

VAYISHLACH { וַיִּשְׁלַח } (And He Sent)

Genesis 32:3-36:34; Obadiah 1:1-21; Hebrews 11:11-20

“And Jacob sent (Vayishlach וַיִּשְׁלַח Yaacov) messengers before him to Esau his brother unto the land of Seir, the field of Edom.” (Genesis 32:4)

In last week’s study, Jacob had managed to flee from his unjust father-in-law, Laban, while he was off somewhere shearing sheep. Jacob stole away with his sons, his two wives (Leah and Rachel), plus all of his livestock, and headed for the mountains.

After twenty-two years in Haran, it was likely very difficult for Jacob to extricate himself from Laban’s wickedness, manipulation and control; but he did succeed in getting free. We can imagine that Jacob was anticipating with great joy his return to his ancestral homeland of Canaan; however in order to do so, he had to first pass through Edom, the territory of Esau, his estranged brother.

The time had come for Jacob to confront his past. More than two decades had passed since Jacob had posed as his brother Esau and had stolen his brother’s ‘first-born’ blessing from their father.



Peter Paul Rubens, *The Reconciliation of Jacob and Esau*, 1624

The last time Jacob had seen Esau, he was filled with murderous rage, vowing to kill him; therefore it is no wonder that Jacob felt “*greatly frightened and distressed*’ at the prospect of meeting his brother again, especially upon hearing that Esau was coming towards him with four hundred of his men!

“**Then the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, “We came to your brother Esau, and he also is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him.” So Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed;**” (Genesis 32:6-7)

Had Esau held a grudge against Jacob all these years? Or had time eased the pain of betrayal and brought forgiveness? Could the generous gifts of livestock sent ahead to Esau somehow appease his anger? Jacob was about to find out.

His initial strategy was to divide his household into two camps so that if Esau attacked one of their camps, there would still be one camp left to survive.

“And he divided the people that were with him, and the flocks, and the herds, and the camels, into two camps.” (Genesis 32:8)

This is the first time that the Torah refers to those who are with Jacob as the nation (*ha'am* אָמָּה) rather than just a family. This is why the Jewish nation, even today, is called the House of Jacob (Yaacov).

“And Jacob was left alone;” (Genesis 32:25)

Jacob had taken his wives and children to the other side of the stream out of fear of an encounter with Esau. He was left completely alone when he met God. So often we crave fellowship and the comfort & wisdom of other Believers when we are going through trials. But there are times when we just need to be alone with God. It's Him and us – one on one.

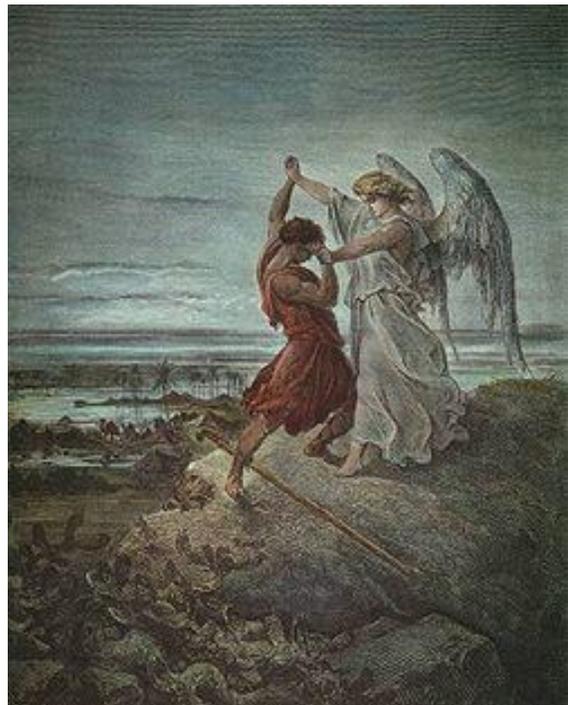
Although He loved people and spent much time ministering to them, Yeshua also purposefully sought for ways and means to be alone with His Father.

“After he had dismissed the multitudes, He went up into the hills by Himself to pray. When it was evening, He was still there alone.” (Matthew 14:23)

I recently read a beautiful devotion about this very subject of quiet solitude from Streams in the Desert by L. B. Cowman: *“The one thing we need today more than anything else is to spend time alone with our Lord, sitting at His feet in the sacred privacy of His blessed presence... Every life that desires to be strong must have its “Most Holy Place” (Ex.26:33) into which only God enters.”*

In this place of solitude, Jacob encountered a ‘man’ (the word used in Hebrew is ‘ish’) with whom he wrestled until daybreak. This ‘man’ (also called an angel) touched the hollow of Jacob’s thigh so that it was strained. To this day, Jewish people don’t eat the hindquarters of an animal.

The angel asked to be let go, but Jacob said, **“I will not let you go until you bless me.”**(Genesis 32:26) We may commend Jacob on his tenacity; for he refused to settle for anything less than his full inheritance. There are times when we must also prevail in prayer; other times being tenacious in faith in order to experience full victory in our lives.



Jacob Wrestling with the Angel (1855 illustration by [Gustave Doré](#))

There came a day, several years ago, when I just felt so incredibly weary. It was not because of some major attack or disastrous circumstance. I just felt tired of the struggle – the never ending battles - of everyday life. Probably most could confess that they have been there at some point. It seemed as if I had been crying out to the Lord for so long but had not yet seen the breakthroughs I desired in so many areas of my life. Can anyone relate? I went to our Shabbat morning Torah study group with a heavy heart, feeling a sense of resignation somewhere deep within my soul. I just wanted to give up.

