



5 Ways to Celebrate Rosh Hashanah

Acknowledging Jewish traditions

Rosh Hashanah is Jewish New Year, celebrating God as Creator and Sovereign. It begins a period of repentance that culminates ten days later in the celebration of *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement.

1. Greet.

Send your Jewish friends, neighbors, colleagues a traditional *Rosh Hashanah* greeting: '*Shanah Tovah!*' (a wish for a good year).

2. Learn.

Ask a Jewish friend to explain more to you about his/her experience of faith and festivals. Or visit a website such as **Aish.com** (go to "Holidays").

3. Eat.

Add a traditional Jewish festive food to your table. E.g., apples dipped in honey: a wish for the sweet year to come. Round-shaped bread (*challah*): symbol of a perfect year.

4. Enjoy.

Savor an aspect of this beautiful world created by God, our Creator and Sovereign. Gather fresh flowers for your home. Watch the sun rise. Breathe deeply, savoring the living breath within you.

5. Let go.

Name an attitude or habit that is not lifegiving, that is dark, sinful. Pray, repent, release it. Ask God to create you anew. In Jewish custom, on *Rosh Hashanah* the family walks to a natural water source for the *Tashlich* ritual; based on the prophet Micah 7:19 'You will hurl [*tashlich*] their sins into the depths of the sea.'



Light of Torah
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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.

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Light of Torah

Ancient texts, through fresh eyes, alive for today.



Deuteronomy 31:1-30

VaYeLeKh:
'he went'

Why reflect on Torah?

Surely this commandment which I am commanding you today is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away. It is not in heaven, that you should say, "Who will go up to heaven for us, and get it for us?" ... No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe (Deuteronomy 30:11-12,14).

This passage, taken from the first part of this week's Torah portion, could be a mission statement for our *Light of Torah* ministry. Our goal is to lead Christians into an intimate relationship with the Torah (bible), to discover God's Word as 'near.'

Our pedagogy is inspired by the biblical traditions of the Jewish people in their love for Torah. Here we find tools keenly attuned to our grassroots audience, tools that allow people to engage with the text in ways that are lively, insightful, prayerful, imaginative, and joyful.

In this way we respond to the Church's call for Christians to develop a new respect for the scriptures and interpretative traditions of the Jewish people.

Our back page reflection focuses on the festival of Rosh Hashanah, Jewish New Year.



Torah Portion

From the Jewish calendar
of Torah readings:

Deuteronomy 31:1-30

In our Torah portion Moses prepares for his death and bids his people farewell. His leadership is transferred to Joshua.

Bibliography: Bialik and Ravnitzky, eds. *The Book of Legends* (NY, 1992); Fox, trans. *The Five Books of Moses* (NY, 1995). Herczeg, trans., *The Torah: With Rashi's Commentary* (NY, 2011); Munk, *The Call of the Torah*, vol. 5 (NY, 1995); Scripture: NRSV.

Tasting Torah

Read chapter 31, with particular attention to the first nine verses. Were you touched by the human sensitivities of these final scenes of the Torah? The time has come for Moses—the great prophet, leader, intimate of God, father-mother to Israel—to let go of *everything*: his authority, his 'job', his Israelite family, his dream of entering the promised land, and even his life. Was there something in this chapter that particularly resonated in you? Share a thought/insight with your havrutah partner. How does the Torah speak to you?

Touching Torah

"I am now one hundred and twenty years old. I am no longer able to get about, and the Lord has told me, 'You shall not cross over this Jordan.'" (Deuteronomy 31:2).

A more literal translation of the Hebrew reads: 'I am no longer able to go-out and to come-in'. According to Rashi, Moses is referring to his diminished prophetic powers. Whereas once his face shone in the radiance of the divine presence as he received the Lord's teachings in full clarity, now his ability to interpret the Torah is weakened. Say the sages, the light of the sun is dimmed. And as it dims, Joshua's face shines like the moon. Joshua is not Moses, whose prophetic role was unique. Yet his time for leadership has come, and now it is the Lord himself, not Moses, who instructs Joshua (see v.14).

Depthing Torah

What is Moses' reaction to all this? Where the Torah hints, the midrash elaborates. The Torah tells us (v.7) that Moses declares his unre-served support for Joshua. Yet the imaginative stories of the midrash describe how Moses' willingness to relinquish leadership, like his willingness to accept death, is a gradual letting go. In one passage he bargains with the Lord:

"Master of the universe, if I must die [to vacate my post] for Joshua, let me be his disciple [in my remaining hours]." The Lord agrees, so Moses goes to where Joshua is teaching Torah and becomes his student. Says the midrash, "At that session, the tradition of wisdom was taken away from Moses and given to Joshua." Later, Joshua receives a revelation in a pillar of cloud. "After the cloud departed, Moses went over to Joshua and asked, 'What did the Word say to you?' Joshua replied, 'When the Word used to reveal itself to you, did I know what it said to you?' In that instant, Moses cried out in anguish and said, 'Rather a hundred deaths than a single pang of envy. Master of universes, until now I sought life. But now my soul is surrendered to you.'" Thus did Moses become reconciled to his dying.

Doing Torah

For the sages, the final scenes of the Torah portray Moses as both heroic and fragile; humble yet touched by envy; whole-hearted despite inner struggle. In your own midrashic reflection, how do you 'read between the lines' of the sacred text?



More from the Midrash

Earlier in the midrashic sequence, Moses implores heaven and earth to seek God's mercy on his behalf that he may be allowed to live, not die. He cries out to the stars and planets, the mountains and hills, then he turns to the sea. The sea replies: 'Are you not the same son of Amram who came to me with your rod, smote me, split me into twelve paths...because the [divine] Presence was proceeding at your right? What's happened to you now?' As the sea reminded Moses of what he was able to do in his younger years, he cried out in anguish, 'Oh that I were as in the months of old' (Job 29:2).

Reflection: Are there past strengths and glory days which you miss? How does the Torah speak to you about those memories?