



5 ways

to grow with God's Word

Western secular culture often demands instant gratification. But the Scriptures are not like that. They invite us into a process that demands patient investment of our best energies. God's Word involves a relationship with God and God's people, and relationships take time to develop, nurture, understand. They involve setbacks and difficulties as well as joys and progress. With this in mind, let us consider five ways to grow with God's Word.

1. Set aside regular time for bible reflection. Persist until scripture becomes a habit, a natural part of life.
2. Don't just read scripture; read it *aloud*. Remember, the bible originates from an oral-aural tradition. We receive the Word differently when we listen to it, when we verbalize it.
3. Learn to relish *slow* reading. Don't be afraid to stay with passages which are apparently obscure, confusing, disturbing.
4. Foster a robust persistence in dealing with difficult texts.
5. Read in *havrutah*, i.e., with a partner. Havrutah (from the Hebrew word *haverim*: 'friends') is a time-honored method of Jewish Torah study.
5. Reverence your faith-ancestors. The bible is not just a book but represents a people who have lived and breathed this book into existence. Even if reading alone, bring to mind 'the People of the Book.'



Light of Torah
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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?

"In sacred scripture, God speaks through human beings in human fashion..."

"Indeed, the words of God, expressed in human language, are in every way like human speech..." [Dei Verbum, 12,13]

The Scriptures are the inspired Word of God. Yet God speaks to us in and through our humanity, frail as it is and conditioned by historical and cultural limitations. Thus reading Scripture is not always easy and its riches not always immediately obvious. We must expend prayerful effort and exercise patience and persistence in regular study of God's Word in order to experience its transformative effect in our lives.

Light of Torah leads parishioners through such a journey of reflection. Over the course of a year we explore the five books of the Torah: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. We do so by drawing on Jewish insights from ancient, medieval and contemporary Judaism. In this way we experience the great Tradition in a fresh way, through the wisdom of the sages passed down through centuries of Jewish interpretation of the Scriptures.



Torah Portion

From the Jewish calendar of Torah readings:

Genesis 32:4—36:43

It is hard to think of a more disturbing passage in the Torah than the rape of Dinah and the bloodbath that follows as described in Genesis 34. It seems that there are no 'winners' in this story. All the characters are either violated or guilty of violation and murder. While various commentators shine a light on this or that part of the text, a satisfying explanation that brings holistic 'meaning' to the story eludes us. Humble and helpless before the mystery of God's sacred word, let us bravely enter the story of Genesis 34.

Tasting Torah

Dinah, Jacob's only daughter, never speaks in the bible. Yet her brief and tragic appearance in the story of Jacob's family can't be ignored. If nothing else the story calls for honest acknowledgement of the human dysfunction and contradictions to be found amidst even good and blessed families, societies and religions. We will make no attempt to solve the ethical dilemmas raised here. Rather, we will aim to familiarize ourselves with the story itself (many Catholics are perhaps unaware that Jacob even had a daughter) and some of the observations of the sages. For instance...

Touching Torah

- Dinah "went out" (v.1). Traditional opinions have judged Dinah unfavorably for setting out as an unmarried girl on an unchaperoned journey!
- Shechem's crime is described (v.7) using the powerful Hebrew term 'nevalah,' i.e., an offence of such magnitude that it threatens to destroy Israelite society.
- The revenge planned by Jacob's sons is marked by deceit. Jacob—whose own life has been marked by deceit—is silent (v.5) and passive in the face of this plan.
- The story ends abruptly (v.30-31) with no clear positive result. E.g., no one is blessed, no gain is recorded.

Share your own observations of the text.

Depthing Torah

Nehama Leibowitz, one of the great Torah teachers of 20th century Israel, draws our attention to the subtle contradictions between the way Shechem and Hamor address Jacob and how they address their own townspeople. E.g.:

"Get me this girl as a wife" (v.4) versus *"My son longs for your daughter"* (v.8).

"Give your daughters to us..." (v.9) versus *"we will take their daughters to ourselves as wives..."* (v.21).

Continue to compare vv.9-10 with vv.21-23. Note especially what is said to the people of Shechem but not said to Jacob: *"Their cattle and substance and all their beasts shall be ours..."* (v.23). It seems that deception is being played out by both parties to the negotiation.

But where is Dinah in this story? And where is God? Continue to prayerfully and sensitively explore this Torah text, sharing your thoughts and questions with your *havrutah* partner (Torah discussion partner).

Doing Torah

Who are the 'Dinahs' of our twenty-first century?

What 'Shechem events' are part of our world today?

What other thoughts, questions, insights rose to the surface as you reflected on this week's Torah portion?



In the midrash

Although the Torah does not tell us what happened to Dinah ultimately, Jewish storytelling traditions that accompany the Torah do. One midrashic interpretation says that Dinah was reluctant to leave Shechem's house ("Where shall I carry my shame?") and did so only after her brother Simeon agreed to marry her. Accordingly, the unnamed Canaanite woman who bears Simeon a son (Gen.46:10), is thought to be Dinah, described as a 'Canaanite' because of her sexual intimacy with Shechem.

Bibliography: Eskenazi & Weiss, eds., *The Torah: A Women's Commentary* (NY, 2008); Leibowitz, *New Studies in Bereshit* (NY: Lambda); *Midrash Rabbah: Genesis* (NY, 1983); Sarna, ed., *The JPS Torah Commentary* (Philadelphia, 1989). Scripture: *NJPS*.