

Fill Your Own Cup 5786

Fall Series – Session Six – Struggling with Ourselves

1) Jacob Wrestling, Michael Dekel

<https://thebezzine.com/portfolio/wrestling-with-god-two-poems/>

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They've all gone ahead, those I loved,
those I cared for but did not love—
arrayed and ranked, walking toward doom
or reunion. This bank, this river I have crossed before—
this creek, this life, this wreck on this shore—
all too familiar, all too fresh, all too unknown, all too new.
Now a shadow over the moon, or
perhaps my own doubt
forms as I ford the stream.
Now I wrestle with myself,
with this messenger,
this something of nothingness.
Now the moon fades—
darkness less dark—
what is my name?
Now I limp away
from this tangled life
of deception and counter-deception—
to losses, deaths, uncertainty,
a favorite son sold to the gypsies—
Who will redeem us?
Soon my brother and I will embrace
but keep our defended distance.
Soon nothing will be the same.
Now, I wrestle with God.

2) Genesis 32: 22 – 33

And so the gift went on ahead, while he remained in camp that night.
That same night he arose, and taking his two wives, his two maidservants, and his eleven sons, he crossed the ford of the Jabbok.
After taking them across the stream, he sent across all his possessions.
Jacob was left alone. And a figure wrestled with him until the break of dawn.
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.
Then he said, "Let me go, for dawn is breaking." But he answered, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me."

בראשית לב: כב - לג

וּמַעֲבָר הַמַּנְחָה עַל-פָּנָיו וְהוּא לֵן בְּלִילָה-הַהוּא
בַּמַּנְחָה:
וַיָּקָם אִ בְּלִילָה הוּא וַיִּלָּח אֶת-שְׁתֵּי נָשָׁיו וְאֶת-
שְׁתֵּי שִׁפְחָתָיו וְאֶת-אֶחָד עֶשֶׂר יְלָדָיו וַיַּעֲבֹר אֶת
מַעֲבַר יַבֹּק:
וַיִּקְרָאם וַיַּעֲבֹרם אֶת-הַנָּחַל וַיַּעֲבֹר אֶת-אֲשֶׁר-לֹ:
וַיִּתֵּר יַעֲקֹב לְבָדּוֹ וַיַּאֲבֹק אִישׁ עִמּוֹ עַד עֲלֹת
הַשָּׁחַר:
וַיֵּרָא כִּי לֹא יָכֹל לֹו וַיִּגַּע בְּכַף-יָרְכוֹ וַתִּקַּע כַּף-
יָרְדּוֹ וַיַּעֲלֵב בְּהַאֲבָקוֹ עִמּוֹ:
וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁלַחֲנִי כִּי עָלָה הַשָּׁחַר וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא
אֲשַׁלְּחֶךָ כִּי אִם-בֵּרַכְתָּנִי:
וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו מַה-שֵּׁמֶךָ וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב:

