

25. And Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn.

**And Jacob was left:** He had forgotten small bottles and returned for them. — [from Gen. Rabbah 77:2, Chullin 91a]

**and a man wrestled:** Heb. וַיִּאָבֵק. Menachem (p. 14) explains: And a man became covered with dust, derived from אָבַק, dust, for they were raising dust with their feet through their movements. I believe, however, that it is a term meaning that he attached himself, and it is an Aramaic expression [found in the Talmud] (Sanh. 63b): "After they became attached (דאביקו) to it," and he would tie it (אָבַיק ליה מיבק), for so is the habit of two people who make strong efforts to throw each other down, that one embraces the other and attaches himself to him with his arms. Our Rabbis explained (Gen. Rabbah 77:3, 78:3) that this was the prince (guardian angel) of Esau.

כה. וַיִּתְּרַם יַעֲקֹב לְבַדּוֹ וַיִּאָבֵק אִישׁ עִמּוֹ  
עַד עֹלוֹת הַשָּׁחַר:

**ויתר יעקב:** שכח פכים קטנים וחזר עליהם:

**ויאבק איש:** מנחם פירש ויתעפר איש, לשון אבק, שהיו מעלים עפר ברגליהם עד לי נעוּעוּם. ולי נראה שהוא לשון ויתקשר, ולשון ארמי הוא, בתר דאביקו ביה, ואבק ליה מיבק, לשון ענינה, שכן דרך שנים שמתעצמים להפיל איש את רעהו שחובקו ואובקו בזרועותיו. ופירשו רבותינו ז"ל שהוא שרו של עשו:

26. When he saw that he could not prevail against him, he touched the socket of his hip, and the socket of Jacob's hip became dislocated as he wrestled with him.

**he touched the socket of his hip:** The upper thigh bone that is thrust into the hip bone is called the כַּף, lit., ladle, because the flesh on it is like a sort of pot ladle.

**became dislocated:** Heb. וַתִּקַּע. It became dislocated from its joint, and similar to this (Jer. 6:8): "lest My soul be alienated (תקע) from you," and in the Mishnah: בִּיצְתָן לַקַּעַקַּע, to tear out their roots. — [from Gen. Rabbah 77:3]

כו. וַיֵּרָא כִּי לֹא יָכֹל לוֹ וַיַּגַּע בְּכַף יָרְכּוֹ  
וַתִּקַּע כַּף יָרֵךְ יַעֲקֹב בְּהִאָבֵקוֹ עִמּוֹ:

**ויגע בכף ירכו:** קולית הירך התקוע בקלבוסי קרוי כף, על שם שהבשר שעליה כמין כף של קדירה:

**ותקע:** נתקעקה ממקום מחברתה, דומה לו (ירמיהו ח) פן תקע נפשי ממך, לשון הסרה. ובמשנה לקעקע ביצתן, לשרש שרשיהן:

27. And he (the angel) said, "Let me go, for dawn is breaking," but he (Jacob) said, "I will not let you go unless you have blessed me."

**for dawn is breaking:** And I must recite a song [of praise] (Gen. Rabbah 78:1, Chullin 91a).

**unless you have blessed me:** Acknowledge for me the blessings [with] which my father blessed me, which Esau is contesting.

כז. וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁלַחֲנִי כִּי עֹלָה הַשָּׁחַר וַיֹּאמֶר  
לֹא אֲשַׁלְּחֶךָ כִּי אִם בֵּרַכְתָּנִי:

**כי עלה השחר:** וצריך אני לומר שירה ביום:

**ברכתני:** הודה לי על הברכות שברכני אבי, שעשו מערער עליהם:

28. So he said to him, "What is your name?" and he said, "Jacob."

29. And he said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, because you have commanding power with [an angel of] God and with men, and you have prevailed."

**no... Jacob:** It shall no longer be said that the blessings came to you through trickery (עֲקֵבָה) and deceit, but with nobility and openness, and ultimately, the Holy One, blessed be He, will reveal Himself to you in Beth-el and change your name, and there He will bless you, and I will be there." He then acknowledged them (the blessings) as being his (Jacob's). This is [the meaning of] what is written (Hos. 12:5): "He strove with an angel and prevailed over him; he wept and supplicated him," [meaning that] the angel wept and supplicated him. With what did he supplicate him? "In Beth-el he will find Him, and there He will speak with us" (ibid). Wait for me until He speaks with us there. Jacob, however, did not consent, [to release the angel] and, against his (the angel's) will, he (the angel) acknowledged them (the blessings) as being his (Jacob's). This is [the meaning of] "And he blessed him there," that he entreated him to wait, but he did not wish [to do so]. — [from Zohar, vol. 3, 45a]

**and with men:** Esau and Laban.

**and you have prevailed:** over them — [from Targum Jonathan]

כח. וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו מַה שְּׁמֶךָ וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב:

כט. וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא יַעֲקֹב יֵאָמֵר עוֹד שְׁמֶךָ כִּי  
אִם יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי שְׂרִיתָ עִמָּי אֱלֹהִים וְעַם  
אֲנֹשִׁים וְתוֹכֵל:

