

Lecture 10

Jacob's Ladder and the World History. The Confrontation of the Twins

Let us now proceed to the story of the two brothers — Jacob and Esau.

Chapter 25 of the Book of Genesis says that Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife Rebekah, because she was childless; the Lord answered his prayer, and Rebekah conceived:

The children struggled together within her; and she said, "If it is to be this way, why do I live?.." (Genesis 25, 22; NRSV)

The literal translation from the original goes: "...then what for [do] I [exist]?.."

...So she went to inquire of the Lord. (Genesis 25, 22; NRSV)

The sons in Rebekah's womb struggled — "pushed each other", according to the Hebrew text. This fight suggested the future enmity between the brothers. The tale says that they contested their birthright while still within their mother. It was the birthright that gave the right to the grand spiritual blessing of Abraham and Isaac. The right to the blessing belonged to the brother who deserved to take up the development of the blessed people of God. Besides, the tradition claims that when Rebekah passed places related to idolatry, Esau, the future idolater, came into motion as if trying to get out. But when she walked by the houses of saints or altars built by Abraham and dedicated to God, it was Jacob who became seized with awe. Thus, the brothers revealed their inclination: the one for light, and the other for darkness. And finally, there is a tale that says: Esau threatened that if Jacob did not give up his precedence, he would kill their mother. And then Jacob let Esau have the birthright...

These legends are not at all utterly fantastic. Many visionaries testify that the baby in the womb of his mother has a soul, which can hear, see and perceive. When the soul unites with its earthly body, it can still remember its former dwelling, the spiritual world; and only when the person is born, an angel deprives them of their memory, so that the baby could direct all its efforts towards perceiving this earthly world.

It is also said here that Rebekah "went to inquire of the Lord". She could do this with the help of saint people of that time, the prophets, because not only Abraham was still alive, but also several of his righteous forefathers. Besides, she could go herself and ask the Lord, for she was a prophetess like Sarah, Abraham's wife, according to some evidence that we are going to touch upon further.

And the Lord said unto her, Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples born of you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the elder shall serve the younger. (Genesis 25, 23; NRSV)

So, already in their mother's womb were the brothers destined: one — for spiritual domination, and the other — for spiritual submission. But nevertheless, their confrontation was long-lasting... Thus, one woman gave birth to two different nations and two different peoples. Naturally, this should be understood not only literally, but also spiritually; Jacob and Esau symbolize two kinds of people: the men of God who serve Him, and the men who oppose the Lord, sinful and wicked. It has nothing to do with foreignness, or with a difference in blood or race, because they are both sons of the same mother. It is all about their spiritual, inner organization.

When her time to give birth was at hand, there were twins in her womb. The first came out red, all his body like a hairy mantle; so they named him Esau. (Genesis 25, 24—25; NRSV)

The name "Esau", עשו <E'sav>, means "hairy", "shaggy". In the original his colour is compared to "a red mantle" (he was possibly born with a red "veil"). In the Scripture this mantle is called אדרת <a'deret>, i.e. "the royal robe" (in the Russian Synodal translation "skin"), from the verb אדר <a'dar> — "to be glorified", "to become famous". "Aderet" is a symbol of the future kingship of Esau's posterity, who were named Edomites, or Idumeans, after their forefather's name (later we shall find out how he got the name of "Edom"). It is mentioned as early as in the Book of Genesis that kings appeared in Esau's family earlier than in Israel's:

These are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom, before any king reigned over the Israelites. (Genesis 36, 31; NRSV)

— and then the kings' names are listed. Almost two thousand years later the last dynasty of the Second Temple period — the Herodian dynasty — assumed the throne of Judea with Roman support; that was the time of Jesus Christ and apostles' earthly life. It was a dynasty of Idumean descent.

And finally, according to some tradition, the origin of Rome was related to Edomites. When Romul, the founder of the city, was gathering multiethnic inhabitants in order to populate Rome, there were a lot of immigrants from the East, including those who, according to Roman historians, had Phoenician names. Obviously, Edomites might well have been among them — that is why Rome bears the name of "Edom" in later documents. And the tale of Jacob and Esau in the Book of Genesis symbolically describes the relationship between the Roman Empire and Israel (see also Chapters "The Sacrifice On Mount Moriah. Death As a Step Towards Renovation" and "Nation Absorber. The Bronze Serpent And Kittim Ships)...

Afterward his brother came out, with his hand gripping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob... (Genesis 25, 26; NRSV)

Jacob had his hand gripping Esau's heel — it is a grand symbol. For where the fleshly nature symbolized by Esau ends (and a man "ends" where his heel is; and it is definitely the heel that is the most meaningful part of this image, for it touches the earth and thus signifies the lowest part of human essence, directly adjoining the dust), begins the spirit, or "Jacob". The hand of Jacob that was holding Esau's heel stands for the future actions of the saint, which he will perform for the glory of God.

