



5 Ways

to enjoy God's Word

Simhat Torah ('Rejoicing in the Torah') is a Jewish festival celebrated just prior to the start of the annual cycle of readings. In synagogues throughout the world, Torah scrolls are dressed as brides; people take the scrolls in their arms and dance jubilantly in procession. As Christians we are reminded that we too are a people who exult in God's Word. With that in mind:

1. Smile.

God's Word is an extraordinary gift in our lives. Rejoice in the gift! The Bible, which has transformed persons and communities over centuries of reflection, is right at our fingertips.

2. Listen.

Listen more attentively than usual to the readings in church each Sunday. If something seems puzzling or strange to your ears, do some 'homework' to deepen your understanding.

3. Watch.

Absorb God's Word with your eyes. Look at those who read...they are part of the proclamation of God's Word.

Watch attentively as the Book is held high during the Gospel procession at Mass.

4. Enjoy.

Table tip: Read and discuss a little scripture at the end of your meal with those at table. Perhaps use this leaflet as an aid. Enjoy a celebratory drink together... a toast to Torah!

5. Dance.

Dance for joy before the Word of God? Well, King David did (2 Samuel 6:14,21). You can always try this at home! Whatever your style, celebrate the joy and life that flows from the gift of God's Word.

Light of Torah

Ancient texts, through fresh eyes, alive for today.

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



Genesis 1:1—6:8

Bereshit:
'in the beginning'



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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.

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Torah Portion

For the start of the Jewish calendar of Torah readings.

Genesis 1:1–6:8

The invitation today is to open our bible at its very beginning: Genesis 1. It begins with an account of the creation of the world (1:1-2:4), not in scientific language but rather communicating a theological view. In a simple story profound religious truths are expressed. Chances are, you are familiar with the story, perhaps having known it since childhood. Herein lies a challenge: to listen again, and to speak it aloud. Better still, voice it aloud with a friend... What fresh insight does the Word of God hold in store for me, for us, this day? Prayerfully, let's read, let's ponder, let's question and—in a reverent way—even 'play' with the text...

Tasting Torah

Try reading Genesis 1:1-2:4 slowly and deliberately, savoring its rhythmic structure. What is interesting here? Certainly the repetition of 'God-plus-verb'.

God said... God saw...

God separated... God called...

What is strange about it? The austere language and plodding sound-pattern makes it all seem so orderly, effortless. God says, God sees, God separates, God calls... and it is so. Surely the creation of the world can't be that easy!

But here lies the power of the text's structure to communicate a central message. God is portrayed as being totally in control of, and at peace with, the creative process. There is gradual ascent, but no urgency; nothing is forced. God gets there, when God is ready.

Touching Torah

Yet there is a paradox. There is methodical rhythm and careful order, yes. But on the other hand, as the story unfolds, it bursts at the seams with imagery that is anything but calm and restrained: 'swarms' of creatures, 'seed-bearing' plants, living things of 'every kind' (a phrase repeated nine times). The picture is of unwieldy growth spurts, lifegiving abundance, joyful abandon! And that's before we reach God's crowning creation: human beings. Man and woman are called 'exceedingly good' and told to reproduce. (How fascinating that God's first command to the human race is to 'make love'!)

Depthing Torah

And as if that isn't enough, behind the creation story Jewish tradition abounds with even more creation stories. In brief, one of them goes like this: God consults with Torah before creating the world. When Torah expresses her skepticism as to whether the world can survive human sinfulness, God assures her that human goodness will indeed prevail. After all, God has already created repentance... The message: God is not only creative, but decisive and optimistic in the act of creating.

Doing Torah

Created as we are in the divine image, we too are equipped with extraordinary lifegiving power. How terrifying! There is so much that dampens our creative spark: rejection, failure, the slavery of unbridled work schedules. Little wonder that people pull their heads in, saying, "I'm not the creative type." Some are afraid to have a child. But the story of our beginnings calls us not to be afraid; to believe that, embedded in our very existence, is a desire to burst forth, spill over, share, and extend the very life force, natural and spiritual, that pulses within us.

Reflect: *God is my Creator.* Ponder the intimacy of this relationship.

Think of an aspect of your God-given creativity that has been dimmed by hurt or sin. How does God want to 'recreate' that part of you? What healing steps can you take?



Faith & Life

A parishioner shares this story:

My friend longed for a child but was having difficulty conceiving. When she found out that she was pregnant she could not contain her joy. Even the news that she was susceptible to a miscarriage could not dampen her spirits. "Are you sure you want to tell people about your pregnancy just yet?" I cautioned. "Absolutely!" she replied. "The joy for me is that I've conceived!"

There was I, a tired mother of two, thinking: why put all that energy into something that might not come to be? And there was she, fully accepting the risks, and reminding me of the miracle of life.

Bibliography: Fox, *The Five Books of Moses* (NY, 1995); Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, (www.sacred-texts.com/jud/loj/index.htm); *HarperCollins Study Bible: NRSV*