



## 5 Ways to Celebrate Rosh Hashanah

Savoring Jewish traditions in Christian life

*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. In 2011 the festival of *Rosh Hashanah* commences at sundown on 28 September and continues through 29-30th.

### 1. Greet.

Include a traditional *Rosh Hashanah* greeting in your social interactions: '*Shanah Tovah!*' (a wish for a good year). Send your Jewish friends a *Rosh Hashanah* greeting.

### 2. Listen.

Dip into the Torah reading designated for *Rosh Hashanah*: Genesis 22. What surprises and fascinates you about this text? Share insights and questions with a friend.

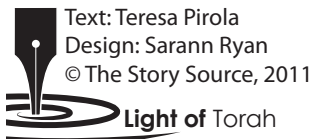
**3. Eat.** Add a traditional Jewish festive food to your meal table. E.g., apples dipped in honey: a wish for

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 people walk to a water source for such a ritual on *Rosh Hashanah*.

TeresaPirola.net



Text: Teresa Pirola  
Design: Sarann Ryan  
© The Story Source, 2011

Light of Torah leaflets encourage Catholic parish audiences to be attentive to the gift of Torah and to the gift of Judaism that gave us Jesus, the Living Torah. Reproduction permitted for non-commercial church use. Websites of interest: [lightoftorah.net](http://lightoftorah.net) | [batkol.info](http://batkol.info) | [etz-hayim.com](http://etz-hayim.com)

# Light of Torah

Ancient texts, through fresh eyes, alive for today.



## 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 (Deut. 30:11-12,14).*

This passage, taken from the first part of this week's double Torah portion, could be a mission statement for our *Light of Torah* ministry. Our goal is to lead Catholics 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 Rosh Hashanah, Jewish New Year, celebrated in the coming week (29-30 Sept, 2011).

Issue #52  
24 Sept 2011

Deuteronomy 29:9—31:30  
*Nitzavim—VaYelekh:*  
'stand'—'he went'



## Torah Portion

From the Jewish calendar of Torah readings:

### Deuteronomy 29:9—31:30

A double Torah portion appears on the liturgical calendar this week. In the first (29:9-30:20), Moses continues to address the people in a final oration outlining Israel's covenantal obligations. In the second (31:1-30), Moses prepares for his death and bids his people farewell. His leadership is transferred to Joshua.

Sources: 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.'" (Deut. 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. From your own Torah reflection, what midrash would you tell? How would 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?