Kol Rina
*An Independent Minyan*
Parashat Vayishlach
December 6, 2025 *** 16 Kislev, 5786

Vayishlach in a Nutshell
https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/3197/jewish/Vayishlach-in-a-Nutshell.htm

The name of the Parshah, "Vayishlach," means "And he sent" and it is found in Genesis 32:4.

Jacob returns to the Holy Land after a 20-year stay in Charan, and sends angel-emissaries to Esau in hope of a reconciliation, but his messengers report that his brother is on the warpath with 400 armed men. Jacob prepares for war, prays, and sends Esau a large gift (consisting of hundreds of heads of livestock) to appease him.

That night, Jacob ferries his family and possessions across the Jabbok River; he, however, remains behind and encounters the angel that embodies the spirit of Esau, with whom he wrestles until daybreak. Jacob suffers a dislocated hip but vanquishes the supernal creature, who bestows on him the name Israel, which means “he who prevails over the divine.”

Jacob and Esau meet, embrace and kiss, but part ways. Jacob purchases a plot of land near Shechem, whose crown prince—also called Shechem—abducts and rapes Jacob’s daughter Dinah. Dinah’s brothers Simeon and Levi avenge the deed by killing all male inhabitants of the city, after rendering them vulnerable by convincing them to circumcise themselves.

Jacob journeys on. Rachel dies while giving birth to her

second son, Benjamin, and is buried in a roadside grave near Bethlehem. Reuben interferes with his father's marital life. Jacob arrives in Hebron, to his father, Isaac, who later dies at age 180. (Rebecca has passed away before Jacob's arrival.)

Our Parshah concludes with a detailed account of Esau's wives, children and grandchildren; the family histories of the people of Seir, among whom Esau settled; and a list of the eight kings who ruled Edom, the land of Esau's and Seir's descendants.

Haftarah in a Nutshell: Obadiah 1:1-21
https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/596328/jewish/Haftorah-in-a-Nutshell.htm

This week's haftorah mentions the punishment of Edom, the descendents of Esau, whose conflict with Jacob is chronicled in this week's Torah reading.

The prophet Obadiah, himself an Edomian convert to Judaism, describes the punishment destined for the nation of Edom. The Edomites did not come to Judea's aid when she was being destroyed by the Babylonians, and even joined in the carnage. Many years later the Edomites (the Roman Empire) themselves destroyed the Second Temple and mercilessly killed and enslaved their Jewish cousins.

Though the Roman Empire was one of the mightiest to ever inhabit the earth, the prophet forewarns: "If you go up high like an eagle, and if you place your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down, says the Lord. . . And the house of Jacob shall be fire and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau shall become stubble, and they shall ignite them and consume them, and the house of Esau shall have no survivors, for the Lord has spoken."

After describing the division of Esau's lands amongst the returning Judean exiles, the haftorah concludes with the well known phrase: "And saviors shall ascend Mt. Zion to judge the mountain of Esau, and the Lord shall have the kingdom."

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

### Fear of Distress by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z”l (5767)
### https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/vayishlach/fear-or-distress/

Jacob and Esau are about to meet again after a separation of twenty-two years. It is a fraught encounter. Once, Esau had sworn to kill Jacob in revenge for what he saw as the theft of his blessing. Will he do so now – or has time healed the wound? Jacob sends messengers to let his brother know he is coming. They return, saying that Esau is coming to meet Jacob with a force of four hundred men. We then read:

> Jacob was acutely afraid and distressed. Bereishit 32:8

The question is obvious. Jacob is in the grip of strong emotions. But why the tautology, the duplication of verbs? What is the difference between being afraid and being distressed? To this a Midrash gives a profound answer:

> Rabbi Judah bar Ilai said: Are not fear and distress identical? The meaning, however, is that “he was afraid” that he might be killed. “He was distressed” that he might kill. For Jacob thought: If he prevails against me, will he not kill me; while if I prevail against him, will I not kill him? That is the meaning of “he was afraid” – lest he should be killed; “and distressed” – lest he should kill.

