

Dear Chavraya,

Many years ago, I met with a woman in my congregation to urge her to come to shul. While I think it is a wonderful thing to come to shul, to so urge is a delicate matter. This was different, however. I knew that the woman wanted to come to shul, but that she felt awkward about appearing. It was indeed her appearance that concerned her. She had a severe limp and walked with great difficulty. Sadly, I was not able to convince her, and she remained alone, not ready to take her place in shul.

To limp with dignity is a sign of noble bearing, a way of life awareness that is given to each of us through our calling as Yisra'el. In this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Vayishlach*, our ancestor Ya'akov is returning home after twenty years. As a young man, he had fled the anger of his brother Esav, having tricked him into giving up the blessing and birthright of the firstborn. With his large family and his herds, we find Ya'akov along the way of return as the week's telling begins. *Vayishlach Ya'akov m'lachim l'fanav/And Ya'akov sent messengers ahead*, seeking to know the state of his brother, whether his anger had subsided. The messengers returned, telling of Esav approaching with four hundred armed men. Though frightened, Ya'akov begins the process of reconciliation, sending gifts ahead to his brother.

On the eve of the fateful reunion, Ya'akov got up during the night. Bringing all that were with him across the river Yabok, he is now left alone, not ready yet to cross the divide. His struggle is not complete, and so ensues the famous night wrestling. He wrestles through the night with a mystery figure. Who is it? Himself? His brother? God? An angel? Locked in struggle, Ya'akov demands a blessing. And so it is given, but not to be realized until after he has encountered his brother face to face. Only then shall he come to be called Yisra'el, one who wrestles with God. As dawn breaks, Ya'akov is struck upon his thigh, and limps now toward wholeness.

Having set forth an elaborate plan of approach, his family divided into camps to come before Esav in successive waves, it is all suddenly put aside as the drama of human emotion takes over. Ya'akov himself, meant to appear last after the heart of Esav has been softened, now boldly moves past all of the others as fast as his limp allows. In a moment of raw and powerfully poignant beauty, the two brothers fall into each other's arms and weep.

As the journey picks up again, we are told, *vayavo Ya'akov shalem/and Ya'akov came whole*. Only the next day following his night encounter, we can assume that Ya'akov is still limping, even as he is called whole. Having risen to the challenge of reconciliation, Ya'akov has found inner wholeness and is now ready to be called Yisra'el. Called by his name, Ya'akov's becoming Yisra'el is a blessing given to each of us to limp with dignity. We all carry our own wounds and scars. Incorporating them into our lives, there is a place in "shul" for each of us to be without shame. Though we limp, we can still be whole.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor