



5 ways

to reflect on our 'comings and goings'

In our Torah reflection overleaf the sages interpret the biblical phrase 'comings and goings' in various ways. Continue to interpret this phrase, naming entry and departure points in your life which are meaningful and for which the experience of blessing is important. Five examples follow. In each instance, ask: what is the blessing I have received/desire/pray for...?

1. Family

From family beginnings...to 'empty nest'. Significant for parents is the day a newborn enters the family unit, and the day that child leaves home.

2. Career

Entering the workforce...to retirement. Do you recall the day you brought home your first pay packet? And the day your career (or part of) came to a close?

3. Liturgy

Born into God's love... departing this world. In the rituals of Catholicism, water is used in welcoming a person

into the life of God at baptism. Then water is sprinkled at the funeral liturgy: a reminder that through baptism this person is eternally embraced as a child of God.

4. Each day

Each day is a series of 'comings and goings': E.g., waking and sleeping; arriving at work/school, departing for home at day's end; coming to the meal table, leaving the table.

5. Airport

Airports, railway stations and bus terminals are busy places filled with comings and goings... And blessings?

Light of Torah

Ancient texts, through fresh eyes, alive for today.

Why reflect on Torah?

"What ought to emerge now is a new respect for the Jewish interpretation of the Old Testament... Christians can learn a great deal from a Jewish exegesis practised for more than 2000 years."

— Pontifical Biblical Commission, 2001.

It is well and good for a Vatican commission of biblical experts to speak of Catholics developing 'a new respect' for Jewish biblical interpretation, but how does the average parishioner develop an interest in Jewish biblical scholarship which in turn invites that respect? How can a noble vision translate into parish practice?

Grassroots strategies on a variety of fronts are essential, and to this end *Light of Torah* makes a contribution. As a reader-friendly leaflet series it guides parishioners in reading the Torah (the first five books of the bible) with the help of traditional Jewish approaches to the text. Week by week, the reader listens to the voice of a Jewish commentator—from ancient, medieval or contemporary times. Gradually, over time, parishioners develop a basic familiarity with the sages and biblical interpretations of the Jewish tradition, while enriching their own Christian faith.



Deuteronomy 26:1—29:8

Ki Tavo:
'when you enter'



Light of Torah
www.lightoftorah.net

Text: Teresa Pirola
Design: Sarann Ryan
© Light of Torah, 2011

Light of Torah is a ministry arising from the Catholic community. In the spirit of Vatican II's call to Jewish-Christian reconciliation, Light of Torah encourages Torah reflection in homes and parishes, drawing on the insights of Jewish interpretative traditions.

Reproduction permitted for non-commercial pastoral use.



Torah Portion

From the Jewish calendar of Torah readings:

Deuteronomy 26:1—29:8

In this week's Torah portion the Israelites are told of the thanksgiving ceremonies they are to perform upon entering the promised land. The covenant is restated and a list of blessings and curses follows... it is indeed a formidable list! Today, let's follow the rabbinic thought patterns concerning a single verse: 28:6.

1. Bava Mezia, 107.

2. Solomon Astruc, late 14th c. Spain.

3. Midrash Devarim, VII, 5.

4. Ha'amek Davar is a commentary by a Torah scholar of Belarus known as the Netziv (1817-1893).

Tasting Torah

"Blessed shall you be in your comings and blessed shall you be in your goings" (Deut. 28:6).

Intrigued by the intricacies of the text and its bounty of meanings, the rabbis saw something odd about this verse. Surely, they reasoned, the word order should be reversed. On a typical day, a person is seen *going out* from home and only later *coming back in*. The text should read, *'Blessed shall you be in your goings and your comings.'* What is the Torah saying through this choice of wording? Ponder with a friend. How do you reply?

Touching Torah

In the Talmud, Rabbi Yohana interprets our verse like this: *"Just as your coming into this world was without sin, so be your going out of the world without sin."*¹ In other words, the blessings relate to the experience of birth and death, entering and departing the world.

Convinced? Not all the sages are. Yes, the explanation holds in the case of an individual, but this text is addressed to a whole nation. Astruc offers an alternative view:² In blessing the people, Moses was assuring them of divine guidance as they entered the promised land. But he was also reassuring them that this blessing would never leave them. Even if they sinned and went out (were exiled) from the land as a result of sin, the Lord would never abandon them. The covenant would remain. Do you find this view more plausible?

Depthing Torah

Yet even Astruc's creative interpretation poses difficulties for the attentive reader. Look at the context of this verse. The blessings listed have a concrete, material quality to them. They are about finding comfort in plentiful crops, a safe home, a healthy family. Thus the Midrash³ may offer a better explanation: our verse refers to a person's daily business affairs—*"your coming in for business and your going out for business"*—or one's worldly affairs in general.

Wait a minute! Is the Torah suggesting a crass 'God will make you rich' theology? No. Listen to what the *Ha'amek Davar* has to say: *"You will be blessed in all these material things when you go into them and leave them. They will not defile or seduce you; but the blessing of the Lord will stand by you to enable you to overcome all temptation."*⁴

So then, the blessing is not wealth, but virtue. As you strive to be faithful, the Lord will help you to be faithful, even amidst those worldly dealings which can threaten to distract you from your focus on the Lord. For the Lord has made you a holy people, and your relationship with God permeates every moment of your life.

Doing Torah

Note the variety of interpretations arising from a single verse of Torah! Where is your own voice in this conversation? On what points do you agree or disagree with the sages? Prayerfully, and creatively attentive to the text, what personal insights can you offer?



Faith & Life

The blessing as described by the *Ha'amek Davar* is that the affairs of the world need not act as a barrier to holiness. To illustrate he cites the example of Abraham's hospitality.

"This special Divine aid was granted to Abraham (Gen. 18:3) who achieved communion with God at the time of the arrival of his guests."

Share your own experience of being in communion with God even as you attend to your family, work and civic duties.

Bibliography: Eskenazi and Weiss, eds., *The Torah: A Women's Commentary* (NY, 2008); Freedman and Simon, eds., *Midrash Rabbah* (London/NY, 1983); Leibowitz, *New Studies in Devarim* (NY: Lambda); Scripture: NJPS.