The difference between being afraid and distressed, according to the Midrash, is that the first is a physical anxiety; the second a moral one. It is one thing to fear one's own death, quite another to contemplate being the cause of someone else's. However, a further question now arises. Surely self-defence is permitted in Jewish law? If Esau were to try to kill Jacob, Jacob would be justified in fighting back, if necessary at the cost of Esau's life. Why then should this possibility raise moral qualms? This is the issue addressed by Rabbi Shabbetai Bass, author of the commentary on Rashi, Siftei Chachamim:

> One might argue that Jacob should surely not be distressed about the possibility of killing Esau, for there is an explicit rule: "If someone comes to kill you, forestall it by killing him." Nonetheless, Jacob did have qualms, fearing that in the course of the fight he might kill some of Esau's men, who were not themselves intent on killing Jacob but merely on fighting Jacob's men. And even though Esau's men were pursuing Jacob's men, and every person has the right to save the life of the pursued at the cost of the life of the pursuer, nonetheless there is a condition: "If the pursued could have been saved by maiming a limb of the pursuer, but instead the rescuer killed the pursuer, the rescuer is liable to capital punishment on that account." Hence Jacob feared that, in the confusion of battle, he might kill some of Esau's men when he might have restrained them by merely inflicting injury on them.

The principle at stake, according to the Siftei Chachamim, is the minimum use of force. Jacob was distressed at the

possibility that in the heat of conflict he might kill some of the combatants when injury alone might have been all that was necessary to defend the lives of those – including himself – who were under attack.

There is, however, a second possibility, namely that the Midrash means what it says, no more, no less: that Jacob was distressed at the possibility of being forced to kill even if that were entirely justified.

At stake is the concept of a moral dilemma. A dilemma is not simply a conflict. There are many moral conflicts. May we perform an abortion to save the life of the mother? Should we obey a parent when he or she asks us to do something forbidden in Jewish law? May we break Shabbat to extend the life of a terminally ill patient? These questions have answers. There is a right course of action and a wrong one. Two duties conflict and we have meta-halachic principles to tell us which takes priority. There are some systems in which all moral conflicts are of this kind. There is always a decision procedure and thus a determinate answer to the question, “What shall I do?”

A dilemma, however, is a situation in which there is no right answer. I ought not to do A (allow myself to be killed); I ought not to do B (kill someone else); but I must do one or the other. To put it more precisely, there may be situations in which doing the right thing is not the end of the matter. The conflict may be inherently tragic. The fact that one principle (self-defence) overrides another (the prohibition against killing) does not mean that, faced with such a choice, I am without qualms. Sometimes being moral means that I experience distress at having to make such a choice. Doing the right thing may mean that I do not feel remorse or guilt, but I still feel

regret or grief that I had to do what I did.

A moral system which leaves room for the existence of dilemmas is one that does not attempt to eliminate the complexities of the moral life. In a conflict between two rights or two wrongs, there may be a proper way to act (the lesser of two evils, or the greater of two goods), but this does not cancel out all emotional pain. A righteous individual may sometimes be one who is capable of distress even when they know they have acted rightly. What the Midrash is telling us is that Judaism recognises the existence of dilemmas. Despite the intricacy of Jewish law and its meta-halachic principles for deciding which of two duties takes priority, we may still be faced with situations in which there is an ineliminable cause for distress. It was Jacob's greatness that he was capable of moral anxiety even at the prospect of doing something entirely justified, namely defending his life at the cost of his brother's.

