

*Shiur L'Yom Sheni*¹

[Monday's Study]

READINGS: ***Torah Vayishlach:*** Genesis 32:3-20
 Haftarah: Obadiah 1:1
 B'rit Chadasha: Matthew 26:36-37

He is coming to find you . . . and four hundred men are with him!
[Genesis 32:6]

Today's Meditation is Psalm 59:1-4;
This Week's Featured Amidah prayer is Petition # 5, *Rofei* [Healing]

The *avot* [forefathers] – often called the ‘patriarchs’ - are teaching us critical lessons on **how to have a relationship with the Creator of the Universe *His way***.

Think about that for a moment. Torah calls us not merely to seek a relationship with the Holy One, but to actually enter into and participate in that relationship on ***HIS terms***, not ours. That means to embrace each of the Covenants He has made with man, and to then day-by-day, Sabbath by Sabbath, Torah portion by Torah portion, New Moon by New Moon, and Appointed Time by Appointed Time co-labor with our Covenant Partner in Heaven to build an intimate, vibrant relationship with Him, with or families and fellow men, and with all of Creation ***His Way***.

What a novel idea! What a scarcely traveled path! What a glorious, life-changing, world-shaking adventure!

The Covenant Lifestyle: Building an Intimate, Vibrant Relationship the Creator's Way

Our patriarchs, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov, have walked this narrow road before us. The details of their stories are included in the narrative of Torah to reveal to anyone having ears to hear and eyes to see what relating to and interacting with the Creator of the Universe according to **HIS plan**, in **HIS timing**, pursuant to **HIS protocol**, for **HIS WILL TO BE DONE** looks like and consists of in real time. Our patriarchs and matriarchs are standing at the very front of the great cloud of witnesses who are cheering us in this generation on toward the finish line of faith – but their message is that true relationship with the Holy One can never be experienced as long as we insist on us getting our way. They want us to

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know that intimately knowing and being known by the Holy One can never happen as long we insist on telling the Holy One what to do instead of letting Him do the planning and the talking. They want us to know that we will miss out on the purpose, plan, and goodness of our King for us, our families, our communities, and our world as long as we insist on thinking, feeling, saying and doing whatever we like, whenever we like, however we like.

Only to the extent we learn and incorporate into our personalities the crucial lessons of how those who preceded us in the realm of relationship and faith walk interacted with the Most High God, the Creator of Heaven and Earth, are we able to find our own identity, our own authority, our own destiny, and our own place and purpose in *the Covenant Way* and, for that matter, in *life in general*.

For many this is a new and offensive paradigm of Biblical Truth – could it really be possible that our comfort, pleasure, convenience, likes, dislikes and ‘happiness’ are . . . well . . . are ***not the most important things in the universe?*** We shudder at the thought!

In case you have not figured it out yet, Dear Reader, ***relationship with the Holy One is supposed to primarily be about HIM, not about us.*** We are not the center of the universe – He is. Our comfort, convenience, and fleshly pleasure are never going to be what determines what happens in this world or the age to come. All of Creation – including our brief season of life on earth – is about *His Glory*, about *His Will*, about *His Kingdom*, and about the fulfillment of *His Grand Plan of Redemption*.

As Covenant Partners or at least potential Covenant Partners we as human beings are *loved*, and *nurtured*, and *cherished*, and *watched over*, and *blessed* in the course of our relationship, of course – but all that is of *secondary importance*. The blessing we receive is merely the *by-product*, rather than the *focus*, of the Covenant relationship to which Torah calls us.

The Walking-With-the-Master, Hands-On Learning Approach to Life

We spent the first 3 weeks of the patriarchal unit of Torah walking the dusty roads of the Middle East with *Avram/Avraham*. Avram/Avraham was the descendant of Shem with whom the Holy One chose to cut the eternal covenant through which He purposes to bring about the redemption of mankind. This man, like Chanoch and Noah in the lineage of Shem before him, *walked with God*. And this man actually modeled for us what such a radical lifestyle actually looks like in real-time.