The deuterocanonical 2 Esdras includes the following commentary to this episode:

...For Jacob's hand held Esau's heel from the beginning.
Now Esau is the end of this age, and Jacob is the beginning of the age that follows.
The beginning of a person is the hand, and the end of a person is the heel... (2 Esdras 6, 8—10; NRSV)

"This age" stands for the fleshly man, "the age that follows" — for the spiritual one. As we can see, the birth of Esau and Jacob becomes a symbol of great depth.

The same theme is developed in the Epistle to Romans:

...And not all of Abraham's children are his true descendants; but "It is through Isaac that descendants shall be named for you."
This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as descendants.
<...>
Nor is that all; something similar happened to Rebecca when she had conceived children by one husband, our ancestor Isaac.
Even before they had been born or had done anything good or bad (so that God's purpose of election might continue, not by works but by His call) she was told, "The elder shall serve the younger."
As it is written, "I have loved Jacob, but I have hated Esau." (Romans 9, 7—13; NRSV)

Thus, according to the Scripture, the newborn brothers consequently denote two different types: Esau — the carnal man, and Jacob — the spiritual one. Moreover, they serve as symbols of the "election" which is performed "from the mother's womb". We shall not touch upon the deeper and more mysterious reasons of this election, let us only mention that God foresaw Esau's evil doings as well as Jacob's righteous acts, therefore, in harmony with the organization of their souls, He loved the one and hated the other respectively.

The name of "Jacob", יַעֲקֹב <Yaa'kov>, is derived from the verb עָקַב <a'kav>, which denotes "to supplant" in the meaning of "to overpower", "to prevail", as well as "to leave a

trace” and “to follow”; it is the one who is destined to struggle and overcome, and also — “to leave a trace”, i.e. to become a pattern, or a prototype.

We are now passing on to the story of Jacob, which contains four main senses: the literal sense, i.e. ancient historical narration about the patriarch, and three layers of prototypical and symbolic senses. Let us focus on these three layers.

Firstly, Jacob’s fate represents the history of his descendants, the people of Israel; secondly, Jacob serves as the prototype of the Messiah — Jesus Christ; and lastly, Jacob portrays the inner man. These three meanings directly contribute to the interpretation of Jacob’s name as “the one who leaves a trace”.

When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, living in tents. (Genesis 25, 27; NRSV)

The idea seems to be expressed very concisely, but the meaning of these words is inexhaustible. For instance: Esau became “a skillful hunter, a man of the field”. Who was, in fact, the first hunter? As we read in the 10th chapter, verses 8—9, such was Nimrod — a great despot, the first king who rebelled against God and led the erection of the Tower of Babel. Thus, Esau was a spiritual heir of Nimrod, the tyrant and renegade. What does his description as “a skillful hunter” mean in the spiritual sense? Obviously, he is a rapacious person; a man who lays traps, snares and strings; the one who sheds blood at his pleasure. Moreover, Esau is “a man of the field”, i.e. a man who is not bound to his home, or tent, he prefers dwelling in the open space. Can such a person aspire to inherit the blessing of God — the blessing given to Shem? Let us recall what it is said:

...Blessed by the Lord my God be Shem...
May God make space for Japheth, and let him live in the tents of Shem...
(Genesis 9, 26—27; NRSV)

The passage is about “the tents”, i.e. as we have already mentioned, the dwellings of saints, temples, houses of learning.

What is Jacob like? He is said to be “a quiet man, living in tents”. The Hebrew word **תם** <tam>, translated here as “quiet”, also has the meaning of “whole”, “innocent”, “pure”.

The tents meant for Shem’s posterity are mentioned not only in the ninth chapter of the Book of Genesis, but also in the Book of Numbers for example, where the blessing of Balaam is delivered, which is to descend upon Israel:

...How fair are your tents, O Jacob, your encampments, O Israel!
Like palm groves that stretch far away, like gardens beside a river, like aloes that the Lord has planted, like cedar trees beside the waters...
(Numbers 24, 5—6; NRSV)

This is said about the tents: they are likened to blooming groves and gardens, to ever-green plants — aloe trees and mighty cedars. The green of groves and gardens in the metaphorical system of the Scripture stands for grace and eternal life (see also the Song of Songs 2, 11—13; 4, 12—16; 5, 1; Isaiah 1, 30; 61, 11 etc.)

