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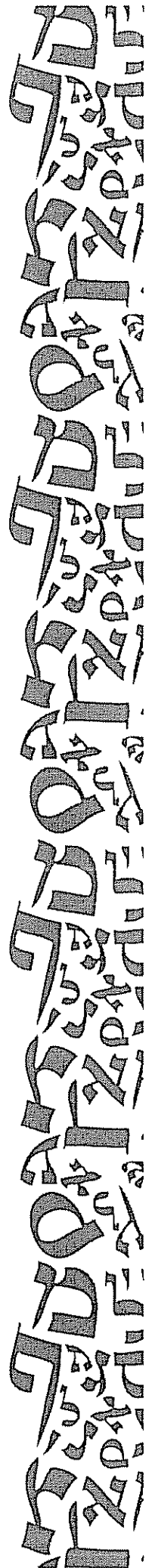
JACOB CONFRONTS HIS DEMONS: WHAT CAN WE LEARN?

David I. Bernstein, Ph.D.
DEAN, PARDES INSTITUTE OF JEWISH STUDIES

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Pardes פּרְדֵּי
Institute of Jewish Studies

DAVID I. BERNSTEIN, PH.D.

davidb@pardes.org.il



Dr. Bernstein holds a BA and MA in History and a Ph.D. in Religious Education from New York University. He also attended Yeshivat HaMivtar. Dr. Bernstein has been the Dean of Pardes since 1998. Previously, he was the director of Midreshet Lindenbaum, popularly known as Brovender's, for 12 years. Dr. Bernstein was a Jerusalem Fellow at the Mandel School for Jewish Education in Jerusalem from 1996-1998. Before making *Aliyah* in 1984, Dr. Bernstein was the director of informal education at the Ramaz Upper School in New York City, where he created and taught an integrated course in world and Jewish history.

THE PARDES INSTITUTE OF JEWISH STUDIES located in Jerusalem brings together men and women of all backgrounds to study classic Jewish texts and current Jewish issues in an open, warm and challenging learning environment.



Ramban on Genesis 12:6

ויעבר אברם בארץ עד מקום שכם -

אומר לך כלל תבין אותו בכל הפרשיות הבאות בעניין אברהם יצחק ויעקב, והוא עניין גדול, הזכירוהו רבותינו בדרך קצרה .

ואמרו (תנחומא ט)

כל מה שאירע לאבות סימן לבנים, ולכן יאריכו הכתובים בספור המסעות וחפירת הבארות ושאר המקרים, ויחשוב החושב בהם כאלו הם דברים מיותרים אין בהם תועלת, וכולם באים ללמד על העתיד, כי כאשר יבוא המקרה לנביא משלשת האבות יתבונן ממנו הדבר הנגזר לכא לזרעו.

AND ABRAM PASSED THROUGH THE LAND. I will tell you a principle by which you will understand all the coming portions of Scripture concerning Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is indeed a great matter which our Rabbis mentioned briefly, saying: "Whatever has happened to the patriarchs is a sign to the children." It is for this reason that the verses narrate at great length the account of the journeys of the patriarchs, the digging of the wells, and other events. Now someone may consider them unnecessary and of no useful purpose, but in truth they all serve as a lesson for the future: When an event happens to any one of the three patriarchs; that which is decreed to happen to his children can be understood.

