JACOB AND ESAU

In this weeks parsha we encounter Jacob and Esau brothers who share a most painful past and separation are reunited. It is a moment fraught with tension and uncertainty. Will Esau greet his brother with open arms or will he harbor a grudge for the trickery that Jaocb played on him in their youth, stealing his blessing and bargaining for his birthright? Esau has 400 men under arms travelling with him, will a war between brothers erupt in their desert meeting? Jacob for his part wrestles with God and his own destiny. What does God want from him, how is he to protect and enlarge the sacred relationship with God that he has inherited from his father? Must he vanquish Esau to prove his worthiness as a leader of the Jewish people? Jacob wonders aloud how do you apologize to someone who you hurt so deeply and can they ever forgive you?

We have each been Jacob and Esau in our lives we have been the victim and the advantage taker. We have stood as Jacob does on the river's edge between our present circumstance and confronting the reality of our past. What does Jacob do? He stands literarily on the shore of the Jabbok river, his brother with his army of 400 men is approaching him fast from the other side. Does he run and hide or does he cross over? Does he cross over and come face to face with the reality that he cannot escape?

With literary brilliance and intrigue the Torah builds up the suspense as Jacob ponders what to do over night. He sends his family and all of his possession across the river to Esau's side and is left alone on his shore. He lays down to sleep but sleep eludes him, he tosses and turns wrestles with an angel or some say with himself. The angel is strong – and nearly prevails over him pulls at Jacobs leg; badly wounding him, but Jacob summons an inner strength and courage and holds on to the angel and over powers him and demands from him a blessing. The angel changes Jaocb's name to Israel the one who struggles with God. This dream and experience give Jaocb the courage and conviction to cross over and confront his brother and the reality that awaits him.

But Jacob is a changed man now, he is not the young boy who bargained for his brother's birthright over a bowl of soup, and he is not the adolescent to stole his brother's blessing with trickery and gall. He is now Israel, he is a man who knows his own flaws and limitations, who bares the scares and the burdens of his past and allows those experiences to inform his present perspective. Jacob is humble and pragmatic. He limps toward his brother, his hip still sore from the struggle the night before and with repentance and humility he asks his brother's forgiveness.

Esau rushes towards him and sensing that his brother is changed man, falls on his neck and kisses him.

The Torah teaches us many lessons and this week it teaches us perhaps the most important lesson of all, to have the courage to change. That in order to change you

have to know who or what you are changing from, you have to know yourself, to confront that which may be ugly or painful or shameful. But self knowledge alone is not change. Jacob could be self aware and still not cross over the river. With that knowledge we have to take the next step and deal with our failings, cross over the river and confront them - we have to be Yisrael – we have to struggle with them; risking perhaps more pain in the process. Because life is not lived on this side of the river? Life is not lived running and hiding from the wreckage of our past. Life is on the other side. What does Jacob do after Esau kisses him. Right there on the other side of the Jabbok, Jaocb builds a house. He is done running, he has nothing else to run from – he has found himself and therefore he has found his home.