That Shabbat, we drank tea as usual, sang worship songs, and prepared to study the Word of God; when suddenly, the leader of our study (normally a quiet, composed, British man) jumped off his chair and leaped upon his son, wrestling him to the ground. To our absolute shock and amazement, this normally placid father and his teenage son tussled for several minutes until finally the son pinned his father to the floor and would not let him up until he promised to give him a chocolate.

The father, after giving his son the demanded chocolate, calmly dusted himself off and sat back on his chair to face our baffled expressions with great amusement. It was only once we began to study the parashah that we realized he had given us a vivid picture of this week's Torah portion.

How often do we wrestle like this for the blessings of God in our lives? This parashah speaks to us of the perseverance and endurance required of the people of God. **“Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise.”** (Hebrews 10:35-36)

It is tempting, after struggling and wrestling for what seems to be such a very long time, to feel like, *‘enough is enough’*, and to lose one's confidence that God's promises for our lives will ever come to pass. This is when many lose heart; but we must instead be like Jacob who absolutely refused to let go of the man until he received the blessing.

Does wrestling for the blessing mean constantly fussing and fretting about the situations in our lives? On the contrary, this spiritual wrestling constitutes the struggle to remain at rest and peace, trusting in God – ‘confident’ in the fulfillment of His promises. **“In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength.”** (Isaiah 30:15)

What is Your Name?

This divine *‘man’* asked Jacob his name - a simple question. Something tells me he already knew, since God says He knows each one of us by name. So why did he ask? Jacob had to admit who he was before he could be changed. His name was *Yaacov* - deceiver, conniver, and manipulator. He confessed this ugly truth before the angel of the Lord, who then changed his name to Yisrael, **“because you have striven (sarita שָׂרִית) with God and with men, and have prevailed.”** (Genesis 32:29)

In English, this doesn't quite make the same sense as in the Hebrew. Yaacov is the Hebrew word for heel; (ekev) עֵקֶב. He was so named because he grasped the heel of his twin brother Esau. He always seemed to be behind, grasping ahead for the blessing and the inheritance.



Jacob struggles with the angel, by Rembrandt Gemäldegalerie, Berlin

After his encounter with this ‘man/angel’; however, his entire character was changed as evidenced by his new name – Yisrael. He was called Yisrael { יִשְׂרָאֵל } because El אֱלֹהִים means God and the word yasar (יָשַׁר) means to strive, struggle or wrestle. These same three Hebrew letters can also spell the word yashar יָשָׁר which can mean ‘straight’, ‘honest’ or ‘righteous’.

So Yaacov, after wrestling with the angel of the Lord, was changed in his very nature from a deceiver to one who is honest, righteous, and straight with God. We must face the truth about ourselves, for it is only the truth that will set us free¹ – not the truth about someone else – but about ourselves.

Once we confess the truth of our sinful natures to the Lord, we become ‘new creations’ in the Messiah: **“Therefore, if anyone is in the Messiah, he is a new creation. Old things have disappeared, and—look!—all things have become new!”** (2 Corinthians 5:17)

We receive a whole new identity – the righteousness of God in Messiah Yeshua.² Halleluyah! Instead of being a perpetual victim we become a victor – more than a conqueror!³ God can also change our name – our very identity – from azuva עֲזוּבָה (forsaken) and sh’mamah שְׁמָמָה (desolate) to ‘heftzi-bah’ חֶפְצֵי-בָהּ (my delight is in her) and ‘be’ulah’ בְּעוּלָה (married).

“You shall no longer be termed Forsaken, nor shall your land any more be termed Desolate; But you shall be called Hephzibah, and your land Beulah for the LORD delights in you, and your land shall be married.” (Isaiah 62:4)

In Hebrew, when someone asks your name, he literally asks, “How are you called?” Instead of being called ‘weak, poor, sick, tired, alone, and afraid’, we can be called ‘confident, joyful, strong, healthy, prosperous, beautiful, and courageous. This is so powerful if we can really get it. We must begin to call ourselves by our new names, the

¹ John 8:32

² 2 Corinthians 5:21

³ Romans 8:37

ones the Lord has given us, if we are to walk in the freedom and abundant life Yeshua died to give us.⁴

You are Mine

“Now this is what the LORD says-- the One who created you, Jacob, and the One who formed you, Israel--” Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; *you are Mine.*” (Isaiah 43:1)

We chose our youngest daughter’s name from this very verse: Liat לִיאָת means ‘*you are Mine*’.⁵



Liat at age 15

This year (2015), Liat turned ‘sweet sixteen’ while we were aboard the Queen Mary Ship on Long Beach, California. We went out for dinner to celebrate and were enjoying our meal when all of a sudden my ears perked up to the song that was playing over the speakers – an old song called ‘You’re sixteen’⁶. The chorus went like this, “*You’re sixteen, you’re beautiful, and you’re mine.*”

I was blown away – it was like God was right there with us, celebrating Liat’s sweet sixteenth birthday by serenading her with a song – sending her a personal message: God sang, “*You are sixteen, beautiful and ‘Mine*’.”

We are no longer orphans, trying to navigate a scary world all on our own. We belong to the Almighty God, and are therefore beloved and secure both now and for all eternity.

The destiny of Yisra-el (Israel) {יִשְׂרָאֵל} is to struggle with God and with men, but also ultimately, to prevail. It is also our destiny – whether we are born the seed of Abraham, or grafted in to the family through Yeshua the Messiah to prevail and ultimately walk in triumph.⁷

Jacob (now Israel) came to know that this was no simple wrestling match with a man, but that this man (ish) was actually divine. Jacob said, “**For I have seen God (Elohim) face to face, and my soul is preserved.**” (Genesis 32:30)

He called the place P’niel פְּנֵי־אֵל (which means ‘my face to God’) because he saw God (El) face to face - ‘*panim to panim*’.

