



Educator's Guide

Torah Trope: Ancient Jewish Symbols

Ta'amei Hamikra, or as it's called in Yiddish, "trope," is a millennia-old system of music symbols that determines how each word in the Torah is recited. Although developed over thousands of years, this system is still used regularly today by Jews in synagogues around the world, as a guide to how to chant the Torah portions recited throughout each week.

If you listen to the chanting of the Torah today, the *nusach*, or melody, of the trope may sound different depending on what synagogue you're sitting in. However, regardless of the nusach, they are all a part of a tradition that dates back to the Second Temple.

[Link to video](#)

Further Learning

1. Chabad.org:
 - [Learn to Read Torah and Haftarah With Trope \(Audio\) - Chant the aliyah blessings, Torah portion and haftarah like a pro!](#)
 - [Torah Reading Trop \(Ta'amim\) - The musical cantillation notes for reading the Torah - Jewish Music - Audio](#)
 - [Who Made Up the Way We Sing the Torah? - Questions & Answers](#)
2. The Forward, [The Science of Torah-Chanting](#)
3. Columbia University Libraries, [Chanting the Torah Through the Centuries](#)
4. Jewish Encyclopedia, [CANTILLATION](#)
5. JTS, [The Meaning of the Shalsholet](#)
6. Aleph Beta, [Bar and Bat Mitzvah](#)



Review Questions

1. What is known as Judaism's "coming of age" ceremony??
 - a. Wedding
 - b. Bar/bat mitzvah**
 - c. Brit milah
 - d. Passover Seder
2. What is the heart of the bar/bat mitzvah ceremony?
 - a. The Torah reading**
 - b. The maftir
 - c. Shacharit
 - d. Throwing candies
3. Which of the following facts are true about Ta'amei Hamikra / Trope?
 - a. They are secret code to find the Ark of the Covenant
 - b. If you understand them, you know all the secrets of the Torah
 - c. They are ancient music symbols that determine how every word is sung**
 - d. They help the reader understand the Hebrew
4. When preparing a Torah reading, what does a Torah reader need to do?
 - a. Memorize the tune for every single word**
 - b. Memorize the the secret meaning of every word
 - c. Be able to recite it in Hebrew and their mother tongue
 - d. Have a bar or bat mitzvah
5. When did a proto-trope begin to develop in Jewish history?
 - a. In the 20th century before the Holocaust
 - b. Around the 15th century right before the Spanish Inquisition
 - c. Around the time the Crusaders attacked Jerusalem in the 11th century
 - d. Around 500 BCE after the Jews returned to Jerusalem from Babylon**
6. What did the prophet Ezra decree?
 - a. That the Torah should be read publicly on a daily basis
 - b. That the Torah should be read publicly on on Mondays and Thursdays**
 - c. That the Torah should be read publicly on a monthly basis



- d. That the Torah should be studied on an individual basis
7. What is Chironomy?
- a. The study of ancient Cairo
 - b. A verbal method to remember Torah trope
 - c. Hand signals used to guide the reader**
 - d. A musical composition for Torah reading
8. What is nikud?
- a. Hebrew vowels**
 - b. Hebrew consonants
 - c. Another name for Torah trope
 - d. A guide for how to read Yiddish script

Discussion Questions

1. What does the diversity within Torah trope teach us about the diversity of the Jewish people around the world? Do you think it would be better if all Jews chanted Torah with the same tune? What are the pros and cons of all Jews chanting Torah with the same tune?
2. How is different Trope used to diversify the atmosphere during the reading of different Jewish texts throughout the Jewish calendar (ie: high holidays, Tisha B'av, Torah vs. Haftarah)? Do you think this is an effective tool? What impact does it have on the participants?
3. In Judaism, music has been added to elevate rituals and traditions including everything from the seven blessings ([Sheva Brachot](#)) recited under the chuppah at a wedding to the songs sung during the [Passover seder](#) to the [Birkat Hamazon](#) (grace after meals). What is your favorite example of Judaism and music colliding in song?

Learning Activities

1. Using tools this [like one](#), ask your students to choose their favorite pasuk (verse) from the Torah and learn how to sing it with Ta'amei Hamikra (trope). They should then record themselves chanting their favorite pasuk and create a small presentation that includes:



- A recording of the verse being chanted with Ta'amei Hamikra
 - An image associated with the pasuk
 - A one-paragraph reflection on why the pasuk is meaningful to them
- 2.** Take your students on a field trip to a local synagogue on a Monday or Thursday morning when the Torah is being read. Ask your students to pay attention to the Torah reader based on the different types of Trope they learned about in the video. After the service, students should guess what Trope the Torah reader used. Ask the Torah reader to share about their Trope with your students and who taught it to them.
 - 3.** Play our [Kahoot](#) about Torah Trope!

Reflection Questions

- 1.** If you have read from the Torah before, describe the experience. Was it meaningful? Challenging? Inspiring? Explain how reading from the Torah made you feel. What do you think contributed to those feelings?
- 2.** What is the significance of chanting the same words with the same tune that your ancestors chanted for centuries? What does this mean to you?
- 3.** Did you have a bar or bat mitzvah? If so, what was the most meaningful aspect of it?