

CHEVRAH TORAH 5778...Seeking ✧ Spirituality

Shabbat VAYISHLACH

Genesis 32:10-33

KEY KOSHI:

WHAT DOES JACOB'S NEW NAME TEACH HIM/US ABOUT WHO/HOW HE MUST BE?
HOW IS WRESTLING/JACOB'S STRUGGLE A LIFE-GUIDE TO OUR ✧ SPIRITUALITY?

P'SHAT—AWARENESS... The beginning of knowing about God is simply paying attention, being fully present where you are

10] Then Jacob said, "O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O Lord, who said to me, 'Return to your native land and I will deal bountifully with you'! 11] I am unworthy of all the kindness that You have so steadfastly shown Your servant: with my staff alone I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps. 12] Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; else, I fear, he may come and strike me down, mothers and children alike. 13] Yet You have said, 'I will deal bountifully with you and make your offspring as the sands of the sea, which are too numerous to count.'"

14] After spending the night there, he selected from what was at hand these presents for his brother Esau: 15] 200 she-goats and 20 he-goats; 200 ewes and 20 rams; 16] 30 milch camels with their colts; 40 cows and 10 bulls; 20 she-asses and 10 he-asses. 17] These he put in the charge of his servants, drove by drove, and he told his servants, "Go on ahead, and keep a distance between droves." 18] He instructed the one in front as follows, "When my brother Esau meets you and asks you, 'Whose man are you? Where are you going? And whose [animals] are these ahead of you?' 19] you shall answer, 'Your servant Jacob's; they are a gift sent to my lord Esau; and [Jacob] himself is right behind us.'" 20] He gave similar instructions to the second one, and the third, and all the others who followed the droves, namely, "Thus and so shall you say to Esau when you reach him. 21] And you shall add, 'And your servant Jacob himself if right behind

10 וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֱלֹהֵי אָבִי אַבְרָהָם וְאֱלֹהֵי אָבִי יִצְחָק יְהוָה הָאֵלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר אָמַר אֵלַי שׁוּב לְאֶרֶץ צְדָד וְלִמְוֹלְדֹתַי וְאִיטִיבָה עִמָּךְ: 11 קִטְנֹנְתִי מִכָּל הַחֲסָדִים וּמִכָּל־הַאֲמֹת אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ אֶת־עַבְדְּךָ כִּי בְמִקְלֵי עֲבָדְתִּי אֶת־הִירְדֵן הִזָּה וְעַתָּה הֵייתִי לְשְׁנֵי מַחֲנֹת: 12 הַצִּילֵנִי נָא מִיַּד אַחִי מִיַּד עֵשָׂו כִּי־יִרְאֶה אֲנֹכִי אֹתוֹ פְּרִיבּוֹא וְהִפְנִי אִם עַל־בָּנָיִם: 13 וְאַתָּה אֲמַרְתָּ הַיֵּטֵב אִיטִיב עִמָּךְ וְשָׁמַתִּי אֶת־זְרַעְךָ כְּחוֹל הַיָּם אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִסְפָּר מְרֹב: [שְׁנִי] 14 וְיָלְדוּ לְךָ שָׂם בְּלִילָה הַהִוא וַיִּקָּח מִרְהַבָּא בְיָדוֹ מִנְחָה לְעֵשָׂו אַחִיו: 15 עֲזִים מְאֹתִים וּתְיָשִׁים עֲשָׂרִים רְחִלִּים מְאֹתִים וְאִילִים עֲשָׂרִים: 16 גַּמְלִים מִיִּנְיָקוֹת וּבְנֵיהֶם שְׁלֹשִׁים פָּרוֹת אַרְבָּעִים וּפְרָיִם עֲשָׂרָה אֲתָנֹת עֲשָׂרִים וְעִירִים עֲשָׂרָה: 17 וַיִּתֵּן בְּיַד־עַבְדָּיו עֵדֶר עֵדֶר לְבָדוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־עַבְדָּיו עֲבְרוּ לִפְנֵי וְרוּחַ תְּשִׂימוּ בֵּין עֵדֶר וּבֵין עֵדֶר: 18 וַיִּצַּו אֶת־הָרֹאשׁוֹן לֵאמֹר כִּי יִפְגְּשֶׁךָ עֵשָׂו אַחִי וְשָׂאֲלֶךָ לֵאמֹר לְמִי־אַתָּה וְאָנֹכִי תֵלֶךְ וְלִמִּי אֵלֶּה לִפְנֵיךָ: 19 וְאָמַרְתָּ לְעַבְדְּךָ לֵיַעֲקֹב מִנְחָה הוּא שְׁלוּחָה לְאֲדֹנָי לְעֵשָׂו וְהִנֵּה גַם־הוּא אַחֲרֵינוּ: 20 וַיִּצַּו גַּם אֶת־הַשְּׂנִי גַם אֶת־הַשְּׂלִישִׁי גַם אֶת־כָּל־הַלְלָכִים אַחֲרֵי הַעֲדָרִים לֵאמֹר כַּדָּבָר הַזֶּה תִּדְבְּרוּן אֶל־עֵשָׂו בְּמִצְאָכֶם אֹתוֹ: 21 וְאָמַרְתֶּם גַּם הִנֵּה עַבְדְּךָ יַעֲקֹב אַחֲרֵינוּ כִּי־אָמַר אֲכַפְרָה פְּנֵינוּ בְּמִנְחָה הַהִלְכָת לִפְנֵי וְאַחֲרֵיכֶם אֲרָאָה פְּנֵינוּ אוֹלֵי יִשָּׂא פְּנֵי: 22 וְתַעֲבֹר הַמִּנְחָה עַל־פְּנֵינוּ וְהוּא לָנוּ בְּלִילָה־הַהִוא בְּמִנְחָה: 23 וַיִּקָּם אִ בְּלִילָה הַהִוא וַיִּקָּח אֶת־שְׁתֵּי נַשְׂוֹ וְאֶת־שְׁתֵּי שִׁפְחֹתָיו וְאֶת־אֶחָד עֲשָׂר יְלָדָיו וַיַּעֲבֹר אֶת־מַעְבַּר יַבֵּק: 24 וַיִּקָּחֶם וַיַּעֲבֵרֶם אֶת־הַנְּחָל וַיַּעֲבֹר אֶת־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ: 25 וַיּוֹתֵר יַעֲקֹב לְבָדוֹ וַיִּאָּבֵק אִישׁ עִמּוֹ עַד עֲלוֹת הַשָּׁחַר: 26 וַיִּרְאֶה כִּי לֹא יָכַל לוֹ וַיִּגַע בְּכַף־יָרְכוֹ וַתִּקַּע כַּף־יָרֵךְ יַעֲקֹב בְּהָאָבֵקוֹ

