UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE | Cambridge Interfaith Programme

Lighting the way across traditions:

A Scriptural Reasoning text pack for UK Inter Faith Week 2026

Developed in the 1990s by Jewish, Christian and Muslim scholars, Scriptural Reasoning (SR) is the practice of reading and exploring sacred texts together. Inspired by traditional Jewish methods of studying text with a partner, SR invites participants to ask open questions:

- Why might the text say that?
- What might that mean?

Engaging in SR helps participants think more deeply about their own traditions, foster genuine curiosity about others, and develop critical reading and listening skills.

About this pack

A text pack brings together passages from different traditions around a central theme. This edition contains texts suggested by Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jews, Muslims and Sikhs. Each connects to the theme of lighting the way.

Includes:

- Curated passages: Texts from different traditions.
- Discussion guidelines: Standard SR group rules designed to ensure a safe, respectful, and constructive environment.

Who is this for?

UK schools: tailored for Religious Education (RE classes), discussion during Form time, and school chaplaincy projects.

Community groups: ideal for local interfaith councils, youth groups, higher education societies, and civic organisations.

Get involved and share your event

Hosting an interfaith discussion or school workshop using this text pack? Help inspire others across the UK by listing your activity on the official interactive map at www.InterFaithWeek.org.

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE | Cambridge Interfaith Programme

Contents

Using this pack 3

Assistance 4

A Jewish text about day and night Bereshith 1 5

A Sikh text about light and creation Bhagat Kabeer, Ang 1349 6

A Christian text about light and darkness John 1 7

A Muslim text about God as light Surah al-Nur (24) 8

A Christian text about shining light Matthew 5 9

A Buddhist text about living like light Buddha's last words 10

A Hindu song about a guiding star Rabindranath Tagore 11

A Buddhist text about light and the way Buddha's first sermon 12

A Jewish text about everlasting light Yeshayahu / Isaiah 60 13

A Buddhist text about enlightenment Nichiren's letters 14

Ground rules for Scriptural Reasoning 15

Further reading and resources 16

About us 16

Using this pack

Scriptural Reasoning is normally interactive. We recommend you choose two or three passages to look at together and try to reflect the religious diversity of your class or group—it works best to discuss a text that is sacred for at least one of your participants.

We strongly recommend that you print copies of the texts you will discuss so everyone has the passage in front of them. This helps to focus attention.

It is really wonderful if you have someone from each religious tradition to introduce the text. We know that may not be possible. We aim to provide a short recording that you can watch where we take turns to introduce texts from our traditions. Most of these recordings will also include a reading in the original language. Find them on YouTube or on the Inter Faith Week for Schools website.

Before discussing a passage, read it aloud together (in English) and make sure everyone has also read or heard the introduction. It is good if a different person volunteers to read each text. Others should listen carefully and think:

- What do you see or hear that interests you?
- Is there something that makes you curious?

Invite everyone to choose a word or phrase and try to tell others why you noticed it. This can be done in pairs and shared back with everyone. Or divide into small groups for discussion. If dividing into groups, it is good to appoint one person in each group to act as facilitator—to see everyone gets chance to speak, keep discussion focused on words in the passages (“Which verse is that?” “Ah, in verse 8?”), and so on.

After everyone has shared something, one of the following questions may prompt further discussion:

- What is light doing in this text?
- What about darkness?
- Is there something you like about this text?
- What perspective do you think this text offers? Is that similar or different to how you normally think about things?
- Is this similar or different to other texts and ideas you have read or heard?

If discussion seems to be straying from the text, re-anchor by asking: Where are you seeing that? Which bit of the text are you looking at now?

You should find the discussion comfortably extends to around 30 minutes for each text. It can be much longer.

As you move to a new text, the discussion will naturally make comparisons with the previous text. That is healthy and there is no recommended order so choose how you want to work through.

Important: If someone asks “What does this mean?”, flip the question back and ask them what they think it could mean. Invite others to respond. Avoid becoming the authority.

Assistance

People have different levels of experience working with religious texts.

Sharing the information below can help your participants grow confident in discussion:

> **Did you know?**
>
> Passages from holy texts are often divided in a system that combines book titles, chapters and verses. This helps readers to find and share passages, whether as part of worship or to study and discuss. This system is more precise than page numbers. It also means people can use different versions of the same text (e.g. different translations or editions).
>
> At the top of each passage in this pack you will see a short title (left), then information about the source—sometimes the name of the book and sometimes the author. A number in the title identifies the chapter or page number.
>
> Small numbers in the passages are often verse numbers. Where the texts did not already include verse numbers, we have numbered lines or sentences. Try using these numbers in discussion — it helps others find the words you are looking at.

