

Rabbi David Ingber's Kabbalat Shabbat Sermon 12/05/2025

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Beautiful and so profound That sometimes I want to run out and say like almost like i'm an evangelist I want to go out to people say like have you read this? We want to walk. I was like, you know And sometimes the torah of course is is not always Transparently beautiful and profound. I mean, let's just be honest Why not? Often the torah like Like Like wine We have to learn how to taste the various qualities that it has certain flavors You don't just pick up You know a torah sometimes sometimes it's just like a cheap modable chiano Cabernet that you get on the box, you know But if you've never taken a class if you don't even know what to look for You And so this week's torah portion is so beautiful on every level you can pick it up and just chug it But if you smell it a little bit the oak the pepper it's really amazing Jacob Is at the center of the story in torah And jacob earns In this week's torah portion he earns His name as isha met the man of truth Often people wonder how did jacob become associated in the tradition with the quality of truth Jacob is truth He's not a very truthful person to be honest But jacob earns that title that moniker this week Because truth In this week's torah portion is not Truth In the abstract it's not a truth that is static jacob earns the moniker this week Because Maybe for the first time in his life Instead of trying to deceive other people.

He tries to be honest with himself And that's the hardest thing to do Jacob in this week's torah portion just to give you like a sense of where we were And by the way, as cantor smith was singing that song that beautiful song katonti From jonathan razzel The words are taken from this week's torah portion where jacob is about to meet his brother Esau when he hasn't seen in 20 years and he's terrified because in order for jacob to go home He has to go by the way of his brother 20 years before jacob had stolen a blessing That had been intended for his brother esau And when esau realized that his brother had stolen the blessing, of course, rebecca put him up to it But jacob went along with it when Esau heard that his brother had stolen the blessing from me screamed a scream that the rabbis say is still being heard today And that scream Was a signal of the amount the the immensity the depth of the pain that That jacob has caused had caused his brother and his brother said out loud or we don't know When my father isaac will die, I will kill jacob And so jacob has been a man who's been safely living with his uncle lavon with his uncle laban whitey And waiting for the opportunity to come home. But while those that opportunity that waiting was going on 20 years passed and jacob became quite wealthy and quite accomplished he had Gotten away with so much and now he was coming into so much He essentially thought I got away with it And now I'm coming home with it And so in anticipation of this this coming back together again He starts to he's terrified. He Strategizes he splits the camp into two camps and says if my brother will come and kill one camp the other camp will be safe Then he starts sending him all kinds of gifts hoping that he'll appease him and then finally as the rabbi say his third strategy after Getting ready for war Trying to appease his prayer And in that profound moment, he says God I'm so small because of all the kindness that you've done with me And we call that I

met he says and all the truth interesting truth That word leaves jacob's mouth the first time And then he says hatzileinina The word hatzalah, you know, like the ambulance is over here on the other side.

Hatzalah L'hatzil means to save I want you to hold that word because in about five minutes or so We're coming back to it because something really profound happened while you were singing that song. I got something that I had never gotten before Hatzileinina Save me Miyad achi miyad esav from the hand of my brother and from the hand of esav twice. He says from the hands hands of esav The hand of my brother the torah tells us That after jacob prays He takes everything that he has and he places it on the other side of this river called the yabok river And jacob is left alone And jacob is all by himself and begins a wrestling match with some mysterious person The torah never tells us who this person is And so jacob is wrestling in chapter 32 Just set the scene because I want to go back out into the street and say look at this Jacob has not been alone for 20 years The last time jacob was alone.

He was running from his brother. The next time he's alone. He's running towards his brother So beautiful The last time jacob was alone.

He crossed over the jordan river. He said with my shteko with my stick. He had nothing He got away from there.

He got away with it. And now he's alone and he's not getting away with it He's giving it away. He takes everything that has defined him for 20 years everything that has been built upon the primal lie Where he said I am esau That primal moment of I am not really that person in order to receive the blessing I will be whatever I need to be to receive the blessing and when isaac asked him.