us.” For he reasoned, “If I propitiate him with presents in advance, and then face him, perhaps he will show me favor.”

22] And so the gift went on ahead, while he remained in camp that night.

23] That same night he arose, and taking his two wives, his two maidservants, and his eleven children, he crossed the ford of the Jabbok.

24] After taking them across the stream, he sent across all his possessions. 25] Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn. 26] When he saw that he had not prevailed against him, he wrenched Jacob’s hip at its socket, so that the socket of his hip was strained as he wrestled with him. 27] Then he said, “et me go, for dawn in breaking.” But he answered, “I will not let you go, unless you bless me.” 28] Said the other, “What is your name?” He replied, “Jacob.” 29] Said he, “Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with beings divine and human, and have prevailed.” 30] Jacob asked, “Pray tell me your name.” But he said, “You must not ask my name!” And he took leave of him there. 31] So Jacob named the place Peniel, meaning, “I have seen a divine being face to face, yet my life has been preserved.” 32] The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping on his hip. 33] That is why the children of Israel to this day do not eat the thigh muscle that is on the socket of the hip, since Jacob’s hip socket was wrenched at the thigh muscle.”

עָמוּ : 27 וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁלַחְנִי כִּי עָלָה הַשָּׁחַר וַיֹּאמֶר
לֹא אֲשַׁלְּחֶךָּ כִּי אִם־בְּרַכְתָּנִי : 28 וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו
מִה־שְּׂמֶדָה וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב : 29 וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא יַעֲקֹב
וַיֹּאמֶר עוֹד שְׂמֶדָה כִּי אִם־יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי־שָׂרִיתָ עִם־
אֱלֹהִים וְעִם־אֲנָשִׁים וַתֻּכַּל : 30 וַיִּשְׂאֵל יַעֲקֹב
וַיֹּאמֶר הַגִּידָה־נָא שְׂמֶדָה וַיֹּאמֶר לָמָּה זֶה תִּשְׂאֵל
לְשִׁמִּי וַיַּבְרָךְ אֹתוֹ שֵׁם : 31 וַיִּקְרָא יַעֲקֹב שֵׁם
הַמָּקוֹם פְּנִיֵאל כִּי־רָאִיתִי אֱלֹהִים פְּנִים אֶל־
פְּנִים וַתִּנְצַל נַפְשִׁי : 32 וַיִּזְרַח־לוֹ הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ בְּאֲשֶׁר
עָבַר אֶת־פְּנוּאֵל וְהוּא צָלַע עַל־יָרְכוֹ : 33 עַל־כֵּן
לֹא־יֵאָכְלוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־גִּיד הַנֶּשֶׂה אֲשֶׁר עַל־
כַּף הַיָּרֵךְ עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה כִּי נָגַע בְּכַף־יָרֵךְ יַעֲקֹב
בְּגִיד הַנֶּשֶׂה :

REMEZ—UN-SELF-AWARENESS... God showed Moses a Torah of black fire written on white fire.

