

# Shavua Tov

Weekly  Parsha

*A Road Awakening!* Torah Commentary  
By Glenn McWilliams

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Torah Portion: *Vayishlach* וישלח "And he sent"

**Jacob sent messengers ahead of him to his brother Esau,  
to Edom's Field in the Seir area**

**Vayishlach** Ya'akov mal'achim lefanav el-Esav achiv artsah Se'ir sdeh Edom

Scripture for study: *Bereshit (Genesis) 32:3 – 36:43*

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The Torah portion "Vayishlach" contains numerous challenges for us to wrestle with. Many of these challenges, however, exist not in the Torah but in our inability to wrestle with and prevail over our own western Gentile upbringing. In other words, many of the difficulties we have with understanding the Torah come from our own inability or unwillingness to let go of our western or Greek thinking and to embrace the Hebrew mind. If we are to truly be Hebrews, then we must not only cross over bodily, but we must also loose our minds (our old ways of thinking) and begin to think like Messiah.

There are many who have heard the Torah calling and have physically crossed over into the covenant by coming out of the world of the Christian Church, giving up the Christmas tree, the bunny eggs, and the sun-god worship. But coming out of Egypt is only half the journey. The journey is not complete until the Hebrews cross over the Jordan and enter the land. Many have crossed over physically into the covenant by keeping the Sabbath, the Feasts, wearing *tzitzit* and eating kosher. To wrestle with the challenges of this portion, however, one must be able to leave the western Gentile intellect behind and embrace a Hebraic mindset. In many ways this is what this portion is about. But before we begin to look at this portion, let me further expand upon the contrast just mentioned.

About a year ago in Grand Rapids, Michigan, I attended a dialogue between Professor McGill of Chicago University and Rabbi Professor Author Green of Brandeis University. The topic of the dialogue was "Contrast and Comparison of Christian and Jewish Mysticism." Rabbi Green stated that a large part of the contrast between Christian and Jewish mysticism stemmed from the contrast between Christian and Jewish exegesis.<sup>1</sup> According to Rabbi Green, the purpose of

Christian exegesis is to discover the absolute meaning of a text. In other words, Christian exegesis looks to narrow down the meaning of a text to a singular static and absolute meaning. The Christian exegete proclaims at the end of his labor, "This is the final and absolute meaning of this text." The Jewish or Hebraic way of dealing with the text is quite different. The Jews, according to Rabbi Green, are more playful with the text. The purpose of Jewish or Hebraic exegesis is not to find a singular, static, or absolute meaning of a text, but to discover the nearly infinite number of applications of the text to the life of the Hebrews. This is quite a bit different than what we are used to. Therefore we may see in the writings of the rabbis several and apparently contradictory interpretations of a story all being affirmed as being true. This is so because each understanding has some relevant application to life.

I love the example of Tevye the milkman in *Fiddler on the Roof*. One man speaks his mind and Tevye confirms, "He's right!" Then the next man counters with his own opposing opinion and Tevye again confirms, "He's right!" A third gentleman in the crowd points out to Tevye the apparent contradiction of his affirmations, saying, "Tevye, they can't both be right," to which Tevye responds, "You know, he's right also!" It is this ability to embrace the living concept being communicated through the text without needing to cast it in stone that allows the believer to embrace the spirit of the text without becoming ensnared in its details. This is not to say that we should ignore the details, or that we are free to twist and torture a text until it submits to what we will it to say. But it does mean that sometimes we will have to open up our hearts and minds and think in more than one direction and dimension at once. To understand the Scriptures, and especially the Torah, we will have to think in the same terms as the Scriptures; we will have to think Hebraically.

This is especially true when dealing with texts involving dreams, visions, angels, and epiphanies, as is the case with the story of Jacob. In many ways our portion this week is simply the sequel and culmination of last week's portion<sup>ii</sup> where Jacob encounters YHWH in a dream and receives the promise of protection on his journey and return to the land.

