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**INTEGRATING JACOB:  
MIDRASHIC AND ARTISTIC INTERPRETATIONS OF  
JACOB WRESTLING THE ANGEL  
GENESIS 32:23-33**

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**Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for Ordination**

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**Advisor: Dr. Norman Cohen**

## **Integrating Jacob: Midrashic and Artistic Representations of Jacob Wrestling the Angel, Genesis 32:23-33.**

Devorah (Diana) Lynn

This thesis explores the relationship and interaction between Midrash and art, *vis-à-vis* the Biblical narrative of Jacob and the "man" who attacks him by the River Jabbok. The goal is to investigate the universal psycho-spiritual nature of the tale and the legacy that this national narrative generates for the Jewish people. In addition, by crossing the media boundary between the textual and the visual, new learning techniques for the exploration of Biblical texts can be created.

The research explores the themes in the classic Midrash and compares them to dominant themes in artistic representations of this story. Illustrated manuscripts from the medieval period and paintings from a variety of artistic movements from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries are examined. One mid-20<sup>th</sup> century sculpture and one late 20<sup>th</sup> century film are also included in the analysis.

The thesis is divided into eight sections beginning with an overview of the critical literary analysts, proceeding to the midrashists and Biblical commentators, and then integrating into the Biblical text itself various interpretations from the world of art. Figures of seventeen works of art are collected in Appendix A with notes on the history of their making in Appendix B.

My hope is that this work will continue the tradition of my teacher and advisor, Dr. Norman Cohen, in making Torah accessible and meaningful to the human drama, and in addition, expand on the inspiring work of Dr. Jo Milgrom, by inviting art along as a companion.

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Thanks go to Dr. Marc Bregman who peaked my interest in the bridge between art and Midrash when he introduced me to the work of Dr. Jo Milgrom during my year in Jerusalem. His articles on the topic were right on target.

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Research for this thesis was conducted at the Library of Congress and was facilitated by the staff of the African/Middle East Reading Room. Gratitude goes as well to the staff of the Klau Library, New York, of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion.

May life bring you all challenges that come wrapped with blessings.

## **Introduction**



I have always been drawn to the story of Jacob wrestling with an angel because I reveled in the notion that I belonged, by chance of birth, to a people who, though they served, bowed to, and praised their God, also argued with Him, sometimes prevailing, as in the stories of Abraham contending for the sake of the Sodomites in Genesis 18:23-32 and Moses' plea to save the people at Sinai in Exodus 32:9-14. Pirke Avot, The Ethics of the Fathers, Chapter 1:4, invites us to drink in the words of our teachers and to sit at their feet in the dust and wrestle. This image of Israel, a people who wrestle with their God, appeals to both my contentious and experiential nature.

As my teacher and advisor, Dr. Norman Cohen, wrote, "Since it is through wrestling with the sacred stories of the Torah and with the complex personages delineated in them that we can begin to take an honest look at ourselves, it is precisely upon our own reading of the biblical text that our search for wholeness and holiness is contingent."<sup>1</sup> Learning for me is a "contact sport." I must encounter and engage the world in an energetic mode or I just simply get bored. Jacob's encounter with a strange being in the middle of the night became an apt metaphor for my engagement with our sacred texts and life as a whole. In this manner, life becomes a holy project. I am proud to be a member of a crowd of feisty, contentious, yes, and "stiff-necked" people who, as linguist Deborah Tannen has written, engage in conversation and life through the tactic of interruption, sentence finishing, and "high-involvement cooperative overlapping."<sup>2</sup> It isn't polite in some circles, but it is exhilarating; like a night of wrestling in the dust.

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<sup>1</sup> Norman J. Cohen, *Self, Struggle and Change: Family Conflict Stories in Genesis and Their Healing Insights for Our Lives* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 1995), 6.

<sup>2</sup> Deborah N. Cymrot, "Interruptors? Linguist Says It's the Jewish Way," *Jewish Week*, June 16, 2000.

Midrash has for me this sense of exuberant, creative, and artistic engagement with the text, using all senses and seeing with both the heart and the mind, using both the faculties of intellect and emotion. It is only natural that I should be attracted to it rather than other religious commentary.

I have been an artist as long as I can remember, first starting with finger painting with my food and graduating to oils at five. But most of my experience with religious art involved laboriously painting the folds of a white tablecloth under a Friday night Kiddush cup or copying the portrait of a studious old bearded Rebbe, both paintings I still own, and with which I have an occasional giggle when I uncover them in a back closet. It was not until I met Dr. Jo Milgrom in Jerusalem in 2001 that I caught the bug of interpreting Biblical text through art with the same excitement as secular subjects. Her collages, made with found objects, depicting religious and not so religious topics, took my breath away, yet gave me the courage to pursue my own voice. I have been making Jewish art ever since in drawing, found objects, and collage, and these works speak both from me and to me. I also now seek out art by others where Biblical tales and Jewish topics feature prominently.

Dr. Marc Bregman would argue that Midrash is better at engaging the mind and heart because it allows the mind's eye to fill in the blanks where the graphic provides all the answers for you. But I would say that art also can be viewed with both the "eyes of the flesh and the eyes of the heart."<sup>3</sup> Just as Bregman maintains that the notion that Hebrew culture is auditory and Greek culture is visual is a reductive stereotype, so I would contend that Midrash and graphic art stimulate both the inner and outer sensory

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<sup>3</sup> Marc Bregman, "Aqeda; Midrash as Visualization," *Journal of Textual Reasoning* 2, no. 1 (2003), *passim*.

modalities, the mind's eye and the physical eye. Exploring in this fashion, through both the visual and textual, can expand the audience who can learn deeper teachings, because they may enter the text through a modality that suits their learning style better. Dr. Jo Milgrom, in her thesis on the art of the *Aqedah*, The Binding of Isaac, quotes Peter Brown's observation on the end of the conflict between art and text:

*It is not art that is victorious, but the recognition of the role of the visual in the perception of the divine.*<sup>4</sup>

Milgrom's thesis and her book *Handmade Midrash* opened for me the many possibilities available to use art as a teaching and learning tool in the exploration of the Biblical text. Artwork provides a universal language that can tap into the collective human experience, regardless of the religious tradition or century of the artist just as Midrash cuts across time, culture, and even religion. Milgrom and Fred Terna, a New York artist and scholar, have both spent a lifetime assembling slides of artwork about Abraham's near sacrifice of Isaac and have told me that there are over fifteen hundred artistic interpretations of note of the *Aqedah*. I have just begun my investigation of Jacob wrestling his angel, but would be shocked to find more than one hundred such works, and so it seemed a more manageable project for a Rabbinic thesis and more curious as to why this story has so many fewer representations. Reaction to the *Aqedah* story from congregants has always appeared to me to be extreme, either fascination and attraction or anger and abhorrence. But everyone seems to relate to the Jacob story.

My telling everyone I met about my thesis was both a sign that I was enthused about it myself and a technique to keep my enthusiasm up until the end. This method proved a

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<sup>4</sup> Jo Milgrom, *The Binding of Isaac: The Akedah - A Primary Symbol in Jewish Thought and Art* (Berkeley, California: BIBAL Press, 1988), 294.

useful tool to maintain that enthusiasm (a word derived from “infusing the *theos*,” Divine). I have been able to preserve the momentum throughout the process because of the outpouring of acquaintances who have told me and sent me their personal Jacob stories. It is also an indication that this particular Bible story touches a deep nerve of the human condition. It’s terse narrative and deep ellipses allow an inherent and profound accessibility upon which others may imprint their own human document.

Abraham’s blind faith, Isaac’s willing service, and Moses’ enduring troubles may not be so easy for the average Joe or Joan to relate to. But Jacob, now there’s a guy with whom everyone can empathize. If the trouble with his manipulative mother, the confusion of his relationship with his father, his sibling rivalry, or his passion, disdain and bafflement over his wives does not resonate, than his trouble with his children and his despair in loss are almost universal. As I dove deeper into the commentary, his story cut remarkably close to the bone, down to the adoption of a new name, yet not relinquishing the old one.

I am an eager member of “the people who wrestle with God.” Judaism’s insistence that we look our troubles in the eye rather than turn away has been both our glory and our nemesis. In my personal life I have attempted to be unafraid to “get dirty” when struggling with tough issues. Everyone knows the terror of encountering the unknown late at night, alone, whether it is wrestling the angel, the demon, the self, or the enemy, whether it be one’s past, present, or future predicaments, guilt, shame, doubt, loss of faith or simply the stomach flu. The Jacob story, unlike Abraham’s *Aqedah*, seems to be every person’s story. It appears to be encrypted in our psyche, perhaps our genes. Challenging and defeating our demons is an archetype of the collective unconscious that

the Torah has inscribed into our own Jewish national mythology and thousands of years of interpretation, in many modalities, has kept alive.

The research for this thesis proceeded on three levels. The first was to examine the major literary analysis of the narrative of Jacob Wrestling with the Angel, with particular attention to the connection between narrative art and the visual arts. A second phase explored the Midrash on the wrestling match, with emphasis on the themes most prevalent in Midrashic literature. The third goal was to explore visual images of Jacob's struggle with the man, taking note of themes that may or may not be evident in the Midrash and analyzing how the graphic arts extend their own interpretation on the story. An overlapping of themes or lack thereof should tell us something about the importance of certain archetypes which may be common or exclusive to the written word and the painted image. I will explore interpretation in both arenas, from classic periods and the modern era as well, including an interpretation from cinema.

One assumption will be declared by this investigator from the start. I believe wholeheartedly that those people who wrote the Torah, penned the Midrash, and created works of art cannot be considered "primitive" or "advanced" because of the age in which they happen to find themselves. It will be taken for granted that all who create art, whether we are talking about narrative or graphic, had as much wisdom and insight no matter the generation in which they lived. The clarity with which craftsmen approach the Torah text may be greatly influenced by the context in which they lived or the technical acumen they may possess, but their wisdom into the human drama remains universal and holds insight for us across the millennia if we approach the works slowly.

The thesis will be divided into eight sections in the following manner:

**Section I** will review some of the major literary analysts of Biblical narrative and the general insights they have about this particular narrative.

**Section II** will begin to follow the narrative of the text line by line. This section will focus on the scene setting, Jacob's past with his brother Esau and the nature of the night.

**Section III** looks at Jacob being alone for the first time in his life and the importance of spatial and temporal settings. Boundaries, foreground, and background will be examined in the artistic expressions of Gustave Dore and medieval illuminations.

**Section IV** analyzes the interruption by the assailant and the wrestling match itself as a form of *deveikut* or divine clinging. The particular inclination of Symbolist painters of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to experiment with this theme will be examined in the works of Gauguin, Moreau, Patissou, Rembrandt, Rosa, and Delacroix. In addition, the thesis will explore the similarities between wrestling and dancing through a modern film.

**Section V** focuses on the wound that Jacob suffers and its purpose advanced. The blessing that comes with pain, repentance, and the legacy this story leaves, will be explored.

**Section VI** concentrates on the actions of the angel in his departure and blessing, and focuses on the artistic interpretations of Jacob Epstein, Gustav Gebhardt and Fred Terna.

**Section VII** addresses the image of the sun as a healing force.

**Section VIII** describes the method used to remember trauma and it's relation to story telling through word and art. The meeting with Esau will be reviewed in light of G.F. Watts' painting of the scene.

Finally, **Section IX** draws conclusions and points to further and future topics.

## **Section I. The Narrative Art**

The account of Jacob wrestling with a man in Genesis, Chapter 32 is one of the Torah's most cherished and enigmatic narrative scenes. Its inscrutable quality derives from its terse depiction. A mere nine verses, this Biblical story is half the length of the *Aqedah* (Gen. 22:1-19), the account of the near sacrifice of Isaac by his father Abraham, and is read only once a year in the Torah cycle on *Shabbat Vayishlakh*. Some might attribute the story's brevity to a lack of editorial attention. Others, however, would argue that this nighttime interlude is a masterpiece of the carefully controlled use of language to heighten the imagination of the reader. The mystifying lacunae that permeate this match between the patriarch and stranger allow readers to dive in and immerse themselves in the waters of both a personal and national struggle. The editors clearly have created a story of every (wo)man left vague just enough at critical places to allow for multiple interpretations for each individual in every generation. This universality not only addresses the religious, but also the psychological and the political. This story's astonishing power derives from its brevity, the use of words with multiple meanings, and the creation of a national myth.

J.P. Fokkelman in his *Narrative Art in Genesis*, does a brilliant job of structurally analyzing the cycle of Jacob stories and allowing the reader to compare Jacob's dream at Bethel to an analysis of the Tower of Babel.<sup>5</sup> Robert Alter, in *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, compares Jacob to King David.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> J.P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1991), *passim*. See Francis Landy's introduction on page xii where he describes this comparison as "implicit." The scattering from Babel to find a name mirrors the hero's (Jacob's) return to find his name.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Perseus Books Group, 1981), *passim*. Alter asserts on page 117 that a common theme is that Divine election neither comes from nor confers moral character and in fact is a tension between the two.



But in the end, the story of Jacob stands alone. The wrestling match is the mid-life crisis of a man whose life we know more about than any other character in the Torah. We are informed of his conception, gestation, birth, youth, adulthood, old age and death with greater detail than any of the other patriarchs or prophets including Moses. We are aware of the tension between his parents before his arrival and the anxieties of his sons after he is gone. From *Parashiyyot Toldot* through *Va-yehi*, Genesis, Chapters 25 to 50, we are handed the most complete picture of the life of one man, Jacob. At each major moment, the repetition of God's promise gives "a religious stamp to each life cycle" event.<sup>7</sup> God's promise begins with Jacob in the womb (Gen. 25:23), continues at Isaac's blessing (Gen. 27:28), and is heard again at Bethel, in the ladder dream (Gen. 28:13-15). The promise of "dealing bountifully" (Gen. 32:13) resonates in the names of Jacob's offspring (Gen. Chapter 30), determines the time to return home (Gen. 31:3), advises in matters of livestock breeding (Gen. 31:11-13), and even warns Laban in a dream to restrain himself against his son-in-law (Gen. 31:29). This extensive description alone must alert us to Jacob's essential nature in the Torah because Biblical writings are infamous for their terseness of character development.

Nonetheless, if we focus on Jacob's wrestling with the strange man, what Dennis Shulman, a Rabbi and psychoanalyst, calls his "critical psychotherapeutic session,"<sup>8</sup> we are struck by the sudden conciseness of the text. And yet, the story contains within its succinct nine verses the genesis of a maturing man, a nation, a town and the first *halachic* proscription. Alter describes the short interlude as a 1) political allegory, 2) night-world

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<sup>7</sup> Michael Fishbane, *Text and Texture* (New York: Schocken, 1979), 41.

<sup>8</sup> Dennis G. Shulman, *The Genius of Genesis: A Psychoanalyst and Rabbi Examines the First Book of the Bible* (New York: iUniverse, Inc., 2003), 1.

psychology and/or 3) the dangerous, inscrutable ambiguity of divine touch.<sup>9</sup> Despite the lack of narrative report, "Jacob Wrestling the Angel" is a poster child for the use of the *leitwortstil*; repetition, and scrupulous word selection to spark hyperlinks to past, present, and future moments in the Biblical narrative and the universal human condition. Fokkelman describes it as a "world in words."<sup>10</sup>

Alter contends that, "the Bible's value as a religious document is intimately and inseparably related to its value as literature."<sup>11</sup> The final redactor shows artistic genius through the use of withholding and reticence,<sup>12</sup> which opens lacunae "large enough to run a Mack truck through." The unanswered questions in the text invite our imagination to run wild and as Marc Bregman states, "it is a greater achievement in literary and graphic art to stimulate the imagination,"<sup>13</sup> than to provide all the answers. We shall explore both the "text paintings"<sup>14</sup> and graphic interpretations that have been generated from this section of the Jacob cycle taken from the Tanaitic period to the present. We will observe the use or lack of use of imagery, and the potential this allows for the mind's eye to interpret and re-interpret the altercation between two beings with only the narrator and ourselves as witnesses.

