



## 5 Ways

to give thanks for our mentors

Over a meal invite each person to describe, in a spirit of thanksgiving, a person who has positively influenced his/her life, e.g., a grandparent, a teacher, an author, a coach, a mentor, a political or spiritual leader. The following quotes and questions may help to stimulate your thoughts.

1. *"Take Joshua, a man in whom is the spirit..."* (Numbers 27:18). Describe the spirit, personality and unique gifts of your mentor.
2. *"...and lay your hand upon him..."* (Numbers 27:18). How has your mentor been blessed? Is fragility also somehow part of this blessing? In what way has he/she shared this blessing with you?
3. *"...like one who lights one candle with another"* (Numbers Rabbah 21, 15). Name the light that your mentor shines in the dark spots of this world, and in your own life.
4. *"...have him stand before Eleazar the priest and all the congregation..."* (Numbers 27:19). What witness has your mentor offered to the community? What has been the community's response?
5. *"...and commission him in their sight"* (Numbers 27:19). For what mission/purpose would you say your mentor was 'commissioned'? How has that mission or sense of purpose been passed to you?



Light of Torah  
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# Light of Torah

Ancient texts, through fresh eyes, alive for today.



Numbers 25:10—30:1

*Pinchas*

## Why reflect on Torah?

During his 2010 visit to the Holy Land, Pope Benedict XVI spoke to Christians of the importance of this land, where *"the Gospel story, contemplated in its historical and geographical setting, becomes vivid and colorful, and a clearer grasp of the significance of the Lord's words and deeds is obtained."*

Christians practice their faith in places all over the globe, yet there is something special about touching the roots where it all began. Those who have been to the Holy Land often remark that they never read the Scriptures quite the same way ever again.

It was from this land that the Hebrew Scriptures originated through the stories, language and religious traditions of the Jewish people, our spiritual ancestors-in-faith. It is upon the firm foundations of these scriptures that the gospel testimony stands.

*Light of Torah* seeks to draw Christians into a deeper engagement with these Scriptures by introducing them to interpretative traditions within Judaism that are ancient and ongoing. Week by week, we read a little of the Torah (the first five books of the bible) with the help of the insights of the Jewish sages.



## Torah Portion

From the Jewish calendar of Torah readings:

### Numbers 25:10—30:1

From today's Torah portion, we take as our focus Numbers 27:12-23. God takes Moses up the mountain on the east side of the Jordan, overlooking the land into which his people will enter. There Moses is told by God of his approaching death, reminded of his exclusion from the promised land, and told to arrange for leadership succession through the person of Joshua.

## Tasting Torah

God: “Go up this mountain of the Abarim range, and see the land that I have given to the Israelites. When you have seen it, you shall be gathered to your people [i.e. you shall die]” (27:12).

Moses: “Let the Lord appoint someone...so that the congregation of the Lord may not be like sheep without a shepherd” (27:17).

The God-Moses interaction on the mountain-top, with the promised land in sight, is filled with pathos. Read it carefully. What thoughts and emotions might Moses have at this moment?

## Touching Torah

It appears that Moses is the epitome of selflessness, his only concern being that his people not be left leaderless. Are you convinced? Are you surprised that Moses holds no sense of personal grievance, despite being excluded from the land promised by God? The Jewish sages of old were not so convinced! Reading between the lines of scripture, they told stories (*midrash*) about Moses' human struggle at this critical point. Moses, they said, remembered that long ago God had called him to a mission which he undertook only with great reluctance. And now, God prevents him from completing his mission! The *midrash* compares Moses to a young woman relentlessly pursued by a great king for her hand in marriage, only to be divorced by the king later. Moses is understandably indignant! Yet he accepts the situation, asking only that God not treat his successor the same way.

## Depthing Torah

Other issues bothered Moses too, according to the midrash; like the fact that Joshua rather than his own sons, would succeed him. Here the sages note that the passage immediately follows the story of the five sisters who negotiate new legislation allowing them to inherit their father's property (27:1-11). “If daughters inherit, it is surely right that my sons inherit my glory,” reasons Moses [Midrash Rabbah 21, 24]. Instead, he faces the lesson that “Anyone who tends a fig tree will eat its fruit” (Prov. 27:18). Joshua is the one with the track record of faithful service and who displays the character of a faithful shepherd. The mantle of leadership passes to him.

So Moses' acceptance of God's will was not automatic; he had to wrestle with his own personal issues. But that he did, and in his struggle the tradition sees more evidence of Moses' integrity as a true servant of God and shepherd of Israel. Thus, when it comes to the appointment of Joshua, “he laid his hands on him and commissioned him” (27:23). Moses lays not one hand (as God had instructed in 27:18), but both hands. This, say the sages, indicates that he blessed Joshua with abundance and unreserved generosity of heart.

## Doing Torah

Describe a time when what God was asking of you seemed unfair, perhaps harsh and uncalled for, but you managed to ‘work through’ your personal grievance to a place of inner peace and acceptance. How can we teach our children to face these difficult passages in life?



### Faith & Life:

A parishioner speaks of gratitude for his elders:

“My grandparents' lives were peppered with colorful achievements and painful struggles. I can't say I knew them well at a personal level, but through the family folklore they have taught me passion for life and determination in pursuing one's goals, especially in the face of adversity.”

Bibliography: Eskenazi & Weiss, *The Torah: A Women's Commentary* (NY, 2008); Leibowitz, *Studies in Bamidbar* (NY: Lambda); *Midrash Rabbah: Numbers Vol.2* (London/NY: Soncino, 1983); Scripture: *NRSV*.