Equally, you can start by asking if anyone can explain the numbers in the text. You may be surprised who knows what!

A Jewish text about day and night — Bereshith 1

1 When God began to create heaven and earth— 2 the earth being
unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep and
a wind from God sweeping over the water— 3 God said, “Let there
be light”; and there was light. 4 God saw that the light was good,
and God separated the light from the darkness. 5 God called the
light Day, and the darkness He called Night. And there was
evening and there was morning, one day.

Translated from Hebrew:
New Jewish Publication Society (1985)

About

This passage comes from the first book in Jewish scripture, known in Hebrew by its opening word Bereshith (buh-ray-sheeth).

English-speakers often call this book Genesis, meaning beginning or origin. Some of you may recognise that a translation of Genesis is normally included at the start of Christian bibles, too.

The book begins with a stylized account of the creation of the world, and its filling with plant life and animals, including human beings. Here, the creation story is told as happening over six days. The story is characterised by rhythms and repetition. If you read more of it, you will see “God said”, “was good” and “there was evening…”.

Glossary

“unformed and void”: Most Jewish scriptures were first written in Hebrew. In Hebrew, this phrase uses two rhyming nouns: tohu and bohu. Together they suggest emptiness.

A Sikh text about light and creation — Bhagat Kabeer, Ang 1349

1 First, God created the Light; then by his Creative Power, He made all mortal beings.

2 From the One Light, the entire universe welled up. So who is good, and who is bad?

3 O people, O Siblings of Destiny, do not wander deluded by doubt.

4 The Creation is the Creator, and the Creator is in the Creation, totally pervading and permeating all places. [Pause.]

5 The clay is the same, but the Fashioner has fashioned it in various ways.

6 There is nothing wrong with the pot of clay — there is nothing wrong with the Potter.

7 The One True Lord abides in all; by His making, everything is made.

8 Whoever realises the Hukam of his Command, knows the One Lord. He alone is said to be the Lord's slave

9 The Lord God is Unseen; He cannot be seen. The Guru has blessed me with this sweet molasses.

10 Says Kabeer, my anxiety and fear have been taken away; I see the Immaculate Lord pervading everywhere.

Raag Prabhaatee, Bhagat Kabeer Ji, Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji, Ang 1349
Translated from Punjabi at SikhiToTheMax.org (amended), copyright © 2026 Khalis Foundation.

About

This Sikh hymn is credited to Bhagat Kabeer. It is one in a series to sing in the morning. The Pause draws attention to the central theme.

The hymn is part of the Guru Granth Sahib, the core scripture of the Sikh faith. The Guru Granth Sahib is essential to understanding Sikh spirituality, serving as the living Guru (teacher) that guides practitioners.

Glossary

ang: meaning limb or body part, ang is the Sikh term for a page of Sikh scripture

Guru: a spiritual teacher, especially the Guru Granth Sahib (see above)

Hukam of his Command: the goal of becoming in harmony with the will of God and thus attaining inner peace; the Punjabi word Hukam is borrowed from the Arabic word hukm meaning command or order

immaculate: clean, free from dirt, flaws or errors—the Immaculate Lord is a title for God

molasses: treacle — a thick, dark brown syrup made when processing sugar

mortal beings: any being, including people and animals, that can be killed or die

A Christian text about light and darkness John 1

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and
the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All
things came into being through him, and without him not one thing
came into being. What has come into being 4 in him was life, and
the life was the light of all people. 5 The light shines in the
darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it.

6 There was a man sent from God whose name was John. 7 He
came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe
through him. 8 He himself was not the light, but he came to testify
to the light. 9 The true light, which enlightens everyone, was
coming into the world.

Translated from Greek:
New Revised Standard Version Bible: Anglicised Edition,
copyright © 1989, 1995

About

This passage is from John's Gospel, the last of four books that record Jesus's life and teachings and the beliefs of his followers. Matthew's Gospel begins with a story about an angel appearing to Joseph to explain that his fiancé is having a baby (Jesus). Mark's Gospel begins with a story about adult Jesus being baptised (a water ritual) by John the Baptist. Luke's Gospel begins with a story about Mary learning she is pregnant with Jesus and visiting her older cousin Elizabeth who is also expecting a baby. The passage above shows how John opens his Gospel.

