

# MINYAN MONTHLY

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## Guidelines for Giving a D'var Torah in the Libray Minyan

by Elliot Dorff

One of the things that makes this minyan special is that from week to week a whole variety of people bring their own unique life experiences and perspectives to bear in interpreting the Torah. Your D'var Torah, we are sure, will add significantly to the richness of the Library Minyan experience for us all.

The very fact that we ask as many people as possible volunteer to give a D'var Torah inevitably means that many people who do so have little or no experience in doing this. No one form or approach is recommended; on the contrary, part of the interest in each D'var Torah comes not only from its content, but from the particular way in which the person frames his/her thoughts. Still, several guidelines have emerged over the years which you should be aware of:

- **DO NOT** summarize the entire Torah reading. Bring to people's attention only the specific part of the Torah reading on which you will be focusing.
- **DO NOT** toss out a long list of ideas which occurred to you as you read the Torah reading. As interesting as they all may be, people will lose you after the second one you mention and will wonder what would happen if you explored the first one you mentioned.
- **DO** focus on ONE issue in the Torah reading. You may bring in all kinds of materials on that issues, from general as well as Jewish Literature, but help your listeners by making the topic of your D'var Torah clear throughout your presentation by indicating how the material you are mentioning relates to your topic.
- Some of the best Divrei Torah last ten minutes. In no case (except the High Holy Days) should a D'var Torah last more than fifteen minutes. If you are reading your D'var Torah, that means a maximum of five, double-spaced pages. There will be plenty of opportunities to talk about other ideas on other occasions or even develop this one further. Remember what they say in show business: Leave them wanting more!
- If you are not used to speaking, you probably will want to type out your talk the first time. As you gain experience,

though, think of speaking from an outline so that you can have more eye contact with your audience. As you gain even more experience, think of engaging the group in a discussion of your topic. You will need to frame that discussion by identifying the topic, providing a source or two to get people thinking about it, and then asking a leading question. Be prepared to hear perspectives you never thought of! If you do this, note that you need not comment on what each participant contributes, but you may comment on those remarks which evoke some specific reaction in you based on what you have read in preparation for this discussion. Also be prepared to STOP the discussion by the fifteen-minute limit!

- Many first-time speakers ask for resources to get them thinking. The most popular Jewish resources are the Hertz commentary we use at Beth Am (which is generally good, but sometimes much too apologetic), the Gunther Plaut one-volume commentary published by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, and the new, five-volume commentary (one of each book of the Torah) published by the Jewish Publication Society. In each case, consult not only the comments on the page of Torah text but also the essays at the end of the section or book of the Torah. The Anchor Bible series, the Westminster Bible series, and the Interpreters' bible, while not generally by Jewish authors, may also provide some interesting insights into the Torah reading. Feel free to disagree with any or all of both the non-Jewish and Jewish sources: that is what developing Jewish commentary is all about!

For classical Rabbinic commentaries translated into English on Genesis and the first half of Exodus, you can use the Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation which is available in the Beth Am Library. Nechama Leibovitz' comments on the Torah, which use many classical materials, have also been translated into English as Studies in Genesis, Studies in Exodus, etc. Some people also use the Artscroll series, but beware of superstition and gullibility in its comments! (The Rabbinical Assembly and Jewish Publication Society are in the process of creating a one-volume commentary with traditional and modern midrash and legal, literary,

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# MINUTES FROM THE DECEMBER MINYAN MEETING

The following is a summary of the minutes from the Library Minyan meeting held in December 1996.

## Ritual Committee

**New Chair:** Bob Braun is the interim chair of the Ritual Committee.

**Siddurim and Chumashim:** Temple Beth Am will be purchasing additional sidurim for the chapel. The existing Hertz Chumashim are being repaired. Additional Chumashim will not be purchased at this time because a new Chumash is being published in 1998.

**Kabbalat Panim:** It was suggested that during the "Kabbalat Panim" portion of announcements, people turn and greet those around them. It is encouraged that all Library Minyan Members walk up to newcomers and welcome them into the community. How about inviting them to lunch?

**Anim Zmirot:** The general rule is that the leader of Musaf may include it if she or she chooses.

**Announcement to the Kahal:** Please take care of the Temple's Tallitot and Sidurim by returning them to their proper place after services.

**Membership on the Ritual Committee:** Only Ritual Committee members can vote on a topic that is being discussed at a Ritual Committee meeting. All major issues are brought to the Kahal for discussion and vote. Alan Broidy, suggested we open the committee to new members. However, you must make a commitment of time. Please call Bob Braun (213) 934-3231, if you are interested.

The Ritual Committee held a meeting on January 12, 1997, at the home of Bob and Sandra Braun.