Are you my son esau jacob? Right remember that And do you remember why isaac asked him are my are you my son esau because he felt the hands of jacob Jacob was wearing the clothing of his brother and so Beautifully powerfully isaac says and all the listeners and to the story here He says wow, how you die in your day esau the hands. Oh the hands are are you? The hands are the hands of esau But the voice Is the voice of jacob? Jacob had been defined by those hands Jacob was defined by the hands of his brother. The very thing is calling card Jacob became a man of the hands.

He was attracted and running and doing 20 years. He's impersonating his brother And now finally all of the fruits of that impersonation of that day of that ruse Are now on the other side of the jacob river the abok river the same letters as his name and now jacob stands alone again naked No clothing of his brother No fruits of that lie. He now stands for the first time in 20 years In that place and so he wrestles And the torah tells us that This mysterious man couldn't overcome jacob jacob couldn't overcome and then was a kind of tie And then he dislocates his hip He saw that he could not prevail so he broke his hip As someone who's been recovering for eight months with a broken hip that must have hurt And now the man who is known for running The man whose name

means heel h e e l Defined by the legs the man who doesn't really know how to fight but knows how to flight He's grounded He slows down There's a primal wound that he's been running from And then of course we know this moment.

He says to him Will you bless me jacob asks for a blessing? You don't have any you don't have enough blessings jacob The last time jacob asked for a blessing It was with his father And he asked it as his brother He asked it as someone whom he wasn't He was in a lie. He was in a game He was in an alternate identity He was what they wanted him to be I'm sure nobody here can relate to that But i think it's a really powerful message stepping into somebody else's story Or trying to live someone else's story Or thinking that if you lived your story it wouldn't be worthy of a blessing That if you who were you you know who you're meant to be Who you were born to be? That somehow that would leave you on the outside And so all of us wear Esau's clothing. We make it out into the world with the hands of Esau, the hands of the brother, the hands of the one who gets the fame, who gets the accolades, the one who is received, the one who is loved, the one who is known, the one who is accepted.

And we can even build a 20-year life on it. Ask anybody in my line of work, if we've ever been with people at the end of their lives, who say, you know, I've been Esau my whole life. What a mistake.

I just couldn't bring myself, I couldn't do it, I couldn't, it would have been too hard to cut the ties. It's too complicated. I can't put them on the other side of the river.

People live their whole lives with strategies on never to be alone, never to have to stop for a minute and ask, wait a second, wait a second. Even that's a privilege too. Some people never have that privilege.

The privilege to be able to stop and ask. Hatzileinina, hatzileinina miyad achi, miyad esav. Save me, he says, from the hand of my brother and the hand of Esau, the hands.

Save me from those hands. Hatzileini, I'm so in the hands. Mr. Ripley.

And so he's dislocated, and the Torah tells us that this mysterious being says to him, well, tell me your name. If you want a blessing, then I'll give you a blessing, but first you have to tell me your name. Come on, everybody.

Is that precious? The last time he got a blessing, his father said, tell me your name. And now 20 years later, he gets another shot at it. Tell me your name.

And it's a test. We can see Jacob going, do I need a lifeline? Who do I call here? What's my name, what's your name, what's your name? It should be a simple answer. Is it a simple answer for Jacob? Areyomer Yaakov, he says, Jacob.

Oh, Jacob, okay. If your name is Jacob, then I'll give you a blessing. If your name is Jacob, then

now you can be more than what you once were.

Because you'll never be more than what you never were. You will never be able to transform if you are not whom you already are. If you're running away, if you're lying to yourself, if you're lying to others, if you haven't even admitted that you're lying, that's already the beginning of it.

And then this last moment in the story, which is, I said I'll get back to in five minutes. Jacob is limping. The Torah tells us that as the dawn comes and as the light comes again, Jacob didn't fight in the light, he was always in the dark.

Because each of us carries that night with us. The night in which we meet what we are refusing to meet by the light of day. He's limping.

And the Torah tells us, v'hu tzolea ad yirei cho. Tzolea is a unique word, it only appears here in this form, in all of Torah. But if we look for this word in other places, it appears in two other places.

To limp, the word used for limping, tzolea is from the word in Hebrew, tzlaot, which means ribs. And its first usage is in the story of Adam and Eve, where Adam's partner is built from the tzela, from the side of his body. Tzolea, to limp, means to favor one side.

