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For Love of the Father: An Archetypal Exploration

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Great stories articulate the movement of the individual and collective psyche and withstand the tests of time, location, cultural and gender distinctions. Through the study of myth, we recognize our shared humanity and the particularities that inform a life. As a depth psychotherapist, I come to archetypal stories with expectancy, hoping to re-cognize myself and my clients within the action of the other. The Biblical story of Jacob and Esau (Genesis 25-35) offers the scholar boundless opportunity for theological, ethical and historical analysis. However, this story of familial relationships requires of me a different kind of telling. This essay is intended not as a scholarly examination of a myth, but rather as a mythic exploration of self. Using Jacob as my guide, I will explore how the archetypal movements of longing, envy and love; deception, separation and reconciliation inform and reveal underlying themes within my life story, and in particular, how my relationship with my father determined much of the course of my life.

KEYWORDS: depth psychology, mythic, archetypal, symbolic, psyche, inner and outer self

Depth Psychological Approach

Depth psychology turns to mythology to glean the psychological lessons that can be excavated from archetypal imagery. Myths are understood to be embellished sacred stories that convey psychic *Truth* about the human experience. One can approach mythology from a cultural or personal perspective to understand motivations, influences, complexes, and behaviors. Mythological imagery is understood with analogical and metaphorical reasoning, and as such, the characters and plot reveal interior aspects of the individual or collective psyche. From an archetypal perspective, gender is a non-binary reality, with all archetypes revealing universal psychic experience regardless of the ascribed gender roles within a story. What is more salient are the behaviors, themes and emotions conveyed within the mythos. Thus, the story of Jacob and Esau reveal aspects of both my outer relationships, and more pointedly, the internal drama of my psyche.

Summary of Genesis 25-35

The story of Jacob and Esau tells of twin brothers born to Isaac and Rebekah. Esau is the older twin who is envied by the younger brother. Aside from having his father's love, Esau, as the oldest, possess the birthright privilege. Their mother, whose love for Jacob is greater, conspires with Jacob to outwit his brother, deceive his father, and steal what rightly belongs to Esau. Jacob purchases the birthright from his hungry and impulsive brother and usurps his father's blessing by cloaking himself in Esau's clothes and covering his smooth skin with goatskins. Isaac is blind to truth by the touch and smell of his apparent hairy son. To protect himself from Esau's rage over the theft, Jacob must leave home and travel east to live with his uncle, Laban. There he will live for 20 years before returning home. Jacob

marries Laban's two daughters, Leah and Rebekah, one out of deception and the other by passionate choice. Once again, we are introduced to siblings with opposing nature and an act of family deception. After a long period of productivity and development, Jacob determines that he needs to return to his homeland. Along the way he will experience a transformative dark night in which he wrestles with a Stranger. Arriving home, the two brothers reconcile and the story concludes when together they attend their father's funeral.

From conception forward, Jacob wrestles with his destiny and the fullness of his being. In Jacob we find a fully imperfect human being whose quests for psycho-spiritual development and wholeness. Movement from one stage of development to the next is precipitated by transformative moments of darkness and revelation. Jacob "clings to these fleeting epiphanies, endures endless travails of his life and eventually emerges as an integrated adult prepared to lead his tribe" (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 236). Jacob's story, and thus mine, can be broken into three parts: The Beginning, Time Away, and Return and Reconciliation.

The Beginning

Isaac prayed to the LORD for his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD granted his prayer, and his wife Rebekah conceived. The children struggled together within her... When her time to give birth was at hand, there were twins in her womb... Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, living in tents. Isaac loved Esau, because he was fond of game; but Rebekah loved Jacob (Genesis: 25:21 – 25:28).

As the future third patriarch, Jacob's life begins in a tussle with his twin brother, Esau. Conceived through divine intervention, the brothers contain divergent energies and qualities. Esau as the hunter, is impulsive, virile, of the earth and extroverted, while Jacob is cunning, strong-minded, introverted, and introspective. Esau has what Jacob does not; he has a know-how in the outer world of fields, the birthright and consequent blessing, and most importantly, Esau has their father's love. The frail Isaac finds within his hairy son the strength he envied in his own brother Ishmael. The father's greater love for Esau inspires feelings of competition, envy, and longing, and drives Jacob to commit two significant acts: the purchase of the birthright, and the deceitful garnering of the blessing intended for Esau. Viewed psychologically Esau is both the outer sibling and the inner twin to Jacob. Sibling rivalry as a recurring mythos in Genesis reveals the soul-making function of familial relationships. As Peter Pitzele suggests, "Brotherhood is the final crucible for the soul" (1995, p. 161). Jacob's life course and the fulfillment of destiny are assured by a covetous longing for a father's love and the birth right that is initially denied to him. Unrequited love, and the inevitable acts of a child, shape an individual life and found a future nation.