*"And Jacob went out from Beersheba, and went to Haran. And he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night because the sun was set; and he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed, and behold, a ladder set up on the earth and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold the angels of Elohim ascending and descending on it. And behold, YHWH stood above it, and said, I am YHWH ELOHIM of Abraham thy father, and the Elohim of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; and thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of." (Genesis 28:10-15)*

At the end of last week's portion, Jacob began his journey back to the land. Clearly YHWH had blessed Jacob and provided for him. Jacob acknowledges this with his bold confession,

*“...for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands.”  
(Genesis 32:10)*

This journey home is not without peril. In order for Jacob to return home it was necessary to either cross over or go around the land of his brother Esau. Either way, Jacob risked encounter with his elder brother. Let us remember that it was the hateful threats of Esau that sent Jacob into exile.

*“And Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing wherewith his father blessed him: and Esau said in his heart, The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then will I slay my brother Jacob. And these words of Esau her elder son were told to Rebekah: and she sent and called Jacob her younger son, and said unto him, Behold, thy brother Esau, as touching thee, doth comfort himself, purposing to kill thee. Now therefore, my son, obey my voice; and arise, flee thou to Laban my brother, to Haran; and tarry with him a few days, until thy brother’s fury turn away; Until thy brother’s anger turn away from thee and he forget that which thou hast done to him: then I will send, and fetch thee from thence:” (Genesis 27:41-45)*

Journeying with the fruit of YHWH’S blessings, and armed with the promise of His protection, Jacob must decide what course to take and how to deal with the potential threat of Esau. Our portion begins,

*“And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother unto the land of Seir, the country of Edom. And he commanded them, saying, Thus shall ye speak unto my lord Esau; Thy servant Jacob saith thus, I have sojourned with Laban, and stayed there until now: And I have oxen, and asses, flocks, and menservants, and women servants: and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find grace in thy sight. And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, We came to thy brother Esau, and also he cometh to meet thee, and four hundred men with him. Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed: and he divided the people that was with him and the flocks, and herds, and the camels, into two bands, and said, If Esau come to the one company, and smite it, then the other company which is left shall escape.”  
(Genesis 32:3-8)*

From the very start there is debate about whom or what these messengers are. Since the Hebrew word *malach* (Mem, Lamed, Kof) is often translated as “angel” and/or as “messenger,” there is debate as to the nature of these emissaries. Some teach that these messengers were the angels that descended from the ladder in Jacob’s dream to accompany him and protect him outside the land of Israel. One suggested meaning of Jacob’s dream was that every country or nation had its own guarding angel, with the exception of Israel, which is YHWH’S own chosen people and directly under His covering. Thus Jacob could command these angels to do his bidding. There is nothing overtly stated in the text to suggest such an interpretation, and it is just as plausible and maybe even more probable that Jacob simply sent very human men as emissaries under a flag of peace to announce to Esau that he was coming through the land, as was considered common courtesy when one nation passed through another.

*“And Moses sent messengers from Kadesh unto the king of Edom, Thus saith thy brother Israel, Thou knowest all the travail that hath befallen us: ...Let us pass, I pray thee, through thy country; we will not pass through the fields, or through the vineyards, neither will we drink of the water of the wells: we will go by the king’s high way...” (Numbers 20:14-17)*

*“And Israel sent messengers unto Sihon king of the Amorites, saying, Let me pass through thy land: we will not turn into the fields, or into the vineyards; we will not drink of the waters of the well: but we will go along by the king’s borders.” (Numbers 21:21-22)*

We must remember that when Moses was passing through these same lands, Israel numbered close to 2.5 million people. Clearly this was a formidable number. It would be easy for a country to feel threatened by so great a populace. Therefore it was essential that Moses make it clear that their intention was merely to pass through and not become a threat. Jacob was not such a formidable people and could have easily slipped by unnoticed. For this reason some of the sages condemn Jacob’s choice to announce his presence.

