

A Letter from Rabbi Saraleya - Guidelines for B'nei Mitzvah Drosh preparation:

Dear B'nei Mitzvah students:

You are all now in your second year of studying with Brian and Zelig, on your way to becoming bat and bar mitzvahs of our wonderful community of Chochmat HaLev. Pretty soon, you will each start working on the drosh (teaching) for your service. This is going to be something you write that you will use like the script of a speech to teach your Torah portion, or parasha, to the community on the day of your bar or bat mitzvah. It is an incredibly important part of your service. It will be the time that you get to shine with your intelligence, sensitivity and, perhaps, letting your humor show, as the culmination of all your hard work.

This letter to you is to help you plan on how to write your drosh; how I, as your rabbi, will be able to help you with that work; and how you can help me to help you most effectively. It is also to help you with your time management so that you don't end up leaving this work for the last minute and causing yourself and your parents a great deal of stress. (Please be kind and take your parents into consideration so that they can be able to give you as much help as possible!)

When you are all finished with it, your writing will have 3 parts:

1. A summary of your parasha to read at the beginning of the Torah service that will give your guests a context for what is happening in in your parasha (1 page – 2-3 minutes to read)
2. Your drosh – your teaching – about the parasha (5-10 pages – 8-15 minutes to read)
3. Thank you's (half a page – 1 minute to read unless it is really funny, then 2 minutes).

This will be a lot of work, so I am giving you an approximate time-line below so that you can look at a calendar and, maybe, write dates on it to get yourself organized. I strongly suggest that you talk with your parents about the calendar very, very soon so that you and I can schedule our work together and not run into conflicts with your classmates' schedules.

STAGE I (*start at least 6 months before your ceremony date*)

1. Read your whole parasha over and over (at least 10 times) with a friend or two your age, and with your family- that is with at least one person your age and someone older. Try to find a few different translations to read over. Discuss what seems to be the basic story or ideas that the parasha is telling.
2. Type up a single page summary of your parasha to contextualize the parashat for those who have no experience with studying Torah. If this is too hard, then you can start by making bullet point list of what happens in your parasha. **All of your work should be typed up in the following format: double-spaced 12 point Times New Roman font, 1" margins**
3. Write down at least 5 ideas, points or concepts that are interesting to you by making a bullet point list on your computer. Ask: What is interesting? What is inspiring? What is challenging? What is difficult to accept? What is difficult to understand? What do I like? What don't I like? Have I ever experienced anything similar?
4. Write down at least 5 questions you have about the parasha.

STAGE II (*at least 4 months before your ceremony date – first session with me*)

When you have completed all the above, this is when you are ready for your first session with me.

When you and I meet, you must bring your type written bullet points and questions.

At our first session together, we will go over your summary and your bullet points and questions and, hopefully, start to develop a focus on what you want to speak about.

- It will now be helpful for you to read about your parasha in the “Fields Commentary”. This is a book in my office at Chochmat HaLev. Kate, my office assistant, can provide you with a copy of the chapter on your parashat and you can compare what you have written with what is in this book.
- After reading Fields, you can make adjustments to your summary if you’d like and perhaps re-focus your questions. You can compare your ideas with the ideas in Fields or other sources that you or your family/friends have found.

STAGE III – *Refining your ideas – (second session with me)*

2 – 3 weeks after our first meeting together, we should meet for a second session. When you and I meet this time, you must bring your written work with any adjustments or revisions that you have made.

At our second session together, we will:

- Start identifying the one or two (or possibly 3) main points you want to make
- Start outlining what you want to say in bullet point form
- Find a way to personalize the questions – ask how is this question relevant to my life? Have I ever encountered or felt or experienced anything similar?

After our second session, you will work independently from me, but you should work with your tutor or family member or friend to:

- Write down answers to your questions we raised together
- Write out your personal reactions
- Continue this work and continue to discuss and talk until you are getting focused and ready to outline your drosh

STAGE IV – *third session with me*

1 – 3 weeks after our second session, we will meet again to develop an outline of perhaps 6-10 paragraphs that you will write that asks the questions, gives the background and then comes to a conclusion. This will be the beginning of your writing your speech. You need to start thinking of your work *as* a speech – how will you say what you need to say in a logical, detailed way; summarize what you have said.

After our meeting, you will again work with your tutor or friend or family member to write the first complete draft of your drosh.

STAGE V – *fourth session with me* –

Our next session together will be 6 weeks before your ceremony – now it's really getting close!

Before this session, you must have a draft of your drosh written and sent to me so that I can review it before we meet. At our meeting, we will review what you have written and see how it hangs together and makes its points, and how it can be refined.

After this session, you should continue to work on refining the drosh with your tutor or friend or family member.

STAGE VI – *final review with me*

Now it's only 4 weeks before your ceremony!

Before this session, you must send me a copy of your drosh as written. It is in its almost final form.

When we meet, you will read your drosh to me and we will practice how you will give it. We may make final changes to it.

At this point, you should be done with your writing. From here on, you should practice and practice your drosh, perhaps with your parent(s) as audience so that you are as comfortable as possible when you are giving it from the bimah.

Summary:

This will be a lot of hard work and you will be the responsible one, but don't hesitate to have your parents, family members and friends (or perhaps another tutor) help you out. Families and friends are meant to help and support each other! I am here to guide you and help you in the process, but I will not be the one writing it or coming up with the script of what your parasha means to you. This will be your own work product and, if you take ownership of it, I promise you that you will have the greatest sense of pride and accomplishment that is possible to hold.

I look forward to working with each and every one of you.

L'shalom, Rabbi SaraLeya