

5 Ways to describe God

Our Torah portion, Deuteronomy 32, employs several metaphors to describe God. These are listed below. Such diverse images. Which 'speaks' to you most clearly? Which is surprising, perhaps even confronting, to you? Discuss these metaphors over a meal with friends, inviting each person to share their favorite image of God, from the bible or from their own life experience.

1. Rock

"Indeed their rock is not like our Rock" (32:31). God is also described as 'rock' in verses 4, 15, 18, 30.

2. Father

In verse 6 God is described as a creative father: *"Is not he your father, who created you?"*

3. Eagle

In verse 11 God is described as an eagle teaching its young to fly: *"As an eagle stirs up its nest, and hovers over its young..."*

4. Mother

Feminine terms are employed in verses 13 and 18 where God is depicted as a mother who gives birth and nurses a child. *"You forgot the God who gave you birth"* (32:18).

5. Warrior

Later in the text, God is described as a warrior protecting his people (vv. 23, 41-42). *"When I whet my flashing sword...I will take vengeance on my adversaries"* (32:41).

Light of Torah

Ancient texts, through fresh eyes, alive for today.

Why reflect on Torah?

Our Torah portion this week is read in Jewish synagogues on the Sabbath which falls between *Rosh HaShanah* (Jewish New Year) and *Yom Kippur* ('Day of Atonement'). This sabbath is often called *Shabbat Shuvah*. In Hebrew, *shuvah* means 'return,' suggesting the return to one's pure origins. From here comes the Hebrew word for 'repentance:' *teshuvah*.

As Jewish communities enter into the penitential spirit of this period, we Christians can draw near in prayerful solidarity, aware of our own need for repentance. Reconciliation has been a key theme in Jewish-Christian relations of the past fifty years, in view of the poor treatment of Jewish communities by Christians over many centuries. In the words of Cardinal Edward Cassidy (speaking in Prague, 1990), *"The fact that anti-Semitism has found a place in Christian thought and practice calls for an act of 'teshuvah' (repentance) and of reconciliation on our part."*

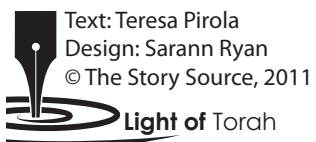
In its own way, may **Light of Torah** contribute to this path of reconciliation by bringing Catholic parishioners to a deeper awareness and appreciation of Jewish interpretative traditions.



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Shabbat Shuvah
Deuteronomy 32:1-52

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Torah Portion

From the Jewish calendar of Torah readings:

Deuteronomy 32:1-52

The bulk of our Torah portion is a poem often referred to as 'the Song of Moses.' The author places on the lips of Moses a recollection by God of the troubled relationship between God and Israel. It begins by remembering an idyllic time when Israel was 'the pupil of God's eye,' but by verse 15 the sins of Israel are laid bare and God's fury is unleashed. From verse 26, God reconsiders punishment as a solution and resolves to deliver Israel from its enemies. Through 52 tumultuous verses, a story of the redemption of a people is told.

Tasting Torah

As an example of biblical poetry, our Torah portion is rich indeed. Let's focus on the opening 15 verses. Read aloud Deut.32:1-15. Listen to the rhythm, patterns, repetitions and imagery of the sacred text. What do you notice?

Touching Torah

Did you enjoy the poetic parallelism? That's where two or more lines mirror each other as in:

*"May my teaching drop like the rain,
my speech condense like the dew"* (32:2).

*"Remember the days of old,
consider the years long past"* (32:7).

In other cases, the lines sound similar but contain two distinct ideas/items such as those underlined here:

*"Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak;
Let the earth hear the words of my mouth."*
(32:1).

*"The Rock, his work is perfect,
and all his ways are just"* (32:4).

Several metaphors are employed to describe God. How many did you notice? (See back page of this leaflet). Note too that four times in verse 2 Moses' words are likened to water. Just as life-giving water sustains the earth, so are these words recited in order to sustain the covenant between God and the Israelites as they enter the promised land.

Depthing Torah

The liturgical context for today's portion is the Ten Days of Repentance, as the Jewish calendar moves from *Rosh HaShanah* to *Yom Kippur*.

At times the journey 'home' to God seems so far that we hesitate to even start. Yet we are not the only one covering the distance: God sets out to meet us! A poignant story comes down to us through Jewish tradition:

"A king had a son who had gone astray from his father a journey of 100 days. His friends said to him, 'Return to your father'; he said: 'I cannot.' Then his father sent word to say, 'Return as far as you can, and I will come to you the rest of the way.' So God says, 'Return to me, and I will return to you' (Mal.3:7)"[Pesikta Raba].

This is a beautiful story for Christians to bear in mind when pondering the Gospel image of the father running to meet the prodigal son (Luke 15).

Doing Torah

- Think of a broken relationship in your life. Does it seem impossible to mend? Impossible to forgive, to be forgiven, to heal again?
- This week, take one healing step, even if it is simply to pray for the *desire* to repent or to forgive. Perhaps talk over the matter with a trusted friend. 'Return' as far as you can.
- Is your relationship with God, with God's people, 'tumultuous'? In what way does this week's Torah portion speak to you?



Faith & Life

Tikkun olam is a Hebrew term referring to the 'healing of the world' through loving deeds. Be alert this week to small gestures that contribute to this healing in the course of an ordinary day; e.g.,

- Pray for the world's needs.
- Write a supportive letter to someone who is 'doing it tough'.
- Give generously to a charity or poverty relief agency.
- Avoid spirals of negativity. Praise goodness in others.
- Give a little extra of your time and patience to a child.

Add your own suggestions...

Sources: Eskenazi & Weiss, *A Woman's Torah Commentary* (NY, 2008); Leibowitz, *Studies in Devarim* (NY, 1996). Scripture: *NRSV*.