*“Rabbi Huna commenced thus: ‘He that passeth by and meddleth with strife not his own is like one that taketh a dog by the ears.’ (Proverbs 26:17) Nahman b. Samuel said: This may be compared to the case of a robber who was sleeping on a path, when a man passed and woke him up, saying, Get up, for there is danger here! At that he arose and began beating him, at which he, the victim, cried out ‘God rebuke this wicked man!’ ‘I was asleep,’ he retorted, ‘and you woke me up!’ Even so did the Holy One, blessed be He, say to him (Jacob), He (Esau) was going his own way, yet thou didst send to him, saying, Thus saith thy servant Jacob.”<sup>iii</sup>*

*“R. Judah b. R. Simon quoted; ‘What wilt thou say, when he shall set thy friends over thee as head, whom thou thyself hast trained against thee?’ (Jeremiah 13:21) Thus the Holy One, blessed be He, said to him, ‘He was going his own way, yet thou didst send to him, say thus saith thy servant Jacob.’”<sup>iv</sup>*

Others contend that Jacob’s willingness to bow before Esau merely empowered and emboldened Esau to act ruthlessly toward Jacob and his descendants. Some of the sages quote the dictate,

*“He who acts like a kid, the wolves devour him.”<sup>v</sup>*

Others of the rabbis made connections between the number of times that Jacob called Esau *adoni* (my lord), and the number of kings that ruled over Edom before Israel inherited and possessed its land and established its own kingship. Ramban and others say this as a symbol of the sin and punishment for voluntarily bowing before a tyrant. Ramban likewise sees this precedent set by Jacob and later followed by the Hasmonean dynasty as being responsible for the ultimate destruction of the Second Temple.

*“Our fall at the hands of Edom (Rome) was due to the fact that the kings in the Second Temple era made advances to the Romans.”<sup>vi</sup>*

Others, however, credit Jacob with saving Israel by his choice to appease and attempt to reconcile with Esau rather than fight. Rabbi Judah HaNasi, Sforno, and others saw wisdom in Jacob's actions, commending him for putting away personal honor for the sake of more practical outcomes. Rabbi Jonathan, seeing a precedent to be followed by later generations, wrote,

*"Whoever wishes to placate a king or authority and is not familiar with their ways and tactics should place this chapter (32 of our sidra) in front of him and learn from it the arts of appeasement and placation."*<sup>vii</sup>

The Gemara of Ta'anit 20a likewise compares a parable supporting Jacob's choice to bend, rather than approach his foe in an unbending fashion.

*"'Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are importunate.' (Proverbs 27:6) Better are the curses that Ahiyah the Shilonite cursed Israel than the blessings with which Balaam the wicked blessed them. Ahiyah the Shilonite cursed them with a reed. He said to Israel (1 Kings 14:15): 'The Lord will strike Israel as the reed is shaken in the water.' Just as a reed stays put in the water: its stock renews itself and its roots are many and not all the winds that blow in the world can make it budge from its place, but it bends with them. When the wind subsides, the reed stays put. But Balaam the wicked blessed them with a cedar as it is said, 'As the cedars.' (Numbers 24:6) Just as a cedar: all the winds in the world that blow cannot make it budge; as soon as a south wind springs up - it uproots it and turns it upside down."*<sup>viii</sup>

There are two very important precedents set by Jacob that may indeed serve us well in the days to come. The first concerns how Jacob prepared for the inevitable encounter with the threat of danger. There are four very clear actions taken by the patriarch.

1. Jacob assesses the situation - Jacob does not act impulsively, but sends out messengers and gathers information. Given the information known and received, Jacob ponders what action would be best.
2. Jacob sends ambassadors of peace - Jacob not only demonstrates respect for Edom by sending messengers to announce his arrival in the land of Edom and his peaceful intentions, but he also prepares an impressive tribute from his vast wealth.
3. Not knowing the heart of his potential adversary, and whether he will accept the tribute or not, Jacob prepares defensive measures to assure the survival of his family as best as is possible.
4. Jacob does not rely upon his own strength, but prays for wisdom, discernment, and above all, divine intervention to assure their safe passage through the land of Edom.

Jacob likewise gives us an incredible precedent for how to pray effectively.