⁴ See article, ‘[I will change your name](http://www.voiceforisrael.net/articles)’, www.voiceforisrael.net/articles

⁵ Liat is the feminine form of word used in the verse (li atah). See article ‘[You are Mine](#)’ on website

⁶ Johnny Burnette

⁷ 2 Corinthians 2:14

Thus closed the circle for Yaacov, from an infant who wrestled with his brother even in the womb, to a man who wrestled for the blessing – first from his father and then from God Himself – to the place where Yaacov finally wrestled himself into spiritual maturity.

The Cost of Wrestling with God

Indeed, the descendants of Jacob today, the Jewish people, continue to wrestle over the mysterious identity of this Divine ‘man’ (ish) who we believe to be Yeshua the Messiah.

One day, I had a call from a very devout Orthodox Jewish woman who was concerned that a woman staying in her home was in reality, a Christian missionary.

This is how she put it,

*“If she is a Christian and believes in ‘Yeshu’, then that’s fine. Everyone has their own faith. They have their God, we have ours. But the two do not mix. It’s like eating milk and meat together. It’s something Jewish people simply do not do!”*⁸ (paraphrase).

The wrestling match between the Jewish people and our own Messiah indeed continues to this day. It is the Jewish nature to struggle and fight. We have always had to fight for our very existence. Everywhere I go in my daily life here in Israel I witness people in verbal wrestling matches with each other. It is a way of life, it seems, to argue and debate here, and it creates a great deal of stress and tension.

Wrestling with God also does not come without cost. The man touched Jacob’s hip and it was strained. Thereafter, Jacob walked with a limp. He now needed to lean on a stick to walk. Jacob seemed to have to struggle and compete for everything in his life and it only brought brokenness. Instead of striving and struggling we can learn to lean on the Lord.

In our struggles with God, we also come forth forever changed, with a noticeable ‘limp’ in our walk, always needing to lean on God; never being able to just ‘trust in our own understanding’. (Proverbs 3:3-5) I read in a book written by Tommy Tenney (God Chasers), referring to Jacob’s struggle with God, *“Never trust a man without a limp”* ☺



Jacob (watercolor circa 1896–1902 by James Tissot)

“And the sun rose upon him as he passed over Peniel, and he limped upon his thigh.” (Genesis 32:31)

⁸ Devout, observant Jewish people do not mix meat or dairy products at the same meal and strictly segregate anything associated with their use such as dish towels, utensils, pots & pans, drainboards, etc. Although not Biblical, it is a strongly held tradition based on Rabbinic law (halachah).

Reconciliation of Brothers

Jacob saw Esau coming from a long ways off and likely trembled in fear over what would transpire between them. Would Esau still be angry after all these years? Would he attack Jacob and all his family? But none of Jacob's fears and worries about meeting his brother Esau came to pass. Instead the two brothers hugged in a warm embrace of forgiveness and reconciliation.



Jacob Sees Esau Coming to Meet Him (watercolor circa 1896–1902 by James Tissot)

Sometimes we see a situation coming to us in the future and we begin to worry about it. What will happen? How will we manage it all? But the Bible teaches us that worrying or being anxious over the future is pointless, since much of that which we spend so much time worrying over never even comes to pass.

We can give all our cares and concerns into God's hands trusting Him to take care of us in any and all situations, even those that could cause us to be fearful or distressed.

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” (Philippians 4:6)



The Meeting of Esau and Jacob (watercolor circa 1896–1902 by James Tissot)

Wrestling with Powers of Darkness

The scriptures also tell us that our wrestling matches are not with flesh and blood but with principalities and powers of darkness.

“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of his age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.” (Ephesians 6:12)

This is one reason why our struggling can become so painful – we are sometimes not quite sure what (or whom) we are wrestling with! This was Job's dilemma – Satan was

causing his trouble, but did so with God’s permission. And his pain was compounded by the insistence of his friends that he must have sinned for God to be *‘punishing’* him so terribly and if he would only confess his hidden sin, everything would be okay.

The problem with their theology was, of course, that Job was a righteous and blameless man, even in God’s sight. And so Job wrestled on several fronts – with God, and man, and the devil – and even with his wife!

If anyone should have given up, it would be Job. Even his contentious, unbelieving wife, speaking for the enemy, advised him to, *“Curse God and die!”* Often the enemy will use those closest to us to bring discouragement.



Job and his wife (painting circa 1500–1503 by [Albrecht Dürer](#))

But Job continued, even through his grief, confusion, and pain, to remain steadfastly confident in his God. **“For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God...”** (Job 19:25-27)

Rise Up and Walk

The children joined us in our Shabbat Bible study, and knowing that the boys delight in wrestling, I asked them a question, *“Boys, how do you know in your wrestling matches when someone has lost?”* They answered that it was when someone pinned him to the ground and he could not get up again.

I realized something important from their answer – that we have not lost if we become weary or discouraged, or even feel like giving up. There are times when the enemy has us pinned to the mat. **“For the enemy has persecuted my soul; He has crushed my life to the ground;”** (Psalm 143:3)

We cannot be faulted for struggling with God, man, or the devil, or for even falling down to the ground at times. A baby learning to walk falls over and over again; and yet he or she does not say, *“Oh, I give up. I will never be a walker!”* Falling doesn’t mean failure; it means learning what doesn’t work. It means getting creative, trying again possibly in a different way.



My daughter Courtney with her daughter Shamaiah taking her first steps

It doesn't matter that we have fallen, even many times. What is of vital importance to remember is that we have not lost until we simply refuse to get back up again.

