

5 ways to remember our God 'on the move'

The Tabernacle in the wilderness is a reminder to the Israelites that God is with them every step, in every trial and danger. Think about the ways we are 'on the move' in life. How can physical spaces and objects be a reminder that God-is-with-us, moving with us, dwelling in our midst?



Moving. "My parents moved house many times. The first thing placed in each new dining room was their treasured painting of the Last Supper." What sacred images/symbols have moved with you?



Driving. Some Catholics hang rosary beads from the rear vision mirror, or place a St Christopher medal on the dashboard. Some fill their car with inspiring music from a CD of hymns or a radio station. And you?



Travel. When you travel for work or vacation, be attentive to the location of a church, shrine or other holy place that you can visit to pray or celebrate eucharist. Turn a secular trip into a mini-pilgrimage.



Busy days. Life on the move... Ensure that your calendar or diary is more than a bunch of dates. Are you also marking sacred time: holy feasts on the church's calendar, sacred dates such as a wedding anniversary?



Maturing. As we grow—physically, spiritually, communally—we become more beautiful temples of the Holy Spirit. A sojourn in a retreat house, or a spirituality seminar, is one way to experience God-with-us.

The *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?

"It is necessary to find creative ways to get [Christian] students interested in the other [i.e. Jewish] tradition. For instance, one Christian professor has given a course entitled: Jesus never read the New Testament: Why we as Christians should be addressing our Jewish Scriptures and roots."

Thomas Casey SJ, Director,
Cardinal Bea Centre for Judaic Studies, Rome.

Why should Christians be interested in Judaism? The question itself reflects the tragic amnesia that has affected our Church for so many centuries. For Jesus himself was a Jew, as were Mary, the apostles and most of the earliest disciples of Jesus. Christianity grew out of the Jewish community, and Judaism remains the rich soil in which our Church is planted. The Scriptures which shaped Jesus and the early Church were the Hebrew Scriptures, and our New Testament is incomprehensible without them. For all these reasons and more, Christians need Judaism for a healthy understanding of their very identity.

Happily, Vatican II marked a turning point in the Church's consciousness of its Jewish heritage. But how does its message reach the average parishioner? *Light of Torah* is one creative offering. It seeks to interest Catholics in the Torah (the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures) and in Jewish interpretative traditions such as those that shaped Jesus.



Torah Portion

From the Jewish calendar of Torah readings:

Exodus 25:1—27:19

As this week's Torah portion opens, the revelation at Sinai has concluded and the sacred text turns its attention to the spiritual welfare of the Israelites during their desert trek to the promised land. This requires elaborate plans for the building of a mobile sanctuary, known in English as the 'tabernacle.' Let's look closely at the opening nine verses of our Torah portion (25:1-9), verse 8 in particular.

* Abravanel, quoted in Leibowitz, 471-2.

Sources: Leibowitz, *New Studies in Shemot* (Jerusalem, 1996); Montefiore & Loewe (eds.), *A Rabbinic Anthology* (NY, 1974); Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary* (Jerusalem/NY, 1991); www.thinkingfaith.org/articles/20091217_1.pdf. Scripture quotations: New JPS.

Tasting Torah

"And let them make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them" (Ex.25:8).

Abravanel, a Spanish-Jewish Torah commentator of the 15th century, poses a question that has fascinated the sages down the ages:

"Why did the Almighty command us regarding the construction of the tabernacle saying 'I shall dwell among them' as if He were a circumscribed corporeal being limited in space when this is the opposite of the truth?" *

How would you answer this question? Why would God, who cannot be contained by time and space, request a holy dwelling place with specific measurements and fixtures?

Touching Torah

Abravanel replies by saying that the last thing that God wanted was for the people to think that they had been forsaken, that God's throne was in heaven and remote from humankind. To combat this erroneous belief *"He commanded them to make a Tabernacle, as if to imply that he dwelt in their midst, that they should believe that God lived in their midst and His Providence was forever with them."* Thus the divine purpose for the tabernacle is *"to implant in their souls that God walked in the midst of their camp."* To accentuate this divine desire to be close to God's people, Abravanel quotes a verse from the love poetry of the Song of Songs: *"There he stands behind our wall, gazing through the window, peering through the lattice"* (2:9). *

Depthing Torah

But perhaps you already gleaned this insight from your own careful reading of our Torah text 25:8. Did you ponder the words *"that I may dwell among them"*? The tabernacle is not designed to 'contain' God, but to reassure the people of God's closeness in their earthly lives.

Knowledge of the original Hebrew text can enrich our reflection. The verb 'to dwell' used in 25:8 [from whose root also comes the Hebrew word *mishkan*, 'tabernacle'] conveys the idea of a temporary lodging, a tent characteristic of a nomadic lifestyle. Thus the sanctuary or tabernacle is not at all like the fixed stone temples 'housing' pagan gods, but rather a dwelling that is accessible and flexible enough to move with the camp of the Israelites on their journey through the wilderness. It is not literally God's abode but, rather, gives the Israelites a tangible reference point as they seek to orient their minds and hearts to the divine presence.

Doing Torah

Reflect on your experience of God 'dwelling' within your life's journey. Have you felt God lovingly "gazing through the window, peering through the lattice" (Song of Songs 2:9).

The tabernacle of the wandering Israelites suggests a dynamic divine presence 'on the move' with God's people. Does this image speak to your experience as a member of the Church?

How does your Torah reflection enrich your appreciation of the Christian use of 'tabernacle.'



Faith & life

From ancient Jewish storytelling traditions:

God said to Israel, "Make me a dwelling (Exod. 25:8; 26:1), for I desire to dwell amid my children." When the ministering angels heard this, they said to God, "Why will you abandon the creatures above, and descend to those below? It is your glory that you should be in heaven." But God said, "See how greatly I love the creatures below that I shall descend and dwell beneath the goats' hair." Hence it says: "Make curtains of goats' hair for the Tabernacle" (Exod. 26:7).

Tanh.B., Terumah, 47b