Raised within a traditional male family as the only daughter, I looked to my four older brothers with deep envy. I ached to have their physical power, their social position and to participate in the activities open to males but denied to females. I was acutely aware that within my family and the culture at large, males were promised a birthright and privilege denied to daughters and mothers. I wanted what they had, to be of the field, not

the tent, to receive blessings and opportunities. Even more significantly, my greatest desire was to gain my father's elusive love. My mother's love was obvious, but I was disinterested in her ways of being because of her oppressed role; I longed for my father's attention, approval and the advantages I thought it would offer.

Like Isaac before him, my father envied his stronger athletic brother, and encouraged his sons to succeed in ways that he could not. We all knew of his love for sports, as well as, his disappointment in lacking natural ability. A fierce competitive nature and psychological gamesmanship served to compensate for my father's lack of talent. He challenged all of his sons to defeat him. As the young girl-child I sat on the outside, looking on with a hungry desire to join the race. Very early in life, I recognized that it was up to me if I were to have a relationship with him; I would have to enter his masculine arena. Blind to and fearful of the feminine, my father had no idea how to relate with a daughter. I grew up listening to him berate women for their "irrational female logic," "supposed intuition" and excessive fear and caution. Having never protected me from his opinions indicates that he denied my gender. Driven to turn his blind eye toward me, I covered my smooth skin with the hairy façade of a young "Tom boy."

Leaving my tent for the fields, I denied my love of mystery and my contemplative, introverted nature, and instead developed a boisterous, active posture. Willing to go to any lengths to steal my father's glance, to usurp my brother's needs, to gain what I so desperately desired, I became all that I sensed my father wanted me to be: stoic, fearless, competitive, career oriented, athletic and rejecting of everything deemed feminine at that time in history (mid to late 1900's). While my father appeared to be impressed with my achievements, I never felt as competent, nor as worthy as my brothers were in his eyes. Refusing defeat, I tried harder. Without complaint, I was always at his side participating in *his* activities, in *his* way, whether I enjoyed them or not.

Returning to the Bible, the story of Esau's deception reveals the complexity of participation that is necessitated by individual and collective destiny. In seeking fulfillment, God and Psyche require humans to commit difficult acts for the greater good of nation and soul. The scripture reveals that Jacob did not deceive his father on his own; together, the Lord's prophecy, Rebekah's insight, Jacob's desire, Esau's carelessness, and Isaac's blindness create the outcome.

My deception also required the mutual involvement of both parents and the fates. Aside from my father's inability to see and value femininity, my mother's actions were complicit with my scheme. At first glance, my mother's motivations appear to be neglectful, necessitated by her own need to survive. Overwhelmed by the demands of five children, seven years apart in age, my mother was relieved to have me seek attention from any other source. Refusing to engage in any of my father's worldly interests, my mother safely put that duty into the hands of her daughter. Outside of the bedroom, I became my father's life partner in the world of sports, travel and adventure. Burdened by her own wounds and devalued as a woman, my mother was unable to foster pride in being female; which supported my willingness to adorn my brothers' skin.

As the years passed, I came to believe that something else was at work, albeit unconscious, within my mother's mind. My mother's story is reflective of so many others of her generation. Prior to meeting my father, my mother had been a pre-med student at Wellesley College. Number one in her class, she had a bright and active mind, and had dreams of a professional future. Instead, she met my father, dropped out of college, married

and became pregnant within six months. Out of duty, love and profound fear of the unfamiliar, her life was one of seclusion to the home. Although often frightened for me, my mother always celebrated my courage to explore the world in pursuit of my dreams. I now suspect that she may have believed that my only way out of the house was through aligning with my father. Perhaps, with Rebekah-like wisdom and sacrifice, she drove me from her lap into the outstretched arms of the patriarchy, knowing that my destiny lay in leaving home.

Although I received my father's blessing for having donned the hairy skin, I never felt that I had authentically won his love. His approval was based on the deception that I had successfully overcome the "limitations" of being female. For decades, I would believe that he loved my masculine ways, not me. Further, my masquerade not only fooled those around me, but effectively veiled my own awareness. Natural instincts driven into unconsciousness, became objectionable and subservient to my adaptive hairy persona. Deep within I sensed that my survival depended on separation from the family crucible of sibling rivalry and paternal doubt. Split-off from my inner self, but bolstered by the strength and promise of masculine outer garments, I left the fatherland in search of my destiny. Leaving home was both an inner act of exile from authentic parts of myself and a physical relocation 1000 miles away from family.