*"And Jacob said, O Elohim of my father Abraham, and Elohim of my father Isaac, YHWH which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee: I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all*

*the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands; Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children. And thou saidst I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the multitude. And he lodged there that same night; and took of that which came to his hand a present for Esau his brother.”*  
(Genesis 32:9-13)

Here we witness the four aspects of Jacob’s prayer:

- Confession - Jacob begins with a sincere assessment of himself as being unworthy of all the many mercies, truths, and riches that YHWH has showered upon him. Thus Jacob’s appeal is not based upon his own merit, but upon the character and nature of the Holy One as merciful and just.
- Request for intervention - Jacob makes his humble request clearly known. He does not arrogantly tell YHWH how to accomplish what he is asking for, but simply asks for help. Notice Jacob does not ask for Esau to be judged, killed, or punished. Jacob asks only for deliverance from his brother.
- Remembers the promises of Elohim - Jacob then recalls the very promises that the Holy One made to him. This is not to remind a forgetful Elohim of what He said, but to demonstrate that what Jacob is asking is consistent with the will of Elohim. This would be the same as believers praying in the name of Yeshua. It means that all we ask is to be in accordance with the Messiah’s will.
- Takes necessary action - Jacob has already confessed that he is unworthy of any favor from YHWH. Therefore Jacob does not rely upon miracles, but does everything in his Elohim-given power to make the fulfillment of this prayer unnecessary. Here we learn that we are not to build an airplane out of lead and then ask for a miracle to make it fly! Instead, we should do everything possible to make our prayers unnecessary.

We should also note Jacob’s motivation for uttering this prayer and taking action. The messengers that Jacob had sent out returned with the news that Esau was approaching, along with 400 men. This is a sizable army of men for Jacob and his sons to contend with. The Torah tells us of three concerns that troubled Jacob’s heart. The first was the well-being of his family. Jacob prayed,

*“Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children.”*  
(Genesis 32:11)

Jacob was also concerned not only for the lives of his own immediate family and servants, but also about the possibility that he would have to kill others, and possibly even his brother Esau. The Torah tells us that when Jacob heard the news of the 400 men, he was both afraid and distressed.<sup>ix</sup>

*“Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed.”* (Genesis 32:7)

Finally, we should understand that by remembering the promises of YHWH in his prayer, Jacob is demonstrating his very concern for the fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, himself, and his descendants.

Some of the sages have pointed out what may appear to be the faithlessness of Jacob by his clear demonstration of fear. Pointing out the very clear promise of the Holy One to be with Jacob and to protect Jacob all along the journey, the current, fear-motivated prayer would seem to be a sign of weak faith. YHWH proclaimed to Jacob in the dream at Bethel:

*“And behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.” (Genesis 28:15)*

If Jacob had faith in the Elohim of this promise, then why would he be afraid and pray now for deliverance? The answer to this question is found in Jacob’s vow to Elohim at Bethel, and is confirmed in the very prayer he utters before his encounter with Esau. At Bethel Jacob declared:

*“If Elohim will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father’s house in peace; and YHWH be my Elohim; And this stone, which I have set for a pillar shall be Elohim’s house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee.” (Genesis 28:20-22)*

Notice that Jacob is declaring that he will be successful in fulfilling all that the Holy One has called him to only IF Elohim will be with him, keep him, and be Elohim to him. In other words, Jacob is declaring that he has no faith in himself, but only in YHWH ELOHIM. The message is clearly evident in Jacob’s prayer in our portion. Jacob begins the prayer with the confession of his own unworthiness. Thus Jacob’s fear is not a lack of faith in the Holy One, but rather in his own ability to merit such saving grace from YHWH. Jacob’s fear is that his own sinful nature would have disqualified him from the promises of YHWH. It is Jacob’s own mixed nature, his *yetzer hara*,<sup>x</sup> which causes him to fear that YHWH will not now be able to justly keep His promises to Jacob.