The Ever-Deepening Friendship Factor

Through intense study of Avram/Avraham's many encounters with the Holy One, and through vicariously experiencing the dramatic life experiences through which the Holy One *led, nurtured, and trained* Avram/Avraham and his wife Sarai/Sarah, as they walked together, we learned **the most fundamental aspects of what it means to be a 'friend of God.'** We learned from the life-stories of Avraham and Sarah that friends of the Holy One who do things His Way *change the world around them* everywhere the sole of their feet treads ***simply by being who they are.***

The Ripple Effect

Covenant Friends of the Holy One, you see, are *carriers of the Glory of the Most High God.* There is a weight to their actions and their words that causes spiritual shock waves to go out in every place the soles of their feet tread and in every geographical area to which the sound of their voice or written word carries. That means that wherever the Covenant Friends of the Holy One go the Glory they carry creates a 'ripple effect' in the spirit realm. The ripples their movements cause in the invisible realm bring about changes in the atmosphere of every room they enter – and make a significant impact in the visible structures of geo-politics, finance, government, culture, and climate.

That is not because they are trying to change the world; that is just what the Glory does. Creation was programmed to respond to the Creator's Glory. And that, Dear Reader, is how the whole earth is to be filled with that same Glory – as we walk with the Creator you and I and a billion or so others will carry that Glory to the uttermost parts of the earth.

The Havoc We Create by Compromising On Issues of Identity and Destiny

The extent of the impact the presence of these Covenant Friends of the Holy One has on the world varies greatly, however, depending upon how true the Covenant Friends in question remain to their Covenant callings. ***Making compromises*** with the prevailing lifestyles and values and priorities of the cultures in which Covenant Friends of the Holy One sojourn slows the process significantly. And ***full-blown assimilation*** into the secular or religious cultures that surround us can actually result in postponement of any visible Kingdom impact for multiple generations. By walking in Covenant with the Holy One, and keeping His Ways of Shalom and Wisdom, we are supposed to impact and influence the cultures that surround us positively for the Kingdom of Heaven; when we let those cultures impact and influence us instead, however, the Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence.

The Covenant 'Catch'

Then two weeks ago in connection with our study of parsha *Toldot* we took another step forward, spending several days walking through life with and getting to know the heart of Avraham's son *Yitzchak* - the one chosen by the Holy One to carry the baton of the Covenant Friendship forward to Avraham's progeny.

We learned from the life-stories of Yitzchak that sometimes the changes that are wrought in the world by reason of the presence of Covenant Friends of the Holy One are not well-received by the human beings whose lives and fortunes and feelings of self-importance stand to be affected thereby. We learned from Yitzchak when to expect - and how to deal with - *hostility, hatred, and persecution*.

Our Introduction to the Crucible of Exile

Last week in the course of our study of parsha *Vayetze* our focus shifted yet again - to *generation #3 of the Covenantal Household*. Our attention became riveted upon the one called by the Holy One while he was still in the womb of Rivkah to succeed Yitzchak as the 'weaker partner' [i.e. *vassal*] in the eternal covenant. This new object of study - up to now at least - is the smooth-skinned son to whom Rivkah and Yitzchak gave the name '*Ya'akov*'.

Ya'akov is the first of the patriarchs we have really seen 'grow up' before our eyes. When we first encountered Avram he was already 75 years of age. While we met Yitzchak at birth and saw him again briefly at his weaning, almost all of the details of his youth were glossed over by Torah. With Ya'akov it is different. We have seen quite a bit of him as he walked through his developmental years.

We have discovered that Ya'akov grew up very much in his twin brother Esav's shadow, and that he thereby learned to approach life more as Esav's alter-ego and arch-enemy than as a person in his own right. Then we saw him do the same with Laban. He has as of yet never learned to be who he was created to be - he has, instead, been primarily focused on *not being like whoever he considers his archenemy*.

In other words Ya'akov's focus in life has thus far been primarily *negative in focus* - he has focused more on *who and what he is NOT* than on *who and what he IS*.

How about *you*? Consider *your* approach to life. Is your basic approach to life primarily **ACTION**-oriented - or is it primarily **REACTION**-oriented? Are you known more for how passionately you PURSUE, NURTURE, and SHARE WHAT YOU LOVE, or for how carefully you AVOID WHAT YOU FEAR and/or how loudly and often you CONDEMN THINGS/PEOPLE OF WHICH YOU

DISAPPROVE?

Covenant Friends of the Holy One are called to be *agents of action*, not drones of re-action. And we are called to be fountains of love, not cesspools of toxic emotional waste! So evaluate your life and consider your identity, Beloved. Is *your* identity and focus in life more concerned with *who and what you do NOT want to do and to be* or on *who and what you DO want to do and to be*?

Are you primarily focused on ‘*not being like*’ a father, a mother, a sibling, a co-worker, an adversary, or perhaps a controversial segment of the population you consider a threat? Is your life primarily *action-oriented* - or *reaction-oriented*? Do *you* have identity, integrity, and destiny issues the Holy One needs to deal with this week? If so, rejoice – for you are living according to the times of Torah.

