

We are God Wrestlers
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Perhaps not surprisingly, I tend to have a lot of conversations with and about God. I always have. As a child, this was a discourse with God or myself, as most of the Jews I knew didn't talk much about God. As a teen, these became question and answer sessions or flat out debates with my Christian friends. Then, as an adult, these conversations turned to a more spiritual nature. But all along, I was talking to and about God. This should have been my first clue that the rabbanite was in my future.

These days, the conversations tend to center around one idea, "Do I (meaning the person with whom I'm speaking) believe in God?" This question can come in a variety of guises; "What does Judaism say about God?", "Do I need to believe in God to be Jewish?", or "Where do I even begin to talk about God if I wanted to talk about God?"

Well, thankfully, we are in the right place! We are God Wrestlers, after all. We are Israelites! Our tradition is steeped in the difficult conversations of "Who is God?" and "What is my relationship to God?" Once we are beyond the first few paragraphs in B'reishit, the impressive All Mighty Creator, we are immediately thrown into a dialogue about the nature of the Human to God relationship. Chava and Adam, Kain and Havel, Abraham and Sarah, on and on, we struggle to understand our place in the world, our connection to something greater than ourselves, and how the puzzle pieces fit together. As each relationship unfolds, God is the other active partner in the dynamic, evolving exploration. This struggle is so real that it manifests as a physical form when Jacob wrestles with a man/angel. It is at this moment, this phenomenon is named, we are Isra-El, the one who wrestles with God.

Throughout the whole of the Tanakh we are referred to as the Israelites, those who struggle with God. As we move from individual relationships to a national one, the questions remain the same. Our formative period as a nation, leaving Egypt, our trials in the desert, our fight for our national identity are all intertwined with our eternal question, "What is our relationship with God?"

Eventually, though, we forget the conversation we are in. We forget to ask the question and we begin to take our relationship for granted. God is a given. The Beit HaMikdash, our Temple stands as a shining beacon for all nations. Our Kohanim and Leviim, our priests serve us as our representatives for our relationship. We are now sending our sacrifices as our emissaries for our transgressions, but we have forgotten the purpose

of our gifts. We are, as they say, phoning it in. We are no longer engaged in the conversation.

That is, until we lose our land. In our national narrative, it is at this point that we transform from not just Israelites to Jews. Our identity is as much about the land that we have lost as it is our relationship with God. Except now God is less of the active participant that God once was. God is obscured. God is no longer our clear and obvious partner. We are in a dance with a shadow.

It is not surprising, then, that today we find it challenging to even know where to begin when we look for a relationship with God. I assert, though, once again, we are in the right place. We are at this moment taking ourselves down to our most humble of places. We are actively trying to find an opening, a space, a place to begin. It takes courage to be this vulnerable. It is here, in this space that we are able to ask and we are able to listen.

Similarly, today's Jews struggle with their relationship with the State of Israel. It would be disingenuous of me to say that all Jews support Israel and that everyone is on board with all of Israel's policies. That would be like saying that all Jews believe in God, and well, we just covered that. I would say that the second most frequent conversation I have, next to the God question, is "How should I feel about Israel?" Just as we are God wrestlers, Israelites, one could say, intentionally set up to be a people who engage in the "what" and ask "why", so too we are expected to question and not simply accept everything at face value. This is just as true for the State of Israel.

But to struggle, to engage, does not preclude the possibility of love. I love Israel. For me, it is home. I somehow managed to live 7 years in Israel without really planning to. That is because it is a place that keeps drawing me back. I leave and then find myself there again. It is where I feel the most at peace and the most at-one-ness. And, the challenges are real. I am not immune, I can see the imperfections. And yet, I call it home.

We just asked God to absolve us of all oaths. That is what Kol Nidre is about. Any vows that I may have taken this past year, either intentionally or unintentionally, please remit them and let's start afresh.

It is in this space that I am asking you to take on a new vow. To support Israel. And, to support her in all her complexity. At your seat there should be an Israel Bonds card. Pick it up. On the back you will see a variety of Bonds options. I particularly like the Shalom Bond, where your funds go to support the charitable organization of your

choice. At the top there are a variety of monetary increments that you can choose. It is not the dollar amount that is important. It is demonstrating support. Take a moment, fold over one of the tabs. Don't worry, you can change your mind later. If you happen to fold over the \$100,000 tab and only meant \$1000, that's ok. This is an emblem of your support. They will work out the details later. Hand the card with the folded tab to your usher.

It is ok to stand in a space of unknown. It is ok to be Jewish and question God. It is ok to love and support Israel and to challenge it to be better. Questioning is our legacy. It is who we are. We are Israelites.