I believe that it is this very character that Jacob wrestles with on the banks of the Jabbok. There is great debate concerning the “man” that Jacob wrestles with. Based on the description of the three “men” who visited Abraham, two of which are later described as angels and one being understood to be Adonai, it is possible that this man is likewise such an angel. We have already seen angels ascending and descending in Jacob’s dream, so this understanding is not improbable. There is at least one scholar that I remember reading some time ago in Biblical Review Magazine that argued that the man is Esau himself. Others hold that it is the guardian angel of Esau. Some have said that it is Messiah, or YHWH, while yet others contend that it is Satan. Needless to say, there should be great debate and discussion on this very subject. Let me now throw my own piece into the debate. Please have mercy on me! I am not claiming divine inspiration, prophetic knowledge, or even good reasoning - just a simple understanding. I present this view only as a possibility for fuel for your debates.

Let me begin by saying that it is this type of story in the Torah that requires us to put our western Gentile minds away and truly cross over to the Hebrew way of thinking about the text. With this said, let me explain the text the way I understand it.

*“And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh: and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him. And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob. And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with Elohim and with men, and hast prevailed. And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name. And he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name? And he blessed him there. And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen Elohim face to face, and my life is preserved. And as he passed over Peniel the sun rose upon him, and he halted upon his thigh. Therefore the children of Israel eat not of the sinew which shrank which is upon the hollow of the thigh, unto this day; because he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh in the sinew that shrank.” (Genesis 32:24-32)*

First let us take notice that the Torah specifically says that Jacob was left alone. There is no mention of any man hiding in the bushes, dropping down from heaven, or coming out of the darkness. The Torah does not say that Jacob thought he was alone but was surprised when attacked by a ninja hiding in a bush. The Torah emphatically states that Jacob was alone. Therefore I think the man that Jacob wrestled with was himself. The battle that Jacob fought was that of a *tzadik* wrestling to bring his *yetzer hara* into service to the Holy One. Remember that the Torah calls us to love YHWH with our whole being.

*“Thou shalt love YHWH thy Elohim with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.” (Deuteronomy 6:5)*

As long as we are of a divided nature, we cannot fulfill this commandment to love YHWH with all of our heart. We may here remember the story of Levi, who, motivated by his *yetzer hara*, impulsively drew his sword and killed all the men of Shechem.

*“And it came to pass on the third day, when they were sore, that two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brethren, took each man his sword, and came upon the city boldly, and slew all the males.” (Genesis 34:25)*

Later, however, it was the descendants of Levi who redeemed themselves by marshalling this same violent impulsivity to serve YHWH after the incident of the golden calf.

*“Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who is on YHWH'S side? Let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him. And he said unto them, Thus saith YHWH ELOHIM of Israel, Put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his*



*neighbor. And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses." (Exodus 32:26-28)*

It was this ability to marshal the *yetzer hara* that allowed Levi to distinguish himself by loving and serving YHWH with his whole heart, mind, and strength; even with his *yetzer hara*. So it is on the banks of the Jabbok that Jacob wrestles with his *yetzer hara*. Here within this lone man is the great cosmic battle between good and evil, Elohim and *hasatan*, being fought. Here we must remember that every man was created to be in the image of Elohim. This is the very created nature and purpose of man - to be the manifest image of Elohim in the world. But the *yetzer hara*, the inclination to evil, opposes the image of Elohim. Thus our *yetzer hara* in this conflict may indeed be considered to be *hasatan*. Here we must remember that the word *satan* is not a proper name. The word *satan* is simply the Hebrew word for "adversary." The word *satan* appears only 23 times in the Scriptures. At least twice it is in reference to the angel of YHWH,<sup>xi</sup> once to David,<sup>xii</sup> and at least four other times it is clearly in reference to merely human adversaries.<sup>xiii</sup> At least once it is a description of David's own inclination.

