

*Shiur L'Yom Sh'lishi*¹

[Tuesday's Study]

READINGS: ***Torah Vayishlach:*** **Genesis 32:21²-31**
 Haftarah: **Obadiah 2-7**
 B'rit Chadasha: **Matthew 26:38**

I will not let you go unless you bless me.

[Genesis 32:26]

Today's Meditation is Psalm 59:5-8;

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is Petition #5, *Rofei* [Healing]

Vata'avor ha-minchah al-panav - Then [Ya'akov] caused the minchah surrogates to go cross over before him ... *v'hu lan b'laylah-ha-hu b'machaneh* – but he himself lodged in the camp that night. **Genesis 32:21.**

Ya'akov is the ultimate prodigal son, trying to make his way home – both physically and spiritually. Nothing comes easy for him on the *ba'al teshuvah* journey of a son of the covenant - but who said finding one's way back to one's true identity, true calling, true mission, and true destiny after decades of constant immersion in the toxic *ra, shachat, and chamas* slime pits of the raging nations and arrogant ethnicities of this world is *supposed to be* – or *could ever be* - easy? Look at Ya'akov. First he had to break free of the eastern mutations of fallen human nature, represented by Laban and the ways of Paddan-Aram; now he has been informed that his estranged brother Esav – the poster-boy of western mutations of fallen human nature - is riding toward him at a gallop with 400 armed men. As a result, Ya'akov has to do a lot of soul-searching about what (and who) he can and cannot live without – what (and who) is essential to his mission, and what (and who) is not. Welcome to the crucible of *Yabbok*, Ya'akov Avinu! What is *Yabbok*, you ask? Geographically it is the name of the main river that carries water from the hill country of Gilead down to the Jordan Rift Valley. Literally, the word means 'I will pour out' or 'I will empty'. Yes, Ya'akov, you will. And this, too, is one of the disciplines of *teshuvah*.

Who by Fire, Who by Water; Who in the Sunshine; Who in the Night³

The muddy waters of the *Yabbok* have touched a lot of feet – human and animal - recently. Over the course of the daylight hours, Ya'akov has sent everything and

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² In the Hebrew publications of the Bible, the numbering of verses differs slightly, such that today's aliyah ranges from Genesis 32:22 through 32:32.

³ This subtitle is borrowed from the late Leonard Cohen. It is the first line of his song 'Who By Fire', which is in turn drawn from the *Unataneh Tokef* prayer of the Yom Teruah/Yom Kippur liturgy.

everyone important in his life across the stream. He, however, stayed behind on the north side of the Yabbok. It is getting dark - and he is out of both time and options. His twin-brother-turned-mortal-enemy, Esav, with his well-trained army of 400 men, will be upon him and his helpless little band of pilgrims tomorrow. On this night – the last few hours before he faces his Esav and his army - Ya’akov wants to be alone. Why? The text does not say. Perhaps Ya'akov was planning on using the solitude of the night to think the scenario through a little more thoroughly. Perhaps he was planning on spending a good part of the evening in prayer. Perhaps he wanted a little privacy so he could shake his fist at Heaven and scream about how unfair it all seemed. Perhaps he was planning to try his hand at making Esav another pot of red, red stew. Who knows what he had on his mind for the upcoming season of darkness. But whatever his plans might have been, they were about to be interrupted. SomeOne Ya’akov could not see was lurking in the shadows, watching his every move. That SomeOne had plans that were about to supersede whatever activity Ya’akov had in mind for the evening. Cloaked by the darkness, he approached Ya’akov from behind. Without warning, Ya’akov felt strong hands grasping his shoulders firmly. Then he found himself on the ground. He looked up and could see nothing – not even a vague shape. Who was this invisible adversary? What did he want with Ya’akov? It looks like this is going to be a long, dark night of the soul.

Cloaked by the darkness, the unseen adversary grabbed Ya’akov around the neck. Ya’akov had not experienced anything this frightening since he was being pummeled by Esav over and over again in the darkness of Rivkah’s womb! Instinct kicked in. The air was filled with grunts and growls, taunts and challenges. And then, those strong hands grasped Ya’akov again - and it was clear that a “no-holds-barred” fight to the finish was ‘on’. There was no bell. There was no ring. There was no referee. There were no rules. There was no time limit. There would be no tapping out. There was no pathway of retreat. There was no neutral corner. Ya’akov had no option but to grab ahold of whatever part of his unseen enemy he could reach ... and WRESTLE as if his life – and perhaps the future of the world – depended upon it!

The Night Yitzchak’s Son Transcended the Persona of Ya’akov and Became ‘Yisrael’

In today’s aliyah we will bid farewell to our beloved ancestor Ya’akov. As he feared, the journey he is taking from Paddan-Aram to Kena’an will indeed be the death of him. Well ... *sort of*. Ya’akov is not about to be gathered to his people the way Sarah and Avraham were. But we *will* bid farewell to him. For in a very real spiritual sense the old Ya’akov we have come to know will *cease to exist* in today’s aliyah. By reason of a Divine encounter we will find that Ya’akov is

virtually going to become a *new person*, with a *new identity ... and a new name*.

