



Rabbi Darren's 7 Steps to write a great speech for your Bar or Bat Mitzvah

Sharing your ideas about your Torah portion and about this great moment in your life is a great opportunity. Here are some basic steps to consider along with an example of a speech below. Good luck and have fun - and most importantly, make it personal!

Step 1: Greet everyone with "Shabbat Shalom."

Step 2. Talk about your Torah portion and provide a short overview

Step 3. Explain or discuss something your find interesting about your Torah portion

Step 4. React to the message or moral or idea of your Torah portion - what do you think?

Step 5. Provide a real life example in your life to bring your teaching to life

Step 6. Recap your teaching - briefly

Step 7. Thank parents, siblings, teachers, friends, etc

Sample Bar Mitzvah Speech

Chet Weissberg, May 3, 2014

Step 1: Greet everyone with "Shabbat Shalom."

Shabbat Shalom!

Step 2. Talk about your Torah portion and provide a short overview

I have just read from Parshat Emor, in the book of Leviticus. In this reading, The Eternal Lord is telling rules to the Israelites through Moses, famous rules such as "An Eye for an Eye", as an example. Now most Bar-Mitzvah boys would say something at this moment in their speech that an eye for an eye teaches them about responsibility and becoming a man - or something that everybody knew was coming. But, I plan to do something a little different, and tell you that I disagree with eye for an eye.

Step 3. Explain or discuss something your find interesting about your Torah portion

Eye for an eye in the biblical way must be taken in a literal sense. In a literal sense it means that the punishment shall be an exact reflection of the crime. If I cut your hand of, my

hand gets cut off. If you kill me, you will die. That exact punishment is something I will call, the biblical eye for an eye. In ancient times, eye for an eye was necessary because people didn't have another way of enforcing justice. But with modern systems of law that have other ways, eye for an eye is no longer relevant.

Step 4. React to the message or moral or idea of your Torah portion - what do you think?

This literal sense shouldn't apply to the world today because if we all acted that way, the losses would be doubled and 2x the number of people would be hurt or maimed. We need a modern way to think about this rule, a new eye for an eye. This new way, I will call eye for an eye in Chet's world.

In Chet's World, there are other ways of performing justice without using revenge. As Gandhi once said "An eye for an eye will only make the whole world blind." Eye for an eye doesn't do us any good because all eye for an eye does is bring more suffering. If one person dies, eye for an eye says that the killer should too, but why would we want more death?

In Chet's World, we no longer need to cause double the suffering every time there is a crime. We still have consequences, and we can have much more effective punishments. In Chet's World, we must interpret eye for an eye more deeply. From an analytical standpoint, there are two ways of looking at eye for an eye. One is that you must compensate for your actions. I actually agree with this interpretation. This is a form of justice that does not imply violence or further suffering than necessary. It goes hand in hand with creating a better world and learning your lesson.

Another interpretation is that you have the right to follow your feelings of revenge. As I have said before, revenge doesn't help anyone. It only causes more suffering which is just completely illogical. Whoever is participating in the action of revenge may feel a sense of satisfaction as they carry out this action. But, let me tell you why this is incorrect. A person only

feels satisfaction in revenge because they have convinced themselves that revenge will ease their suffering.

Step 5. Provide a real life example in your life to bring your teaching to life

Let me give you a real life example of something I witnessed about three years ago. I was playing on a baseball team called the Pawsox. On this team there was a kid who I will not name, lets just call him Darwin, who always liked to act like a professional baseball player. He would swagger around with his expensive batting gloves constantly on, chewing his gum. One game, I was sitting in the dugout and Darwin was up to bat next. We never had an on deck circle where the batter up next could take some practice swings like the MLB stadiums did, but Darwin liked to pretend. Darwin started taking his swings right at the entrance of our dugout. Well, another kid walks out of the dugout, not paying much attention when BAM! Darwin had hit this kid in the face with his bat. Luckily he was not injured too badly. But If eye for an eye was interpreted in the Biblical sense, that kid could have whacked Darwin right back in the face. And what good would come of that? We would have two kids on the floor, and two less players in the game. This situation shows that if society was ruled by eye for an eye in the Biblical sense, society would be at a lower standard because every time there was an injury or a theft, there would be double the pain.

In Darwin and the kid's example, Darwin had a punishment. He had to sit in the stands for the rest of the game, could not play, and did not sit with the team. This was not revenge, this was a punishment that fit the crime, mostly. This was an example of living in Chet's world. Eventually, Darwin apologized, he learned his lesson, and the kid and Darwin went on to finish the season.

But many people would say that we already live in Chet's world. This, in my opinion, is only partly true. Yes, there is no law that says that we must partake in eye for an eye. There is

nothing that says it must happen, but people still do it. Eye for an eye is still living in the human instinct. If someone gets punched, many people's response would be immediately to punch back. These instincts could theoretically be traced back to the laws of the torah or other ancient law manuscripts that included an eye for an eye. One real problem is that the torah, when describing an eye for an eye, never says to step back and consider if the other person had any reason or justification for doing what they did before you "punch back." People really need to consider if eye for an eye is really the right thing to do or to consider the justifications of another person's action before inflicting eye for an eye onto them. And even if they didn't have any justifications, you still shouldn't hit back, because that just causes more people to be hurt.

Step 6. Recap your teaching - briefly

In conclusion, disagreeing with the biblical eye for an eye and coming up with my own interpretation has taught me a lot about becoming a bar mitzvah. I've learned that I can interpret things my own way, I cannot just accept everything that is in front of me, I need to read it my own way. That is what it means to me to be an adult.

Step 7. Thank parents, siblings, teachers, friends, etc

I want to thank my parents for raising me, my grandparents: grandpa larry, grandma bobby, grandma kate, grandpa norby, and grandma judy. My aunts, uncles, cousins, and the rest of my family. Thank you to my brother Bix, though if there really was eye for an eye, I don't think he would still be alive. Thank you Rabbi Darren, Canter Avi. My friends, And of course, Darwin, who taught me what not to do as a Jewish adult.

When you print your speech, please print it double space. When you read your speech, read it slowly, clearly, and take your time. If you ever have a question, ask your tutor or rabbi for help. Good luck!