

5 Ways to bless

with Aaron's Blessing

Num. 6:24-26 is sometimes termed 'Aaron's Blessing' and described as 'the Lord's Prayer of the Old Testament.' Just as we teach our children *The Lord's Prayer* as a normal part of their Christian upbringing, we can also teach them *Aaron's Blessing*. Five practical tips follow.



1. Make (or purchase) an attractively framed presentation of Aaron's Blessing. Hang it in your home in a prominent place where it will be readily seen and prayed.



2. Aaron's Blessing can be 'heard' at different levels. It is familiar, or at least inoffensive, to most people. Consider including it in your next gathering of extended family where a variety of faiths and spiritualities mingle.



3. Bless young children before they sleep by laying hands upon them and praying Aaron's Blessing. Remind them that God is smiling at them, and check your own face: the medium is the message!



4. Hands held high, arms enfolded... Young children love to sing and pray using bodily gestures. Aaron's Blessing lends itself to tactile gestures. Make up your own actions and teach them to your children.



5. Farewell visitors at the door, or relatives at the airport, by incorporating Aaron's Blessing into your goodbye hugs, kisses and words of endearment. Your children will witness and learn by your example.

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. Reproduction of this leaflet permitted for non-commercial church use.



In the Light of Torah

Ancient texts
through fresh eyes,
alive for today.

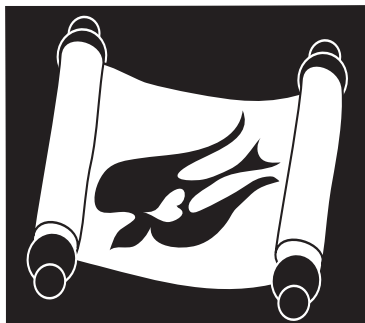
Why reflect on Torah?

In its specific sense, 'Torah' refers to the first five books of the bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy). These books are sacred for Jews and Christians alike, and foundational to the life and teachings of both faith communities.

In the Hebrew Scriptures and Jewish *midrash* (ancient storytelling traditions), the Torah is described as spiritual illumination: *The Lord make His face to shine...with the light of the Torah... May He enlighten your eyes and heart in the Torah ... 'For the commandment is a lamp, and the Torah is light' (Prov. 6: 23).* [Midrash Rabbah 11, 6]

In the language of ecumenical councils the voice of the Church concurs: *The plan of salvation...is found as the true word of God in the books of the Old Testament: these books...written under divine inspiration, remain permanently valuable. 'For all that was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope' (Rom. 15:4).* [Dei Verbum, 14]

But if the Hebrew Scriptures are divinely inspired, spiritually illuminating, instructive, hope-giving, and foundational to the New Testament, why are they so often overlooked by Christians? This leaflet series, **Light of Torah**, seeks to highlight the gift of Torah in Christian consciousness, with attention to Jewish insights into the biblical text.



Torah Portion

From the Jewish calendar of Torah readings:

Numbers 4:21 - 7:89

Today's Torah portion presents some challenging reading: more 'counting' with repetitious numerical data, a bizarre 'test' for women accused of sin, and details about the piety of the Nazarites. Yet, seemingly 'out of the blue,' there appears a beautiful priestly blessing of the people which is sure to be familiar and delightful to Jews and Christians alike. Treat yourself to these verses (6:22-27) as we explore their meaning and prayerful value.

Sources: *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1992); Fox, *The Five Books of Moses* (NY, 1995); Leibowitz, *Studies in Bamidbar* (Jerusalem, 1994); *Midrash Rabbah: Numbers Vol 1*; (London/NY: Soncino, 1983); Milgrom, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Numbers* (NY, 1990).

Tasting Torah

*May YHWH bless you and keep you!
May YHWH shine his face upon you
and favor you!
May YHWH lift up his face toward you and
grant you shalom! (Num. 6:24-26; Fox)*

This blessing makes wonderful use of poetic rhythm, fully appreciated in the Hebrew text as it unfolds in three progressively-longer lines. Read (pray) aloud a few times from Everett Fox's English translation (above) which is particularly sensitive to the Hebrew rhythmic structures. (Note: the divine name 'YHWH' can be read as 'the Lord'.)

Touching Torah

What else do you notice? The repetition of YHWH? And 'face'? The pairs of divine actions: bless and keep, shine and favor, lift up and grant peace? Why might these actions be paired as they are? The *midrash* suggests that one action is consequential to the other. Thus if you receive a blessing/gift, then it needs to be kept/protected or it may be lost/stolen.

Recall how the Psalms (e.g., 68:2; 69:18) describe God's face as 'turning,' 'shining,' 'hiding.' Recall how Moses' face shone after encountering the Lord's glory with unprecedented directness (Ex. 34:29). Lovely luminous imagery fills this blessing, along with a sense of comfort. YHWH draws near, with face lifted towards us in a gaze of pleasure and affection. Indeed, the text could read: 'May YHWH smile on you.'

Deeper into Torah

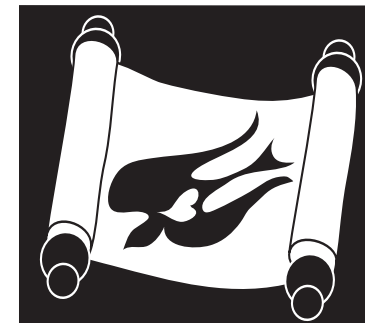
Jewish commentators suggest that the three sections correspond to the bestowal of gifts in an ascending order: a blessing of material goods (e.g., food, shelter), followed by a blessing of spiritual qualities (understood as spiritual illumination through the study and living of Torah), and finally the promise of *shalom*, i.e., peace in its fullest sense, arising through the combination of the first two blessings. The *midrash* highlights this climax through a series of statements and quotations about the greatness of peace and its fittingness as the 'seal' (conclusion) to the blessings. E.g.,

'This is to tell you that the blessings are of no avail unless peace goes with them... Great is peace, for it was given to the meek; as it says, But the humble shall inherit the land, and delight themselves in the abundance of peace (Ps. 37: 11). Great is peace, for it outweighs everything.' (Midrash R. 11, 7)

In this last statement, can we hear echoes of the Beatitudes ('Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth' Mt 5:5)? As a faithful Jew, how might Jesus have been influenced by these verses of blessing in the Book of Numbers?

Doing Torah

- Have you noticed that this blessing is one of the optional prayers in the Christian burial rite?
- The Torah speaks of God's love using images of bodily gesture such as 'lifting up his face' toward you. Consider your own use of body language and facial gesture to communicate love.



Faith & Life

Sitting in church, Cathy invariably gives the homilist the full impact of her gaze. She looks directly at him, face alert, smiling warmly, or — at the very least — with a thoughtful, responsive facial expression. You might think Cathy is a friend of the homilist, or especially enthralled by his message. But in fact she acts the same way with every homilist and speaker, of whatever age, gender, spirituality, culture, and regardless of their talents. Being experienced in public speaking herself, she understands how difficult it is to face a group, the courage it takes to present a point of view, the energy it takes to prepare and deliver a talk. So she uses her facial expression to communicate support, encouragement, solidarity, compassion. She 'lifts up her face' as an everyday gift of love.