That characteristic – distress at violence and potential bloodshed even when undertaken in self-defence – has stayed with the Jewish people ever since. One of the most remarkable phenomena in modern history was the reaction of Israeli soldiers after the Six Day War in 1967. In the weeks preceding the war, few Jews anywhere in the world were unaware that Israel and its people faced terrifying danger. Troops – Egyptian, Syrian, Jordanian – were massing on all its borders. Israel was surrounded by enemies who had sworn to drive its people into the sea. In the event, it won one of the most stunning military victories of all time. The sense of relief was overwhelming, as was the exhilaration at the re-unification of Jerusalem and the fact that Jews could now pray (as they had been unable to do for nineteen years) at the Western Wall. Even the most secular Israelis admitted to feeling intense religious emotion at what they knew was an

historic triumph.

Yet, in the months after the war, as conversations took place throughout Israel, it became clear that the mood among those who had taken part in the war was anything but triumphal. It was sombre, reflective, even anguished. That year, the Hebrew University in Jerusalem gave an honorary doctorate to Yitzhak Rabin, Chief of Staff during the war. During his speech of acceptance, he said:

> "We find more and more a strange phenomenon among our fighters. Their joy is incomplete, and more than a small portion of sorrow and shock prevails in their festivities, and there are those who abstain from celebration. The warriors in the front lines saw with their own eyes not only the glory of victory but the price of victory: their comrades who fell beside them bleeding, and I know that even the terrible price which our enemies paid touched the hearts of many of our men. It may be that the Jewish people has never learned or accustomed itself to feel the triumph of conquest and victory, and therefore we receive it with mixed feelings."

A people capable of feeling distress, even in victory, is one that knows the tragic complexity of the moral life. Sometimes it is not enough to make the right choice. One must also fight to create a world in which such choices do not arise because we have sought and found non-violent ways of resolving conflict.

Jacob's Fear: Vayishlach by Arnold M. Eisen (2013)
https://www.jtsa.edu/torah/jacobs-fear-2/

The Torah wants us to identify with the ancestors we meet in

the book of Genesis; indeed, Abraham and Sarah and their children become our ancestors when we agree not only to read their stories, but to take them forward. Abraham “begat” Isaac in one sense by supplying the seed for his conception. He “begat” him as well by shaping the life that Isaac would live, setting its direction, digging wells that his son would re-dig, making Isaac’s story infinitely more meaningful—and terrifying—by placing him in the line of partners with God in covenant. So it is with us. Nowhere is this impact of the ancestors more obvious than in the case of Jacob, who in this week’s parashah receives the name by which we heirs to the covenant call ourselves to this day: Israel. The ancestors are us, if we accept the Torah’s invitation to make them so. We are them: the latest chapter in the story that they lived and bequeathed to us, and which we have chosen to live and bequeath to others.

Jacob is a particularly compelling ancestor for contemporary Jews because he is so very human. Just think of the words that come readily to mind as descriptions of his character: heel, trickster, schemer, cheat. The man exhibits courage from time to time. He can be noble, loving, wise. We have seen his depths. But he is often so much less than he could be. The Rabbis imagined Jacob studying Torah all day while his brother, Esau, was out hunting game (and see him pausing just long enough from the holy books to put the soup on for dinner), but that is not the way we see Jacob. We are not sure whether or not Rebecca ever told Jacob about God’s promise that he, her younger son, would eventually supplant and rule his older brother. But we certainly watch Jacob with awe as he moves swiftly to acquire the birthright from Esau and steal the blessing. The Torah lavishes unusual detail on the story of how Jacob outmatches his uncle and father-in-law, Laban, in

deception, but also makes us witness to the moment at the beginning of Jacob's journey to the old country (Gen. 28:10) when God affirms that Jacob and his descendants will inherit the promises made to his grandfather Abraham: land, fertility, protection, the ability to bless and be blessed by others, the gift of God's enduring presence. He is a man of many parts and little wholeness.

