

LBT's From Light to Liberation: *Struggle*

Week of February 7, 2021 / 25 Shevat 5781

These texts are designed to be engaged in chevruta (with a partner), with a larger group, or on your own as part of your journey from Light to Liberation. As you approach these texts, you are invited to let the discussions and thoughts they foster live with you and be part of you. If you are reading these on your own or with others, we encourage you to read aloud.

Framing: Last week, we talked about one of the names that we go by: Jews. This week, we turn to another one of the storied names of our people: Israel. The third patriarch, Jacob, a wily and ambitious young man, is infamous for tricking his brother out of his birthright and tricking his father into giving him, the younger son, the blessing of the first born due his older brother Esau. After a period of separation Jacob prepares to meet the brother who he bamboozled. The tension builds. Will Jacob encounter his brother still fuming from Jacob's deception or at peace with the past? The night before, in the midst of this intense scene, Jacob falls asleep and awakens to find himself wrestling with a mysterious figure. At the end of the struggle, this mysterious figure (thought to be an angel) renames Jacob "*Yisrael*," literally meaning "one who struggles with God." Unlike his parents (Isaac and Rebecca) and grandparents (Abraham and Sarah) who passed the inheritance of their tradition to just one child, Jacob had 12 children, becoming the 12 tribes of our Israel: *B'nai Yisrael*, the Children of Israel.

בראשית ל"ב:כ"ה-ל'

(כה) וַיִּנְתֵּר יַעֲקֹב לְבָדּוֹ וַיֵּאבֶּק אִישׁ עִמּוֹ עַד עֲלֹת הַשָּׁחַר: (כו) וַיֵּרָא כִּי לֹא יָכֹל לוֹ וַיִּגַע בְּכַף-יָרְכוֹ וַתִּקַּע פַּרְזֵי-רֶגְלֹו יַעֲקֹב בְּהֶאֱבָקוֹ עִמּוֹ: (כז) וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁלַחֲנִי כִּי עֲלֶה הַשָּׁחַר וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אֲשַׁלַּחְךָ כִּי אִם-בִּרְכָתִנִּי: (כח) וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו מִה-שָּׂמַךְ וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב: (כט) וַיֵּי אָמַר לֹא יַעֲקֹב יֹאמֶר עוֹד שָׂמַךְ כִּי אִם-יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי-שָׁרִיתָ עִם-אֱלֹהִים וְעִם-אֲנָשִׁים וַתֹּכֵל: (ל) וַיִּשְׁאַל יַעֲקֹב וַיֹּאמֶר הַגִּידָה-נָא שְׂמֶךְ וַיֹּאמֶר לָמָּה זֶה תִּשְׁאַל לְשָׁמִי וַיִּבְרַךְ אֹתוֹ שָׁם:

Genesis 32:25-30

(25) Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn. (26) When he saw that he had not prevailed against Jacob, he wrenched Jacob's hip at its socket, so that the socket of his hip was strained as he wrestled with him. (27) Then he said, "Let me go, for dawn is breaking." But Jacob answered, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me." (28) Said the other, "What is your name?" He replied, "Jacob." (29) Said he, "Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel, for you have struggled with beings divine and human, and have prevailed." (30) Jacob asked, "Pray tell me your name." But he said, "You must not ask my name!" And he took leave of him there.

Questions for Reflection:

1. How have you struggled with the divine (define as you wish)? What was the outcome and what did you learn? How does wrestling the divine fit in (or not) with your identity as a Jew?
2. Throughout our lives, we are asked to struggle with ideas, concepts, and other machinations of the mind. Share a story about a time in your life you confronted something in your mind, wrestled it to the ground, and prevailed.
3. What do you struggle with in your meditation practice? How does your struggle transform you?