The Divine Pursuit And Apprehension

Ya'akov has been *passionately loved* and *jealously pursued* by the Holy One for a long time. Ya'akov's story is indeed the prototypical prodigal son story – the glorious romance between Creator and the 'one that almost got away'. The Holy One first got Ya'akov's attention when the young man was a terrified fugitive running for his life on the "road to Charan". That first encounter was founded in a dramatic dream sequence during the course of which the Holy One made not only startling *revelations of Himself* but also a startling series of *promises* to the young prodigal. Let's look back at what the Holy One said to Ya'akov at that time:

***I am the God of your father Avraham and the God of Yitzchak.
I will give the land on which you lie to you and to your descendants.
Your descendants will also be like the dust of the earth,
and you will spread out to the west and to the east, and to the north and to the south;
and in you and in your descendants will all the families of the earth be blessed.
Behold, I am with you and will keep [guard and protect] you wherever you go,
and will bring you back to this land;
for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.***

[Genesis 28:13-15]

Twenty years of hard labor in Laban's world elapsed before the Holy One's next appearance to Ya'akov. Even then, after all those years, all the Holy One said was that Ya'akov was being released to leave Laban's household and return to "***the land of his fathers***" and to re-unite with his relatives. At least the Holy One renewed His promise to *never leave* Ya'akov, this time restating it in the affirmative as: "***I will be with you.***" Genesis 31:3.

As we begin today's aliyah Ya'akov's worst fears have just crystallized in a terrifying way. The messengers he sent ahead of his fledgling band of pilgrims to "feel out" Esav's attitude toward him have returned with a chilling message: Esav was riding toward him at full gallop ***with an army of 400 men***. This was not what Ya'akov wanted to hear. He must have questioned whether he would have been better off 20 years ago to have stayed and dealt with Esav's anger when it was just the two of them – *one-on-one*. Now it did not take a mathematician to imagine what would happen when Esav's 400-man army swooped down on him, his two wives, his children, a couple of slave girls, and a handful of menservants, all virtually un-armed. Ya'akov knew his little band of pilgrims was completely *helpless* in the face of Esav's onslaught. This was the prototypical the time of '*Jacob's Trouble*'.

How Does a Son of the Covenant Deal With Seasons of Intense Tribulation?

In “great fear” and “distress” Ya’akov was left with no choice but to do the unthinkable - prioritize the lives of the members of his own family. He had to determine which of his loved ones were the most - and which were the least - “expendable”. With great angst he had to ask the most terrifying of questions: *if this horrible onslaught by Esav and his army that he feared actually happens, whom should I sacrifice to the wrath of Esav, and who should I try to save?* He actually developed a plan along these lines, saying: **“When Esav comes, he will attack one group - and the other group may be able to escape.”** Genesis 32:8. Whoever Ya’akov sent out to meet Esav first would of course *surely be killed*; perhaps, however, he thought, the others would have a chance to escape. But whom – which of his flesh and blood - would he assign to which group? Such questions a man should not have to ask, much less answer. They are *more than any man should have to bear*. Hence the tremendous weight of this burden at last drove Ya’akov to prostrate himself in prayer. **“O God of my father Avraham, God of my father Yitzchak ...”** he cried out, **“... Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esav, for I am afraid ...”** Genesis 32:9, 11. It was indeed a very *dark night of the soul* that loomed before him.

***In the Long Run, the Holy One Knows He Can Only
Entrust Material Possessions In Great Quantities
to Those Who are Willing to Give Them All Away at His Word –
And Never Bemoan the Loss***

In the course of our last lesson we read that, after he had engaged in an intense time of prayer, Ya'akov decided to try to appease Esav with an impressive gift of livestock. From the abundant supply of material goods which the Holy One had placed in his custody over the course of the last six years of his stay in Charan he selected droves of goats, sheep, oxen, camels and donkeys that he directed be sent out to Esav in waves. As Torah puts it **vayikach min-haba b'yado** – *Then he took from that which had come into his hand/under his stewardship ... minchah l'Esav achiv* - a present/tribute for his brother Esav. **Genesis 32:13**⁴.

What was Ya'akov *doing*, you may ask? Why would he give away so much of the wealth he had acquired in Laban's world? Some say he was reverting to his old ways, and 'playing' Esav - taking advantage of the same penchant toward lusty materialism that had caused a much younger Esav to sell Ya'akov his birthright for a bowl of lentil soup. See **Genesis 25:29-34**. But is it possible that instead what Ya'akov was doing was offering *restitution* for the wrong he had done to Esav in connection with taking his father's material blessing by deception? After all, the substance of what Ya'akov sent out to Esav as a *minchah* [i.e. a choice gift of tribute] was exactly what Yitzchak had intended to bestow upon Esav that day long ago. It was just the STUFF of life – i.e. the *dew of heaven*, and the *increase of the land*. In so doing, was Ya'akov offering Esav the *monetary equivalent of the very blessing he had deceived his father into giving him so long ago?*

At Mount Sinai generations later the Holy One will announce the following *mitzvah*:

***If anyone sins, and commits a trespass against the Holy One,
and deals falsely with his neighbor in a matter of deposit, or of bargain, or of robbery,
or has oppressed his neighbor, or has found that which was lost,
and dealt falsely therein, and swearing to a lie;
in any of all these things that a man does, sinning therein;
then it is to be, if he has sinned, and is guilty, he is to restore that which he took by robbery,
or the thing that he has gotten by oppression,
or the deposit, which was committed to him, or the lost thing that he found,
or any thing about which he has sworn falsely;
he is to restore it even in full, and he is to add a fifth part more to it.
To him to whom it belongs he is to give it in the day of his being found guilty.***

[Leviticus 6:1-5]

⁴ In the Hebrew Bible the numbering of verses is different, and this verse is numbered as Genesis 32:14.

This – *i.e.* making **shalam** is *the way of the Holy One*. It is *his eternal standard of righteousness*. What is *shalam*? It is the act of returning whatever one has wrongfully taken or of replacing what has been lost or damaged under one’s stewardship, multiplied. The goal of *making shalam* – often referenced in English as restitution, but involving much more - is not merely to restore the other person to the state/condition in which he or she would have been absent our bad behavior, but to actually leave the other person in a far *better, significantly improved, state*. The objective of making *shalam* is to co-labor with the Holy One in *making everything beautiful in its time*, and in ‘*working all things together for good*’ for those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose. See **Ecclesiastes 3:11 and Romans 8:28**.