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<sup>9</sup> Robert Alter, *The World of Biblical Literature* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1992), 145.

<sup>10</sup> Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 6.

<sup>11</sup> Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 19.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter 6.

<sup>13</sup> Bregman, "Aqeda; Midrash as Visualization," see footnote #59.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

## **Section II. It Was a Dark and Lonely Night**

**"That same night he arose ....and crossed at the ford of the Jabbok" Gen. 32:23**

### A. Clearing the Stage

This story within the Jacob cycle lacks description of not only character, but of space and time as well. This is in contrast to the text that has gone before and comes after. In the scenes of Jacob's preparation for the encounter with his brother, Esau, and the actual engagement of the estranged brothers, the dialogue is more explicit, inner thoughts are revealed and the details of gifts, actions and players are drawn with far more accuracy.<sup>15</sup> The abstraction of our focused passage and the novelty of several terms that appear for the first or only time in the Tanakh, heighten the probability that the symbols will alert the reader to the gravitas of the encounter. Robert Alter proposes that, "The greater the probability of a symbol's occurrence in any given situation, the smaller will be its content. Where we can anticipate, we need not listen."<sup>16</sup>

Jacob, after his twenty-year problematic sojourn with his Uncle Laban, is returning home to Canaan. Behind him are gnawing altercations with his mother's brother, Laban. Before him lays murderously unresolved sibling rivalry with Esau initiated by the manipulations of his mother Rebecca. He fears with great anxiety the unfinished business he ran away from twenty years before. The use of two adjectives to describe his apprehension in Genesis 32:8, *y-r-h* and *y-tz-r*, fear and anxiety, emphasizes, according to Rashi, that he is terrified that someone, either himself or his brother, will die in their meeting the next day.<sup>17</sup> He stops at the River Jabbok for the night knowing that his brother's camp is not far away on the other side.

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<sup>15</sup> See Genesis 32:4-22 and Genesis 33:1-17.

<sup>16</sup> Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 63.

<sup>17</sup> Rashi on Genesis 32:8.

## B. The River Jabbok

This particular river is a major tributary of the Jordan and runs east to west through today's territory of Jordan. It is not evident that Jacob came this way on his journey to Haran as this is the first mention of the Jabbok in the Torah. Because the sun has set, Jacob chooses to camp there (Gen. 32:14). During the night, Jacob is disturbed by the pending encounter with his brother, Esau, who he has been warned is coming to meet him with four hundred men. He rouses all of his great camp, including his wives, concubines, children, servants and flocks, and personally transports them across the river. Again and again, the root *`v-r* is used to describe Jacob's ferrying of his family across the Jabbok. The root *`v-r* reminds us that this family are *`vri*, Hebrews, the ones who cross. Jacob has just returned from being a wandering Aramean, *a-r-mi* like his grandfather, Abraham. The two roots provide a bridge between Jacob's exile to Haran and Jacob's return home to Canaan. The root *`v-r* is repeated in the word *ma`avar* for the ford used to cross the river. This crossing will prove to be both spiritual and physical between polar opposites.<sup>18</sup>

This river is not the Jordan River. The Jabbok River is outside of the Holy Land. It is the frontier,<sup>19</sup> the outer boundary, the outer limits if you will, where wilderness is a reality. This is a classic motif of ancient myth. The hero arrives at a river and attempts to cross. He is challenged to a fight by the river spirit protecting his territory and the hero is made to pay some sort of price. It could be the River Styx in Greek mythology,

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<sup>18</sup> Cohen, *Self, Struggle and Change*, 113.

<sup>19</sup> *The Jewish Publication Society Torah Commentary*, ed. Nahum M. Sarna (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 403.

separating life from death, or the River Rubicon where Julius Caesar "marked his ascent to absolute power."<sup>20</sup> But it is neither.

The narrative we encounter in the Torah is different. First, it is not clear after Jacob crosses back and forth with his possessions, on which side of the River Jabbok he remains. Is he on the near or far side of the river? Roland Barthes reasons that that if Jacob is on the far side, then yes, this is a typical myth format of a River Demon. However, if Jacob is on the near side (the Canaan side), then the story is not a question of crossing, but of being chosen.<sup>21</sup>

### **C. A Darkness That Can Be Touched**

After all his possessions have crossed the river, Jacob is alone in the wilderness, in the dark. Pesikta de Rav Kahana tells us that the Torah was given to us in the wilderness to demonstrate that Israel must be possession-less to receive revelation.<sup>22</sup> Redemption, however, occurs at night in the Exodus, thus equating day with the Torah, accessible to all including the other nations. The night, another name for the Oral Law, is meant only for Israel and protects her.<sup>23</sup> The rabbis also equate night with this world and our human struggle in it. Jacob is situated in the deep darkness of the desert night; the background music takes on an ominous tone.

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<sup>20</sup> Naomi H. Rosenblatt and Joshua Horowitz, *Wrestling with Angels: What the First Family of Genesis Teaches Us About Our Spiritual Identity, Sexuality, and Personal Relationships* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1995), 297.

<sup>21</sup> Roland Barthes, *Image, Muse, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 130.

<sup>22</sup> Pesikta de Rav Kahana, *Piska* 12:20.

<sup>23</sup> Pesikta de Rav Kahana, *Piska* 7:12. See also Pesikta Rabbati 11:5; Shemot Rabbah 47:8; and Midrash Tehillim 19:7.

Contrastingly, the Talmud is very clear that the night is to be equated with exile and persecution and that "a Torah scholar should not go outside alone at night."<sup>24</sup> Lev Aryeh, in commentary on Rashi, describes Jacob accompanying his family across the Jabbok in the light of the moon, but when he is finished, the moon sets and he is left only with the stars.<sup>25</sup>

This rabbinic image of a dark night is anathema to the artistic portrayal of a scene. One cannot portray the pitch-black night where you can't see your hand in front of your face except in the black on black paintings of the modern minimalist schools. The Codex 1164 of the Bilder Pentateuch (Fig. 1) helps us visualize this portrayal by showing Jacob and the Angel engaged under three stars, a clear indication of the *halakhah* for the recitation of *Havdalah* to wait until three stars appear, when darkness is assured. Pesikta Rabbati tells us that the three stars represent the three patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and provide comfort.<sup>26</sup>

Now that Jacob has divested himself of all his possessions and he is plunged into darkness, the scene is set for a major transformation. William Bridges, in his book, *Managing Transitions*, describes the journey an organization must traverse to achieve major life changes. His model can also be applied to an individual in transformation. The paradigm describes three stages of transition: 1) an ending zone of disengagement, dis-identification and disenchantment; 2) a neutral zone of disorientation, disintegration, and discovery; and 3) the vision of new beginnings.<sup>27</sup> Jacob is now in the first stage;

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<sup>24</sup> BT *Chullin* 91a. See also Radak on Genesis 32:27, Midrash ha-Gadol on Genesis 32:27.

<sup>25</sup> See note #53 in Artscroll BT *Chullin* 91a.

<sup>26</sup> Pesikta Rabbati, *Piska* 11:4.

<sup>27</sup> William Bridges, *Managing Transitions* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1991), *passim*.

carrying all his possessions across the Jabbok, he disengages. His identity disappears with his acquired goods. The anxiety he has regarding his brother, his uncle, and possibly his mother and father is palpable. He is left utterly vulnerable again after twenty years of slowly building a shepherd's empire. He is left completely in the dark, both physically and spiritually. It is a dream-like world where nothing makes sense.



### **Section III. And Jacob Was Left Alone**

### A. Jacob's Only Possessions

*Va-yivater Yaaqov livado* (Gen. 32:25) And Jacob was left alone. Jacob is not only alone, but he is without possessions. Pesikta de Rav Kahana's assertion above that revelation comes to those who are possession free applies to Jacob's current situation. In his prayer to God (Gen. 32:11), Jacob says that he came this way before with only his shepherd's staff and now returns wealthy, with two camps. But for a moment, having carried all he owns across the river, he is once again left with only his staff. Although the text says nothing of his rod at this juncture, Jacob's shepherd's staff becomes an important prop in several paintings. Most notably, we see the rod become "a line in the sand" in Gustave Dore's "*Jacob Wrestling the Angel*" (Fig. 2).

The shepherd's staff lies between Jacob's legs as he crosses over it to advance on the angel. The staff identifies Jacob as a shepherd, but here, in Dore's painting, it is used as a symbol that marks the boundary between Jacob's past and his future. Jacob's entourage lies below in the valley and he faces the angel alone on the bluff. While the angel shows calm and unyielding control, Jacob shows great energy in the lunge across the rod as if it is a charge across a vast space and time into the realm of the divine. This rod, according to the Midrash, is no ordinary rod. It is the rod Judah gave to Tamar, the rod that Moses and Aaron used to work miracles, and David used as both weapon and scepter. It is the rod that God created before Creation.<sup>28</sup> We shall see this symbol repeated in other works to delineate a boundary between reality and the other worldly.

Why does Jacob put himself in this vulnerable position? Why does he return across the river? Rashi relates an *aggadah* from the Babylonian Talmud that Jacob

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<sup>28</sup> *Yalqut Shimoni*, vol. II, Remez 869.

returned once more to retrieve some small earthenware pitchers, a deliberate misreading of *l'kado* (small containers) for *l'vado* (alone); a scribal slip between a *bet* and a *kof*.<sup>29</sup> Jacob finds himself alone because he has gone to retrieve one last thing. Oddly, the Midrash does not wonder what was in those little jars. Perhaps it is the blessing and birthright that Jacob stole from his brother Esau. Note that a pitcher sits in the corner of the *Bilder Pentateuch* drawing. This indicates that this well-known Midrashic tradition may have informed the artist. Together with the use of the three stars, these two symbols would argue for the artist's Jewish background and familiarity with Jewish legend and custom.

#### **B. Global Positioning: Where is Jacob?**

Where exactly Jacob is, is still not perfectly clear from the text. We shall see later that in the mind's eye of the artist, Jacob is clearly on the far side of the Jabbok, separated from his brother and loved ones by the river. Much of the Midrash, though not conclusive, would agree that he is on the far (north side) of the Jabbok.<sup>30</sup> If we make some spatial maps we can get a better picture of just where Jacob is in relationship to the other individuals in his life.

Before Jacob ferries the family across the river, he is situated between two family conflicts: the one with his father-in-law, Laban, over inheritance (Gen. 31:43-54) and his conflict with his twin brother, Esau, over the birthright and blessing (Gen. 26:29-34 and Chapter 27). Between each of these disputes, Jacob has put distance and natural

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<sup>29</sup> Rashi on Genesis 32:25, BT *Chullin* 91a

<sup>30</sup> Rashi says that Jacob "returns" to the north side to collect the jars. BT *Chullin* says he "remained behind."

obstacles: a mound and pillar, named *Yegar-sahadutha*, "the mound of witness,"<sup>31</sup>

between him and Laban, and the River Jabbok between Jacob and his brother.

The Midrash describes Jacob's position between his enemies and the greeting he receives from angels that accompany him coming and going:

*Jacob had no need to fear either Laban or Esau for...he was accompanied by two angel hosts (one for outside Palestine and one for inside the Holy Land). And when he beheld them, Jacob said: "You belong neither to the host of Esau, who is preparing to go out to war against me, nor the host of Laban, who is about to pursue me again. You are the hosts of the holy angels sent by the Lord." And he gave the name Mahanaim, Double-Host, to the spot on which the second relieved the first.*<sup>32</sup>

But we know Jacob does have reason to be fearful. Visually his location looks like this:

Esau (future conflict)	.....//.....	Jacob and camp	.....// .....	Laban (past conflict)
Red		R. Jabbok	mound/pillar	white

From an artistic point of view, it is interesting to note that Laban means white and Esau, or Edom, his alternative name, means red. Jacob is now fenced in between the white and the red.

Jacob is so anxious he divides his camp into two as a defense (Gen. 32:8). After Jacob ferries the family across the river, he places Laban behind him in his mind, and, focusing on the danger ahead, places his camps, including his wives and children, between himself and his enemy, Esau. This new arrangement looks like this:

<sup>31</sup> JPS Tanach, Genesis 31:47.

<sup>32</sup> Targum Yerushalmi to Genesis 32:3; Bereshit Rabbah 74:17 and 76:10, Tanhuma ha-Nidpas, *Va-yishlah*, 8:3.

Esau ↔ Jacob's camps ↔ /River/ ↔ Jacob

Jacob remains behind, leaving his camps vulnerable. These spatial relationships will be important markers in paintings of the scene, as artists will use the river, the staff, or even a tree to define relationships.

Wherever Jacob is, he is definitely on the edge of transformation and situated between polar opposites. Roland Barthes<sup>33</sup> and the Midrash would hold that Jacob is alone among the chosen. Ironically, Bereshit Rabbah describes an equivalence between *Yeshurun*, with the root of *yashar*, straight, and *Yaaqov*, its root being *aqav*, crooked:

*And Jacob was left alone. It is written, "There is none like unto God, O Jeshurun" (Deut 33:26.) There is none like God; yet who is like God? Jeshurun, which means Israel, the Patriarch. Just as it is written of God, "And the Lord alone shall be exalted" (Isaiah 2:11), so of Jacob too: "And Jacob was left alone." (Gen. 32:25)*<sup>34</sup>

The same word, "*livado*," "alone," is used in both passages. This underscores that Jacob, not yet Israel, the Patriarch, is equivalent to God. The Rabbis are universal in their surprising love for Jacob, a problematic figure at best, and in their condemnation of Esau, the embodiment of evil at worst. But Jacob's equivalence to the Divine is problematic and will become a theme in the Midrashic narrative.

<sup>33</sup> Barthes, *Image, Muse, Text*, 130.

<sup>34</sup> Bereshit Rabbah 77:1.

**Section IV. And a Man Wrestled With Him Until the  
Break of Dawn**

## A. Creation of Myth

Many formulae exist to describe myth. Stephen Geller writes that a true myth is one in which the tension is never resolved. Making a situation strange, confusing or mysterious heightens the awareness of the reader and draws attention to the scene. Jacob, all along his way, has met angels and talked to God so many times that it has almost become a routine occurrence for him.<sup>35</sup> Our narrator has to ratchet up the suspense in order to get the reader's attention. *And a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn* (Gen. 32:25). As is consistent with the Jacob cycle, there are only two players on the stage at any given time. We the reader become the only witness to the scene and we shall "see" how our observation will change depending on where we "stand."<sup>36</sup>

J.P. Fokkelman presents a formula that describes the creation and reception of text.<sup>37</sup> His understanding of the creation of narrative is that an author creates the narrative, which begins in the author's mind. While it is still a potential creation, it may expand and evolve. Once it is fixed in print, it loses its plasticity. Because the text can no longer change, it is a creation that could become static. However, when it is read, the writing enters the mind of the reader, where it becomes a dialogue between the writer and the reader and there, can again expand, evolve and be recreated. This interaction between writer and reader keeps the work alive. We can extend this equation to graphic interpretations in the visual arts. An artist reads a text and allows the work to develop and

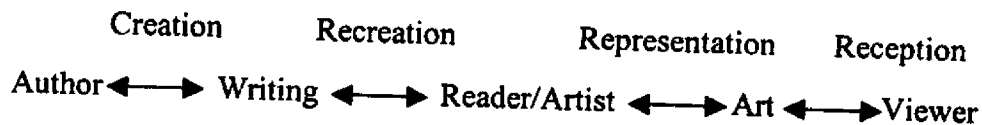
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<sup>35</sup> Stephen A. Geller, *Sacred Enigmas: Literary Religion in the Hebrew Bible* (London, England: Routledge, 1996), 28. See Genesis 28:12-15, 31:3, 31:11, 32:2.