What, then, does it mean that Jacob lived in tents? Two meanings are implied here: the literal one — he became a cattle-breeder, a shepherd of the sheep living in shepherd tents; and a symbolic one — he “dwelled”, or lived long, in the tents of Abraham and Isaac, his fathers, where he learned to follow God’s will.

And further it goes:

Isaac loved Esau, because he was fond of game; but Rebekah loved Jacob.
(Genesis 25, 28; NRSV)

Isaac in his old age presents an image of a righteous man who has lost some spiritual bearings (it is said of him further with good reason that his eyes got “dim”, or blind. — Genesis 27, 1). Isaac lacked the sort of vital naturalness, impulsiveness that Esau had, his “naturalness”. The fear that Isaac experienced during the sacrifice of Abraham probably rooted in him for the rest of his life and predetermined much of his development; that is why he was so attracted by Esau’s way of life — as the hunter, the free man, wild, ferocious, courageous. Whereas Rebekah in her old age wholly maintained her prophetic intuition, that’s why she loved Jacob so much.

Thus, Jacob and Esau represent multifaceted prototypes of the future “nations”: the people of God and “the generation” of sinners. Jacob is said to have been quiet. The Sermon on the Mount regulates to the people of God:

...But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also...
(Matthew 5, 39; NRSV)

Jacob lives in the tents — he is a shepherd. God’s people is guided by a spiritual shepherd — a prophet, and the people of God is a community of “lambs”, meek and humble, of whom Jesus Christ said that his sheep hear his voice (John 10, 27). Besides, the people of God dwells in “the tents of learning” and follows the teaching of God, just as Jacob lived in the tents of Abraham and Isaac.

The godless “people”, which has Esau as the prototype (it should once again be mentioned that this does not refer to a racial or national community, but to a purely spiritual one, because Jacob and Esau are blood brothers), is noted for treachery, hatred, rapacity, lust for conquest and bloodshed — all this is represented by Esau, who was “a skillful hunter”. A society of this kind is organized after the pattern of a gang of robbers. Esau was “a man of the field”; robbers usually live in the fields, woods, plains, remote from peaceful settlements. And finally, unrighteous people — “men of the field” — are those who hate

spiritual culture; generally, culture is symbolically related to the building of a house, to interior arrangement, to “living in the tents”. “Men of the field” tend to lead a wild, barbarian life, trying to destroy culture.

Let us proceed to the second level of symbols. Jacob is a prototype of the Messiah: he is gentle, or “whole”. “I am gentle and humble in heart”, said Jesus (Matthew 11, 29). Jacob lives in the tents as a shepherd, as well as Jesus is a shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep (John 10, 11). Jesus summons his disciples to the “tents” to learn the Word of God, just as Jacob lived in the tents of his forefathers, perceiving the will of the Creator. As a youth at the age of twelve, according to the Gospel of Luke, Jesus entered the Temple of Jerusalem and had a conversation with the teachers, accepting the teaching from them and revealing his wisdom: he stayed in the great “tent” of God (Luke 2, 46- 49).

It is common knowledge that the opposite of Jesus is the antichrist, who has Esau as a prototype: a hunter, a trapper, who lays invisible traps and catches souls; he is a murderer living at the expense of others. Whereas the true shepherd lays his soul for the sheep, the antichrist constantly murders in order to appropriate the vital energy of his victims (this is known to be the foundation of witchcraft). The most vivid example for this is Nazism: its essence is the creation of such formidable altars for mass sacrifice as concentration camps, devourment of the vital force of other people and whole nations, in one word, satanism (see Lecture 14 of the commentary to The Books Of Leviticus, Numbers And Deuteronomy: the Biblical Legislation for further information).

Besides, Esau, “the man of the field”, is also the image of antichrist, in the sense that the latter tries to destroy any spiritual life, the inner “home” of a person and the whole humankind, annihilate culture as such; just as Nazism tends to eliminate the humanistic tradition — part and parcel of Christianity.

The third level of symbols: Jacob represents the spiritual, inward man — gentility and placidity are typical of him. The relationships between the shepherd and his flock are reflected in the inner world of a believer: here the spirit is the shepherd and all the other human manifestations of the emotional, intellectual, physical kind are like the sheep that are to be rescued by the shepherd. The spirit directs, whereas everything else within the person obeys and serves it — such is the basis of the inner life of the inner man.

And finally, the spiritual man dwells in “the tents”. But here “the tent”, God’s Sanctuary, is located inside the man: “...you are God’s Temple and... God’s Spirit dwells in you...”, the Spirit says through Apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 3, 16). Man of the Spirit dwells in “the tents” in the sense that he longs to retire with God, to seclude himself in his inner Temple perceiving the living voice of the Holy Spirit.

