



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 the Jewish tradition:

1. "The Rabbis have taught: It says, 'You shalt not hate your brother in your heart.' For a person might think, 'I must not strike him ... [but I may hate him]. Therefore it says, 'In your heart.'"
2. "Yield your will to the will of your friend: but let both your friend's will and yours yield to the will of God."
"All the divisions of hell rule over an angry person."
3. "Rabbi Johanan said: the proud person is as sinful as if one had denied God. Rabbi Hisda said: God declares, 'The proud person 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."



Light of Torah
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Light of Torah is a ministry arising from the Catholic community. In the spirit of Vatican II's call to Jewish-Christian reconciliation, Light of Torah encourages Torah reflection in homes and parishes, drawing on the insights of Jewish interpretative traditions.
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Light of Torah

Ancient texts, through fresh eyes, alive for today.



Genesis 32:4—36:43

Vayishlah:
'he sent'

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.

'Torah' is a Hebrew word that means 'teaching,' 'instruction.' In its specific sense, Torah refers to the first five books of the bible. It can also refer to the whole of the bible or even the entire corpus of Jewish sacred teachings.

Light of Torah provides Christians parishioners with a resource for engaging the Torah on a personal and pastoral level. It is a resource which draws on Jewish approaches to the sacred text which are insightful, reverent, and 'playful.' Each week we select a few verses from the Torah portion on the Jewish calendar of readings. In solidarity with our Jewish brothers and sisters, we read our shared scriptures with fresh eyes and ears.



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 over five chapters: 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 events; too much for one week. We need to limit our focus. Let's read 32:4-24.

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

Tasting Torah

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

As our Torah portion opens, Jacob, with his entourage of wives, children, handmaids, household staff, animals and treasures, is travelling 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 homebody 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; that 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 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 the shrewd Uncle Laban, 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 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

A dear friend passed away after a 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. (PV)