

4. Read the *Light of Torah* leaflet

- Invite one person to read aloud, OR invite each person to read a section, starting with the cover page and working your way to the back page.
- Where the leaflet asks you to pause to examine a verse or ponder a question, do so for as long as is fruitful, then move on.

5. Havrutah

- Having read the leaflet (and shared comments and revisited some of the text), enter into a further period of discussion, pursuing a particular theme that caught your attention.
- As you share your perspective, don't be afraid to enter into robust and respectful debate. Remember: the sages of Israel teach that the Torah has 'seventy faces,' i.e., many interpretations.
- Keep your comments grounded in the text and in the great tradition of faith. The great sages, even when presenting highly creative points of view, didn't pull things from the air. Be creative, engage your life experience, be true to your unique personality, *but* stay with the text!

- *Listen* to one another; approach your discussion prayerfully. God is Love and our Torah study is to be loving praise of God.

6. Closing

Invite people to sum up their experience with a brief response to one of the following questions:

- How has your understanding of this bible passage been stretched with the help of the insights of the sages and this little community gathered?
- Has this Torah experience shed light on any New Testament passages, on any words/actions of Jesus or on Christian practices? If so, how?
- What impact might this text, and your table discussion, have on your daily life and spirituality? Name one practical resolution you will take away from your time together.
- Finish with a prayer of thanksgiving for the gift of God's Word.

7. Let the joy overflow!

- Anyone for drinks, more coffee? Refreshed by God's Word, continue to enjoy the company of God's people!

Start-up Series: Leaflet #3



Light of Torah

*“But those who study
the Torah give forth light
wherever they may be.
It is like one standing in the
dark with a lamp in his hand”*
(Exodus Rabbah 36,3).

How to lead a Torah group
at home, with friends

Torah in the home

Light of Torah encourages regular Torah reflection in small group Christian settings.

While a group can meet any time and anywhere—e.g., on a Tuesday night in a parish meeting room—give serious consideration to Torah sessions in the home. Breaking open the Word in the home has a powerful impact on one's lifestyle; it is part of the spirituality and mission of the 'domestic church.'

We approach our Torah study with the awareness that:

- The home is a holy place;
- God *speaks* to us through God's Word;
- God speaks to us as *a people*; we treasure the sacred story of God's people;
- The Word was made flesh in the fragile humanity of Jesus; and the Word is 'enfleshed' in the fragile human words of the biblical text;
- By studying Torah with Jewish sources we are responding to the Church's call (*Nostra Aetate*, 4) for its members to be attentive to their Jewish spiritual heritage;
- Our Torah study is not just intellectual curiosity but transformation of life;
- Small steps count: *“Just as rain comes down in drops and forms rivers, so with the Torah; one studies a bit today and some more tomorrow, until in time one becomes like a flowing stream.”* (Song of Songs Rabbah)



Light of Torah
www.lightoftorah.net

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Through weekly reflections, Light of Torah encourages Catholic parishes and other Christian audiences to be attentive to the gift of Torah and to learn from the interpretative traditions of Judaism. This is in the spirit of Vatican II's commitment to Jewish-Christian relations. Reproduction permitted for non-commercial parish use.



Voices from a Torah group

"In our group we read the text twice. The first time we just listen, allowing the words to 'wash over' us. The second time we jot down observations as it is read."

"I've learned patience with the text. I don't demand 'instant revelation.' I enjoy the very sound of God's word, trusting that it feeds me, even when I don't always understand."

Further info & resources:
www.lightoftorah.net

Start-up steps

Seven steps to the joy of Torah

Basic tools:

- Bible
- *Light of Torah* leaflets
- Optional: coloured pens and a print-out of the text.

Nominate a facilitator for each gathering who will ensure that leaflets are copied, pens are available, who will keep time and ensure that all have a chance to speak.

1. Gather

- Start with a prayer of blessing/thanksgiving for this time together in the company of good people and the gift of God's Word.

2. Read the Torah portion of the week

- Turn your attention to the Torah portion of the week. The Torah reference is found on each *Light of Torah* leaflet. We follow the Jewish calendar of readings as this allows us to touch upon all five books of the Torah over the course of one year.
- It may help if people arrive having familiarised themselves with the text. Even so, read it aloud. It will sound 'different' verbalized in the midst of this little community. (Choose a reader/s with a strong, clear voice.)
- You are encouraged to read the whole Torah portion, however as this is quite lengthy many groups will find it easier to select part of the text (e.g., one chapter, or several verses). Even a morsel of scripture is nourishing. The sages would spend hours on a single word of the Torah!

Start-up steps

- You may wish to develop the practice of marking the text as you read/listen. That is, listen actively, underlining or highlighting anything of interest such as puzzling words, repetitions, poetic phrases, interesting use of numbers or names, questions raised by the text. We refer to this method as 'Archaeology of the Word' (see Start-up Leaflet #5). Explain this method to your group early on in your Torah gatherings. With practice, they are sure to enjoy it!

3. Havrutah

- By '*havrutah*' we refer to the process of pondering the bible in a learning partnership—with a friend or a small group. *Havrutah* is related to the Hebrew word *haverim*, 'friends.' This study method pre-dates Jesus and is still the principal pedagogy for Torah study in Judaism today. [Prov. 27:17 teaches that '*Iron sharpens iron, and one person sharpens the wits of another.*'] In fact, if you visit a Jewish place of Torah study you will find nothing like a hushed library or meditation space; rather, a noisy room filled with spirited debate. Torah study is active engagement, and it can be absolutely thrilling!
- In *havrutah* share your initial reactions, observations, questions about the text. Don't try to 'solve' everything; simply table what you saw/heard. Marvel at the array of insights already evident. Let the challenges of the text dance before you and tantalize your faith buds! ('What might this mean?!' 'Could God really be saying that...?')



Home is a holy place

Create a home environment that is warm and hospitable, prayerful and inviting; e.g.,

- Greet people personally when they arrive;
- Prepare an uncluttered, inviting Torah space;
- Place a symbol in the centre of the table—a candle, a bible, a religious icon. [One group has a small ceramic reproduction of a first century oil lamp as a reminder that '*the commandment is a lamp, and the Torah is light* (Prov. 6:23).]
- Be flexible. Adapt the process to your group. E.g., a monthly instead of weekly gathering may be more feasible for your situation.