

5 thoughts

Having read the article overleaf, ponder these added thoughts.

The genealogy in Ex. 6 is followed by a surprising repetition (see 6:26-27). Moses and Aaron have already been included in the genealogy. Why then is there any need to say “It was the same Aaron and Moses” to whom the Lord spoke, “the same Moses and Aaron” who confronted Pharaoh. Surely we don’t have doubts about their identity. What, then, is God’s Word trying to tell us?

1. Aaron and Moses were not superheroes from another planet. They knew human frailty and fear as much as the rest of their kin. Yet they *responded* to God’s call to a history-altering mission. Why some people respond and others don’t is a mystery in every age, is it not?

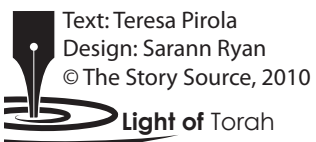
2. Even the descendants of Simeon and Levi, the hotheads who were so proactive in taking revenge upon the population of Shechem (remember Dinah’s story from two weeks ago?), are unresponsive. Perhaps the mention of their names gives insight into just how devastating was slavery on the Israelites’ morale.

3. It could be argued that Moses, raised as an Egyptian, had not shared in the suffering of his fellow Israelites. The same could not be said, however, of Aaron.

4. In the repetition noted in 6:26-27, notice how the order of names, Moses and Aaron, undergo reversal. The great Torah commentator Rashi (following the midrash) sees this as indicating their equality.

5. Then again, others (like Rashbam) argue that this change in order signifies a transition. In the natural order, Aaron is first because he is the first born. From a redemptive view, Moses is first in prophetic status.

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Light of Torah

Ancient texts, through fresh eyes, alive for today.



Why reflect on Torah?

Our Torah portion this week falls on 1st January which in our Church calendar is the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God. And here we are reading Exodus! What connection can there be between our Torah reading program and a Marian feast?

Let’s pause to consider the Gospel reading of this day, eight days after Christmas Day. In Luke’s Gospel (2:21) we read that Jesus was circumcized eight days after his birth in accordance with Jewish ritual practice. Circumcision for the Jews was (is) a sign of their covenantal relationship with God. Prior to Vatican II and the reform of the liturgical calendar, the Octave of Christmas was called Feast of the Circumcision.

Thus, in the midst of this unmistakably ‘Catholic’ liturgical celebration, as we listen to the Gospel proclaimed, we are reminded of the Jewish ground of our faith: that Jesus, Mary and Joseph were faithful Jews, and that it was from the rich depths of Jewish faith, based on the Torah, that our own Christian faith tradition emerged.

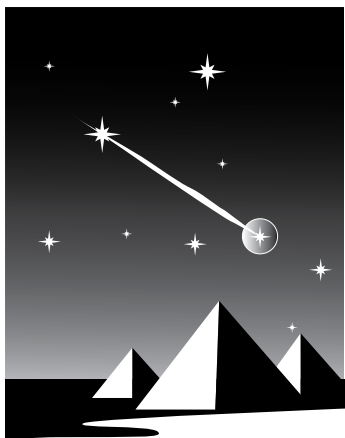
We note, too, that the Church designates 1 January as a day of uniting in prayer for peace. May our ‘Light of Torah’ efforts contribute to interfaith harmony.

Issue #14

1 Jan 2011

Exodus 6:2—9:35

Vaera: ‘I appeared’



Torah Portion

From the Jewish calendar of Torah readings:

Exodus 6:2—9:35

After a disastrous start to the mission of liberation, Moses and Aaron once again apply themselves to the task of fulfilling their commission from the Lord. Our Torah portion includes stories of how Moses confronts Pharaoh with dramatic signs ('the plagues') with which our Catholic readership is likely to be familiar. But let's leave the comfort of familiarity and focus instead on a less known part of the text, entering into the creative insights of the Jewish biblical tradition.

Tasting Torah

Read Exodus 6:1—7:7 slowly, carefully, and preferably with a friend. The narrative describes God preparing Moses for the great event of liberation from Egypt. The dialogue between God and Moses is intense. But you will notice that it is suddenly interrupted in 6:14 by a genealogy, after which their dialogue resumes. What is the point of this interruption? Certainly, family trees are common in the bible, but why now? And why does it not provide a full list of Jacob's descendents (for after naming the households of Reuben, Simeon, Levi it stops)?

Touching Torah

Is this simply an editorial accident in the text? Remember that in *Light of Torah* we work with traditional Jewish approaches to the bible, and so we apply ourselves prayerfully and imaginatively to excavating God's Word in search of spiritual meanings buried deep within the text. What did you find?

In the midrash (Jewish storytelling traditions), the voice of Rabbi Ya'akov focuses on 6:13 and the meaning of 'He commanded them' (or 'he gave them orders', *NRSV*). The order to be given to Pharaoh is clear. But what was the order for the Israelites? The text doesn't say, but the midrash concludes that God was calling for the involvement of the Israelite leaders and it is for this reason that the text begins naming the heads of tribes.

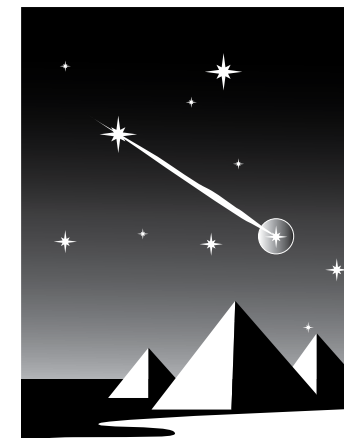
Depthing Torah

Following this midrashic lead, we can imagine Moses and Aaron going from house to house, calling for partners in the liberation to follow. Despairing of a response from the tribe of Reuben, they move on to the tribe of Simeon. Unsuccessful there, they seek support from their own tribe, the Levites. At this point the genealogy stops, suggesting—say some Torah commentators—that Moses and Aaron recognize their aloneness in this mission. For "they would not listen to Moses, because of their broken spirit" (6:9). The truth dawns: it is just the two of them...and God.

At this point Moses' dialogue with the Lord continues; but note the shift compared to that which preceded the genealogy. This time Moses is not sent to speak to the Israelites, he is told simply to confront Pharaoh with precisely the words that God places in his mouth. God's proactive role is more pronounced and Moses' role as God's prophet is emphasized. (Do you agree?) This is not going to be a humanly orchestrated uprising. This is going to be a divine showdown where God acts decisively, gratuitously, for the sake of the chosen people. The drama builds, and God is leading the way...

Doing Torah

Where do you find yourself in this sacred story? Can you relate it to an experience of call-and-response in your own life's journey?



Faith & Life

A man who runs an organization that assists homeless people had this to say:

"When I was young I never thought of myself as a leader, let alone a leader in *this* field. I grew up in a comfortable home and never had any exposure to poverty. But one thing led to another... the influence of an incident, a book, a friend... Somehow God led me to this place in my life. And here I am."

Sources: Lichtenstein, *Moses: Envoy of God, Envoy of His People* (NJ, 2008); Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary* (Philadelphia, 1991); Scherman, Zlotowitz (eds.), *Rashi: Commentary on the Torah* (NY: Mesorah, 1995, 1999). Scripture quotations: JPS.