Ya’akov’s dynamic personality, his dramatic God-encounters, and his harrowing life experiences up to this point in his brief moment on the stage of history have, you see, provided us a wealth of insight into human nature. So far it is fair to say that we have learned as much from walking with Ya’akov these past two weeks regarding what definitely not to do in the context of a relationship with the Holy One as we learned what to do in the context of such a relationship from walking with Avraham and Yitzchak. But that is about to change. Parsha *Vayishlach* will mark a major change in Ya’akov’s life – and a dramatic shift in the quality of the lessons we can glean from him. In parsha *Vayishlach* the narrative of Torah will begin to change our focus back from what we as Covenant Friends of the Holy One should not do and be to what we should do and be.

***It is Time to Be Established
in Identity, in Integrity, and in Destiny***

It is parsha *Vayishlach* that the Holy One is going to cause Ya’akov to deal with his major remaining life issues – issues of **identity**, **integrity**, and **destiny**. From an identity perspective Ya’akov will discover that he is not, as he had trained his mind to believe, on earth merely to serve as the alter ego and arch-nemesis of the Esavs and Labans of the world. He will discover that he has been placed on earth *to be a prince in his own right* –to represent a King and a Kingdom far above this world’s ken.

With regard to issues of **integrity** Ya’akov will discover that he is not free to do and say whatever his flesh deems expedient to accomplish his selfish, soulish purposes. Instead, as a prince of the Heavenly Kingdom of which he is now an active part he has a responsibility to accurately represent the superior values and vision of that King and that Kingdom.

From a perspective of **destiny** Ya'akov will discover that his assigned mission on earth is to both *sire* and *shepherd into an Egyptian womb* a fledgling nation of Covenant Friends of the King Who reigns in Heaven.

How will all this happen? Through a series of God-encounters and life-experiences.

The Process of Awakening the Lion Begins

Parsha ***Vayishlach*** begins with Ya'akov now married to two sisters of the house of Laban, and having twelve children through those two women and their surrogates. But he is not through fathering. He will have one more natural child [Binyamin, who we will meet this week]. And years later he will adopt 2 more [Efrayim and Menashe, who we will meet later].

Ya'akov has just survived a 20-year sojourn/exile in a place we have in these studies come to refer to as '*Laban's world*'. He went there – 500 miles from his home - to escape the wrath of his twin brother Esav, who had vowed to kill him the moment his father died. By the blessing of the Holy One Ya'akov has over the past six years of exile prospered exceedingly in Laban's world. He is now *quite rich*. He has large flocks and herds. He has camels and donkeys. He has numerous servants, both male and female. What more could he want from life? And what more does the Holy One want *with him*?

Ya'akov has apparently not heard from or communicated with Esav – or with his parents for that matter – since the day he left Beer-sheva. He has told everyone he is going home now - but he has begun to realize he has no idea *what he is going home to* - much less *who he is going home as*.

Questions had to abound. What will he find when he gets home? Is his father still alive? Has he forgiven him for what he did? How about his mother? Even if they are still alive, are they still living at Be'er-sheva – or have they had to move on? Will they be happy to see him? Will they understand the dramatic God-encounters he has had? Does Esav still want to kill him? Does he have nieces and nephews? Do any of his cousins [descendants of his uncle Yish'mael] live nearby? What will be the mood of the Kena'ani and Ph'lishtim towards him – did they take up Esav's offence when he left? Who is the king in Gerar now – and what will that mean for the covenant family? What will life be like for him when he returns home?

This trip could *be the death of him*. Not only that, but even if he somehow survives, he now has *a lot to lose*.

If things do not go well, he could lose not only everything he has worked for the past 20 years, but every single person he holds dear.

Is the journey home – to who knows what - really *worth it*? He and his family would probably be safer if they were to do like Avraham's father Terach, and just find a nice quiet place along the road to Kena'an with good pasture for their livestock, say *'it is good enough'*, and settle there in peace.

Why should he subject the wives and small children to the dangers and unknowns of returning all the way to Kena'an? What if Rachel is pregnant, and due to her delicate condition cannot withstand the rigors of the journey? Ah, but the Holy One has visited him. And with that beautiful, majestic irresistible voice, has said to him ***"Return to the land of your fathers and to your family."*** And the One who has at last captured Ya'akov's heart and imagination most has promised him ***"And I will be with you."***

Ya'akov is therefore now more than just a Covenant Friend of God – he is now *a lover of God*. And consideration of risks and benefits and dangers and options is just not the kind of thing that lovers of God rely on in making decisions. Lovers of God, you see, not only cry out ***'not my will, but YOURS!'*** in a moment of passion – lovers of God actually mean every word of it, and once it is spoken go forth and prove it by their actions.

