



5 Ways

to cherish the gift of creation

Each week observant Jews keep the Shabbat, remembering that “God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that God had done in creation” (Gen.1:3). While observed in a unique way by the Jewish people, Shabbat is God’s gift to all humanity, divinely given in the context of the creation story. This week, try these five steps on Shabbat:

1. Stop. Cease the frenetic pace, even if for a moment. Breathe deeply and become conscious of your breath, the gift of life, that pulses through your body this day.

2. Listen. Be more attentive to the sights and sounds of creation around you: the warmth of sunlight, the texture of leaves, the smell of damp earth, the antics of a child, the heartbeat of a loved one.

3. Pray. Pray Psalm 8 with a sense of awe as you contemplate the beauty of this day and the presence of our Creator God who gives and sustains all life.

4. Affirm. Affirm the Creator’s handiwork by naming the God-given qualities you see in those around you. Perhaps do this as part of a conversation over a meal.

5. Enjoy. Enjoy the gift of life and celebrate it in a special way today over a shared meal with friends and family. Add flowers, candles, and a nice bottle of wine to the table setting. Include music. In Jewish communities there is a wealth of *nigunim* [melodies] especially composed to praise the gifts of creation and redemption as part of Shabbat celebrations.



Light of Torah
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Light of Torah

Ancient texts, through fresh eyes, alive for today.



Genesis 1:1—6:8

Bereshit.
‘in the beginning’

Why reflect on Torah?

Welcome to our *Light of Torah* series. In the spirit of the Second Vatican II which ushered in a new era in Jewish-Christian relations, this resource encourages Christians to learn from the Jewish people, especially from their tradition’s vast knowledge and experience of the Scriptures. As we follow the Jewish lectionary, over the course of one year we will visit each of the five books of the Torah: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.

If you are joining our Torah journey for the first time, welcome! Be patient as you find your way with the biblical texts and the method. It can take some ‘getting used to’, but as we enter into conversation with the Jewish commentators you will soon find yourself developing a new alertness to the sacred text: its questions, its puzzles, its dilemmas and layers of meaning.

If you are a seasoned *Light of Torah* reader, great! The fresh insights of this cycle will be feeding your growing familiarity with the Torah. As you are aware, each Torah portion contains countless paths of reflection, and a lifetime of study opportunities.



Torah Portion

For the start of the Jewish calendar of Torah readings.

Genesis 1:1–6:8

In the opening two chapters of Genesis the reader finds two different accounts of the creation of humankind. What are we to make of these differences? Read the two accounts closely in Genesis chapters 1 & 2, preferably with a friend, and with a pencil or highlighter to underline and circle key words, ideas, repetitions and poetic elements that strike you as unusual or interesting.

Bibliography: Joseph Soloveitchik, *The Lonely Man of Faith* (NY: Doubleday, 1965). Scripture: *NRSV*.

Tasting Torah

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it...” (Genesis 1:27-28)

So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. (Genesis 2:21-22)

What do you notice as you compare the two stories of the creation of humankind? How would you describe the persona of Adam/Eve 1 compared to Adam/Eve 2?

Touching Torah

Perhaps you noted that Adam 1 is characterized by a decisive commissioning to ‘subdue’ the earth. He, along with his female counterpart, is a man of action, productivity, initiative. He is *empowered* by God to call the shots, in control of himself and his environment. Adam 2, on the other hand, although given authority over the animals, is immediately led into an experience of sacrifice and surrender. He is *overpowered* by God as he succumbs to sleep and relinquishes part of his own body in the creation of woman. Do you agree with these observations? What else did you observe in the text? How might we explain or reconcile these different Adams/Eves?

Depthing Torah

If we were examining Genesis from an historical viewpoint we might suggest that the two stories represent two distinct storytelling traditions preserved in the text. But let’s set aside such theories here and hear instead from Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, an esteemed Torah scholar of the 20th century, who interprets Genesis with a compelling synthesis of traditional biblical wisdom and modern religious anthropology.

According to Soloveitchik, in these Torah texts we see two kinds of instincts in the human person, both willed by God. God wants us to be both active *and* submissive, victory-bent *and* humble, disciplined *and* docile. Enshrined in our existence is a creative tension between self-expression and covenantal relationship; individuality and community. Thus Genesis reveals something of the mysterious, complex depths and paradoxes of the human person, setting humankind apart in the order of creation.

Doing Torah

Table topic: Integrating the diverse qualities of the two Adams is the great challenge of human and spiritual growth. Can you name somebody who exhibits this integration? Discuss the challenge that Genesis 1-2 poses in your life. Do you most resemble Adam/Eve 1 or 2?

Can you recognize the tension mentioned above in other biblical stories (e.g., the gospel story of Mary and Martha, Lk.10:38-42)?



Faith & Life

A Light of Torah reader says:

“I work in a stressful environment where there is a tendency for people to focus on all the problems and pitfalls of the job. There is one manager, however, who is clearly different. He has a knack of breathing hope into every meeting. I’ve watched him in action and I think his secret is to focus on people’s strengths and the positive potential of any given situation. He achieves productivity *with* and *through* people, not at their expense. I guess you could call him Adam 1 *and* 2; he is both productive *and* relational!”