<p>Said the other, "What is your name?" He replied, "Jacob." Said he, "Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with beings divine and human, and have prevailed." Jacob asked, "Pray tell me your name." But he said, "You must not ask my name!" And he took leave of him there. So Jacob named the place Peniel, meaning, "I have seen a divine being face to face, yet my life has been preserved." The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping on his hip. 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.</p>	<p>וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא יַעֲקֹב וַיֹּאמֶר עוֹד שְׁמִי כִּי אִם- יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי-שָׁרִיתָ עִם-אֱלֹהִים וְעִם-אֲנָשִׁים וַתִּזְכָּל: וַיִּשְׁאַל יַעֲקֹב וַיֹּאמֶר הִגִּידָהּ נָא שְׁמֶךָ וַיֹּאמֶר לְמָה זֶה תִּשְׁאַל לִשְׁמִי וַיִּבְרָךְ אֹתוֹ שָׁם: וַיִּקְרָא יַעֲקֹב שֵׁם הַמָּקוֹם פְּנִיֵאל כִּי-רָאִיתִי אֱלֹהִים פָּנִים אֶל-פָּנִים וַתִּנָּצַל נַפְשִׁי: וַיִּזְרַח-לּוֹ הַשָּׁמֶשׁ כַּאֲשֶׁר עָבַר אֶת-פְּנוּאֵל וְהוּא צָלַע עַל-יָרְכוֹ: עַל-כֵּן לֹא-יֵאָכְלוּ בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת-גִּיד הַנֶּפֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר עַל-כִּפְּי הַיָּרֵךְ עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה כִּי נָגַע בְּכַף- יָרֵךְ יַעֲקֹב בְּגִיד הַנֶּפֶשׁ:</p>
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<p>3) Genesis 25:24-26 When her time to give birth was at hand, there were twins in her womb. The first one emerged red, like a hairy mantle all over; so they named him Esau. Then his brother emerged, holding on to the heel of Esau; so they named him Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when they were born.</p>	<p>בראשית כה:כד-כו וַיִּמְלְאוּ יָמֶיהָ לֵלֶדֶת וַתֵּהֶנּה תוֹמָם בְּבֶטְנָהּ: וַיֵּצֵא הָרֹאשׁוֹן אֲדָמוֹנִי כָלוּ כַּאֲדָרְתַּת שֹׁעֵר וַיִּקְרְאוּ שְׁמוֹ עֵשָׂו: וְאֶחָד-יָצָא אַחֲרָיו וַיִּדְּ אֶחָזֶת בַּעֲקֵב עֵשָׂו וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ יַעֲקֹב וַיִּצְתַּק בְּרֹשֵׁי-שֵׁשִׁים שָׁנָה בִּלְדָתָהּ אֹתָם:</p>
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<p>4) Genesis 27:35-36 But he answered, "Your brother came with guile and took away your blessing." And he said, Is not he rightly named Ya'akov? For he has supplanted me twice: he took away my birthright; and, behold now he has taken away my blessing! And he said, Have you not reserved a blessing for me?</p>	<p>בראשית כז:לה - לו וַיֹּאמֶר בָּא אֶחָד בְּמַרְמָה וַיִּקַּח בְּרַכְתִּי: וַיֹּאמֶר הֲכִי קָרָא שְׁמוֹ יַעֲקֹב וַיַּעֲקֹבֵנִי זֶה פַעַמַּיִם אֶת-בְּרַכְתִּי לָקַח וַתֵּהֶנּה עֲתָה לָקַח בְּרַכְתִּי וַיֹּאמֶר הֲלֹא-אֶצְלָתָה לִי בְרָכָה:</p>
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<p>6) Babylonian Talmud Tractate Megillah 13b What was the modesty displayed by Rachel? — As it is written: "And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's brother" (Genesis 29:12). Now was he her father's brother? Was he not the son of her father's sister? Rather he said to her, Will you marry me? She replied, Yes, but my father is a trickster, and you cannot outwit him. He replied: I am his brother in trickery. She said to him: Is it permitted to the righteous to engage in trickery? He replied: Yes; "With the pure, act in purity and with the perverse, act wily" (Il Samuel 22:27). He said to her: What is his trickery? She replied: I have a sister older than me, and he will not let me marry before her. So he gave her certain tokens. When night came, she said to herself, Now my sister will be put to shame. So she handed over the tokens to her. So it is written, "And it came to pass in the morning that, behold, it was Leah." Up to now she was not Leah? Rather, what it means is that on account of the tokens which Rachel gave to Leah he did not know until then.</p>	<p>תלמוד בבלי מסכת מגילה יג: ומאי צניעות היתה בה ברחל דכתיב (בראשית כט, יב) ויגד יעקב לרחל כי אחי אביה הוא וכי אחי אביה הוא והלא בן אחות אביה הוא אלא אמר לה מינסבא לי אמרה ליה אין מיהו אבא רמאה הוא ולא יכלת ליה אמר לה אחיו אנא ברמאות אמרה ליה ומי שרי לצדיקי לסגויי ברמיותא אמר לה אין (שמואל ב כב, כז) עם נבר תתבר ועם עקש תתפל אמר לה ומאי רמיותא אמרה ליה אית לי אחתא דקשישא מינאי ולא מנסיב לי מקמה מסר לה סימנים כי מטא ליליא אמרה השתא מיכספא אחתאי מסרתינהו ניהלה והיינו דכתיב (בראשית כט, כה) ויהי בבקר והנה היא לאה מכלל דעד השתא לאו לאה היא אלא מתוך סימנין שמסרה רחל ללאה לא הוה ידע עד השתא</p>
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7) Aviva Zornberg, The Beginnings of Desire. pgs 234-235

Another midrashic tradition, however, suggests a more ambiguous identification: “I shall not let you go till you tell me your name.’ And he called his name Israel—like his own (the angel’s) name, for his name was Israel.”

In this reading, the angel has come for no hostile purpose but “to save and rescue him.” This angel is called Israel, perhaps because that is the purpose of his mission, to show Jacob, in a therapeutic encounter, how to become Israel. Since angels are named for their mission, this may be the reason for the angel’s response to Jacob’s question (“What is your name?”) - “Why do you ask my name?” Jacob already knows in himself the purpose of the angel’s coming, for, essentially, he is facing himself, the desire-fear necessity of a new name. He has summoned the angel to save him from the condition of being Jacob.

Some additional sources on Yaakov’s Transformation

- <https://www.alexisrael.org/vayishlach-jacob-struggles>
- <https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation-family-edition/vayishlach/no-longer-shall-you-be-called-jacob/>
- <https://library.yctora.org/2010/11/no-longer-shall-your-name-be-yaakov-but-yisrael-personal-transformation-while-living-with-our-past/>