לב / בראשית פרק לב / Genesis 32

א וישכם לבן בכור, וינשק לבניו ולבנותיו--וירכרץ אתהם; וילך וישב לבן, למקמו **ב** ויעקב, הלך לדרךבו; ויפגעו-בו, מלאכי אלהים. **ג** ויאמר יעקב פאשר ראם, מנחה אלהים זה; ויקרא שם-המקום ההוא, מחניב. **ד** וישלח יעקב מלאכים לפניו, אל-עשו אחיו, ארצה שעיר, שדה אדום. **ה** ויצו אתם, לאמר, כה תאמרון, לאדני לעשו: כה אמר, עבדך יעקב, עם-לבן גרתי, ואחר עד-עתה. **ו** ויהי-לי שור וחסמור, צאן ועבד ושפחה; ואשלחה להגיד לאדני, למצא-חן בעיניך. **ז** וישבו, המלאכים, אל-יעקב, לאמר: באנו אל-אחיה, אל-עשו, וגם הלך לקראתך, וארבע-מאות איש עמו. **ח** וירא יעקב מאד, ויצר לו; ויחזק את-העם אשר-אתו, ואת-הצאן ואת-הבקר והגמלים--לשני מחנות. **ט** ויאמר, אם-יבוא עשו אל-המחנה האחת והכהו--והנה המחנה הנשאר, לפליטה. **י** ויאמר, יעקב, אלהי אבי אברהם, ואלהי אבי יצחק: יהיה האמר אלי, שוב לארצה ולמולדתך--ואיטיבה עמך. **יא** קטנתי מכל החסדים, ומכל-האמת, אשר עשית, את-עבדך: כי במקלי, עברתי את-הירדן הזה, ועתה הייתי, לשני מחנות. **יב** הצילני נא מיד אחי, מיד עשו: כי-ירא אנכי, אתו--פן-יבוא והפני, אם על-בנים. **יג** ואתה אמת, היטב איטיב עמך; ושמתי את-זרעך כחול הים, אשר לא-יספר מרב. **יד** וילן שם, בלילה ההוא; ויקח מן-הבא בקדו, מנחה--לעשו אחיו. **טו** עזים מאתים, ותלשים עשרים, ורחלים מאתים, ואלילים עשרים. **טז** גמלים מיניקות ובניהם, שלשים; פרות ארבעים, ופרים עשרה, אתנת עשרים, ועזים עשרה. **יז** ויתן, בנד-עבדיו, עדר עדר, לבדו; ויאמר אל-עבדיו, עברו לפני, ורוח תשימו, בין עדר ובין עדר. **יח** ויצו את-הראשון, לאמר: כי יפגשך עשו אחי, ושאלך לאמר, למי-אתה ואנה תלה, ולמי אלה לפניך. **יט** ואמרתי, לעבדך ליעקב--מנחה הוא שלוחה, לאדני לעשו; והנה גם-הוא, אחרינו. **כ** ויצו גם את-השני, גם את-השלישי, גם את-כל-ההלכים, אחרי העדרים לאמר: כדבר הזה תדברון אל-עשו, במצאכם אתו. **כא** ואמרתם--גם הנה עבדך יעקב, אחרינו: כי-אמר אכפרה פניו, במנחה ההלכת לפני, ואחרי-כן אראה פניו, אולי ישא פני. **כב** ותעבר המחנה, על-פניו; והוא לן בלילה-ההוא, במחנה. **כג** ויקם בלילה הוא, ויקח את-שתי נשיו ואת-שתי שפחתיו, ואת-אחד עשר, וילדיו; ויעבר, את מעבר יבק. **כד** ויקחם--ויעברם, את-הנחל; ויעבר, את-אשר-



לו. כה ויִנְתֵּר יַעֲקֹב, לְבֹדוֹ; וַיֵּאבֶק אִישׁ עִמּוֹ, עַד עֲלוֹת הַשָּׁחַר. כו וַיָּרָא, כִּי לֹא יָכַל לוֹ, וַיִּגַע, בְּכַף-יָרְכוּ; וַתִּקַּע כַּף-יָרֵךְ יַעֲקֹב, בְּהֶאֱבָקוֹ עִמּוֹ. כז וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁלַחֲנִי, כִּי עָלָה הַשָּׁחַר; וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אֲשַׁלְּחֶךָ, כִּי אִם-בְּרַקְתָּנִי. כח וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו, מַה-שָּׂמָךְ; וַיֹּאמֶר, יַעֲקֹב. כט וַיֹּאמֶר, לֹא יַעֲקֹב יֹאמֵר עוֹד שָׂמָךְ--כִּי, אִם-יִשְׂרָאֵל: כִּי-שָׂרִית עִם-אֱלֹהִים וְעִם-אֲנָשִׁים, וַתּוֹכַל. ל וַיִּשְׁאַל יַעֲקֹב, וַיֹּאמֶר הֲגִידָה-נָא שָׂמָךְ, וַיֹּאמֶר, לָמָּה זֶה תִּשְׁאַל לְשָׁמִי; וַיְבָרֵךְ אֹתוֹ, שֵׁם. לא וַיִּקְרָא יַעֲקֹב שֵׁם הַמָּקוֹם, כְּנִיאֵל: כִּי-רָאִיתִי אֱלֹהִים כְּנִים אֶל-כְּנִים, וַתִּנְצַל נַפְשִׁי. לב וַיִּזְרַח-לוֹ הַשָּׁמֶשׁ, כְּאֲשֶׁר עֵבֶר אֶת-כְּנִיאֵל; וְהוּא צֹלַע, עַל-יָרְכוּ. לג עַל-כֵּן לֹא-יֵאָקְלוּ בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת-גִּיד הַנָּשָׂה, אֲשֶׁר עַל-כַּף הַיָּרֵךְ, עַד, הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה: כִּי נִגַע בְּכַף-יָרֵךְ יַעֲקֹב, בְּגִיד הַנָּשָׂה.

