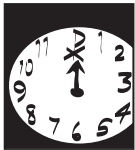


5 tips for table rituals

inspired by the Jewish Passover meal

Celebrating treasured table rituals with our children and grandchildren is one way religious faith is preserved through the generations. For the Jews, the *seder* meal is central to Passover celebrations. As a Catholic, what table rituals are part of your faith experience in the home? Be inspired by these elements from the Jewish Passover meal, the *seder*:



Unhurried. The *seder* is not a rushed meal. It takes priority, time and requires careful preparation. How often are our meals 'eat and run' events? How can we slow ourselves down to a wholesome pace?



Blessing. Blessings and prayers weave their way through the Jewish *seder*. What blessings and prayers are part of our own Catholic table rituals? What creative prayer additions can we bring to our table?



Story. The *seder* meal celebrates a powerful memory in Jewish consciousness: the Israelites' exodus from Egypt. Is storytelling part of your table experience? What memories do you treasure as family?



Question. "Why is this night different from all other nights?" asks a Jewish child at Passover. Is there a thought-provoking question, one that engages people's memories/stories, for your next family meal?



Symbol. Certain foods have religious symbolism at Passover. E.g., unleavened bread, bitter herbs. Is there a food that carries symbolism in your family story? As Catholics, the sharing of a cup of wine or grape juice at table can bring a lovely eucharistic echo to family meals.

This *Light of Torah* leaflet series for Catholic parishes encourages parishioners to be attentive to the gift of Torah as part of their sacred Scriptures, and to the gift of Judaism which gave us Jesus, the Living Torah. Text by Teresa Pirola. Illustrations by Francine Pirola. © The Story Source, 2010. Reproduction permitted for non-commercial church use. Further reading: www.lightoftorah.net; www.batkol.info and www.etz-hayim.com.



Light of Torah

Ancient texts
through fresh eyes,
alive for today.

Why reflect on Torah?

"The writings of the New Testament acknowledge that the Jewish Scriptures have a permanent value as divine revelation. They have a positive outlook towards them and regard them as the foundation on which they themselves rest. Consequently, the Church has always held that the Jewish Scriptures form an integral part of the Christian Bible."

"The Jewish People and their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible," n.8 (Pontifical Biblical Commission, 2002)

The Old Testament Scriptures are precious to the Church and yet, sadly, many Catholics look upon them as having secondary importance, superseded by Christ and the message of the Gospels. This *Light of Torah* series exists to awaken Catholics to the fundamental importance of the Old Testament, in particular its first five books, the Torah ('Pentateuch' in the Greek). *Torah* is a Hebrew word meaning 'instruction, teaching.' The Torah is part of the Hebrew Scriptures that were formative for Jesus. As a faithful Jew, Jesus learned, loved and taught Torah. How fitting that we who seek to draw close to the mind and heart of Jesus should immerse ourselves in Torah.

Light of Torah invites you to do just that. How? By reading a little from the Torah each week and reflecting with the help of interpretative insights from Jewish tradition. This is one practical response to the call of Vatican II for Christians to be in touch with the spiritual heritage they share with Judaism.



Torah Portion

From the Jewish calendar of Torah readings:

Exodus 10:1–13:16

Our Torah portion this week contains the story of a momentous event that shapes Israel as a people and is told and retold down through the generations to this very day. What event? The Passover; the ritual meal which the Jews shared on the night of their exodus out of Egypt. With this story comes the first comprehensive list of religious precepts that we find in the Torah. Many more will follow in other books of the Torah, especially in Leviticus. But here, at the critical turning point of the Passover, we find the first. Read this passage in Exodus 12:1-28.

* First book of religious instruction among Jews of the Middle Ages. Quoted in Leibowitz, 179-180.

Sources: Leibowitz, *New studies in Shemot* (Jerusalem, 1996). Scripture quotations: JPS.

Tasting Torah

“This day shall be to you one of remembrance; you shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD throughout the ages; you shall celebrate it as an institution for all time” (Ex.12:14).

Note all the instructions detailing how this festival is to be remembered. Read them in Ex. 12:1-28. Why does the sacred text interrupt the exodus story with a list of seemingly tedious domestic duties and laborious legalities? Doesn't this contradict the essence of the narrative which is all about liberation? With the sages of Israel, ponder this question.

Touching Torah

A key insight is found in the *Sefer Ha-hinukh*:* *“Consider well therefore your occupations and pursuits; for you will be influenced by them and not vice versa. Do not be lulled into a false sense of security as if to say: ‘seeing that my heart is perfect and unimpaired by its belief in God, what harm is there if I occasionally indulge in worldly pleasures, in idling in the streets...engaging in vain and boastful talk with the scorners...Why should they influence me?’”* The text goes on to say that *“actions shape character.”* How fitting, say the sages, that Israel should commemorate its central salvific event by not only telling the story but performing an elaborate set of ritual actions. *“Now that you know this, do not be puzzled by the large number of precepts connected with the commemoration of the miracles of Egypt.”**

Depthing Torah

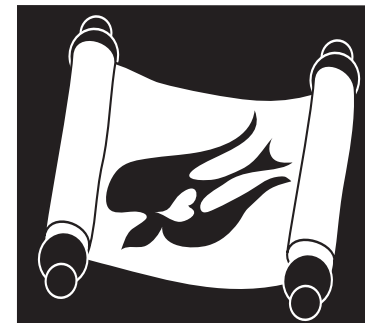
As we ponder this as Catholics, perhaps we can appreciate how Jewish customs have inspired the development of the Church's liturgical traditions, especially its central one: the Eucharist. We don't just *tell* the salvific story of Christ's death and resurrection, we also perform an elaborate ritual which we call the Mass.

But wait! Didn't Jesus have some strong words about people who become so ritually obsessed that their worship is mere lipservice? Indeed, yes. And from where might Jesus have gleaned such ideas, growing up as a young Jewish man? Again, from the Hebrew Scriptures, from the Jewish prophetic tradition such as we hear in Isaiah: *“[Their] worship of Me has been a commandment of men, learnt by rote”* (29:13).

Then again, just as the prophets of Israel warned against distortions of ritual excess, they also warned against lack of practice (e.g., see Jeremiah 7:27-28). Convictions of the heart are expressed in concrete action, while our actions confirm and strengthen the convictions of the heart. As Catholics we are familiar with the idea that faith *and* good works are essential to the way human beings love and worship God. This delicate interplay is core to Catholicism, and we find it embedded in the Hebrew scriptures of the Jewish people.

Doing Torah

Talk about your experience of the ritual of the Mass. Do you experience it as an “action that shapes character”? What details of the rites of the Mass especially impact upon you, and why?



Faith & life

Because we say grace before meals we had a delightful time when our grandson started in school with Sister Jacinta. The whole family gathered at the table had to wait until he had one hand on his chest and one open hand extended to the right in readiness to make the sign of the cross. It was quite humorous waiting for the little chap to decide right hand from left hand, but we dare not crack a smile because he was so deadly earnest. Of course we adults had to adopt this same pose. It was all so deliberate in slow motion so we'd all get it right!

Table topic:

- What ritual actions, performed in our home, help to shape our values and spirituality as a family?
- How do the adults, teenagers and children in our family teach each other in this regard?