<sup>36</sup> Fred Terna teaches that Yaacov Agam, the Israeli artist, whose work requires the observer to move in order to fully appreciate it, is the only truly Jewish artist because the viewer's perception of his work "depends upon where the observer stands." Class at HUC-JIR, New York, November 4, 2204.

<sup>37</sup> Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 3.

grow in her mind until an artistic creation is conceived and is completed. This creation could also become static, or lay around on the studio floor, unseen except by the artist. However, once it is out in the public realm, viewers receive the work's vision that can then expand and change in the viewer's mind possibly into more text or art in another medium. Visually this interaction looks like this:



We shall see, in the course of this thesis, that this fluid interaction across media boundaries, results in an exciting affect when we examine Biblical text, Midrash and art.

Fokkelmann teaches us brilliantly about the creation of the artist, whether written or graphic, in the metaphor of the birthing of a child:

*For the birth of a text resembles that of man: the umbilical cord which connected the text with its time and the man ...who produced it, is severed once its existence has become a fact; the text is going to lead a life of its own, for whenever a reader grants it an adequate reading it will come alive and become operative...Whereas the creation of a text is finite....its re-creation is infinite. It is the task for each new age, each new generation, each new reader, never to be considered complete.<sup>38</sup>*

And so it is also true for the creation of art and its reception, interpretation, re-creation and re-presentation vis-à-vis the text. The verse, Genesis 32:25, *And Jacob was left alone, a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn, (va-ye'aveq ish imo ad 'lot*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 4,5.



*ha-shahar*) is comprised of eight words in simple Hebrew describing a climactic scene that lasts all night. What is the response of the reader, the artist, the witness? Let us slowly traverse the text and look at the descriptions we are given.

## B. Rolling in The Dust

We stop at the first word of the phrase, *va-ye'aveq*, he wrestled. This is the first of only two usages of *avaq* as a *niphal* verb in the Torah, the second being the infinitive used in verse 26 immediately following. The commentator, Radak writes that he agrees with the definition held by Menachim ben Saruk (author of the first Hebrew dictionary, Spain, 10<sup>th</sup> century) who equates *avaq* (wrestle) with *'afar* (dust), connecting the dust that is kicked up by wrestlers with the description of wrestling itself.<sup>39</sup> This connection is also made in Pirke Avot, *v'heve mitabeq va'afar raglehem*,<sup>40</sup> which is often translated, "Sit eagerly at their (your teachers') feet," but could be rendered as "*Roll yourself (wrestle with yourself) in the dust at their feet*," or loosely, get dirty, struggle with your learning. This more visceral portrayal of the student/teacher relationship requires that we learn experientially, with our whole body; that learning must engage every part of us, not just the intellect.

A discussion in the Talmud raises the question of "How does this dust from earth connect us to God?"

*Rabbi Joshua ben Levi said, The clause, "when he wrestled with him," teaches that they raised dust unto the Throne of Glory. It is written here, "wrestled with him" and it is written there (Nahum 1:3), "God's*

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<sup>39</sup> Radak on Genesis 32:25.

<sup>40</sup> M. Avot 2:4

*path is in a storm and in a tempest, and clouds are the dust (avaq) of His feet.*<sup>41</sup>

This indicates that the dust we humans raise in our struggle to understand the Divine reaches to the footstool of Heaven.

What does this dust represent? Dust is the stuff of everything and nothing. *Who can count the dust of Jacob, number the dust-cloud of Israel?* (Num. 23:10). *For dust you are and to dust you will return* (Gen. 3:19). Dust can be worthless. Yet, in Genesis 13:16 it is the sign of abundance: *I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, then your offspring too, can be counted.* The language of "kicking up dust" represents the Divine world manifested in this world. The earthly dust that is "raised to the throne of Heaven" is a pillar of cloud that connects the two.

With all this dust in the air, the scene is obfuscated and the narrative text makes little effort to clarify our confusion. The Biblical text tells us that the assailant is an "*ish*," "a man" by all translations, but our modern dictionaries define *ish* as a person, male or female or **no one**. The *ish* bears no description whatsoever. Not one word is wasted on a portrayal. And from here the picture gets even murkier. The pronoun prefix for "he," he wrestles, he sees, he cannot prevail, in the following verses begs the question, "Which he?" We cannot be sure who is winning until Jacob identifies himself in verse twenty-eight.

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<sup>41</sup> BT Chullin 91a.

Intertextually, the prophet, Hosea, clearly identifies the *ish* who attacks Jacob in Genesis 32:25. Hosea states definitively that the "man" is an angel and it is Jacob who prevails and forces the angel to cry out for mercy:

*Grown to a man, he strove with a Divine being,*

*He strove with an angel and prevailed*

*The other (the angel) had to weep and implore him*

*(Hosea 12:4-5)*

This opening verse of terse text is an excellent example of narrative which is withheld, rather than filling in all the details, in an effort to force the reader to work creatively at the interpretation, to wrestle with the text.

### C. Entwined as One

Ramban and Rashi do not like the definition of *avaq* as "dust." They both believe it is from the Aramaic *aviqu*, meaning "attaching," "entwining oneself," as in loops of couches and fringes on the corners of prayer shawls. *Avuqah* is a torch because it is made up of intertwined pieces of thread or wood.<sup>42</sup> We think of the entwining of the Havdalah candle. This interpretation emphasizes the visual intertwining of Jacob and the strange assailant.

From an aural perspective, Ramban posits that *aleph* and *chet* are commonly interchanged in Hebrew because *het* is hard to pronounce, therefore *ye'aveq* may be *ye'haveq*, "he embraced," the same word used when Esau and Jacob embrace upon their reunion (Gen. 33:4).

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<sup>42</sup> Rashi on Genesis 32:25, Ramban on Genesis 32:25. See also BT *Menachot* 42a.

Rabbi Joshua ben Levi continues his description of wrestling when he elaborates on this intertwining embrace:

*The verse states "as he wrestled" him, like a person who embraces (hoveq) his fellow, so that his right hand reaches until the right haunch of his fellow.<sup>43</sup>*

Rashi adds to the details of a wrestling match and its goal to throw the opponent:

*For it is the way of two who struggle, for one person to throw the other down, then he grasps him and entwines him in his arms.<sup>44</sup>*

In trying to get to the heart of the meaning of *avaq*, Ramban looks to Targum Onkelos' translation of *avaq*, which nuances the word to include a sense of deceit, an all too common theme with our protagonist Jacob:

*Perhaps this is the opinion of Onkelos who translated the word "va-ye'aveq," as "ye-ishtadel," which he used as translation of "ye-fateh," (seduces) in Exodus 22:15, as if he (the wrestler) embraces and kisses, which is the manner of seduction. It may be that Onkelos found no word comparable to va-ye'avek and so he considered it a matter of cunning, for all "effort" (vishtadel) implies cunning and a (need for) clarification of circumstances.<sup>45</sup>*

An even deeper meaning is given to *avaq* in Midrash Rabbah. The word employed to interpret *avaq* is "*shequim*:"

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<sup>43</sup> BT Chullin 91a.

<sup>44</sup> Rashi on Genesis 32:25.

<sup>45</sup> Ramban on Genesis 32:25.

R. Hanina b. Isaac said: "They fought (*shequim*) the whole of that night, each man's shield against his opponent's..."<sup>46</sup>

The translation above is tame by any standard. A more colorful rendition would be, "They penetrated each the other. Their shield received the other's shield until the breaking of dawn." Albeck notes that the word *pog'in* (offensive) is used in other manuscripts.<sup>47</sup> Much discussion proceeds on the grammar and definition of the word *avaq*, but there is little beyond the Talmud that describes the action of wrestling. For an entire night of combat, it is surprising there are few stories describing the "blow by blow." Since the Midrash is remarkably quiet about the exact nature of the fight, we look to art to fill in the gap.

Salvator Rosa's *Jacob Wrestling with the Angel*, (Fig.3) shows the most realism in action. The figures grapple in the way described above in the description of Tractate *Chullin* and Rashi: grasping, reaching, entwining, wrapping themselves around each other in an attempt to throw the other off balance. If only their other hands were visible, grasping at the opponent's hip, we would see exactly what the Sages were describing. However, without the fighters' second hand, we perceive a two-headed figure whose legs and arms could be those of one man. This is a hint that this struggle is between two sides of Jacob.<sup>48</sup>

This Angel is the most masculine one we shall see graphically. Both figures appear to be on the very verge of throwing the other to the ground. Were it not for the wings, thrown to one side, these figures could be brothers, so close are they in physique

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<sup>46</sup> Bereshit Rabbah 77:3.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Cohen, *Self, Struggle and Change*, 116. See Dr. Cohen's connections between *tzelah* (side) and *tzoleiah* (limp), and *tukhal* (prevail) and *takhil* (integrate).

and dress. We shall see in the next section that the Midrash will strongly identify the assailant not as Esau, come under cover of night, but Esau's guardian angel. The Midrash also proposes that the angel manifests itself as another shepherd. Either of these characters would be mirror images of Jacob as we see in the Rosa painting; equally matched, attached twins.

Other symbols should be noted in the picture field, including the rod, which we discussed above, as a sign that we have left the earthly. The rod seems to be leaning against a pitcher, a possible indication that the Rashi Midrash above, that Jacob retrieves something left behind, was a well known theme. The cow in the field presents a new but repeated symbol, which will be discussed when we look at Gauguin.

A much more graphic and erotic example of the scene is by the largely unknown Jacques Patissou of the Modern French School. His *Jacob Wrestling the Angel* (Fig.4) is a decidedly sexual pose, the figures disrobed, legs entwined, the embrace more intimate than offense. This painting parallels the use of "*shequim*" in Midrash Rabbah, a penetration of one figure into the other. The figures are equals, twins, an even match, but, even more so entwined than in the Rosa painting, they meld into each other in the flash of light glowing around their heads. Note the complete absence of anything to distract from the action; even the wings are thrust to the side, out of the way, and there are absolutely no other symbols on the canvas to distract our attention from the couple.

#### **D. Medieval Illuminated Manuscripts**

The energy and power exuding from these two images by Rosa and Patissou are in stark contrast to what we have seen before in the Bilder Pentateuch and the Dore work.

Looking at other early Jewish manuscripts, we observe Jacob and his angel in gentle embrace. Note, for example, that in Figures 5, 6, and 7, (the Rothschild Miscellany, The Catalan Haggadah, and the Golden Haggadah, respectively, all from the late Middle Ages), this embrace of wrestlers is exactly the same as Jacob's greeting of Rachel in the Golden Haggadah (Fig. 8). Animosity, violence or even the struggle for survival are completely absent from these early works.<sup>49</sup>

In analyzing the Golden and Catalan Haggadot we find common elements. The Jabbok River, represented by wavy lines, is a clear boundary between a Jacob left behind and the family that has crossed the river. Action on the left side of the picture, Jacob pointing the way to move on, occurs in later verses. Note the painting reads right to left as does Hebrew. In the Golden Haggadah, Jacob is pointing onward as in Genesis 33:17. In the Catalan Haggadah (though it is unfortunately not a clear manuscript), an Esau-like character may be arriving from the left to greet the family, as in Genesis 33:4.<sup>50</sup> All this happens in the same picture plane as Jacob's wrestling on the right, as if time stands still in his divine territory. In addition to the Jabbok River, both illustrations use very straight trees to define boundaries of space and time, not unlike the rod used in Dore's rendering. Note again the jars that appear in the Catalan Haggadah in the lower right corner. The Rothschild Miscellany also includes a very straight tree, though it does not provide a boundary, but only serves as a backdrop.

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<sup>49</sup> It should be noted that depictions of Jacob and the Angel are absent from earlier works, such as the Dura-Europa and Alpha Synagogues that are frequently used as resources for examples of illustrated Biblical narratives.

<sup>50</sup> Gabrielle Sed-Rajna, *The Hebrew Bible in Medieval Illuminated Manuscripts* (New York: Rizzoli, 1987), 52.

## E. Identifying the Angel

Regardless of how energetic or sedate the poses of the characters in these examples, every single depiction shows the assailant as a winged creature, an angel. The Midrash is universally clear on this subject as well. All the midrashim agree that this being is no ordinary "*ish*," just as the *ish* that accosts Joseph is no ordinary man (Gen. 37:15).<sup>51</sup> But who the angel is, who the angel represents, and in what guise the angel appears is a lively topic for discussion. There are several major themes recurrent in the Midrash: 1) The angel comes as a shepherd; 2) the angel comes to strengthen Jacob; and 3) the angel comes to weaken Jacob.

Many midrashim and Rabbinic commentators describe the angel as a shepherd with good or bad intention. Bereshit Rabbah 77:2 relates the following story and offers us two versions of how Jacob sees the man: one as friend and the other as someone who is considered suspicious:

*Rabbi Huna said: He (the man) appeared to him in the guise of a shepherd. Thus, each had flocks, each had camels...The Rabbis said: He appeared to him in the guise of a brigand; each had his flocks and each had camels, and he proposed to him: "Take mine across and I will take yours." The angel transported Jacob's in the twinkling of an eye, whereas Jacob took some across, returned and found more, took those across and found more (and so on.) "You are a sorcerer!" he exclaimed.*<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> See Bereshit Rabbah 84:14 and Pirke de Rebbe Eliezer Chapter 38 for an explanation that the man who tells Joseph where his brothers are pasturing is an angel.

<sup>52</sup> See also Yalqut Shimoni, *Pasuk* 25:63,64, Bereshit Rabbah 77:2 and 78:6.



This dual image of the shepherd suggests that the angel comes as a mirror, reflecting back to Jacob both sides of himself: the simple (*tam*) shepherd and the brigand, trickster (*yaaqov*).

Many others equate the angel with a menacing Esau. Bereshit Rabbah 78:3 establishes that this messenger is Esau's guardian angel and Rashi concurs.<sup>53</sup> Nations and individuals, according to the Talmud, have guardian angels that direct their destiny and watch over them.<sup>54</sup> Eliezer of Worms, the 13<sup>th</sup> century mystic, calls such guardians "*malakh mazal*," "lucky angels," "angels of a constellation or destiny," just as the zodiac determines fate.<sup>55</sup> The following verse from the Talmud reveals that Jacob makes his own connection between the angel and his brother's heavenly guardian:

*R. Hama b. R. Hanina said: It was the guardian Prince (angel) of Esau. To this Jacob alluded when he said to him (Esau): "For to see your face is like seeing the face of God, and you have received me favorably. (Gen. 33:10)"*<sup>56</sup>

The Soncino commentary puts this concept of a guardian angel in a modern perspective and ponders whether this guarding/guiding spirit is comparable to the subconscious mind.<sup>57</sup> Employing this idea, Jacob would be wrestling with his conscience, in the guise of Esau, which has undoubtedly troubled him, since he stole the birthright from his brother in Genesis, Chapter 27.

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<sup>53</sup> Rashi to Genesis 32:25. See also Bereshit Rabbah 78:3, Tanhuma, *Vayishlah* 8, Zohar I, 146a.

<sup>54</sup> BT *Hagigah* 16a and BT *Sanhedrin* 94a.

<sup>55</sup> Elliot Wolfson, *Through a Speculum That Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University, 1994), 257.

<sup>56</sup> Bereshit Rabbah 77:3.

<sup>57</sup> The Soncino Chumash to Genesis 32:25.