**לא יעקב:** לא יאמר עוד שהברכות באו לך בעקבה וברמיה כי אם בשררה ובגלוי פנים. וסופך שהקב"ה נגלה עליך בבית אל ומחליף את שמך, ושם הוא מברכך, ואני שם אהיה ואודה לך עליהן, וזהו שכתוב (הושע יב) וישר אל מלאך ויוכל בכה ויתחנן לו, בכה המלאך ויתחנן לו, ומה נתחנן לו (שם) בית אל ימצאנו ושם ידבר עמנו, המתן לי עד שידבר עמנו שם, ולא רצה יעקב, ועל כרחו הודה לו עליהן, וזהו (פסוק ל) ויברך אותו שם, שהיה מתחנן להמתין לו ולא רצה:

**ועם אנשים:** עשו ולבן:

**ותוכל:** להם:

30. And Jacob asked and said, "Now tell me your name," and he said, "Why is it that you ask for my

ל. וַיִּשְׁאַל יַעֲקֹב וַיֹּאמֶר הַגִּידָה נָא שְׁמֶךָ  
וַיֹּאמֶר לְמַעַן זֶה חֹשֵׁאֵל לְעַמִּי וַיִּרְרָה

name?" And he blessed him there.

אֲנִי אֶשְׂמְךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל  
אֲתוֹ שֵׁם:

**Why is it that you ask:** (Gen. Rabbah 78:4) We have no permanent name. Our names change, (all) according to the service we are commanded [to do] in the mission upon which we are sent.

**למה זה תשאל:** אין לנו שם קבוע, משתנין שמותינו, הכל לפי מצות עבודת השליחות שאנו משתלחים:

31. And Jacob named the place Peniel, for [he said,] "I saw an angel face to face, and my soul was saved."

**לא. ויקרא יַעֲקֹב שֵׁם הַמָּקוֹם פְּנִיאֵל כִּי רָאִיתִי אֱלֹהִים פְּנִים אֶל פְּנִים וַתִּנְצַל נַפְשִׁי:**

32. And the sun rose for him when he passed Penuel, and he was limping on his thigh.

**לב. ויזרח לו השמש כַּאֲשֶׁר עָבַר אֶת פְּנוּאֵל וְהוּא צָלַע עַל יָרְכוֹ:**

**And the sun rose for him:** This is a common expression: When we arrived at such-and-such a place, the dawn broke for us. This is the simple explanation. The Midrashic Aggadah (Tanchuma Buber, Vayishlach 10; Gen. Rabbah 68:10) [explains]: And the sun rose for him-to heal his limp, as it is said: (Mal. 3:20): "the sun of mercy, with healing in its wings"; and those hours that it hastened to set for him when he left Beer-sheba, it hastened to rise for him.

**ויזרח לו השמש:** לשון בני אדם הוא, כשהגענו למקום פלוני האיר לנו השחר, זהו פשוטו. ומדרש אגדה ויזרח לו לצרכו, לרפאות את צלעתו, כמה דתימא (מלאכי ג כ) שמש צדקה ומרפא בכנפיה, ואותן שעות שמיהרה לשקוע בשבילו כשיצא מבאר שבע, מיהרה לזרוח בשבילו:

**and he was limping on his thigh:** He was limping on his thigh when the sun rose.

**והוא צלע:** והוא היה צולע כשזרחה השמש:

33. Therefore, the children of Israel may not eat the displaced tendon, which is on the socket of the hip, until this day, for he touched the socket of Jacob's hip, in the hip sinew.

**לג. על כן לא יאכלו בני ישראל את גיד הנשה אשר על כף הירך עד היום הזה כי נגע בכף ירך יַעֲקֹב בְּגִיד הַנָּשָׂה:**

**the hip sinew:** Heb. גיד הנשה. Now why was it named גיד הנשה Because it sprang (נָשָׂה) out of its place and rose, and that [root] is a term for springing. Similarly (Jer. 51:30): "their might has failed (נִשְׁתָּה), and similarly (below 41:51): "for God has caused me to forget (נָשִׂי) all my toil."-[from Chullin 91a]

**גיד הנשה:** ולמה נקרא שמו גיד הנשה, לפי שנשה ממקומו ועלה, והוא לשון קפיצה, וכן (ירמיה נא ל) נשתה גבורתם, וכן (לקמן מא נא) כי נשני אלהים את כל עמלי:

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## Wrestling with Angels

By Yanki Tauber

Perhaps the most mysterious incident in the Torah's account of Jacob's life is the night-long battle described in the closing verses of the 32nd chapter of Genesis.

Jacob is preparing for his encounter with Esau the next day. He ferries his family across the Yabbok stream, but "remained behind alone" (according to the Talmud, he stays to retrieve some "small jars" of his that were left behind). There, "a man wrestled with him until dawn." Jacob is injured in the struggle, but is undefeated. At daybreak, Jacob's combatant pleads with him to let him go. Jacob says: "I will not let you until you bless me." The man accedes and confers upon him the name Israel, "because you have struggled with the divine and with men, and you have prevailed." (Israel, *Yisrael* in the Hebrew, means "he who prevails over the divine.")

