

Sparks

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Real Love Means Embracing Conflict The Secret of Jacob

The Torah (Bible) teaches us that Jacob went to the house of Laban, his uncle, and dwelt there for many years. He married Rachel and Leah, Laban's daughters, and had eleven sons there. After years of struggling with Laban constantly deceiving him he finally left to return home and face Esau who hated him. In the middle of the night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two handmaids and his eleven sons, and sent them across the Jabbok River shallows. After he had taken them and sent them across, he also sent across his possessions. Jacob alone remained on the other side of the river. It was there that the famous "stranger" appeared and wrestled with him until just before daybreak:

When the stranger saw that he could not defeat him, he touched the upper joint of Jacob's thigh. Jacob's hip was dislocated as he wrestled with him.

"Let me leave!" said the stranger. "Dawn is breaking."

And he (Jacob) said: "I will not let you leave until you have blessed me."

"What is your name?"

"Jacob."

"Your name will no longer be said to be Jacob, but Israel: for you have wrestled with *ELOKIM* and man and you have won."

Who was this mysterious stranger? According to the Oral Tradition the stranger was the angel of Esau - *Samael* - the angel of evil.

Clearly, this was no mere wrestling match, but a holy struggle. The Talmud states that the dust they kicked up, while fighting, ascended to the Holy Throne.

In other words, Jacob was willing to wrestle with the forces of evil, knowing that the struggle itself is a Divine mission meant to augment his love for G-d and reveal G-d's oneness. Although it entailed having to roll around in the dust of the earth, soiling himself with the dirt of this world and risking casualties, Jacob knew that ultimately he was kicking up the dust for the sake of the Holy Throne.

Although Jacob defeated the forces of evil, he did not escape unharmed. The angel dislocated Jacob's hip in the course of his struggle, but this was a price he was willing to pay for the ultimate victory. His injury teaches us that engaging in war with evil indeed causes damages, but the final victory of love makes the battle worth fighting.

The Kabbalah teaches that evil is really working for the G-d. Its job is to try and seduce us, but its purpose is only to help us reach an even greater awareness of our inseparable love for G-d. The purpose of evil is to awaken within in us a greater consciousness of our loving bond with G-d by tempting us to stray from G-d. Only by struggling with that temptation do we truly appreciate the profound connection and love we share with G-d. Jacob could have remained pure and uncomplicated. He could have sat in his tent unblemished by the struggles of the outside world.

However, Jacob accepted the challenge as an integral part of serving and loving G-d. He knew that the risk of sin is the price of serving G-d with love. Angels cannot sin, since they have no urge to do wrong and, therefore, no free choice. But we can violate G-d's will, and, therefore, we can also experience fulfilling G-d's will with love. Love is a choice and in order for there to be a choice there has to be a challenge. Love for G-d is the greatest of all love but it can only come with the greatest of challenges. Jacob was truly unique—for the sake of the ultimate love of G-d he was willing to wrestle with evil and embrace the challenges living in the material world.

The angels said, "Let me leave —dawn is breaking!" The Talmud explains the angel's strange comment about the time of day:

He said, "I am an angel, and from the day that I was created, my time to sing praise to G-d did not arrive until this moment."

Jacob, in effect, enabled the angel of evil force to join the chorus line of all the other good angels and partake in singing praise to G-d. This had been the angel's purpose all along and yet it had never happened before. Jacob was the first person in the world to accept the struggle with the evil with love for G-d as part of his selfless service to G-d. Therefore, the angel was actually happy when Jacob embraced the challenge, understanding that the struggle with evil is a gift of love from G-d. Jacob acknowledged that the evil angel also sings G-d's praises.

This is a profound lesson of love. Real love will always have challenges. And the challenges are precisely what preserve the freshness and potency of the love. Often people get married and try to avoid problems, conflict, and confrontation. However, if there is no possibility for fights then there is also no possibility for love. In fact, many lovers will admit that when they make up after a good fight, they actually feel even closer to each other than before the fight. Jacob understood that love is revitalized through conflict; in the name of love he embraced conflict.

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