

ישראל

Israel

lit. he-who-wrestles-with-G!d

Question Everything, Including Authority

The Jewish approach includes asking hard questions of ourselves and others. Even in the face of great power the approach is not to bow down but to engage, seeking a better outcome.

Jacob is alone in the wilderness, the night before he is about to confront his brother Esau, who he is pretty sure wants to kill him. Years earlier, Jacob had stolen from Esau and left without saying goodbye. Suddenly, a figure appears out of the night. They wrestle. Jacob's hip is dislocated. He keeps wrestling, and finally pins his opponent, who says 'Let me go; the day has broken.' Jacob demands a blessing first. So this mystery figure (was it an angel? his brother?) gives him a blessing ... and a new name: *Israel*, He-Who-Wrestles-With-G!d. Jacob becomes Israel and goes on to grandfather a people with the same name.

When G!d was about to destroy the people of Sodom, Abraham argued with G!d – what if there are innocent people there? Would it be fair to destroy them also? When G!d was about to destroy the Israelites for their worship of the Golden Calf, Moses argued with G!d -- what will the Egyptians think of You? And remember the promise You gave to Abraham?

In ancient Israel, in addition to a king there was another kind of leader, called a prophet. The prophet questioned the people's behavior and described a terrible future if the people didn't change their ways. The prophet even questioned the behavior of the king, like the prophet Nathan who was not hesitant to call out King David for causing the death of a romantic rival.

Questions for Conversation and Reflection

1. Who are some of the 'modern prophets' of our time – those who point out hypocrisy, power imbalances and where we are failing? What is their message?
2. How might you use a question to call attention to a situation that needed to be challenged in your work, school, or family?
3. How can we do better at questioning assumptions?