

# 5 Words that go with Justice

For the Jewish sages, the double use of *tzedek*, 'justice', invited creative interpretation such as linking justice to a second category (e.g., justice & truth). If you were to pair justice with another related quality or essential virtue what would it be? Explain your choice and why it is important to you. [Ideas: [www.socialaction.com/education\\_resources/quotables.shtml](http://www.socialaction.com/education_resources/quotables.shtml)]



## Justice & relationship.

*If your brother becomes poor,...uphold him* (Lev. 25:35).  
*One man's word is no man's word; we should quietly hear both sides* (Johann Wolfgang von Goethe).



## Justice & responsibility.

*For the sin we have committed in Your sight by casting off responsibility...* (A prayer of repentance from the morning service for *Yom Kippur*).



## Justice & zeal.

*The Prophets take us to the slums. Their breathless impatience with injustice may strike us as hysterical...* (Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel).



## Justice & action.

*Justice is truth in action* (Benjamin Disraeli).  
*The greatest menace to freedom is an inert people...* (Louis Brandeis).



## Justice & joy.

*Happy is the just man, for he shall fare well; He shall eat the fruit of his works* (Isaiah 3:10).



# In the Light of Torah

Ancient texts  
through fresh eyes,  
alive for today.

## Why reflect on Torah?

*The Church must never forget that "it draws nourishment from that good olive tree onto which the wild olive branches of the Gentiles have been grafted."*

- Nostra Aetate, 4; Oct 28, 1965

With this statement, which is based on Scripture (Rom. 11:17-24), the Second Vatican Council unveiled a new era for Christians and Jews. After nearly 2,000 years of tragic division, we are now in a position to recognize and affirm the profoundly graced relationship between the two peoples of faith.

Christianity did not emerge out of the blue; it grew out of Judaism. Jesus himself was a devout Jew, as was Mary, the apostles and most of the early Church. Without the rich soil of the Jewish faith in which she is planted, the Christian Church simply cannot grow to full maturity.

Our roots in Judaism very definitely include the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament). Sometimes Christians tend to overlook the Old Testament, viewing it as less important than the Gospels, when in fact the Gospels depend on it for their very foundations.

For this reason, this leaflet series, *In the Light of Torah*, is designed to encourage Christians to read and reflect upon the Old Testament. Specifically, it invites us to read the Torah (the first five books of the bible) week by week, drawing on Jewish sources and traditions to help us gain insight into our own Christian faith.

*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.





## Torah Portion

From the Jewish calendar of Torah readings:

### Deuteronomy 16:18-21:9

Today's Torah portion begins with the summons, "You shall appoint judges and officials throughout your tribes... and they shall render just decisions for the people" (16:18). The judicial figures appointed here are not priests but lay people, apparently selected from existing chiefs, officials and military personnel.

Sources: Bradley Artson, Parashah Shoftim commentary, 5769, American Jewish University, <http://judaism.ajula.edu>; Eskenazi & Weiss, *A Woman's Torah Commentary* (NY, 2008); Friedman, *Commentary on the Torah* (San Francisco, 2008); *Midrash Rabbah, Vol. 7* (London/NY: Soncino Press, 1983).

## Tasting Torah

*Justice, justice you shall pursue...* (Deut.16:20, Friedman).

*Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue...* (Deut.16:20, NRSV).

In Jewish Torah study, this verse, with its repetition of the Hebrew word for justice, *tzedek*, has attracted much attention and interpretation over time. Because ancient biblical Hebrew did not have punctuation, repetition was a common way to indicate emphasis. It also opened the door for further interpretation. What kinds of interpretations do we find emerging from the sages?

## Touching Torah

For Rashi, the repetition of the Hebrew word for 'justice' suggests that one should 'seek reliable civil courts.' Other commentators take it to mean that justice should be pursued only through just means. Still others say that justice should be sought for both plaintiff and defendant. *Targum Onkelos* (an ancient Aramaic translation of the Hebrew bible) interprets the repeated word as a call for honesty and integrity. "It is better to choke, than to utter a lie," goes one rabbinic saying, indicating how highly esteemed is truthfulness in rabbinic thought. Thus the first characteristic of a good judge is honesty, and the most basic way to pursue justice is to pursue truth.

And you? How might you creatively interpret the double use of *tzedek*, 'justice'?

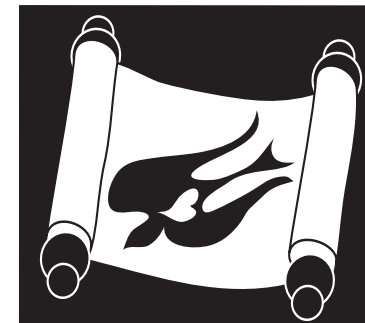
## Deeper into Torah

Justice and righteousness are central religious and ethical categories in Judaism. One cannot claim to love God without being concerned for justice. *Midrash Rabbah Devarim* (a collection of ancient Jewish storytelling literature) explains that God prefers justice to ritual sacrifice. It notes that Scripture does not say that God loves justice *as much* as sacrifice, but rather *more* than sacrifice. It then elaborates on this with further reasons for the superiority of justice over sacrifice. Briefly: (1) Sacrifice was only useful while the Temple stood, but after its destruction sacrifice ceased while just acts continued. (2) Sacrifices are performed by humanity, but even God practices justice. (3) Sacrifices have merit in this world, but justice is essential to the world to come.

Justice, of course, is also a central teaching in Christianity. By reflecting on it from the standpoint of Judaism we can better understand justice and righteousness being at the core of Jesus' Jewish identity, a teaching deeply embedded in the Torah and in Jewish tradition.

## Doing Torah

Justice relates to how we treat the 'poor' and the 'weakest' in our midst (the 'widow' and 'orphan,' to use the Torah's language). What does justice 'look' like in a family/household setting, in a parish setting, in the neighborhood or workplace?



## Faith & Life

I entered a store early one quiet Sunday morning to buy a newspaper and - lo and behold - there was a queue! *I hate queues!* The shopkeeper seemed to be taking forever to serve one elderly man. Another half minute ticked by as I became increasingly impatient. *All I want is a newspaper!* At that point, the shopkeeper gently moved the man aside and I heard him say, 'Now Sam, you go out the back there and I'll make you a cup of coffee in just a minute.' Suddenly I understood. I looked at the old man again and noticed his unkempt hair and shoeless feet. My impatience dissolved into shame. I was witnessing not an inefficient storekeeper but a man who lived by the values of justice and mercy.