**The Hidden Jewel HOD – *Parshat Vayishlakh***

When Rabbi Menachem Mendel was about to leave for the Holy Land, he went first to visit his master, Rabbi Ya’akov Yosef of Polnoy. He arrived at the inn in a troika, which seemed ostentatious to the other *hasidim* and annoyed them greatly. But when he came to the master’s house, they were even more flabbergasted to see that he arrived hatless and beltless. His shoes had big golden buckles, and a pipe stuck out of his mouth. They were sure Rabbi Ya’akov Yosef would boil with anger and harshly reprimand him, for his temper was well known.

But instead, Rabbi Ya’akov Yosef greeted Rabbi Menachem Mendel warmly and invited him in, where they sat and talked affectionately for many hours. When Menachem Mendel left, the *hasidim* asked their *rebbe* why he wasn’t disturbed by Menachem Mendel’s conduct.

“Let me tell you a story,” said the master. “Once there was a king whose land was under attack, so he hid all his wealth and precious family heirlooms as best he could, hoping to prevent them from falling into the hands of the enemy. But his most precious possession, the family crown jewel, he hid in palace basement, under a heap of cinders, for he knew no one would think to look for it there. And so it is with Reb Menachem Mendel – he hides his great humility in the cinder heap of vanity.”

Humility is a tricky thing, mostly because it’s not a “thing” – it is the absence of something. What is it the absence of? It is the absence of psychologically investing in one’s “self-ness.” Put more simply, it is the absence of concern for how the self looks to others; it is the absence of self-image. This is why, in the story, Menachem Mendel *appears* to be concerned with his self-image; in that world, displays of apparent vanity and ostentatious displays of wealth would invite harsh, judgmental attacks from others. But he doesn’t care! That’s the true humility – *not being concerned with looking humble.*

Part of why humility is so important is because when we are attached to a certain self-image or a certain fixed point of view, this can block us from growing; we think we “already know” or that we are “already there.” The arrogant personality doesn’t think it needs to grow. This is why Jewish teaching sees the imperfect person who transforms as far more relevant than the perfected *tzadik.* In fact, the three names that are commonly used for the Jewish people all point to this process of transformation:

The first name is עברי *Ivri,* Hebrew. The first time this word is used is in reference to Abraham, who is called *Avram ha’ivri –* “Abram the Hebrew” (Genesis 14:13). The word עברי *Ivri* appears to be connected to the root עבר *aver,* which means to “cross over” or “pass by,” probably referring to the fact that Abraham and his family were part of the ancient migrations from Mesopotamia to the Land of Canaan.

But in a deeper sense, Abraham founded a new kind of spirituality. Out of the pagan culture in which he was embedded, he began teaching that the gods, the *Elohim,* are actually a singular Reality; Abraham’s story is one of transformation from seeing Reality as a plurality of conflicting forces, to seeing the underlying Unity.

The second name is ישראל *Yisrael,* Israel, which, in this *parshah,* is the name that Jacob is given by the mysterious being with whom he wrestles all night long and comes out victorious.

The third name is יהודי *Yehudi,* Jew, which comes from Jacob/Israel’s fourth son, Judah. Judah’s story comes in the next *parshah,* and as we will see, his story is one of being humbled, of having his arrogance broken, and his ensuing transformation results in his making peace with his brother Joseph.

Judah’s name, *Yehudah,* is related to the word הודאה  hoda’ah, which can mean confession, conceding an argument, and also thankfulness, as in the morning prayerמידה אני  Modeh/Modah Ani, which is chanted upon awakening to give thanks for being alive another day. He was given that name my his mother Leah who wanted to give thanks for his being born. The name י**הוד**ה *Ye****hud****ah* has the word הוד *Hod* within it, which is the origin of the *sefirah* of *Hod* being associated with humility and gratitude, even though *Hod* literally means “Glory.”

Jacob’s transformation also stems from his being humbled, and like Judah, his transformation results in his making peace with his brother as well – his brother Esau. The process begins with Jacob’s intense fear of his brother, who is coming toward him with four hundred men. Jacob, whose name means “heel,” had manipulated his brother many years earlier to sell him his birthright, and then tricked their father into giving him the blessing of the firstborn as well. Esau resolved to murder Jacob, so Jacob fled to Haran, where worked for Laban, got married and built a family. Now he is returning home, and he is terrified that his brother is going to kill him.

