



## How to Create a *D'var Torah*

Many circles like to start meetings with a *d'var Torah*, literally, “a word of Torah.” This is a great way to get members’ feet wet with bringing Jewish texts and values into your circle’s conversations. A *d'var Torah* is entirely customizable: you can personalize it and shape it in whatever way is most meaningful to you. It could be a summary of the week’s Torah portion, an intro to an upcoming holiday, or any piece of text that you want to discuss. You can summarize, ask questions, discuss what inspires or troubles you, note connections to other texts, and/or talk about the meaning and relevance of the text in the context of current events or contemporary culture. Because of the wealth of resources available online to help you, you don’t need to have any prior knowledge of Jewish texts - or any language other than your own - to get started.

Here’s a simple process for creating a *d'var Torah*. You should aim for a 5-10 minute presentation, depending on the agenda of your meeting, and you might want to leave some time for questions as well:

- 1 Choose a text.** We’re using “text” here in the broadest possible sense of the word: while many people focus on the week’s Torah portion or an upcoming holiday for a *d'var Torah*, you can choose just about anything: a text from [Selected Texts on Jewish Giving](#), a book, film, or really anything.
  - A good place to find out what this week’s Torah portion is is [TorahPortions.org](#) or [Hebcal](#).
  - [Sefaria](#) is a great online source for most classic Jewish texts, in the original language and in English translation.
- 2 Check out what others have said about this text.** Search online for “[your text] + *d'var Torah*.” This will give you some good examples for how other people have shaped their discussions of this text, and after you read a couple of them, you’ll be able to see what the main issues are that have most interested, inspired, and confused other commentators!
  - [G-dcast](#) has an animated *d'var Torah* for every weekly Torah portion, short videos about all of the major Jewish holidays, a variety of Jewish folktales and stories, and much more - even apps and games.
  - [MyJewishLearning](#) is an online encyclopedia of Jewish knowledge - holidays, texts, history, food culture, everything - without any religious or political bias.
- 3 Find a focus.** Pick just one or two main points to discuss. Ask your own questions, make your own connections, come up with your own opinions.
  - *What interests you about this text? What bores you?*
  - *What inspires you? What dismays you?*
  - *What confuses you? What questions does it bring up for you?*
  - *What connections do you see between this text and other parts of Jewish life?*
  - *What relevance does this text have in contemporary culture and for current events? How can we understand it and interpret it in light of contemporary values, issues, events?*
  - *How might this text and its lessons or the questions it raises shape our individual or collective work as givers?*
- 4 Share it!** Write it down in full if you need, or speak from notes. Keep to the allotted time frame. Make sure to explain any Hebrew words or Jewish concepts that other members with which other members might not be familiar. Keep your audience in mind - be thought-provoking if you want, but keep away from things that will upset or hurt other members.

## Additional Advice

We also like this advice from Larry Kaufman's [How to Write a D'var Torah](#):

- If you have a problem with the text, or with the historic interpretations, share it with the group—particularly if your setting permits your presentation to be interactive.
- If you are struck by a particular insight, rather than presenting it as your original thought, cite your source—let Rabbi Gamaliel's authority enhance your credibility, and show that you have done your homework.
- Show respect for your audience. Chances are that many of them know as much about the material as you do. But don't be intimidated by that either, because chances are even greater that most of them don't.
- Be sure to translate any Hebrew word you use. Even as common a word as mitzvah is likely to be heard as “good deed” if you don't clarify it as “sacred obligation.”
- If, like me, you prefer to present from a written text, use your manuscript as a guide, but talk it, rather than reading what you have written.
- Make regular eye contact with your listeners—be there for them and with them. (It's okay to read brief quotations from the attributed writings of others, but keep them brief!)
- Don't try to wing it from the text alone. Because we construe the Torah as a living document, its words can only be understood in the context of the generations.
- Just because a d'var Torah primarily is designed to teach does not mean it may not entertain. A touch of humor is in order, as long as it is germane to the lesson. No jokes for joke's sake. As darshan, you have a responsibility to take the material you are presenting seriously, which doesn't mean you can't find the humor in it. What could be funnier than Adam passing the buck—“The woman whom You gave me, gave me the fruit, so I ate,”—or Abraham's negotiation with Ephron the Hittite: “What's 400 shekels between you and me?”