Hmmmmn. It appears Ya’akov may just have made a connection with the Master in his hours of prayer on that dark night of his soul. He appears to have finally heard the heart of the Creator. This is what Torah tells us of Ya’akov’s motivation in *making shalam* unto Esav:

ki-amar achaprah fanav b’minchah ha-holechet l’fanai

[Ya’akov] said, ‘I will cover his face with the gifts that are being sent ahead before him,

v’acharei-chen er’eh fanav ulai yisa f’nai

and then when I face him he will esteem me.’

Blessed are the *poor in spirit*, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven⁵. Blessed are the *meek*, for they will inherit the earth⁶. Blessed are the ‘*peacemakers*’ [*i.e.* makers of *shalam*], for they will be called the children of God⁷. Ya’akov is indeed making progress. His transformation into a son of the Covenant is taking effect. The marks of a mensch and patriarch are finally appearing in both his spirit and his flesh.

Making Mikveh

The next thing Ya’akov is going to do is take his family and possessions across the River known to the ancients as *Yabbok*. The name is derived from a Hebrew verb meaning *he will wrestle*. With the advent of English the *yod* [‘y’ sound] at the beginning of the word was converted to a ‘J’ sound, to change the name to *Jabbok*⁸.

Was this just a river crossing – a necessary part of the journey from Charan to

⁵ Matthew 5:3.

⁶ Matthew 5:5.

⁷ Matthew 5:9.

⁸ The river in question, now called the *Zerka*, or *blue river*, is a deep ravine located outside and to the East of the Promised Land. It begins in the mountains of Gilead, and meanders Southwesterly [sometimes underground] over an approximately 65-mile course until it pours into the Yarden [Jordan] river from the East. The confluence of the Yabbok and the Yarden is about midway between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea, or about 45 miles below the South end of the Sea of Galilee. This river formed the ancient boundary between Ammon and Moav.

Eretz Yisrael? Or was it instead a pilgrimage undertaken *for spiritual purposes* – something like Avraham’s journey up to Mount Moriyah with his son Yitzchak? We will soon find out.

With Esav and 400 men riding toward them it would seem that the worst thing that Ya’akov and his family could do – the worst military strategy they could devise – would be to cross the Yabbok. At least on the North side of that river [actually more of a creek] they had both the ‘high ground’ and a natural defensive position. Once they crossed over they lost the ‘high ground’ advantage and - horror of horrors - they were caught between Esav’s army and the water. That was the worst possible scenario for a battle. They would, you see, not only be totally unable to defend themselves - they would have *nowhere to run* if Esav and his army attacked. It therefore occurs to me that the Yabbok crossing, at this particular time, under these circumstances, was to Ya’akov more of a *mikveh* than a part of the journey. What’s a *mikveh*? A *mikveh* is a voluntary self-immersion for spiritual purposes in a pool or flowing stream of water [living water]. Why a *mikveh* at this place, and at this time? To the Hebrew mindset a *mikveh* is an integral part of *t’shuvah* [repentance and return to the ways of and relationship with the Holy One] and of *starting any significant new undertaking*. An ancient midrash relates that after being banished from Eden Adam sat in a river that flowed from the garden seeking a spiritual cleansing that would return him to intimacy with the Creator from Whose Presence he was banished. Likewise, before receiving the revelation of Torah at Mt. Sinai all members of the Redeemed Community were instructed to immerse themselves in a *mikveh* in preparation for coming *face-to-Face with* and *hearing the Voice of* the Holy One. Furthermore, the induction of Aharon and his sons into the priesthood was inaugurated by immersion in a *mikveh*, and in Temple times not only the priests but every person who wished entry had first to immerse in a *mikveh*. When Yochanan [John (the Baptist)], son of Zecharyah the priest and his wife Elisheva called people to come the Jordan River what he was calling them to do was to make *mikveh*.

Mikveh is symbolic of total submission to the Holy One’s *will, Words, and ways*. It is a voluntary surrender of all aspects of who one is to the womb of Creation – the waters of the primordial deep from which the Holy One called forth all things. One does not come forth from the waters of the *mikveh* the same person he was when he entered them. One comes forth re-born, transformed by the Creative words **‘Let there be light’** which the Holy One spoke over the Deep in Genesis 1:3. And the Holy One said **“Let there be Light!”** - and there *was Light*. So consider the possibility that as today’s aliyah gets underway what is happening is that Ya’akov is leading his family in making *mikveh* in the nearest water available - the waters of the Brook *Yabbok*. As Torah records it:

V'yakom b'laylah hu v'yikach et-shtei nashav
In the middle of the night he got up and took his two wives,

v'et-shtei shifchotav v'et-achar asar yeladav
his two handmaids, and his eleven sons,

vaya'avor et Ma'avar Yabok⁹
and sent them across the Jabbok River shallows.

V'yikachem vaya'avirem
After he had taken them and sent them across,

Et ha-nachal vaya'aver et-asher-lo
he also sent across all his possessions.

This *mikveh* of Ya'akov's family will of course foreshadow the later *mikveh* of the crossing of the Jordan to enter into the land promised by the Holy One – *if* by the Holy One's grace Ya'akov can somehow survive the imminent encounter with Esav.

A Wrestling Match To Remember

Ah, but before he meets Esav Ya'akov has another encounter with one much more to be feared than Esav or his 400 men. And this adversary must be wrestled with alone. You see, the man we know as Ya'akov could not face Esav and live. But the Holy One has the situation covered. After the dark night at which our aliyah begins the Holy One has ordained that the man we know as Ya'akov will live no more. A new creation, named Yisrael, will live in his place. And *Yisrael* is and always will be more *than a match for Esav* – because Yisrael has *wrestled with God*.

