

5 ways

to pray the V'ahavta ('You shall love...' Deut. 6:5-9)

Pray these words of scripture, along with the interpretative phrases below:

1. 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might' (Deut. 6:5). *Yes, we will love you, Lord, with every breath, for as long as we live. We will love you with all the power of our hearts' longings, with every ounce of our will, and with all that we hold dear in life.*

2. 'Keep these words...in your heart. Recite them to your children...' (6:6-7). *Yes, we will ponder your teachings, Lord. We will do all we can to pass them on to our children.*

3. '...and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise' (Deut. 6:6-7). *We will*

reflect on your words at home, and take them into our workplace, our neighbourhood, wherever we find ourselves in our day; whether we are tired or rested, troubled or at peace.

4. 'Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead...' (6:8). *Yes, Lord, we will let your words influence all that we handle; we will keep your words at the forefront of our minds, as the guiding light of our vision.*

5. '...and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates' (Deut. 6:9). *We will make them the touchstone in our decision-making. We will not leave them behind at the door of our houses, or outside the gates of our lives.*



Light of Torah
www.lightoftorah.net

Text: Teresa Pirola
Design: Sarann Ryan
© Light of Torah, 2012

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.



Deuteronomy 3:23—7:11

Va'-ethanan:
'I pleaded'

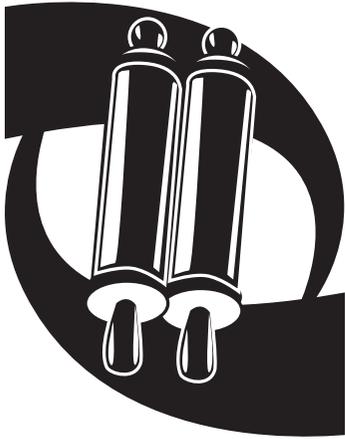
Why reflect on Torah?

"For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished" (Matthew 5:18, NRSV).

As a faithful Jew, Jesus' life and teachings were firmly grounded in Torah. In order to understand more deeply our sacred scriptures and Jesus himself, we Christians can draw nourishment from the insights of the Jewish tradition, conscious of our historical, biblical and spiritual connections. As Pope John Paul II said during his visit to the Synagogue of Rome in 1986:

"The Church of Christ discovers its 'links' with Judaism 'by pondering its own mystery'. The Jewish religion is not 'extrinsic' to us, but in a certain manner, it is 'intrinsic' to our religion. We have therefore a relationship with it which we do not have with any other religion."

May this *Light of Torah* leaflet series encourage Christians to be more aware and appreciative of the Jewish-Christian relationship. Join us this week as the sages teach us to be prayerfully and creatively attuned to the details of the sacred text.



Torah Portion

From the Jewish calendar of Torah readings:

Deuteronomy 3:23—7:11

As Moses continues his farewell discourse just outside the promised land, he reminds the Israelites of the momentous events on Mt Sinai when the Lord gave the Torah (the 'teaching', 'instruction', 'law') and established a covenant with his people.

The Book of Deuteronomy is also referred to as "The Book of the Righteous" (*Sefer HaYosher*). Why? Because of the prominence of "Do what is right" (6:18), a phrase which we will explore here in conversation with the sages.

Tasting Torah

"Do what is right and good in the sight of the Lord..." (6:18).

This verse caught the eye of the sages. It appeared to them as an 'irritation' in the text calling for closer attention. They noted that it follows numerous exhortations to 'keep the commandments' (e.g., see 4:1,5-9; 5:1,2,9; 6:1,2,17). Throughout this Torah portion there is constant insistence that every law and statute be faithfully observed. Why, then, asked the Jewish sages, do we find the addition of this instruction to 'do what is right and good'? Surely if a person keeps all the commandments, he/she will be living in a way which is 'right and good'!

For the sages, words of Torah are never superfluous; there must be deeper meaning to be discovered in this verse. Ponder it with a friend... what do you discover there?

Touching Torah

Perhaps you considered, as did two great sages, Rashi and Maimonides,¹ that obedience to rules alone is not enough to ensure a just and loving society. More is needed. It is possible to keep the letter of the law but to violate its spirit. Indeed, it is possible to actually negate the depths of God's desires through foolish use of the letter of the law. As Rashi puts it: *That which is right and good: this implies a compromise...going beyond what the law requires.*

Depthing Torah

The 20th century Jewish thinker Rabbi Yeshaya Shapira (d.1942) enters the discussion this way:

Whoever wishes to achieve a perfect observance of the Torah cannot rest content with adhering to its explicit rulings. He must penetrate deeper in order to arrive at the ultimate aim of these rulings. He must not only think of what is good and upright in his own eyes but that 'which is upright and good in the eyes of the Lord'...²

That we should live by the spirit of the law and not just the letter of the law is a familiar teaching to Christians. What is important here is to recognize it also as a fundamental tenet of Judaism. Sadly, in the history of the church Christians have often stereotyped Judaism as a 'legalistic' religion in contrast to Christianity as a religion of 'love' and 'of the spirit'. We can help dispel such stereotypes by becoming acquainted with the interpretative processes at work in Jewish tradition, how the legal passages in scripture are handled delicately and creatively by Jewish commentators.

Doing Torah

Continue to ponder these ideas with reference to this week's Torah portion.

In your own words, describe what it means to "Do what is right and good in the sight of the Lord..." (6:18).



Faith & Life

A rabbinic saying:

Said Rabbi Yohanan: Jerusalem was destroyed only because they acted with the letter of the Torah and did not go beyond it. (Bava Mezia 30b)

Talk about the dangers of legalism and superficial practice in your own life of faith. How can we seek to penetrate Christian teachings to reach their deepest sense and meaning for our lives?

1. **Rashi:** Rabbi Shelomo Yitzhaki, 11th c., France.

Maimonides: Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon (also known as Rambam), 12th c., Spain, Egypt.

2. Quoted by Leibowitz, 63.

Bibliography: Leibowitz, *New Studies in Devarim* (NY: Lambda); Rashi: *Commentary on the Torah* (NY: Mesorah, 2001). Scripture: NRSV