

# 5 Divine Blessings

Try this Torah exercise at a meal with family/friends: Divide up between table guests the Divine Blessings in Lev. 26:3-13. Have someone introduce this section of the Torah portion, then read it aloud. Next, invite each person to share a reflection, a question, or a prayer relating to 'their' blessing, especially in terms of the peoples and lands of our times. Finish by praying together the Lord's Prayer.



## 1. Fruitfulness of the Land (Lev. 26:3-5)

What does the gift of rain mean to you? Are you in touch with agricultural settings, or are you a city-dweller? Which lands are in drought, or flood, and need our prayers?



## 2. Peace, shalom (Lev. 26:6)

Peace: our deepest human longing! How is peace expressed, in the heart, the family, the neighborhood, the nation, the world...? For whom do I want the blessing of peace at this time?



## 3. Victory over enemies (Lev. 26:7-8)

What is this term 'enemy' to you? A person, a policy, an attitude, a behavioral issue? When Jesus taught us to 'Love your enemies,' how might he have interpreted this divine blessing from Torah?



## 4. Flourishing of the nation (Lev. 26:9-10)

What does it mean for a family, a community, a nation to 'flourish'? What might be its fruits: children, grandchildren, loving values, knowledge, life-skills, resilience? What of the gifts of the Spirit?



## 5. Assurance of the Divine Presence (Lev. 26:11-13)

How do you know that God is with you? Did you always know this? Do you know it now? What are the signs of the Divine Presence? Who taught you to recognize them?



# Light of Torah

Ancient texts  
through fresh eyes,  
alive for today.

## Why reflect on Torah?

*"Whoever does not know the Scriptures does not know the power of God nor his wisdom. Ignoring the Scriptures means ignoring Christ,"* said Pope Benedict XVI, citing St. Jerome, in his opening address to the 2008 Synod of Bishops (5 Oct '08).

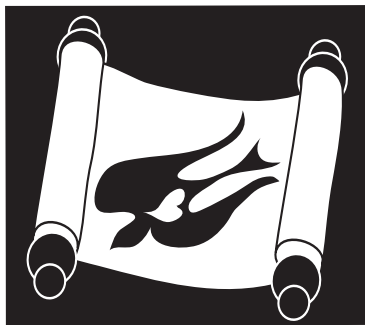
In today's climate of Jewish-Christian relations, we might extend this statement: *Whoever does not know the Scriptures as the gift of Jewish faith and theology, does not know the power of God nor his wisdom. Ignoring the Jewishness of the Scriptures means ignoring the Jewishness of Jesus and the people of the covenant who shaped his existence.*

Tragically, for most of its history, the Church community has done just that: ignored the Jewishness of Jesus and set itself in conflict with Judaism. What a welcome, Spirit-led transformation occurred last century at Vatican II! There, the Church, at its highest level of teaching authority, rejected anti-Semitism as the antithesis of the Gospel and embraced the special relationship that Christians share with the Jewish people: their common patrimony, shared Scriptures, their close spiritual ties (see *Nostra Aetate*, 4).

This **Light of Torah** series seeks to continue this transformation among grassroots Catholic audiences by sharing Jewish insights into the Torah. 'Torah' refers to the first five books of the Bible, those sacred texts held dear and foundational by both faiths.

The *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, 2010. 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:

### Leviticus 25:1—27:34

This week's Torah readings bring us to the end of the Book of Leviticus. Our focus for discussion is the opening verses of a series of blessings found in Lev. 26:3-13. The blessings are sometimes categorized as follows: 1) fruitfulness of the land; 2) peace; 3) victory over enemies; 4) the flourishing of the nation; 5) assurance of the Divine Presence.

(1) Rashi: French Torah scholar (1040-1105); regarded as the 'prince' of Jewish bible commentators.

(2) Babylonian Talmud: *Sotah* 14a.

Today's issue is based on *Parashat Be-hukotai* commentary by Jack Driscoll, cfc, of Bat Kol Institute, Jerusalem. Other works consulted: *Rashi: Commentary on the Torah, Vol. 3* (NY: Mesorah, 1999); with thanks to the input of R. Pesach Schindler.

# Tasting Torah

*If you follow my statutes and keep my commandments and observe them faithfully, I will give you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. (Lev. 26:3-4; NRSV)*

Most versions translate the verb as 'follow.' However the Hebrew verb is 'walk.' What does this suggest: to walk in the Lord's ways? Is 'walking' in Torah's commandments a more active, alert, responsive set of choices than 'following'?

# Touching Torah

Let's hear from Rashi (1) and his Torah sources: When we read "*If you follow my statutes,*" we might think that this refers to the fulfillment of the commandments. However, in the very next breath the Scripture says, "*and observe my commandments.*" Since the command to observe, or fulfil, the commandments is already stated, what could be the meaning of "*If you follow my statutes*"? Interprets Rashi: It means that one must *toil* (labour, work) in the study of Torah. For since the Hebrew word for 'follow' literally means 'walk,' then this is a strenuous activity. Further, you shall toil in the study of Torah *in order* to observe and fulfill the commandments.

The *Sfat Emet*, a great 19th century Chassidic rabbi, says this toiling goes beyond the simple acquisition of Torah wisdom. Walking in God's laws means to become so connected to the will of God that the presence of the Almighty becomes manifest on earth. *Thy Kingdom come.*

# Depthing Torah

Rabbi Hama, living in Galilee around 230 CE, takes our discussion a step further when he asks:

*"How is it possible for a person to walk in the path of the Shechinah [God's Presence]? Has it not been stated that 'the Lord your God is a consuming fire' [see Deut.4:24]? The meaning [of walking in the Divine path] is to walk in the path of the [ethical] character of the Holy One... As He clothes the needy [as for Adam & Eve, Gen. 3:21] so shall you clothe the needy."* (2)

Rabbi Hama continues:

*As He visits the sick [as with Abraham in Gen.18:1] so shall you visit the sick.*

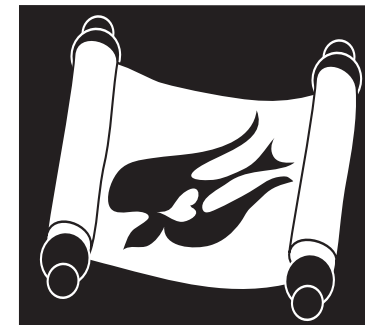
*As he comforts the mourners [as with Isaac after his father's death in Gen.25:11] so shall you comfort mourners.*

Thus the concept of 'walking in God's ways' underpins the human commitment to *imitate* the Divine by performing acts of loving kindness, also described as *Imitatio Dei* ('Imitation of God'), a term familiar to us as Catholics.

# Doing Torah

'Toiling, laboring, walking...'

- What kind of effort (walk/toil/labor) am I making to live according to God's ways?
- Notice how the Gospels use 'work' images, such as going into the vineyard, to describe one's relationship to the Kingdom of God.
- Does the 'toil' of discipleship seem 'too much'? What encouragement can we give one another?



## Walk with me

A hospital chaplain says:

"Standing at the nurses station, I noticed a doctor speaking on the telephone to a family whose father lay in the cardiac unit in a serious condition. What caught my attention was the intensity with which the doctor spoke. Deep compassion filled her voice and marked her body language. Anyone would think it was her own father whose life was at risk. I am often impressed by the hospital staff here. Not only are they professionally competent, they seem to have a gift for 'walking with' patients in their suffering."