So, he sends his brother gifts, he splits is family into two camps, and prays for salvation from his brother. He is then left alone in the night, and a mysterious being appears and attacks him; he wrestles with this “angel” all night long, and is eventually victorious. It is then that the mysterious being gives him the name Israel, which means *sarita-El,* one who has “wrestled with” or “strives for God.” We then have the following verses:

וַיִּשְׁאַ֣ל יַעֲקֹ֗ב וַיֹּ֙אמֶר֙ הַגִּֽידָה־נָּ֣א שְׁמֶ֔ךָ וַיֹּ֕אמֶר לָ֥מָּה זֶּ֖ה תִּשְׁאַ֣ל לִשְׁמִ֑י וַיְבָ֥רֶךְ אֹת֖וֹ שָֽׁם׃

*Jacob asked, “Please tell me your name.” And he said, “Why do you ask about my name?” And he blessed him there.*

וַיִּקְרָ֧א יַעֲקֹ֛ב שֵׁ֥ם הַמָּק֖וֹם פְּנִיאֵ֑ל כִּֽי־רָאִ֤יתִי אֱלֹהִים֙ פָּנִ֣ים אֶל־פָּנִ֔ים וַתִּנָּצֵ֖ל נַפְשִֽׁי׃

*Jacob named the place Peniel, because “I have seen the Divine face to face, and my life has been spared/my soul has been rescued.”*

וַיִּֽזְרַֽח־ל֣וֹ הַשֶּׁ֔מֶשׁ כַּאֲשֶׁ֥ר עָבַ֖ר אֶת־פְּנוּאֵ֑ל וְה֥וּא צֹלֵ֖עַ עַל־יְרֵכֽוֹ׃

*The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, and he was limping on his hip.*

עַל־כֵּ֡ן לֹֽא־יֹאכְל֨וּ בְנֵֽי־יִשְׂרָאֵ֜ל אֶת־גִּ֣יד הַנָּשֶׁ֗ה אֲשֶׁר֙ עַל־כַּ֣ף הַיָּרֵ֔ךְ עַ֖ד הַיּ֣וֹם הַזֶּ֑ה כִּ֤י נָגַע֙ בְּכַף־יֶ֣רֶךְ יַעֲקֹ֔ב בְּגִ֖יד הַנָּשֶֽׁה׃

*Therefore, the children of Israel do not eat the sciatic nerve that is on the sinew of the hip to this day, because he struck Jacob’s hip socket on the sinew.*

* Genesis 32:30 – 33

Let’s look at each of these verses:

וַיִּשְׁאַ֣ל יַעֲקֹ֗ב וַיֹּ֙אמֶר֙ הַגִּֽידָה־נָּ֣א שְׁמֶ֔ךָ וַיֹּ֕אמֶר לָ֥מָּה זֶּ֖ה תִּשְׁאַ֣ל לִשְׁמִ֑י וַיְבָ֥רֶךְ אֹת֖וֹ שָֽׁם׃

*Jacob asked, “Please tell me your name.” And he said, “Why do you ask about my name?” And he blessed him there.*

Why is Jacob chastised for asking the name of the being/angel he is wrestling?

This is similar to when we might be outraged by something, and we ask, *What is that??* The asking itself is a way of denying its validity; it is a way for the ego to pronounce judgment on something. Additionally, learning the name for something can give the ego a feeling of security, as if calling it something imparts a sense of control. In fact, it is a common belief of early peoples that to know the name of a deity or spirit would allow you to control it.

The being’s response is, “access denied.” Immediately after, it says וַיְבָ֥רֶךְ אֹת֖וֹ שָֽׁם *vay’varekh oto sham – he blessed him there.* Meaning, right there – the refusal to reveal its name – that itself is the blessing! Jacob’s ego is not given any wiggle room, and that is the blessing, because it is in transcending the ego that transformation becomes possible. As Reb Pinhas of Koretz said: “The strength of one who accepts reproof is greater than the one who reproves!”

The next verse says:

וַיִּקְרָ֧א יַעֲקֹ֛ב שֵׁ֥ם הַמָּק֖וֹם פְּנִיאֵ֑ל כִּֽי־רָאִ֤יתִי אֱלֹהִים֙ פָּנִ֣ים אֶל־פָּנִ֔ים וַתִּנָּצֵ֖ל נַפְשִֽׁי׃

*Jacob named the place Peniel, because “I have seen the Divine face to face, and my life has been spared/my soul has been rescued…*

The phrase וַתִּנָּצֵ֖ל נַפְשִֽׁי – *Vatinatzel nafshi –* is normally translated as “my life was spared,” and this makes sense in the ordinary understanding of the words. But there is a deeper level when we look at these words more literally: *nafshi* literally means “my soul,” not “my life,” and *vatinatzel* means “rescued,” “delivered,” or “snatched away.”

Seen this way, it is saying that the deepest level of being – the soul, or consciousness, is set free – meaning, consciousness is liberated through the ego becoming humbled. And this is “seeing the Divine face to face” – meaning, when our consciousness is set free from its petty concerns and preoccupation with self-image, our eyes are open to see the wonder of Existence everywhere, and all things are the “Divine Face.”

The next verse says:

וַיִּֽזְרַֽח־ל֣וֹ הַשֶּׁ֔מֶשׁ כַּאֲשֶׁ֥ר עָבַ֖ר אֶת־פְּנוּאֵ֑ל וְה֥וּא צֹלֵ֖עַ עַל־יְרֵכֽוֹ׃

*The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, and he was limping on his hip.*

“The sun rose” is another way of expressing וַתִּנָּצֵ֖ל נַפְשִֽׁי, the setting free of consciousness, and רָאִ֤יתִי אֱלֹהִים֙ פָּנִ֣ים אֶל־פָּנִ֔ים seeing the Divine face to face; the “light” of consciousness is set free, and that Light is then perceived as the essence of all things. But, it doesn’t happen without a price:

וְה֥וּא צֹלֵ֖עַ עַל־יְרֵכֽוֹ *v’hu tzole’a al yirkho – and he was limping on his hip…*

The “hip” is a euphemism for the sexual organs, which are represented by the *sefirah* of *Yesod. Yesod* represents joy and connection. So, the message is: having one’s ego humbled can temporarily put a damper on our joy! But, not to worry about this – it is temporary, and the “rising of the sun” reveals a depth and beauty that ignites a deeper joy, one not based on temporary conditions.