Could Jacob be wrestling with all the heartache he has suffered, his shadow self, in the Jungian sense? In figure 10, Gustave Moreau's *Jacob and the Angel*, Jacob faces forward while a very feminine angel with wings and halo stands behind him, unmoved, unmoving and not even touching Jacob. Jacob is "shadow boxing"<sup>58</sup> with himself and his own demons that must certainly include most of the members of his family, including Esau but also Isaac, Rebecca, Rachel, Leah and Laban. All have caused him angst with which he must struggle before he re-enters the Land and the arms (military or otherwise) of his twin brother. He may have divested himself of his material possessions, but he must lay down at least some of his psychological burdens before he can cross the River *Yabboq* that sounds so much like his own name, *Yaqov*.

As much as the midrashic narrative reveres Jacob, it can be relentless in its vilification of poor Esau. One story goes so far as to equate Esau with Samael, the Rabbinic name for Satan:

*What was Jacob's reason that "he took them and sent them over the stream" (Gen. 32:24)? He saw Samael, the Accuser, going about among his camp. Said Jacob, "I will cross over to the other side of the stream; perhaps this entanglement with the Accuser will not continue there."*<sup>59</sup>

Here, the angel, who is identified as Esau's guardian, is equated with the forces of evil, and in the early part of the first millennium, he is further portrayed as the embodiment of Rome (Edom). Bereshit Rabbah (77:3) calls this the "generation of destruction" when Israel suffered huge losses in the Hadrianic Wars (132-135 C.E.). This

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<sup>58</sup> An apt description in light of wrestling the Jungian "shadow."

<sup>59</sup> Bereshit Rabbah 76:8.

principle, that what occurs to the patriarchs is a hint at what will transpire in history to the children of Israel, is derived from Tanhuma ha-Nidpas, *Lech Lecha* 9 and transposed clearly by Nachmanides:

*When an event happens to any one of the three patriarchs, that which is decreed to happen to his children can be understood.*<sup>60</sup>

The tradition sees this wrestling match and the injury that is incurred, as a sign that Israel will suffer as Jacob does, but also will not be destroyed.

Some midrashim say that the angel is sent to strengthen Jacob. Bereshit Rabbah continues to guess that the angel's identity is either Gabriel or Michael, the angels with the highest status in the angelic hierarchy.<sup>61</sup> Radak is definitive in pronouncing that the angel is Gabriel, come to give Jacob strength as he did for Joshua at Jericho (Joshua 5:13) and predicted the end of days to Daniel (Daniel 8:16). Jacob needs this strength to defeat the angel and to meet his brother.<sup>62</sup>

Another view holds that there is jealousy over Jacob's high status and equivalency to God as we saw in the Jacob/Jeshurun connection.<sup>63</sup> A particularly colorful midrash from Pirke de Rebbe Eliezer suggests that Jacob's ladder dream (Gen. 28:12) is the source for the angelic attack:

*It was taught in a Beraita: that the Angels ascended and descended and gazed at the image of Jacob's face below on earth and his face on the side of the Heavenly Throne above. And he was one of the four Chayot*

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<sup>60</sup> Ramban to Genesis 12:6.

<sup>61</sup> Bereshit Rabbah 78:1.

<sup>62</sup> Radak on 32:25.

<sup>63</sup> See discussion of *Jeshurun* in Section III B.

*(mystical beings) on the Throne! (of Ezekiel 1:5-10). And they became jealous of Jacob and wished to harm him.<sup>64</sup>*

An angel is sent to do away with Jacob, the interloper. The angel accuses him, according to Bereshit Rabbah 78:3, of competing with God, "You are a Prince ("sarita") together with God, your features being engraved on high."

Another charming story from Tanhuma answers the question, "Why does the angel dislocate Jacob's thigh?:"

*R. Pinhas said: All night long they struggled. Then the angel thought; "I wonder if he can be another angel, I had better find out." He, therefore, touched Jacob's knees to see whether there was a joint there. For since an angel does not sit down, he has neither hip nor joint, as it is said, I will give you free access among these that stand. (Zech 3:7)<sup>65</sup>*

Jacob has knees, a human limitation to be sure, and the angel injures him and leaves because he realizes that he has no right to harm one of God's earthly beings.

Our paintings tell a similar mixed story of benevolence and menace. The early paintings show a gentle, smiling angel; the latter paintings offer characters of great strength, but they do not go so far as to make the opponent demonic.

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<sup>64</sup> Pirke de Rebbe Eliezer, Chapter 35. See also Chullin 91a.

<sup>65</sup> Menachim Kasher, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation*, Genesis 32:26, #87. Some references from Kasher were difficult to locate in manuscript, check sources.

## 1. Come to Protect

The question remains: "Who is this strange assailant?" We observed in the Moreau painting that the angel is remarkably feminine. A narrative in Midrash Yashar tells us that Jacob's mother, Rebecca sends a host of warriors to meet Jacob as he approaches his brother, because she fears the worst for both of them. She relays this message via the soldiers:

*I have heard, my son, that your brother, Esau, has gone forth against you on the road... Therefore, my son, listen to my voice, and think about what you will do. When he comes up to you, supplicate him and do not speak roughly with him and give him a present from what you own and from what God has favored you with...for it is your duty to honor him, since he is your older brother.*<sup>66</sup>

Here, Rebecca is credited with being the source of inspiration for exactly what Jacob does in order to placate Esau.<sup>67</sup> Her advice is soothing, conciliatory and so motherly. If we take a look at Rembrandt's *Jacob and the Angel* (Fig 9), the feminization of the angel is quite obvious.<sup>68</sup> Rembrandt's portrait radiates against the dark of Jacob's face and body, and she embraces him, caresses him like a mother, an almost sly look upon her face as she lifts her right knee to dislocate Jacob's hip.

Jacob needs her advice, for it was her machinations, that convinced him to steal Esau's blessing in the first place, that got him into this trouble. "Mother, Mother!" he

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<sup>66</sup> Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, trans. Henrietta Szold (Philadelphia: JPS, 1968), 378.

<sup>67</sup> Genesis 32:4-6.

<sup>68</sup> We see this as well in Dore's piece. The body of Dore's angel is strong, but the hands and feet are that of a petite woman.

seems to be saying, "You got me into this, now save me." If we liberally translate *ish* as "person," it is entirely possible that Rebecca is one of the many guises the angel takes. Oddly, Rebecca's death in the Torah remains a mystery. We hear that her nurse Deborah dies (Gen. 35:8) just after Jacob returns to Bethel. We know that she is buried in the Cave of Machpelah, but there is no mention of her actual death. Could the angel, in the spirit of Rembrandt's portrait, be the spirit of Rebecca already deceased, coming to make peace with Jacob?

The many possible identities of the *ish* indicate that Jacob had much "unfinished business" and the apparitions of all these unresolved issues kept him occupied the entire night. We may be left with multiple identities of the assailant, but what is clear is that this encounter is different than other encounters in the Torah between human and divine, before this narrative and after. It is one thing to send messengers to Abraham, for whom he has Sarai prepare lunch (Gen. Chapter 18). It is another for Moses to talk face to face with God (Num. 12:8) and to show the heavenly secrets to Ezekiel. But it is an entirely different experience to actually engage, to physically wrestle with an incarnation of God, to survive and to carry as proof a tangible wound. This scene takes the encounter with God to a more intense level.

Maimonides asserted that this angel with Jacob was merely a dream, generated by his imagination.<sup>69</sup> Radak, however, writes otherwise. Perhaps it was just a dream, Radak asks out loud. No, he answers, all dreams are preceded by "*Hineh*," Behold (Gen. 41:2, Gen. 37:7, Gen. 28:12). There is no "*Hineh*" in our passage so Jacob must be awake.

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<sup>69</sup> Kalman P. Bland, *The Artless Jew: Medieval and Modern Affirmations and Denial of the Visual* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2000), 6.

Perhaps it is his imagination, Radak questions. No, how can it be his imagination if he walks away with a real injury? Radak's own words gives his definitive answer:

*It is possible to say that it is the imagination of Joshua and Gideon (when angels came to call) and even with the visiting angels of Abraham and Lot. These could all be in a vision but this was a touch that could only be truly physical. Therefore, we say that (the angel) was clothed in "gashmiut," materiality, for his mission. This was a touch in Jacob's hip socket and he limped because this was really an authentic touch.*<sup>70</sup>

Could it be like waking in the morning with a crick in your neck after wrestling all night over a problem in your dreams? Radak is sure this is no dream. He believes that God sends messengers dressed in materiality and that this encounter is "*panim al panim*,"<sup>71</sup> a face to face encounter with God that is a miracle and cannot be denied. And even if it is not real, says Radak,

*...nevertheless, in a prophetic vision there remains something within as if it was real. (Radak on Gen. 32:26)*<sup>72</sup>

Radak would not countenance the Gustav Moreau interpretation, a wrestling partner in Jacob's imagination. For Radak, the encounter was as real as it was for Rembrandt and Salvator Rosa.

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<sup>70</sup> Radak on Genesis 32:26.

<sup>71</sup> Genesis 32:31.

<sup>72</sup> Radak on Genesis 32:26

## 2. Self Knowledge

The works of Rembrandt and Rosa during the Renaissance's awakening laid the groundwork to an increased awareness of individuality and autonomy in the Enlightenment of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. The Medieval depiction of people with little or no expressive content on their faces dramatically changes during the Renaissance, when portraiture and emotional articulation arose in artistic content. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, French writers, poets, philosophers and musicians, reacting to the naturalism and realism of the Enlightenment, pioneered modernism and explored the new realms of the Freudian subconscious.

The "Symbolist Manifesto" of 1886 written by the poet, Jean Moreas, announced that Symbolism would be hostile to the plain meaning (*pshat*) and that its goal would be to clothe the Ideal in a perceptible form, just as Radak talks about *lavash gashmiut*, clothing the angel in materiality. The Symbolists renewed an interest in mysticism and Kabbalah and saw art as a refuge from the world of reality and a vehicle to access direct experience of higher worlds. Their subjects focused on other-worldliness, mortality and the power of sexuality.

Suzanne Singletary writes that Jacob wrestling the angel is conspicuous by its neglect among works of art until the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>73</sup> The Symbolists, a literary and artistic movement on the cusp of the 20<sup>th</sup> century emphasized transcendence and redemption through struggle, and nothing was more emblematic of this mystical struggle than the artist's wrestling with his canvas. Using nature as a springboard, the artist opened the gate to the intangible. The viewer is invited into the struggle and is in fact an

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<sup>73</sup> Suzanne M. Singletary, "Jacob Wrestling with the Angel: A Theme in Symbolist Art," *Nineteenth Century French Studies* 32, no. 3-4 (2004), 298.



essential component in its renewal and completion. The artist reaches from within his soul through the visual plain to the soul of the observer, where the viewer may immerse herself in memories and feelings and retrieve private associations.<sup>74</sup> Just as Fokkelman insists on the reader's participation in the narrative, so must the artist use metaphor and elasticity, allowing the viewer to enter the soul of the creator.

Symbolist works included the writings of Stephane Mallarme, Charles Baudelaire, Edgar Alan Poe, the philosophy of Schopenhauer and Swedenborg, and the music of Richard Wagner, Claude Debussy, Aleksandr Scriabin and Arnold Schoenberg. Visual artists included Paul Gauguin, Gustave Moreau, Odilon Redon, Edvard Munch and August Rodin. The Symbolist Painters influenced the next generation of Expressionists and Surrealism and even early motion pictures.

A powerful example of this relationship between the artist, living in a material world and divine wrestling can be seen in figure 11, Paul Gauguin's, *Vision After the Sermon: Jacob Wrestling the Angel*, which he painted in August of 1888. The title gives us a hint at the source of his inspiration. The painting is considered the greatest and most mysterious of his works and the first masterpiece of the Symbolist movement of the *fin-de-siecle*.

### 3. The Artist's Struggle

Mathew Herban places the setting of Gauguin's painting as an August day in Pont Avon, Breton, France where in the Celtic Church the reading of Genesis 32:22-31 was a

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<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, *passim*.

likely lectionary choice for the Sunday of August 5<sup>th</sup>, 1888.<sup>75</sup> In revisiting the town of Pont Avon, Herban relives where the River Blavet becomes the River Jabbok on Gauguin's canvas. The tree, as we have seen previously, becomes a boundary between the divine and the twelve Breton women. Herban believes they represent Jacob's tribes, which, having crossed over, watch impotently from the foreground while the action takes place reduced in size and indistinct. The field on which they wrestle is ablaze in red color. Herban reports that in celebration of the Pardon of St. Nicodemus (a Pharasaic convert), the young men, after the service, would wrestle with each other and then light bon fires that would turn the grass in the fading light a blazing red.<sup>76</sup> The cow wandering in from the field serves, not unlike the ram stuck in the thicket at the *Aqedah*,<sup>77</sup> as a reminder that sacrifice is man's means of redemption.<sup>78</sup> The painting is rampant with symbolism, but its main focus is Gauguin's identification with the wrestler. He, like Jacob, struggles with his interface between reality and the divine. We see in this painting a confluence between Gauguin's real world of Northern France and his interior struggles.

Just as "...scale escapes optical rules and color is a quality of the mind..." for the modern artist,<sup>79</sup> so, too, Gauguin pursues a kind of hyperconsciousness only accessible when one is willing to wrestle with the Divine. Many Symbolist artists, and no less Gauguin, saw themselves as artist/prophet/priest/messiah/chosen. "It is," writes George

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<sup>75</sup> Mathew Herban, "The Origin of Paul Gauguin's Vision after the Sermon: Jacob Wrestling with the Angel (1888)," *The Art Bulletin* 59, no. 3 (1977), 419.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 418.

<sup>77</sup> Genesis 22:13.

<sup>78</sup> Herban, "The Origin of Paul Gauguin's Vision after the Sermon: Jacob Wrestling with the Angel (1888)," 417. See Ezekiel 42:18-20.

<sup>79</sup> David Hamilton Fraser, *On Gauguin's "Vision after the Sermon-Jacob Struggling with the Angel"*, ed. Carol Weight, *Painters on Painting* (London: Cassell, 1969), 21.

Braque in his studio diary, "as if one heard the fluttering of wings."<sup>80</sup> No longer satisfied with the muse that brings inspiration, the Symbolists wish to go after the access to heaven. It is a time of experimentation with magic, the occult, and theurgy.

Singletary sums it up this way:

*Artmaking is a ceaseless interplay of battling forces bolstered by a yearning for resolution through the work. Jacob's encounter can be read as an interior one, a fitting metaphor for the artist's experience and for the creative process itself...Art is one mode through which divine truth enters the physical world.*<sup>81</sup>

We know from the diaries of this period, that the artists spoke freely to each other of the spiritual unification they wished to achieve through their work.<sup>82</sup> Through painting, writing, and music they wished to achieve *deveiquit*, union with the Divine. Perhaps this is a common goal for artists throughout the ages, but the Symbolists were willing to articulate these ideals in their writings, though an echo of our own great Rabbis (Nachmanides and Maimonides) is heard in the diary of Mellarme. He warns, "Do not speak of this!" for this was not fit conversation for the common folk.

A 20<sup>th</sup> century artist, Samuel Bak, eloquently expresses his turmoil with the brush:

*The process of painting is after all a struggle with an angel, perhaps a struggle with God, certainly a struggle with oneself. I produce paintings but do not know how to explain the enigma of their making.*

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<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>81</sup> Singletary, "Jacob Wrestling with the Angel: A Theme in Symbolist Art," 301.

<sup>82</sup> Fraser, *On Gauguin's "Vision after the Sermon-Jacob Struggling with the Angel,"* *passim*.