Time Away

*Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the elder was Leah,
and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah's eyes were lovely,
and Rachel was graceful and beautiful. Jacob loved Rachel...*

Genesis: 29:16-18

With his parent's blessing, Jacob leaves Beer-sheba for Haran, with the hopes of finding a bride. Arriving in the land of the East, Jacob falls instantly in love with Rachel, upon meeting her "Jacob kissed Rachel and began to weep aloud." (Genesis 29:11). Jacob asks Laban for Rachel's hand in marriage. Although Laban agrees to a price, seven years of Jacob's labor, he deceives Jacob by sending Leah to the wedding bed instead of Rachel. Jacob honors his marriage to Leah but insists on having Rachel for a second wife. Once again, Jacob must serve Laban for seven more years as a price for his true love.

In the image of the two sisters, we find again the theme of deception and longing, as well as, an allusion to intrapsychic marriage and external desire. Esau and Rachel are the siblings with the favored physical presence of strength and beauty, while Jacob and Leah possess vision and resourcefulness and a will to get what they need. Leah, like Jacob, conspires with a parent to gain what she lacks. Although unloved, Leah bares seven of Jacob's children. In Leah, Jacob finds a mirror reflection of his character and needs. In her like-mindedness and less favored condition, Leah can be viewed symbolically as the cloaked and adaptive mate, while Rachel, the object of Jacob's longing represents his split off authentic self. Before Jacob can bed with his true self, he must commit to years of labor with the self-reflecting wife, that part of him that seeks outer approval through action.

A few years after leaving my father's home I came to meet my true love, my future husband, Doug. As with the biblical couple, I immediately recognized that I had met the man I would marry, however, ten years would pass before our wedding day. Standing

between Doug and myself was my Leah, my inner mate of deception. Before I could truly commit my love to another, I had to have intercourse with the mirroring bride that revealed my own desperate acts of deception and self-denial. My relationship with Doug unveiled my attachment concerns: what further sacrifice of self would be required to have this man's love? What disguise, what deception would be necessary to win his blessing? Total commitment was halted by the self-knowledge that without a stronger sense of personal identity, I would once again lose myself for the love of another. Thus, my first commitment had to be with myself, the extroverted sister who could manifest in the outer world of career accomplishment. Only after serving this need could I wed my beloved.

Moving further into the intrapsychic meaning of the two wives, I see within the sisters, my adaptive, extroverted Leah who birthed much but never felt genuinely cherished within or without. Always wrestling with a sense of not being enough, my Jacob-Leah union produced a great deal but remained absent of true love –love for myself. However, during these decades of imposed psychic exile, events conspired which introduced me to my inner Rachel, the lost beloved, contemplative, soulful self. Is it no wonder Jacob weeps when he first kisses Rachel? Who among us has not been deeply moved when we come in contact with denied qualities of our soul that return to awaken our passion and offer sacred union. Years of inner work and healing finally brought me to remember and embrace my inner Rachel. But like Jacob, further sacrifice was required for integration to happen. I needed time with both wives, with both my extroverted and introverted self, with the bride who brought me outer success, and she who calls me back to soul. As I imagine happened for Jacob, my hairiness began to recede while smoother skin took outer form. As such, my relationship with myself, and my family began to evolve into more genuine exchanges and a greater valuing of my authentic way of being. I was readied for return and reconciliation, when something happened along the way.

Return and reconciliation

Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob's hip was put out of joint... Then he said, "Let me go for the day is breaking... You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Isreal, for you have striven with God and with humans and have prevailed." Genesis: 32:24-28

Years of service to Laban bring Jacob psychological growth, physical prosperity and numerous offspring. Having achieved success, Jacob is called to return to his homeland, to the unfinished business he left behind. A nightly encounter with the Angel or Stranger (Rosenblatt, 1996; Pitzele, 1995) provides the final preparation for his return. Jacob wrestles through the night with the mysterious being, and walks away forever changed. Having never fully defined the night figure, the Bible allows us, along with Jacob, to experience the mystery and depth of the encounter. Perhaps the Stranger is God, destiny, or Jacob's own unknown inner psyche. What appears most significant, is that he leaves the experience humbled physically and psychologically, and with an earned, not manipulated, blessing. Jacob, the heir apparent patriarch, has been given a new name, Israel.