(This passage about Jacob’s injury is also the source of the practice in *kashrut* not to eat the hindquarters of the animal, so as to avoid consuming the sciatic nerve that is referred to in these verses. Why? To eat something is to make it part of us. The message is, don’t make your ego-injury part of you; don’t identify with being a victim! Instead, reignite your joy as soon as you can; let go of the past and *ivdu et Hashem b’simkha –* serve the Divine with joy!)

וַיִּֽזְרַֽח־ל֣וֹ – *Vayizrakh lo hashemesh – The sun rose for him…*

The phrase relates to the “Saying of Creation” associated with *Hod:*

וַיֹּ֣אמֶר אֱלֹהִ֗ים יְהִ֤י מְאֹרֹת֙ בִּרְקִ֣יעַ הַשָּׁמַ֔יִם

Elohim *said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky…”*

* Genesis 1:14

Just as the “rising of the sun” represents the liberation of consciousness and the perception of the Divine Presence in all things, so too the *me’orot birkia hashamayin,* the “lights in the expanse of the sky” also hint at this perception. In the realm of human relationships, this perception is mirrored by our relation with our parents; they are the first “lights above” which we become aware of. The Zohar therefore relates this to the imperative of honoring one’s parents in the *Aseret Hadibrot,* the Ten Commandments:

כַּבֵּ֥ד אֶת־אָבִ֖יךָ וְאֶת־אִמֶּ֑ךָ לְמַ֙עַן֙ יַאֲרִכ֣וּן יָמֶ֔יךָ

*Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be lengthened…*

* Exodus 20:12

Interestingly, this is one of the few *mitzvot* for which a clear reason is given; we should honor our parents in order to live longer! Again, honoring our parents is an expression of *Hod –* of humility and gratitude. The rabbis extended this much further and expressed the connection between our honoring of others and our connection with the Divine:

 אֵיזֶהוּ מְכֻבָּד, הַמְכַבֵּד אֶת הַבְּרִיּוֹת, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר כִּי מְכַבְּדַי אֲכַבֵּד וּבֹזַי יֵקָלּוּ:

*Who is honored? One who honors all creatures, as it is said: “For I honor those who honor Me, but those who spurn Me shall be dishonored…*

* *Pirkei Avot* 4:1

The word for honor, *kavod,* is also sometimes used to describe the Divine Presence:

וּמַרְאֵה֙ כְּב֣וֹד יְהוָ֔ה כְּאֵ֥שׁ אֹכֶ֖לֶת בְּרֹ֣אשׁ הָהָ֑ר לְעֵינֵ֖י בְּנֵ֥י יִשְׂרָאֵֽל׃

*The Divine Presence* (K’vod Hashem) *appeared as a consuming fire atop the mountain, to the eyes of the Children of Israel…*

* Exodus 24:17

In other words, an important key to the liberation of our consciousness (the “rescue of the soul”) and beholding he Divine Presence, the *K’vod Hashem* in all things (the “rising of the sun”), is being *ham’kkabed et habriyot –* honoring all beings, all creation, especially those who raised us and to whom we owe our very lives.

***More on ​Vayishlakh...***

[**Raise Your Cup! Parshat Vayishlakh**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/torah-of-awakening-teachings-408656/raise-your-cup-parshat-vayishlakh)12/9/2019 [0 Comments](https://www.torahofawakening.com/torah-of-awakening-teachings-408656/raise-your-cup-parshat-vayishlakh#comments)

What is the nature of pleasure? Is pleasure something to be enjoyed and celebrated, or is pleasure a spiritual obstacle?

There is a teaching recorded in the Talmud that contains a puzzling dialogue between Moses and Hashem:

בקש להודיעו דרכיו של הקדוש ברוך הוא ונתן לו שנאמר הודיעני נא את דרכיך אמר לפניו רבונו של עולם מפני מה יש צדיק וטוב לו ויש צדיק ורע לו יש רשע וטוב לו ויש רשע ורע לו אמר לו משה צדיק וטוב לו צדיק בן צדיק צדיק ורע לו צדיק בן רשע רשע וטוב לו רשע בן צדיק רשע ורע לו רשע בן רשע

(Moses) requested that the ways of the Holy Blessed One be revealed to him, and it was granted it to him, as it is stated: “Show me Your ways and I will know You” (Exodus 33:13). He said, “Master of the Universe! Why is it that there are righteous who prosper, righteous who suffer, wicked who prosper, and wicked who suffer?” (The Divine) replied to him: “Moses, the righteous person who prospers is a child of a righteous person. The righteous person who suffers is a child of a wicked person. The wicked person who prospers is a child of a righteous person. The wicked person who suffers is a child of a wicked person.
(Berachot 7a)

This teaching (attributed to Rabbi Yohanan in the name of Rabbi Yosei) attempts to answer that old perennial question: if there is Divine justice in the world, why do bad things happen to good people? Why are there bad people who seem to have all the good things? The answer given here is a little baffling – it’s just because of their parents? Not very satisfying!