“The righteous may fall seven times, and yet he rises again.” (Proverbs 24:16)

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, “*We must accept finite disappointment, but we must never lose infinite hope.*” In fact, when we lose hope, we become heartsick:

“**Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life.**”
(Proverbs 13:12)

It is God who will raise us up, dust us off, put on the band aids and set our feet back on the solid rock. “**The Lord upholds all who fall, and raises up all who are bowed down.**” (Psalm 146:14)

It is by His grace that we continue to press onward with the battle cry, “*Kadima!*” (Onward!) As probably most of you know, I have experienced some health issues over the years, mostly with pain in my hip, resulting in a limp. Perhaps I share more with my forefather, Jacob, than I care to admit! ☺ I have had my times of wrestling with God.

I have experienced many times when I felt discouraged about my life in general. It seemed like I had desired to see change in a number of areas for a long time and yet things seemingly remain the same. I went one day to my health practitioner for a treatment. Usually we chat for a while first and I was amazed at the statement she made to me. She said, “*We all fall at times, but we must not stay down; we must rise up and keep going...every day is a new day....*”

The fact that I had just written these words in my own parashah study and that this woman was not even a follower of Yeshua, astounded me! The Spirit of God used His word to confirm something back to me that I had written for others. In other words, I better read some of my writing for my own life and not just for others.

God does not want us to give up hope, even if we have believed for a long time and have not yet seen the evidence of answered prayer. Our challenge is to rise up each day, knowing His mercies are new every morning, and seek for wisdom from the Holy Spirit to know how to press forward in Him towards the prize.

Have you ever noticed the number of times that the Lord just says to someone, Get up! (Kum!) He said it to the lame and to the downcast and even to the dead! Wow! Maybe all we need to do is to kum - ‘*Rise up and walk*’.

Running our Race with Endurance

Why must we wrestle with God for the blessing? Surely this divine man could have overpowered Jacob in a split second. But there is a redemptive purpose in the struggle. Jacob's nature was changed to inherit the promises of God. He was not fit to fulfill his

destiny as the father of the twelve tribes of Israel before the struggle. So too, must we be trained in endurance in order to finish the race set out before us.

“...let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Yeshua, the author and finisher of our faith...” (Hebrews 12:1-2)

Jacob struggled for his entire life: **“He took his brother by the heel in the womb, And in his strength he struggled with God. Yes, he struggled with the Angel and prevailed;”** (Hosea 12:3-4) He was born with a violent and conniving twin brother, Esau, who contended with him for the blessing and birthright. He had to run away from his brother who threatened to kill him for winning the battle.

Later, his father-in-law, Laban, tricked Jacob into marrying the wrong woman and coerced him into seven extra years of hard work for his wife, Rachel. Laban tried to cheat Jacob out of his wages several times. His daughter, Dinah, was raped. His sons, Simon and Levi, tricked the entire male population of Shechem into being circumcised and then slaughtered them all!

His beloved wife Rachel died just prior to the death of his father. And as if this wasn't enough, his ten elder sons kidnapped Joseph, and led Jacob to believe that his favorite son had been killed by a wild animal. Yet, through all of the bloody battles of Jacob's life, he never abdicated his faith in the goodness of God.

Abraham and Isaac led a separated, set-apart life. Abraham lived with his family in a tent. He prayed for the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah but would not live amongst them. So, too, with Isaac, who walked away from the Philistines when they blocked his father's wells, and kept his distance from the inhabitants of the land.

But it was Jacob (Israel) and his children, engaged in a constant struggle with real life, who were entrusted with establishing the Jewish nation. Jacob brought God into the world of commerce, politics and everyday life.

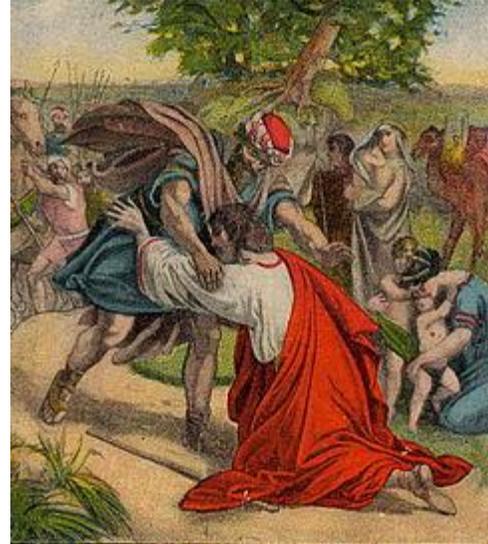
We called also called to be a light in the darkness of this corrupt world but not to be conformed to it; and as such we walk a fine line. Only the Holy Spirit can help us to maintain a right balance needed to 'affect' the world and not be 'infected' by it. Yeshua did not separate himself from the common people, but was known as a friend of sinners. Although we struggle and wrestle throughout our life, we too can bring God into the real world in which we live.

Be Ye Transformed...

Yaacov, the deceitful grasper was miraculously transformed, through his tenacious struggle with the Divine, into Yisrael – a man of integrity - right with God and man.

The biggest transformation that took place within the depth of Jacob's heart is that before his encounter with God, he was a 'taker'. He took Esau's birthright; he took Esau's blessing; he took his father's blessing; but after striving with God and coming out victorious, he became a giver, just as God is a giver.

After this life-changing encounter, he was ready to meet his brother Esau once again; but with a different spirit – no longer fearful – but seeking the love and forgiveness of a brother. Esau had also been changed over the years. Instead of killing Jacob as he had threatened twenty two years earlier, he ran to meet his brother, embraced him, fell on his neck, and kissed him - and they wept.



The Reconciliation of Jacob and Esau (illustration from a Bible card published 1907 by the Providence Lithograph Company)

The Valley of Baca (Weeping)

“Passing through the valley of Baca they make it a spring; the early rain also covers it with blessings.” (Psalm 84:6)

Today, we seem to consider tears the domain of women and weeping is usually considered too 'emotional' to be manly ('real men don't cry'); but in the Bible, we see several instances of mighty men of God openly displaying their emotions with weeping.



