

# ALONE WITH FRIENDS

by Torah.org

Jacob and his family were traveling to meet Esau and return to the Land of Israel. Jacob had his family and flocks cross the Yabok river before him, leaving Jacob himself alone on the other side. At that moment, a man — whom the Midrash says was Esau's personal angel — attacked him and wrestled with him until the morning.

The Sages equate the force of Esau's angel to man's lowest nature, the *Yetzer Harah* (Evil Inclination). As such,

Jacob's struggle while alone with the angel is comparable to our struggle to live according to our moral values when we're alone, separate from our family or social support.

When Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakkai was close to death, his students asked for a parting blessing. He said, "May the fear of heaven be to you like the fear of flesh and blood." The students were surprised and said, "That's all? That's the level of fear we should aspire to?" He said, "If it were only that much! When people sin, they say, 'I hope nobody is looking.'" (Talmud Brachos 28b)

Among friends and family, we feel more responsible for our actions. When our "personal brand" is on the line, we will do our best not to disappoint our peers.

Jacob was victorious in his struggle, but he did not leave unscathed. The angel managed to injure his thigh, and he limped away from the battle. It's best to avoid being "alone," to always have a peer group that expects the best of us, for even the greatest among us can fall to temptation. Pursue friendship with people and check in with your companions, especially when you feel alone. The strength we find from our peers will help us maintain our spiritual achievements and continue to grow!