



## 5 things I've learnt

Our Torah portion this week concludes the book of Genesis. This might be a good time to pause to consider the impact of this Torah-reading journey on your life since you first opened Genesis at the start of this Torah cycle. Ask yourself, "What have I learnt?"... about the bible story... about Jewish methods... about our faith heritage... about my relationship with God's Word...? Here are five comments from *Light of Torah* readers:

1. "Abraham... Isaac... Jacob... Sarah... Rebekah... Rachel... Having always been vaguely aware of these biblical characters, I have finally worked out how they all relate to each other!"
2. "I now have an appreciation of the subtleties of the text. Previously I could never have imagined that the addition or omission of a single word could lead to profound reflections... what the Jewish sages uncover is amazing."
3. "It's been years since I undertook a regular bible study - and it was always the New Testament. Discussing the Old Testament with friends is a new experience for me and I am thoroughly enjoying it."
4. "Personally I've loved the *humanity* of the stories in Genesis... the mix of heroism and frailty in the characters; the way God's promise persists even amidst family dysfunction... I find in all this a great message of encouragement in my faith, because my life is far from perfect."
5. "Sometimes I am tempted to skip the front page (*Why Reflect on Torah?*). The message is repetitive and I think, 'Yeah, I already get it.' But then each time I read it I am glad because I hear the message from a slightly new angle. I've learnt that growing into a full appreciation of the Jewish-Christian relationship is not an instant thing, it's a deepening journey."



Light of Torah  
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# Light of Torah

Ancient texts, through fresh eyes, alive for today.



Genesis 47:28—50:26

Vayechi:  
'and he lived'

## Why reflect on Torah?

If you have been following this *Light of Torah* series for the past 11 weeks, you will have been 'tasting Torah' from the book of Genesis. We have considered passages drawn from narratives of creation, journey, tumultuous family life, fidelity, treachery, hope.

Have you become more than a reader? Are you becoming a student of the Torah? Are you bringing your questions and insights to the Torah? Have you had the opportunity to share this adventure with a friend? Have the ponderings of the Sages heightened your appreciation of the biblical stories?

*Light of Torah* offers a fresh, accessible engagement with the Word of God, specifically the Torah (the first five books of the bible), by drawing on the insights of a time-honored Jewish tradition; insights that can enrich our own Christian reading of the sacred texts. We do so in response to, and in the spirit of, Vatican II:

*"Since the spiritual patrimony common to Christians and Jews is thus so great, this sacred synod wants to foster and recommend that mutual understanding and respect which is the fruit, above all, of biblical and theological studies as well as of fraternal dialogues."* (Nostra Aetate, 4)



## Torah Portion

From the Jewish calendar  
of Torah readings:

### Genesis 47:28—50:26

As our Torah portion opens, Jacob has been 17 years in Egypt. His longing for his homeland is unmistakable. His longings reflect not just individual preference, but the movement of faith and his membership among a religious people. Further, he puts his desires into word and active example by the way he speaks to Joseph and makes arrangements for his burial in Canaan. Familiarize yourself with this portion, then closely read these nine verses: Genesis 47:27—48:4.

## Tasting Torah

And Jacob said to Joseph, “God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the the land of Canaan, **and he blessed me, and he said to me, ‘I am going to make you fruitful and increase your numbers; I will make of you a company of peoples, and I will give this land to your offspring after you for a perpetual holding’**” (Gen. 48:3-4).

Torah commentators note that Jacob is repeating God’s words, but he is not repeating them *exactly*. Compare Jacob’s words of blessing with God’s ‘original’ blessing in Gen. 35:11-12. What does Jacob leave out? What does he add? (Hint: create two columns and compare line by line.) What might the sacred text be communicating through any omission or addition? Ponder this with the sages in the context of what you know about Jacob’s story and suggest an interpretation.

## Touching Torah

Recall that last week’s discussion focused on Jacob’s fear that his family’s temporary descent into Egypt might result in them never returning to their God-given homeland. The Torah tells us that, 17 years after they entered Egypt, Jacob’s children and grandchildren are doing rather well in this alien land; for “they gained possessions in it, and were fruitful and multiplied exceedingly” (47:27). Does this observation assist your reflection on how Jacob ‘edits’ God’s blessing?

## Depthing Torah

Can you appreciate the dilemma? If Jacob’s descendants are so comfortable in Egypt, will they want to uproot their lives and return to Canaan? And if they don’t, what will become of the promises and blessings of God which are bound up with the gift of a specific land?

In this text some Torah commentators see Jacob—now an elderly man and close to death—doing all he can to steer his children towards honoring their unique inheritance. Not only does he set an example by insisting that he be buried in Canaan (see 47:29-31), he also deletes the line where God says “kings will spring from you” (25:11) lest his children associate royalty with Egypt where Joseph has already achieved royal-like status. Instead Jacob emphasizes that the land of Canaan should be their constant focus by adding the phrase “for a perpetual holding” (Gen. 48:4).

Thus Jacob, a great patriarch of the chosen people, ends his days firmly fixed on the promises of God, on the relationship between God and God’s people. No gain in power or wealth can compare with the riches of knowing God and being faithful to the divine call.

## Doing Torah

As you ponder and discuss this Torah portion, ask yourself: in what ways does it speak to my hopes and dreams, yearnings and fears as a believer and as a member of my faith community?



## Faith & Life

“While in Israel I shared a meal with a group of Jewish families with young children. All seven adults had been born elsewhere in the world, but all 12 children had been born in Israel and Hebrew was their first language. The adults spoke of the sacrifices made by their parents to move to Israel in the 1970s and ‘80s. For most it had meant an irrecoverable setback in their career paths, a drop in income, a lower standard of living, not to mention adjusting to day to day tensions arising from the political situation. They had uprooted their ‘comfortable’ lives and moved to Israel for the sake of their religious convictions, for the future of their children and their people.”

Bibliography: Leibowitz, *New Studies in Bereshit* (NY: Lambda).  
Scripture: NRSV.