1. And Laban arose early in the morning and kissed his sons and daughters and blessed them, and Laban went and returned to his place. 2. And Jacob went on his way, and angels of God met him. 3. And Jacob said when he saw them, "This is the camp of God," and he named the place Mahanaim. 4. Jacob sent angels ahead of him to his brother Esau, to the land of Seir, the field of Edom. 5. And he commanded them, saying, "So shall you say to my master to Esau, 'Thus said your servant Jacob, "I have sojourned with Laban, and I have tarried until now. 6. And I have acquired oxen and donkeys, flocks, manservants, and maidservants, and I have sent to tell [this] to my master, to find favor in your eyes.'" 7. The angels returned to Jacob, saying, "We came to your brother, to Esau, and he is also coming toward you, and four hundred men are with him." 8. Jacob became very frightened and was distressed; so he divided the people who were with him and the flocks and the cattle and the camels into two camps. 9. And he said, "If Esau comes to one camp and strikes it down, the remaining camp will escape." 10. And Jacob said, "O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, the Lord, Who said to me, 'Return to your land and to your birthplace, and I will do good to you.' 11. I have become small from all the kindnesses and from all the truth that You have rendered Your servant, for with my staff I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps. 12. Now deliver me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I am afraid of him, lest he come and strike me, [and strike] a mother with children. 13. And You said, 'I will surely do good with you, and I will make your seed [as numerous] as the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted because of multitude.'" 14. So he lodged there on that night, and he took from what came into his hand a gift for his brother Esau: 15. Two hundred she goats and twenty he goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, 16. Thirty nursing camels with their young, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty she donkeys and ten he donkeys. 17. And he gave into the hands of his servants each herd individually, and he said to his servants, "Pass on ahead of me and make a space between one herd and another herd." 18. And he commanded the first one, saying, "When my brother Esau meets you, and asks you, saying, 'To whom do you belong, and where are you going, and for whom are these before you?' 19. You shall say, '[I belong] to your servant Jacob; it is a gift sent to my master, to Esau, and behold, he himself is behind us.'" And he commanded also the second one, also the third one, also all those who followed the herds, saying, "In this manner shall you speak to Esau when you meet him. 21. And you shall say, 'Also, behold, your servant Jacob is behind us.'" For he said, "I



will appease his anger with the gift that is going before me, and afterwards I will see his face, perhaps he will favor me." 22. So the gift passed on before him, and he lodged that night in the camp. 23. And he arose during that night, and he took his two wives and his two maidservants and his eleven children, and he crossed the ford of [the] Jabbok. 24. And he took them and brought them across the stream, and he took across what was his. 25. And Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn. 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. 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." 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." 30. And Jacob asked and said, "Now tell me your name," and he said, "Why is it that you ask for my name?" And he blessed him there. 31. And Jacob named the place Peniel, for [he said,] "I saw an angel face to face, and my soul was saved." 32. And the sun rose for him when he passed Penuel, and he was limping on his thigh.

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.

Genesis 28:15

טו וְהִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי עֹמֵד, וְשֹׁמְרֵיךָ בְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר-תֵּלֵךְ, וְהִשְׁבַּתִּיךָ, אֶל-הָאֲדָמָה הַזֹּאת: כִּי, לֹא אֶעֱזָבְךָ, עַד אֲשֶׁר אִם-עָשִׂיתִי, אֵת אֲשֶׁר-דִּבַּרְתִּי לְךָ.

15 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.

Mekhilta Beshalah

אדם שהקב"ה הבטיחו – היה ירא ומפחד? אלא שאמר יעקב אבינו: אוי לי שמא יגרום החטא!

A man whom the Lord had promised (security), should he fear and be afraid? But what Jacob meant was: Woe is me, per-adventure sin has made me forfeit (Divine protection).