Who is this man with whom Jacob wrestled? According to the Sages, he is the "angel of Esau," and their struggle, which "raised dust up to the Supernal Throne," is the cosmic struggle between two nations and two worlds -- the spirituality of Israel and the materiality of Edom (Rome). The night through which they wrestled is the long and dark *galut* ("exile"), in the course of which Jacob's descendants suffer bodily harm and spiritual anguish, but emerge victorious.

The struggle is conducted on two planes -- "with the divine and with men." It is a struggle with men: in nearly 4000 years of *galut* we have wrestled with the Egyptians, the Canaanites, the Babylonians, the Persians, the Romans, the Spanish Inquisition, Nazi Germany and Islamic terror. These and many others did their worst to destroy us, yet we have prevailed.

It is also a struggle with the soul of *galut*, with its Divine essence and purpose. Thrice daily we plead, protest and contest before the Supernal Throne: How much longer? Yes, it is true that these struggles have roused the highest and deepest potentials of the Jewish soul. Yes, it is true that *galut* has unearthed reserves of faith and wisdom such as would never have been actualized by a tranquil people enjoying a tranquil existence. Yes, it is true that we are fulfilling the cosmic plan in retrieving the Sparks of Holiness buried in the darkest reaches of G-d's creation. But how much longer must we linger over these "small jars"? And surely You, the essence of Kindness and Goodness, could have devised a way to achieve all this without all the evil and pain!

It is a long and difficult struggle till dawn. But in the end we triumph over men and prevail over the divine as well. For this is the essence of Israel.



9 Comments

### Jacob's struggle

Posted: Feb 16, 2010

I see this struggle as one of a man (or a nation) stepping into his divine calling, which had to be entered into by passing through his enemy's (yes, his own brother was his imagined enemy because of how Jacob tricked Esau and Isaac) land. I don't think that anyone who steps into his/her divine calling does so without at least a few moments of internal (and maybe external) struggle. Sometimes it takes years of struggle to get yourself to go where you know you have been called by G-d to be. I also don't think that we come out of the struggle without some signs or scars to remind us of what we came through (like Jacob's hip injury). As usual, G-d has prepared what we are stepping into, so the victory has already been won for us, but we struggle to step into it because of our own human sinful untrusting nature.

Posted By Mary Borge, Western springs, IL

### To Anonymous Brooklyn

Posted: Dec 27, 2009

Great questions, but did you read the article? It basically answers those questions...

Posted By Jack, NY, NY

### victory over the divine

Posted: Dec 24, 2009

There's a lot about this story I find unclear. What does it mean to prevail over the divine, for example? How can that be? Isn't Israel supposed to submit or be obedient to the Divine?

How could a brawl go on all night in the first place? Has anyone ever heard of this? One guy wins sooner than that. But, finally, the angel sees he cannot win, so he uses his magic powers and dislocates Yakaav's hip? If he could do that, then why couldn't he win earlier? How could the angel, with powers like that, not win? And if the idea was not to use powers, then why did he use them in the end? Reminds me of "Bewitched" TV show, where you always had to wonder, if she could do X then why not Y (the solution to the whole problem)? It never made much sense, and it appears right now that this wrestling scenario doesn't either.

If Yakaav had lost to the angel of Essau, which represented the victory of Israel, would that mean that Israel would have perished? Would God have let it?

Posted By Anonymous, Brooklyn

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date Tue, Nov 9, 2010 at 12:10 PM  
subject RE: Comparing the literal meanings of the words "Israel" and jihad" - Tues, 11/9 7p-9p at  
Congregation Beth Abraham,1073 Elmwood Ave, Buffalo, NY - special Orchard Turners scripture  
discussion - Muslim-Jewish Twinning event

Rob,

Greetings, I hope all is well. Here are some words you can share on term "jihad".

Jihad literally means to "struggle" or "strive", to make a genuine effort. It's a personal struggle within, to completely surrender your soul and will to do Allah's or G-d's will.

To define "Jihad" as war against America is blasphemy and an insult to the mission of Muslim life. Muslims are obligated to be useful and a service to all humanity. Those who do so are considered the "best" of G-d's servants. Jihad now is often redefined as **fighting or violence** based on extreme behavior, conditions, misinterpretations or just plain ignorance and hate. Muslims are **never to be aggressors** in violence. Muslims are only allowed to fight in self defense after first being attacked. Killing innocent people, suicide, destroying the land (natural environment) is strictly prohibited in Islam.

The Qur'an says 22:78 using the term Jihad "and strive in His cause as you ought to strive (with sincerity and under discipline). He has chosen you, and has imposed no difficulty on you in religion; it is the creed of your Father Abraham. It is He who has named you Muslim, both before and in this (revelation); so that the Messenger may be a witness for you, and you be a witness for mankind! So establish regular prayer, regular charity and hold fast to Allah. He is your Protector. The Best to Protect and The Best to Help".

I hope this is helpful.

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