

## WRITING A D'VAR TORAH

It is traditional for the B-Mitzvah to give a D'var Torah (teaching dealing with Jewish content), just before we read from the Torah Scroll. This talk generally relates to the weekly Torah or Haftarah portion that will be read. Personal thank yous to family and friends should not be part of the D'var Torah.

Writing a D'var Torah for your B-Mitzvah requires a partner! It could be a parent, teacher, tutor, rabbi, hazzan, or friend who will listen to your ideas and even debate them with you. Here are helpful steps, but you really need someone to help you stay clear and focused!

- ◆ Buy a two-pocket folder in which you will keep all of your notes and sections of your speech organized.
- ◆ Read a summary of the Torah portion in translation.
- ◆ Read the entire Torah portion in translation even if you are reading only part of it for your B-Mitzvah.
  - Read as much as you can of the portion in Hebrew. Also read the whole Haftarah portion in translation and Hebrew. Then figure out the connection between the Torah and Haftarah (there's always a connection).
- ◆ Try to summarize the portion aloud or in writing.
  - In analyzing the text, The Ten Universal Questions taken from "Torah with Love" by Epstein and Stutman can be very helpful.
    1. What is the predicament?
    2. Who is in the predicament?
    3. What is the relationship between the people?
    4. How is God involved?
    5. How is the predicament resolved?
    6. How does the community affect the predicament?
    7. Does the predicament illuminate our contemporary life?
    8. What ethical and moral principles are posed by the manner in which the predicament occurs or is resolved?
    9. Does individual "free will" permit any other course of conduct?
    10. How can you retell the story?
- ◆ Jot down the parts of the portion that you found interesting or confusing.
- ◆ Write down any questions that you had as you read and reread the portion.
- ◆ Discuss the portion with someone else who has read it, such as your tutor, parent, religious school teacher, rabbi, or hazzan. Ask them what they thought was the message of the portion and what questions it raised for them. Share your ideas and see their reactions.
- ◆ Consult the commentaries. We have a rich tradition of commentaries on the Torah and Haftarah. You should look at the traditional commentaries available in your synagogue library or through your rabbi. Modern commentaries on the Torah that might be very helpful include:
  - *Teaching Torah* by Sorel Goldberg Loeb and Barbara Binder Kadden, A.R.E. Publishing Company, Denver, Colorado 1997. This book has excellent summaries of each week's portion

followed by a selection of interpretive and explanatory material with questions for the reader. It also contains activities for analyzing the text, personalizing the text, and suggestions for B-Mitzvah projects.

• *B'shivtekha B'veitekha - When You Sit in Your House* by Sharon Halper, Torah Aura Productions, California 1994. Designed for family education, this text includes a week- by-week study of the Torah portion, including a multi-verse quote from the portion, short commentary, and questions for the family members to share ways that they would have acted were they in the same situations as the Bible characters.

• *Zot ha-Torah: This is the Torah* by Jane Ellen Golub and Joel Lurie Grishaver, Torah Aura Productions, California 1994. This book was developed for B-Mitzvah students and contains a quote from each week's Torah portion, which is examined in depth. There is a focus on a mitzvah suggested by the portion, which includes relevant doable mitzvah projects.

- ◆ Check the Internet for information.

Recommended sites:

[www.uscj.org](http://www.uscj.org)

[www.urj.org](http://www.urj.org)

[www.torahaura.com](http://www.torahaura.com)

- ◆ Write down the ideas generated from reading some of the suggested books and commentaries and decide which of the ideas you have written down will be the ones that will be the focus of your speech.
- ◆ Try to find ideas that speak to your heart. Look for examples in your life and or in today's world that illustrate your points. Maybe you have a favorite story about your sibling or a relative? Consider using those stories.
- ◆ Make an outline of the main ideas that you want to discuss and then go back and fill in details supporting your ideas. Use quotes from the sources that you studied and ideas and quotes from the people with whom you discussed your portion. Be sure to include your original ideas and interpretations too.
- ◆ Discuss this outline with your tutor, rabbi, or parent and listen to their input and revise the outline.
- ◆ Write your speech and turn it in to whoever reads it and gives you feedback. **It should be no more than 700-750 words.**
- ◆ Revise your speech and practice reading it aloud, slowly and clearly.
- ◆ Find an audience (parents, siblings, and/or friends will do) and give the speech, asking for their feedback on whether it was clear and easy to follow.
- ◆ Refine and practice.
- ◆ Save a copy and put it in your B-Mitzvah album.