He's limping on only one side. It's so perfect, because the word tzolea also sounds a lot like he'd say, like latzil. Hatzileni.

He was saved because he was limping. What saved him was that he stopped trying to be two things. He stopped trying to be what he wasn't.

As long as he kept thinking, oh, this Jacob walk is not enough. You know this one, where you're just on the one leg, the Jacob leg? I gotta get back over here with Esau. As long as Jacob wasn't willing to acknowledge that he's only one side of it, he's only gonna be one, he's gonna be himself.

One tzela, one side. That was his tzola, that's what saved him. Hatzileni na, help me to know which side I am.

Save me from the hands, save me from the lies, save me from those shadows, save me, I want to limp. Because limping will at least be true. It'll be honest, I'll be Ishemet, a man of truth.

And not playing the game, playing the game of Jacob. Getting away with it. So I want to be an evangelist.

Because to be someone who is a child of Jacob means to know how to wrestle in the night. To be a child of Jacob means someone who has the courage to put all the things that are not true about us on one side and for a moment stand alone and naked. To be a child of Jacob doesn't mean to

have arrived at a final identity that one can present on their resume.

But at least to be willing to wrestle. At least be willing to be injured by a confrontation with truth, with our own truth, the truth of others as they appear to us. To be in the mix of it and not to be running from it.

At times I feel like the first Jacob. At times I feel like him trying to throw out, right, to choreograph my life in a way so that I don't ever have to deal with the demon that's waiting for me when I get alone for five minutes. But then I wouldn't be Ishemet.

I wouldn't be a man of truth. A person of truth, a person who wants truth. One of the most profound pieces of Torah about that limp is that it was a constant reminder to Jacob that it's not worth it to run.

It's not worth it to stand on two feet if that second foot is not yours, it's not yours, you're not on solid ground. It's not worth it. Better to be someone who has that wound, that wound that will become your wisdom.

That wound that will teach you, that wound that will remind you when you forget. We don't know if Jacob ever, ever regained his natural walking pattern, we don't know. Doesn't say anywhere in Torah, and Jacob healed from the broken hip.

And in fact, if anything, the Torah tells us that we're never ever supposed to forget about Jacob's dislocated hip. We don't eat the sinew that is known as the sciatic nerve or the sinew of the hip, which is called the gira nasha, the ligament of nasha. And the most profound understanding of that dietary restriction is that the word nasha, the sinew of nasha is connected to the name minasha, which means to forget.

We don't eat the forgetting vein. The gira nasha is the nerve or the sinew that is connected with a sense of amnesia, a sense of, oh, I've been unconscious now for a decade. Don't eat from that.

Yesterday I had a chance to stand in front of about 2,000 people on 68th Street or something like that at a rally that was to say out loud and proud who I am, who many Jewish New Yorkers are in the wake of a protest that took place in front of a synagogue last week, not getting into the details of it. And the sermon is not intended to relitigate that or to even use it to say, to talk about my Zionism tonight or my support for the nation of Israel and the land of Israel. But just generically to say that there comes a moment for all of us when that which we're wrestling with will ask us what our name is.

And we need all the help we can, love and lovers, communities, friends, family, if we're lucky, to be able to say, go ahead, tell them you're Jacob. Let go of your brother's story, his hands, and hold on to your side. Be that, settle into it, be that, be you.

I'll tell you, every dance, every dance, as dancers know, every dance is itself full of faith, the faith

to lift one leg and then be standing in a place of instability. And better, I think, to find our ground by losing it, to find our true identity by letting go of those that aren't us, and to live our lives without that kind of faith, without that kind of dancing. So I just wanna bless all of us tonight.

This is a really deep parasha. And there are a lot of Jacobs in this room who've been impersonating Esau. I'll be the first one to say it.

I just wanna bless all of us, the power of this story, that we see clearly the ways in which we avoid that conversation. We avoid that kind of hatzalah, that kind of being saved. And may the Holy One, a blessing, bless us, each and every one of us, with the strength to be ourselves, to be who we are, and to call that forth in others as well, in our communities, and let us say amen.

Amen. Please rise for the Aleinu and the Mourner's Kaddish.

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