Torah tells us that after everyone else had crossed the river, and Ya'akov was alone - he thought:

V'yivater Ya'akov l'vado
*Ya'akov remained alone*¹⁰.

vaye'aveik ish imo ad alot ha-shachar
*A stranger*¹¹ [*appeared and*] *wrestled with him until just before daybreak.*

⁹ **Yabbok** is *yod, beit, kuf*, Strong's Hebrew word #2999. In addition to meaning 'he will wrestle' it can mean "emptying", or 'pouring out'. The *mikveh* made by Ya'akov and his family at this time was not only a preparation for wrestling with the angel, but was a 'emptying'/pouring-out of *self* and of *stuff*. Such a *mikveh* is necessary for all of us, Beloved.

¹⁰ According to the Talmud Ya'akov stayed behind to retrieve some "small jars" of his that were left behind. Chasidic sages intuit from this that "*the righteous know that their material possessions contain "sparks of holiness" which are redeemed and elevated when the object or resource they inhabit is utilized to fulfill the Divine will. The righteous person sees these sparks of Divine potential as virtual extensions of his own soul, since he understands that the very fact that Divine Providence has caused them to come into his possession indicates that their redemption is integral to his mission in life.*" See '**From our Sages**', Parsha *Vayishlach*, Chabad.org, <http://www.chabad.org/parshah/in-depth/default.asp?AID=35877>

Vayar ki lo yachol lo vayiga
When he saw that he could not defeat him¹²,
b'chaf-yereicho vateika kaf-yerech
he touched the *yarech* area;
Ya'akov b'he'avko imo
Ya'akov's became lame as he wrestled him.

The word our English Bibles translate as “wrestled” in our aliyah is *'abaq*¹³. It does not literally mean “wrestle” in the sense you and I might think; it means to *kick up dust*, like a windstorm does, for instance – or like two men grappling on the ground in the desert might do. To *'abaq* with the Holy One as Ya'akov did means *to grab on to Him and hold so much of Him as you can grasp as if your very life depended upon maintaining your grip – while He grasps you just as tightly*. To *'abaq* does not involve *competition* like collegiate or Olympic wrestling, nor does it involve *entertainment* like the choreographed bouts of the World Wrestling Federation. The *'abaq* of the Holy One is *a passionate dance in the dust*. The Holy One, of course, does not seek – or need - to prove He can “pin” a man. Likewise, one should not in the course of this *'abaq* process hope to “pin” God. The goal of *'abaq*, you see, is neither *victory over God* or *victory of God* – it is instead confirmation of God's *existence*, God's *Presence*, and God's *covenant commitment*.

One cannot, you see, “wrestle” with Someone who does not exist. A wishful thought does not kick up dust when you tumble with it across the desert floor. Whoever the Holy One engages in *'abaq*, therefore, forever knows that He is real, and forever remembers the transforming power of that embrace.

Another Essential Aspect of the Covenant Relationship With Which We Need to Become Acquainted

The willingness to continually engage the Holy One in *'abaq* is that which defines a true son of the Avrahamic covenant – a true friend of God like Avraham. To

¹¹ In a footnote to the transliterated text provided by World ORT the following is said regarding the traditional interpretations of what occurred this verse. “According to tradition the one who wrestled with Ya'akov was *Samael*, guardian angel of Esau and the incarnation of Evil (*Bereshit Rabbah* 77; Rashi; *Zohar*). See Hosea 12:4,5. Jacob's wrestling with him would symbolize the struggle with evil that he and his descendants would have from this time forth. **Bachya**; See *Handbook of Jewish Thought* 4:29. According to others, it was a holy angel, symbolizing Ya'akov's future struggles with the spiritual. *Targum Yonatan*; *Tanchuma*.

¹² The sages say that the struggle of Ya'akov and the unidentified *ish* at Yabbok represents the physical suffering of *galut* [exile]. In the words of the midrash, "This is the generation of the *shmad*"-the cruel tortures inflicted by the Romans in Mishnaic times (1st and 2nd century ce) in their effort to eradicate the faith of Israel.” **Nachamanides**.

¹³ The verb *abaq* – *alef, beit, qof* - is Strong's Hebrew word #79. It is pronounced *aw-bawk'*.

'abaq, you see, is to continually grasp all of the Holy One which He reveals to you - and to hold on for dear life. To *'abaq* with the Holy One has nothing to do with adopting a theology or practicing a religion. It is not membership in – or leadership of – a religious organization. It is not politely accepting doctrines and dictates and “words” of pastors, prophets or rabbis.

To *'abaq* is not passively or piously saying “*Thy will be done*” in real-life circumstances without first challenging with every fiber of your being the resoluteness of that Will, the essence of what that Will really is, and what the impact of that Will may be. To *'abaq* is instead to *pursue the Holy One* in the darkest moments of the darkest night and the in heat of the desert sand and to *wrestle strenuously with His Words, and His Ways, and His Presence*. To *'abaq* with the Holy One is to *exert oneself* in attaching oneself to the Holy One and to in the course of the exertion *make oneself totally vulnerable* to the Holy One. It is only through a lifestyle of *'abaq*, you see, that one can truly know beyond a shadow of a doubt what is the *truth* of God and what is *the prattle of well-meaning fools*.

