



5 Ways to ponder God's Word

Bible reflection tips

God's Word is a living word. A stirring word. A word that speaks heart to heart. A love letter. A voice that comes to us through the People of God, drawing us ever more intimately into communion with God and one another. Both Christians and Jews share this lively engagement with Scripture.

1. Read. Above all, read the text! The Exodus story can appear so familiar that we might be tempted to skip over it and just read a commentary instead. Always go to the bible text and read it for yourself.

2. Revisit. Allow the Book of Exodus to remind you of some stirring 'exodus' songs (e.g., "We Shall Overcome"), images (fall of the Berlin wall), speeches (Martin Luther King: "I Have a Dream").

3. Watch. The animated film *Prince of Egypt* is an adaptation of the Moses story. Watch it with your children as a way of encouraging a

bible-based discussion at home, noting how the film is similar and different to the bible story.

4. Wrestle. Like the sages of old, probe the biblical text, question it, wrestle with its puzzling aspects. In your thinking and study, *make an effort*. Fire up your reflections with prayer.

5. Pair up. Be inspired by the time-honored method of *havrutah*, i.e., share scripture with one or two friends (*haverim* in Hebrew). "Iron sharpens iron" (Proverbs 27:17). Just as one piece of iron sharpens another, so two will sharpen each other's minds by discussion of a sacred text.

Light of Torah

Ancient texts, through fresh eyes, alive for today.

Why reflect on Torah?

This leaflet series, *Light of Torah*, encourages Christians to read the Torah with the help of Jewish insights into the sacred text.

'Torah' (Hebrew: 'teaching', 'instruction') refers to the first five books of the bible. These books come to us through the faith and life of the Jewish people who continue to engage with their sacred texts. As a faithful Jew, Jesus' life and teachings were firmly rooted in Torah. In order to understand more deeply our sacred scriptures, and Jesus himself, we Christians can draw nourishment from the faith and spirituality of Judaism.

Pope John Paul II, on numerous occasions, affirmed the close bond between Christians and Jews. During a visit to the Synagogue of Rome (1986), he said:

"The Church of Christ discovers its 'links' with Judaism 'by pondering its own mystery' (NA4). 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. You are our favoured brothers and, in a certain sense, one can say our elder brothers."



Exodus 1:1—6:1

Shemot: 'names'



Light of Torah
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Torah Portion

From the Jewish calendar of Torah readings:

Exodus 1:1—6:1

Today we begin the Book of Exodus. The title immediately brings to mind images of Moses the great liberator, the Israelites' wandering in the desert, the Ten Commandments, and so on. For many of us, our familiarity with this book comes from childhood bible stories, or perhaps from film and song. Now we have a chance to explore it afresh, ideally with a friend, perhaps taking turns to read the text aloud. What buried treasure can we uncover? Read on, with particular attention to the first two chapters of Exodus.

Tasting Torah

When we first encounter Moses in Chapter 2 of Exodus, he is a helpless child hidden among the reeds on the bank of the river. Within 16 verses, he has been saved, raised as an Egyptian prince and has fled to Midian. Having just intervened to kill an Egyptian who was beating a Hebrew slave, he now flees in order to save his own life.

Touching Torah

Have you ever wondered why Moses turned his back on his place of privilege to stand in solidarity with the enslaved Hebrews? The text simply reads, *“One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and saw their forced labor”* (2:11, NRSV). Surely it was a familiar sight to Moses. What made this time different? From the sages of old, to Torah scholars and students of our own day, many have pondered this passage.

According to Rashi,¹ Moses “focused his eyes and heart to share their distress.” Rashi’s interpretation, explains one commentator,² is attentive to the use of the Hebrew verb *ra’ah* (‘to see’) and the preposition *be* (‘in, into’). Thus the text can read, “he looked *into* their burdens.” Says an Australian student of Torah,³ “What strikes me about Rashi’s interpretation is that Moses saw their suffering not only with his eyes, but also with his heart.”

Did Moses act so strongly, even violently, because he saw with ‘eyes of the heart’? Ponder this passage and join in the Torah discussion.

Depthing Torah

Moses refuses to stand by in the face of injustice, but he is not the only one to do this. The courageous disobedience of women is also a key theme in these first chapters of Exodus. We find a Levite woman who hides her son amongst the reeds, thus dangerously contradicting Pharaoh’s edict. The infant’s sister (Miriam) colludes in this challenge to Pharaoh’s authority. Then Pharaoh’s daughter finds and saves the baby, willingly contravening the authority of her father.

Each of these valiant women creates a ripple of defiance that will become the swell of the exodus. The emerging message might be understood as this: it requires only one person to take a stand against injustice for the river of liberation to start flowing.

Doing Torah

- Describe a time when you saw something or someone with ‘eyes of the heart’ or when you ‘looked into the burden’ of another.
- Who is a ‘Moses’ figure in our own times?
- How can we teach our children to be obedient to God and disobedient to forces of evil?
- Creatively drawing upon your life experience and your reading of this week’s Torah portion, speculate as to what might have been going on within the mind/heart of Moses as he made the transition from ‘prince of Egypt’ to ‘liberator of slaves.’



From the Talmud

“The world stands upon the single column that is the just person.”
(TB Hagigah, 12b)

1. Rashi: outstanding Jewish Torah scholar of the Middle Ages.
2. Nehama Leibowitz, 1996.
3. Mark David Walsh, 2007.

Bibliography: Herczeg, ed., *Rashi: Commentary on the Torah* Vol.2 (NY: Mesorah, 1995, 1999); Leibowitz, *New Studies in Shemot* (NY, 1996); *parashah* commentaries at www.batkol.info.