I don't know about you, but I treasure Jacob's very human response to God's promise, at once an example of the very best of which we mortals are capable and of behavior that is transparently limited and self-serving. You do all this for me, Jacob tells God—you bring me home in one piece, you feed me and protect me—and I (who owe my very life to you!) will give back 10 percent and have you be my God! By normal human standards, the tithe seems generous, as indeed it is. By God's standards and the Torah's, however, given that we owe absolutely everything to God and own absolutely nothing, the offer looks quite different. The description given of Jacob at the start of this week's portion is precious to me for the very same reason. The man who has just bested Laban with God's help; who has escaped from Laban's clutches with both his wives and all his children; who carries with him the promise that God will protect him as he now heads home and prepares to encounter the brother whom he wronged so grievously many years ago—this man Jacob, the Torah tells us (32:8), "was very afraid and distressed."

The Rabbis are both incredulous and understanding: incredulous that God's chosen vessel for the covenant should fear his brother at this moment despite God's promise of protection; understanding of that fear because, as one particularly astute midrash points out (Genesis Rabba 76:1), fear comes naturally to human beings. Moses too is afraid, as

he prepares to fight Og, king of Bashan (Num. 21:34), even though he bears a promise of divine protection and has just defeated Sihon, king of the Amorites, as Jacob had just defeated Laban. The ancestors, like us, are mortals. They too have a lot to lose. Indeed, their encounters with "the living God," far from immunizing them against fear, only make them treasure life all the more and so give them more to fear. Picking up on both words used to mean "fear" in this verse, Rashi (on Genesis 32:8) adds another layer of explanation: Jacob feared that he might be killed and was distressed that he might kill others (or, I would say, be responsible for their deaths). Jacob has been guilty of great wrongs in the course of his life. He desperately wants to be in the right from now on. He knows from experience that fear and vulnerability sometimes lead us to compromise of virtue. Put another way: Jacob wants to maximize the part of him that is Israel and minimize the part that is Jacob. Fear takes him in the opposite direction. He does not want to go there.

The Torah knows that its readers have much to fear and ample reason to fear it. We walk the streets, going about our daily business, as if we feared nothing, but that is often not the case. There are moments when adrenaline and courage rise to meet an imminent challenge—as when Jacob confronts Esau in this week's parashah—and there are moments of quiet trepidation: a visit to the doctor, for example, or a conference in the principal's office about a troubled child, or an interview that will determine if we get the job, the security that it entails, and the self-respect with which it is bound up.

I asked a JTS rabbinical student who teaches teenagers to ask them what they most fear. "Letting people down," said one. "I feel like I have a lot of stress nowadays and I have a lot of people I NEED to make proud." Such fear of failure is

widespread among teens. The college application process is a time of particular anxiety. Love sometimes seems conditional on achievement: fail to be the person your parents and your friends want you to be, and perhaps they won't love you as much or will not love you at all. (God's "chosen people" have had this problem from time to time, aggravated by prophets who warned Israel that God was not pleased with them and by disasters that seemed to be proof of that displeasure.) One 20-something, when asked what that age-group fears, said this: "What are we not afraid of is probably a better question. I personally am afraid that I am not on the right path or that I don't know what the right path is. I'm afraid that I'm not enjoying these years that are supposed to be so 'enjoyable' enough. I'm afraid that I'm going to be lonely or unhappy." And then there are the times when those sorts of fears vanish, or seem small, in the face of immediate threats to health or life itself. We all learn to live with fear, if we are lucky. We cross the river, as Jacob does. We throw ourselves into life, which surrounds and contains fear with joy and blessing. We are filled with gratitude for what we most fear to lose.