It is only through the *'abaq* process that one can truly learn to discern what is *real* and what is *hype*. It is only by way of *'abaq* that one can come to understand what is of the *Ruach* [Spirit] of the Holy One and what is merely cleverly disguised man-flesh - and to thereby distinguish between what is *important* and *essential* and *purposeful* in life and what is a *meaningless chasing after the wind*. This *abaq* wrestling with the Holy One, one-on-One, is what separates the *spiritual* in a man or woman from the *religious* in that person. You see, Dear Reader, no *flesh* can survive a bout of *abaq*-ing intact. That which is Spirit in man, therefore, always prevails. That is what the Holy One wants for us. And that is precisely why He presents Himself to us in the ring of life in the first place.

How To Engage in 'Abaq' Interactions With the Holy One

A collegiate wrestler grabs whatever his opponent makes available – an arm, the head, a leg, etc. So it is with the Holy One. Our task is to grab *whatever of Himself He makes available to us*. What of Himself has He made available to us? First and foremost He has made available to all of us *His Torah*. A true son of Avraham therefore grabs the Torah of the Holy One and *wrestles*. There are never any *referees*. There is *never any time limit*. It is a *lifelong vocation*. ***Abaq***-ing is just what a son or daughter of the Covenant does.

Grab hold of whatever the Holy One offers you of Himself, Beloved. Hang on very, *very tight* – like your life, and that of your family, depended upon it. *Kick up some dust*. Don't worry about your hip joint. And don't let go ... no, do not ever -

by any means, for any reason - let go ... *until you get the blessing.*

In This Corner ...

Exactly who [or Who] was it with whom Ya'akov 'wrestled' on the 'dark night of his soul'? The one with whom Ya'akov *kicked up dust* refused to tell Ya'akov his name¹⁴. Torah does not identify him for us either. He is introduced to us in this passage simply as 'a man'. The Hebrew word our English Bible translates as a man in this passage is *ish*¹⁵. Some say this "ish" was Esav's guardian angel¹⁶; others say it was *Satan*. Some suspect it was *Michael*, Captain of the hosts of Israel¹⁷; others theorize it was the pre-incarnate *Yeshua Ha-Mashiach*¹⁸. And some even say it was the Holy One Himself.

I will tell you right up front – I do not know who - or Who - it was. And neither does any other human being. Here is all I *do* know on the subject. The word *ish* is first encountered in the context of the Holy One's forming of Chava – the woman – from Adam's 'rib'¹⁹. In that verse we are told:

*Ha-adam said, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh.
She will be called Woman, because she was taken out of man [ish]."*

[Genesis 2:23]

The Hebraic word picture presented by the word *ish* is fascinating. The first letter, *alef*, portrays the Holy One, the beginning of everything. The second letter, *yod*, pictures the Divine Hand, and references the work of the potter or craftsman. The third letter, *shin*, is a picture of *ascending flames of fire*, representing the manifestation of the Divine Presence - as in the burning bush, or the fire sent from Heaven to consume the flesh on the altar. Hence, *ish* pictures a physical manifestation of the Divine Presence. That is what Ya'akov wrestled with – a *physical manifestation of the Divine Presence*. And that is all we really need to

¹⁴ When Ya'akov asked this mystery wrestler replied merely: "*lamah zeh tish'al l'sh'mi*" [*Why do you ask my name?*].

¹⁵ *Ish* is *alef, yod, shin*, Strong's Hebrew word #376, pronounced *eesh*.

¹⁶ This is the position of Rashi, who points out that Ya'akov knew Esav was coming to kill him and to destroy his children, in order to reclaim his inheritance. Rashi explains that, when Ya'akov discovered that he was wrestling with Esav's angel, he realized that he might be able to convince Esav to forgive him for taking the blessing. So Ya'akov fought on, refusing to give up until Esav's angel acknowledged his right to his own blessing. This brings up interesting parallels to the horrible struggle that took place in Rivkah's womb while she was pregnant with Ya'akov and Esav.

¹⁷ The sages who taught that Ya'akov's opponent was the angel, Michael [who, we are later told by Daniel, wrestled with the 'prince of Persia' as well], further taught that Michael was sent to Ya'akov at this time to test his strength and courage. Because Ya'akov did not give up, they opine, he warranted a new, more glorious name. See *Sefer Ha-Aggadah*.

¹⁸ See, e.g. Matthew Henry's Commentary on Genesis 32.

¹⁹ The Hebrew word translated as 'rib' is *tsela*, *tsade, lamed, ayin*, Strong's Hebrew word #6763, pronounced *tsay-law'*, and meaning simply 'side'. See for instance Exodus 25:12, 14.

know.

Be careful of people who presume to know exactly who this Divine Adversary was. If the *Ruach HaQodesh* Who dictated Torah to Moshe took pains not to tell us, we must wonder what source of information supposedly revealed it to those who claim to know. But know this. Demonstrating to us how to *abaq* the Holy One is, if you will receive it, one of two *primary contributions of our ancestor Ya'akov to the development of the covenant lifestyle*²⁰. Avraham's primary contribution to the lifestyle of the people of God was to show us how us to *sh'ma* the Divine Voice, and to pass on His precepts to our children. Yitzchak's primary contribution to the lifestyle of the people of God was to show us how to *atar* – to cry out humbly, out of brokenness, to the Holy One our covenant partner to provide for us those things which are necessary to accomplish the Divine One's goals for us but which we are powerless in our own flesh to effect.

A New Name – For A New Creation of the Holy One

When Ya'akov refuses to surrender to the mystery wrestler even after being disabled by a crippling blow, the mystery wrestler not only *blesses* Ya'akov but tells him he is going to be given a new name – *Yisrael*²¹. Here is how Torah records the post-bout conference between the combatants:

V'yomer elav Mah-sh'mecha

And he [the mystery wrestler] asked: 'What is your name?'

