

Pathways

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and his students

ALONE WITH THE ANGEL

By Ozer Bergman

[Yaakov] got up that night ... and crossed Ma'avir Yabok ... Yaakov remained alone. A man wrestled with him until dawn" (Genesis 32:23-25).

Considering some of the people Yaakov Avinu (our Patriarch) had to contend with, I would have thought that wrestling with an angel would be a piece o' cake. I would have been wrong. Angels are actually pretty tough characters. They have no body, so they never get tired or worn out. They are assigned only one job at a time, so they never get distracted from the task at hand. Also, because they don't have a physical body, they *know* God exists and they'd better do their job!

Speaking of God, a popular pastime among us Breslovers, I'm sure you know that He created the entire world for the sake of Israel. The main reason God did that was so Israel should carry out His will. Another way of saying this is that God created Israel in order that they should cleave to their Source and be enveloped in God (by doing His will). The only way to be enveloped in the Source is through *bitul* (self-negation)—i.e., giving God's will precedence over one's own.

I'm sure you're waiting to know how to achieve *bitul*. Rebbe Nachman teaches that *bitul* is only possible through the steady, regular practice of *hitbodedut*, pouring out your heart to God, in your own words, about the matters in life that are the most important to you *now*.

Let's get back to Yaakov Avinu. Who was the angel that he wrestled? According to one opinion, the angel was a *talmid chakham* (Torah scholar-gentleman). Another opinion has the angel as a Mafia don (*Bereishis Rabbah* 77:2). Either way, we know it was Esav's guardian angel (*ibid.*, 77:3) who looked like Esav (Genesis 33:10), Yaakov's twin. What made it so hard to beat that angel was that Yaakov Avinu was wrestling with his twin self!

This is why *bitul* via *hitbodedut* takes so long: you've got to wrestle your "twin" self. You have to admit that your "twin" is both a *talmid chakham* (aka the good inclination) and a Mafia don (aka the evil inclination), sometimes at the same time! All the character traits that go into becoming either need to be honed, and one has to develop the judgment to know which characteristic to apply when.*

Yaakov Avinu wrestled the angel when he was alone, at night. The best (but not the only) time for *hitbodedut* is at night when the world is asleep, not rushing madly in pursuit of its temporal objectives. The best (but not the only) place for *hitbodedut* is a secluded location that's little visited by people at any time. Such a place contains little or no residual negative energy. The quiet of the hour and the stillness of the place make it easier to concentrate. They also help remind one of the simple, unavoidable fact that he, too, will one day "cross Ma'avir Yabok"—i.e., die.

It can take a long time to rid ourselves of bad traits (like anger) and perfect our good characteristics (like honesty). So there is a real danger that one might quit wrestling before the match is over. Notice! Yaakov Avinu never wins the match outright. He just *outlasted* the angel. So *never despair!* No matter how tough your angel is, if you keep on wrestling, just as surely as dawn follows night, you'll surely win. Amen.

* Rebbe Nachman teaches us to wrestle one trait/attitude—e.g., faith, mood, a craving—at a time. Wrestling too many at once is inefficient at best, ineffective at worst. For more about the importance of *hitbodedut* and how to do it, please read *Outpouring of the Soul* and *Where Earth and Heaven Kiss*, available at our website, www.breslov.org.

*a gutn Shabbos!
Shabbat Shalom!*

—Based on *Likutey Moharan* I, 52

SIDE PATH

"Rebbe Nachman remarked: "My achievements came mainly through simplicity. I spent much time simply conversing with God and reciting the Psalms."

The Rebbe yearned to serve God like the simple, common people. He often said, "*Ay! Ay! SIMPLICITY!*" (*Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom* #154).

PARASHAH PEARLS

By Chaim Kramer

32:14 He took from what he had with him a gift for his brother Esau

One Who Controls His Anger Merits To Great Wealth

Since Esau was an angry person, why did Jacob send him a present that showed off his wealth? Wouldn't Esau be jealous of that wealth, making him even angrier and desirous of harming Jacob even more?

Jacob planted a telling message in his choice of a gift for Esau, whose whole being and power stemmed from anger and thus represented the paradigm of anger. One who controls his anger can merit to great wealth (see LM I, 68). By sending Esau the fruits of his 20-year relationship with Laban, Jacob demonstrated that he had never succumbed to the frustrations of Laban's constant attempts to deceive him. Rather, he had controlled his anger all that time, thereby meriting to great wealth. More importantly, Jacob was able to control anger—i.e., Esau—itself (LH VIII, p. 191b).

32:23 He crossed Ma'avir Yabok

The Main Thing Is Not To Fear

Jacob made himself into a bridge, taking his animals and his moveable property from one side of the river to the other (Rashi).