Securely established in the outer world, a deeper reclamation and return became possible for me. The Stranger that assaulted me on my inward journey home was the Angel of Death, who unexpectedly took my mother from us following a 16-day hospitalization. Wrestling with the inevitable power of death and its profound grief forever changed me and my position within the family. My night tussle with the Death Angel transformed my way of being; my outward movements, my interactions, my mind and heart were greatly humbled by the markings of death. Quickened by my encounter, I fell further into my authentic self and spiritual truth. Being fully present to my mother, and serving my father and brothers, was made possible by stripping myself of outer garments and fully embracing my wholeness as a woman and daughter. Midwifing her transition was filled with struggle, grace and revelation, and I was made anew.

Twelve hours after my mother passed, I called her cousin, her most cherished friend of 80 years and a mentor to my soul, to tell her the sad news. Just before getting off the phone she said to me: “You are now the Matriarch of the family.” Her words struck deeply, this was a blessing and a renaming. In that moment, somehow, I knew the truth of her words and that I was prepared for this new charge. Rather than a manipulated blessing, I had earned the true privilege afforded a daughter’s birthright.

Following the dark night, Jacob completes his journey home and is greeted by his brother.

Esau ran to meet him and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept...Esau said, “What do you mean by all this company that I met?” Jacob answered, “To find favor with my lord.” But Esau said, “I have enough, my brother: keep what you have for yourself.” Jacob said, “No, please; if I find favor with you, then accept my present from my hand; for truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God—since you have received me with such favor...”
Genesis 33:4-11

Humbled, wizened and open to the truth, Jacob arrives in the fatherland and faces the brother he betrayed. Unexpectedly, Esau graces Jacob with love and forgiveness, freeing Jacob to fulfill his duty as Israel. Within Esau’s face, Jacob sees God, a symbol of the psychic truth that it is a divine act to face oneself, and in so doing, to survive. Having reconciled, the brothers choose to go their separate ways, but will reunite later at their father’s funeral.

Witnessing and tending to death brought me fully home to myself and to those around me. All my years of programming about the weak and devouring feminine led me to fear and despise my birthright. However, my soul waited gracefully for my return. Years of painful work brought about a reclamation of my intuitive instinct, my fascination with the unknown, and the full range of my emotions. Softer, more compassionate and receptive, I have returned to the tent where I spend my days in spiritual and psychological contemplation. Although the furry exterior has been mostly discarded, the lessons gleaned from its offerings have been integrated into my psyche. Rather than being in opposition with the other, I have reconciled my way of the fields with my smoother nature. Moderating the tools my father gave me successfully compliments my more natural instincts. Most importantly I have reconciled with the choices I made. Years of genuine grieving and courageous inner work, eventually led to inner acceptance and forgiveness. I am grateful

for my twin nature, for the years of wearing the hairy persona and for my return home to the fullness of my being.

My mother's passing, and the vast hole it left behind for my father, granted us the opportunity to see each other with new vision. No longer blinded by expectation, projection and assumption, I felt valued and loved for all of who I am. With hindsight, I look back to my childhood, recognizing that although I never believed it, I always had my father's affection. Peeling back deep levels of shame, hurt and forgiveness, I am grateful that, like Jacob, I became cunning and wise to all openings for connection. And with a surprise that resembles my biblical brother's, I am grateful that past resentments have been overcome in favor of their gifts of love and respect.

Through Jacob, I recognize how needs, desires, and the natural unfolding of one's destiny necessitate periods of impersonation and self-sacrifice. As well, Jacob's story deepens my awareness of the centrality my father holds within my heart and imagination. Articulating my story as a father's daughter has triggered feelings of guilt and love. To speak against the father is dangerous, yet to recognize our archetypal struggle only inspires more love. In aligning with the father, I acquired humor, courage, passion, curiosity and an adventuresome spirit. However, I am grateful that he too learned to value and respect my previously repressed energies, finding within them a balanced offering.

My father passed away 5 months ago, surrounded by the love of his sons and daughter. In our final years and especially at the end, although he remained most vocal about my physical and intellectual accomplishments, in his misty and aging eyes, I recognized how he turned to me for my spiritual, contemplative strength and emotional presence. He was genuinely open and grateful for my intuitive awareness, and for his daughter's smooth touch. As an inner and outer family, we came face to face with pure love, and were reconciled and united as my father took his final breath.

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