

Torah Portion: **Vayishlach**
(Book of Genesis)

Rabbi Harold Kushner wrote a book entitled, *Who Needs God?* The title poignantly underscores a growing trend of not just doubting God, but dismissing God. It's an attitude that goes beyond agnosticism and even atheism. An agnostic may doubt God's existence but doesn't preclude the possibility. An atheist may proclaim there is no divine being but still actively searches for some form of moral/ethical salvation. To dismiss God is to say none of the above even matters.

Jacob dismissed God. On the verge of starvation, Jacob denied his brother Esau food unless Esau bequeathed to him his birthright as first-born. Jacob later used disguise to cheat his brother Esau out of the special first-born blessing from his dying and visually impaired father Isaac. In the absence of God and lacking any kind of moral compass, Jacob wandered in a desert of meaninglessness satisfying his own needs at the expense of others. . . until the proverbial *ah-hah* moment. Jacob, like so many, discovered God in the night of his life waking up to realize "*Surely God is present in this place, and I did not know it.*" (Gen. 28:14)

Rabbi Kushner writes, "A world without God would be a world in which gravity pulled us down and there was no counterforce to lift us up, to cleanse us if we had sullied ourselves when we stumbled and fell, and assure us that we were worthy of a second chance." Jacob was given a second chance. He reconciled with his brother and made peace with his past. Yet, a belief in God did not insulate him from the misfortunes of life that lay ahead.

We need God not to magically create miracle cures for illness, nor stop wars or prevent misfortune but to give us the strength to face these challenges. Rabbi Bradley Artson profoundly observes, "[God] cannot prevent depression or worry. But [can] provide the perspective with which we can endure and survive. In the words of the prophet Isaiah, "*They who trust in the Lord shall mount up with eagles' wings.*"

In the end, "Who Needs God?" we all do. Artson concludes the above statement by noting, "Though we may face troubles, we can still be uplifted, and even fly."

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