Rebbe Nachman once said, "The whole world is a very narrow bridge. The main thing is not to be afraid" (LM II, 48).

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32:29 No longer will your name be said to be Jacob, but Israel

When We Cry Out To God, We Attain New Levels Of Wisdom

There is an immanent intellect and a transcendental intellect. In order to attain Godliness, a person must transform the transcendental intellect into immanent intellect, so that he will possess both levels of Godliness.

The name *YaAKoV* (יעקב, Jacob) represents the lower level of intellect, the *EiKEv* (עקב, heel). The letters of the name *YiSRaEL* (ישראל, Israel) may be rearranged to form the phrase *LY ROSH* (לי ראש, I have a head), indicating the higher level of intellect. When a person feels that he is on a low level and not growing spiritually, he must cry out to God. Then he attains transcendental intellect, and he incorporates the qualities found in the names *Yaakov* and *Yisrael* (LM I, 21:8).

32:33 He touched Jacob's thigh on the sciatic nerve

With The Help Of The Tzaddikim, We Can Always Come Back To God

There are three explanations for the word *haNaSheh* (הנשה, sciatic): 1) *NaShu ve-kaftzu* (נסו וקפטו, moved away from); 2) *NaShani* (נסני, forgot or became removed from); 3) *NaShu gevuratam* (נסו גבורתם, lost their strength) (Rashi).

These three interpretations may be applied to those who have lost the courage to approach and serve God. *Nashu ve-kaftzu*—there are some people who at one time recognized God, but who have moved away from Him. *Nashani*—others have, over time, forgotten their connection to God. *Nasu gevuratam*—still others want to serve God, but feel too weak to do so.

The angel who wrestled with Jacob intended to create situations that would induce people to leave God. But Jacob and the tzaddikim in general are always seeking ways to help people who are far from God to draw close to Him (LM I, 56:3).

33:9 Esau said, "I have a lot"

We Must Distinguish Between True And False Torah

Yesh li rav (יש לי רב, I have a lot) may also be read as "I have a Rav." That is to say, Esau is the leader of the Other Side, and he presents himself as a Torah authority. This same idea may be seen in the phrase *alufei bnei Esav* (אלופי בני עשׂוֹן), the chieftains of the sons of Esau) (Genesis 36:15), which the *Targum* renders as *rabbanei bnei Esav* (רבני בני עשׂוֹן), a phrase that connotes both "multitudes" and "rabbis."

In general, we must realize that there are some Torah scholars whose learning comes not from holiness but from the Other Side (LM I, 8:3).

33:17 He built himself a house and made sukkahs for his flocks

The Tzaddik Uses Every Tool To Reveal Faith

Jacob worked his entire life to reveal faith in God. Even his house was built with this goal in mind. For faith is mainly revealed through the idea of *Sukkah* (סוכה), which is similar to *SoKheH* (סוכה, oversee). The tzaddik oversees faith and nurtures it, using every means available to him to reveal it to others. Thus, "He made sukkahs for his flocks"—for those people whom he was able to influence, he illuminated true faith (LH VIII, p. 257b).

33:20 He erected an altar there and called it "God is the Lord of Israel"

God Grants Our Prayers Power To Mitigate His Decrees

Vayikra lo El Elohei Yisrael (He called it "God is the Lord of Israel") can also be read as "The Lord of Israel called him [i.e., Jacob] 'El.'" In other words, God called Jacob a divine being (*Megillah* 18a).

The Jews—represented by Jacob—possess, as it were, power over God. Their prayers can mitigate His decrees and even change nature (LM II, 2:4).

KITZUR L'M WEEKLY

7 — "And these are the laws" (Exodus 21:1) (continued)

7. It is impossible to come to faith except through truth. (The explanation of this is as follows: Faith can only exist in connection to

those things that the intellect does not understand. A person certainly does not need to have faith in something that he understands intellectually to be true. But if this is so, in those areas where the intellect does not comprehend, how can a person come to believe in what he ought to believe in? The answer is that faith essentially depends on truth. If a person wishes to look at the *real* truth, he will understand on his own that it is correct to believe in the holy faith in God, in the true tzaddikim, and in His holy Torah—even though it is impossible to fully comprehend this properly with our minds, as bound to physicality as they are. For if a person sincerely looks at the truth, he will understand from afar that this is indeed the truth. It is only that it is impossible to comprehend this intellectually. A person must fortify himself only with perfect faith. Understand this well!)

8. It is impossible to come to truth except by drawing close to true tzaddikim and following their advice, without deviating to the right or the left from their words. In this way, truth is etched upon a person and he merits faith, prayer, the Land of Israel and miracles. And through these, the Redemption will come.



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THIS SUNDAY