

5 Ways

to cherish the gift of creation

Every Saturday, observant Jews observe *Shabbat*, remembering that “God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation” (Gen.1:3). While observed in a unique way by the Jewish people, *Shabbat* is God’s gift to all people, offered in the context of the creation story. This *Shabbat*, take time out to be attentive to your Creator and to creation.

1. 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.

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 hand of our Creator God who gives and sustains all life.

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

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

Light of Torah

Ancient texts, through fresh eyes, alive for today.



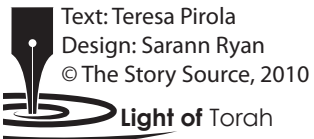
Why reflect on Torah?

‘Torah’ refers to the first five books of the Bible. These writings are treasured by Jews and Christians alike. Yet Christians often tend to overlook this part of the bible, preferring to go straight to the New Testament. When we do this we rob ourselves of the rich soil in which the gospel message is planted. As the Pontifical Biblical Commission reminds us, “Without the Old Testament, the New Testament would be an incomprehensible book, a plant deprived of its roots and destined to dry up and wither” (2001).

In our times, the Church urges us to revisit our Jewish roots and to learn from the Jewish people. This *Light of Torah* series encourages Catholics to read Torah with the help of Jewish insights. Today’s focus is the Torah portion read in synagogues on the Saturday after the Jewish festival *Simhat Torah* (‘Rejoicing in Torah’). In synagogues, the first five books of the bible are read over the course of a year. The festival *Simhat Torah* (1 Oct 2010) marks the completion of the annual cycle of Torah readings and anticipates the opening chapters of Genesis as the cycle begins anew.

Issue #1.
2 Oct 2010.
Genesis 1:1—6:8
Bereshit: ‘In the beginning’

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Torah Portion

For the start of the Jewish calendar of Torah readings, 2 Oct 2010.

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.

Sources: Joseph Soloveitchik, *The Lonely Man of Faith* (NY: Doubleday, 1965). Scripture quotations: *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...” (Gen. 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. (Gen. 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!”