

## Preparing a Drash or D'var Torah

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### I. Definitions

- A. Parashah (פְּרָשָׁה) may also be written Parshah (פְּרָשָׁה) and means portion or episode.
- B. Haftarah (הַפְּטוּרָה) means conclusion and refers to the portion from the prophets that we read after the completion of the Torah reading.
- C. D'var Torah (word of Torah), Midrash (interpretation), Drash (interpretation) refers to a teaching based on a Jewish topic.
- D. PaRDeS (פַּרְדֵּס) is an acronym. The Hebrew word "Pardes" means orchard. The English cognate is "paradise". The acronym PaRDeS (פַּרְדֵּס) refers to: pshat (literal), remez (hint), drash (interpretation), sod (secret or esoteric) levels for studying, understanding and teaching Torah.

### II. Thinking About your audience

- A. On any given Shabbat or holiday, our congregation includes a mixture of people both more familiar and less familiar with the Torah.
- B. If you are not sure whether the microphone is picking you up (or if you are speaking without a microphone), before you begin, ask if everyone can hear you and adjust accordingly. Look at your audience throughout your drash to see if they look like they can hear you; or if they look puzzled or are nodding off. Try to adjust for these things.
- C. Use effective presentation techniques, such as: making eye contact from time to time; speaking clearly and not too fast; repeating key points, phrases or words that you want to emphasize; pausing at times for emphasis; involving your audience by asking a question or two.

### **III. Choosing a theme — four approaches**

A. Read and re-read the entire parashah or haftarah (or whatever is the primary text about which you will be speaking), look for a theme or topic that interests you, or that puzzles you. Write down questions that pop into your mind.

B. Read a few commentaries that others have written to spark your interest in a theme, or that relates to some aspect of the parashah that you might not have noticed.

C. Think about the parashah and commentaries you may have read with a focus on what is the bigger lesson or take-away that you see? What is the bigger lesson you see? Can you apply some of the points or issues from the parashah to your life? How are these points or issues relevant to your audience?

D. Develop a drash from a bigger concept (such as developing self-esteem, or learning to be in conversation with God, or how to get back on track when we have lost our way) and look in the parashah to find connection(s) and support for this bigger concept.

### **IV. Preparing the D'var Torah — Steps You Might Take**

A. Possibly begin with a personal anecdote or story that something in the Parashah evoked for you. This is a technique that Rabbi Mark Melamut used in almost all of his drashot.

B. Briefly summarize the complete parashah, emphasizing the sections you wish to highlight, such as the section we are reading in synagogue on that Shabbat or an idea that you plan to emphasize in your drash. (2 min)

C. Explain what you want to focus on and perhaps why you selected this theme or point from the parashah. It's a good idea to stick with 2 or 3 main points and develop these with your own ideas and perhaps extracts from a commentary that further supports or develops the theme(s). (6 to 7 min.)

D. If appropriate (and it usually is), think of a question that you want to pose to the group. This can be done anytime during the drash, but always keep the time in mind and ask your questions in a way that invites short answers and not open ended conversation so that questions don't "rob" you of the time you need to finish your drash. (2 to 3 min.)

E. Conclude with a very brief recap of the main points you presented and how they relate to one or two take-aways (i.e. what we can learn from the Torah reading, or what we can apply from the reading to our daily lives. (1 min.)

## V. Activity

Using an extract from either last week's Torah portion or the upcoming week, we will:

- a. Read and re-read the extract
- b. Look for possible theme/topic for your drash
- c. Write down one or two questions you have and want to try to answer.
- d. Begin to draft your thoughts, ideas about the theme/topic
- e. Read some commentaries from My Jewish Learning, footnotes in Etz Chaim or other sources.

## VI. Remember:

1. Read the entire parashah
2. Your drash can relate to any part of it, not just the section for that Shabbat.
3. Read the footnotes and any introductory material to the parashah.

## VII. Sources for Commentaries divided by Torah Portion

My Jewish Learning (commentaries from teachers of various types of Judaism) - <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/torah-portions/>

American Jewish World Service (Tikkun Olam organization with commentaries from leaders of various types of Judaism) - [https://ajws.org/dvar-tzedek/?gclid=Cj0KCQiAmsrxBRDaARIsANyiD1p3jMenzwq9-o2xtNTIVvWErmX7s\\_0xctXp6m90WwXAgSRnOkair1gaAnjzEALw\\_wcB](https://ajws.org/dvar-tzedek/?gclid=Cj0KCQiAmsrxBRDaARIsANyiD1p3jMenzwq9-o2xtNTIVvWErmX7s_0xctXp6m90WwXAgSRnOkair1gaAnjzEALw_wcB)

Conservative Yeshiva in Jerusalem (commentaries from primarily Conservative teachers) <https://www.conservativeyeshiva.org/torahsparks/>

Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies, American Jewish University, Los Angeles (Conservative rabbinic school with commentaries from teachers of various types of Judaism) - <https://www.aju.edu/ziegler-school-rabbinic-studies/torah-resource-center/parashat-ha-shavua-commentaries>

ReformJudaism.org (Reform Movement with commentaries from teachers of various types of Judaism) - <https://reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study>

Chabad (Haredi/Ultra Orthodox outreach movement with commentaries from teachers of various types of Orthodox and Ultra Orthodox Judaism) - [https://www.chabad.org/parshah/otherparshas\\_cdo/aid/9175/jewish/All-Parshahs.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/otherparshas_cdo/aid/9175/jewish/All-Parshahs.htm)

## VIII. Additional Resource

This resource has commentaries on some of the Torah portions, but not all. The commentaries were prepared by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, an Orthodox rabbi. He served as the Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth (of the United Kingdom) from 1991 to 2013. <http://rabbisacks.org/category/covenant-conversation/>