*"And satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel." (1 Chronicles 21:1)*

Therefore we may say that Jacob is wrestling with *satan* when he is wrestling with his evil inclination. It is the evil inclination that is opposed to all that YHWH wills for us. It is the evil inclination that distorts and desecrates the image of Elohim in man. Therefore when Jacob prevails over his *yetzer hara*, he sees the clear image of Elohim that he was given life to bear. So Jacob declares at the end of his wrestling match,

*"I have seen Elohim face to face, and my life is preserved." (Genesis 32:30)*

We should note that the *yetzer hara* is the one that could not prevail against Jacob's *yetzer hatov*. Just as darkness cannot extinguish light, but light can dispel darkness, so too the image of Elohim was meant to prevail over every false image. We should note that the evil inclination wrestling Jacob is concerned for the coming of the NEW DAY. This is because when the NEW DAY comes, there shall no evil be found in it. The evil inclination will not be in the world to come. We should also note that Jacob does not kill the man he wrestles with, for that would be impossible in this day. Until this body of sin dies, we must live with and wrestle this double nature. Until the NEW DAY dawns, we are bound to love YHWH with our whole heart only by following Jacob's lead and wrestling our evil inclination into submission. Jacob does not kill his *yetzer hara*, but cleaves to it until it produces blessings in his life. We too must take hold of our *yetzer hara* and not allow it free reign in our lives. We must cleave to it and take it captive to the service of YHWH. As the apostle Shaul wrote,

*"For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through Elohim to the pulling down of strong holds; casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of Elohim, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Messiah." (2 Corinthians 10:4-5)*

When we have taken every evil imagination of heart captive for Messiah, we may then truly love YHWH ELOHIM with our whole heart, mind, and strength.

During this wrestling match there are two changes that take place. First, Jacob's hip is disjointed. The Torah tells us that the man touched him on the hollow of the thigh. Here we should think of Abraham making his servant place his hand under his thigh to swear an oath.<sup>xiv</sup> We have already discussed how this action was a reference to the only holy object that Abraham possessed, the circumcised organ that bore the sign of the covenant. So it is in the story of Jacob wrestling at the Jabbok. The *yetzer hara* does everything in its power to keep Jacob from walking in the covenant. To the evil inclination, the covenant is bondage and a curse upon its sensual freedom; so the *yetzer hara* seeks to cripple Jacob's ability to walk in the covenant. The first change we see in Jacob is a changed walk. When we subject our *yetzer hara* to Torah, we too will see our walk changed. We cannot be in the covenant and continue to walk in the customs and traditions or our old worldly ways.

The second change that we witness in Jacob is that of his name. No longer is Jacob to be called Jacob, but now his name will be Israel. This is a significant change. Jacob's opponent asks Jacob what his name is. Jacob responds by admitting his name. Here we must remember that the name "Jacob" was bestowed upon him because when he was born, he was holding the heel of his brother Esau.<sup>xv</sup> The Hebrew word for heel is *akev* (Ayin, Qof, Vet). Jacob's name in Hebrew is *Ya'akov* (Yud, Ayin, Qof, Vet). The root of *Ya'akov* (Ayin, Qof, Vet) is the same as that of the Hebrew verb *akav* (Ayin, Qof, Vet), which means both "to follow at the heel" and "to deceive." By asking Jacob his name, his adversary was in some sense admitting that as Jacob, he operated in the power of his own flesh, knowledge and reason. But now that he prevailed over his *yetzer hara*, Jacob is now Israel - a prince, or one with El's authority.

Throughout the Torah there are some very interesting interplays between the name Jacob and the name Israel. This is true even as it applies to the descendants of Jacob/Israel. For the most part, Israel is the name of the patriarch when it is referring to spiritual realities, and Jacob is the name used of more mundane and earthly matters. A very clear example of this may be seen in the story of Jacob preparing to bless Joseph.

*"And one told Jacob, and said, Behold, thy son Joseph cometh unto thee: and Israel strengthened himself, and sat upon the bed." (Genesis 48:2)*

Here we witness that it is physical Jacob who lays weak and dying, but spiritual Israel who strengthens himself for the blessing about to be bestowed. We may also see in this a subtle illusion to the two lines of descendants - those who are the physical descendants and are like the dust of the earth, and those who are the spiritual descendants who are like the stars of the heavens. At the very end of the story of Israel's wrestling, we read a report concerning a dietary change.