However, a novel interpretation of this passage comes from the renown 19th century rabbi known as the Chasam Sofer. He says that the good person who suffers (tzaddik v’ra lo- literally, “righteous and bad for him”) is not one to whom bad things happen. Rather, it is someone who doesn’t know to receive painful experiences. After all, painful experiences will absolutely happen to all people, regardless of how good or bad they are ethically. The issue is not whether pain will come, it is how we deal with the pain when it comes.

That’s why the passage says that the tzaddik v’ra lo is a righteous person with wicked parents. The tzaddik v’ra lo is good intentioned, but because they have wicked parents, they don’t learn how to receive pain and not get caught by it; they are still ruled by their impulses, in the same way a wicked person would be.

Conversely, the rasha v’tov lo – the wicked person who prospers – doesn’t mean a wicked person to whom good things happen; good experiences are constantly happening to all people, regardless of how good or bad they are ethically (like, for example, our next breath.) Rather, this is someone who may be ethically wicked, but because they have good parents, they have learned the skill of receiving pain without resistance, as well as the skill of cultivating gratitude and appreciation for the all the blessings.

The Chasam Sofer is interpreting the Gemara in light of this most fundamental spiritual quality: the simple receiving this moment as it is, also called “equanimity.” The main obstacle to equanimity is the impulse to resist and reject our present moment experience. This resistance, in turn, takes two main forms: rejecting or denying or judging or attacking what we don’t want, and longing for or running after what we do want.

One common approach to cultivating equanimity is to purposely restrict your enjoyment of pleasure and voluntarily take on a certain amount of pain; this is the path of asceticism. From the ascetic point of view, pleasure is seen as suspect, even immoral, because it leads to weakness of character and dependence on external experience. This is the context within which the pleasure-negative point of view arises in Judaism and in many other traditions.

The counterpoint to the ascetic point of view is the Hassidic approach, which came along to counteract the pleasure-negative ideology that became so prevalent in eighteenth century Eastern European Jewry. After all, it is not pleasure itself that is dangerous, but the clinging to and dependence on pleasure that is dangerous. Feeling good is a blessing of life – why should we go against our nature? Put another way, why should we reject the gifts that Hashem gives us?

That’s why Hassidism celebrated eating, drinking, dancing, sexuality, and so on, as a means to realize the sacred; the key was the kavanah – the intention – that one brings to pleasure.

One time, Rabbi Yisrael of Rizhyn walked into a room where some of his hasidim were drinking together and making merry, and he seemed to look at them with disapproval. “Are you displeased that we are drinking?” one of them asked. “But it is said that one when hasidim sit together over their cups, it is just as if they were studying Torah!”

“There are many words in the Torah that are holy in one passage, and unholy in another,” replied that rabbi of Rizhyn. “For example, it is written:

וַיֹּ֤אמֶר יְהוָה֙ אֶל־מֹשֶׁ֔ה פְּסָל־לְךָ֛ שְׁנֵֽי־לֻחֹ֥ת אֲבָנִ֖ים – And the Divine said to Moses, 'carve for yourself two tablets of stone…'
(Exodus 34:1)

“And in another place, it says:

לֹֽ֣א תַֽעֲשֶׂ֨ה־לְךָ֥֣ פֶ֣֙סֶל֙ – Do not make for yourself a carved image…
(Exodus 20:1)

“Why is the same word, fesel (“carved”), holy in the first passage and not holy in the second? It is because in the first passage, “yourself” comes after “carved,” and in the second it comes first. And so it is in all that we do: when the self comes after, all is holy; when it comes first, all is not.”

In other words, the sacred function of pleasure is to help us transcend ourselves; it is to use the pleasure as a means to praise and gratitude, to connection with the Source of blessing, rather than cling to the blessing for the sake of gratification alone. And even deeper, it is to awaken that Presence which is the deepest level of our being, beyond the “self” that craves this and that. After all, there is something essential that we can learn from enjoying pleasure: just as we enjoy pleasure for its own sake, savoring the moment without any future goal, so too we can learn to fully savor the moment as it is, even without any external gratification.

We can do this because there is a deeper goodness, a deeper pleasure, that arises from Presence Itself; when we awaken this deeper pleasure, we can see through the ups and downs of transient experience and pierce through to Oneness of Being, the Divine Ground that knows Itself through our own awareness, through the Living Presence that we are, beneath and beyond the “self” of thoughts, feelings, and changing experiences.

In the parshah, Jacob is pushed into this realization through crisis. He is terrified that his brother is coming to kill him and his family. He sends gifts to appease his brother, he prays for salvation, he divides his camp in the hope that some might survive if they are attacked. But then he spends the whole night wrestling with a mysterious being who attacks and injures him. By the time dawn breaks, Jacob is victorious, and the being gives him the name Yisrael, which means “strives for the Divine.”