I could not help but think as I read Jacob's story this year that American Jewry is once more engrossed by the specter of its own diminishment and disappearance. Jacob feared the death of his family—the covenant family—at the hands of a vengeful brother. We fear the death of our community—the covenant community, or a substantial portion of it—at the hands of disinterest in the tradition of the ancestors. We worry that the story might soon find its place in "Bible as Literature" courses, but not be translated into the stuff of life, ethics, law, and policy. I think that Jacob has a lot to teach us about this as well. Watch him as he summons his courage, strategizes the best he could to meet the situation, and then sets out to meet

his brother. He survives intact the encounter he had so much feared—and he knows enough about life by this point, and about God's covenant, to know that other challenges await: losses and sufferings mixed with immense joys and blessings, with God's protection there to guide him along the way, but not to save him from fear or what occasions fear. Jacob earns the name of Israel the hard way, the only way: by living it. May this be true of us as well. I, for one, am grateful for his example, and his company, as I too walk the path of Torah. *(Arnold M. Eisen is Chancellor Emeritus and Professor of Jewish Thought at JTS)*

## Vayishlach: Wrestling with God: The Identity of Am Yisrael by Rabbi Adam Yisrael

https://truah.org/resources/adam-gillman-vayishlach-moraltorah_2025_/

A gentle breeze passes through Jacob's thinning hair as he sits by the Jabbok River, alone and searching for the small jars of his youth. His family and possessions are already across; he lingers behind, uncertain of his future and fearful of Esau's wrath.

Jacob's life is marked by struggle — running, bargaining, wrestling. Yet here, at night by the riverbank, he faces his most mysterious opponent.

The Torah tells us: "Jacob was left alone. And a figure wrestled with him until the break of dawn." (Genesis 32:23)

This is no ordinary encounter. Jacob wrestles with something — or Someone — beyond himself. The classic rabbinic commentators debate the nature of this struggle. Was it physical, or spiritual? Did Jacob wrestle with an angel, Esau's guardian, or perhaps his own inner turmoil? The word vayē'avek (wrestled) comes from avak, meaning "dust." As Rashi notes, their struggle lifted up dust towards heaven. The

image is both earthly and divine, capturing what it means to be human: to wrestle with God in the dust of life.

Jacob, the bargainer and heel-grabber, who has somehow always seemed to maneuver his way through conflict, now meets a challenge he cannot outwit. The match ends in a draw. Wounded but unbroken, he refuses to let go without a blessing, a blessing which shifts his fortune.

“Said he, ‘Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with beings divine and human, and have prevailed.’” (Genesis 32:29)

Jacob becomes Yisrael — one who wrestles with God. Rashi teaches that from this moment on, Jacob’s blessings come not through shrewdness or deception, but rather through honesty and integrity. The new name marks not just a new identity and title, but a new way of being, bringing together the pieces, broken and whole.

Jacob limps into the dawn carrying both pain and blessing, injury and insight. His struggle remains unresolved, and that may be the point. The Netziv teaches that “both of them prevailed.” Jacob’s limp becomes a sign of faith — a reminder that encountering the Divine can leave us changed, even wounded, yet ultimately strengthened.

To be Am Yisrael — the People of Israel — is to inherit this identity. We, too, are God-wrestlers. Rabbi Arthur Waskow z”l called us “Godwrestlers” not because we defy God, but because we engage — refusing complacency, grappling with the moral and spiritual questions of our time. Our tradition is not one of sheer acceptance but of courageous engagement: wrestling with Torah and our values as we work alongside our partners, neighbors, and family, confronting the absence and striving to bring the Divine Presence into our world.

In this moment, when our communities carry fear, grief, and uncertainty, this identity of wrestling feels especially urgent. Wrestling is a powerful metaphor for faith. It is intimate, demanding, and requires courage and persistence. To wrestle means to hold on — even when understanding feels out of reach. Jacob's night by the Jabbok becomes our metaphor: Faith lives in the tension between the darkness and dawn.

Jacob's strength lies not in perfection but in persistence. He doesn't flee the struggle; he stays in it until the light breaks through. That, too, is the story of our people. Across generations, the Jewish people have wrestled with exile, persecution, questions of justice, and moments of despair — yet we have never stopped striving toward hope, purpose, and covenant.

Our resilience, like Jacob's, is born from our willingness to engage: to ask, to question, to hold on. As Am Yisrael, we are called to continue this sacred wrestling — to seek God's presence, to confront brokenness with compassion, and to live our questions with integrity and faith.

