

The Pardes Center for Jewish Educators presents

An Interactive **PARSHA EXPERIENCE**



Parsha: Vayishlach

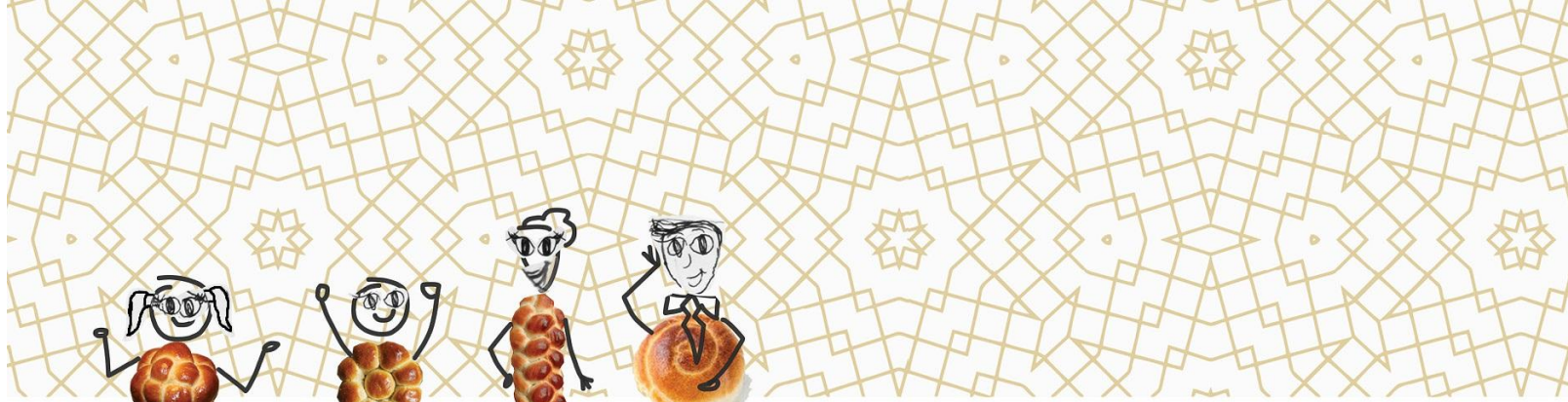
Title: Gaining Perspective on Prayer

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2017-18

The Parsha at First Glance

Spotlight on the Parsha:

In *Parshat Vayishlach*, it's been 20 years since Yaakov fled from his brother Esav after stealing his birthright. Now Yaakov is going to see Esav again, and he is worried that his brother might kill him for what he did long ago. Yaakov prays to God that everything will go alright. The night before reuniting with his brother, Yaakov wrestles with someone throughout the night, breaking his hip in the process. It is unclear if this 'someone' is a dream, an angel, a man, or something



else entirely. This is the first time that Yaakov is renamed Yisrael (meaning something like 'he will strive with God'), because he has striven with beings divine and human both. When Yaakov and his family approach Esav, Yaakov bows to him, and in return Esav runs to Yaakov, weeping, to embrace him.

Zooming In:

Yaakov's prayer encompasses a lot. Overall it is a prayer for salvation. He asks God for protection, restoration, and a future for his people. It is also a prayer of gratitude. Some people have concluded from Yaakov's prayer that this moment is the spark that eventually leads to formal prayer structured in the way we pray today. Commentator Seforno connects Yaakov's prayer specifically to *Shemone Esre*, and although our text has many other examples of prayer that could potentially lead up to the way we pray today, it is Yaakov's prayer in this *parsha* that appears to be the main structure of our liturgy, more than others.

Questions for Consideration:

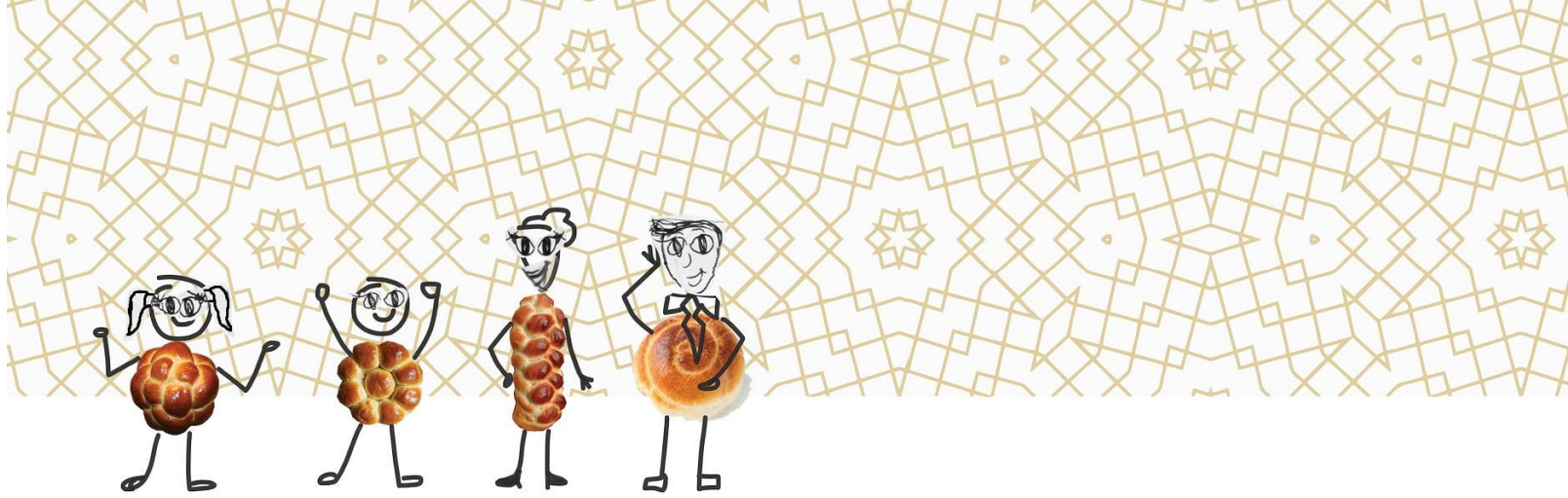
With whom is Yaakov wrestling? What does it mean if Yaakov is wrestling with an angel? With a man? With himself?

Yaakov's interaction in the night proves to him that he is ready to confront Esav, no matter how much bigger and stronger the people on Esav's side are. Why does Yaakov decide to pray? Does/how does prayer help him? Why do we pray? Does prayer help us?

The Parsha Through Another Lens

Picture This:

PLEASE NOTE: This activity requires writing/drawing.



Let's think about all of the times a day/week that we pray. Count up all of the different prayers we say daily because they are part of our Jewish tradition. Now add to those all of the prayers we say because we need them for ourselves and they just come out (of our mouths, or we say them in our hearts). Talk about why these prayers are important to us, and if we feel relevance in all of them to our lives today.

Our prayers are often in a language that is challenging to understand, either because of a language barrier or because the wording is ancient and confusing. Write or draw your own versions of the prayers we say every day in a way that is relevant to you. If you'd rather, or in addition, write or draw your own prayers that you want to be saying every day in the future.

Maybe write them on label stickers that can be stuck to notebooks or water bottles that are frequently used as a reminder. Or write them in dry-erase marker on the bathroom mirror as the first thing seen after waking up in the morning!

Shabbat Shalom!