

Self-Struggle

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

“Jacob was left alone and a man struggled with him until the dawn.” Who struggled with Jacob? Tradition teaches an angel, but it is not hard to conclude that Jacob struggled with himself.

We struggle with ourselves, are divided against ourselves, and that can be all to the good. Robert Browning writes in his poem *Bishop Blougram's Apology*, “When the fight begins within himself, a Man's worth something.” Poets know this. Yeats, like Browning, advocated self-struggle, teaching that, “We make out of our quarrel with others, rhetoric, but of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry.”

Indecision is the unworthy name we often give to self-struggle. Surely there were times in the night when Jacob wanted to give up, relax into himself, stop worrying, feel no more pain. But his need for growth pushed him on. In the morning he limped, since all real combat produces wounds. As the night waned and the dawn broke, Jacob asks the angel for a blessing. Yet curiously, the angel does not offer a blessing — he does not promise Jacob riches or ease or long life. Rather he changes his name to Israel. When we struggle successfully, the soul emerges different, changed. We earn a new name. Inside ourselves, rhetoric gives way to poetry.