Jacob's night by the Jabbok reminds us that blessing is often found within struggle, that faith can coexist with doubt, and that wrestling with God is not a mark of weakness but of a deep relationship. May we embrace this sacred identity — to wrestle, to strive, and to hold on until the dawn reveals new light. *(Adam Gillman (he/him) is an educator, a hospital chaplain, and a rabbi. He was ordained by the Jewish Theological Seminary in 2023, where he also earned an MA in Jewish Education. He currently lives in New York City with his wife, where he serves as a chaplain resident at the VA.)*

Table for Five
https://www.accidentaltalmudist.org/table-for-

five/2025/11/30/vayishlach-a-difficult-birth/

## *Why does Jacob change the name that his beloved Rachel has chosed for their child?*

*And as her soul was departing—for she was dying—she called his name Ben-Oni; but his father called him Benjamin. – Genesis 35:18*

**Nili Isenberg - Judaic Studies Faculty, Pressman Academy**

It's hard to understand how Rachel could name her child "Son of my Suffering" ("Ben-Oni") with her dying breath. According to Ramban (1194 – 1270), Jacob himself struggled to understand the name! Ramban writes, "Jacob wanted to call him by the name his mother had called him, for all his children were called by the names their mothers had called them, and he thus rendered it to good and to strength." Ramban explains that the word "Oni" has the meaning of "mourning" in some verses, but elsewhere also has the meaning of "vigor." In other words, out of Rachel's suffering came the strength that Jacob turned into the name "Binyamin."

I think about this duality in relation to the name we gave our second son, Elyasaf Asher, meaning "God adds Joy." My husband and I anticipated that a second child would add great joy to our lives. When we named him, we didn't know that our son had a genetic condition called Angelman Syndrome that would severely impact his mental and physical abilities. As Eli turns 13 years old this January, he still can't walk, talk, or take care of even his most basic needs without help. When I think about his name against all the challenges we have faced, it feels like a cruel irony. And yet, like many individuals with Angelman Syndrome, Eli always has a happy demeanor. In the face of so many difficulties, Elyasaf Asher teaches us joy

with his contagious laughter and his sweetest of smiles.

**Aliza Lipkin - Writer and Educator, Maaleh Adumim, Israel**

Rachel's path to marriage and motherhood was steeped in pain. She watched her sister Leah marry Jacob, the man she loved, and later became his second, rival wife. While Leah bore many children, Rachel remained barren. In anguish, she cried, "Give me children, otherwise I am dead!". Midrashically and psychologically, she meant that without offspring, her existence had no future; she would vanish from the world.

Jacob's harsh reply, "Am I in place of God?" wounded her deeply and later seared his own conscience. When Rachel finally died giving birth to her second son, naming him Ben-oni ("son of my affliction"), Jacob was overwhelmed by guilt.

By renaming the child Binyamin, "son of my right hand," Jacob made a lifelong vow of tikkun (rectification). This was his silent answer to Rachel's earlier plea: "You said that without children, you would be dead. I failed you then by speaking harshly. I swear now, as long as this child, the last extension of your life, remains alive at my right side, you are not dead. Through him, your life continues, and I will guard it with all my strength."

Thus, Benjamin became far more than Jacob's youngest son; he was the final living link to his beloved soulmate. That is why Jacob refused to let Benjamin go to Egypt; he could not risk losing the last remnant of Rachel, the one who kept her alive in this world.