*Shouldn't my weary angel-like figures be entitled to some credit? What is their part in my ongoing evocation of the mystery of life?*<sup>83</sup>

The artists of this time period were quite confident of their superiority. The art itself became a religion. But our focused narrative is not so definitive about who can win. The resolution remains obscure between Jacob and his angel, the hero wounded, the opponent escapes. Rather than assert his superiority, Jacob insists, *katonti*, I am small (Gen. 32:11). The ego invested in the artist as priest and prophet will make their authority short-lived.

#### **F. Dancing or Wrestling**

Our other patriarchs, Abraham and Isaac, talked with God (Gen. 22:1, Gen. 26:24). But this one, Jacob, wrestles. Jacob, in comparison to Esau, is the lighter weight, the one we think of as the mama's boy (Gen. 25:28), *tam*, mild-mannered. Yet we also know him as the one who moves a boulder single-handed (Gen. 29:10) and here, with the angel, he wrestles with incomparable strength.

Wrestling, says Arthur Waskow is a lot like making love.<sup>84</sup> Dr. Norman Cohen wrote that at a distance, whether a couple is wrestling or dancing, is indistinguishable.<sup>85</sup> That is the confusion Nachmanides writes about between *ye'aveq* and *yehabeq*, wrestling and embracing. They are interchangeable.<sup>86</sup> Sferno writes that Jacob is cleaving to

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<sup>83</sup> *Between Worlds: The Paintings of Samuel Bak from 1946-2000*, (Boston: Pucker Art, 2002).

<sup>84</sup> Arthur Waskow, *Godwrestling - Round 2: Ancient Wisdom, Future Paths* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 1996), 19.

<sup>85</sup> Cohen, *Self, Struggle and Change*, 118.

<sup>86</sup> Ramban on Genesis 32:25.

God/Angel, *deveiqut*, the closest possible melding outside of sexual intercourse.<sup>87</sup> The text says that Jacob wrestled "*im*," with the man, not "*et*" *ish*, the impersonal preposition, which implies that Jacob wrestled with the stranger as an equal in the most intimate way possible.

Note in this regard that the theme of dancing is very apparent in our paintings. Look again at the Medieval Golden Haggadah, the Bilder and the Rothschild Miscellanies. The figures in these illustrations look like angelic dancing partners. Through Salvator Rosa and Gauguin, and even the Moreau and Dore, we see the aggressive nature of wrestling, even if one opponent is in total control. But through the eyes of the 19<sup>th</sup> century painter Eugene Delacroix, we revisit the idea that the partners are engaged in a dance, albeit one of great significance and passion.

### 1. Eugene Delacroix

Eugene Delacroix, France's greatest Romantic painter, was considered the last of the great Renaissance influenced painters, a disciple of Michelangelo and Rubens, and the first of the moderns who influenced the Symbolist School and later Abstract Expressionism, which included Picasso and Van Gogh. His work is a bridge between the realism and naturalism of the 14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries and the abstraction of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. His masterpiece, *Jacob Wrestling with the Angel* (Fig. 12), is a giant mural installed at the Church of Saint-Sulpice in Paris, France and has been described as the *leitmotif* of his career, spiritual combat between his roots in classicism and his stretch to the modern world.

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<sup>87</sup> Sforno on Genesis 32:26.

The painting, which spans approximately twenty five by fifteen feet, portrays Jacob and the angel in a deep forest. To the right of the mural Jacob's possessions and camp proceed forward with no knowledge or acknowledgment of the struggle that is taking place above them. Jacob's weapons and clothes, including a bright yellow straw hat, lay in a heap behind the strugglers. Jacob's spear points directly at his upraised heel, a possible allusion to Jacob's "Achilles" heel, symbol of Jacob's grasping and deceitful nature. A serpentine sash lies under Jacob's feet and Singletary remarks that it is "suggestive of transfiguration. As the snake battles to shed its outworn skin," Jacob struggles to shed his past identity.<sup>88</sup>

## **2. The Tango Lesson**

The pose of Jacob and the angel in the Delacroix is that of a couple dancing and it is this posture that is evocative for the filmmaker, Sally Potter, in her romance, *The Tango Lesson*, (2003). Potter tells the autobiographical tale of her love for a young Jewish tango instructor in Paris and the subsequent struggle between art and life. She aspires to learn the tango, perform in competition with Pablo, the instructor, and make a film of his spectacular dancing. They fall in love and after a heated battle over her dancing ability, she phones him and relates the Biblical story of Jacob wrestling the angel. She then leads him to the Church of St. Sulpice and, before the giant mural, they assume the stance of the life-size figures above them and realize the similarity between the wrestling and the tango. Delacroix's depiction of the figures as equals is emphasized

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<sup>88</sup> Singletary, "Jacob Wrestling with the Angel: A Theme in Symbolist Art," 301.

by the parity between Pablo and Sally. The combatants are of equal stature and equal strength.

However, as we saw in the Dore, the angel is in control, holding and transforming Jacob in his frustration. The angel leads, as Pablo insists that he must lead Sally in the dance. Sally is accustomed, as a filmmaker, to leading and it is Pablo who must transform Sally's instinct to fight into an ability to let go. Letting go is essential in the tango in order for Sally to receive the blessing of being Pablo's dance partner that she so desires. This balance between control, supremacy, letting go and release is made manifest in the final dance sequences of the film. The intertwining of legs and feet gives new meaning to *aveq*, *havaq*, and *shequah*, the key action words in our text. The embrace of the tango epitomizes the struggle of the interior with the exterior, just as Jacob wrestles with both his inner and outer enemies and the polar sides of himself.

Dance, in the mystical literature, is used as a metaphor for the encounter with God so deep that it is erotic. The Zohar compares Jacob's wrestling to the dance of the sun and moon, opposing forces of night and day, the feminine and masculine aspects of God.<sup>89</sup> According to the *Baal Shem Tov*, the founder of *Hasidism*, as related by Elliot Wolfson:

*Dance (ha-riqqud) is for the sake of elevating the sparks and raising the lower gradation to the higher one....an explanation of the Talmudic dictum, "How does one dance before the bride,"...the purpose of dance as construed in Beshtian teaching is to elevate the Shekhinah from her state of exile so that she will become a "bride" wedded to her masculine consort.*<sup>90</sup>

<sup>89</sup> *Aspaklaria*, ed. Shmuel Adler, (Jerusalem:Hotzat Aspaklaria, 1988) vol. 9, page 390.

<sup>90</sup> Elliot Wolfson, *Along the Path; Studies in Kabbalistic Myth, Symbolism and Hermeneutics* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995), 108.

The 19<sup>th</sup> Century was a rare and ripe time for Jacob's struggle to be imbued with this powerful sexual metaphor.

### 3. The Healing Dance

This concept, that dance and wrestling are intertwined in a cosmic dance of sun and moon, God and Shekhinah, and Jacob and the angel, is little touched upon by the classic Midrash, but becomes a central theme in visual representations of the scene, a physical and external manifestation of interior struggles beginning with the 19<sup>th</sup> century into the present. Little wonder that Rabbi Steven Greenberg uses a stripped down version of Delacroix's figures for the cover of his book, that wrestles with the Jewish tradition and homosexuality.<sup>91</sup>

Michael Fishbane, in the Chapter entitled "The Mystery of Dance," describes Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav's use of dance as a healing tool:

*Hence simple dance, when performed in the service of religious ends and not purely private passions (hitlavut ha-yetzer) may induce a catalytic catharsis in the individual and lead to a higher healing. But this requires the celebrant to direct the energies so elicited toward the divisive and depressive dimensions of the self...The antidote is the joy of dance. Its circular swirl draws the heavenly Shekhinah down to the earthly realm, where it may alight upon the sick soul in healing union...Nahman interprets the passage as God's descent that effects a*

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<sup>91</sup> Steven Greenberg, *Wrestling with God and Men: Homosexuality in the Jewish Tradition* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004).



*therapeutic transformation of the sick into tzaddiqim, or righteous saints.*<sup>92</sup>

The passage of which Nahman speaks is not the subject of this thesis. It is from the Jerusalem Talmud, which describes God as the leader of every dance troupe for the righteous.<sup>93</sup> But it could easily be our passage. God's descent into the earthly realm in the guise of the "man" effects a transformation of Jacob's divisive and depressive self into Israel, a righteous one, able to prevail over men and God. By being "left alone" (Gen. 32:25), Jacob, himself, creates a space into which he can draw down the heavenly Shekhinah to the earthly realm, where it might alight upon his sick soul in healing union.

We notice a pattern in the Bible that Jacob never allows solitary space to enter his life. He is with his brother in the womb, his mother and father manipulate him, Laban aggravates him, and his wives confuse him. He is on stage only with one character at a time, but **always** another. This is the first time that Jacob has space and place to confront the "divisive and depressive dimensions" of himself before he can move on from his camp by the Jabbok. It lasts only a split second, one half a verse. Is it any wonder that Jacob's history comes rushing into the vacuum he has allowed? God has sent Jacob a messenger with whom he can both wrestle and dance, challenging him to the core, but also comforting and strengthening him for the confrontation with Esau ahead. Jacob works through the night overcoming and coming to terms with his demons. By the end of the night he is ready for some true healing.

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<sup>92</sup> Michael Fishbane, *The Exegetical Imagination on Jewish Thought and Theology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 176.

<sup>93</sup> JT *Megillah* 2:4. Also Midrash Vayikra Rabbah 11:9.

**Section V. When He Saw That He Could Not Overcome  
Him...**

## A. The Enlightening Touch

The battle continues. The narrative is remarkably brief, but the struggle, it tells us, is waged all night long. Yalqut Shimoni asks the question, "How can Jacob prevail against a messenger of God who is as large as the world?" Nachmanides answers that this angel was not sent to defeat Jacob but only to harm him, to pull out his hip.<sup>94</sup> God purposefully confined the messenger to a particular mission. The Zohar emphasizes *v'yar*, and He **saw** (that he could not prevail). The Zohar alludes to the *sephirot* when claiming that the Angel came from the right (*Hod*) and saw the merits of Abraham and knew he could not prevail from the right. He then approached from the left (*Netzakh*) and saw the merits of Isaac and knew he could not prevail from the left and so he had to approach Jacob from the front, and from this frontal position, seeing Tifferet, the consort of the Shekhinah, he **saw** he could not prevail.<sup>95</sup> Though not able to defeat the powerful Jacob, the angel is able to strike a painful yet not decisive blow.

The Zohar attests that the only place that the assailant could find a weak spot was at the hip, the traditional generative symbol:

*He reached for (yiga) his hip socket and wrenched (teqa) Jacob's hip socket in his struggle with him.*

*Yiga*, touch, strike, reach, from the root *n-g-* is usually translated as "He *touched* his hip socket." I have translated it here as "reached" because it is graphically described

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<sup>94</sup> Ramban on Genesis 32:26.

<sup>95</sup> *Aspaklaria*, ed. Shmuel Avraham Adler, 29 vols., (Jerusalem: Hotzat Aspaklaria, 1988), vol. 9, page 390. See also Tishby on Zohar, vol. 3, p.1146.

in the Talmud that when two men wrestle they do so, "like a person who embraces his fellow, so that his hand reaches (*maga 'at*) until (*od*) the right haunch of his fellow." <sup>96</sup>

If we listen to the way verse 26 would be told orally, *n-g-*' (reach) is a homophone for the root *n-g-h* with a *heh* instead of the *ayin*. *Nagah* with a *heh* means "to shine," "to enlighten." In the darkness of the wrestling night, the man, our messenger, touches Jacob with the touch of enlightenment. Another example of God enlightening the darkness is found in the Second Book of Samuel: 22:29:

*V'Adonai yagihah hashkhi, Adonai lights up my darkness.*

This special touch is a magical touch. It lights up the screen, like a fairy wand. In the darkest part of Jacob's night struggle, at the moment of greatest pain, there is light. Do we see this artistically expressed? Note that in the Patissou painting there is a glow around the figures, but it is really around their heads and arm embrace, highlighting what appears to be a kiss. Rembrandt is the only one who gives any indication of this special touch. Note the angel's left hand on Jacob's right hip and the angel's right knee pressing against Jacob's back. This hold is quite a jujitsu move. The angel's right knee is in darkness, but Jacob's right hip is highlighted by the lightening of the paint under the angel's hand. Rembrandt is very sparing with his light in all his paintings and therefore we must pay attention to its placement. This delicate, but intentionally heightened light, draws our attention to the right hip and the magical "touch" "*naga*"" and dislocation by the angel. <sup>97</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> BT *Chullin* 91a

<sup>97</sup> BT *Chullin* 91a spends much time on the argument over which hip is touched and therefore which thigh meat is forbidden to eat. In general, the argument tends to stress the right hip because of the *heh* before *kaf ha-yerekh*, meaning the dominant right hip. Nonetheless, *halachically* both hips are forbidden unless their sciatic

*Nagah* (shine) is a verb used to describe the radiance of the moon's light. If we compare a line from Isaiah 13:8 with Gen. 32:26 we can hear a wonderful assonance between *yerekh* (hip) and *yareakh* (moon)

*V'yareakh lo'-yagiah 'oro*

*And the moon shall shine no light.*

*(Lo 'Yekhol) lo, vayiga' bekhaf-yerekho ,*

*(he couldn't prevail) He touched his hip socket.*

The moon may have set on our wrestling couple, but the light of enlightenment shines bright in the confrontation. Though not evident in the Midrash, the paintings rely on the "night light" of the angel to illuminate the scene. Without the light from the angel, the scene would be pitched in utter darkness.

## **B. Repentance and Pledge**

The verse continues to describe the wound inflicted upon Jacob's hip. The use of the word *teqa'* could mean sprained, dislocated, a strike or blow, but interestingly can also be from the same root for blowing the shofar. The shofar is so intimately connected with both the *Aqedah* and the Revelation at Sinai through the High Holiday liturgy that we hear each year in the *Shofarot* service:

*The shofar summons us to sacrificial devotion, recalling the ram which replaced Isaac on the altar; recalling Abraham's readiness to offer all*

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nerves are properly "porged" or removed. However, it seems the argument for forbidding both hips could easily be supported by the two-fold repetition of *kaf yerekh*.

*to God, The shofar calls us to remember the revelation at Mount Sinai accompanied by "trembling, and thunderous Shofar blasts. (teqiah)"*<sup>98</sup>

It is possible to say here that just as the shofar blast is a wake up call, so, too, is this divine touch (*teqah*) a call to Jacob that the time has come for change and change he will on a personal and national level.

In addition to these alternate meanings, *taqah* is used later in Proverbs (17:18 and 22:26) where the clap of the hand (*toqea kaf*) is a gesture ratifying a bargain, specifically pledging oneself to become surety.<sup>99</sup> Through Jacob's injury (*teqa' kaf yerekh*), Israel pledges itself as surety through the generations. Through this injury, Jacob will be freed, purged, cleansed (*tinaqeh*) from his past.

### C. Generation

It is this very part of the anatomy, the thigh, that evokes the image of past and future generations. The *yerekh*, thigh, is the very symbol of a pledge. In Genesis 47:29, Jacob requires his son, Joseph, to make an oath about his burial by placing his hand under Jacob's thigh, the symbol of the life force.<sup>100</sup> Ibn Ezra states bluntly that the *yerekh* is referring euphemistically to the penis,<sup>101</sup> the location of the *brit kodesh*, the sacred covenant between Abraham, his descendents, and God.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> *Machzor Chadash*, p.323.

<sup>99</sup> Francis Brown, Driver, S.R., Briggs, Charles, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, trans. Edward Robinson (Oxford, England: Clarendon press, 1951), 1075.

<sup>100</sup> See also Genesis 24:2,9, Eliezer's oath to Abraham.

<sup>101</sup> Ibn Ezra on Genesis 32:25.

<sup>102</sup> Genesis 17:9-14.