On the Road Again

As so as Torah's eighth parsha opens we find Ya'akov *on the road again* - heading back to the beautiful hills of *Eretz Yisrael* and his father's house. Fresh from a dramatic confrontation with Laban on the hills of 'Gilead' Ya'akov begins the parsha closer than he has been in 20 years to facing a challenge even greater than the recent confrontation with Laban: he must now deal with *the fearsome wrath of his brother Esav* – the same wrath which caused him to flee the land of Israel 20 years ago.

The first lesson we will learn as we walk through the next phase of life experiences with our ancestor Ya'akov will therefore be the difference between the *fear of man* on the one hand, and the *fear of the Holy One* on the other. This lesson is a critical one, which we, and every heir to the covenant the Holy One made with Avraham, must learn and incorporate into our lives before we can move on to the next level of intimacy with God and fulfillment of the Destiny and purpose for which we were given life and placed on this earth at such a time as this.

All of us, like our ancestor Ya'akov, must deal with not only the Labans of this world, but the Esavs as well.

Keep that in mind this week. Do not be surprised at who you meet along the road. And whoever you happen to meet, do not be afraid of him - for the Holy One is with you.

Feeling the Nudge of the Holy One's Cattle Prod

Ya'akov has postponed the confrontation with Esav for 20 long years – but, alas, he can postpone it no more. The Holy One is *propelling* him – *nudging* him with his Divine cattle prod – toward an inevitable showdown with Esav – a showdown in which lies the very seeds of the Holocaust – and the end of days.

Twenty years ago, after Ya'akov deceived Yitzchak into giving him the blessing Yitzchak had intended for Esav, Esav had 'comforted himself' with the thought of killing Ya'akov – tearing him limb from limb².

Had 20 years and the death of his mother softened Esav? We will see. But first Ya'akov must deal with something every human being has to face and overcome if he/she is to be a friend of God. He must face and overcome the *fear of man*.

The Awakening Lion's First Challenge: Facing and Overcoming the Fear of Man

Have you ever truly *feared* any other human being? Have you ever known for sure that another human being has not only the desire, but also the power, to *take your life*? Have you ever had to make a journey you knew could very likely end in your falling into the power of angry men who hate you, and have sworn to kill you?

In this week's study we will face such terrifying fear twice - through the life of our ancestor Ya'akov [in parsha *Vayishlach*] and through the life of our Beloved Messiah, Y'shua, in the corresponding *Vayishlach* readings from the Apostolic Scriptures. Let us learn the lessons of such paralyzing fear *now*, under circumstances of relative peace - in order that if, and when, we are in a predicament such as will be faced this week by Ya'akov and Y'shua, we will walk worthy of the calling and blessing of God upon our lives, and sanctify the Holy One's awesome Name.

² Genesis 27:41 tells us "*Esav held a grudge against Ya'akov, because of the blessing his father had given him. He said to himself, 'The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Ya'akov.'*" The mother of the boys, Rivkah, interpreted this to Ya'akov as "*your brother Esav is consoling himself with the thought of killing you.*" Genesis 27:42.

The Cold Reality of Knowing That You are the Object of Someone Else's Death Wish

Living in Laban's world was very, very dangerous. Laban deceived, manipulated and took advantage of Ya'akov. Moreover, at the end of their sojourn together, Laban greatly misunderstood, disliked, envied and distrusted Ya'akov. Laban did not, however, *hate* Ya'akov. Laban was motivated exclusively by the perverse desire for material gain and the sense of power and prestige possessions gave him. That made him incapable of feeling love, but it also made him incapable of feeling hate. And for that reason it had been possible for Ya'akov to co-exist with Laban.

The challenge presented to Ya'akov by Esav, however, is totally different. Esav *hated Ya'akov intensely*, from the womb onward. He had vowed to kill him. A killer by profession [a hunter], Esav looked upon Ya'akov as the ultimate prey. The only question in Esav's mind was how and when he would close in for the delicious moment of 'the kill'.

Similarly, Y'shua of Natzret found Himself alternatively misunderstood, disliked, envied and distrusted by some people, but hated by others – particularly by those born with the Divine Destiny to plot His death.

