

Hebrew Congregation of St. Thomas Bar/Bat Mitzvah Program

D'var Torah (Commentary on the Torah Portion)

Guide and Outline



Towards the very beginning of a Bar/Bat Mitzvah service at the Hebrew Congregation of St. Thomas, we offer a blessing which refers to our young people, on this occasion, as “Teachers of Torah, Leaders of Prayer.” This, along with taking one’s place within and as part of a Jewish community, is truly the heart of the meaning of a Bar or Bat Mitzvah. Elsewhere you will receive an outline regarding what parts you will lead in the service. This page is your guide to master the meaning of these ancient teachings, and see how these words have been interpreted over time. And then it is your chance, to take your place in that chain of transmission, and shape their message for yourself, for us, and in a way which works in our world, and for our time.

Part One: Introduction

Begin the D'var Torah simply by identifying the portion of the week, sharing where it comes from, and saying which part you will read/chant.

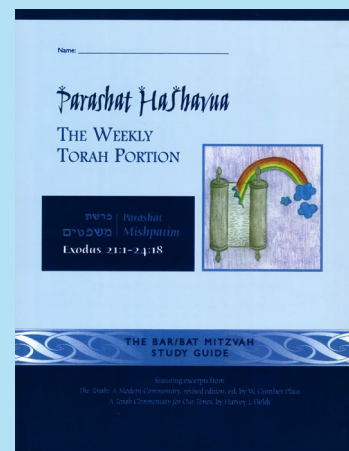
The Torah portion this week/this Shabbat is entitled _____ (name of the portion). It is taken from the book of _____, Chapter ____, Verse ____ through Chapter ____ Verse _____. The part that I will be reading/chanting today comes from Chapter _____, beginning with Verse _____.

Part Two: Summary

Read the English translation of your Torah portion very carefully. What is it about? What events happen or what ideas come up?

What characters are in your portion, and what role do they play in Jewish history.

When you have read and thought about your portion, summarize the entire section, retelling it in your own words, in two to three paragraphs.



Part Three: Choosing and Introducing Your Topic

After analysis of the portion, discussion, exploration of the topics it is time to narrow the focus, from a broad summary to a specific topic.

You might have just told us that your Torah portion was about vegetables, and then gone ahead to describe all of them. After the summary, now you might say: “I would like to speak about broccoli.” The rest of your D’var Torah will now be about the topic you have chosen.



Part Four: Interpretation in Jewish Tradition

This is the part which might require the most help.

You are not the first to have written about this portion.

What did other Jewish writers and great commentators say about this portion, and the topic you have chosen? Your tutor, our rabbi, and (carefully vetted) Rabbi Google (the Internet) are your resources for this section.

Write one or two paragraphs using a few quotes from Jewish sources or other ways in which this topic has been addressed before. Example (not a Jewish source though): President George W. Bush announced that he hated broccoli, and now that he was President he never wanted to have it again. Broccoli farmers got mad!

Part Five: Personal Interpretation

What jumps out at you from what you have learned?

What questions do you have you would like answered?

What character do you most relate to? Or what bothers you the most?

This is your moment to take an ancient source and make it live in a new way, for you and for us.

Example: I believe that if people from different cultures all ate broccoli at exactly the same time, and we all stuck our our tongues in distaste, we would realize how much we have in common, and there would be world peace.

Part Six: Page Number

We use the Plaut Torah Commentary, both original and revised editions.

End your speech by saying: “If you would like to follow along, the portion may be found on page ____ of the Plaut Torah commentary, or page ____ of the Revised Edition.”