This relationship between the thigh and procreation is further deepened after Jacob goes down to Egypt to see Joseph. The twelve brothers, who accompany him, represent the twelve tribes that issue from Jacob, the seeds of a great nation:

*All the persons belonging to Jacob who came to Egypt-his own issue*

*(yotsei yerekho)...*

*Gen. 46:26*

Where both Abraham and Isaac are blessed with only one child who will become Israel, a precarious situation, Jacob is blessed with twelve offspring to ensure the nation's survival. "All that issues from Jacob" will come to mean all the generations down to our own time.

Nehama Leibowitz explains carefully the concept that the struggles of our ancestors portend the struggles we will have with other nations. According to the Midrash, the angels who ascended and descended Jacob's ladder at Bethel were the princes of the nations whose destinies rise and descend.<sup>103</sup> Leibowitz cites *Krochmal's Moreh Nevukhei Hazeman (Guide of the Perplexed of this Age)* to explain this rabbinic philosophy:

*The essence of a nation is not synonymous with its physical existence but its spiritual character...The spiritual essence animating and distinguishing each people was personified. Just as the king of a nation represents it visibly, so its god represents its unifying and coherent inner essence.*<sup>104</sup>

<sup>103</sup> Tanhuma ha-Nidpas, *Vayeitzei* and *Pirkei d'Rebbe Eliezer* Chapter 25.

<sup>104</sup> Nehama Leibowitz, *Studies in Bereshit in the Context of Ancient and Modern Jewish Bible Commentary*, trans. Aryeh Newman (Jerusalem: Benzi Hadar, 1976), 368.

Jacob's encounter with the Prince of Esau, the representative of Edom, of Rome, is a perfect example of the rabbinic principle that the deeds of the patriarchs are a sign to their descendants. Midrash Lekah Tov (Gen. 32:25) clarifies the text as a symbolic national struggle between Esau and Jacob, in addition to tying together the themes of night and thigh present in the story:

*For the exile is like the night. The nations of the world and the wicked kingdom of Edom wrestle with Israel to lead them astray from the path of the Lord... "And when he saw that he could not prevail against him," that he could not dissuade Israel from acknowledging the unity of the Omnipresent, "he touched the hollow of his thigh," that is the circumcision. Indeed the wicked government instituted religious persecution and forbade the circumcision of their children. "And the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint," referring to those defiled during the days of persecution.*<sup>105</sup>

Leibowitz continues the thought: "Before Jacob actually encountered Esau in the flesh, his spirit struggled with that of Esau's, with his **national genius**."<sup>106</sup> Classical Midrash, in times of great persecution and oppression, is quick to see Esau as the embodiment of the world's evil. Stefano Zuffo, unfortunately without illustration, declares that,

*At the beginning of Christian art, Jacob is shown wrestling directly with God. Later, God is replaced by an angel. In medieval art Jacob*

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<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.* A more ghastly description of persecutions can be found in Ramban on Genesis 32:25.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 369.



*often clashes with a demon. Often the scene is similar to the portrayal of the legendary episode of St. Christopher and the angel. In Christian art, Jacob's sick (wounded) leg symbolizes the Jews and the synagogue, a withered limb being a symbol of disbelief...*<sup>107</sup>

Perhaps the abundance of persecution in the Midrash is in answer to this visible humiliating representation in the Church. Where paintings and stained glass were the vehicle for teaching Biblical literature to Christians who in general were not literate, literacy was more widespread amongst the Jewish population. The lack of angst and in fact the gaiety with which Jacob dances with the angel in our medieval Haggadot belies what may be an underlying national fear for survival which is prevalent in the midrashic literature. But the text encourages and provides a *nehemtah*, a consolation. Jacob may be wounded, but the enemy shall not prevail, *lo' yekhol lo*.

The Midrash provides many faces for this mission, all wrestled under the cover of darkness; the face of Esau, the face of Rome, the face of Jacob's past, the merits of his ancestry and the face of his own insecurities. But as the dawn approaches, the light shines on the truth of the encounter and in its truth it will bring further healing.

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<sup>107</sup> Stefano Zuffo, *Old Testament Figures in Art* (LA: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2003), 136.

## **Section VI. Release**

### A. Uttering His Name

"Let me go!" cries the Angel, "for the dawn is breaking!" "I will not let you go until you bless me" (Gen. 32:26). Steven Molen, in a tightly written essay, wonders about this mysterious opponent who has the strength to crush flesh and bone, but the weakness to beg for mercy.<sup>108</sup> He is both human and divine. Molen points out the similarity between Esau's begging for food in Gen. 25:30 and 32:26:

*Let me eat (that red pottage), for I am starving! (Gen. 25:30)*

*Let me go, for the dawn is breaking (Gen. 32:26)*

The syntax is clearly similar and in both cases Jacob exacts a price; in the former, the birthright (*bekhorah*) and in the later, the blessing (*berakhah*). Just as the wrestling match mirrors Jacob's struggle in the womb with Esau (Gen. 25:22), we see another parallel between Jacob's present predicament at the Jabbok and his brother's entreaty to him for food in the past. This is another clue that the strange assailant is the "Prince of Esau."

### B. Heaven and Earth Connect

Although this intertextual connection gives us a horizontal link in time, a unique Midrash in Pirke de Rebbe Eliezer, Chapter 37, gives us the vertical relationship between heaven and earth:

*"Let me go, for the time has arrived when I must arise and sing and chant praises before the Holy One, blessed be He." But Jacob did not wish to let him go. What did the angel do? He began to sing and to*

<sup>108</sup> Steven Molen, "The Identity of Jacob's Opponent: Wrestling with Ambiguity in Genesis 32:22-32," *Shofar* 11, no. 2 (1993), 21.

*chant praises from the earth. And when the angels (on High) heard the voice of the angel who was singing and praising God from the earth, they said: "Because of the honor of the righteous one (Jacob) do we hear the voice of the angel who is singing and praising from the earth." And concerning him the verse says, "From the uttermost part of the earth have we heard songs, glory to the righteous" (Isaiah 24:16)*

Midrash ha-Gadol reiterates this story, but with a new twist. In recognition of the angel who stayed behind on earth with the righteous Jacob, angels in heaven would not begin to sing praises above for the morning prayers, until they heard singing from below, from earth.<sup>109</sup>

The image of a connection between heaven and earth is best exemplified in a painting by Eduard von Gebhardt, an artist of the German Modern School. The painting in Figure 14 of *Jacob Wrestling with the Angel* depicts a relationship between the figures we have not seen before, except perhaps to some extent in the Rembrandt where the angel is positioned just slightly above Jacob and seemingly rising. In the Gebhardt, Jacob is surrounded by mundane realia: a blanket, a straw hat, a thermos, his staff, and there is a charming pastoral scene in the rear of the painting. The angel rises effortlessly above him as Jacob grasps for the angel's ankles. One is struck by the pathos upon Jacob's face, the gentle orientation of the angel's hands, and its compassionate expression. He looks as if he is about to bless Jacob from above. Jacob is painted in dark hues and the angel is shimmering with a heavenly glow. This painting, more than any we have addressed in this paper, shows the struggling figures in vertical orientation.

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<sup>109</sup> Midrash haGadol, Genesis 32:27.

As Steven Molen writes, every line in this narrative echoes a piece of Jacob's memory.<sup>110</sup> Gebhardt's rendition re-enacts Jacob's grasping of Esau's heel at birth in a new light. Gebhardt sensitively renders the melancholy in Jacob's face, now old, as he clings to the angel, a personification of his dear brother. There is no animosity or deceit in Jacob's countenance. There is no bitterness or resentment in the angel's (Esau's) face. There is only love between the twin brothers. One can practically hear Jacob crying, "Don't go, please, I beg you, don't go, my brother." The angel, in the full vigor of youth, represents their childhood, while Jacob symbolizes their old age.

From the moment of this painting we can continue on in the dialogue to verse twenty-seven. Jacob demands or pleads: "*Berakhtani*, you **have** blessed me," in the **past** tense, not *t'varekhni*, in the future tense. This curious use of the past tense alerts us that Jacob is asking for something quite different than we might at first imagine.<sup>111</sup> Is he not asking the Angel to bless his past, to say that the stealing of the birthright and blessing were in the service of God's will and forgivable? How can he leave this past blemish behind without the pardon he needs from the Divine? The next line, verse 28, answers this question.

"What is your name? he asked. 'Jacob', he said." Pure and simple. I am now Jacob, guilty of the deceit within my name. The last time he was asked that question by his father, Isaac, Jacob lied and said he was Esau (Gen. 27:18-19). Now that Jacob is able to own his "Jacobness," he is fully ready for repentance. As the Rambam instructs, true repentance requires the recognition of one's sins as sins, *ha'karat ha-het*.<sup>112</sup> Just one

<sup>110</sup> Molen, "The Identity of Jacob's Opponent," 23.

<sup>111</sup> Rashi on Genesis 32:27.

<sup>112</sup> Mishneh Torah, *Hilchot Teshuvah*.

word, Jacob's own name, embodies who he truly is, carries his identity like a driver's license. *Yaaqov*, Jacob, the heel, the heel grabber,<sup>113</sup> the wrestler, *me'aveq*, on the bank of the Jabbok, *Yabboq*. The *leitwortsils*, repeated words and roots, *yud*, *bet*, *kuf*, hit us again and again in these few lines. Simply by stating his name to this strange messenger he can own his own sins. This is the moment we see painted in the Gebhardt; Jacob saying his true name and the angel lifting his hands to bless. "Now that you can own your sins," says the angel, "Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel" (Gen. 32:29). It is this moment that is emphasized by the vertical orientation of the painting. Jacob is being drawn upward in a heavenly ascent to another spiritual level in response to his ability to confront his past, his mistakes, himself.

In previous illustrations, the Haggadot, the Miscellany, the Dore, the Rosa, the action is decidedly horizontal. In the Rothschild and the Catalan illuminations Jacob's family is depicted crossing over the river, from right to left and Esau comes to meet them. These actions occur over the period of two days. The horizontal is used to extend the story into the future while bringing along some elements of the past. By contrast, in the Gebhardt, the tone is totally vertical. This moment of revelation for Jacob connects heaven to earth.

### C. Naming and Blessing

We might predict that such a momentous encounter between heaven and earth would mean that Jacob would not return to his wayward self. The text tells us that he will no longer be called Jacob, but that is in fact not the case. Unlike Abraham and Sarah who

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<sup>113</sup>Waskow, *Godwrestling*, *passim*.

lose their previous names entirely, Jacob retains his *Yaaqov*. It is used no fewer than seventy five times after his name change to Israel.<sup>114</sup>

*And he said, "No longer shall you be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men and prevailed." Genesis 32:28*

Steve Molen suggests that the name Israel **contains** rather than cancels Jacob, that the name Israel "updates rather than effaces the older name's dependence on the heel of Esau."<sup>115</sup> Both names, Jacob and Israel, are descriptive of a man who contends, heel grabber and striver, but the former carries with it a pejorative sense. Esau explains the etiology of Jacob's name as "supplanter" in Genesis 27:36: "*Was he named then Jacob that he might supplant me these two times*" (for the birthright and blessing.) Esau cries out for simple justice but recognizes that one's identity resides in the name.

Another identity for the angel lies in the principle that an angel is named for his mission.<sup>116</sup> Though most of the midrashim try to identify the Angel as Gabriel, Michael or the Prince of Esau, Pirkei de Rebbe Eliezer takes this different view:

*And (the angel) called his (Jacob's) name Israel like his own name, for his (the angel's) own name was Israel.*<sup>117</sup>

The angel instructs Jacob to be one who strives with the earthly and the divine, to be a warrior of God until God's opposition in this world is defeated. Bereshit Rabbah

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<sup>114</sup> Shulman, *Genius of Genesis*, 119.

<sup>115</sup> Molen, "The Identity of Jacob's Opponent," 24. Also see Bereshit Rabbah 78:3 "It was not intended that the name of Jacob should disappear, but that 'Israel' should be his principal name and 'Jacob' a secondary one.

<sup>116</sup> Genesis Rabbah 78:3, Tosafot to BT *Sanhedrin* 37b and Midrash ha-Gadol to Gen. 32:27.

<sup>117</sup> Pirkei de Rebbe Eliezer, Chapter 37.

further explains that angels have no definite name because angels' names change with the missions upon which they are sent. Isaiah 40:26 clarifies this concept:

*Who created these? He who sends out their host by count, who calls them each by name. This, however, teaches that there is no permanent name, but a continuous change in the present name (of an angel), not being the same as he may bear later on.*<sup>118</sup>

The same principle holds true in the story of Manoah and his wife who are visited by an angel before the birth of Samson:

*For Manoah did not know he was an Angel of the Lord. So Manoah said to the angel of the Lord, "What is your name? The Angel of the Lord said to him, "You must not ask for my name; it is unknowable!"*

*(Judges 13:16-18)*

This quote accords with Jacob's conversation with the wrestling man, but rather than denying his identity to Jacob as Manoah's angel does, the angel asks Jacob a question. By averting a direct answer to Jacob's question, the angel aligns himself with both aspects of Israel's new name. In other words, because the "man" refuses to define his own identity, he can be characterized as both of man and of God.<sup>119</sup>

Sforno defines the angel's mission slightly differently:

*Tell me, if you please, your name which indicates your essence and your mission, that I might know why you were sent to confront me, so I will be able to repent and pray.*<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Bereshit Rabbah 78:4.

<sup>119</sup> Molen, "The Identity of Jacob's Opponent," 26.

<sup>120</sup> Sforno on Genesis 32:30.



Sforno sees the mission of the angel not in terms of strengthening or weakening Jacob, but in terms of demanding from Jacob *teshuvah*, repentance, for his past sins, so that he may rectify them and move on. This would mean that the name Israel is both a blessing and a kind of curse because it represents Jacob's **obligation** to confront both God and men, and wrestle towards resolution rather than obscuring issues. Jacques Lipchitz, the famous sculptor, interprets the Godwrestling narrative as God's invitation to us to fight with Him.<sup>121</sup> Bereshit Rabbah makes this concept of repentance clear by explaining Jacob's repeated bowings to his brother Esau when they meet in Genesis 33:3:

*R. Hanina b Isaac said: He did not cease from repeatedly prostrating himself until he converted judgment to mercy.*<sup>122</sup>

Soncino's note to Genesis 33:3 assures us that Jacob is bowing not to his brother but to God, asking for God's mercy.<sup>123</sup> Jacob's process of *teshuvah* throughout the narrative, enduring the long dark night of struggle within his soul, comes to a culmination when he recognizes his name, Jacob, for what it truly is, an identity which he wishes to leave behind.

In a novel interpretation, Steve Molen conjectures that the pronouns in this part of the Jacob narrative continue to be purposefully confused regarding who is who (and who is "he") during the struggle. We thought we left that confusion behind in verse twenty-six, but Molen boldly asserts that the configuration of the verses from twenty-seven to thirty shows a pattern of alternating sentences, one attributable to Jacob, then one attributable to the "man," so that when we come to the line "*va-yevarekh oto sham, he*

<sup>121</sup> Richard Cork, *Jacob Epstein* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 63.

<sup>122</sup> Bereshit Rabbah 78:8.

<sup>123</sup> A. Cohen, *The Soncino Chumash* (Hindhead, Surrey: Soncino Press, 1983).

