

Portion Vayishlah Genesis - Bereshit (32.4-36:43)

Jacob is now returning to his father Isaac's home with his wives, Rachel and Leah, their servants and all their children and flocks and herds. He is worried his brother Esau still aims to kill him for stealing his father's inheritance. So Jacob sent messengers ahead to meet his brother. "Tell Esau," Jacob said, "I have been with Uncle Laban and I am rich with animals and servants. Tell him I seek favor in his eyes."

Jacob's messengers returned, "Your brother Esau is coming to meet you with 400 men." Immediately he moved his family to safety then prayed, "O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac, God who tells me to return home, I know I am unworthy of all Your kindness but save me and my family from Esau." Then through the night, in the hopes his brother would forgive him, Jacob sent servants to his Esau with a tribute, with gifts of herds and flocks.

Jacob was now left alone, and someone wrestled with him until the break of day. When the wrestler saw that he couldn't overcome Jacob, he struck Jacob and dislocated his hip, saying "Let me go for it is morning." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." The wrestler said "What is your name?"-- "Jacob" ---"Your name will no longer be Jacob. It will be Israel, for you have struggled with God and men and prevailed." And he blessed him. Jacob named the place Divine, saying "I have seen the Divine face to face, and my soul has withstood it. He left as the sun rose, limping because of his thigh.

In the morning, when Jacob saw his brother Esau and the 400 men, he bowed to the ground. Seven times Jacob fully bowed until Esau ran to hug his brother. And together they wept. Then Esau said, "I got your gifts but I have plenty." "You keep them." Jacob said, "I have looked up to your face as to a judge and you have accepted me with kindness. Please take my blessings because God has favored me with it." Thus Esau accepted the gifts and they went their separate ways. Jacob reached the boundaries of Canaan, his homeland and built an altar to God he named, "God is the God of Israel."

Then God commanded Jacob to go to Beth-El where God had appeared to him when was fleeing Esau. Before leaving, Jacob told everyone to get rid of their idols, purify, and change their clothes. He made an altar to God. "This is for God, who on the day of my distress, was with me and was revealed." Later God blessed Jacob and said, "You shall no longer be called Jacob but Israel shall be your name. I am God Almighty and All-Sufficient. Be fruitful and multiply, a nation and many nations shall come from you and kings from your loins. The land I gave to Abraham and Isaac, I will give to you and your offspring." They had already left Beth-El when Rachel began to give birth. Her labor was difficult and she died. Jacob named his son Benjamin and then buried his wife. Jacob returned to his father Isaac's home. Jacob had twelve sons. In the fullness of his years, Isaac died and was gathered to his people and buried by his two sons Esau and Jacob. Esau settled away and fathered the Edom nation.

Questions: 1) What is forgiveness? 2) Have you ever been forgiven? How does that feel? 3) Do you forgive yourself? How?
Illustration Ideas: Esau coming to meet Jacob with 400 men... Jacob struggling in the middle of the night... Jacob sending gifts to Esau... Jacob and Esau hugging... Jacob building an altar... Benjamin being born... Rachel being buried. Jacob seeing his father again... Isaac being buried by his two sons © 2012 Nancy Reuben Greenfield