Vayomer Ya'akov

And he replied: "Ya'akov"

V'yomer lo Ya'akov ye'amer od shimcha ki im-Yisrael

And he said: 'Your name will no longer be said to be Ya'akov, but Yisrael.'

ki-sarita im-Elohim v'im anashim

*You have become a prince*²² *before the Holy One and man.*

²⁰ The other primary contribution Ya'akov will make to the development of the covenant lifestyle is showing us how to make *teshuvah*, which he will do at Bayit-El, later in this parsha.

²¹ Ya'akov's name change differs from the name changes of Avram to Avraham and Sarai to Sarah, and Hoshea to Y'hoshua, in that once Avram became Avraham, Sarai became Sarah, and Hoshea became Y'hoshua they were never again addressed or referenced under their former names. Ya'akov on the other hand retained his old name, as both titles, Ya'akov and Yisrael, are used interchangeably concerning him throughout the rest of the Torah.

²² The footnote to the on-line transliterated text provided by World ORT [<http://bible.ort.org/books/torahd5.asp?action=displaypage&book=1&chapter=32&verse=23&portion=8>] informs us regarding the traditional interpretations of what occurred this verse. It reads: "You have become great ..." (Targum). Or, 'You have become a prince (sar) among the angels and man' (Ralbag). Others have, 'You have fought (or struggled) with a divine being and you have won' (Bereshit Rabbah; Josephus 1:2:2; Septuagint; cf. Hosea 4:5). The root of the word *sari-tha* here is thus *sarah*, meaning to contend or 'fight to win'. Radak, *Sherashim*. cf. Hosea 9:6. It is related to the root *sarar*, to rule; cf. Numbers

V'tuchal v'tuchal

And you have twice prevailed!

Goodbye *Ya'akov avinu*. Welcome Yisrael! To you and your multitude of offspring will it be said "*Sh'ma Yisrael*".

What is the Significance of this Unusual Name Change?

Torah tells us in its opening parsha [*B'reshit*] that after the Holy One created all the animals of the earth He brought them to Adam so that he could name them. One by one they were brought by the Holy One to Adam, and one by one Adam provided a name for them. What was the significance of Adam naming all the animals? Hebrew commentators suggest that instead of being arbitrary sounds selected for convenience in reference the Hebrew names chosen by Adam for the animals actually *described the essence and nature of the animal*. A lion, for instance, is called an *aryeh* in Hebrew, because something about that name expresses the very essence of the lion.

So too it was with the names of the *avot*. The names Avraham, Sarah, Yitzchak, and Yisrael were not merely identifying features. Those names actually were given to creatively and prophetically determine the *essence*, the *reasons for living*, and the *missions in life* of those persons. The Holy One chose these names. These names were thus creative and prophetic in effect. They were *Divine Empowerments – determinants* rather than *descriptions* of the recipients' destiny and purpose.

The name Avram was not given by the Holy One but by Avram's father Terach. Terach saw this son as what he hoped for himself to be - an '*exalted father*'. The Holy One however saw Terach's third son as something much, much more. The Holy One saw the one Terach called 'Avram' as *Avraham* - "*the father of all* (or at least a multitude of) *nations*."

What is the significance of the fact that despite what the Divine Wrestler says in today's aliyah [*'Your name will no longer be said to be Ya'akov, but Yisrael*], unlike Avraham, Sarah and Y'hoshua, Ya'akov will, in the remainder of Torah and Scripture still at times be called by his *old name*? Both names - Ya'akov and Yisrael - it would appear, are intended to indicate a specific and defined life role in the Divine Plan of the Holy One. *As Ya'akov* his destiny was *to continually find himself grabbing someone's – more particularly Esav's – heel*. Esav was to lead Ya'akov, Ya'akov was to follow. Esav was to rule over Ya'akov, and Ya'akov

16:13, Esther 1:22, Proverbs 8:16. Also see Judges 9:22, Hosea 8:4. **Israel (Yisrael)** thus means, '*he who will be great [before] God,*' or '*he who will struggle with the divine.*'

was to be Esav's servant, and depend upon Esav's benevolence. Ya'akov was destined to serve as an abused underdog, downtrodden and subservient. But *as Yisrael* it would be the opposite. *As Yisrael he would lead Esav, and Esav would follow. As Yisrael he would rule over Esav, and Esav would be his servant, and depend upon his benevolence.* It would be so because of *the power of the name Yisrael (Israel).*

Edom and Ya'akov, Esav and Yisrael

When the Divine Wrestler gave Ya'akov the name Yisrael - a name derived from the Hebrew word *sar*, meaning noble and eminent – however, He declared that *the 'last' was to 'become first' – that the abused underdog was sometimes to instead take the leadership, and dominate, his brother.* However, because Ya'akov retained his former name as well, misfortunes, tragedies, and calamities at the hands of Esav would continue to plague him. He will be Yisrael – the princely one of God - when his brother plays the role of *Esav*. But he will revert to being Ya'akov – the abused underdog - whenever his brother plays the role of *Edom*.

As it was in Rivkah's womb so will it be throughout the ages. The two will constantly *jockey for position and challenge each other for pre-eminence.* Ya'akov/Yisrael's dual nature has you see perpetuated through his progeny, the Jewish people. Likewise, Esav/Edom's dual nature has perpetuated through his progeny. Throughout the ages the Jewish people have been the target of Edom's scorn and contempt. Under Edom's cruelty, Ya'akov's descendants have been made to feel like the heel; suppressed and subdued. However, even amidst the greatest tragedies – tragedies like the Destruction of the Temple, the *Galut* [Exile], and even the *Shoah* [Holocaust] - the spark of greatness that is named Yisrael refuses to be, and cannot be, extinguished.