Yonah - Jonah - Chapter 3

ד וַיֵּחַל יוֹנָה לְבוֹא בְּעִיר, מִחֻלָּה יוֹם אֶחָד; וַיִּקְרָא, וַיֹּאמֶר, עוֹד אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם, וַיִּנְהַרְס נִינְוֶה.

4. And Jonah commenced to come into the city, one day's walk, and he proclaimed and said, "In another forty days Nineveh shall be overturned!"

ט מִי-יִדְעַע יְשׁוּבָה, וַנְּחַם הָאֱלֹהִים; וְשָׁב מִחֶרְוֹן אֶפּוֹן, וְלֹא נֹאכַד.



9. Whoever knows shall repent, and God will relent, and He will return from His burning wrath, and we will not perish.

Bereshit Rabbah 76, 2

"אם יהיה אלהים עמדי" (כח:כ) – ר' הונא בשם ר' אחא אמר: "הנה אנכי עמך" – וכתוב: "אם יהיה ה' עמדי"? אלא מכאן שאין הבטחה לצדיק בעולם הזה.

R. Huna in the name of R. Aha said: "And behold I am with thee" (Gen. 28:15) and it is also written: "If God will be with me" (Ibid, 20). But from here we learn that there is no guarantee for the righteous man in this world.

Rashi on Genesis 32:8

ויירא שמא יהרג, ויצר לו אם יהרוג הוא את אחרים

Jacob became...frightened, and...distressed: He was frightened lest he be killed (Gen. Rabbah 75:2, Tanchuma, Vayishlach 4), and he was distressed that he might kill others.

to the core of his being that to be a child of the covenant is neither easy nor safe. What carried him through was courage (*gevura*) – and for whatever reason, the historical record is clear: to remain Jewish takes courage.

In connection with Jacob, though, the prophet Micah speaks of truth (“You will give truth to Jacob” [7:20]). This does not imply truth in a cognitive sense (What are the facts? What is ultimately real?), but rather truth in an existential sense (Who am I? To which story do I belong and what part am I called on to play?). The search for cognitive truth – scientific, metaphysical, artistic – is not specific to the Abrahamic covenant. It is the heritage of all mankind. There is no such thing as Jewish science or economics or psychology. What is, is; and it is given to Homo sapiens as such to discover it (Rashi translates the phrase “Let us make man in our image, *after our likeness*” to mean “with the capacity to understand and discern”).⁴ The truth with which Jacob spent much of his life wrestling was quite different. It was a truth about identity. Central to it are the words *face* (in which mirror do I look to see who I am?), *name* (by which term do I know myself?) and *blessing* (to what destiny am I called?).

One thing stands out about the first phase in Jacob’s life. He longs to be Esau – more specifically, he desires to occupy Esau’s place. He struggles with him in the womb. He is born holding on to Esau’s heel (this is what gives him the name *Jacob*, “heel-grasper”). He buys Esau’s birthright. He dresses in Esau’s clothes. He takes Esau’s blessing. When the blind Isaac asks him who he is, he replies, “I am Esau, your firstborn” (27:19).

Why? The answer seems clear. Esau is everything Jacob is not. He is the firstborn. He emerges from the womb red and covered in hair (Esau means “fully made”). He is strong, full of energy, a skilled hunter, “a man of the fields.” More importantly, he has his father’s love. Esau is *Homo naturalis*, a man of nature. He knows that *homo homini lupus est*, “man is wolf to man.” He has the strength and skill to fight and win in the Darwinian struggle to survive and the Hobbesian war of “all against all.” These are his natural battlegrounds and he relishes the contest.

Esau is the archetypal hero of a hundred myths and legends of the



The patriarchs were more than just founders of a new faith. They were also role models. Their lives are significant not only for what they tell us about the past but also for what they tell us about the present – for their challenges are ours.

Abraham was the man who had the strength of conviction to stand apart from the culture of his time – to be different, to refuse to worship the idols of the age, and to listen instead to the inner voice of the one God, even when it meant setting out on a long and risk-laden journey. What carried him through was love (*hesed*) – love of God and, yes, the love of humanity that shines through all his deeds and words.

Isaac was the man who knew the reality of sacrifice. He lived, he survived, but not without seeing the knife lifted against him. He knew

4. Rashi, 1:27.

ancient world (and of action movies today). He is not without dignity, nor does he lack human feelings. His love for his father Isaac is genuine and touching. The midrash, for sound educational reasons, turned Esau into a bad man. The Torah itself is altogether more subtle and profound. Esau is not a bad man; he is a natural man, celebrating the Homeric virtues and the Nietzschean will to power.

