

# 5 Ways to live with family frailty

In our faith family as much as our blood family, life deals cruel blows: loss, betrayal, grief, shattered dreams. Torah records it all, even sets our teeth on edge (like the rape of Dinah, in a forthcoming Torah portion). And through it all, our God is faithful. Love finds a way. Grace forges a path. Where there is nothing, something is born. Day by day we are invited to embrace a deeper mystery.



**Acknowledge** the reality of human limitations, mistakes, weakness and sin. The Torah certainly does! With the help of Scripture, can you see your family as broken yet graced, wounded yet loved?



**Grieve** what makes you sad. Torah records the anguished cries of Rebekah in her painful pregnancy (Gen. 25:22), of Esau as a victim of deception (Gen. 27:34), and of so many other biblical characters.



**Inquire** into God's ways. That is, call out to God, seek divine insight, 'pray with pluck,' like Rebekah. She doesn't just passively endure her painful ordeal; she goes 'to inquire of the Lord' (Gen. 25:22).



**Trust** that there is a loving mystery at work in all this. Perhaps it can't be 'seen' or 'felt' at this difficult moment, but make an act of faith anyway. Scripture attests to the ultimate triumph of God's love.



**Move on.** There is a time for reflection, grief, prayer and making amends. And there is a time for just 'getting on with it,' moving forward in life, and allowing our brave steps to forge a new and more hopeful future. This in itself can be part of healing grace.

This *Light of Torah* leaflet series for Catholic parishes is designed to encourage parishioners to be more attentive to the gift of Torah as part of their own sacred Scriptures, and to the gift of Judaism which gave us Jesus, the Living Torah. Text by Teresa Pirola. Illustrations by Francine Pirola. © The Story Source, 2009. Reproduction permitted for non-commercial church use. Further reading: [www.batkol.info](http://www.batkol.info) and [www.etz-hayim.com](http://www.etz-hayim.com).



## Light of Torah

Ancient texts  
through fresh eyes,  
alive for today.

## Why reflect on Torah?

*Christianity, then, came to birth in the bosom of first century Judaism. Although it gradually detached itself from Judaism, the Church could never forget its Jewish roots, something clearly attested in the New Testament; it even recognised a certain priority for Jews... (Rm 1:16). [The Jewish People and their Sacred Scriptures (PBC, 2001)]*

For much of its history the Church has displayed a tragic amnesia towards its Jewish roots. Thankfully, Vatican II issued a dramatic wake-up call for the faithful to rediscover their sacred links with the Jews and to learn from Judaism's rich biblical tradition.

Numerous aspects of Christian life and worship which we take for granted in fact grew out of the Jewish faith; e.g., the calendar of feasts, the use of word and gesture in sacraments, the daily rhythms of prayer, the reading of scriptures followed by an explanation of the text, the sacred meal, anointing, laying on of hands, charismatic prophecy, ethical enquiry, fasting, burial practices, the centrality of Jerusalem, and the list goes on.... Most especially, we remember that the bible of the earliest Christians was that of Israel.

Each week, *Light of Torah* reflects on a portion of the Torah (the first five books of the bible) drawing on Jewish sources and insights. It is a way for Catholics to be sensitized to the Jewish pulse that throbs in the person of Jesus and in the depths of the Church.



## Torah Portion

From the Jewish calendar of Torah readings:

### Genesis 25:19–28:9

In this week's Torah portion, God's promise to Abraham passes to another generation via the complex family life of Isaac and Rebekah and their two sons. The narrative has all the hallmarks of a soap opera: a painful pregnancy, two warring siblings, parents with 'favorites,' competition and cunning, deception and betrayal... Can this really be the way the divine plan is worked out?! Read the whole portion for yourself and embrace the mayhem and mystery of our ancestral story.

Sources: Friedman, *Commentary on the Torah* (NY, 2001); Goldstein (ed.), *The Women's Torah Commentary* (Woodstock, Vermont, 2000); Plaut, *The Torah: A Modern Commentary* (NY, 2006). Scripture quotations: JPS.

## Tasting Torah

Where does one begin to discuss this Torah portion? Ethical dilemmas abound. The actions of characters surprise and irritate us. Small details capture our imagination yet leave us perplexed and impatient for a satisfactory explanation. Just *what is going on* in the dubious familial antics of our revered patriarchs and matriarchs?!

After reading through the whole portion, return to one or more of the sub-plots (examples follow). Try to articulate some of the questions and possible answers that arise within you. How might God be speaking to you through this text?

## Touching Torah

### Rebekah's pregnancy.

After twenty years of barrenness, Rebekah conceives. Yet, like her barrenness, her pregnancy turns out to be a heart-wrenching ordeal. Does she just put up with things? No, "she went to inquire of the Lord" (25:22). The Hebrew '*lidrosh*' ('inquire, seek') is an interesting choice of verb. The Torah uses the same word to indicate the seeking of God in worship. What do we learn of Rebekah here? That she is proactive? Bold? God-seeking? And what light does this episode shed on her (and Isaac's) behavior in the rest of the story?

Note, too, how the Lord responds to Rebekah's inquiry, addressing her directly, immediately ("You've got twins!") and supplying her (not Isaac) with critical information about the children in her womb.

## Depthing Torah

### Sibling rivalry. Imperfect parental love.

The tradition portrays Esau as the less admirable son, a huntsman interested only in killing and filling his belly, even if it means selling his precious birthright to do so. Why, then, does Isaac favor Esau? "Because he had a taste for game" (25:28). Esau supplies something that his father enjoys immensely. Even so, Isaac is unhappy with Esau's choice of wives (26:35). Meanwhile, Rebekah favors Jacob. We are not told why. Can you suggest a reason?

### The deception of Isaac.

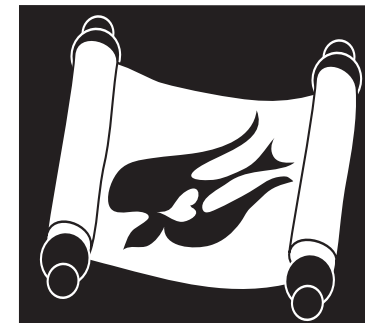
Rebekah and Jacob collude to trick Isaac into blessing Jacob instead of Esau. God's promise continues through the line of Jacob. Forevermore God's people will declare their faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac *and Jacob* (not Esau). Does the end justify the means? Surely not, and the Torah itself implies judgement upon Jacob in the sense that it records how, later in life, Jacob experiences what it means to be the victim of deception.

But is Isaac *really* deceived, or deceiving himself? Does he know deep-down that Jacob is the most suitable son to shoulder the mantle of Abraham? Does Rebekah execute what Isaac knows has to be done, but can't bring himself to do?

## Doing Torah

'Torah holds timeless messages concerning the achievements and trials of family life.' *Discuss.*

Share your thoughts about the mysterious workings of God amidst human frailty.



## Faith & life

*A committed Catholic shares:*

"I marvel at the hand of God in my childhood which, in terms of religious upbringing, was far from perfect. My father had no faith convictions. My mother didn't practice her Catholic faith for fear of the tensions it would create in their marriage, and so religion was never spoken of at home. However, my mother did insist on sending me to Mass with the neighbours each Sunday (a routine which I deeply resented) and to a Catholic school (where I was terrified of the nuns).

"And yet, despite all these unfavorable memories associated with religion, at the age of 12, and without any coercion, I was praying daily for the conversion of my father. A year later he was received into the Church."