*"Therefore the children of Israel eat not of the sinew which shrank, which is upon the hollow of the thigh, unto this day: because he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh in the sinew that shrank." (Genesis 32:32)*

Remember that the hollow of the thigh represents a crippled walk in the covenant. Note that it is not the sons of Jacob that refuse to partake of this weakness, but the children of Israel. In other words, it is those who are spiritually like Israel that will not allow the *yetzer hara* to cripple their walk in Torah.

We should note that this is the very first usage of the title the “children of Israel.” We may then give definition to this title from its first usage, and state that the “children of Israel” are those who have wrestled with their *yetzer hara* and prevailed, and will not partake of any weakness that affects their walking out the Torah. We should also take note here that it was Jacob/Israel alone that did this wrestling, and not any of his descendants.

So it is that we see in the story of Dinah and Shechem and the subsequent revenge that the title the “children of Israel” is not used. Dinah, who brazenly went out among the women of Shechem, is first considered as the “daughter of Leah.” This is in reference to the fact that Leah went out to meet Jacob and inform him that she had bought the right to sleep with him.<sup>xvi</sup> Later Dinah is referred to as a “daughter of Jacob.” It was likewise the “sons of Jacob” that came out of the fields, and the “sons of Jacob” that made a deceitful (don’t miss the connection between Jacob and deceit) pact with the men of Shechem, and it was the “sons of Jacob” that looted and murdered with the sword. All of this was done in the flesh, motivated by revenge. These were not the “children of Israel,” but the “sons of Jacob.” Eventually this title will apply to the descendants of Israel. As he grows in his name and nature, so too shall he teach his children and their children.

The story of Dinah in Shechem should help us to understand that we are called to be different than the world. We are not to mix seed or live by a mixed nature. Instead, we are to take captive every imagination of the heart. We are not to be like Shechem, who impulsively responds to every urge that rises up within us. Instead, we are to wrestle and prevail over our *yetzer hara* and subject it to the Torah. This is what sets us apart. This is what makes us “children of Israel” and not merely “sons of Jacob,” or for those of us of a different heritage, simply the “sons of Adam.”

We should also note that Jacob’s name was not changed at the Jabbok, but later, after all the false images and idols had been put away. Only then did YHWH appear to Jacob and officially bestow upon him the name Israel. When we too subdue the adversary within us and begin to embody the Torah with our whole heart, mind and strength, then the false images created by our *yetzer hara* will disappear from our lives, and the image of Elohim will be restored in us. When we have thus prevailed, then YHWH may declare the name “children of Israel” over us as well.

SHAVUA TOV !

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<sup>i</sup> “Exegesis” is a compound Greek word meaning to draw meaning out of a text. It is the opposite of “eisegesis” which means to bring meaning to the text.

<sup>ii</sup> Vayetze Bereshit 28:10-32:2

<sup>iii</sup> Midrash Rabbah Bereshit, 75:2-3, Sonico Press, Pg. 690

<sup>iv</sup> Ibid

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<sup>v</sup> Studies in Bereshit, Nahama Leibowitz, LAMBDA Publishing, Pg. 346

<sup>vi</sup> Ibid

<sup>vii</sup> Ibid Pg. 348

<sup>viii</sup> Studies in Bereshit, Nahama Leibowitz, LAMBDA Publications, Pg. 349

<sup>ix</sup> The Schottenstein Edition Interlinear Chumash, Mesorah Publications, Pg.187

<sup>x</sup> *Yetzer hara* and *yetzer hatov* are the fruit of eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The *yetzer hara* is our inclination to do evil, and the *yetzer hatov* is the inclination to do good. All of the children of Adam and Eve have this mixed nature.

<sup>xi</sup> Numbers 22:22-23

<sup>xii</sup> 1 Samuel 29:4

<sup>xiii</sup> 2 Samuel 19:22; 1 King 5:4; 1 Kings 11:14, 1 Kings 11:23, 25

<sup>xiv</sup> Genesis 24:2

<sup>xv</sup> Genesis 25:26

<sup>xvi</sup> Genesis 30:16