The agenda included the following topics:

**Liturgy for Yamim Noraim:** The continued use of the Silverman Mahzor? The inclusion of the service "Fires of Israel" and other prayers.

**Microphone for Bar/Bat Mitzvot Drashot Only?**  
(See article in this issue)

**Mi Shebeyrach for the ill:** Suggestion has been made to have people stand in their seats and say the name of the ill person, instead of lining up to give name to the Gabbai Rishon.

## Safety and Security

Ami, the head of Temple Security, raised the issue of safety for Temple members who come to shul for Shabbat services. After a discussion, it was decided that the gate leading to the underground parking garage will be closed to all pedestrian traffic. Walkers should go to the main entrance of the Shul. If you have a stroller or a wheel chair, you may use the Shabbat elevator to the right of the Shul's main entrance. Cars will have the gate to the garage opened by a security guard using a remote control.

## Chapel Art Work

Meyer Brenner, Robert Pflug, Lida Baker, Mark Rothman and Sandra Braun were invited to attend an art committee meeting. According to Meyer, it seemed at that point that most of the decisions concerning the art were already decided; Library Minyan members did ask that the artwork would not clash with the stained-glass windows or the upholstery, it shouldn't make the room appear darker, the frames would harmonize with the wood. Meyer questioned whether it should include the human figure. Lida offered the suggestion of the five Megillot as a theme. The decision to install the artwork had been made prior to this meeting although Meyer questioned the appropriateness of this without Library Minyan input.

After the discussion, the following process is what members present at the Minyan Meeting decided: The Chairperson of the Library Minyan should have been informed of the plans at the "get go". Announcements would have been made on Shabbats to invite Library Minyan members to informational meetings, perhaps to see proposed drawings, as was done with the architectural plans of the chapel.

Marshall Kramer will draft a letter indicating our concerns regarding the process which will be signed by Alan Broidy and brought to Rabbi Rembaum with a copy to Marilyn Zeiring, the head of the Temple Art Committee. Marshall Kramer welcomes suggestions for the wording of the letter. In addition, the letter will state that the Library Minyan wishes to use a democratic method to determine what, if anything, to do next.

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theological comments. That should be ready in 1998 or 1999, and it will eventually replace Hertz in most Conservative synagogues.) Sometimes different translations of the Bible provide fresh perspectives on specific passages. See, for example, the new translation by Everett Fox.

By all means, feel free to bring in materials from general literature, politics, philosophy, etc. Often the most interesting Divrei Torah are those in which people bring in their own professional expertise or their own life experiences to illustrate the biblical text or argue with it. Remember that this D'var Torah is meant to be your perspective; the commentaries of the people who came before you may help you to do your own thinking, but they should not intimidate you. You too are a Jew who has a right--maybe even the duty -- to hear the message of Sinai anew.

If you would like to volunteer to give a D'var Torah, please call Cathy Ann Lippman or Rachel Green (find their numbers on the enclosed Minyan List). We look forward to learning from you.

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## Use of Microphone for Bar/Bat Mitzvah Drashot

Several families of upcoming Bar/Bat Mitzvahs have requested that the Library Minyan consider permitting use of a microphone specifically during the drasha given by the Bar/Bat Mitzvah (and not during any other part of the service). This matter was referred to the Ritual Committee for initial review.

The Ritual Committee considered the matter at its meeting of Jan 12. The committee recognizes that this could be a sensitive matter, given the strong feelings that were evoked by earlier discussions of using a microphone on the High Holy Days. The committee held an open discussion to clarify the exact nature of the request, and to examine its pro's and con's. First, the request is only for use of a microphone during the drasha, not during any other part of the service. Second, the request is for Bar/Bat Mitzvah youths only, not for any other persons or occasions.

The concerns expressed were as follows: This might be interpreted by some as opening up the broader question of microphones again, which has proved to be a sensitive issue, and might cause bad feelings in the community. Even if this specific use is warranted, it might be more difficult to avoid further requests which

## Social Action at Beth Am

Library Minyan member Kathy Rosenblatt, is the Temple Beth Am Vice President of Social Action, Tikkun Olam (SATO). Her portfolio involves Temple Beth Am with the Greater Los Angeles community. Some of the social action projects SATO has been involved in have been: holding Thanksgiving dinner for seniors, bringing food to SOVA and involving the youth department in serving food at a soup kitchen on Christmas Day.

SATO has already begun to reach out to the community by connecting with an African-American church, The Inner City Christian Center. Kathy, Rabbi Rembaum and temple member, Mindy Einhorn, have met with Dr. William Martin II, Mr. Sherry Martin and Pastor Kevin Smith of The Center. This committee needs help implementing some of the ideas this group came up with at their meeting.

