

# Marcia Zimmerman

## Voices of Faith – March 10, 2014

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In the Torah, the five books of Moses, Jacob wrestles with an angel and becomes Israel. In this transformative story Jacob is a man, but Israel becomes a people. 4,000 years later, we the Jewish people are the direct descendents of Jacob. We are the people who wrestle.



Jacob's son Joseph's story is one of wrestling, as well. He is sold into slavery by his jealous brothers and thrown into jail by false accusations. In jail, his gift of interpreting dreams is requested endlessly. He is brought to Pharaoh to interpret his dream – does so – and from Joseph's interpretation Egypt is saved from a famine. The Jewish people's story is a story of liberation and freedom. Because of Joseph, Jacob's son, we were accepted in Egypt. Then a Pharaoh arose who knew not Joseph. We became slaves in Egypt but G-d heard our cries and set us free. While this was the first time the Jewish people were isolated and mistreated, it is not the last. Out of this experience of oppression, the Torah impels us to fight for the needy, the oppressed, the persecuted.

It says 36 times in the Torah to welcome the stranger for the Israelites were strangers in the land of Egypt. As long as the Jewish people are on this earth, we have an imperative to help others in need, to make a difference in the world.

That is why 9% of all Nobel Peace Prize recipients are Jews, when we make up 0.2% of the world's population. We have worked to create great strides for the world and humanity.

Jews were central to the civil rights movement. It was people like Rabbi Stephen Wise and so many others who began the NAACP. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, who walked hand in hand with the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, Reverend Ralph Abernathy holding a Torah scroll – a shared history and story between the African American and Jewish communities' experiences of slavery. This is why Rabbi Heschel said at the moment of the photograph, "My feet are praying ...."



We know what it is like to be powerless – we know how to reach out to others who are disenfranchised to create a power base of activism but do we as a people know what to do when we are in a position of power? This is where we as a community are wrestling today.



66 years ago, out of the Holocaust came the redemption of the modern state of Israel. Never again would Jews wander from port to port for safety – only to be sent back to their deaths. The modern state of Israel was our hope and dream for security and Jewish survival.

Two narratives, one land, has created a war-torn country. Today we wrestle with how to create peace, a two-state solution.

The American Jewish community is not monolithic in its views of Israel. But it is only in recent years that the multitude of voices has emerged. Generations X and Y are more comfortable publically criticizing the Israeli government. J-street, whose mission is a two-state solution, has gained power in the American Jewish discourse along with AIPAC. Ari Shavit's book, *My Promised Land*, speaks honestly about events long denied. His book is at the center of civil discourse within the American Jewish community. The wrestling we do today will hopefully bring tomorrow's peace.