Glossary

a man . . . John (verse 6): refers to John the Baptist, a famous Jewish leader who was killed during Jesus's lifetime. Luke's Gospel teaches that John was Jesus's cousin (Elizabeth's baby). This is not the same John who wrote the Gospel.

A Muslim text about God as light — Surah al-Nur (24)

35.1 God is the Light of the heavens and the earth.

2 The parable of His Light is a niche, wherein is a lamp. 3 The lamp is in a glass. 4 The glass is a shining star kindled from a blessed olive tree, neither of the East nor the of the West. 5 Its oil would shine forth, even if no fire had touched it. 6 Light upon light.

7 God guides unto His Light whomsoever He will, and God sets forth parables for humankind, and God is Knower of all things.

Translated from Arabic:
Caner K Dagli, in The Study Quran
ed Seyyed Hossein Nasr (2015), amended

About

Surah al-Nur is the 24th chapter of the Quran. Its Arabic name means the Light Chapter, showing the significance of this verse (ayah 35) in Muslim tradition. We have numbered the English sentences to help you discuss this text.

Later verses compare the light with the darkness of a deep sea, covered by waves—a metaphor to describe the state of someone whose heart has been covered from the light of God.

Before electricity, lamps used oil or wax, a wick, and fire to make light. Olive oil has a gentle smell with no harmful by-products, making it safe for household use.

Glossary

kindled: started, lit

lamp: miṣbaḥ in Arabic, either the wick of a candle or an actual lamp

niche: mishkah in Arabic, an entrance or gap in a wall made to put a lamp

parable: a short story that teaches a moral, spiritual, or religious lesson

A Christian text about shining light — Matthew 5

14 “You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be
hid. 15 People do not light a lamp and put it under the bushel
basket; rather, they put it on the lampstand, and it gives light to all
in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others,
so that they may see your good works and give glory to your
Father in heaven.”

Translated from Greek:
New Revised Standard Version Bible: Anglicised Edition,
copyright © 1989, 1995

About

This passage is from Matthew’s Gospel, one of four books that record stories about Jesus’s life and teachings. Traditionally, Matthew is the first book in the Christian New Testament. It was said to have been written by one of Jesus’s close followers (“Matthew”).

In chapters 5–7, Jesus goes up a mountain and speaks to those following him. This speech, sometimes known as “The Sermon on the Mount”, includes blessings, warnings, and instructions on how to pray. The passage above is part of that speech (chapter 5, verses 14 to 16).

Glossary

bushel basket: made to carry grain after harvest—similar in size to a laundry basket, perhaps

lampstand: a wooden or metal stand used to keep oil lamps off the floor

A Buddhist text about living like light Buddha's last words

1 Ananda, be a lamp to yourself. 2 Live yourself as refuge.
3 Seek no other refuge. 4 Live having the Dhamma as your lamp. 5 Dhamma as your refuge. 6 Seek no other refuge.

Translated by Mahinda Deegalle from Paḷi
Mahaparinibbaṇa Sutta of the Digha Nikaya (D.II.72)

About

This short message is found twice in the Theravada Buddhist scriptures. We have numbered the sentences to help you discuss the text.

The historical Buddha spent the last three months of his life journeying to reach the Sala Grove in Kusinara (Kushinagar in northern India), where he passed away. The words above were spoken just before his death.

Ananda was a close follower and assistant to Buddha. He memorised Buddha's teachings, so that they could be shared with others.

The use of "lamp" in this message is striking. Buddhism is all about "enlightenment". Sometimes the message is also translated as "be an island to yourself." The Paḷi word dipa (dee-pah) has two meanings: lamp and island.

Glossary

Ananda: Buddha's cousin and assistant

buddha, the historical Buddha: a person who is awakened or enlightened. Siddhartha Gautama (563–483 BCE) was a prince who became known as Buddha (the historical Buddha) after his experience of enlightenment.

dhamma: teaching, law, truth

dipa: lamp, light, island

Theravada Buddhism: a variety of Buddhism practised in South and South East Asia. (Compare Mahayana Buddhism, mostly practised in East Asia.)

A Hindu song about a guiding star — Rabindranath Tagore

O Lord–
I have made you the polestar of my life,
On this ocean I will never again lose my way.
Wherever I may go, may you remain expressed,
Pour down your rays of light on my stream of tears.
In my innermost mind your face always rises silently,
If separated even for a moment I see no shore or land.
If ever this heart seeks to stray away from your path,
on seeing your face it is at once ashamed and becomes recentred.