The SATO committee met on January 14 (it was announced in the December *Olympian*) and scheduled a planning meeting for January 27, at the Inner City Christian Center to plan for a March 2 activity to be hosted at Temple Beth Am.

If you would like to get involved on this worthwhile committee, call Kathy Rosenblatt at home (213/939-4767) or at work (310/393-0411, ext.7289), or leave a message with Charlene, at the Temple.

would move us back into painful areas, such as requests by others with quieter voices who wish to give a drasha, or requests to use the microphone at other parts of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah service. While now the Minyan is generally attentive and quiet during the drasha, having amplified sound might encourage some people to talk with their neighbors. Finally, there may be some difficulty figuring out how to make the microphone function during the drasha, but not before or after (e.g., moving it, turning it, or switching it on/off).

Points in favor of the request were as follows: As noted in earlier discussions, this is not a matter of halachah since microphones are accepted by the Conservative movement, but of ambience and atmosphere. The major concerns with broader use of a microphone were that it changed the dynamics of leader and kahal (congregation) davening together, that some leaders who did not wish to use amplification might not volunteer, and that it might erode the good attentiveness that now prevails in our minyan. However, these concerns are not applicable to the specific use requested. During the drasha, the kahal is not accompanying the leader in prayer, but rather trying to hear what the darshan is saying. Since those families who want a microphone would be using it only for themselves, there is no issue

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of discouraging anyone who does not wish to have it. And unlike other darshanim where there is a choice of whether and when to volunteer, the Bar/Bat Mitzvah is obliged to give a drasha to a larger than normal crowd, while they have less experience and perhaps ability in projecting their voice. At the point of the drasha, they have probably already led one or more parts of the service and read from Torah and Haftorah, so their voice is likely to be more tired. Providing amplification will make it easier for their drasha to be heard and understood, and hence will facilitate greater attention by the kahal than if many cannot hear them and become restless.

The Ritual Committee considered these points, and voted on the question. They decided that the request should be forwarded for consideration by the overall Library Minyan at the next Minyan meeting, with the recommendation of the majority of the Ritual Committee that the request be approved, assuming that some satisfactory method can be arranged to make the microphone effective only during the drasha. The Ritual Committee also requested that this summary be distributed in the Minyan Monthly prior to the next Minyan meeting, to facilitate discussion. The committee noted that the next Bar Mitzvah will be on March 22 (Aaron Sunshine), and that this might be a timely opportunity for a trial use of the microphone to help assess the actual effects, after which a long term decision could be made.☆

## LIBRARY MINYAN CONTACTS & COMMITTEES

<b>Steering Committee Chair,</b>	
Alan Broidy	213/933-8894
<b>Minyan Treasurer</b>	
Dale Bodenstein	213/937-7443
<b>Torah &amp; Haftorah Reading</b>	
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Larry Weinman	310/454-6521
<b>Gabai'im</b>	
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Alan Broidy	213/933-8494
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Cathie Lippman	213/658-6917
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Henry Morgan	213/935-9831
<b>Ritual Committee</b>	
Bob Braun	213/934-3231
<b>Child Care Committee</b>	
Teri Cohan Link	310/204-1401
Larry Harris	310/556-7778

## TREASURERS REPORT

On behalf of the Library Minyan, I would like to thank the following for their contributions to our treasury. Donations help us provide weekly shabbat kiddushes and for child care.--Dale

### *Speedy recovery to Ronnie Cohen*

*Linda and Amos Amit*

### *Donation*

*Fredda and Avrum Lowenstein*

### *In honor of Sandra Braun*

*Elaine and David Gill*

### *In memory of Beral Kotlar*

*Phyllis and Mitch Miller*

### *Simchat Torah Pledge*

*Laurie Levenson and Doug Mirell*

*Scott Taryle*

*Teri and Baruch Link*

*Alan and Sheila Spiwak*

*Jonathan Friedman*

### *Kiddush Fund*

*Alan and Sheila Spiwak*

*Jonathan Friedman*

Contributions are welcome anytime and for any occasion. Please make your checks payable to "Library Minyan-Temple Beth Am" All donations may be mailed to the synagogue or Dale's home.

Temple Beth Am	Dale Bodenstein
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### **Hospitality**

Abby Harris	310/556-7778
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### **Kiddush**

Amy Rabin	310/652-7353
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### **Minyan Monthly**

Sandra Braun	213/934-3231
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### **Scheduling LM Events (Bnai Mitzvot, etc.)**

#### **--Master Calander**

Val Goldstein	310/837-5503
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#### **Shiva Minyans**

Contact Beth Am	310/652-7353
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#### **Minyan List**

Ira Grossman	213/651-1633
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