Then, it says something interesting:

וַיִּקְרָ֧א יַעֲקֹ֛ב שֵׁ֥ם הַמָּק֖וֹם פְּנִיאֵ֑ל כִּֽי־רָאִ֤יתִי אֱלֹהִים֙ פָּנִ֣ים אֶל־פָּנִ֔ים וַתִּנָּצֵ֖ל נַפְשִֽׁי׃
Jacob named the place Peniel, because “I have seen the Divine face to face, yet my life has been preserved.”
(Gen. 32:31)

It is true that it all turns out well for Jacob in the end; his brother forgives him and they hug and weep upon each other’s necks. But this verse comes before he sees his brother; he doesn’t know yet whether his prayers will be answered; he doesn’t know yet whether his brother will forgive him or kill him. And yet he says, וַתִּנָּצֵ֖ל נַפְשִֽׁי  – which is usually translated as above: “my life has been preserved.”

But the word for “my life” – nafshi – literally means “my soul,” not “my life.” In other words, his becoming Yisrael means that he has pierced beyond the “good” and “bad” of his personal experience, to his underlying “soul” – his essential being beyond the “self,” beyond ego. He becomes Yisrael because regardless of whether he lives or dies, regardless of whether his prayers are answered or not, he knows now that everything is the Face of the Divine – ra’iti Elohim panim el panim – I see the Divine face to face.

This is our task: not to avoid pleasure, not to pursue pleasure as the goal, but to receive both pleasure and pain with full Presence. Because beneath our transient experience is a deeper pleasure, a pleasure with no opposite, a pleasure that is the nourishment we need now for our deepest being…

 וְֽהָיָ֗ה כְּעֵץ֮ שָׁת֪וּל עַֽל־פַּלְגֵ֫י מָ֥יִם – And one shall be like a tree planted by streams of water…
​(Psalm 1:3)
​
[**No Expectations – Parshat Vayiskhlakh**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/no-expectations-parshat-vayiskhlakh)
11/21/2018  [1 Comment](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/no-expectations-parshat-vayiskhlakh#comments)

 Although we have done our best to raise our children eating healthy food, they have lately become a bit obsessed with candy. The other night, my daughter showed me a little toy electric fan filled with M&Ms that someone had given to her. As she tried to take out the M&Ms, I said, “Honey, let’s read the ingredients on the label.” We did. There were so many chemicals, both artificial flavors and colors, along with preservatives.

She asked what all those things were, and when I got to explaining about the preservatives, she said, “But that’s good, right Abba? The preservatives prevent it from going rotten.”

I suddenly realized she had a point. It’s true, many preservatives aren’t in any way nourishing. But, in certain situations, a little preservative would certainly be better than eating something that had become overrun with dangerous bacteria.

It’s kind of like spirituality. When spiritual practices like prayer and ritual are “fresh” – meaning, they are done with a spirit of openness and humility, they can be deeply nourishing. But there is a danger – when a person thinks of oneself as “spiritual” and therefore special or superior, the same practices can be a source of arrogance. The spirituality becomes “rotten” in a sense. In such a case, we need some kind of “preservative.”

What is the spiritual preservative?

Once, when Rabbi Avraham Yehoshua of Apt came to visit a certain town to teach, two men competed to have the rabbi stay with them. Both homes were equally roomy and comfortable, and in both households, all the halakhot – the rules of conduct aroundkashrut and Shabbat – were observed with meticulous exactness.

The only difference was that one of the men had a bad reputation for his many love affairs and other self-indulgent habits. He knew he was weak, and didn’t think much of himself. The other fellow, on the other hand, was perfect in his conduct, and he knew it. He walked around proudly, thoroughly aware of his spotless purity.

The rabbi chose the house of the man with the bad reputation. When asked the reason for his choice, he answered that in the Talmud (Sotah 5a), it says:

“R. Hisda said… every person in whom there is arrogance of spirit, the Holy Blessed One says, ‘I and he cannot both dwell in the world.”

“And,” said the rabbi, “if the Holy Blessed One can’t share a room with an arrogant person, then how could I? We read in the Torah, on the other hand, that the Divine “…dwells with them in the midst of their uncleanliness.” (Lev. 16:16) And if Hashem takes lodgings there, why shouldn’t I?”

The Divine can’t dwell with the arrogant person, because his spirituality has become spoiled. And what is the “preservative” that kept the other fellow from being arrogant?

Sin!

An amazing, radical teaching: Yes, sin is sin. It’s not good, just like a preservative is not in itself healthy. And yet, it can prevent rottenness of spirit, by helping to conquer arrogance.

After all, what is arrogance really? It’s not just thinking good of oneself; it’s about entitled expectation.

***Spiritual practice, on the deepest level, is about dropping all expectation.***

When we’re successful in that, there can be an experience of freedom, of space, of sacredness. And in that experience, there can be a very subtle form of expectation that creeps in without our even knowing it; this is spiritual arrogance, the expectation perhaps that others should see us as special, and even more importantly, that we are somehow entitled to the spiritual bliss lasting forever. But if we reflect on our own imperfections, bringing to mind that we have made many errors and aren’t entitled to anything in particular, then we can paradoxically remain connected to the root, even when our branches falter.