The sages tell us that although the name Ya'akov was indeed retained, the name Yisrael became our ancestor's - and thus our - primary and dominant name²³. Yes, Ya'akov still lives on, particularly when Edom asserts its age-old hatred against us. But Yisrael lives in us as well – and *Yisrael will always overcome.* Because, Beloved, never forget that, whatever it may look like at any given moment, Yisrael's ultimate destiny is not to be subjugated, but is to be caused to triumph by the Holy One - and to be led forth in triumphant procession by Messiah.

Ya'akov's Injury and the Mystery of Gid Ha-Nasheh

The final verse of today's aliyah references a folk tradition not to eat the meat of that part of an animal [and we are speaking now of only 'kosher' animals] corresponding to the part of Ya'akov's body that was struck by the unidentified opponent in this

²³ Tractate Berachot 13a.

all-night wrestling match. Torah tells us that as daylight approached the Divine Wrestler did something that disabled Ya'akov. According to verse 32, with which our aliyah concludes:

*... the children of Israel do not eat [of] the sinew²⁴ that shrank,
which [is] upon the yarech, unto this day,
because he touched Ya'akov's yarech²⁵ in the sinew that shrank.*

The folk tradition is called ‘the law of *Gid HaNashe*²⁶’. But it is not specifically even suggested – much less *commanded* - by the Holy One. Nowhere in this passage - or for that matter anywhere in Holy Writ - does the Holy One tell anyone they should not to eat any part of a kosher animal other than the blood and certain fat. If an animal is *tahor* it would seem that all its flesh – including the - is *tahor* in the Holy One’s eyes.

So if there is nothing inherently *tamei* about *gid ha-nashe*, and the Holy One did not specifically tell us not to eat it, why do some choose not to eat T-Bones and sirloins? It could be – and in some cases is - ‘mere tradition’. In honor of Ya'akov, and the touch of the Divine Wrestler upon his *yarech*, many Jews elected to forego the meat of the thigh muscle of any animal presented in substitution for a descendant of Ya'akov [i.e., an animal set aside for *korban*]. Perhaps, however, the focus should be less on *the past* than is on *the future*. For, you see, the ‘good news’ inherent in the smiting of Ya'akov’s *yarech* by the Divine Wrestler is the prophetic promise that *what the Holy One has wounded among us, He will, one day, wonderfully heal!* As Hosea 6:1-3 tells us:

*Come, and let us return to the Holy One; for he has torn us, but he will heal us;
He has injured us, but he will bind up our wounds.
After two days will he revive us. On the third day he will raise us up,
And we will live before him.
Let us know the Holy One. Let us press on to know the Holy One.
As surely as the sun rises, the Holy One will appear.
He will come to us like the rain - like the spring rain that waters the eretz."*

²⁴ The word translated *sinew* is *giyd, gimel, yod, dalet*, Strong’s Hebrew word #1517, pronounced *gheed*. The verb root from which this word is derived is *guwd, gimel, vav, dalet*, Strong’s Hebrew word #1464, pronounced *goode*. This word means *to invade*, or *to penetrate*; hence, it is used to describe an *attack* on a walled city, the goal of which is to get inside [penetrate] the city. It is from this root that one of Ya'akov’s sons – Gad – received his name.

²⁵ The word our English Bibles translate as *thigh* in this passage is *yarech*²⁵. This is the word which was used earlier in Torah to describe the place Avraham asked his servant to place his hand while vowing to obtain a wife for Yitzchak from among his kinsmen in Charan rather than from among the Kena’anim. See Genesis 24:2, 9; see also Genesis 47:29. The most telling usage, however, is found in Genesis 46:26, and again in Exodus 1:5, when the 70 persons who traveled to Egypt to escape the famine were said to be “*all the souls which came from his [Ya'akov’s] loins [yarech]*”. It was not Ya'akov’s *thigh* that produced 70 offspring, of course. The part of his body that did that was a little *higher than the thigh* - in the soft and very tender [*i.e. yarech*] area we know as the *groin*.

²⁶ *Gid* means tendon. *Nashe* means ‘*displaced*’. *Gid ha-Nashe* thus literally means ‘the displaced tendon’.

And this is confirmed in the writings of *Yeshayahu* [Isaiah], in chapter 35, when we are told:

Then the lame man will leap as a hart, and the tongue of the mute will sing;

the redeemed will walk [there]:
and the ransomed of the Holy One shall return, and will come with singing to Tziyon;
and everlasting joy will be on their heads:
they will obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.
[Isaiah 35:6-10]

This promise is also repeated by *Yirmayahu* [Jeremiah]:

Sing with gladness for Ya`akov, and shout for the chief of the nations:
Publish Praise! And say, O Holy One, save your people, the remnant of Yisra'el.
Behold, I will bring them from the north country,
and gather them from the uttermost parts of the eretz,
[and] with them the blind and the lame,
the woman with child and she who travails with child together:
a great company will they return here.

I will cause them to walk by rivers of waters,
in a straight way in which they will not stumble;
for I am a father to Yisra'el, and Efrayim is my firstborn.