In this week's reading both Ya'akov and Y'shua will prepare for the confrontation they dread most. Their methods of preparation are vastly different - there is only one thing those preparations have in common: *both of them prayed to the God of Creation with passion only those under a sentence of death can understand*. We have the privilege of reading the prayers of both. We will, in reading these prayers, tread on very, very holy ground.

Another Fine Mess . . .

Ya'akov did not start the process of preparation with prayer. Ya'akov started instead by trying to *appease* his adversary. He was afraid. But there was now nowhere to run. His first response was to resort to a fleshly defense mechanism – appeasement. He knew Esav was pathologically obsessed with power trips and material wealth – so he decided to try to *feed Esav's demon* the two things it loved most. Torah tells us:

Vayishlach Ya'akov mal'achim l'fanav

Ya'akov sent messengers ahead of him

el-Esav achiv art'zah Se'ir sadeh Edom

to his brother Esau, to Edom's Field in the Seir area.

V'yetzav otam l'mor koh tom'run

He [Ya'akov] instructed them [the messengers] to deliver the following message:

L'adoni l'Esav koh amar av'decha Ya'akov

To my lord Esau. Your humble servant Ya'akov says

im-Laban garti va'echar ad-atah

I have been staying with Laban, so I have not returned until now.

Vayehi-li shor v'chamor tzon v'eved v'shifchah

I have acquired cattle, donkeys, sheep, slaves, and slave-girls,

V'eshlachah l'hagid l'adoni limtzo-chen b'eynecha

And am now sending word to tell my lord things favorable in your eyes.

[Genesis 32:4-6]

Notice that Ya'akov calls Esav 'my lord' and identifies himself as Esav's 'humble servant'. This is to feed Esav's egotistical need to think himself superior. It is his free ticket to a 'power trip'.

We who have been studying Torah these past few weeks instinctively know that it is Ya'akov who is destined to be the 'lord' of the family, and that it is Esav who is destined to serve him. ! Not only did Ya'akov purchase Esav's birthright, but the blessing Ya'akov received from Yitzchak was very clear:

Heveh gevir l'achecha

You will be like a lord over your brother;

V'yishtachavu lecha b'nei imecha

Your mother's children will prostrate themselves to you.

[Genesis 27:29]

And, after this, even after finding out about the deception Ya'akov had practiced on him, Yitzchak had specifically told Esav, "*I have made him [Ya'akov] lord over you, and have made all his relatives his servants*" **[Genesis 27:37]**.

So why is Ya'akov now assuming the *submissive role*? Why is he pretending to be the servant, and Esav the lord, when by all rights it was the other way around? Is Ya'akov not once again – one last time - dressing up in Esav's clothing? Is he not once again resorting to subterfuge? Yes, that is *exactly* what Ya'akov is doing. Ya'akov has learned many lessons in Laban's house. Alas, so have we all. Ya'akov has not fully grasped his identity or his destiny yet. ***Have you?***

Without a good grasp on one's ***identity*** and one's ***destiny***, integrity is really difficult to even define, much less achieve. Integrity, you see, means being true to one's identity and staying on course toward one's destiny. *Integrity is a function of identity and destiny. When identity is unclear and destiny is questionable, integrity*

is impossible – for anyone. And yes, that includes our ancestor Ya’akov.

When you do not yet know who you are, or what your destiny is, compromises do not even seem like compromises – they just seem like the logical course of action. *Especially* if you are not yet a man with a very, very strong personal prayer life.

So Ya’akov equivocates. So he placates. So he throws out barrages of flattery. So he never even mentions the elephant in the living room, and tries to play to and exploit his brother’s weakness instead of dealing with the real issue between them and trusting the Holy One to work out the details. So he goes back to a form of the old, hey look-at-this-lentil-stew-I-have-made-for-myself game that worked for him when he and Esav were children. So he does whatever he thinks he has to in order to sooth the savage beast.

Don’t you dare get all high and mighty in judging Ya’akov for this, Beloved. Who among you has not played the same game? Who among you is not playing it somewhere, with someone, even now? The world is, you see, *full of flatterers and superficial people* – full of human chameleons who live for ‘popularity’ and therefore dress and talk and act - and live – not according to the Holy One’s plan for them, but in whatever manner they think will bring them the most advantage in a given situation. Some call it ‘expedience’. Some call it ‘appeasement’. I call it *social witchcraft*. And the basis of it all is *fear of man*.

