

Writing the First Draft of Your D'var Torah

1. For your second meeting, complete your entire rough draft. Compose it in Google Docs and share it with rebyehoshua@gmail.com before your meeting.
2. Put yourself in the shoes of a listener who does not know anything about the *parashah*, understands little about Judaism, and cannot read Hebrew. What does this person need to hear to understand your point?
3. Every thing you say should develop your thesis. Anything that does not move your argument forward should probably not be said.
4. There is no rule about how long a *D'var Torah* should be. If you have been able to fully communicate your thesis, it will be the right length. (But most *Divrei Torah* are 700-1100 words.)

INTRODUCTION

- **Hook** — Grab your listeners' attention. This can be with a story, a joke, a provocative question— something that would be interesting to most people (not the *parashah*). Your opening should set up your thesis.
- **Thesis** — What lesson will your listeners come away with? You should be able to say it in **one sentence only** (no run-ons). A thesis should teach your listeners something about their lives.

THREE BODY PARAGRAPHS

1. Something in the *parashah* supports this thesis (a story, a character, a law). Tell the story or law in your own words. Make it dramatic and exciting (see below). Include all details that a listener who is completely unfamiliar with the Torah needs in order to understand – and no more!
2. This is where you prove your thesis. Ask a question/raise a dilemma about the section of the *parashah* that you have just discussed. Suggest possible answers, referring to at least one traditional commentary. Your final answer to the question/dilemma you raised should directly support your thesis.
3. How does your thesis relate to our lives? Give examples from world events, popular culture, your own life, etc. How does this give us insight into what it means to be a Jew or a human being?

CONCLUSION

- Restate your thesis (in different words).
- Relate to your thesis personally. How do you intend to apply this lesson to your life, as a responsible member of the Jewish community?
- You might want to talk about a mitzvah project (volunteer hours) or a tzedakah project (donating money).
- Wrap up your *D'var Torah* with a final, inspiring message. What would you like your listeners to do or think about now that they have heard you speak?

GIVING THANKS

- After your D'var Torah's conclusion, pause for 3-5 seconds.
- If you can connect your thesis to your Thank You's, it will be a smoother transition.
- Then, thank all of the people who helped you prepare for this day: teachers, Rabbi, parents, siblings, etc.
- Vary your thank you language (I would like to thank..., Thank you..., I appreciate..., etc.)
- For each person you thank, try to think about something special that you appreciate about that person. The best Thank You's are personal and honest, and can only be said by you.

ENDING

End with the following:

“Shabbat Shalom. The *Haftarah* for *Parashat* _____ can be found on page _____ in the red *Etz Hayim chumash*.”

GENERAL GUIDELINES REGARDING LANGUAGE

- Usually, the fewer words it takes to describe something, the easier it is for a listener to understand. Keep your sentences short.
- When describing what happens in the Torah portion, you can make it exciting for your listeners by telling it in the **present tense** and by using as much **dialogue** as possible.
- Unless you are telling a story about yourself, it is generally advisable to avoid speaking in the 1st person singular (I, me). It puts up a barrier between the speaker and the audience.
- Similarly, avoid the 2nd person (you). Instead, consider using the 3rd person singular (he, she, a person, etc.) or the 1st person plural (we, us). It is more inviting.
- Avoid expressions like: “I think,” “In my opinion,” “I though about it and then decided,” etc. Statements like these only make your speech weaker.

RECOMMENDED ONLINE RESOURCES

Torah Sparks from the Conservative Yeshiva

<http://www.conservativeyeshiva.org/torahsparks/>

Torah From the Jewish Theological Seminary

<http://www.jtsa.edu/jts-torah-online>

Has the *parasha* (Torah portion) in English and a large archive of commentaries on each *parasha*.

MyJewishLearning.com

<http://www.myjewishlearning.com/>

A comprehensive adult Jewish education website with a section on the weekly *parasha* that includes many contemporary commentaries.

Iyunim: Weekly insights on the parasha with commentaries by Nehama Leibovitz

<http://www.jewishagency.org/nechama-leibowitz/>

High level analysis of the *parasha* and medieval commentators by one of the giants of contemporary Torah interpretation.

The Judaica Press Complete Tanach with Rashi

https://www.chabad.org/library/bible_cdo/aid/63255/jewish/The-Bible-with-Rashi.htm

A translation of Rashi's commentary, the classic interpretation of the Bible from the 11th century.

Torah Study from the Union for Reform Judaism.

<https://reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study>