**Rabbi Abraham Lieberman - Shalhevet High School**

Rachel, having a very difficult birth realizes she might pass away. She gives Binyamin one name and Yaakov gives him different name. Why is Yaakov changing the name that his

beloved Rachel has chosen for this child? We should remember that Rachel, who was childless for many years, finally has Yosef, whom she named as a prayer to merit one more child. The naming of Yosef reaches prophetic realization and this child is born. In her last few moments, she names him. Rashi comments that Ben Oni refers to pain as in "son of pain or sorrow". Yamin, the Hebrew word for the right side, is understood, as it is many times in Tanach, to be a sign for vigor, power, therefore Yaakov names him "son of strength". Ramban writes, that the names are indeed very close and that Yaakov only wants to clarify the name that Rachel has given him, not contradict her.

Pain and strength are opposites.

How can we understand Ramban's point? But if we examine these two ideas, we can see the connection. In life we can look at pain and begin to dwell on it and that would indeed incapacitate us, freeze us. It would not allow us to develop. In order to overcome pain, we need to have strength. Yaakov is only refocusing Rachel's name. Pain will lead to strength. If we learn from our painful experiences, we will move on to have the power and vigor to deal with pain in the future.

**Denise Berger - Freelance Writer**

There is, in some parts of the Jewish world, a radical iconoclastic view towards the Torah: The people in it are flawed. G-d is flawed. G-d also isn't really G-d, and didn't write the Torah, people did. The stories are made up, the mitzvot are made up, G-d is made up. It's sort of an ideological package deal. It's also a very human way of looking at things, an extension of our world-view as children, where goodness is equated with pleasantness and anything difficult or complex is a sign that the world is not to be trusted.

But what if the complexities in the Torah are actually part of the point? What if Hashem is preparing us for the reality of life, which is anything but simple to navigate?

In this pasuk, Rachel is consumed with agony. The nay-sayers can easily jump on this moment, condemning G-d's cruelty as well as Rachel seeming to lash out, naming her son after her pain. Yakov however does neither; instead, he modifies the name in a way that gives positive meaning for the boy and allows himself to carry Rachel's memory. He's acknowledging his feeling without succumbing to it.

If we take the cynical view, we are left with only a bitter anecdote. When we recognize Divine authorship, there is guidance and wisdom way beyond what a human writer could make up. Rather than disproving G-d, the "messy" parts of the Torah might offer the most compelling "proofs" that He is with us.

**Dr. Erica Rothblum - Head of School, Pressman Academy of Temple Beth Am**

As Rachel takes her final breaths, she names her newborn Ben-oni, "son of my sorrow." It is a name born from her pain, a name acknowledging a story that will not end the way she hoped. And then Jacob steps in and names him Binyamin, "son of my right hand," a name that looks forward, imagining the strength, blessing, and promise this child might carry into the future.

Both names are preserved in our Torah.

Both stories are held. Rachel's naming teaches us that we don't need to deny sorrow or pretend away difficulties. But Jacob's name reminds us that our stories don't have to end there. Even in moments of loss, there is room to choose hope, to imagine what growth or renewal might still be possible.

This feels particularly meaningful as Jews right now. As we confront anti-semitism, the trauma of October 7th, and the exhaustion of navigating politics that leave so little room for nuance or empathy, the “Ben-oni” side of our story can feel very present. But that is not the only name we carry. Even in this difficult time, there is so much “Binyamin” present. We see it in Israelis rebuilding their lives, in the generosity of Jews around the world who lift each other up, and in the educators, parents, and leaders who choose hope – not because it is easy, but because it is necessary.

May we continue to lean into our Binyamin- finding glimmers of strength and blessing amidst a world of sorrow. *(Table of Five was edited by Nina & Salvador Litvak, the Accidental Talmudist)*

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## Yahrtzeits

Willa Bruckner remembers her mother Anita Cohen on Saturday December 6th

Albert Gottlieb remembers his father Albert Gottlieb on Monday December 8th

Nancy Rothchild remembers her son Joshua Rothchild on Monday December 8th

Alice Solomon remembers her mother Florence Weiss Blitzer on Monday December 8th

Ken Kraus remembers his father David Kraus on Tuesday December 9th

Ilisia Kissner remembers her husband Steve Kissner on Wednesday December 10th