Identity-Denying Forms of Hatred Cannot Be Appeased

Ya’akov is about to learn a more important lesson than Laban could ever teach him. He is about to learn that *when you are chosen of the Holy One, you cannot pretend otherwise just to ‘get along’ with people*. When you are chosen of the Holy One, you do not have to tell anyone about it, or ‘lord’ it over people, or rub their noses in it – but *you cannot hide it, or pretend you are something else*.

When the essence of the issue is not *what you have done* but *who you are* there is no way to appease that kind of hatred.

Flattery, in such situations, will not work. It did not work in Ya’akov’s case. For Torah tells us:

V’yashuvu ha-mal’achim el Ya’akov l’mor

The messengers returned to Ya’akov, and said

Banu el-achicha el-Esav v’gam holect l’kratcha

We went to Esav your brother, and he is also coming toward you.

V’arba-me’ot ish imo

And he has 400 men with him.

[Genesis 32:7]

400 men, huh? Heading toward me, huh? Well, that didn't work. What will Ya'akov do next?

The Prototypical Dark Night of the Human Soul

Our ancestor Ya'akov is sweating bullets now. He is *out of masks to wear* and *out of places to hide*. He has *no chance of escape*. It's time to *deal with reality*. As Torah puts it: “Ya'akov was **very frightened** and **distressed**.” Genesis 32:8.

And so as Ya'akov ponders the imminent charge of Esav's cavalry upon his defenseless little camp of women and children he *engages in the unthinkable*. He *divides the indivisible*. He *prioritizes things that are all absolutely essential*. He makes choices no man should ever have – or pretend – to make. He actually assigns priorities between his wives and his children – as to which of them he will try to protect – and which of them he will sacrifice to Esav's blood lust by putting them in the forefront to slow Esav's charge. As Torah puts it:

Vayachatz et-ha-am asher-ito

So he divided the people accompanying him,

v'et-ha-tzon v'et-ha-bakar v'ha-g'malim

along with the sheep, cattle and camels.

L'sh'neh machanot

into two camps.

Vayomer im-yavo Esav el-ha-machaneh ha-achat

He said, 'If Esau comes and attacks one camp,

v'hikahu v'hayah ha-machaneh ha-nish'ar lifleytah

at least the other camp will survive.'

[Genesis 32:8(b)-9]

That process is destined to be *the death of Ya'akov*. He is encountering the ‘*dark night of the soul*’³.

Ya'akov's First Recorded Prayer

Finally, in the terrible angst of this ‘dark night of the soul’, Ya'akov is driven to prayer for the first time. Hallelu-Yah! That means that Ya'akov is about to discover both his *identity* and his *destiny*. And in the process Ya'akov is about to become one very, very powerful man – like his father Yitzchak and his grandfather Avraham. You see, Ya'akov is about to learn what it means to be a *carrier of the*

³ Perhaps now he knows a little of how Yitzchak felt in Genesis 27:33 as he stared into the abyss of *sheol* upon discovering that Ya'akov and Rivkah had deceived him.

Glory . . . in real time!

We spoke often in our studies on parsha *Vayetze* last week of Ya'akov's tendency to approach life 'in the flesh'. We spoke, in *Shiur L'Yom Shishi* [Friday's Study] from *Vayetze*, of a 'break-through' that occurred in his life as that parsha was ending. Today we will finally read Ya'akov's *first prayer* to the God of Avraham, of Yitzchak, and, most importantly, now of Ya'akov as well. It took a long time, but the Holy One has, it seems, finally broken Ya'akov's will.

This is Ya'akov's *Moriyah* moment. This is his dark night of the soul.

Ya'akov's gut wrenching prayer on this dark night is recorded for posterity. It is found in Torah beginning with verse 9 of today's aliyah. Let's listen in on Ya'akov's most intimate encounter with the Holy One to date, shall we?

Vayomer Ya'akov Elohei avi Avraham

Ya'akov said, "God of my father Avraham,

v'Elohei avi Yitzchak Adonai ha-omer elay

and God of my father Yitzchak, the Holy One, who said to me,

Shuv l'ar'tzecha ul'moladetecha v'eytivah imach

'Return to your country, and to your relatives, and I will do you good.'

Katonti m'kol ha-chasadim

I am not worthy of the least of all the lovingkindnesses,

Um'kol ha-emet asher asita et-avdecha

and of all the truth, which you have shown to your servant;

ki v'makli avarti et ha-Yarden hazeh

for with just my staff I passed over this Yarden;

v'atah hayiti l'sh'nei machanot

and now I have become two companies.

