

Don't be a Wanna Be
Parshat Vayikra, 5773
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This morning my remarks are going to be made in honor of Yaakov Avinue (Jacob our father).

The Torah commands that the meal offerings we offer to God should not contain *hametz* (prepared leaven), nor any *dvash* (honey). Rather the offerings should contain Melach (salt). Why, Yeast makes dough rise higher and honey makes food taste sweeter? However, both yeast and honey are external additives. Salt on the other hand brings out the flavor of the food, but only the flavor that was already there, as explained by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin. Rabbi Mordechai Gifter puts it this way, "When serving God you should follow the model of salt. That is, utilize all your abilities and talents you have to serve God. Don't be like the yeast that causes distortion of what is there ... or the honey that is sweet but borrowed from the outside." Be yourself, but make every effort to be your best self.

Why does this message have to do with Jacob our father? Jacob was the first Jewish "wanna be." Jacob (Yaakov in Hebrew) is derived from the word from *ekev* (heal) for Jacob was born holding on to his older twin brother Esau's heal. Right from the beginning Jacob was trying to be Esau as explained by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks. As they grow Jacob

spent his time indoors, while Esau became a rugged hunter and dad Isaac's favored son.

Yet, Jacob was determined to supplant Esau. Acting on the advice of his mother, Rebecca, he tricked his father into blessing him with the blessing of the first born. When Esau discovered that Jacob had stolen his blessing he sought to kill him, for Jacob had been blessed with being a Lord to his brother and having others bow down to him. When did Jacob stop trying to be a "wannabe?" After his nocturnal wrestling match with God's angel. After the encounter with the angel Jacob named the place Peniel meaning, "I have seen God's face and lived." At long last Jacob had overcome his God given *yatzer hara* (evil inclination) to be someone else, namely Esau. Listen to the dialogue as Jacob snatches hold of the angel and demands to be blessed. The angel said, "What is your name?" and Jacob responds, "Jacob." The angel then declares, "No longer will it be said that your name is Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with the divine and overcome." In other words, Jacob had overcome his desire to supplant his older brother and would accept the role that God had meant for him, that of Israel. And what is the blessing of Israel? It is the second blessing that Isaac gave Jacob as he fled Esau, the blessing of Abraham. Unlike the blessing Jacob stole, this blessing has nothing to do with power. This blessing speaks of being fruitful and inheriting the land God gave to Abraham.

In light of this we can now better understand the reunion between Jacob and Esau which followed Jacobs wrestling match. Jacob says to Esau, “Please take my blessing... for I have everything,” that is take the blessing I stole from you years earlier because I am no longer trying to be you, for I am content with who I am. Jacob and his family also bowed down to Esau fulfilling Isaac’s blessing of the first born that people would bow down to him and he would be a Lord over his brothers. Jacob declared to Esau, “I have seen your face and it is like seeing the face of the divine” (Gen. 33:10). Jacob realizes that though both he and his brother are different, they are both created in the image of God. Indeed, the Mishna (Sanhedrian 4:5) teaches that though each person is stamped with the seal of Adam (we are all children of the same God) , each one of us is distinct.

As we dip our Challah bread in the salt on the *Shabbat* (Sabbath), let the salt remind us of the lesson of Jacob and that is, we will be most likely to succeed not by trying to be somebody we were not mean to be, but, by being the best person God meant us to be. Furthermore, we will help others succeed, not by trying to recreate them in our image but by helping them to be the best persons that God means them to be.