The negative ground on and by which all things can be read is itself a message.

V.25

And Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn

RASHI...Menachem ben Saruk [Spain, C.920-980 C.E., compiler of MACH'BeReT—the Notebook, a Biblical language reference] explains this as “And a man became dusted,” since they raised dust as a result of their movements. But it appears to me that it means “*and they became bound up,*” as in the Aramaic. [cf Sanhedrin, 63b] For it is the way of two people who are struggling to topple each other that one hugs and ties up the other...Our Rabbis of blessed memory explained: This was the angel of Esau.

ALSHECH... “*VaYe-Avek...*” That is—*It became like dust*, meaning, even the spiritual counterpart of Esau with which he wrestled became like dust when confronted by a *Tsaddik* such as Jacob.

Prof N. SARNA...The Hebrew stem “*AVaK*” which is peculiar to this story, creates a word play with the names Jacob and Jabock. There may have been a popular etymology connecting the name of the river with this incident.

RASHBAM...The angel was sent not to wrestle with him, but to prevent Ya’Akov from crossing over the Yabok [River Jabok] and running the other way.

TALMUD... “*As he wrestled with him...*” The Rabbis taught: [This verse] teaches that they threw up the dust of their feet to the Throne of Glory, for it is here written: “*B’Hey-Avko imo*” and is there written “*v’Anan Avak Raglav—clouds are the dust on His Feet.*” [Nachum 1:3] [Chullin, 91a]

RAMBAN...In the language of the Sages, AViKaH is often used to convey the sense of CHAVIKAH, loops...small pieces of a larger thing which are bound up or tied to one another...It is possible that the word *VaYe-AVeK* is actually *VaYeCHA-VeK*, and he embraced...for it is hard to tell the difference.

V.26

When he saw he could not overcome him, he struck the socket of his hip, so that Jacob’s hip-socket was wrenched as he wrestled with him

BA’AL HaTURIM... Esau’s guardian angel wanted to maim Jacob so as to disqualify him from performing the sacrificial offerings—one of the future privileges that accompanied his birthright.

RASHBAM... “*he touched the socket of his hip*”...in retribution for his attempt to flee...We find similarly with all those who journey against the Will of the Holy One. As with Moses when he was hesitant to undertake God’s mission, an angel met him along the way with intent to kill him, “*At a night encampment on the way, YHVH met him, seeking his death...*” [Exod 4:24]

RAMBAN... “*he could not prevail...*” because the angel was restrained by God, permitted only to do what he did—touch the hollow of his thigh, as the Midrash understands, “*Yotsei Yerech—the issue of his loins,*” Jacob’s descendants. This is a hint to a future where the seed of Jacob will wrestle with Rome, who will come close to forever wounding Israel’s posterity.

V.28-9

What is your name? He replied: Jacob. He said, Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with beings divine and human and have prevailed.

ETZ HAYIM...The name “*Yisrael*” in the Bible was popularly derived from *sarita*—you struggled, referring to Jacob’s struggle/triumph in the face of overwhelming odds. Its actual meaning is “*God is superior.*”

PHILO... Understand that YiS-Rah-El is ISH Ra’AH EL, the man who sees God

ONKELOS... “*You have fought before God with man and have succeeded.*” Consequently, Israel means “*fighter before God,*” thus no indication of fighting with men is to be found in the name, significantly, for Israel’s mission. Jewry’s millennial struggle is within society...with spiritual weapons. [MUNK]

ZOHAR...Note: Torah does not say “*ki sarita al elohim—striven against*” but “*sarita im—struggled with.*” Jacob is now transformed into Israel, not the one who strives to overcome but to unite with.

R’ H. KUSHNER...The name *Yisrael* may be interpreted to mean “*one who struggles with God.*”

Through the ages, Jews have struggled to understand what God means in their lives and have contended with God, insisting that God live up to the divinely proclaimed standards of Justice and kindness.

R’ M. ZLOTOWITZ... “*they will no longer call you...*” The Talmudic prohibition [B’rachot 13a] of referring to Avraham as Avram does not apply to Jacob/Israel, whom even Torah continues to call both...

D'RASH—READING BETWEEN THE WORDS...

Prof. LEON KASS...

The story of Jacob's wrestling is both superficially and profoundly mysterious, mysterious both for Jacob and for the reader. We, like the hero, Jacob, are in the dark about the identity of his opponent, the reason for the attack, the nature of the wound, the significance of the outcome, the meaning of Jacob's new name...At no point in the entire Jacob saga are we more in need of careful interpretation and searching reflection.

