

### Lights, Camera....Torah! Putting the Thrill of Live Theater Back in Torah, *Elective*

|                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| <b>AUTHOR(S):</b>        | Simon Feil  |
| <b>TOPIC (S)</b>         | Prayer - Tefillah, Storytelling   |
| <b>SUMMARY</b>           | In this session, we'll explore the innovative history of the weekly public Torah reading that's a cornerstone (ahem) of our services. We'll experience the tools actors use to make a deceptively simple story crackle with possibility and personal connection. You'll never read (or hear) Torah the same way again. (Experience reading or hearing Torah not necessary.) |
| <b>GOALS:</b>            | Participants will know <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• how to personalize a story</li> <li>• the history and original purpose of Torah reading</li> <li>• how to use questions to gain connection and specificity to a text</li> <li>• how to connect personally to Torah stories (even the Leviticus sacrifices!)</li> </ul>                                      |
| <b>AUDIENCE:</b>         | Any Audience  |
| <b>TIMING:</b>           | Elective- 75  |
| <b>APPENDICES:</b>       | Stories, <a href="#">Script Analysis Tools</a> , <a href="#">History of public Torah reading sources</a>  |
| <b>MATERIALS NEEDED:</b> | N/A   |
| <b>SET-UP DETAILS:</b>   | Virtually, in a Zoom space where the facilitator can host comfortably and manage breakout rooms<br><br>In person, a space large enough to allow for participants to sit together in a circle, and also to go off and create smaller groups for discussion.  |

## SESSION TIMELINE:

- 00:00-00:05 - Introductions, welcome
- 00:05-00:10 - What's a favorite scene from a movie or play?
- 00:10-00:25 - Torah story vs script
- 00:25-00:35 - History and purpose of public Torah reading
- 00:35-00:50 - How actors analyze a script
- 00:50-01:15 - Analyze the movie scene/Analyze the Torah scene

## SESSION OUTLINE:

00:00-00:05 - Introductions, welcome

Everyone loves stories. Even if you say you don't, unless you hate movies, TV, TikTok, you're lying. Stories are an essential way we communicate what matters to us, relax, stay entertained and informed. And Judaism loves stories too. We even read our stories pretty regularly but, for the most part, a lot of folks seem pretty tuned out or bored. Unless it's reading Megilat Esther and we get to "boo" a lot at Haman. We're going to look at

00:05-00:10 - What's a favorite scene from a movie or play?

[Jamboard](#) scenes from participants that are memorable to them - describe however they like for 2 min.

3 min: Then ask them to add to their section:

What do you remember most about the scene? Write down as many details as you can remember?

When did it happen? Where? Who is in the scene? What kind of people are they? What is their relationship to each other? What's happened to them before this scene? Where are they going next?

Why is this a favorite scene? How does it make you feel? Did it change you in some way when you saw it, change how you felt or thought? If so, how?

00:10-00:25 - Torah story vs script

Look at the Stories handout, which has both a Torah story and a scene from a movie or play.

What are the details you get? What do you know about this story, just from reading it here without other knowledge? What details do you want to know, or feel you need to fully understand?

Split into groups of 4-5 in breakout rooms to read both stories and compare and respond to these questions.

Have groups [Jamboard](#) answers as they go. Session leader can bring them all together for the last 3 minutes and read out repeated ideas/themes.

When in doubt, make a choice.

00:25-00:35 - [History and purpose of public Torah reading](#)

Using [Nehemiah 8:1-9](#), [Bava Kama 82a](#), teach about the return of Babylonian Jews under

Ezra, the discovery of the loss of traditional knowledge and practice, and Ezra's instituting 10 edicts to try and restore Jewish identity and practice. One of which was -the first public reading of the Torah. It was established on Mon and Thurs. There are various explanations in Jewish text for why, some mystical (connected to Moses going up to Mt Sinai on Mon and descending on a Thurs), some mathematical (readings on Sat, Mon and Thurs minimize the number of days gone without hearing Torah) and one practical - Mon and Thurs were the market days, and so it was practically the best time to ensure people would be around to hear it! It's also when Ezra instituted judges to hear people's disputes, likely for the same reason.

Ezra wanted the people to reconnect with their story powerfully and personally, "for all the people were weeping" Nehemiah 8:9. This was NOT a rote mumbling, or meaningless chant.

00:35-00:50 - [How actors analyze a script](#)

Using "Script Analysis Tools" handout, go through the journey.

Curiosity. Never taking anything for granted. No one shows up to do a "scene" in life. We only speak when we have something to say, for a reason. Why are these people talking? To each other? Now? Here? Why do they keep talking? Why doesn't it end after every line? What justifies (demands, really) that it continues?

Where are they? Really answer that, with the same specificity you did for your favorite scenes earlier. These are just on paper now, but the ones you listed were once too.

Someone had to make them real.

When are they? Same questions.

Look at each line (of dialogue, of stage direction) and decide what you think will happen next. Don't peek. Really think and justify your decision. Then see how close you were - make corrections to your assumptions with whatever new information you now have from the next line.

Put yourself in the situation- how would you feel as each of the characters in the scene? What would you be thinking, feeling, wanting? Where are you coming from? How do you feel about the other people in the scene? How does your body feel - are you full, hot, sweaty, tired, bored, scared?

Who is not in this scene but is affected by it?

When in doubt, make a choice.

00:50-01:15 - [Analyze the movie scene/Analyze the Torah scene](#)

Apply those tools to the two stories we read earlier. What new details have you learned?

Bonus - think of the most boring portion of the Torah you can imagine. Some dry list of offerings, or the rules of animal sacrifice. What happens to those sections when you ask all

## CORNERSTONE 2021 RESOURCE

the questions above? For animal sacrifice - what must it have smelled like in the Temple on sacrifice day? What happened to all the Priestly white garments with all that blood? Who was in charge of the Temple laundry? What was *their* day like?

**Take any section and ask “how specific and curious can i get about everyone in or affected by this scene?”**

When in doubt, make a choice.

This is why we read the Torah. To get this involved in our national, personal story.

### BRINGING IT BACK TO CAMP & SHIFTING TO IN PERSON:

In order to best adapt this program for in camp use I would suggest:

- Finding a place with large walls to hang up the texts
- Planting some counselors amongst the texts to observe camper’s reactions
- Bringing everyone into a circle for the discussion where everyone can see everyone else