

1. Intro

- a. What is a dvar torah?
 - i. The expression of something beautiful in Torah
 - ii. A call to action, or to better action.
 - iii. A practical lesson.
 - iv. Concise; one strong, central takeaway
 - v. Provocative
 - vi. Takes something important to you and makes it important to others
- b. What is the purpose of a dvar torah?
 - i. From the perspective of the speaker?
 1. To express something that matters to them very much
 2. To share excitement — to light other people's fires.
 - ii. From the perspective of the community?
 1. To learn something beautiful
 2. To take a break
 3. To get to know the speaker
 4. To learn something practical
 5. To be moved to action.
 6. Conversation for lunch.

(Since a DT should challenge a community, it needs to be defined by both the speaker and those who invited him/her to speak)

2. What the congregation/gabbaim should consider

- a. First decision: what kind of dvar torah do you want to have?
 - i. The "Vort:" 3-7 minutes, very little build up. Essentially a comment on a specific text. No handouts, sources might only be in translation. Very little community interaction.
 - ii. The "Short learning session:" A short text study session. Bar is set higher. *Definitely* use handouts, with translation if possible. Possibly leave time for questions (have some prepared to set the tone). Doesn't need to be so homiletic — and can cover a potentially much larger range of topics.
 1. Needs to be coordinated further in advance.
 - iii. Discourage speaking for more than 10 minutes without a text.
- b. Where in the service?
 - i. Before davening starts (especially if it starts late!)
 - ii. Before musaf (a reasonable default)
 - iii. Before Torah reading — if you want to explain the parsha!
 - iv. Right after davening — great on weekdays, not on Shabbat.
 - v. During Kiddush/lunch (for text studies, etc.)
- c. Who is speaking?
 - i. Same responsibility as choosing a person to lead davening or read the Torah
 1. Be realistic about who is capable
 - ii. A new person introducing themselves
 - iii. A community pillar, well-respected by others
 - iv. A guest

- d. Keep in mind:
 - i. Generally, give notice 1-2 weeks prior.
 - ii. Make sure your speaker knows to whom he/she is speaking
 - 1. Size of cong.
 - 2. Jewish knowledge, Hebrew knowledge
 - 3. if handouts are expected/required
 - 4. if questions should be expected/encouraged
 - 5. What parsha it is!
 - iii. Be firm about setting timing restrictions, but not on other things.
 - iv. Ask if they need/want help preparing.
 - v. Ultimately, it's hard to control content. Once you've invited someone to speak, the die is cast.
 - e. Make sure...
 - i. Make sure they know when to arrive.
 - ii. Make sure handouts are distributed beforehand.
 - iii. Make sure speaker's notes can be carried to shul.
 - iv. Make sure people know who is speaking — celebrate them, briefly.
 - v. Make sure to thank them.
3. What the speaker should consider
- a. For anything under 10 minutes: Have *one* central point.
 - i. Most important thing: make sure you *care* about what you're talking about.
 - ii. The point can also be a central question, a tension that you don't know how to resolve. Everyone will have a better conversation at lunch as a result!
 - iii. It's tempting to use DT time as a few minutes of fame, especially if you have a lot to say. Resist the urge.
 - iv. Having one central point makes presentation run more smoothly.
 - v. Make sure that your point is *genuinely* new.
 - 1. New because the force of your personality backs it up.
 - 2. New because the point is original.
 - b. To read or to orate?
 - i. Best: to orate, but with notes. Practice will get you there.
 - c. Know your audience (general notes)
 - i. Size matters
 - 1. In small groups (and small rooms), it is easier to be more informal; it is also easier to teach for an extended period.
 - 2. In large groups (and large rooms), strong and clear presentation is critical.
 - ii. Level of knowledge matters
 - 1. The use of Hebrew diminishes when your audience can't understand it.
 - 2. Make sure all Hebrew terms are translated, if necessary.
 - d. Structure matters a great deal
 - i. A strong structure prevents repetition and helps others follow, especially when there is no handout

- e. Give just enough context, but no more.
 - i. When you're speaking in public, it's hard separate out that which is marginal from that which is central.
 - ii. Use Hebrew when necessary, but not otherwise.
- 4. How do you prepare?
 - a. What are your techniques?
 - b. Hard: What was the most powerful moment you've had this week?
 - i. Find Jewish texts which relate to that point.
 - c. Simplest, most effective: Read the parsha, then commentaries.
 - i. It's not a mechanical process — what catches your eye?
 - ii. What doesn't make sense?
 - iii. What bothers you, excites you?
 - iv. Try to find the same in commentators (See handout). You don't *need* to use commentators, but they can be helpful.
- 5. How to begin.
 - a. Starting with a joke? (Rabbi Akiva)
 - b. Like a good essay, have a strong opening.
- 6. How to end.
 - a. Don't "circle for a (Messianic) landing"
 - b. If your point is clear, you can stop talking
 - c. Sometimes it is nice to end with a bracha articulating parts of what you've just said.