He who scattered Yisra'el will gather him,
and keep him, as a shepherd does his flock.
For the Holy One has ransomed Ya`akov,
and redeemed him from the hand of him who was stronger than he.
They will come and sing in the height of Tziyon,

Then the virgin will rejoice in the dance,
and the young men and the old together; for I will turn their mourning into joy,
and will comfort them, and make them rejoice from their sorrow.
[Jeremiah 31:7 ff]

It can therefore be said that the choice not to eat of *gid ha-nashe*, representing the unhealed wounds of the Holy One's people may in a sense have a prophetic and spiritual meaning²⁷. In voluntarily choosing not to eat of *gid ha-nashe* our *chassidim* are acknowledging that though horrific wounds have been inflicted upon Ya'akov and his descendant - most recently by Anti-Semites, by Nazis, and by Islamic Jihadists – the Holy One's promises of redemption, restoration, and healing are true, and will come to fruition through Messiah, the Redeemer and Regatherer of Israel. This will be the greatest of all redemption. May it come quickly, in our day. And soon, very soon, may the veil be lifted, may all Yisrael be saved as the

²⁷ Please do not misinterpret what I am saying. I am not suggesting to anyone that they follow the 'law of *gid hanashe*'. I merely acknowledge that some people – some very devout people – do, and demonstrate that, while I personally do not see this is a Torah requirement, I appreciate the symbolic statement that is being made – with or without their knowledge - by those who do.

prophets have declared - and may Ya'akov's *yarech* at last be healed.

Questions Concerning Today's Study

1. After Ya'akov is totally "alone", at the ford of the Yabbok River, the Holy One comes to him and robs him of sleep, but gives him the new identity *and* the blessing he needs to survive the encounter with Esav, enter into his inheritance, and fulfill his Divinely orchestrated destiny.

[A] In Strong's and Gesenius, look up the word translated as "man" in verse 24. Write the Hebrew word and its definitions. Some say this was Esav's guardian angel; others say it was Satan. Some suspect it was *Michael*, Captain of the hosts of Israel; others theorize it was the pre-incarnate Yeshua Ha-Mashiach, and some say it was the Holy One Himself. Who do you think this was? Why? Who did Ya'akov say it was [see verse 30]?

[B] In verse 24 the Torah says that Ya'akov "*wrestled*" with this 'man' for an extended period of time. In Strong's and Gesenius, look up the word translated "*wrestled*". Write the Hebrew word, in Hebrew letters with vowel markings, and describe the Hebraic word picture that this word presents in its root form.

[C] When did the *wrestling* cease? Why?

[D] If the 'man' was able to dislocate Ya'akov's thigh/hip with just a 'touch', why do you think Torah says the 'man' did not 'prevail' against Ya'akov?

[E] In Strong's and Gesenius, look up the word that is translated '*prevail*' [KJV] in verses 25 and 28. Write the Hebrew word in Hebrew letters with vowel markings, and describe the Hebraic word picture that this word presents in its root form. Is this the same word translated as '*prevail*' in Obadiah 7?

[F] What do you think this wrestling had to do with the Holy One's preparation of Ya'akov? How did what happened that night impact Ya'akov?

[G] What is the difference in meaning between the name 'Ya'akov' and the name 'Yisrael'?

[H] Explain the 'blessing' that Ya'akov received from the 'man'.

[I] Why did Ya'akov name the place '*Penei-El*'? What does that mean?

2. In today's haftarah, the '*servant of Yah*', Ovadayah, speaks the word of the Holy One against Esau's descendants who dwell in Edom, and prophetically against all of like characteristics:

*Behold, I have made you small among the nations. You are greatly despised.
The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who dwell in the clefts of the rock,
whose habitation is high, who says in his heart, 'Who will bring me down to the ground?'*

*Though you mount on high as the eagle, and though your nest is set among the stars,
I will bring you down from there, says the Holy One.*

*If thieves came to you, if robbers by night – oh what disaster awaits you –
wouldn't they only steal until they had enough?*

If grape pickers came to you, wouldn't they leave some gleaning grapes?

How Esav will be ransacked! How his hidden treasures are sought out!

*All the men of your alliance have brought you on your way, even to the border.
The men who were at shalom with you have deceived you, and prevailed against you.
Friends who eat your bread lay a snare under you. There is no understanding in him.*

[A] What does the Holy One identify as the ‘root sin’ of an ‘Edomite’ [Idumean]?

[B] What does the Holy One say will cause the hidden treasures of ‘Edomites’ [i.e. *Idumeans*] to be ransacked?

[C] Who does the Holy One say will be the instruments the Holy One uses to bring down the Idumeans?

3. Today in the readings from the account of the redeemed tax collector, *Mattitiyahu* [Matthew] concerning the Master, we are permitted to eavesdrop at the Garden of travail, on Yeshua’s ‘dark night of the soul’. This was the night he was to be betrayed, placed on trial, and condemned to death on a Roman execution stake. Our Rabbi calls to us, as He called to *Kefa* [Peter], *Ya’akov* [James] and *Yochanan* [John], saying:

*My soul is exceedingly sorrowful ... even to death!
Stay here and watch [Hebrew, *sh’mar*] with me."*
[Matthew 26:38]

[A] How does the Master describe His internal/emotional state to His *talmidim* [disciples] as He enters into prayer in Gethsemane?

[B] In Strong’s look up the word translated as “*sorrowful*”. Write the Greek word and its meaning.

[C] In the last part of verse 38, the Master calls out across the centuries to each of us with the same words He spoke to His *talmidim*. What are the two things He instructed/commanded His *talmidim* (and you and I) to do? What in your opinion does each of these things mean we are to do? Explain in terms that are realistic for your life.

[D] To assist you in answering subpart [C], look up in Strong’s and Gesenius the words translated “*tarry*” and “*watch*” [KJV]. Write the Greek words and their meanings. What would the corresponding Hebrew words be?

May you not let go of Him until He blesses you, Beloved!

The Rabbi’s son

Meditation for Today’s Study

Psalm 59:5-8

O Holy One God Tzva’ot, God of Yisra’el, rouse yourself to punish the nations.

Show no mercy to the wicked traitors. Selah.

They return at evening, howling like dogs, and they prowl around the city.

Behold, they spew with their mouth.

*Swords are in their lips,
"For," they say, "who hears us?"
But you, O Holy One, laugh at them. You scoff at all the nations.*