

PARSHAT VAYISHLACH
17 KISLEV 5781/03 DECEMBER 2020



Jacob Wrestling with God
Painting by Jack Baumgartner

In the painting of Jacob, there is meaning that I intended to place there and there is meaning that emerges as I work, often pointed out by an outside observer. Both are placed there in faith, and both are discovered again in faith....I don't know what Jacob was thinking. But I know I wish I had the guts to engage my God with such an intertwined closeness. I despise the distance of religion. I use that distance to keep myself "safe" in this life, but at what cost.

THE TRANSACTIONAL AND THE TRANSFORMATIONAL

1. "If God remains with me and protects me...and gives me bread to eat and clothing to wear and if I return safe to my father's house then Adonai shall be my God." (Genesis 28:20-21)

"Just because you are a kinsman, should you serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?" (Genesis 29:15)

"I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel." (Genesis 29:18)

"Pay me nothing....every speckled and spotted animal...such shall be my wages." (Genesis 30:31-32)

2. “I have become two camps.” (Genesis 32:11)

“If I atone with a gift...perhaps he will show me favor.” (Genesis 32:21)

3. And a man wrestled with him. (Genesis 32:25)

Fearing the confrontation with Esau, Jacob wanted to run away, and God sent an angel to wrestle with him to stop him doing so. On this reading, God was teaching Jacob how to wrestle with his fears and defeat them. (Rabbi Jonathan Sacks)

God answers a person’s prayers if the person prays by searching himself, becoming his own opponent. (Rabbi Benno Jacob)

“I will deal with you in great goodness” (Genesis 32:13) suggests that God promises Jacob that his sense of his own life will share in the experience of God’s goodness. God will not merely be good to Jacob. God will make Jacob accomplice in the benign self-creation of Israel. (Sefat Emet)

“Remember, I am with you. I will protect you wherever you go and will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.” (Genesis 28:15)

“No longer will your name be Jacob but Israel.” (Genesis 32:29)

4. Moving from the transactional to the transformational:

- ❖ Know that you have all that you need within you
- ❖ Know that you contain the power of loving creation
- ❖ Focus on blessing others, rather than seeking to receive anything from others
- ❖ Trust that fulfillment is realized in and through relationships of mutuality with others