Abraham wept when his beloved wife Sarah died. Isaac wept when he saw Rebecca. Joseph cried when he saw his brother Benjamin again, as did Jacob when he was reunited with his brother Esau and with his beloved son, Joseph. King Hezekiah wept when told that he would die from his illness⁹. Even Yeshua wept at the tomb of his friend, Lazarus, in the garden of Gethsemane; and he also wept over Jerusalem.

Throughout the Bible, crying is shown to be not only acceptable but often a necessary accompaniment to one's powerful emotions. It has been said that tears penetrate the heavens. Whether male or female, sometimes we just need to cry, because tears can be a release when we feel there is nothing more that can be done.

Sometimes all we can do is weep before the altar. When we have no right sounding or lofty words to express our desperate or grief stricken prayers to God, tears can suffice.

⁹ II Kings 20:1-5

Sometimes we need to cry alone, as did Joseph when overcome with emotion – he sent everyone out of the room.

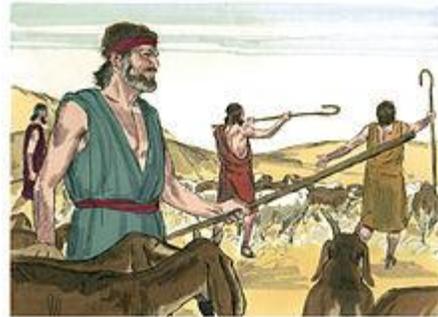
But there are times when we need to cry in the presence of others and have them comfort us in our pain. We are to weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice.¹⁰ The one thing we know about our tears is that God keeps each one in a special vessel¹¹; not one tear drop is wasted. And there will come a day in eternity when God will wipe away every tear from our faces and comfort us.¹²

Tears are not a sign of weakness; they express our God-given emotions. We can know that even when walking through a valley of tears (called Emek Habacchah עִמְקֵי הַבְּכָא), God can make it into a beautiful oasis. Having walked through our own valleys of weeping, we can offer comfort to others who are struggling through similar trials.

How do we know that Jacob had been transformed? When Esau asked his brother who this great company of people were with him, Jacob replied, “**The children whom God hath graciously given thy servant.**” (Genesis 33:5)

Jacob now acknowledges that all the blessings he has received in his life come from God alone. He calls himself Esau’s servant; Jacob has learned humility and servanthood. Jacob has become more like Yeshua, who humbled himself to come to earth as a servant.

The Divine Being, at some point in the wrestling match imparted His Divine nature into the depths of Jacob (Israel)’s being. Jacob urged Esau to receive his gifts. “**Take, I pray thee, my gift that is brought to thee; because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough.’ And he urged him, and he took it.**” (Genesis 33:11)



Jacob got together a big present for Esau. (1984 illustration by Jim Padgett, courtesy of Distant Shores Media/Sweet Publishing)

Now the tables are turned. Jacob no longer says to his brother, *Give me, give me!* Now he gently urges, “*Take the blessing, I have enough, so please take it.*” God is a giver and when we become more like Him, we no longer grasp after His blessings, conniving, deceiving and manipulating others to ‘get a blessing’; but instead, knowing we have more than enough, we love to share the blessing with others.

“**And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have abundance for every good work.**” (2 Corinthians 9:8)

¹⁰ Romans 12:15

¹¹ Psalm 56:9

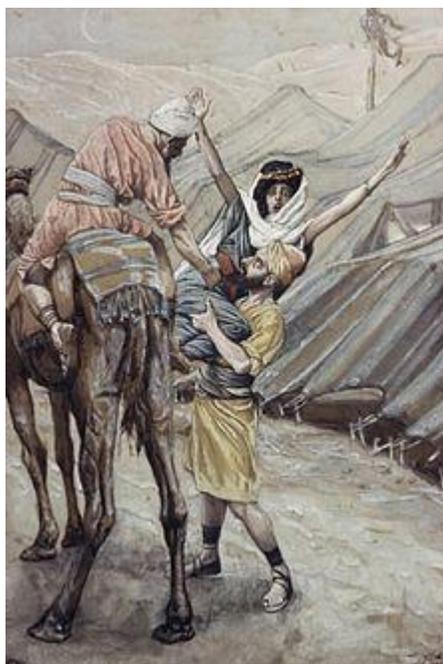
¹² Rev. 21:4

The Importance of Feminine Modesty

This week's Parashah continues with the rape of Dinah, the only daughter of Leah and Jacob. When Dinah went out to see the daughters of the land, a man named Shechem, son of Hamor the Hivite, took her and lay with her by force. Afterwards, he wished to marry her.

Interestingly, the Hebrew meaning of the name Hamor is a donkey. Is it possible that the son of a donkey was just as stubborn and self-willed as his father? Stubborn enough to take what he wanted - by force if necessary?

We can also see from the Hebrew, however, that the Scripture does not totally absolve Dinah of all responsibility for her misfortune. In Hebrew, a male youth is called a na'ar **נער**; a female youth is a na'arah **נערה**.



Dinah (watercolor circa 1896–1902 by [James Tissot](#))

In describing Dinah's adventure to see the daughters of the Land (with whom they were forbidden to mix or intermingle), the Torah calls her a na'ar, not a na'arah. True, it is only the difference of one letter, but this letter is the letter hey **ה** which can be used as an abbreviation for the name of God.

By removing the letter **ה**, it shows us that in going out to the daughters of the land alone, she did not walk in the fear of God. Also, removing the letter **ה** renders her a male youth rather than a female.

If someone is not aware of how precise and exacting Torah scribes are, one might think this a simple typo – a technical error. But knowing of the scrupulousness in which Torah scholars transcribe each Torah scroll, one would know that the removal of the letter **ה** was not a mistake, but rather a deliberate act.