וַיִּירָ֧א יַֽעֲקֹ֛ב מְאֹ֖ד וַיֵּ֣צֶר ל֑וֹ וַיַּ֜חַץ אֶת־הָעָ֣ם אֲשֶׁר־אִתּ֗וֹ וְאֶת־הַצֹּ֧אן וְאֶת־הַבָּקָ֛ר וְהַגְּמַלִּ֖ים לִשְׁנֵ֥י מַֽחֲנֽוֹת
Jacob became very frightened and distressed, so he divided the people who were with him… into two camps.

This was Jacob’s quality that won him the name Yisrael. He is very insecure about his brother who wants to kill him, so he “divides the people” – meaning, part of him wants to simply trust the Divine protection that was promised to him, but part of him isn’t sure. His insecurity is actually the deepest nature of existence: all things, all beings, are completely insecure. Nothing is guaranteed. There may be a deep desire to trust, to believe that we have some kind of Divine protection, but this kind of trust is arrogance; if we’re honest, we must admit that insecurity is the Truth.

וַיִּוָּתֵ֥ר יַֽעֲקֹ֖ב לְבַדּ֑וֹ וַיֵּֽאָבֵ֥ק אִישׁ֙ עִמּ֔וֹ עַ֖ד עֲל֥וֹת הַשָּֽׁחַר
And Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until the rising of dawn.

These two sides of his being wrestled, until the “arising of the dawn” – until illumination occurred. He had done everything he could – he sent many gifts to his brother, he split up his camp, he prayed for safety – now it was time to surrender, and in that surrender, to conquer.

וַיֹּ֗אמֶר לֹ֤א יַֽעֲקֹב֙ יֵֽאָמֵ֥ר עוֹד֙ שִׁמְךָ֔ כִּ֖י אִם־יִשְׂרָאֵ֑ל כִּֽי־שָׂרִ֧יתָ עִם־אֱלֹהִ֛ים וְעִם־אֲנָשִׁ֖ים וַתּוּכָֽל
He said, “No longer shall your name be called Jacob, but Yisrael, for sarita im Elohim –you have conquered with (your) Divine (nature) and (your) human (nature), and you are able!”

Through his human nature, through his profound insecurity, he reached the true kind of trust – not trust in a particular outcome, but trust in Reality Itself, trust that this moment is as it is, and will be as it will be. Thus, through his human nature, he reached his Divine nature.

And this is our opportunity as well – to do everything we can to secure the outcome we want – pray, send gifts, work hard, all of it. But at the same time, be free. Embrace and relax into the insecurity, into the unknown, and into the true and actual security that isn’t about what we want; it’s about connecting with the truth of this moment, beautiful and fragile and tragic and miraculous. And in doing so, we can truly be one, and reunite with anything disowned or denied from our past:

וַיָּ֨רָץ עֵשָׂ֤ו לִקְרָאתוֹ֙ וַיְחַבְּקֵ֔הוּ וַיִּפֹּ֥ל עַל־צַוָּארָ֖יו כתיב צוארו וַֹיִֹשָֹׁקֵֹ֑הֹוֹּ וַיִּבְכּֽוּ
And Esau ran to greet him and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept…​Good Shabbos and Happy Thanksgiving!

[**Send! Parshat Vayishlakh**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/send-parshat-vayishlakh)
12/15/2016  [1 Comment](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/send-parshat-vayishlakh%22%20%5Cl%20%22comments)

“Vayishlakh Ya'akov malakhim lifanav el eisav-
And Jacob sent angels before him to Esau…”

This week’s reading begins with Ya’akov, with Jacob, sending angels ahead of him to appease his brother Eisav who had been intent on killing Ya’akov.
So who are Ya’akov and Eisav?

They’re twin brothers, but they were also opposite archetypes. Eisav was a hunter, a man of the field. Ya’akov, on the other hand, “dwelled in tents” where, according to the tradition, he would study Torah.

Get it? Eisav represents the body, and Ya’akov the mind.

Eisav wants to kill Ya’akov because Ya’akov used his cunning intelligence first to convince Eisav to sell him his birthright, and later to trick their father Yitzhak into giving Eisav’s blessing of the first born to Ya’akov.

And isn’t this what the mind so often does?

The body has its needs- not very complicated or profound- it needs good food, fresh air, good rest, and so on. But our minds have other more sophisticated and ambitions and plans. And because of all the great things we want to accomplish and experience, we end up polluting our bodies, not getting enough rest and exercise, and pushing ourselves in ways that can make us sick- not to mention the damage we cause to other people and to the earth. Eventually, Eisav will rebel- the body rebels, the oppressed rebel, the earth rebels. And that’s when life can fall apart.

So what’s the solution?

It’s to realize, first of all, that there’s a much more profound dimension to your mind than your thoughts, ideas and ambitions; and that’s your sensitivity- your awareness, your Presence.

