that repeats in the chapter that can confirm the identity of which prophet said that prophecy. Look carefully, and you will discover wonders.

Useful for all books.

Put the title:

Tool 3: Repeating sentence structures in the verses

Tool 4: Understanding what we read

write the meanings of the verses

“For rebellion is like the sin of divination, Defiance, like the iniquity of teraphim” (I Samuel 15:23)

This verse is not clear to understand, because we don't encounter words like rebellion (*meri*), defiance (*haftzar*), and teraphim on a day to day basis.

More than once, I've noticed that when I don't understand what the verse is saying, it makes it harder for me to remember it. I started copying out the chapters I didn't understand and writing their meanings. The verse above is of course just one example of a meaning that can completely distort our understanding of the verse due to not understanding it properly... Therefore, in the chapters of Prophets and Writings, it is recommended to consult commentaries and to write the most simple explanation possible that will enable the words to make sense. I recommend Metzudot David, which is one of the simplest but clearest commentaries. For those who want to go deeper, I also really like Abarbanel, and Malbim, who goes even deeper. But an important point to remember is that time is short, and while it is well and good to delve deep into a prophet, it is better to do so after the Chidon, so we will not give too large a role to our commentaries. After we have done this, we will see that suddenly the verse is clearer, and it is most important that each person writes the meaning for themselves, which will help you to internalize the material in your mind.

Useful for the following books:

In particular the heavier prophets, and difficult books in Ketuvim (Writings).

Put the title:

Tool 4: Verses that evade understanding

Tool 5: Challenge yourselves with questions that you compose yourself!

In the Chidon, we always search diligently for questions from past years, because we're certain that the more we read questions, the less chance we have of being surprised by an unfamiliar question. But let me tell you, usually, what already appeared in the Chidon in past years will not appear much in future years, since there are so many questions that can be asked. The solution I have found to ensure that they cannot surprise me is **to compose questions for myself!**

In the Chidon, creativity is the name of the game. The more creative we are, the more secure we are that the material will stay in our heads for the long term. If there is a collection of verses that we see that we really want to remember but don't have anything to grasp them with, we can just make up a question on our own. We can leave the tests from past years for last-minute cramming.

Example:

Question: Isaiah Chapter 1 mentions a line about religious actions that are not desirable in the eyes of God. List five of them.

Answer: “¹**New moon** and ²**sabbath**, ³**proclaiming of solemnities**, Assemblies with iniquity, I cannot abide. Your new moons and fixed seasons Fill Me with loathing; They are become a burden to Me, I cannot endure them. And ⁴**when you lift up your hands**, I will turn My eyes away from you; though you ⁵**pray** at length, I will not listen. Your hands are stained with crime.” (Note that it is very important to preserve the language of the verse in your answer.)

What do we gain from the tool of asking questions?

- Significantly lower chance of being surprised by a question we’ve never seen
- You can build yourself a collection of questions that you can review again and again

Useful for the following books: all the books.

Make a title:

Tool 5: Questions that I composed myself

Tool 6: Find the unique style of each book

So, it’s true that in Tool 3 we already spoke about the structures of the chapters, and now we are talking about a similar tool, but with entire books. Every prophet has a unique style for expressing himself. If you look at that style, you can match it up to the right prophet easily, and when you encounter a verse like that, even if you didn’t recognize it very well before, it will be very clear who said it. Let’s bring a few examples for this. In Isaiah, we will see the phrase “the Holy One of Israel” (“Kedosh Yisrael”) many more times than in the entire rest of the Tanach. With Jeremiah (Yirmiyah), the phrase “Maiden Israel” (“Betulat Yisrael”) is very common, and with Ezekiel (Yechezkel), we see mention of “fetishes” (gilulim), a term which other prophets use very seldom. With the prophet Hosea, it is particularly noticeable; he uses the word “Ephraim” more than 30 times in the book, along with “calves of Samaria” (“eglei Shomron”), “Beth-aven,” “Gibeah,” and Peor. We need to mark and remember these phrases, so that they will jump into our heads automatically when we encounter them. Even though chances of success are not 100%, they are very good chances.

Useful for the following books: Latter Prophets (Neviim Acharonim).

Put the title:

Tool 6: Unique styles for books (only 2 pages...)