It suggests that Dinah's solo jaunt into the countryside was made without awareness or acceptance of the vulnerability of her feminine gender. I am not in any way, shape, or form, suggesting that Dinah 'asked for it', or that she was not a victim of rape; only pointing out what the Hebrew scriptures show us – that Dinah went out as if she were a male youth, not conscious of the dangers of wandering the countryside alone as a young woman.

She could easily have taken one of her brothers with her, but she chose not to. This is not courage, but rather foolishness. Taking appropriate precautions to protect our purity is not cowardice; it is wisdom.

It seems to me that there is a lesson in this for us as women. There are vulnerabilities to our feminine nature, and in the fear of the Lord we must acknowledge these, walk in wisdom, and not put ourselves in situations where we endanger our purity or sanctity of mind, soul, and/or body.

Although Shechem must carry full responsibility for his criminal and violent act towards a defenseless woman, Dinah perhaps also showed a lack of feminine modesty in wandering the countryside alone.

I don't recall ever hearing about Dinah again. Did she ever marry? Have children? Or did this forced loss of her virginity ruin her life forever? I don't know. Perhaps Jacob, as her father, was negligent in allowing his daughter to wander about the land alone and unprotected. Perhaps growing up with a family full of brothers caused Dinah to behave as a 'Tomboy'. As parents, we need to teach our daughters how to behave, speak and even dress in proper modesty so as not to place themselves in harm's way.

Fathers and mothers need to establish rules and boundaries to protect their daughters. When my eldest daughter, Courtney, turned twelve we celebrated with a bat mitzvah.¹³ At this time, we also gave her a necklace with three simple words engraved on it, "True Love Waits".¹⁴



She wore this simple necklace continually, day and night, until the moment I led her up the altar to meet her beloved bridegroom, Emanuel. Just before walking down the aisle, she reached up, unclasped the necklace and placed it in my hand, saying, "Thanks Mom, I won't need this anymore." It was truly a precious moment that still has the power to bring tears to my eyes.

But I will never forget one particular moment in Courtney's teenage years. Of course, when Courtney grew into a lovely young woman it happened that young men began to take interest in her. One such young man phoned the house, asking for her. Poor boy, he had the misfortune of having my (then) husband, Radek, pick up the phone.

Coming from an Eastern European background, the father is absolute boss and makes no pretense of running a democratic home. It's "*his way and there's no highway option!*"¹⁵ Radek's response to this young man calling Courtney was to bellow, "*No! You can't talk to Courtney and never ever call here again!!*" (followed by a loud hang up). And that was that 😊.

¹³ Bat mitzvah, coming of age ceremony

¹⁴ <http://www.lifeway.com/n/product-family/true-love-waits>

¹⁵ From the movie, *Pacific*

This may seem extremely overprotective (and I am not recommending this approach to any fathers of teenage daughters out there); but Radek took his job as protector of Courtney's feminine virtue very seriously, and I am thankful. In the end, it was at their wedding that Courtney and Emanuel shared their first kiss. It's sometimes hard to know where to set the boundaries with our children. We can waver between being too protective or too permissive.

We once let our son, Timothy (Shmuel), then eight years old, ride his bike over to a friend's house which was several blocks away. It was his first time doing so, and we were a little nervous about letting him go alone. But he had a cell phone on him and he could call if he needed help.

Upon returning home, he told us that three teenagers had accosted him on the way and tried to force him to hand over his cell phone, taking his bag away and hassling him. We were horrified, knowing that this time it had been three fairly harmless teenagers, but in a city like Jerusalem, another encounter could be much more dangerous.

Now that Timothy has grown into a married man, I have to let go and trust God (ya think? ☺). We can't keep our kids in a bubble forever, but we can do our best to train them up in the way they should go according to God's standards and not the world's.

Cruelty of Unrestrained Anger

Jacob's sons, Dinah's brothers, were outraged at the defilement and dishonoring of their sister. Hamor spoke with Jacob, asking that through this marriage of their son and daughter, their two people groups could come into covenantal relationship.

This would have caused Jacob to break the Torah, as God had forbidden Israel to intermarry with the pagan peoples of the Land. But the sons of Jacob spoke treacherously to Hamor, and told him that they would agree to his proposal on the condition that all the males be circumcised, since this was the sign of the covenant.

Hamor and Shechem, in good faith, agreed, and all the males were circumcised. On the third day, when they were immobilized and in pain, the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, slew all the males, because Shechem had defiled their sister. They even took all the spoil – their flocks, riches, wives, and little ones.

Simeon and Levi took revenge for a terrible crime committed against their sister, even though God has said, "**Vengeance is Mine**"¹⁶. They used trickery and deceit to murder innocent men for a crime they did not even commit. Could this be evidence of generational sin that went back to Abraham? Jacob, the deceiver, begat children who used deception as well to achieve their purposes. These generational sins absolutely must be broken over ourselves our descendants through the blood of Yeshua.

¹⁶ Deut. 32:35

Rage can cause people to do terrible things; a bad temper is a character weakness that needs to be overcome if we are ever to be the people of God He desires us to be. The word of God tells us **“The anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God”**¹⁷; and that **“anger rests in the bosom of fools”**¹⁸.

It is natural to feel anger at times, but we must not allow anger to control us. The enemy wants to use our anger against us and others to cause much destruction. **Sin crouches at the door and its desire is for us but we must master it.**¹⁹ Sin must not have dominion over us; we must have dominion over sin, including the sin of anger.

