

4. Read the *Light of Torah* leaflet

- Invite one person to read aloud, OR invite each person to read a section, starting with the cover page and working your way to the back page.
- Where the leaflet asks you to pause to examine a verse or ponder a question, do so for as long as is fruitful, then move on.

5. Havrutah

- Having read the leaflet (and shared comments and revisited some of the text), enter into another period of discussion, pursuing a particular theme that caught your attention.
- As you share your perspective, don't be afraid to enter into robust (and respectful!) debate. Remember: the sages of Israel teach that the Torah has seventy faces, i.e., many interpretations.
- Keep your comments grounded in the text and in the great tradition of faith. The sages, even when presenting highly creative points of view, didn't pull things from the air. Be creative, engage your life experience, be true to your unique personality, *but* stay with the text!

- Listen well to one another, and approach your discussion prayerfully. God is Love and our Torah study is to be loving praise of God.

6. Closing

Invite people to sum up their experience with a brief response to one of the following questions:

- How has your understanding of this bible text been stretched with the help of the insights of the sages and this little community gathered?
- Has this Torah experience shed light on any New Testament passages, on any words/actions of Jesus or on Christian practices? If so, how?
- What impact might this text, and your table discussion, have on your daily life and spirituality? Name one practical resolution you will take away from your time together.
- Finish with a prayer of thanksgiving for the gift of God's Word.

7. Let the meal continue!

- Dessert? Coffee, anyone? Refreshed by God's Word, continue to enjoy the meal and the company of God's people!

Start-up Series: Leaflet #3



Light of Torah

“But those who study the Torah give forth light wherever they may be. It is like one standing in the dark with a lamp in his hand”

(Exodus Rabbah 36,3).

How to lead a Torah group at home, at table

Torah study groups

The central goal of the *Light of Torah* movement is to encourage Catholic households to engage in regular reflection on portions of the Torah, often around a meal table, in a spirit of joy and celebration.

This twofold domestic dynamic—scripture and meal—mirrors and supports the twofold liturgical dynamic of Word and Eucharist, so central to Catholic life and worship.

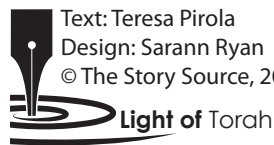
We approach our Torah study with the awareness that:

- The home is a holy place;
- God *speaks* to us through God's Word;
- God speaks to us as *a people*; we treasure the sacred story of God's people;
- Just as the Word was made flesh in the fragile humanity of Jesus, the Word is also 'enfleshed' in the fragile human words of the biblical text;
- In studying Torah with Jewish sources we are responding to the Church's call (*Nostra Aetate*, 4) for Christians to be attentive to their Jewish spiritual heritage;
- Our Torah study is not just intellectual curiosity but transformation of lifestyle;
- Small steps count.

“Just as rain comes down in drops and forms rivers, so with the Torah; one studies a bit today and some more tomorrow, until in time one becomes like a flowing stream.” (Song of Songs Rabbah)

TeresaPirola.net

Text: Teresa Pirola
Design: Sarann Ryan
© The Story Source, 2010



Light of Torah is a grassroots movement that encourages Catholic parish audiences to be attentive to the gift of Torah and to the gift of Judaism that gave us Jesus, the Living Torah. Reproduction of its materials permitted for non-commercial church use. More information: lightoftorah.net

Further info & resources: www.lightoftorah.net



Additional tips

Hold the meal early enough so as to allow plenty of time for Torah discussion.

Nominate a leader/facilitator for each gathering (preferably not the person providing the meal) who will ensure that leaflets are copied, pens/paper are available, who will keep time and ensure that all have a chance to speak.

Voices from a Torah group

“In our group we read the text (or part of the text) twice. The first time we just listen, allowing the words to ‘wash over’ us. The second time we jot down observations as it is read.”

“I’ve learned patience with the text. I don’t demand ‘instant revelation.’ I enjoy the very sound of God’s word, trusting that it feeds me, even when I don’t always understand.”

Start-up steps

Seven steps to the joy of Torah

Basic tools:

- Bible
- *Light of Torah* leaflets

1. Gather for a meal

- Perhaps with extra touches of festivity.
- Start with a prayer of blessing/thanksgiving for the food, for the company and for the gift of God’s Word.
- Enjoy uplifting and positive table conversation as the meal proceeds.

2. Read the Torah portion of the week

- After the main course (and before dessert), turn your attention to the Torah portion of the week. The Torah reference is found on each *Light of Torah* leaflet. We follow the Jewish calendar of readings as this allows us to touch upon all five books of the Torah over the course of one year.
- It may help if people arrive having familiarised themselves with the text. Even so, read it aloud at table. It will sound ‘different’ verbalized in the midst of this little community. (Tip: choose a reader/s with a strong, clear voice)
- You are encouraged to read the whole Torah portion, however as this is quite lengthy many groups will find it easier to select part of the text (e.g., one chapter, or several verses). Even a morsel of scripture is nourishing. Israel’s sages would spend hours on a single word of the Torah!

Start-up steps

- Develop the practice of marking the text as you read/listen. That is, listen actively, underlining anything of interest such as puzzling words, repetitions, poetic phrases, interesting use of numbers or names, questions raised by the text. This is a method which we call ‘Archaeology of the Word’ (see Start-up Leaflet #5). Explain this method to your group early on in your Torah gatherings. With practice, they are sure to enjoy it!

3. Havrutah

- By ‘*havrutah*’ we refer to the process of discussing the biblical text in a small group. *Havrutah* is related to the Hebrew word *haverim*, ‘friends.’ This study method pre-dates Jesus and is still the principal pedagogy for Torah study in Judaism today. [Prov. 27:17 teaches that *Iron sharpens iron, and one person sharpens the wits of another.*] In fact, if you visit a Jewish place of Torah study you will find nothing like a hushed library or meditation space; rather, a noisy room filled with excited voices and spirited debate. Torah study is active engagement, and it can be absolutely thrilling!
- In *havrutah* share your initial reactions, observations, questions about the text. Don’t try to ‘solve’ everything; simply table all the interesting aspects you saw, heard, underlined, circled. Marvel at the array of insights already evident from your reading. Let the challenges of the text dance before you and tantalize your faith buds! (‘What on *earth* could that mean???’ ‘Could God *really* be saying that...?’)



Home is a holy place

Create a home environment that is warm and hospitable, prayerful and inviting; e.g.,

- Greet people personally when they arrive;
- Prepare an uncluttered, inviting Torah space;
- Place a symbol in the centre of the table—a candle, a bible, a religious icon. [One group has a small ceramic reproduction of a first century oil lamp as a reminder that *‘the commandment is a lamp, and the Torah is light* (Prov. 6:23).]
- Be flexible. Adapt the process to your group. E.g., a monthly instead of weekly gathering may be more feasible for your situation.