

7 Easy Steps to Leading a Torah Study Session

1. Gather information
 - a. Find out what the Torah portion is for the week you'll be studying
 - i. Ask the Rabbi
 - ii. Look at a Jewish calendar – most have the Torah portion noted on each Saturday. Each Shabbat is known by the name of the Torah portion which is read
 - b. Decide whether you're going to focus on the entire Torah portion, or just the reading we'll cover in this year's triennial portion. See pages 710-724 in the *Kol Haneshamah* prayer book for the triennial readings.
 - c. Find out how much time you will have; where you will be doing the study; and how the space will be arranged.
2. Read the Torah portion aloud. See "Resources" at the end for information about finding the translation
 - a. Reading aloud provides the opportunity to hear the words that were written.
 - b. It also allows us to slow down the reading instead of skimming over it.
 - c. Listen to yourself as you read.
 - d. Some things to look for (Source: Being Torah Teacher's Guide; Torah Aura Publications):
 - i. Missing Information. What information is missing? What doesn't the Torah tell you? What information would help clarify the story or the instructions, etc?
 - ii. Number-words. The numbers 7, 10 and 40 are important; individual words repeated 5, 7, 10 or 12 times in a single portion are usually very important – those key words are a clue to what the portion's about.
 - iii. Text repetitions. The language in the Torah is specific, with no "extra" or "unnecessary" words. So if a section is repeated, or a list is given, that's often a clue to that there is emphasis on that particular verse, story or list. Are the repetitions identical or do they differ? If they differ, how do they differ? What could the differences mean?
 - iv. Echoes. The same word or phrase which appears in multiple places in the Torah, in addition to the parshah you're studying. The use of echoes helps link the individual segments in the Torah.
 - v. Theme-words. Almost every parshah (portion) has theme-words: words built on the same Hebrew root word. These often get missed in translation or by those of us who are not fluent in Hebrew.
 - e. Re-read the section, this time jotting down words or phrases that jump out at you, that have some relevance for you, or that you have a question about.
3. Research – look to see what current commentators have written.
 - a. Check in with Rabbi Heifetz, who is more than willing to help figure out key themes to focus on, or to help with ideas and sources.
 - b. Some good online sources (See "Resources" at the end for print materials):
 - i. Jewish Reconstructionist Federation: <http://jrf.org/recon-dt>
 - ii. The Union for Reform Judaism: <http://urj.org/learning/torah/>
 - iii. American Jewish University: <http://judaism.ajula.edu/Content/ContentUnit.asp?CID=894&u=1474&t=0>
 - iv. Aish: <http://www.aish.com/tp/>

- v. Chabad: http://www.chabad.org/parshah/otherparshas_cdo/aid/9175/jewish/All-Parshas.htm
 - vi. My Jewish Learning: http://www.myjewishlearning.com/texts/Bible/Weekly_Torah_Portion.shtml
- c. Scan them to see if there's something one of them has written that addresses a question or thought that occurred to you – or addresses a new insight that has particular relevance for you. [Note: This is where it's really helpful to have decided to only focus on the triennial portion – your source material is a little more limited!]
4. Begin to pull your thoughts together. Select two or three topics/questions/verses you'd like to address.
- a. Why are these relevant to you? Do they speak to your life or experiences in some way? If so, how? Are they an echo or reminder of someone you grew up with or an experience from your past? Do they address a goal that you're striving for?
 - b. If other commentators have addressed the same ones, you may choose to quote them. And then add your comments to theirs (either as supporting OR dissenting opinions).
 - c. If no one else has yet published on the question, insight or interpretation that you've found – include it in your study anyway! Each generation needs to find its own meaning in our texts and you're part of the process. It's perfectly fine to have questions without answers and to throw those questions out to the group.
 - d. Come up with a beginning and a closing.
5. Rewrite.... and practice aloud, so that you get the timing down.
6. Some tips for leading a Torah study session:
- a. Make sure there are enough copies of the Torah Commentary for your group
 - b. Ask participants to volunteer to read your selected verses aloud for you.
 - c. After the selection has been read, ask a question and/or allow people to share what they think the selection means.
 - d. When there's a pause, look around the room and see if anyone else wants to comment.
 - e. Keep an eye on the time and end when promised by making a concluding statement.
7. Enjoy! The first time is always the hardest, so volunteer to do it again!

RESOURCES:

Translations of the text can be found in any *chumash*/Torah Commentary. Oseh uses The Plaut Commentary by the Union of Reform Judaism; they've also recently published a [The Torah: A Woman's Commentary](#). [Etz Hayim](#) is a fairly recent one published by the Conservative movement. Online, you can find a line by line translation at http://www.chabad.org/parshah/otherparshas_cdo/aid/9175/jewish/All-Parshas.htm Click on the name of the parshah, and then on the "Text of Parshah (Hebrew and English Linear Translation"

Printed Torah Study Resources:

Artson, Bradley Shavit. [the Bedside Torah](#). Contemporary Books
 Frankel, Ellen. [The Five Books of Miriam](#). HarperSanFrancisco
 Goldstein, Elyse. [The Women's Torah Commentary](#). Jewish Lights Publications
 Salkin, Jeffrey (ed) [The Modern Men's Torah Commentary](#). Jewish Lights Publications
 Rossel, Seymour. [The Torah Portion-by-Portion](#). Torah Aura Productions