I have sojourned with Laban. Jacob was taken away from his parental home and experienced a long night of darkness, misery, and distress. He was burdened with the mission of proving to the world that the covenantal community was capable of practicing Abraham's unique moral code, by living a lifestyle of saintliness—not only in the Promised Land, but in exile, far from the hills and valleys of Hebron and Shechem. From this experience, I have learned the 613 mitzvos (Rashi). Jacob stayed with Laban for twenty years, enough time to settle down and become a citizen of Haran and to consider himself a veteran resident of Haran. He should have said, "I have settled with Laban," but he said, "I have sojourned; he felt a stranger in Haran, the way his son Joseph later felt a stranger in Egypt. He had not assimilated; he had not integrated himself into Laban's society and community; he had not accepted their morals, their code of ethics, or their lifestyle. He sojourned in Haran for a long time. He preserved his moral religious identity: his commitment to the God of Abraham, his commitment to the way of life that the God of Abraham sanctioned, his commitment to the Promised Land. All those commitments, and many more, were not affected at all. Jacob was as dedicated at the end of his twenty years of servitude in Laban's house as he was at the first; he spent on the cold stones in Beth-El when he pledged, the Lord will be my God (28:21). At the completion of his sojourn in Haran, the angel of God revealed himself to Jacob: I am the God of Beth-El, where you anointed a monument, where you pronounced to Me a vow (31:13). In other words, you remained loyal to your spiritual heritage and faith in Me.

Joseph was burdened with a similar task; he again had to prove that Abraham's covenant could be practiced outside the Promised Land, that the moral laws are not contingent upon geography and chronology. The difference between Jacobs and Joseph's assignments is a dual one. First, Jacob had to prove that the Torah is realizable in poverty and oppression, that the immigrant—no matter how hard he has to work for a livelihood, no matter how poor and oppressed—is capable, if he makes up his mind, to give devotion and loyalty to his ancestral tradition. Joseph's mission was to demonstrate that enormous success, unlimited riches, admiration, prominence, and power are not in conflict with a saintly covenantal life. The immigrant, no matter what his destiny turns out to be—glorious success or miserable failure—can, if he possesses the heroic quality of either Jacob or
Second, Jacob had to manifest his heroic quality in a backward country. Haran was a pastoral camp. Joseph demonstrated his heroic action in the most advanced civilization of antiquity, Egypt.

(From: Days of Deliverance, p. 102–103)
I have often argued that the episode in which the Jewish people acquired its name—when Jacob wrestled with an unnamed adversary at night and received the name Israel, as we saw earlier—is essential to an understanding of what it is to be a Jew. I argue here that it is equally critical to understanding what it is to lead.

There are several theories as to the identity of “the man” who wrestled with the patriarch that night. The Torah calls him a man. The prophet Hosea calls him an angel (Hos. 12:4-5). The sages say it was Samael, guardian angel of Esau and a force for evil. Jacob himself was convinced it was God. “Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, ‘It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared’” (Gen. 32:31).

My argument is that we can only understand the passage against the entire background of Jacob’s life. Jacob was born holding onto Esau’s heel. He bought Esau’s birthright. He stole Esau’s blessing. When his blind father asked him who he was, he replied, “I am Esau your firstborn” (Gen. 27:19). Jacob was the child who wanted to be Esau.
Genesis

Why? Because Esau was the elder, because Esau was strong, physically mature, a hunter. Above all, because Esau was his father's favorite: "Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebecca loved Jacob." (Gen. 25:28). Jacob is the paradigm of what the French literary theorist and anthropologist René Girard called mimetic desire, meaning, we want what someone else wants, because we want to be that someone else. The result is tension between Jacob and Esau. This tension rises to an unbearable intensity when Esau discovers that Jacob has taken the blessing Isaac had reserved for him, and vows to kill Jacob when Isaac is no longer alive.

Jacob flees to Laban where he encounters more conflict; he is on his way home when he hears that Esau is coming to meet him with a force of four hundred men. In an unusually strong description of emotion the Torah tells us that Jacob was "very frightened and distressed." (Gen. 32:7) — frightened, no doubt, that Esau would try to kill him, and perhaps distressed that his brother's animosity was not without cause.

Jacob had indeed wronged his brother, as we saw earlier. Isaac says to Esau, "Your brother came deceitfully and took your blessing." (Gen. 27:35). Centuries later, the prophet Hosea says, "The Lord has a charge to bring against Judah; he will punish Jacob according to his ways and repay him according to his deeds. In the womb he grasped his brother's heel; as a man he struggled with God." (Hos. 12:3–4). Jeremiah uses the name Jacob to mean someone who practises deception: "Beware of your friends; do not trust anyone in your clan; for every one of them is a deceiver [akov Yakov], and every friend a slanderer." (Jer. 31:32).