It is not surprising that Jacob's first desire was to be like him. That was the face he first saw in the mirror of his imagination, the face he presented to the blind Isaac when he came to take the blessing. But the face was not the face of Jacob, any more than were the hands.

Nor was the blessing he took the one that was destined for him. The true blessing was the one he received later, when Isaac *knew* he was blessing Jacob, not thinking him to be Esau.

Jacob's blessing had nothing to do with wealth or power. It had to do with children and a land — children he would instruct in the ways of the covenant and a land in which his descendants would strive to construct a covenantal society based on justice and compassion, law and love. To receive that blessing Jacob did not have to dress in Esau's clothes. Instead he had to be himself, not a man of nature, but a person whose ears were attuned to a voice beyond nature, the call of the Author of all to be true to that which cannot be bought by wealth or controlled by power, namely, the human spirit as the breath of God and human dignity as the image of God.

It should now be clear exactly what Jacob was doing when he met Esau twenty-two years later: He was giving back the blessing he had taken all those years before. The herds and flocks he sent to Esau represented wealth ("the dew of heaven and the richness of the earth"). The sevenfold bowing and calling himself "your servant" and Esau "my lord" represented power ("Be lord over your brothers, and may the sons of your mother bow down to you"). Jacob no longer wanted or needed these things. "I have everything," he says — meaning, "I no longer need either wealth or power to be complete." He makes this explicit in the words "Please take [not just 'my gift' but also] 'my blessing.'" He now knows the blessing he took from Esau was never meant for him, and he is returning it.

It is equally clear what was transacted in the wrestling match the previous night. It was Jacob's inner battle with existential truth. Who was he? The man who longed to be Esau? Or the man called to a different destiny, "the road less travelled," the Abrahamic covenant? "I will not let you go until you bless me," he says to his adversary. The unnamed stranger responds in a way that defies expectation. He does not give Jacob a conventional blessing ("You will be rich, or strong, or safe"). Nor does he promise Jacob a life free of conflict. The name *Jacob* signifies struggle; the name *Israel* also signifies struggle. But the terms of the conflict have been reversed.

It is as if the man said to him, "In the past, you struggled to be Esau. In the future you will struggle *not* to be Esau but to be yourself. In the past you held on to Esau's heel. In the future you will hold on to God. You will not let go of Him; He will not let go of you. Now let go of Esau so that you can be free to hold on to God." The next day, Jacob does so. He lets go of Esau by giving him back his blessing. And though Jacob had now renounced both wealth and power, and though he still limped from the encounter the night before, the passage ends with the words, *Vayano Ya'akov shalem*, "And Jacob emerged complete." That is the stunning truth at which Jacob finally arrived, and to which the name Israel is testimony. To be complete we do not need Esau's blessings of wealth and power. Ours is another face, an alternative destiny, a different blessing. The face we bear is the image we see reflected in the face of God when we wrestle with Him and refuse to let go.

Not by accident was this episode the birth of our identity (our "name") as Israel. At almost every significant juncture in our history we have wrestled with civilizations who worshipped the gods of nature: wealth ("the dew of heaven and the richness of the earth") or power ("may nations serve you and peoples bow down to you"). Israel never knew the wealth of ancient Greece or Rome, Renaissance Italy or aristocratic France. It never knew the power of great empires, their invincible armies and weapons of destruction. When it longed for those things, as in the days of Solomon, it lost its way.

Israel's strength never lay in itself but in that which was other and greater than itself: the power that transcends all earthly powers, and the

Vayishlah

wealth that is not physical but spiritual, a matter of mind and heart. Jews have often wished to be someone else, the Esaus of the age. Too often, they knew what it was, in Shakespeare's words, to

...look upon myself, and curse my fate,
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
Featur'd like him, like him with friends possess'd,
Desiring this man's art, and that man's scope,
With what I most enjoy contented least.

(Sonnet xxix 4-8)

That is a feeling we must ultimately reject. The Torah does not ask us to think badly of Esau. To the contrary, it commands us: "Do not hate an Edomite [i.e., a descendant of Esau], for he is your brother" (Deuteronomy 23:7). It did however ask us to wrestle, as did Jacob, alone, at night, in the depths of our soul, and discover the face, the name and the blessing that is ours. Before Jacob could be at peace with Esau he had to learn that he was not Esau but Israel – he who wrestles with God and never lets go.

