

# 5 Sayings of the Rabbis

Calls to reconciliation

Jacob and Esau's reunion displays elements of both hope and distrust, progress and uneasiness. The Torah captures the challenges and risks of taking steps to reconciliation. Reflect on these challenges, with the help of these rabbinic sayings (below) from Jewish tradition; wisdom that might once have been formative for an up and coming young rabbi named Jesus.



1. "The Rabbis have taught: It says, 'Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart.' For a man might think, 'I must not strike him ... [but I may hate him]. Therefore it says, 'In thy heart.'"



2. "Yield your will to the will of your friend: but let both his will and yours yield to the will of God."

"All the divisions of hell rule over the angry man."



3. "Rabbi Johanan said: the proud man is as sinful as if he had denied God. Rabbi Hisda said: God declares, 'The proud man and I cannot live in the world together.'"



4. "Let not a man after he has sinned say, 'There is no restoration for me,' but let him trust in the Lord and repent, and God will receive him."



5. "If others speak ill of you, let the worst they say seem small; if you speak ill of others, let a small thing seem to you big, till you go to appease the one of whom you have spoken ill."

Quotations from Montefiore & Loewe, *A Rabbinic Anthology*, (NY, 1974).



## Light of Torah

Ancient texts  
through fresh eyes,  
alive for today.

## Why reflect on Torah?

"Make your own the mind of Christ Jesus"  
(Phil.2:5).

How was the mind of Jesus formed? How did Jesus, fully human and fully Jewish, grow in wisdom (Lk.2:40), know how to question the rabbis in the temple (Lk. 2:46) and teach in the synagogues during his public ministry (Lk. 4:15)? Jesus was formed by engaging with Torah. The Torah was his text for study, for prayer, for teaching.

Our *Light of Torah* series provides individuals, families and parish communities with a resource that makes it possible to engage the Torah on a personal and pastoral level. [Note: 'Torah,' in its specific sense, refers to the first five books of the bible. It is a Hebrew word that means 'teaching,' 'instruction.']

Each week we select a few verses of the Torah portion being studied by our Jewish sisters and brothers, our 'elder siblings in the faith,' according to their calendar of Scripture readings. We present this invitation to 'take and read,' enriched by references to traditional Jewish sources and commentaries.

Why would a Catholic choose to read Scripture with the assistance of Jewish sources? Because these treasures reflect the interpretations available and sacred to the Jewish people at the time of Jesus, and earlier, and continuing to our times. Join us each week as we examine the texts that were so familiar to Jesus and which were elaborated by him in his proclamation of the kingdom of God.

This *Light of Torah* leaflet series for Catholic parishes encourages parishioners to be attentive to the gift of Torah as part of their 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.lightoftorah.net](http://www.lightoftorah.net); [www.batkol.info](http://www.batkol.info) and [www.etz-hayim.com](http://www.etz-hayim.com).





## Torah Portion

From the Jewish calendar of Torah readings:

### Genesis 32:4–36:43

In this week's Torah portion the story of Jacob's family continues for five chapters filled with episode upon episode of the human drama: the meeting of two estranged brothers; the night-long wrestling of Jacob with an unnamed stranger; the rape of Dinah (Jacob's only daughter among thirteen children) and its consequences; Jacob's homecoming; the deaths of Rachel and Isaac; the future of Esau. Fascinating turns of events; too much for one week. We need to limit our study. **Let's read 32:4-24.**

Sources: Montefiore & Loewe, *A Rabbinic Anthology* (NY, 1974); Munk, *The Call of the Torah* (NY, 1994); Nachshoni, *Studies in the Weekly Parashah* (NY, 1988). Scripture quotations: JPS.

## Tasting Torah

*"Jacob sent messengers ahead to his brother Esau" (Gen. 32:4.)*

As our Torah portion opens, Jacob, with his entourage of wives, children, handmaids, household staff, animals and treasures, is traveling back to his homeland, to Canaan. He has just spent twenty years working for his uncle, Laban, and now leaves as an economic success. But what awaits him at home? His father, Isaac, is still alive; his mother, Rebecca, is probably already dead; and now he is distressed by news that, *"Your brother Esau; he himself is coming to meet you, and there are four hundred men with him"* (32:7).

Why is Jacob distressed? The text does not say but, like the sages of old, we can imaginatively, prayerfully and playfully 'read between the lines.'

## Touching Torah

Let's recall what we know about the brothers.

Jacob is the favorite of his mother, Rebekah. He is a home-body who becomes a schemer and steals the birthright of his elder twin brother.

Esau is a man of the outdoors, quick-tempered, a hunter-gatherer. He is the favorite of his father, Isaac. At their last meeting he was furious with Jacob, his final words being: *When the time is right, I will kill my brother Jacob!* (see 27:41).

We can well imagine that Jacob is frightened by Esau's approach because he fears for his life and for the safety of his household. His brother may be coming to greet him, but then again...

## Depthing Torah

For Jacob, who has a history of being a schemer, a time for quick thinking is at hand. Let's imagine.

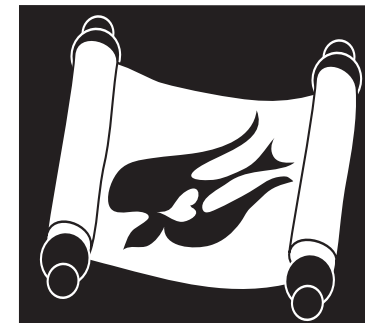
*I need a plan. Is this the time to try to heal old wounds? Maybe I can set the scene for reconciliation. I have the financial resources to do it. I'll show him I'm a man of means. I'll shower him with gifts from my ample supplies. That should soften his heart. And, just perhaps, Esau might even be coming to say let bygones be bygones. But, then again, suppose he's not. Why is he coming to meet me with four hundred men? I've got to have a plan to deal with the worst-case scenario. And, after twenty years with Uncle Laban, the shrewd wheel-dealer, I've learned a few tricks. I'll divide my entourage and my treasures into two camps, and have them move out separately. If Esau attacks one, perhaps the other camp will escape and survive...*

## Doing Torah

When you imaginatively, prayerfully and playfully enter into this scene, anticipating a meeting between two estranged brothers, what do you see; what insights emerge? Do you smell reconciliation in the air, or is it battle planning?

Can you relate to the complexities of the moment? Have you experienced estrangement and reconciliation in your own family or community life? What dilemmas have you encountered in the reconciliation process?

What do you think of Jacob's handling of the situation? What counsel would you give him?



## Faith & life

My dear friend passed away after a lengthy battle with cancer. One of her sufferings during her final years was her estrangement from one of her sons. She longed to be reconciled with him before her death, 'for his sake if for no other reason.'

One day, not long before she died, I visited her and saw a new light in her eyes. She had just received a visit from her son and, even if reconciliation was not complete, something significant had shifted in their relationship.

While I mourn my friend's passing, I smile whenever I recall that light in her eyes.

- With whom would you like to make peace?
- What is one small step you could take towards mending the relationship?