

Good morning and thank you for coming. This day is very special for me; in the Jewish religion, to become a bar mitzvah is to become someone who follows the commandments. My Torah portion is from the Book of Genesis. In this portion Jacob is making preparations for the arrival of his brother Esau. The preparations were gifts. Jacob hadn't seen his brother for a long time so he prepared many gifts for him, sheep, donkeys and oxen. If it were me, I might have prepared a bag of microwave popcorn, but then I didn't steal my brother's birthright. A birthright is a blessing you get from your father when you are the first-born. It can mean the difference between getting an inheritance or not. So you can see why Jacob might be so anxious.

My favorite part of my portion is the last verse, which says how Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until the rise of dawn. Jacob and the man wrestled so long that they used every move possible to get the upper hand, including: Jab, Cross, Hook, Right Uppercut, Left Uppercut, Right Rip, Left Rip, Overhand Right, Superman Punch, Back Fist, the Butterfly, the Half Butterfly, the Octopus, and the Turtle. In the end Jacob got his superstar wrestler nickname, Israel!

When the man first appeared Jacob didn't know if he was dreaming. Some believe Jacob could have wrestled with God, or an angel, maybe even Esau.

Many commentaries believe this was Jacob wrestling with himself. I think Jacob was indeed wrestling with himself. Why was it important that Jacob wrestle at all? Because if you are wrestling with your own conscience it sometimes means you feel bad about a wrong you have committed.

I can connect to that interpretation specifically, because I find myself wrestling with my conscience sometimes. When I battle with my conscience I start with just struggling to know what is right and wrong. I think Jacob was guessing how Esau would react and blowing it out of proportion. Last time he saw Esau was twenty years ago and Esau had threatened to tear Jacob's throat out, but a long time had passed since then. Jacob could not possibly have known what Esau was thinking. Jacob couldn't imagine that Esau had forgiven him. With anxiety clouding his mind and fear in his eyes Jacob sought pity from Esau, and when they met, Esau surprisingly hugged his beloved brother. A troubled conscience often reflects the guilt one feels for acting impulsively.

Let me give you a hypothetical example...say - I shot a guy for no apparent reason. I think we can all agree that using a weapon for this purpose would be wrong. Think about the stress I went, I mean would have to go through after realizing the consequences of my actions. I could see how I would wrestle with my own conscience if I'd done this terrible thing. Our actions have many

consequences and we cannot simply forget about it, sometimes it tortures us until we make it right. Jacob might have avoided all that energy wrestling with his conscience and all the time spent dwelling on it by doing the right thing in the first place; thou shall not steal your brother's birthright.

I believe another thing we can learn from Jacob's wrong doing towards Esau is; if we don't think about the consequences of our actions we may find ourselves battling with our conscience. This is what it means to become "Israel". This is what it means to be a Jew, a child of Israel. It means listening to your conscience and doing the right thing at the right time, rather than our conscience coming to us in the form of a wrestling match. If only Jacob knew how Esau felt about him, he could have spent his time imagining hope, love and forgiveness instead of painful turmoil. Thankfully, they had a happy ending – may this be the case for all of us who wrestle with our conscience and seek to make things right.

To conclude I would like to thank my parents for making this all possible. I would also like to thank my grandmother for tutoring me and for his love and support, my grandfather. Last but not least Mrs. Fromer, Cantor Sager and Rabbi Caruso for helping prepare and perform this ceremony.