



5 ways

to look back over life's journey

"I have led you forty years in the wilderness. The clothes on your back have not worn out, and the sandals on your feet have not worn out; you have not eaten bread, and you have not drunk wine or strong drink—so that you may know that I am the LORD your God." (Deut. 29:5-6, NRSV)

1. *The clothes on your back...*

Look back over life's journey... How were you 'clothed'...physically, spiritually? Were you ever in material want? How did your clothing (work uniform? choice of style?) express your 'outer' and 'inner' self? How/where was the Lord leading you through all this?

2. *The sandals on your feet...*

Footwear assists walking, especially over rocky or difficult terrain. Use this image to reflect on the ways you have 'walked' with (and perhaps at times seemingly without) the Lord. Would you describe your life as a walk? A run? A marathon? A sprint?

3. *No bread...* Bread is a basic source of sustenance. But a person 'does not live on bread alone' (Deut. 8:3). God fed the Israelites with manna. How has God 'fed' you, physically/spiritually, over the years?

4. *No wine or intoxicant...* Biblically wine symbolizes joy and festivity. It is used in sacred ritual. What special joys and sacred moments have been part of your life's story?

5. *...that you may know that I am the LORD your God.* We seek God in all life's gifts, blessings, strivings and struggles... Your thoughts?

Light of Torah

Ancient texts, through fresh eyes, alive for today.

Why reflect on Torah?

When as Christians we look back over 2000 years of church history, we know that our treatment of the Jewish people has not been one of our happy achievements, to say the least. However Vatican II marked a 180 degree turn in that path: from conflict to reconciliation; from polemic to partnership. In just fifty years of Jewish-Christian dialogue great steps in healing have been taken. Certainly, obstacles and hurts, misunderstanding and prejudice still exist. But there is every reason to be hopeful.

Continuing in the direction set by the Council, we can wonder what the Jewish-Christian relationship will look like in another two millennia; and how the church will be transformed as a result. Surely there will be no need for a *Light of Torah* ministry, as Christians and Jews, with mutual respect, will naturally and eagerly seek to learn from each other's traditions and interpretative insights into shared biblical texts.

A pipe dream? Yet if you were a Christian in the Middle Ages who could have imagined a time when the bishops would gather at an ecumenical council and call the church to embrace its Jewish roots!

Let's continue to dream, and, in the pursuit of those dreams, put shoulder to the plough.



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, 2012

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

On the edge of the promised land, Moses reminds the Israelites that their forty year wilderness journey has been a story of God's signs and wonders, yet also a story of the people's rebellion. Why this contradiction? Why have the Israelites been blind and deaf to God's miracles? Let's take a closer look at Moses' words in Deut. 29:1-3 with an ear to the wisdom of the Jewish sages.

Tasting Torah

*"You have seen all that the LORD did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, the great trials that your eyes saw, the signs, and those great wonders. **But to this day the LORD has not given you a mind to understand, or eyes to see, or ears to hear.**" (Deut. 29:2-4).¹*

Traditional commentators wrestled with these verses, especially with the last statement which seems to suggest that God was the cause of the people's blindness. Ponder and discuss this with a friend in *havrutah*. What is God's Word saying to you?

Touching Torah

Moshe Hefez, a 16th century Italian commentator interprets the verse as a statement about the dangers of familiarity and habit. The closer we are to the miracle, the less we appreciate it:

"We do not appreciate [miracles] until they are far away from us, since familiarity breeds contempt and they are regarded as natural not supernatural phenomena. This is what Moses meant. You witnessed all those great wonders but only appreciated their full significance just now, at this time, after they had receded from view, as if you had heretofore lacked sight and hearing."²

Prayerfully ponder this... Have you had the experience of recognizing a sign, wonder or miracle only *after* the event? What prevented you from 'seeing' it at the time?

Depthing Torah

Rabbi Meir Simha (19th century, Dvinsk, Russia) interprets the text this way: The Israelites often mistakenly attributed divine powers to Moses, forgetting that he was a mere mortal like themselves. For years they presumed the miracles to be Moses' doing. Only when he died did they come to terms with his mortality and acknowledged God as the true author of the signs and wonders that they had witnessed. Indeed, one tradition has it that this speech was delivered on the day of Moses' death.

But do either of these views really account for the reference to *'the LORD'* in our text? This is the question posed by Nehama Leibowitz (20th century, Israel) who goes on to offer this creative view: At the end of his life Moses looked back on forty years of toil as he had tried to bring his people into relationship with the Lord. Nothing had worked! Overcome by the mystery of his human 'failure' he looked for an answer in divine providence. Perhaps the people's resistance was not their fault, he reasoned, it was somehow part of the divine plan. Thus what we hear in this verse is a great sigh of disappointment that lays itself to rest in the unfathomable mystery of God's ways.

Doing Torah

Three interpretations are presented from three different centuries of Jewish Torah study. Which 'speaks' to you and how does it agree (or not) with your own reflections on this text?



Faith & Life

Our three commentators touch on critical tasks in the journey of life. We might name them as:

1. The ability to look back on the past with clarity and to recognize the footprints of grace in even painful events.
2. The importance of distinguishing God's message from the messenger, and acknowledging God as its true author.
3. The willingness to accept that we can't solve everything in life, to surrender our imperfect lives to the divine mystery.

Share some thoughts on these points in view of our Torah text.

1. Or Deut. 29:2-3, variation in verse numbering.
2. Leibowitz, 292, Bibliography: Leibowitz, *Studies in Devarim* (NY: Lambda). Scripture: NRSV.