



5 reflections

The building plan for the Tabernacle in today's Torah portion is a breathtaking image of divine-human cooperation. God provides the master plan for the people to rally and make it all happen! Countless human acts and earthly materials are involved in the project, yet collectively they all point to a single-minded focus on God and a way of life based on Torah, i.e., the teachings of God.

Take a moment to reflect on how your own material surrounds and physical efforts reveal a deeper story of love, faith, spiritual values.

1. Think about the ways in which you freely volunteer your time, resources, talent in your community. Are you part of a core group who form the bedrock of community life? Or are you on the periphery?
2. If you have experienced the happy sense of companionship and purpose engendered by a parish working bee, you have an insight into the power of physical effort to unite hearts and build community.
3. Notice the details of your parish church. Do you know the story behind them? Who donated the stained-glass window? Why was the church named so? Ask around and learn more about your parish story.
3. Likewise, look at the details of your home. Is there a story behind that fading wallpaper? Did a special person give you that ornament? Was the back room extension the result of a familial cooperative effort?
5. As you go forth from this time of Torah reflection, be attentive to your choices to build, to contribute, to participate in the projects of your local faith community.



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 the life of a Christian 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 both Jews and Christians.



Torah Portion

From the Jewish calendar
of Torah readings:

Exodus 25:1—27:19

Having received the stone tablets inscribed with the Decalogue ('ten commandments'), the Israelites now receive from God the task of building the Tabernacle: a portable shrine which will house the precious stone tablets.

Unless you are an architect with an interest in ancient temple structures, at first glance the details in this Torah portion may test your patience! But let's stay with the text, empowered by rabbinic insight, and see if we can unlock meaning for our own lives. Read as much of the portion as you can, then let's focus on a single verse: 25:2.

Tasting Torah

*Tell the Israelite people to bring Me gifts; you shall accept gifts for Me **from every person whose heart is so moved***" (25:2, JPS).

Note how three other translations express the same theme:

"...from all whose hearts prompt them to give" (25:2, NRSV).

"...from every man whose heart makes-him-willing" (25:2, Fox).

"...from every man whose heart motivates him" (25:2 Stone ed., Mesorah).

What does your bible say? A close reading of this verse has led Torah commentators to view it as shedding light on the whole Torah portion. Can you see why?

Touching Torah

Following Rashi (11th century Torah scholar) we note that this building task is not only dedicated to the Lord's name, it is to be a *voluntary* effort, an expression of goodwill. It does not involve coercion, guilt or competition but hearts willingly moved, rightly motivated. How different is this work to the forced labor under Pharaoh's rule!

As a work of love it is to be lifegiving, uniting the Israelites in a common goal, forming them into a people dedicated to the service of the Lord. We are reminded that the gift of self, freely given, is at the heart of faith, and that an ethos of community service is a hallmark of both Judaism and Christianity.

Depthing Torah

When someone or something is precious to us, we tend to be aware of intricate details. "I love the way that lock of hair falls in the middle of her forehead," says the romantic lover. "Note how the pattern of the tiles has a subtle 'tree' motif," says the proud homeowner. Details overlooked as irrelevant by an 'outsider' are the mark of specialness to the 'insider' who is intimately connected with and applies significance to those details. In this light, can we start to hear our Torah portion not as a tedious list of construction ingredients, but as a hymn of praise to the Living God? As the people are called to willingly gather, pool their offerings, contribute their skills and expend their energies, a sacred focal point will emerge in their midst to have enduring significance for ages to come. Note the interpenetration of ordinary earthly tasks and an extraordinary spiritual perspective.

Doing Torah

Reflect on the gift of a willing heart.

Think of a time when your heart was 'so moved' to undertake a great labor of love. What intricate details were part of that experience?

Are there rituals/works in your life which were once a delight but are now undertaken with a sense of joyless obligation? What steps can you take to rediscover the original reason and enthusiasm for your giving?



Jewish storytelling

The midrash tells a parable about a king who could not bear to part with his daughter when she married another king. He went to his son-in-law and asked this favor: '*Please, wherever you live, have a room ready for me that I may dwell close to you.*' According to the midrash, God is like that father, asking that a tabernacle be built so as to remain close to his people, Israel, even as they travel. As scripture says, '*And have them make me a sanctuary, so that I may dwell among them*' (Ex.25:8).^{*} (See *Exodus Rabbah* 33:1)

^{*} A point of note in the Hebrew text: *mikdash* ('sanctuary') is singular, while *betochem* indicates the plural (dwell 'among them').

Bibliography: Freedman & Simon, eds., *Midrash Rabbah: Exodus* (NY: Soncino, 1983); Herczeg, ed., trans. *Rashi: Commentary on the Torah* (NY: Mesorah, 1995, 1999); Schorsch, *Canon Without Closure* (NY, 2007).