



## 5 steps

### to Havruta-style Torah reflection

The Hebrew word *Havruta* is related to *haver*: 'friend.' We use the term to refer to a method of Torah reflection which draws from traditional Jewish ideas and practices that emphasize a learning *partnership*. *Havruta* is built upon *active listening*; listening deeply to the text and to each other as we ponder God's Word together. As well as *listening*, here are five more elements of *havruta*-style Torah reflection:

- 1. Articulate:** In pairs, or threes, take turns verbalizing your thoughts. Avoid making definitive statements too early in the process.
- 2. Wonder:** There are infinite depths to God's Word. Even if you lean towards a certain view, maintain an open mind and heart to the world of imagination and possibility.
- 3. Focus:** While staying open to various paths, don't get 'lost' in them. Harness the discuss to focus on a particular point of interpretation or debate.
- 4. Support:** Encourage your partner in his/her enquiry by affirming efforts, interacting with ideas, and asking questions that might urge the other to greater clarity of thought.
- 5. Challenge:** *Havruta* involves asking questions that call the other to rethink their position, highlighting inconsistencies and proposing an alternative interpretation. Envisaged here is not a style of debate which seeks to 'defeat' the other, but one enhances the joy and excitement of mutual learning.

Note: Orit Kent's 'core havruta practices' are discussed by Mark David Walsh in 'An Introduction to Havruta Style Learning' (IFRS Faculty Lecture Series, Manila, 16 Aug 2011)



Light of Torah  
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# Light of Torah

Ancient texts, through fresh eyes, alive for today.



Leviticus 21:1—24:23

*Emor*: 'say'

## Why reflect on Torah?

At a meeting in Rome in 1982, Pope John Paul II urged bishops and other church leaders to study the relationship between the Church and Judaism, and to take special care with the way Judaism is presented in Catholic teaching:

*'We should aim, in this field, that Catholic teaching at its different levels, in catechesis to children and young people, presents Jews and Judaism, not only in an honest and objective manner, free from prejudices and without any offences, but also with full awareness of the heritage common [to Jews and Christians].'* (6.3.82)

This *Light of Torah* series responds to this call by encouraging Catholic 'grassroots' audiences to develop a thirst for Torah while respecting and learning from traditional Jewish approaches to the sacred text.

In its specific sense, 'Torah' refers to the first five books of the bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. By opening ourselves to Jewish approaches and commentators concerning these biblical texts, our Christian appreciation of God's Word is nourished and expanded.



## Torah Portion

From the Jewish calendar of Torah readings:

### Leviticus 21:1—24:23

Today's Torah portion contains a verse that describes two of Judaism's key commandments. This verse (Leviticus 22:32) has been called 'Israel's bible in miniature.' First, it warns against profaning the Divine Name. Then it calls for the Divine Name to be sanctified ('hallowed') by Israel. In Jewish teaching, this double-command is for every Jew, to be fulfilled by the witness of his/her life.

## Tasting Torah

*You are not to profane my holy name, that I may be hallowed amid the children of Israel; I am the Lord, the one-who-hallows you (Lev. 22:32).*

Although spoken to Israel's priests, this command has long been applied to the whole of Israel. The Hebrew term for sanctifying the Lord's Name is *Kiddush HaShem*. We are hallowed by God's holiness that we might hallow God's Name.

## Touching Torah

*Kiddush HaShem* is to act in a loving and just way so that those who witness it become aware of the presence of God in their midst. God calls us into a relationship of love, and all our thoughts and deeds, every aspect of our lives, should reflect the holiness of our Creator. Abraham Heschel<sup>1</sup> said, "Just to *be* is a blessing, just to live is holy."

There is a famous *Kiddush HaShem* recorded in the Talmud:<sup>2</sup>

Rav Shimon ben Shetach's students bought a donkey for their teacher from a person from outside the Jewish community. They discovered a precious stone attached to the donkey unbeknown to the seller. Rabbi Shimon ordered them to return it. When questioned why it was necessary to do so since the law did not require it, Rav Shimon replied that his goal in life was not amassing wealth. Rather he desired hearing a non-Jew blessing God more than all the wealth in the world!

## Depthing Torah

Of course, the command to sanctify God's name is for Christians too. Says Sr Ann Kelly, fmdm, of Lusaka, Zambia: "While studying this portion with my Torah study partner, we became aware of a new meaning to the Lord's Prayer. When we pray 'hallowed (holy) be your name' we are expressing something which is integral in the Jewish spirituality of Jesus, the deep sense of the holiness of God's name. These words call us to constant conversion. The personal Divine mission for each of us in this world is to sanctify God's Name. We all have daily challenges to do this."<sup>3</sup>

According to the Talmud, the sublime love of God calls for the active engagement of one's whole life, even unto death where death is preferable to desecrating the Name of God in public apostasy. However, while acts of martyrdom feature in Jewish history, biblical and rabbinic sources view *Kiddush HaShem* primarily as an expression of faith in the day-to-day realities of living.

## Doing Torah

Think back over your day. In what practical ways did you 'sanctify the Lord's name'? What opportunities will come your way tomorrow?

Reflect with Bernadette Farrell's hymn, *God beyond all Names*, conscious of the lyrics, "All around us we have known you, all creation lives to hold you. In our living and our dying we are bringing you to birth."



## Faith & Life

Pray the Lord's Prayer ('Our Father'), more slowly than usual, meditating on those words, "*Hallowed be your name...*" and on the Jewish teacher who taught them to us (see Matthew 6:9-13).

Allow these words to give your day its prayerful rhythm and focus.

1. Heschel: American Jewish philosopher, 20<sup>th</sup> c.
2. Yerushalmi Bava Metzia 2:5
3. This leaflet based on the *Parashat Emor* commentary by Ann Kelly, fmdm, 2008, Bat Kol Institute, Jerusalem: [www.batkol.info](http://www.batkol.info)

Other works consulted: Fox, *The Five Books of Moses* (NY, 1995); Leibowitz, *New Studies in Vayikra, Vol 2* (NY, 1996); Munk, *The Call of the Torah* (NY, 1992).