Just as Ya’akov sends the malakhim- the angels- to Eisav, so you can send your awareness into your body. That’s how you can give yourself love, because awareness is the carrier wave for love; it’s the whole basis for love. After all, before you do anything loving for anyone, you first have to be present with them, you have to pay attention to them. Sometimes, attentiveness is all that’s needed. And, it’s the same for your own body.

So what does Eisav do when they finally meet? Eisav weeps and kisses Ya’akov.

In the same way, when you bring your mind out of its imaginary worlds of ambition and projection and down into your physical body, then with practice, your body will reflect back to you that quality of love and attention as a feeling of blissful openness, showing you the true nature of your own Being.

So on this Shabbos Vayishlakh, the Sabbath of Sending, may we send our loving attention deeply into our own bodies, and may our appreciation of the body lead us to eradicate all the needless human oppression on this planet. May we also love and protect this earth which is our physical home. And as we approach the time of Hanukah, may this loving attention- this Power of Presence- ever increase like the lights of the menorah.

Good Shabbos!!
-b yosef

​[***DON'T Let it Go! Parshat Vayishlakh***](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/dont-let-it-go-parshat-vayishlakh)
11/25/2015

“Abba, do you want to wrestle?” asked my four-year-old daughter hopefully-

“Sure,” I said, “How do we start?”

“First, you go on that side of the bed, and I go on this side of the bed. We have to make mean faces and put our fists in the air. Then, we fall forward face down… and then… we wrestle!”

When I was in seventh grade, I was on the wrestling team, but we never started a wrestling match quite like that. Hilarious. But that’s what we did: We made our mean wrestling faces, put our fists in the air, fell onto the bed, and then… we wrestled!

Sort of…

Wrestling with a little four-year-old girl is not exactly fair. She thinks we’re wrestling, but I'm calling the shots. I pretend to struggle, then I fall over and say, “Oh no, she’s getting me! She’s getting me!”- but really, it's an illusion.

Kind of like when we wrestle with Reality. We can groan and moan, complain and blame, and somehow the mind thinks that all this drama will get us somewhere... but of course, it's an illusion too. We can do a lot to change our situation for the future, but we can never do anything to change what has already become.

And yet, in the case of wrestling with my daughter, just because it’s an illusion doesn’t mean it’s worthless. The real value is not in the struggle itself, but the blessing of connection that comes from the struggle.

In this week’s reading, Jacob demands that a blessing comes from his struggle.

​Jacob is once again in a dark place. He has received word that his brother Esau is coming toward him with four hundred men, and he fears for his life:

“Jacob became very frightened and distressed, so he divided the people, flocks, cattle and camels into two camps…” (Gen. 32:8)

If Esau attacks half of his camp, at least the other half will survive. He then sends tributes ahead to appease his brother and prays for his life.

Night falls. After sending his family across the river, a strange thing happens-

“He spent the night there… Jacob was left alone and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn…”

The “night” is his not knowing- his anxiety about the danger that might befall him. So, he “wrestles” with his situation- meaning, he resists the truth of his predicament. Of course, it’s not a fair fight- the “wrestling” is an illusion. You can’t fight with Reality.

But eventually, the “man” says to Jacob,

“Let me go, for the dawn has broken!”

In every experience of fear, anger, frustration or loss, there comes a time to “let it go”. To “let it go” means you stop telling yourself stories about it, that you stop torturing yourself with it.

But- is there a value in not letting it go?

Jacob thinks so:

“I will not let you go until you bless me!”

Jacob knows that the real value is not in the struggle itself, but in the blessing that comes from the struggle. The mysterious man concedes and says:

“No longer will it be said that your name is Jacob, but Yisrael, for you have striven (Sarita) with the Divine and with man and have prevailed.”

Jacob insists on a blessing, so his opponent gives him the title of one who has mastered his situation.

It’s true- Jacob has done everything he could do with both God and man to take responsibility: He’s split his camp to ensure the survival of at least half of them. He’s sent many gifts to appease his brother. He’s prayed to God for safety and protection.

And now, after an all night struggle with his anxiety and fear, the dawn is breaking. He’s done his best- he has become Yisrael- and now he’s ready to let go, surrendered to whatever is going to happen.

But something is missing. He is not satisfied with the mere title of Yisrael, there’s something he still needs to learn- so he asks a question:

“Va***yisha***l Ya’akov- Jacob ***asked***- ‘Tell me please your name!’”

The word for “asked” is “yishal”- the same letters as his new name, “Yisrael,” except that it’s missing a letter Reish.

The letter Reish means “head”. It implies authority, as in the “head of a school” or the “head of a company” and so on.

As Yisrael, Jacob has used his head wisely- he’s thought through his situation and acted as the responsible “head” of his family. But in asking a question, Yisrael becomes Yishal- he loses the Reish,as if to say, “my head is incomplete- there’s something I don’t yet know.”

What is it that he doesn’t know?

He doesn’t know the identity of the “man” that he’s wrestling with. In other words, even though he might be ready to give up his struggle, he doesn’t yet understand the nature of his struggle.