Ha-tzileni-na miyad achi miyad Esav

Please deliver me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esav:

ki-yare anochi oto pen-yavo

for I fear him, lest he come and strike me,

v'hikani em al-banim

and the mothers with the children.

V'atah amarta Heytev eytiv imach

You said, 'I will surely do you good,

v'samti et-zar'acha kechol ha-yam
and make your seed as the sand of the sea,

asher lo-yisafer m'rov
which can't be numbered because there are so many."

V'yalen sham b'layah
And he lodged there that night

Ya'akov was not going to go gently into that good night.

There were *miles to go* before he would sleep.

Amen *Ya'akov avinu!* I am so proud of you, beloved ancestor! It is so good to see *the real son of the Covenant* arise at last. ***The lion is awake*** – so ***let him run, and roar!***

Living in the Eights

This is the eighth parsha of Torah, Beloved. Interestingly, parsha *Vayishlach* will consist of exactly *eight separate new trials* for Ya'akov. In Hebraic thought eight is the number of new beginnings and therefore is the number of Messiah - the author of new beginnings. Ya'akov's gut-wrenching 'dark night of the soul' prayer, which we were just privileged to read, was the 'beginning of the beginning' for Ya'akov.

But do not just sit back and observe Ya'akov. This is not the time to be merely a spectator in the arena of Torah. Let this week – the week of new beginnings - be a new beginning for ***your*** prayer life, as it was for that of our ancestor Ya'akov. The time has come for you, as well as Ya'akov, to acknowledge and face those things that you fear most – and to confront those people whose *opinions* about you and *attitudes* toward you matter the most. The time has come for the sons and daughters of the Covenant to eschew comfort zones and present all their relationships on the altar of the God of Avraham, of Yitzchak and of Ya'akov. Do not despair over this. Do not weep – *behold the lion!*⁴

You will see in the haftarah we read this week the ultimate end the Holy One has planned for all your enemies. And you will grow in the confidence that, whether your enemy relents (as did Esav), or whether he gleefully vents his rage on you (as did the leaders of organized religion in 29 C.E. who were Y'shua's enemies), ultimately both

⁴ The imagery and language are taken from the book of Revelation. In Revelation 5:5 the sadness of Yochanan the Revelator is broken off by the counsel of the elders: "***Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals.***"

your life and the life of your enemy are in the hands of the Holy One, who brings about good for all those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose. Do not cower in fear of man ever again.

In Luke 12:5, as Y'shua was warning His *talmidim* about the leaders of organized religion in His day, He said:

***“My friends, I tell you: don’t fear those who kill the body
but then have nothing more they can do.
I will show you whom to fear: fear him who after killing you
has authority to throw you into Gei-Hinnom!
Yes, I tell you, this is the one to fear!”***

Our ancestor Ya'akov learns this lesson in this week's aliyah. May we learn it as well. May we come *al-p'nei* [face to Face] with the Holy One – and find acceptance and blessing in Him – and what man thinks or says about you, or for that matter does to your body, will fade into insignificance. Live in the eights.

Questions for Today's Study

1. Having emerged victorious from his encounter with an angry *Laban* [Laban], Ya'akov now prepares for the larger challenge - coming face to face with *Esav* [Esau], the brother from whose violent anger he had fled twenty years earlier. The Holy One did not let Ya'akov face this challenge unprepared.

[A] Why was Ya'akov apprehensive about being reunited with his brother?

[B] In the twenty years Ya'akov had been gone, Esav had left Yitzchak's home and was living outside the land of Kena'an. Where had he moved? Find this place in a Bible Atlas or on a Bible map.

[C] The place where Esav had moved was not on the route Ya'akov would take to get to Yitzchak's home at Hebron. Why do you think Ya'akov decided to inform Esav that he was 'back'?

[D] This week's parsha begins with the "sending" of messengers by Ya'akov to Esav. In Strong's and Gesenius, look up the words translated "sent" and "messengers" in verse 3. Write the Hebrew words so translated and the definitions of each word.

[E] What was the message with which Ya'akov sent these 'messengers'?

[F] What was Esav's response to this message?

[G] The first thing Ya'akov did when he was told of Esav's response was to pray. List the elements of Ya'akov's prayer. How does that prayer reflect Ya'akov's growing relationship with the Holy One?

[H] In verses 13-20, Ya'akov makes his preparations for Esav's coming. Summarize the elements of Ya'akov's 'preparedness plan'.