In the way of Yeshua, we are **not to return evil for evil, but to overcome evil with good.**²⁰ Yes, we may become angry over injustice and the wrongs that people do against us or others, especially our loved ones, but this does not give us the right to sin in return. **“Be angry and sin not...”**²¹

Did Simeon and Levi act righteously? Apparently, their father did not think so, for he never forgave them to his dying day. Rather than blessing them on his deathbed, Jacob cursed their anger and cruelty.

“Simeon and Levi are brothers; instruments of cruelty are in their dwelling place. Let not my soul enter their council...cursed be their anger, for it is fierce; and their wrath, for it is cruel! I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel.”
(Genesis 49:5-7)

The word of God has so much to say about anger. God Himself is called gracious and slow to anger;²² and He asks us to imitate him in this: **“He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.”** (Prov. 16:32)

Wow! Self-control over our anger is a more powerful victory than a conquering warrior?! It seems unbelievable, and yet, judging from how difficult it can be, at times, to keep my anger under control when really stressed, pressured or provoked, I now agree with this scripture.

We can have all the best intentions in the world, and then something sets us off and – wham! A huge explosion! It’s crazy – I didn’t even know that I had a problem with my temper until I got married and had kids. 😊

We always think it’s the other person’s fault. *“If not for them, I’d be fine.”* One day my teenager was giving me an ‘attitude’ while I chauffeured him to yet another event. We

¹⁷ James 1:20

¹⁸ Ecclesiastes 7:9

¹⁹ Genesis 4:7

²⁰ Romans 12:21

²¹ Ephesians 4:26

²² Psalm 103:8

were both getting a little ‘*hot under the collar*’. Finally he burst out with, “*Well, it must be you! Because I wasn’t like this all day long until I got into the car with you!*”

Some people really do know how to push our buttons, don’t they? I know I’m probably not the only one who struggles with anger. But we know that the anger of man does not accomplish the righteousness of God.

When we are under the influence of out of control anger, we can be very cruel indeed. This is definitely something that we must cooperate with the Holy Spirit to transform us deep within. Being filled with the fruit of the Spirit will help us to overcome the works of the flesh, which include outburst of wrath and murder.

Those who habitually practice having outbursts of wrath (or rage) will not enter the Kingdom.²³ Sobering words.

Death of Rachel

This parashah comes to a conclusion with God affirming Jacob’s change of name to Israel and the passing of the covenant through his generational line to his descendants. This includes the promise of the Land of Israel.²⁴

Rachel gave birth to her second son, but it cost her everything – even life itself. Rachel died and was buried in Beit Lechem, (Bethlehem) where her grave is to this very day.



The Death of Rachel (painting circa 1847 by Gustav Ferdinand Metz)

As she labored to give her infant son life, she named him *Ben-Oni*, which means ‘*son of my sadness*’, for she was dying; but his father (who knew the power of a name), changed his name to *Ben-yamin*, whose name means “*son at my right hand*”.

A change of name is a powerful thing. According to Jewish thought, it can even affect our entire destiny.

Although the ten northern tribes of Israel were exiled for their sins and ‘lost’ among the nations, the tribe descended from this son, Benjamin, along with Judah, were preserved and survive as the Jewish people today! Benjamin Netanyahu is the name of our current Prime Minister of Israel.

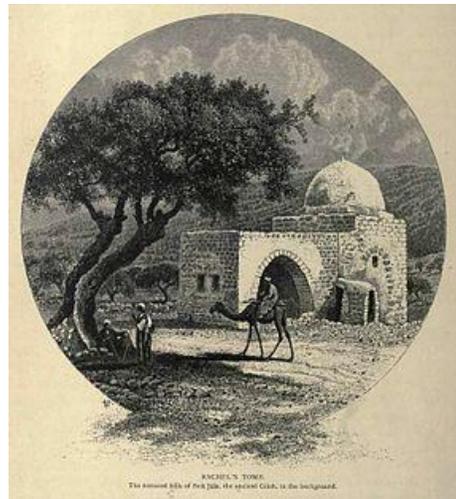


Illustration of Rachel’s Tomb, 1880

²³ Gal 5:19-21

²⁴ Genesis 35:10-12

Death of Isaac

Isaac also died and his sons, Jacob and Esau, buried him, as Isaac and Ishmael buried their father Abraham. Hopefully, it is not only through death, but in life, that families can resolve their differences and be reconciled.

Some of us also have relationships which have been strained; perhaps family members who are angry with us over some past offense.

(1984 illustration by Jim Padgett, courtesy of Distant Shores Media/Sweet Publishing)



Isaac died when he was 180 years old.

We may even have committed a great wrong towards someone close to us; and yet in time even these estranged relationships can be reconciled through love and forgiveness.

We have each been given the ministry of reconciliation and should do whatever we can to bring healing and restoration to our relationships with one another, especially our brothers and sisters in the Body of Messiah.

“Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Yeshua the Messiah, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation,” (2 Corinthians 5:18)

Esau settled in the territory of Mt. Seir and the Bible clearly states not once or twice but three times that **“Esau is Adom”**²⁵ (Adom in Hebrew is the color red). **Adom** was Esau’s nickname because he was red and hairy when born. Esau became father of the Adomites.

Although Esau eventually reconciled with his brother, his descendants, the Edomites, continued to harbor hatred against Jacob’s descendants – an ancient hatred which continues to this very day. The descendants of Esau continue to shed the blood of the children of Jacob.



Recently, in a particularly barbaric attack in a Jerusalem synagogue, Arab terrorists stormed in with knives and axes, hacking several unarmed Jewish worshipers to death. Their innocent blood was spilled over their prayer books (siddurim) and soaked the prayer shawls (tallitot) that they were still wearing at the time of the attack.