*blessed him there,*" though every translation attributes this blessing to the "*ish*" who then departs,<sup>124</sup> Molen, looking at the pattern differently, ascribes it to Jacob.<sup>125</sup> Molen is saying that **Jacob** actually blesses the **angel**. Because the angel gives such an obscure reply to the question, "What is your name?" Jacob realizes it is an angel. It follows that this surprise enlightenment, "Ah, I have been wrestling with the Divine!" would naturally be followed by a "thank you," a praise of the Divine for being given the opportunity. Jacob is blessing the angel for confronting him with his personal demons. This act of blessing the stranger foreshadows Jacob's obsequious bowing and the offering of blessing to his brother, Esau (Gen. 33:10) and suggests a substantial explanation of Jacob's announcement that seeing Esau's face is like "seeing the face of God" (Gen. 33:10). It is a provocative interpretation.<sup>126</sup>

A fine example of Jacob's purposeful and joyous release of the angel is seen in Fred Terna's painting *Renamed at Dawn* (Fig. 15). Here we see a Jacob who releases the angel and bows on bended knees with arms lifted to the radiance, giving thanks and praise to the enlightenment he has received from this messenger. Why shouldn't Jacob, given so many gifts, bless the angel instead of vice versa?

In one of the most powerful representations of the *dénouement* of the scene, Jacob Epstein, the noted sculptor, has carved an arresting piece of work. Figure 15 shows the figures clasped in an embrace, the angel now in complete control; Jacob appears to completely surrender. It is again reminiscent of the Rembrandt where Jacob is enfolded

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<sup>124</sup> In fact many translations render the line as "and he departed" without mention of a blessing at all.

<sup>125</sup> Molen, "The Identity of Jacob's Opponent," 26.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

in the niche of the angel's arms. The Midrash tells a similar story based on Genesis 27:21:

*Then when Isaac said to Jacob, "Come near, I pray thee, that I may feel thee, my son," urine ran down Jacob's thighs, and his heart turned soft as wax. But the Holy One provided him with two angels, one at his right and one at his left, who supported him by his elbows so that he should not fall.<sup>127</sup>*

Epstein gives us another version of this Midrash. One angel holds Jacob up under his arms and prevents him from falling, not from fear, but from sheer exhaustion or possibly from the shock of revelation. Both our 20<sup>th</sup> century artists, Terna and Epstein, show the battle not as a draw, as we have seen in earlier portrayals such as the Salvator Rosa, but as a complete surrender of Jacob to the greater power. Note how equally matched are Epstein's Jacob and Angel in breadth of shoulder, torso, hands, legs, and feet, yet the artist describes a magnificent contrast in spirit between the two, so brilliantly portrayed in this medium of alabaster. The angel lifts Jacob like a sleeping baby. Epstein marvelously defines this power difference by the bend in the knees.

Richard Cork's book on Jacob Epstein provides both historical, biblical and art critical contexts for the work that was carved between 1940 and 1941 as Europe raged in war:

*In one respect, the choice of subject surely reflects his (Epstein's) appalled response to the struggle in Europe. The story in Genesis of Jacob's nocturnal encounter with a mysterious man, who*

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<sup>127</sup> Bereshit Rabbah 65:19.

*'wrestled...with him until the breaking of the day,' had a ready-made pertinence during this protracted conflict. But the emotional charge of the carving itself proves that Epstein had other, more personal motives for choosing the subject as well. It was surely significant that he shared his first name with the biblical Jacob. The wrestling enacted in the sculpture paralleled his own attempt to struggle with the outsize slabs of stone he favored. For a whole year his sustained and concentrated expenditure of energy on this great carving was as formidable, in its way, as Jacob's valiant attempt to fight his anonymous antagonist. When the angel's wings are viewed from behind, their insistent flatness retains a suggestion of the unhewn block. So Jacob could be seen as an embodiment of the sculptor himself, seeking to impose his will on the material rearing like a cliff in front of him.<sup>128</sup>*

This insight into the emotional struggle of the artist with the medium brings to mind the diaries of the Symbolists, writing about their own struggles with the canvas and the muse that comes from a higher source. But for Epstein, Jacob does not look like the victor. Jacob cannot be called the decisive winner in our narrative as he limps away with a severe though not mortal wound. Cork writes further:

*Epstein...realized how much a sculptor could gain from allowing the nature of the material to play a decisive role in the carving's development. Perhaps Epstein saw a parallel, here, with the sculptor's*

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<sup>128</sup> Cork, *Jacob Epstein*, 60, 63.

*capacity to benefit from the closest possible engagement with and acknowledgment of the profound stimulus inherent in the stone.*<sup>129</sup>

This giant portrait of the struggle and Cork's elucidation epitomize the artists' internal and external engagement and combat with their materials. Unlike the Symbolists, who maintained their godlike superiority, possibly Modernists, defeated in spirit by the excesses of the modern age, admit surrender to a greater force that expresses itself as art. The artistic work represents an external expression of an internal itch that could not be suppressed. Once executed, the finished product leaves the artist both weakened by the effort, yet strengthened by its coming to fruition; weakened, because the engagement with that piece is now complete, and strengthened by the wisdom that comes from that engagement.

Does this not parallel the biblical portrayal of our Jacob? Jacob is both weakened by the wound he suffers and the completion of the encounter, yet strengthened because of the wisdom that comes with both. Radak notes that it is not until later, as Jacob limps past Penueel, that he feels the pain in his hip.<sup>130</sup> There is a delay between the astonishment of illumination and the real pain in carrying on.

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<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>130</sup> Radak on Genesis 32:32.

## **Section VII. The Sun Rose Upon Him**

Peeking over the trees in the Gebhardt painting is the sun announcing '*alot ha-shahar*, the rising of the dawn.

*And the sun rose upon him as he crossed by Penuel, and he was limping on his thigh. (verse 32)*

Radak finds this delay intriguing and interprets verse 32, "*as he crossed Penuel, he felt more pain and found himself limping.*" This phrasing emphasizes the time it takes after a trauma to actually assess reality, to reenter the body and find oneself again, similar to the bewilderment experienced in disorientation after an accident. The Zohar writes that only after the trauma will pain be felt and the wounded will be astonished in hindsight at the ordeal they have survived,<sup>131</sup> just as Jacob in verse 31 states that he saw God and, according to Torah, should not have survived,<sup>132</sup> but in fact did.

The Zohar alludes that dawn on this morning comes slowly, in two parts, for although revelation may come instantaneously, redemption takes more time.<sup>133</sup> Rashi has his own math. He states that the sun, that set prematurely for Jacob at Bethel, forcing him to stop and have his ladder dream,<sup>134</sup> is now making up the hours and rising prematurely to heal Jacob's wounds.<sup>135</sup> Rashi and Radak refer to Malachi who sings graphically:

*But for you who revere My name, a sun of victory shall rise with healing in its wings...and you shall trample the wicked to a pulp, for*

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<sup>131</sup> Aspaklaria, vol. 9, 391.

<sup>132</sup> Exodus 32:20.

<sup>133</sup> Aspaklaria, vol 9, 390.

<sup>134</sup> Genesis 28:11.

<sup>135</sup> Rashi on Genesis 28:11.

*they shall be dust beneath your feet on the day that I am preparing,*

*said the Lord of Hosts. ( Malachi 3:20-21)*

The image of dust (*'afar*) returns to the scene in an image of combat and this time it not only obscures our vision, but it buries the enemy.



**Section VIII. The Children of Israel To This Day Do Not  
Eat The Thigh Muscle**

## A. Re-membering the Imaginable

How does an individual and an entire nation remember an encounter with the Divine? We as Jews know that celebrating Passover and Shavuot each year, sounding the shofar, and re-reading special holiday texts are ways in which we remember our encounter with the Divine power that took us out from Egypt and met us at the foot of Mt. Sinai. Here in our text we see a different method, detailed as an etymological footnote in verse 33. Mary Douglas calls this a spiritual change reinforced by a kitchen change.<sup>136</sup> Verse 33 identifies and explains the first law pertaining to *kashrut*. Not only is this the first rule, it is also the only rule of *kashrut* in the Torah which is given an etiology.

This, like the light that surrounds Rembrandt's hip, alerts us to the significance of Jacob/Israel's transformation. Not only does our narrative teach us that we have an obligation to strive with God as the nation Israel, but we have an obligation to remember the original striving and commemorate it by our eating habits. We are reminded by our laws of *kashrut* of the merit of our father Jacob, and by not eating this delicious portion, it is *q'iylu*, as if we ourselves wrestled all night with the angel. This is the same *q'iylu* in our Passover Haggadah; it is as if we ourselves left Egypt by the hand of God.

There is general agreement that the *gid hanasheh* is the sciatic nerve and *halachic* law requires that the *gid hanasheh* be removed completely or the thigh meat must be discarded. This portion of the cow is the filet mignon, the tastiest and most cherished of meats. To remove the sciatic which branches like a tree from hip to heel, one must dig

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<sup>136</sup> Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London, England: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), 10.

very deeply and patiently which could be a metaphor for the need to confront our past mistakes by digging deeply to be able to enjoy the most delicious reward. Just as Radak speaks of the angel taking on *gashmiut*, materiality,<sup>137</sup> we, too, make incarnate the spiritual transformation that occurred at the Jabbok. It is an outward manifestation of an inward yearning for *deveikut*, union with the Divine.

## **B. The Dawn of Repentance**

The night has passed, morning has broken, the assailant has disappeared leaving Jacob transformed by what has occurred. We began with William Bridges' description of the transformative process and looking back on the late night struggle, one could easily describe it as Bridges does, as a period of disorientation, dis-identification and discovery. The text indirectly tells us that Jacob discovers that he is no longer a cad, but a man of integrity. Though outer manifestations of a mark on his body and a name change remain, the true transformation is internal. We will only know the nature of this transformation through Jacob's future actions in the following chapters.

A remarkable example of the changes engendered by the night of wrestling is a painting by George Frederic Watts, a painter of the Modern British School. Watts' "*The Meeting of Jacob and Esau*" seen in figure 18 shows a frail, impoverished, vulnerable Jacob being greeted by his swarthy brother. They are totally unlike the equally matched pair of wrestlers the night before. Jacob and his brother Esau, in this painting, remind us of the first description of their nature. Esau is an *ish sadeh*, a man of the field, and Jacob is an *ish tam*, a mild man.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Radak on Genesis 32:26.

<sup>138</sup> Genesis 26:27.

In this depiction of the aftermath of the battle, Jacob is stripped of his strength, that great strength he used to push open the cave at Haran to impress the beautiful Rachel.<sup>139</sup> Looking at Jacob's pitiful condition in the Watt's painting, his whole life comes back to us; the deceit, the running, and the confrontations which clearly have taken a severe toll on him. Jacob's bedraggled face and body even may recall the image of the blind, aged, ailing father, Isaac, blessing the boys.<sup>140</sup> Jacob is a different man, accepting the embrace and kiss of his brother Esau. At first glance, Esau leans into the frail Jacob as if to whisper something in his ear. But everything about this meeting, starting with the text itself, gives us pause. The text reads:

*Esau ran to greet him. He embraced him and, falling on his neck, he kissed him, and they wept. (Gen. 33:4).*

The wording is so precise and sets off all manner of alarm bells of recognition from previous texts. Esau "ran," "*yaratz*," echoes the text from Genesis 25:22 where the boys "struggle" "*yitrotzetzu*," within Rachel's womb before they are even born. Now Esau runs towards him, rather than tearing him apart in utero.<sup>141</sup>

Esau embraces him, "*yihabqehu*," recalling the "*behe'aveq*" of the wrestling, the roots of *avaq* (wrestling) and *havaq* (embracing) so tantalizingly close.<sup>142</sup> Has the battle been transformed to an embrace? The Midrash is horribly equivocal. The word for "and he kissed him," "*vayishaqehu*," has unusual diacritical dots over the Hebrew. Rashi tells us that these dots alert us that the text means not what it says, a kind of "highlighting" of the Torah script. However, Rashi is very even handed over what he thinks the dots mean

<sup>139</sup> Genesis 29:10.

<sup>140</sup> Genesis 27:1, 27.

<sup>141</sup> Cohen, *Self, Struggle and Change*, 203, note 26.

<sup>142</sup> See the discussion at Section IV:C.

to say. One tradition in Sifre, Rashi relates, believes that the dots mean that Esau did not kiss wholeheartedly, while another argues that since we know Esau hates Jacob, this kiss represents a complete change of heart.<sup>143</sup>

Pirkei de Rebbe Eliezer tells the oft told story that *yishaqehu* should be *yishakhehu*, with a *kof* instead of a *kuf*, which means Esau bit him! But, of course, a miracle happens and Jacob's neck turns to marble so Esau breaks his teeth and that is why he weeps.<sup>144</sup> Ibn Ezra firmly condemns this tale.<sup>145</sup> He countenances no more demonization of poor Esau.

With this much ambivalence and disagreement among the Rabbis, what can a deeper look at our Watt's painting tell us? Jacob is clearly in no shape to offer any resistance. Esau's accompanying soldiers are nowhere in the scene. He comes alone to Jacob. His weapon, strapped to his belt, is clearly evident and menacing. But a more careful look reveals that this is not a sword or dagger, but arrows that are useless without the bow, which Esau is not carrying. His arms are empty but for the caress of his twin brother.

Note well the prominence of the woman peering out between the two men. Jacob has in Genesis 33:1-3 divided his camp and put himself ahead, between his family and Esau. How noteworthy that despite the state we see him in Watt's painting, weakened by the night, he moves himself defensively to the front, willingly making himself vulnerable, a completely different orientation to what we saw earlier in the narrative, where he hides behind his entourage and the River Jabbok.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Rashi on Genesis 33:4. Sifre Bamidbar *Piska* 89.

<sup>144</sup> Pirkei de Rebbe Eliezer Chapter 37. See also Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah 7:5 and Bereshit Rabbah 78:9.

<sup>145</sup> Ibn Ezra on Genesis 33:4.

<sup>146</sup> See Section III-b

Who is the woman observing this reunion? It must be the beautiful Rachel, Jacob's beloved, the one who knew only too well the sorrow of being supplanted by her sibling, Leah. It is Rachel, the daughter of Laban, who is the brother of Rebecca, Jacob and Esau's mother. One could suppose she is the spitting image of her aunt Rebecca. Rachel's portrait in this painting, so centrally located, extends even further the intertextual connections the Biblical text makes to Jacob's life of conflict. She is an icon of Rachel/Rebecca, the wife/mother surveying this reconciliation, the turning from wrestling to embracing, that is before her.

Or, could it be Leah? After all, Jacob, according to Genesis 33:1, arranged the women according to his love for them, putting Leah before Rachel. Perhaps the face is the face of Leah, who knows even more painfully than Rachel the feeling of being unloved and manipulated by family. The painting, with the space it allows for interpretation, asks more questions than it answers. And there lies the painting's beauty. "For this reason," Stephen Geller writes about the Biblical text, "the story is ...a true myth...because it contains tensions that can never be resolved. By being unclear on such a vital point, the text allows intimations of all possible answers."<sup>147</sup>

Knowing the text and commentary intimately, the painting speaks volumes and touches a nerve.

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<sup>147</sup> Geller, *Sacred Enigmas: Literary Religion in the Hebrew Bible*, 23, 24.

### C. Return of the Blessing

Rashi tells us that Jacob prepared to meet Esau in three ways: through battle, through prayer and through gifts.<sup>148</sup> This night was full of battle and Jacob was well prepared and survived. But he also offered out loud a heart wrenching prayer to God in Genesis 32:10-13. The JPS Edition gives us an additional prayer in its translation of Genesis 32:30: *Hagidah-nah shimekha, Pray, tell me your name.* In naming the place Peniel, for "*I have seen a divine being face to face, yet my life has been preserved*, Jacob acknowledges the presence of the Divine and his encounter with It. And now, in his meeting with Esau, Jacob finally returns to his brother the blessing:

*Qakh-nah et-birkhati asher huvat lach*

*Pray, take my blessing which has been brought to you..*<sup>149</sup>

Jacob has been blessed by the Angel/God. What more blessing does he need? He has blessings to spare. Jacob, as depicted in the Watt's portrait, is a weaker man. But internally he is strengthened. Just as looking at the Watt's painting recalls Jacob's whole life, Jacob himself within the text makes an intertextual connection between the blessing he stole from Esau and the one he now returns.