2. In today's Haftarah the prophet *Ovadiyah* [Obadiah] announces the word of the Sovereign Lord concerning Edom, the nation descended from Esav. The Holy One sends an "ambassador", or messenger to the nations - as Ya'akov sent a messenger to Esav in today's reading from the Torah.

*This is what the Holy One GOD says about Edom.
We have heard news from the Holy One,
and an ambassador is sent among the nations, saying,
"Arise, and let's rise up against her in battle."*

We will be studying the rest of the message this week. The message of the ambassador to the nations is going to sound strange to us - it is not going to be a message of peace. Instead, it is a clear call to war. The nations are to take up arms against the descendants of Esav. Some nations will be sheep; others will be goats - but Edom will indeed fall. And Tzion will be delivered and vindicated.

[A] Look up the names "Obadiah" and "Edom" in Smith's Bible Dictionary and/or in Strong's and Gesenius. What do those names mean?

[B] In an Encyclopedia or Bible Dictionary, look up the nation of Edom, and write a brief history of that nation/people.

[C] In Strong's and Gesenius, look up the words translated as "ambassador" and "sent" in verse 1. Write the Hebrew words and their meaning.

[D] What is the message of the ambassador?

[E] To whom is the ambassador to deliver this message?

[F] Many Jewish sages see Esau and Edom as the forerunner and symbol of the Roman Empire. What characteristics do Esau/Edom and the Roman worldview have in common?

3. In today's B'rit Chadasha reading Messiah Y'shua enters the garden of ***Gat-Shemanim*** [Gethsemane] on the night preceding His atoning death on the stake of execution. In the place where olives grown on the Mount of Olives are pressed, Y'shua is about to go through his 'dark night of the soul' – a night that will make Ya'akov's, as traumatic as it was, pale in comparison.

Y'shua has just warned his talmidim that this will be a traumatic night. Kefa has just sworn that he will never leave Y'shua – and Y'shua has just assured him that he will indeed leave and forsake him before the cock crows thrice. And now, they enter – the olive press [***gat-shemanim***], the place of extreme pressure – where pure oil is produced.

*Then Y'shua came with them to a place called **Gat-Shemanim**,
and said to his talmidim, "**Sit here, while I go there and pray.**"
He took with him Rock [Kefa] and the two sons of Zavdai,
and began to be sorrowful and severely troubled.*

[Matthew 26:36-37]

[A] Look up ‘**Gethsemane**’ in your Bible Dictionary, Encyclopedia, Strong’s, and Gesenius. What does the word ‘**Gethsemane**’ mean? Why was this name appropriate for what happened there that night?

[B] Where was/is ‘Gethsemane’ located? Relate this to the location of the Temple and the Antonio Tower from which the Roman soldiers were dispatched.

[C] What was Y’shua’s purpose in going to Gethsemane?

[D] How do the events of Gethsemane relate to today’s verses from the Torah?

[E] Read the article on ‘prayer’ in Richard’s Expository Dictionary (or in Vine’s or Strong’s if you do not have Richard’s). The Greek word ‘**proseuchomai**’ is the word translated ‘pray’ in verse 37. How does that word for prayer compare to other Greek words used in the Bible to refer to prayer?

[F] Look up the Hebrew word for prayer that would correspond most closely to the Greek word ‘**proseuchomai**’. Write that word and its definitions, and contrast its definitions with the definitions of ‘**proseuchomai**’.

[G] Which 3 *talmidim* [disciples] did Y’shua take with Him into the place of prayer? [Please use their real Hebrew names instead of the Anglicized “nick-names” found in our English Bibles].

[H] Which of these men was the first to be killed merely because He was a follower of Y’shua’s?

[I] What persecutions did the other two individuals face?

[J] In Strong’s and Gesenius, look up the words translated as “sorrowful” and “troubled” [NIV] in verse 37. Write the Greek words and their definitions. What Hebrew words would express these meanings?

*May the Holy One protect and defend you,
hide you in the shadow of His wings, and break off of you the fear of man.*

The Rabbi’s son

Meditation for Today’s Study

Psalm 59:1-4

*Deliver me from my enemies, my God.
Set me on high from those who rise up against me.
Deliver me from the workers of iniquity.
Save me from the bloodthirsty men.
For, behold, they lie in wait for my soul.
The mighty gather themselves together against me,
Not for my disobedience, nor for my sin, O Holy One.
I have done no wrong, yet they are ready to attack me.
Rise up, behold, and help me!*