



# *In the Light of Torah*

Ancient texts  
through fresh eyes,  
alive for today.

## *Why reflect on Torah?*

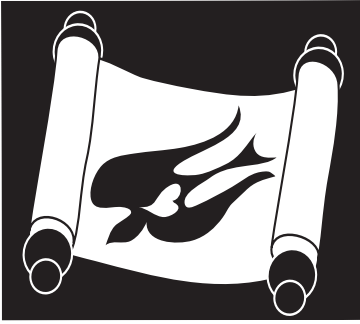
*“It is above all by virtue of its historical origin that the Christian community discovers its links with the Jewish people. Indeed, the person in whom it puts its faith, Jesus of Nazareth, is himself a son of this people.”*

(Pontifical Biblical Commission, 2002)

Christianity is rooted in Judaism as a plant is rooted in the earth; it cannot live apart from the soil in which it is planted. This truth—so obvious, yet tragically ignored for most of the 2000 years of Christian history—was firmly grasped as one of the groundbreaking reforms of Vatican II. Through the document *Nostra Aetate*, and subsequent Vatican documents, the Catholic Church has set itself on a path of reconciliation with the Jewish people, calling its members to understand, appreciate and rejoice in the common spiritual ancestry and the shared Scriptures of Christians and Jews.

This weekly leaflet series, *In the Light of Torah*, offers a means for Christians in parish communities to read the *Torah* (the first five books of the Bible) in such a way as to connect with their Jewish faith-heritage.

Each leaflet offers brief insights drawing on Jewish sources and traditions, plus suggestions for how these insights can enrich Christian faith and practice, especially in the home and in the events of daily life.



## Torah Portion

From the Jewish calendar  
of Torah readings:

### Exodus 27:20 — 30:10

In last week's Torah portion God instructed Moses in how to make an altar and a court for the tabernacle. In today's portion he is instructed about the ritual lighting of Temple lamps (Ch. 27), the making of priestly vestments (Ch. 28), the ritual steps for ordaining priests (Ch. 29) and how the incense altar is to be constructed (Ch. 30). In meticulous detail the Israelites are guided to create a system of worship... and all in the midst of the desert!

1. Jewish biblical scholar, 1862-1955.  
2. E.g., Malbim, 19th century Russian-Jewish rabbi.

# Tasting Torah

*You shall make sacred vestments for the glorious adornment of your brother Aaron. And you shall speak to all who have ability, whom I have endowed with skill, that they may make Aaron's vestments to consecrate him for my priesthood.*  
(Exodus 28:2-3)

Why all this attention to priestly vestments? Can they really be that important? Can a long, tedious list of details in fact hold precious insights? Let's start by considering the meaning of clothing today. What does your own choice of clothing signify? Why do we give authority to people in uniforms? How does festive or sacred clothing affect our experience of time and place? What messages are communicated through a piece of cloth?

# Touching Torah

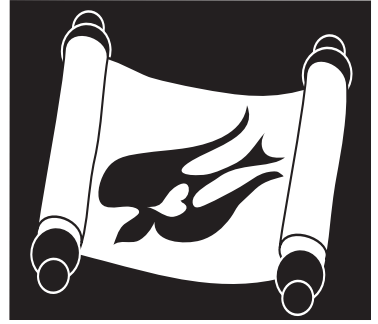
Commentators on this portion interpret the significance of clothing in various ways. E.g., Says Benno Jacob:<sup>1</sup> have you ever noticed that the Genesis creation account makes no mention of God teaching man and woman how to make a fire, till the soil or build a house. All is left to their initiative, except for one thing: *God makes clothes for them*. Not only does God make 'garments of skins', but God actually 'clothes' them. (Gen. 3:21.) Just as royalty are clothed in fine robes, God clothes man and woman as a sign of their consecration to be parents of the human race. Following the divine example, Moses clothes Aaron and his sons as a sign of consecration to priestly office.

# Deeper into Torah

Other commentators,<sup>2</sup> favoring an allegorical interpretation, view the priestly clothing in moral terms. To put on a garment is to be vested in qualities of fine character, to be God-like. “O Lord my God, you are clothed in majesty, wrapped in light as with a garment” (Psalm 104:1). This idea is used to solve a contradiction in the text: Why does God command *Moses* to make the garments in v.2, then command *the people* to make the garments in v.3? The allegorists explain the double-command like this: The garments in v.2 refer to the instruction in holiness that Moses is to give the priests. The garments in v.3 refer to the outer garments of cloth that symbolize these inner ‘vestments of the soul’. Note that the people who are to make these outer garments are described as ‘skilled’ (v.3). In the original Hebrew, ‘skilled’ is literally ‘wise of heart’. Only the ‘wise of heart’ understand the true meaning of the garments and the inner virtues they represent.

# Doing Torah

Material ‘things’— e.g. holy objects, garments, images — have a legitimate place in creating a space for worship. As symbols they help to draw us into Divine Presence, but they are not, in themselves, the Divine Presence! Name the ‘things’ that help you to pray and to enter into loving relationships with God and people. Name the ‘things’ that get in the way of genuine relationships with God and others.



## From the prophet next door

A married couple says: “We are 35 years married and still try to look nice to each other, just as we did when we were dating. Okay, so our dress or shirt size may have changed, but the care and delight in the way we dress for one another is all part of kindling the flame of our ongoing love affair.”

Share your practical wisdom about clothing and dress choices and how they impact on relationships.

## More thoughts on Torah

If Aaron wears his robes wrongly, he will die! (See Exodus 28:35,43.) The priest bears a serious responsibility in coming into the Divine Presence! As a baptized Christian do I take as seriously the Divine Presence, and my responsibility to respond completely, faithfully? Think about it: To miss the Divine Love is to die.

# 5 Ways to *be clothed in God's love*

## Savouring Jewish traditions in Christian life

In Jewish practice, a prayer shawl (*tallit*) with fringes (*tzitzit*) at the corners is worn like a cape over the shoulders (not as a scarf around the neck). The fringes are a reminder of a Jew's responsibility to observe God's commandments (*mitzvot*). A blessing is prayed before donning the *tallit*.



**Read.** In his letter to the Christians of Ephesus, St Paul urges his readers to “clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.” (Eph 4:24)



**Ponder.** “You have become a new creation, and have clothed yourselves in Christ. See in this white garment the outward sign of your Christian dignity.” Ponder these words from the *Rite of Christian Baptism*.



**Make.** There are Christian groups that knit or crochet “prayer shawls” for people in hospitals as a gift of comfort and a symbol of prayer. Make a prayer shawl for someone, and perhaps one for yourself too.



**Discuss.** Table topic: “Look good, feel good!” Discuss both the wisdom and pitfalls of this saying. Does attention to your appearance affect your attitude to self? Do we judge people too quickly by what they wear?



## Re-evaluate.

This week, examine more closely what you wear, where you wear it, and why you wear it. What are you ‘saying’ by your dress choices? Bring this question to prayer and let God speak to you.

*In the Light of Torah* is a parish leaflet series designed to encourage Christians to be more attentive to the gift of Torah as part of their own 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, 2009. Further reading: [www.batkol.info](http://www.batkol.info). Reproduction of this leaflet permitted for non-commercial church use.

