5 challenges

Our Torah reflection overleaf speaks of a just and humane system that protects both workers and landowners. The challenge of balancing diverse needs and interests is felt every day by families, businesses, nations, the global community. Discuss in light of your own personal and community experiences. Five examples follow.

1. **Family**
   How do parents balance the needs of their children (physically, medically, emotionally, educationally) while attending to their own and the whole family’s wellbeing?

2. **Workplace**
   How does an organization design parental leave policies so as to support family life, the rights of both genders, and the productivity/goals of the organization?

3. **Nation**
   How does a government balance the best insights of a welfare system with the best insights of a capitalist system so that the vulnerable are protected while personal initiative is encouraged?

4. **World**
   The global community desperately wants peace in the Middle East. Yet how to protect the civil and religious interests of all groups is a perplexing challenge.

5. **Religion**
   How does a religious tradition move with the times while preserving core, timeless truths? How does it introduce change into traditions and customs that are centuries old?

---

**Why reflect on Torah?**

“Since Christians and Jews have such a common spiritual heritage, this sacred council wishes to encourage and further mutual understanding and appreciation. This can be achieved, especially, by way of biblical and theological enquiry and through friendly discussion.”

— Vatican II: *Nostra Aetate*, 4

The church teaching above may not sound earth-shattering to us today, however at the time (1965) it represented a radical reappraisal of what had been a conflicted relationship with the Jewish people for most of the history of Christianity. Further, it is a statement made at a General Ecumenical Council. Among the various levels of authority at which the church teaches, this is the highest level.

But even major teachings can take a long time to reach the ‘nooks and crannies’ of daily life. *Light of Torah* is a tool to take this teaching directly to the grassroots. It invites parishioners to read the Torah (the first five books of the bible) week by week, drawing on Jewish insights. In this way, parishioners grow in an appreciation of Judaism while being enriched in their Christian faith.

---

Light of Torah is a ministry arising from the Catholic community. In the spirit of Vatican II’s call to Jewish-Christian reconciliation, Light of Torah encourages Torah reflection in homes and parishes, drawing on the insights of Jewish interpretative traditions. Reproduction permitted for non-commercial pastoral use.

---

**Light of Torah**

Ancient texts, through fresh eyes, alive for today.
The sages discuss the fact that the permission to eat is restricted and conditional. Says Rashi, the text sets up an opposition: eat as much as you desire (lit: ‘as your soul’), but only your fill. A hungry worker should not have to endure the sight of forbidden fruit, but nor should the land owner be exploited by a glutton. While detailed interpretations vary according to translation (and you may wish to consult more than one version), the sages generally agree that the Torah is protective of both labourer and land owner. The Talmud observes that permission to eat keeps the worker in good health and so increases productivity; but storage and removal of the produce is not in the owner’s interests. The Mishnah notes that by urging self-control the text is protective of the labourer lest he ruin his own employment prospects. Meanwhile, other opinions in the tradition stress the Torah’s humane quality: permission to eat is not a form of payment on top of existing wages, but simply a gesture of kindness. Strict justice in employment relations does not eliminate the need for goodwill and compassion.

What current issues come to mind as you ponder this ancient text. E.g., note how the Torah teaches restraint (Rashi: ‘eat your fill but only your fill’); compare this to the 2011 London riots where comfortably well-off youths reportedly joined in the looting of consumer goods.

Bibliography: Eskenazi and Weiss, eds., The Torah: A Women’s Commentary (NY, 2008); Herczeg, trans., The Torah: With Rashi’s Commentary (NY: Mesorah, 2011); Leibowitz, New Studies in Devarim (NY: Lambda); Scripture: NJPS.

1. Bava Mezia, Mishnah 7,3; 87b.
2. Malbim, 19th c.
3. Maimonides, 12th c.
4. Rashi, 11th c.
5. The Mishnah: an early compilation of rabbinic teachings (2nd c. onwards) which was later incorporated into the Talmud.