Jacob’s opponent answers him with yet another question:

“Why do you ask me my name?”

His opponent puts a question back onto Jacob: What’s your motivation in asking?

When we experience the inner pain of resistance, there comes a time when we accept and let go. Little children do this all the time- they’re great a letting go. But that doesn’t help them stay out of trouble in the future. The next moment, they’re upset about something else. There’s no self reflection- no sense of how they create their own suffering.

But if you take the time to really look at your own motivation- ask yourself, “How am I creating my experience?” then there’s the possibility for growth, for actually responding to life with a new wisdom. That kind of wisdom can only be won through the real struggles of your life.

But the struggle itself doesn’t automatically give it to you. You have to hold on to it a little longer and deeply inquire into yourself, before the “dawn” makes you forget all about it. The wisdom you get from that self-inquiry is the true blessing.

When you experience the blessing that only comes through suffering, the suffering takes on a whole new dimension. It’s no longer your enemy. Behind your troubles and problems, there is the Divine Friend, urging you to grow, to evolve.

In Psalm 119, the psalmist says to God: “I am a stranger on the earth- hide not your commandments from me!”

On this verse, the Hassidic rebbe, Rabbi Barukh of Mezbizh, taught:

“When a person is driven into exile and comes to a strange and alien land, he has nothing in common with the people there and not a soul he can talk to.

But, if a second stranger appears, even though the new stranger comes from a totally different place, the two can confide in one another, and come to cherish one another. And had they not both been strangers, they never would have known such close companionship.

And that’s what the psalmist means: ‘You, just like me, are a stranger on this earth, for Your Divinity is hidden by my pain and suffering. So please, do not withdraw from me, but reveal to me your ‘commandments’- reveal to me the wisdom that can only be learned through this suffering- and let us be friends…’”

On this Shabbos Vayishlakh, the Shabbat of Sending, may our personal pain and all the troubles of the world be sent far away. But before it goes, may we extract the Light that can only come from the darkness- the self-knowledge we need to evolve. And as we approach the time of Hanukah, may that Light ever increase as the lights of the menorah, helping our whole species to evolve. May we dedicate ourselves ever more completely to the revelation of this Light!

Good Shabbos,
b yosef  ​

[**Send Yourself ﻿Home- Parshat Vayishlakh**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/send-yourself-home-parshat-vayishlakh)
12/4/2014  [2 Comments](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/send-yourself-home-parshat-vayishlakh#comments)

 Where have you been?

This week’s reading, Parshat Vayishlakh, opens: “Vayishlakh Yaakov malakhim lefanav el Eisav akhiv- Jacob sent angels before him to his brother Esau…”

Jacob had been away from Esau for twenty years. After Jacob had tricked their father Isaac and stolen Esau’s blessing and birthright, he fled for his life from his brother. Now, as he prepares to return to Esau, he sends angels to deliver gifts and bring back information.

Esau is an ish sadeh- a man of the field- a hunter and trapper. In other words, Esau represents the physical. Jacob is a yoshev ohalim- one who “dwells tents”. According to tradition, this was the tent of learning, of the mind. Esau and Jacob, then, represent the spectrum of human existence- from the physicality of our bodies to the inner worlds of mind and thought.

Our bodies generally serve our minds, to our detriment. If our minds served our bodies, would we poison ourselves with toxic foods and stress? It is easy to take the body for granted, to make it serve our intentions, as if the mind is the adult and the body is the child. The truth, however, is that the body is older; the body is the “first born”. Only later did the mind develop. And yet, the body is often ignored, except to gratify it. We tend to live in the mind, in the world of time, not in the real world of the body that lives in the eternal present. Our minds have “stolen the birthright” of our bodies.

Like Jacob, we flee the present world of the body into the mind in order to manipulate and control, just as Jacob used his mind to outsmart the trickster Laban. But at some point, we must return home to our bodies or we become stuck in the world of lies, the world of the mind with its calculations and projections. We must return to the eternal present, to the world of truth, to the physical. The irony is that in returning to the physical, we discover the spiritual, for that which is aware of the physical is itself spiritual. But if we stay preoccupied with the mental, awareness becomes stuck in the world of thought and separation.

So what is the solution?

Like Jacob- send the angels of your awareness all the way down into your body. Let your body feel the sun, the air, the rain, the whole natural world. Pour your awareness all the way down to your feet. Take off your shoes, let your heels touch the earth. In fact, Jacob’s name means “heel”. As long as Jacob is stuck in the mind, he is paradoxically a “heel”- a manipulator. But as he prepares to meet and honor the physical, wrestling on the dark earth with his mysterious foe, he receives the name Yisrael- meaning one who “strives for" or "wrestles with the Divine”. His name is not changed; he is still Jacob, but now he is also Israel. Rather than being a "heel" in the negative sense, he becomes like the bodily heel- supporting the higher structures of the mind through full connection with the earth and the present.

G-d is ever-present, but are you present? Send the “present” of your awareness into your body, and receive what your body has to tell you. In this unity of presence with form, of awareness with the body, the Divine reveals Itself: The basic and simple Oneness of Being, manifesting in the gorgeous and awesome miracle of this moment…