The Polestar
Translated from Bengali by Ankur Barua, 2026

About

This song was written by Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941), a poet who lived in Bengal, in what is now north-east India. The song uses ideas and images that are important in Hinduism.

In Hindu stories and teachings, life can sometimes be compared to a huge, stormy sea. People face difficulties, make mistakes, and can feel lost or confused. To cross this dangerous sea, they need someone to guide them safely.

Hindus may see this guide as God or as a wise teacher.

We have numbered the lines to help you discuss the text.

Glossary

polestar, pole star: The North Star that helps travellers find their direction.

A Buddhist text about light and the way Buddha's first sermon

1 The Buddha has realised the Middle Way: It gives vision, it gives knowledge, and it leads to peace, to insight, to enlightenment, to final release. And what is that Middle Way?

2 It is simply the Noble Eightfold Way, namely: (1) right view, (2) right intention, (3) right speech, (4) right action, (5) right livelihood, (6) right effort, (7) right mindfulness, and (8) right concentration.

3 This is the Middle Way . . . which gives vision. . . with reference to the doctrines, unheard of before. The (inward) eye arose. Cognition arose. Wisdom arose. Knowledge arose. Light arose.

Translated by Mahinda Deegalle from Paḷi
Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta of the Saṃyutta Nikaya (V.420)

About

This passage is "the Way" in Buddhism. It is recorded and recited today in Paḷi, a language used in ancient India and now sacred language for Theravada Buddhism. It is part of the historical Buddha's first sermon.

The historical Buddha was a Prince named Siddhartha Gautama (563–483 BCE). He had a moment of deep understanding, an awakening, while sitting under a pipal tree (also known as a Bodhi tree). He then became known as Buddha.

The audience for this sermon was a group of five followers gathered in Benares, India. Buddhists recognise this sermon as the birth of the Buddhist tradition. The Middle Way also known as the Eightfold Way is the Buddhist technique of living well now and working toward spiritual achievements.

We have numbered the paragraphs to help you discuss the text.

Glossary

bodhi: an awakening or enlightenment, the status of Buddhahood

buddha: a person who is awakened

cognition: mental action of coming to know and understand; compare "recognition"

doctrines: specific teachings or beliefs, normally part of a system of thinking

Gautama (in Pali: Gotama) "who has accomplished the purpose"

livelihood: how a person gets life's necessities (food, clothing, shelter, etc)

Theravada Buddhism: a variety of Buddhism practiced in South and South East Asia. (Compare Mahayana Buddhism, mostly practiced in East Asia.)

A Jewish text about everlasting light Yeshayahu / Isaiah 60

19 No longer shall you have the sun for light by day;
Nor shall the radiance of the moon be light for you [by night];
For the Lord shall be for you an everlasting light,
Your God shall be your glory.
20 Your sun shall set no more,
Your moon no more withdraw;
For the Lord shall be a light to you forever,
And your days of mourning shall be ended.

Translated from Hebrew:
New Jewish Publication Society 1985,
adapted by Lindsey Taylor-Guthartz.

About

Isaiah, known in Hebrew as Yeshayahu, is one of the books in the Prophets section of the Hebrew Bible.

In the chapter where these verses are found, the prophet envisions a future time that will be very different from difficulties faced by the speaker and the speaker's community. In this future, there will be no more violence and destruction. The passage above uses light when talking about these hoped-for changes.

Glossary

prophet: a person who speaks for a god; a prophet's message often responds to a present issue by forecasting what else could happen (good or bad)

radiance: glowing light

A Buddhist text about enlightenment Nichiren's letters

1 Everything has its essential point, and the heart of the Lotus Sutra is its title . . . of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. 2 Truly, if you chant this in the morning and evening, you are correctly reading the entire Lotus Sutra…

3 Even though one neither reads nor studies the sutra, chanting the title alone is the source of tremendous good fortune. 4 The sutra teaches that women, evil men, and those in the realms of animals and hell—in fact, all the beings of the Ten Worlds—can attain Buddhahood in their present form. 5 [This is an incomparably greater wonder than] fire being produced by a stone taken from the bottom of a river, or a lantern lighting up a place that has been dark for a hundred, a thousand, or ten thousand years. 6 If even the most ordinary things of this world are such wonders, then how much more wondrous is the power of the Buddhist Law!