Tool 7: Songs and Stories

We have a great many lists in Tanach, starting with the genealogical lists in the first chapters of Bereishit and finishing with the 42 travels of the Israelites in Parashat Masei. Lists are one of the hardest things to remember, and therefore we need, once again, very creative in order to remember them. One of the ways is to compose a song or strange story that includes all the items on the list in order, and to remember them that way. The stranger, more piquant the story you invent is, the better you will remember it.

If you go even further than this and record a song and listen to it again and again, it will definitely carve itself well into your head, and you'll find the answers immediately.

Useful for the following books: particularly long lists.

Put the title:

Tool 7: Recorded songs and stories

Tool 8: Re-organize the chapter

In many stories in the Latter Prophets (Neviim Acharonim), we find our troubles multiplied; not only is the chapter itself difficult to understand, but at times, there is no logical order between the verses...

This makes it even more difficult to remember where the verse comes from. Therefore, I found a solution which is not bad at all. Re-organize the chapter on the computer, so that the order looks more logical to you, connect one verse to another through connecting words, or shared topics, or switch it up and look in the commentaries for traditional ways in which they connected the verses – and you'll find that you can remember them.

Useful for the following books:

Latter Prophets (Neviim Acharonim) and Writings (Ketuvim).

Make the title:

Tool 8: Re-organized chapters

Tool 9: The "HaRishon b'Chidon" app

Here's a 21st-century tip...

In the Google Play store on your mobile device (so long as you have an Android), you can enjoy an app designed specifically for Chidon HaTanach, made by Elad Finish, the Sgan HaTanach (second place winner) from 2008.

In this application, you can search the Tanach for specifically what you are looking for, test yourself to finish verses from the whole Tanach, or select the specific chapters that you designate. You can quiz yourself on a random verse from Tanach, and with multiple-choice questions or open questions. You can also test yourself on complicated lists such as the kings of Israel and Judah, and more.

This application is constantly being updated, and more questions and innovations are frequently added to it. In the near future, it will also be available in English and in other languages.

Tool 10: listening by ear

This next tool is the tool that without a doubt changed the most for me in studying for Chidon, but I don't know if it will work for everyone, because it requires an auditory memory, but it is worth a try for everyone.

The prophecies in Neviim Acharonim (Latter Prophets) or Ketuvim (Writing) are some of the most difficult things to remember. Certainly in terms of completing verses from the book of Mishlei (Proverbs), which is often required in the final round of the Chidon. Can we start memorizing more than 15 chapters?

Therefore, we have a special tool that doesn't require a great deal of effort, it just needs focus. This tool is called listening. You can listen to the chapters again and again and again until it sticks in your mind!

As time passes, you will see how the chapters enter your head more. It's very likely that you won't feel it in the first few days, but don't give up. This is a path that can make miracles, tried and true.

The year before the National Chidon, I listened a lot to the chapters from Neviim Acharonim (Latter Prophets), and I recommend that you do this, as well. That is to say – start listening to entire chapters, again and again. Instead of listening to songs on your phone, listen to Isaiah's "song of [his] lover about his vineyard." You don't have a set time for studying? Listen while you have your afternoon snack, while you travel, while you wash dishes, and whenever you have time. Where can you download the recordings? There are a number of options:

- From the **Mechon Mamre** website for free, with no tune

- You can download them from Levi Sudari's site with Sephardi cantillation tunes
- Most recommended: be creative! If you have a good voice, record yourself with a tune, to the tune of a song you know well, or if you prefer not to listen to yourself – get a friend to record themselves for you. All you need is a cellphone or a simple recording device. Sing it, play it, and you'll remember it like a song. I did it the hard way, without a tune, but there's no reason for you not to do better and benefit.

Don't give up on this path; start listening from now. Take a set number of chapters, and listen to each chapter as much as you can, until you can hear that it's caught in your head.

Useful for the following books:

Especially Neviim Acharonim (Latter Prophets) and Ketuvim (Writings). It is recommended to analyse the narrative chapters with the comparison tables.

In summary:

There are many different and diverse ways to study for Chidon, and everyone needs to find the way that suits them from the tools we have suggested, and to explore more and new ways, and think outside the box. You can create card games and other types of games based on the questions you can find online, tests from past years, and so forth.

And one thing that is very important – sticking with your friends. Studying together is more powerful than studying alone.

And always remember – the Tanach is the soul, the Chidon itself is just another tool to remember the things in the Tanach, but it's not the main point. Knowing Tanach and making it more widespread is what is important; the rest is just for sport.