



5 voices

from the Tradition

'And let them make Me a sanctuary so that I may dwell among them (Exodus 25:8). The construction of the Tabernacle in the book of Exodus is all part of the great unfolding love affair between God and Israel, as captured in this sampling of texts from the midrash and from later Jewish commentary:

- 1. From the first day on which the world was created God yearned to dwell with His creatures below, but He did not do so until the Sanctuary was erected, and then God caused His Shechinah [Divine Presence] to rest upon it...*
Num. R., Naso, 13.6
- 2. 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
- 3. Make a lodge for the shepherd that he may come and feed you...*
Exod. R. 34.3
- 4. The Divine Presence does not rest on the sanctuary by virtue of the sanctuary but by virtue of Israel 'for they are the temple of the Lord'.
Zedah La-derekk (published 1624)*
- 5. He commanded that each individual should build him a sanctuary in the recesses of his heart, that he should prepare himself to be a dwelling place for the Lord.....*
*Malbim
(19th c. Russian-Jewish rabbi)*

Sources: Refer overleaf.



Light of Torah
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Light of Torah

Ancient texts, through fresh eyes, alive for today.



Exodus 25:1—27:19

Terumah: 'gifts'

Why reflect on Torah?

*"The Lord speaks his word... **his word is not something fundamentally alien to us, and creation was willed in a relationship of familiarity with God's own life.**"*

(Verbum Domini, 2010)

If God's word is meant to speak to our human hearts, if God's word is a word to be recognized as lifegiving and fulfilling, why does the bible so often appear to parishioners as strange and obscure, even tedious and boring? Take today's Torah portion, for instance: three chapters from the Book of Exodus detailing the materials and instructions for constructing an ancient shrine... can this really speak to life in the 21st century?

This *Light of Torah* series answers with a resounding 'Yes!' But we need to grow in our relationship with scripture. By learning from the brilliance of traditional Jewish methods for exploring the Torah (first five books of the bible) and their attentiveness to the subtle details of the text, this leaflet series leads parishioners on a journey of discovery of those scriptures which were dear to Jesus, and are held sacred by Jews and Christians alike.



Torah Portion

From the Jewish calendar of Torah readings:

Exodus 25:1–27:19

“And let them make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them” (Exodus 25:8).

Having received the Torah at Mt Sinai, the Israelites now receive from God the task of building the Tabernacle: a portable tent-like shrine which will signify the Lord’s presence among his people.

After listing the construction materials, the text describes each of the furnishings to be made. At the innermost section of the Tabernacle will rest the ark—the box or chest containing the stone tablets engraved with the Decalogue. Thus the ark is linked in a special way with God’s covenant with Israel through the gift of Torah.

Tasting Torah

“Exactly as I show you—the pattern of the Tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings—so shall you make it” (25:9).

“They shall make an ark” (25:10).

“You shall make a cover of pure gold...” (25:17).

“You shall make a table...” (25:23).

“You shall make a lampstand...” (25:31).

“You shall then make cloths...” (26:7).

“You shall make the planks...” (26:15).

“You shall make bars of acacia wood...” (26:26).

“You shall make the altar...” (27:1).

As the divinely-given construction details unfold over three chapters, the recurring pattern “*You shall make...*” is clear. But there is one departure from the pattern which caught the attention of the sages.

Touching Torah

“They shall make an ark” (25:10).¹

The exception occurs in relation to the ark itself. Why the contrast in wording: ‘They’ instead of ‘you’? Perhaps you notice that the ark is the first furnishing mentioned. This led the sages in the midrash to observe:

Just as the Torah preceded everything [at the Creation], so did God give precedence to the Ark over all other vessels in the construction of the Tabernacle; and just as light preceded all other works of the Creation...so also did the work in connection with the Torah, which is called ‘light’—as it is written: ‘For the commandment is a lamp and the Torah a light’ (Prov. 6:23)—*take precedence.*²

Depthing Torah

But we have not yet answered our question: why ‘they’? Again let’s turn to the midrash:

*The Holy One Blessed be He wished to stress that the command [to build the Tabernacle] applied to each and every Israelite alike. No one should have the excuse to say to his fellow: I contributed more to the ark. Therefore I study [Torah] more and have a greater stake in it than you! Whoever is part of the congregation of Jacob...they are just as important as the High Priest.*³

Later commentary takes this further, pointing out that the implementation of the entirety of God’s teachings (Torah) requires collaborative effort.

*“No single individual can perform all the precepts...But, taken as a whole, the Israelite people can keep the entire gamut of Jewish observances. For this reason the Torah states: ‘they shall make the ark.’”*⁴

Harnessing all these insights, we might answer our question thus: By using the pronoun ‘they’ the Torah singles out the ark as having a special role, one which enlists all Israel in its making, highlighting the essential link between Torah, peoplehood and the indispensable gift and role of each person.

Doing Torah

In Jewish synagogues today, the Torah scrolls are housed in a central structure called *aron ha-kodesh*, ‘ark of holiness’. Have you ever been to a synagogue? Ponder your own experience of ‘tabernacle’ in the light of the Hebrew scriptures and Jewish practice.



Faith & Life

For Catholics, the renewal of theology and church life over recent decades has sought to recover a stronger communal perspective considered faithful to Christianity’s origins. Thus ‘church’ is viewed not as the sole domain of clergy but a calling for each member of the community to offer his/her unique gift as part of the one body of Christ.

Reflect: From its ancient depths can you hear today’s Torah portion testifying to your unique role in the community of faith?

1. Most English translations read ‘they.’ NAB: ‘you.’
2. Exodus Rabbah
3. Midrash Tanhuma
4. Or Ha-Hayyim: a mystical commentary published Venice 1742.

Bibliography: Freedman & Simon, eds., *Midrash Rabbah: Exodus* (NY: Soncino, 1983); Leibowitz, *New Studies in Shemot* (NY, 1996); Montefiore & Loewe, *A Rabbinic Anthology* (NY, 1974). Scripture: NJPS