The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin § 121, page 922
Nichiren Buddhism Library (Soka Gakkai)
Translated from Japanese by the Gosho Translation Committee (1979–1995) with Dr Burton Watson

About

This passage is from a letter that the Japanese Buddhist monk Nichiren (1222–1282) wrote to a follower called Myoho. We have numbered sentences to help you discuss it.

It is one of a series of letters to help people understand the Lotus Sutra, part of the historical Buddha's teaching. The historical Buddha was a Prince named Siddhartha Gautama (563–483 BCE).

The Lotus Sutra teaches that all human beings have the potential to become enlightened like Buddha.

Glossary

Buddhahood: the state of being awakened or enlightened. A Buddha is as wise, kind, and brave as it is possible to be. They understand and see things clearly, and help all others with the deepest care.

Nam-myoho-renge-kyo: the full title of the Lotus Sutra in Japanese. In English it means something like "Devotion to the mystic teaching of the *Lotus Flower Sutra*".

Ten Worlds: Mahayana Buddhism teaches that inside each living being are different worlds or realms, from very unhappy ones (like hell) to joyful ones (like enlightenment).

sutra: (in Buddhism) a text or sermon that shares Buddha's words and teachings

Ground rules for Scriptural Reasoning

Stick to the text in front of you | Remarks should be linked to the text. When you offer a response, it is helpful to indicate the verse or paragraph using the markers ("In verse 8…", "In line 10", etc).

Share your take | The temptation to ask others' thoughts before sharing your own can be strong. In SR we encourage everyone to volunteer your own perspective. This may draw on personal experience and knowledge—we learn from the diversity of perspectives.

Be present | Having a mindful presence is important. Avoid distractions such as looking at your phone (even to look something up related to the text).

Listen | You may disagree with how others read a text. That should not prevent you listening openly.

Be respectful | Care should be taken when handling sacred texts. For example, please avoid placing these pages on the floor.

Facilitators are expected to:

Be honest | No one is an expert on every text. It can be important to be clear what you do not know.

Avoid generalising | One cannot and should not say eg "[All] Christians believe…".

Avoid interpreting | Others encounter a text when we step back from telling them about meanings that have been determined by communities and tradition. It is possible to share such perspectives during a plenary if wanted.

Use original languages to expand conversation if appropriate | Sometimes people have knowledge of scriptural languages and may share that where it adds to what can be said about the passage being discussed. (You will see some examples in the video.)

Further reading and resources

For extra information about Scriptural Reasoning including a series of short How-to videos, visit the Resources section at www.interfaith.cam.ac.uk.

Sometimes people allege that religious texts are responsible for disseminating unhealthy perspectives. If you encounter this, you may find the resources from the Cambridge Scripture and Violence project useful: www.ScriptureAndViolence.org.

The Rose Castle Foundation runs monthly online sessions and maintains the ScripturalReasoning.org website where you will find further information.

About us

This text pack was put together for Inter Faith Week 2026 by a team of scholars affiliated with the Cambridge Interfaith Programme, a research and engagement centre based in the Faculty of Divinity at the University of Cambridge.

Contributors include:

Dr Ankur Barua, Senior Lecturer in Hindu Studies, University of Cambridge

Prof Daniel Weiss, Polonsky-Coexist Professor of Jewish Studies, University of Cambridge

Dr Giles Waller, Senior Teaching Fellow (Theology and Literature) and Research Associate, University of Cambridge

Inderpreet Kaur Pejatta, a graduate of the Faculty of Divinity, University of Cambridge (BA 2024, MPhil 2025)

Rabbi Dr Lindsey Taylor-Guthartz, Teaching Associate in Jewish Studies, University of Cambridge

Luke Wilkinson, a doctoral candidate in the Faculty of Divinity, University of Cambridge

Prof Mahinda Deegalle FHEA, Professorial Research Associate at SOAS University of London and formerly Visiting Scholar in the Faculty of Divinity, University of Cambridge

Riya Kartha, a doctoral candidate in the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge

The compiler and editor is Dr Iona Hine FHEA (PGCE Secondary Religious Studies), CIP Programme Manager, University of Cambridge.

For more about the work of the Cambridge Interfaith Programme, visit our website: www.interfaith.cam.ac.uk

Sign up to receive email alerts about our latest work in Education and pedagogy: https://cikh.civi360.com/opt-in