We, as a people, carry with us three keepsakes of this momentous battle. Firstly, we carry our narrative, the Torah, and within it, the tale of Jacob and the Angel. We carry with us the law of *kashrut*. And finally we carry with us the name *Yisrael*. All three are mixed blessings. All three carry personal and national redemption at a price. And all carry a burden of ambiguity.

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<sup>148</sup> Rashi on Genesis 32:9. Also see Tanhuma Buber *Vayishlach* 6:22.

<sup>149</sup> Genesis 33:11.

Dr. Rachel Naomi Remen, in her short story, "Wrestling With the Angel," blesses us with a *nehemtah*, a consolation for life's journey:

*Sometimes a wound is the place where we encounter life for the first time, where we come to know its power and its ways. Wounded, we may find a wisdom that will enable us to live better than any knowledge and glimpse a view of ourselves and of life that is both true and unexpected...this story (is) a compass. It is a puzzling story, a story about the nature of blessings and the nature of enemies. How tempting to let the enemy go and flee. To put the struggle behind you as quickly as possible and get on with your life. Life might be easier then but far less genuine. Perhaps the wisdom lies in engaging the life you have been given fully and courageously as possible and not letting go until you find the unknown blessing that is in everything.*<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Rachel Naomi Remen, *My Grandfather's Blessing* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2000), 25-27.



## **Section IX. Conclusion**

The journey has come full circle. Jacob has almost completed his travels from the east back home to the west. In the last twelve hours he has come from great darkness to an exalted light. Wounded and diminished, he is elevated by a new name and identity. He has survived a murderous attack and now enters the loving embrace of his brother. This journey not only represents a crossing horizontally over the River Jabbok, but a transformation vertically between heaven and earth, spirit and flesh. In a few curt lines we have come to understand a man as a metaphor for not only the human condition, but a cosmic national allegory.

Though the Torah text may be terse, the Rabbinic Literature and art at which we have looked is highly expansive, with angels and armies coming and going. At once the assailant is friend and foe, human and divine, mysterious and tangible. There is tremendous drama and action in the art of the words and the narration in paint, stone and celluloid.

Any creative work runs the risk of becoming a lifeless entity once it is committed to form. While it is still in the head or heart of the creator it has room to grow, expand, and evolve. But once it is expressed, it is set in stone, so to speak. It, therefore, depends on the reader to breathe new life into it and allow the mind's eye to expand on what the physical eye sees. But the creation must allow for such breathing space to enter. If there is no gateway or room to interpret, than engagement by the observer is discouraged.

In this thesis I have chosen to compare a variety of art works spanning generations and media with the medium of Midrashic Literature. Both media reveal their dexterous imagination. Both media provide the student of Torah a vehicle for explanation and each can complement the other in translating the text for different eras

and different learning styles. Prejudice against the visual in Jewish interpretation has fallen away as we can see from the lack of Jewish artists available in "the Age of Enlightenment," but no lack of strong examples from the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

A few trends reveal themselves in this work. First of all, chronologically, the art work appears to expand where the classic Midrash leaves off in the Renaissance. Little to no representations were available of Jacob wrestling before the 13<sup>th</sup> century, not even at Dura or Beit Alph Synagogues (3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries respectively). But much existed in the Midrash. When persecution and oppression are real threats, the written word appears to dominate a tale with nationalistic tendencies such as our text. We can imagine that nationalistic pride must be hidden within the Jewish language for our eyes only. But during periods of enlightenment, when individual autonomy becomes paramount, the graphic may become a more powerful and universal tool to express internal and individual struggle. Interestingly in our progression of artistic choices through the ages, they begin with dance poses, change to true wrestling, then return to dance. Not just any dance, but the Tango, a dance fraught with power, control, and emotion.

One theme that clearly showed itself throughout both written and graphic creations was that of the physicality of Jacob's battle. The Midrash and the art were not reduced to an intellectual battle of wits. The sensuality has not been downplayed. The wrestling that is discussed in this story, whether it is horizontal between Jacob and Esau, vertical between Jacob and God, or internal between Jacob and himself is portrayed as a powerful visceral, intimate grappling. The encounter is a bonding, penetrating, clasping, grasping meeting of tension, danger, pain and exhaustion. The Hebrew *deveikut*, 'clinging,' 'devotion,' 'zeal,' best describes the tension between opposing emotions;

love/hate, devotion/revulsion, sex/violence. The root is from *d-v-k*, the same root for glue. These high emotions are the glue of human drama. This union with the Divine is no less strenuous than wrestling nor less intimate than lovemaking.

In the end, throughout our subjects of inquiry, there is the theme of release, forgiveness, resolution and healing. Left behind is a scar, which whether physical or psychological, nonetheless, goes deep inside the body. A nerve is touched that reminds us what we may want to forget.

In this work I have drawn parallels across boundary lines of time and media to demonstrate that they are a continuum and can complement each other as a teaching and learning tool. As Dr. Jo Milgrom says in her doctoral thesis, "the image is the other side of the word. For any story of relationship, love, succor, battle, the word alone is inadequate. One must see the body move, the gesture intended, the shadow cross the eye."<sup>151</sup> Could there be a better description of the Tango or a better metaphor for our Jacob's wrestling with an angel? In the simple reading of Genesis 32:25-33 we long for a description of these three things, the body, the gesture, the eye, and more. The artistry we have examined takes a step towards satisfying that longing.

This thesis provides only a beginning for a lifetime of further study. In future exploration I would like to study the demonic portrayal of both Esau and Jacob in Midrash and art. More attention to early Christian art may reveal this relevant theme. As a counterpoint, I could look more closely at modern Israeli art on this particular narrative. I also did not include feminist analysis of the Jacob narrative and, therefore, could in the future investigate the story from the point of view of the women in Jacob's family.

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<sup>151</sup> Milgrom, *The Binding of Isaac: The Akedah - a Primary Symbol in Jewish Thought and Art*, 294.

Another avenue I would like to investigate is the history of Judaism's aversion to the image. This thesis could also be a starting point for an exploration on dance in Jewish literature and its use in healing. This could be very helpful to those who suffer from the common ailment we know as sciatica, the pain in the thigh from hip to heel

All in all, this has been a tremendous learning experience. The beginning of a longer journey.

## **Appendix A. Figures**



Figure 1. Bilder-Pentateuch by Moses dal Castellazzo, Codex 1164, 1541



Figure 2. Gustave Dore (1832-1883) "Jacob Wrestling with the Angel"



Figure 3. Salvator Rosa (1615-1673) "Jacob Wrestles with the Angel"



Figure 4. Jacques Patissou (1880-1925) "Jacob Wrestling with the Angel"





Figure 5. Rothschild Miscellany circa 1470



Figure 6. Catalan Haggadah circa 1330, lower left



Figure 7. Golden Haggadah (1310-1320), Barcelona, Spain



Figure 8. Golden Haggadah (1310-1320) Barcelona, Spain



Figure 9. Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669) "Jacob Wrestling with the Angel"



Figure 10. Gustave Moreau "Jacob and the Angel" 1878



Figure 11. Paul Gauguin "Vision after the Sermon: Jacob Wrestling with the Angel" 1888



Figure 12. Eugene Delacroix "Jacob Wrestling with the Angel", ~25 x 16 feet



Figure 13. From Sally Potter's "The Tango Lesson" 1997



Figure14. Eugene Gebhardt (1838-1925) "Jacob Wrestling with the Angel"



Figure 15. Jacob Epstein "Jacob and the Angel" 1940-1941, 84 x 43 x 46 inches



Figure 16. Jacob Epstein "Jacob and the Angel" 1940-1941, View 2



Figure 17. Fred Terna (1923- ) "Renamed at Dawn"



Figure 18. George F. Watts (1817-1904) "The Meeting of Jacob and Esau"

## **Appendix B. Biographical Notes**



Figure 1. The Bilder Pentateuch, Codex 1164, Vienna. The Bilder is a Biblical picture book created in Venice, Italy, in 1541, by Moses dal Castellazzo, probably a Christian humanist. The Bilder Pentateuch is not an illustrated Bible, but a set of successive narratives with the Hebrew text at the top margin and a few lines of Italian script at the bottom from the Rabbinic Midrashic tradition, relating to the pictures. The Pentateuch consists of 123 woodcuts using red, green, and brown colors. The drawings read, like Hebrew, from right to left and display costumes of the period.<sup>1</sup>

Figure 2. *Jacob Wrestling with the Angel*, by Gustav Dore, (1832-1883). Dore was a world famous illustrator of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He is most famous for his illustrations of Dante's *Inferno*, of Edgar Alan Poe's *The Raven*, and of the Bible. He was incredibly prolific, employing up to forty woodcutters and illustrating over two hundred books, some with more than four hundred plates. This massive production represents a commercialization of the Romantic school.<sup>2</sup>

Figure 3. *Jacob Wrestles with the Angel*, by Salvador Rosa, (1615-1673). A Neapolitan painter and etcher of the Italian Baroque period, Rosa is remembered for his wildly romantic landscapes and surly self-portrait. Passionate for the magnitude of nature, he was known for his refusal to choose the most obvious subjects of religious and mythological nature. More associated with Romantic period subjects, Rosa is considered an artist who was 150 years ahead of his time.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Facsimile Edition, Codex 1164*, University of Vienna, 1986.

<sup>2</sup> Gustav Dore, *The Bible in Pictures* (Tel Aviv, Israel: Sinai Publishing, 1954).

<sup>3</sup> [www.countrylife.co.uk/artsantiques/fineart/salvatorrosa](http://www.countrylife.co.uk/artsantiques/fineart/salvatorrosa)

Figure 4. *Jacob Wrestling with the Angel*, by Jacques Patisson, (1880-1925) of the French Modern School.<sup>4</sup> From Nantes in France, he was a professor of painting at the Polytechnic School.

Figure 5. *Rothschild Miscellany*, MS. 180/51, from the Israel Museum, is the most lavish of Hebrew illuminated manuscripts consisting of 948 pages, over three hundred text illustrations, and containing more than fifty religious and secular works including the Passover Haggadah and Siddur. It was created in Northern Italy around 1480. The *Miscellany* was commissioned by Moses ben Yekuthiel ha-Cohen at the height of the Italian Renaissance. This illustration, with beautiful blue and red coloring, of Jacob wrestling the angel was probably painted by Leonardo Bellini and illustrates the Passover song "It Happened One Night."<sup>5</sup>

Figure 6. *The Catalan (Barcelona) Haggadah* of c.1330, British Library MS.2284. This illustration shows Jacob wrestling with the angel on the right and Esau coming to meet Jacob and his camps on the left, with the frames separated by the River Jabbok. This Spanish Haggadah contains only illustrations within the text. Illuminations are of three categories: biblical, ritual, and textual.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Walter Shaw Sparrow, *The Old Testament in Art* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1905), 106.

<sup>5</sup> Bezalel Narkiss, *Hebrew Illuminated Manuscripts* (New York: MacMillan, 1969), 152. MS. 180/51 Facsimile Editions, London, 1989.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

Figure 7 and 8. *The Golden Haggadah*, c.1320, MS. 27210 of the British Library, was probably executed in Barcelona, Spain. The extravagant use of gold leaf in its 56 miniatures earned the Golden its name. Illustrations from the Golden Haggadah include stories from Genesis, Exodus and Jewish ritual. The paintings of this Haggadah were executed by two unknown artists. Fortunately, because of its inoffensive nature, the Golden escaped the censorship of the Church and remained undamaged until it was acquired by the British Library's Hebrew manuscript collection.<sup>7</sup>

Figure 9. *Jacob Wrestling with the Angel*, by Rembrandt van Rijn, (1606-1669).

Rembrandt was a giant in the history of art and the greatest painter of the Netherlands School during its golden period. His paintings are characterized by luxuriant brushwork, rich color, and a mastery of *chiaroscuro*, and were greatly influenced by the work of the Italian painter Caravaggio. He is known for his portraiture and dark moody scenes, many taken from biblical themes. Much attention has been focused recently on his many Jewish themes and use of Jewish models. This painting, dated 1627, is owned by the Berlin Royal Gallery.<sup>8</sup>

Figure 10. *Jacob and the Angel*, by Gustav Moreau (1826-1898). Moreau was one of the leading Symbolists of the French school. A student of the Romantic school, he infused his work with mystically intense images, mythological figures and fanciful civilizations. His painting is sensuous and jewel-like. His students included Matisse and Rouault.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>8</sup> H.W. Janson, *History of Art*, 4th ed. (New York: Prentice Hall, 1991).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

Figure 11. *Vision After the Sermon: Jacob Wrestling with the Angel*, by Paul Gauguin (1848-1903). Gauguin was an "enfant terrible" who bridged the gap between the lyricism of Impressionism and the wild abandon of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Expressionism. Gauguin took an independent avenue, rejecting the civilized middle class of France for the purity and simplicity of Tahiti. *After the Sermon* is an emblem of the Symbolist movement.<sup>10</sup>

Figure 12. *Jacob Wrestling with the Angel*, by Eugene Delacroix (1798-1863). The greatest of French painters from the Romantic movement, Delacroix joined classic painting of the Renaissance to the new modern period by experimenting with the use of vibrating adjacent tones and the division of color. He had a preference for emotionally charged subjects and monumental murals which included religious subjects in, as Baudelaire said, "a faithless generation." This monumental mural is in Saint Sulpice Church in Paris, France.<sup>11</sup>

Figure 13. Sally Potter and Pablo Veron pose in front of Delacroix's St. Sulpice mural of *Jacob Wrestling with the Angel* in the film *The Tango Lesson* (1997), written and directed by Sally Potter. The film explores the relationships between dance and wrestling, power and letting go, art and biblical myth.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> David Hamilton Fraser, *On Gauguin's "Vision after the Sermon-Jacob Struggling with the Angel"*, ed. Carol Weight, *Painters on Painting* (London: Cassell, 1969).

<sup>11</sup> Suzanne M. Singletary, "Jacob Wrestling with the Angel: A Theme in Symbolist Art," *Nineteenth Century French Studies* 32, no. 3-4 (2004).

<sup>12</sup> [www.sonyclassical.com/artists/potter/bio](http://www.sonyclassical.com/artists/potter/bio).

Figure 14. *Jacob Wrestling with the Angel* by Eduard Gebhardt (1838-1925). A painter of the German Modern School, Gebhardt is largely known in Europe for his paintings with epic biblical themes influenced by the German and Dutch national ideals.<sup>13</sup>

Figure 15 and 16. *Jacob and the Angel*, by Jacob Epstein (1880-1959). Son of Polish immigrants, Epstein was an American-born sculptor who worked chiefly in England and studied under Rodin. His work is distinguished by its rejection of ornate prettiness and adoption of a vigorous, rough-hewn and often shocking expression.<sup>14</sup>

Figure 17. *Renamed At Dawn*, by Fred Terna (1923-). Mr. Terna is a Brooklyn artist and educator who began his artistry in the ghetto at Terezin. His canvases are known for their thick encaustic and sand textures painted in either somber red and black tones or golden sanctuaries of light.<sup>15</sup>

Figure 18. *The Meeting of Jacob and Esau*, by George Frederic Watts (1817-1904). A titanic figure in 19<sup>th</sup> century British Modern School, Watts was considered the father of British Symbolism and a central figure in Victorian-era England. He is most notable for his portraits of the British nobility and intelligensia.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> [www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eduard\\_Gebhardt](http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eduard_Gebhardt)

<sup>14</sup> Richard Cork, *Jacob Epstein* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

<sup>15</sup> Conversations with artist, November 2005.

<sup>16</sup> Review by National Portrait Gallery, Washington, D.C.

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