As long as Jacob sought to be Esau there was tension, conflict, rivalry. Esau felt cheated, Jacob felt fear. That night, about to meet Esau again after an absence of twenty years, Jacob wrestles with himself; finally, he throws off the image of Esau, the person he wants to be, which he has carried with him all these years. This is the critical moment in Jacob's life. From now on, he is content to be himself. And it is only when we stop wanting to be someone else (in Shakespeare's words, "desiring thine man's art, and that man's scope, With what I most enjoy contention least") that we can be at peace with ourselves and with the world.

2. Shakespeare, "Sonnet 29."

This is one of the great challenges of leadership. It is all too easy for a leader to pursue popularity by being what people want him or her to be — a liberal to liberals, a conservative to conservatives, taking decisions that win temporary acclaim rather than flowing from principle and convictions. Presidential adviser David Gergen wrote about Bill Clinton that he "isn't exactly sure who he is yet and tries to define himself by how well others like him. That leads him into all sorts of contradictions, and the view by others that he seems a constant mixture of strengths and weaknesses."

Leaders sometimes try to "hold the team together" by saying different things to different people, but eventually these contradictions become clear — especially in the total transparency that modern media imposes — and the result is that the leader appears to lack integrity. People no longer trust his or her remarks. There is a loss of confidence and authority that may take a long time to restore. The leader may find that his or her position has become untenable and may even be forced to resign. Few things make a leader more unpopular and the pursuit of popularity.

GREAT LEADERS HAVE THE COURAGE TO LIVE WITH UNPOPULARITY. Lincoln was reviled and ridiculed during his lifetime. In 1864 the New York Times wrote of him: "He has been denounced without end as a perjurer, a usurper, a tyrant, a subverter of the Constitution, a destroyer of the liberties of his country, a reckless despot, a heartless traitor over the last agonies of an expiring nation." Churchill, until he became prime minister during the Second World War, had been written off as a failure. After the war he was defeated in the 1945 general election. John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. were assassinated. When Margaret Thatcher died, some people celebrated in the streets. Jacob was not a leader; there was as yet no nation for him to lead. Yet the Torah goes to great lengths to give us an insight into his struggle for identity, because it was not his alone. It happens to most of us (the word "not" used to describe Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob means not only..."

It is not easy to overcome the desire to be someone else, to want what they have, to be what they are. Most of us have such feelings from time to time. Girard argues that this has been the main source of conflict throughout history. It can take a lifetime of wrestling before we know who we are and relinquish the desire to be who we are not.

More than anyone else in Genesis, Jacob is surrounded by conflict: not just between himself and Esau, but between himself and Laban, between Rachel and Leah, and between his children, Joseph and his brothers. It is as if the Torah were telling us that so long as there is a conflict within us, there will be a conflict around us. We have to resolve the tension in ourselves before we can do so for the world. We have to be at peace with ourselves before we can be at peace with the world.

That is what happens in this parasha. After his wrestling match with the stranger, Jacob undergoes a change of personality. He gives back to Esau the blessing he took from him. The previous day he had given him back the material blessing by sending him hundreds of goats, ewes, rams, camels, cows, bulls, and donkeys. Now he gives him back the blessing that said, "Be lord over your brothers, and may the sons of your mother bow down to you" (Gen. 27:29). Jacob bows down seven times to Esau. He calls Esau "My lord" (33:8), and himself "your servant" (33:5). He actually uses the word "blessing," though this fact is often obscured in translation. He says "Please take my blessing that has been brought to you" (33:11). The result is that the two brothers meet and part in peace.

People conflict. They have different interests, passions, desires, temperaments. Even if they did not, they would still conflict, as every parent knows. Children — and not just children — seek attention, and one cannot attend to everyone equally all the time. Managing the conflicts that affect every human group is the work of the leader — and if the leader is not sure of and confident in his or her identity, the conflicts will persist. Even if the leader sees himself as a peacemaker, the conflicts will still endure.

The only answer is to "know thyself." People must wrestle with themselves as Jacob did on that fateful night, throwing off the person they might like to be but are not; they must accept that some people will like them and what they stand for while others will not; they must understand that it is better to seek the respect of some than the popularity of all. This may involve a lifetime of struggle, but the outcome is an immense strength. No one is stronger than the person who knows who and what he is.
וכך מович חזרה חוהים ה',楠משורת נפשו, הניא: "יש לך להזין לך סיים חוהים
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בדיד על חודש ממרוספימו זאל כל chaud ששלם אפוניו ישיאלי
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כל עלפות. דרך שסנעה את מימד נטול (ז"ל: "משריא אדומיא" שבך
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שאני לה על ידי יִנְי מני שמחה והשיקות פי השכל הנותנא עז השכל המרופע
בוגר".