²⁵ Gen. 16:8, 19,43

Haftorah Vayishlach (Obadaiah) – An Ancient Hatred

Today's study from the prophets (Nivi'im) is the book of Obadiah, which tells us of prophecies regarding Adom (Edom). **“Thus saith the Lord God concerning Edom”** (Obadiah 1: 1)

The prophet Ezekiel also warned Edom of the destruction God would bring against them for their violence against the children of Israel:

“Because you have had an ancient hatred, and have shed the blood of the children of Israel by the power of the sword at the time of their calamity,...therefore as I live, says the Lord God, “I will prepare you for blood and blood shall pursue you, since you have not hated blood, therefore blood shall pursue you.

Thus I will make Mount Seir most desolate...Because you have said, These two nations and these two countries (Judea and Samaria) will be mine, and we will possess them...

therefore as I live, says the Lord God, I will do according to your anger and according to the envy which you showed in your hatred against them....Then you shall know that I am the Lord.” (Ezekiel 35:5-12)

God makes it completely clear in His word that this land belongs to the descendants of Jacob (Yaa'cov)/Israel and not to Edom (the descendants of Esau).

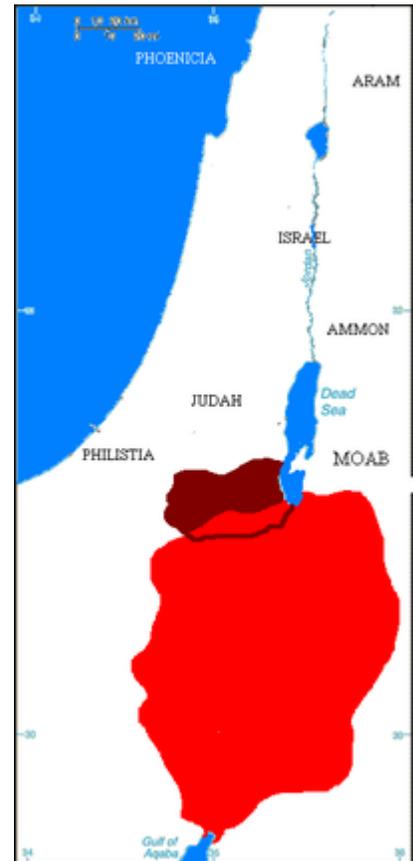


Photo: Map showing kingdom of Edom (in red) at its largest extent, c. 600 BC. Areas in dark red show the approximate boundary of classical-age Idumaea

Today there are those who make a claim to this land; who say *“this land is ours and we will take possession of it and drive those Jews into the sea”*. But the ones who make this boast are boasting against the Almighty God and woe to those who consider themselves Christians but ally themselves with the enemies of Israel.

God does not take lightly the terrorist attacks perpetrated by the war-like descendants of Esau against the children of Israel. Their innocent blood yet cries out to God from the ground for justice!

Obadiah gives the word of the Lord, **“FOR THE VIOLENCE DONE TO THY BROTHER, JACOB, SHAME SHALL COVER THEE, AND YOU SHALL BE CUT OFF FOREVER.”** (Obadiah 1:10)

In fact, Obadiah goes so far as to declare that none shall escape the Lord's wrath; there will be no survivors: **“there shall not be any remaining of the house of Esau”**. (Obadiah 1: 18)

What a terrible word against an entire people group, but it is our obligation to be a *‘voice crying out in the wilderness’* and to speak the word of truth wherever the Holy Spirit opens the door.

This word is very relevant to our world situation today, for Obadiah also speaks the Word of the Lord to the nations (in Hebrew the word used is *goyim* which could be translated Gentiles):

“For the day of the Lord is near upon all the nations; as you have done, it shall be done unto you; your dealing shall return upon your own head.” (Obadiah 1: 15).

As each Gentile nation deals with Israel, so shall it be done unto them, for the God of Israel has promised to bless those who bless the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Israel) and also to curse those who curse us. (Genesis 12:3)

This Divine promise has proved itself true amongst the nations throughout history and will hold true now and in the future. God's word is established forever. Halleluyah!

Vayishlach Study Questions

1. How did Jacob's journey lead him to confront his past? Have you ever needed to go back and confront some difficult personal situations or relationships from the past? What was the outcome? Share and discuss.
2. Did Jacob's fears about meeting Esau again come to pass? Has there (or is there now) something that you see coming from afar that you are fearful or worried about? Can you release these fears and concerns to the Lord now?
3. Jacob was completely alone when he wrestled with the angel. Do you have enough 'alone time' with God where you can wrestle out issues?
4. There are times when we need to wrestle with God and refuse to let go until we receive the blessing we need. Have you experienced this need for endurance? Share & discuss.
5. What was the significance of Yaacov's change of name to Yisrael?
6. Have you received your new name (identity) in Messiah?
7. In the account of the rape of Dinah, what does the specific Hebrew lettering suggest? Do you agree with this interpretation?
8. Do you believe that feminine modesty in dress and manner is important? Share & discuss.
9. Simeon and Levi took vengeance into their own hands for the rape of Dinah and punished all the men of Shechem. Do you believe this was justified? Why or why not?
10. If you or someone you love has been violated or mistreated are you able to leave vengeance to the Lord?
11. Are you slow to anger or does your anger sometimes get out of control? What can you do to help manage the anger that each one of us experiences at times?
12. How is the terrorism that Israel is experiencing today an 'ancient hatred' that goes all the way back to Jacob and Esau?
13. What does God have to say about those who shed the blood of the children of Jacob (Israel)? What will be the end result for those who harm the Jewish people?
14. As a part of God's people in the nations, what can you do in this situation?

About the Author:

Hannah Neshher grew up in an Orthodox Jewish home and received her education in a religious Hebrew school in Canada. During a crisis pregnancy, she came to know Jesus (Yeshua) as her Messiah and Savior. She now lives in Israel with her children and grandchildren, teaching the Jewish roots of the Christian faith.

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