To this point, God has communicated with Jacob mainly through angels and a dream (about angels). If this is indeed another divine encounter, it remains to be seen whether Jacob can now recognize it despite—or through—the human form. If what he is supposed to discover is that his relations to man and God are mutually implicated, the ambiguity and mystery of the antagonist's identity is perfectly appropriate...One thing is not ambiguous: Jacob's antagonist is in fact the assailant. Not Jacob but the man initiated the wrestling. Jacob did not seek, but did not decline the contest...

The struggle itself and some of its features clearly remind us of the struggle in the darkness with Rebekah's womb (for example, the tenacious hold of Jacob); and Jacob's renaming here appears to be a second birth.

Through this struggle, Jacob is marked but does not yield. An unblemished draw is impossible when one struggles...One no longer goes the same way upon the earth, and one's children often suffer the consequences. Some of them may fall away from the ways of their father, others may be killed or martyred—alienated, rotted, or out of joint...Despite his assailant's grasp at Jacob's thigh, Jacob holds on. Jacob—the heel grasper—again does not loosen his grip.

...Jacob has won or earned a new name; it seems to be a title of victory in the struggle, directly and not guilefully won. In this act of rebirth, Jacob becomes the first of the patriarchs to acquire a name tied to God's name...We must also take seriously the suggestion that Jacob has indeed been struggling literally and directly with (and against) God. Insofar as he here is wrestling with God—or with his messenger—Jacob not only accepts the confrontation. He tries by strength to hold his own with God, to hold on to God, even to make God truly his God...Jacob has expressed a desire for narrowing the gap between himself and God. Even as he struggles with and against God, Jacob's willingness to grapple so close with the assailant can be said to be a sign of his desire to be close to God.

The core question: Why Jacob is rewarded for such struggling, and especially with God, to whom one might think submission or obedience would be preferable to struggle...Given the human condition, man will necessarily struggle with man, including those closest to him. And given the human condition, men will—at best—necessarily grapple with God. But struggle or striving is vastly preferable to ignorance or indifference...Jacob has never refused the struggle, not against men, not now in his wrestling with...is it God? He hangs on, he endures, he *holds*—and hold *on to*—his own. At no point does he despair. In short, he *prevails*.

To endure something of the contrary character of the world without losing heart, to stay close, to strive and struggle against adversity—this is the virtue most needful for the successful transmission of God’s new way...What does Jacob, by the dawn’s early light, make of all this?

A little reflection reveals that the limp carries a perfect lesson for our hero—indeed, for anyone who aspires to self-sufficiency....A man who limps is slowed down, made conscious of his gait, mindful that his plans cannot fully succeed because the perishable body does not simply execute what reason and will command. Like Oedipus (“swollen foot”) who prematurely walked with a stick, a limping man is old and dependent before his time, often in need of someone or something to lean on....The limp bends and weakens our upright posture, that mark of our more-than-animality, which permits us to see the limitless horizon and to enlarge our deeds and projects accordingly...The man who limps gets along only with the help of grace.

Jacob, “reborn” in this encounter, has acquired a new claim to the birthright and the blessing...He has earned—through his own efforts at striving, suitably instructed—his place as patriarch. The people will have a second new beginning and new source of legitimacy, as does Jacob...They will remember that the God of Israel is a living God who struggles with man but who allows him to live and sanctify his life.

[The Beginning of Wisdom, pgs 456-465]

SOD—The SELF of the UNIVERSE... God’s “I am” has the psycho-theological force not of dissolving individual selves but of reminding us that we were never individual selves in the first place...Our selfhood endures by virtue of its participation in some greater Self,

ITTUREI TORAH...

For you have contended with God and with men, and have prevailed...Some time after the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, the Yevseksia (the “Jewish Section”—made up of Communist Jews who were violently anti-religious) in Kharkov banished the Jews from the local synagogue and converted it into a clubhouse. R’ Aharon Milkowski then gave a speech to the Jews in the community, in which he said:

The Torah tells us “*You have contended with God and with men, and have prevailed.*” This seems strange. What type of victory was it for Jacob. If he emerged a cripple, limping on his right thigh? The answer is that when two people argue philosophically, the one who is correct comes armed with logical proof to his position, whereas the second, who has no proof to support his position, often gets angry and furious, tries to belittle his opponent, and on occasion, if he is a bully, physically beats up his opponent. Now, the struggle between Jacob and Esau’s guardian angel was certainly one over rival philosophies, for an angel is a spiritual being and cannot engage in physical combat. And if Jacob came out crippled from this struggle, it is proof that Esau’s guardian angel did not have any convincing argument and that Jacob had vanquished him. “In our case too,” the rabbi concluded, “if in the philosophical argument between us and the Yevseksia they use force, it is proof that their argument is in the wrong.