The direct opposite to the spiritual man is the one who is unborn, “outer”. Rapacity and selfishness prevail in him just like in Esau; he appropriates without giving; deprives other people of their vital force in order to seize it for himself. His inner organization corresponds with the arrangement of an “Esau-like” society: his inner nature is similar to a gang of rob-

bers led by their chief; and the chief is his own unbounded will. “I wish it!” — that is his credo, which occupies all his thoughts, feelings, speech and actions.

And finally, “the outer nature” is “the man of the field”: he greatly dislikes solitude and is afraid of it, he is in constant search for outer entertainment, he is practically never in his inner “tent”, alone with God and his denouncing conscience.

...Further we read how Esau lost his birthright:

And Jacob sod pottage: and Esau came from the field, and he was faint:
And Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage;
for I am faint: therefore was his name called Edom. (Genesis 25, 29—30;
KJV)

Esau, who loves bloodshed, the red colour most of all, felt a special yearning for this food. His nickname אֶדוֹם <E'dom> means “red”. We remember that Esau was born in a red “veil” because right from his birth he was predisposed to bloodshed. Here we find another of Esau’s distinctions: he is “faint”. His way of life leads to exhaustion and inner devastation — unlike Jacob, who is always vivacious (see Isaiah 40, 31: “...But those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.”)

Jacob said, “First sell me your birthright.”
Esau said, “I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?” (Genesis
25, 31—32; NRSV)

Let us reflect more on the subject: why does Jacob want the birthright, why is he so eager to obtain it? Could it possibly be in order to have some material advantages? Not at all. He knows Esau’s temper and foresees that later he will be obliged to flee home and become a wanderer and stranger, hiding from his brother’s revenge; he knows that he will not obtain any material advantage. When we read the story of Jacob to the end, we shall find out that he did not ever receive them: the wealth which he collected was sent to him from God, the possessions of his father Isaac were seized by Esau.

Obviously, Jacob, who learned in the tents of Abraham and Isaac, who knew the mysteries of God, was well-informed of those greatest spiritual benefits, which birthright would have secured — he wished to become heir to the promises given to Abraham and Isaac from above and he realized that his brother Esau did not deserve them. So he agreed to bear any deprivation — need, rove and wandering — only to receive the real-life communication with God, this incomparable welfare, the greatest blessing.

Whereas Esau, as we can see, is in complete disdain of his birthright. He says: “I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?” Such way of thinking is typical of the carnal man, who does not believe in any promises: I am mortal, I am going to die, what is the use of your illusive spiritual blessings to me? What is the need in spiritual life at all? Give me

the real, material welfare right now, let me get sated, it is as if he says, I will gladly give you all my spiritual benefits instead.

So, Esau is a person who does not believe in the immortality of the spirit, in the future life; one who wants to enjoy the material world right now, immediately. He is totally identified with his mortal body, his animal nature: “I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?”

Jacob said, “Swear to me first.” So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob.

Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank, and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright. (Genesis 25, 33—34; NRSV)

He “...ate and drank, and rose and went...” This reflects Esau’s whole way of life: eating, drinking, rising and going without contemplating on where one is going to and what place one is leaving, what one is neglecting in favour of material welfare. Esau is in a permanent hurry: he is “busy”, “it is time to go”, he has no time for reasoning... And mark you, he swore, whereas the oath in the context of the Bible is the last word, which completes the agreement, the word which cannot be changed (Hebrews 6, 16). Now Esau is forever, and legally at that, deprived of the birthright; that is why everything that follows, including the ruse due to which Jacob receives the blessing of the first-born son, is the result of Esau’s oath: he swore that he does not claim the birthright anymore.

Let us ask another question: did one who treated the legacy of the two great saints—Abraham and Isaac — with such neglect deserve to receive it? And could God admit such a man to the dialogue, to His covenant?

So we read about the way Isaac blessed his son Jacob:

When Isaac was old and his eyes were dim so that he could not see, he called his elder son Esau and said to him, “My son”; and he answered, “Here I am.” (Genesis 27, 1; NRSV)

When Isaac became old and his eyesight got dim, not only in the physical sense (according to the tradition his physical eyesight weakened because he did not object to the idolatry in the family of Esau: Esau took Hittite wives who worshipped their gods, and Isaac, out of love for his elder son, closed his eyes to this), but also concerning his spiritual eyesight — which includes the fact that he did not recognize Jacob when he came under the guise of Esau.

In this context let us look at other examples of spiritual vision and spiritual blindness. In the 48th chapter of the Book of Genesis we read that Jacob (Israel) knew the day of his death:

Then Israel said to Joseph, “I am about to die, but God will be with you and will bring you again to the land of your ancestors. (Genesis 48, 21; NRSV)

And from the 50th chapter of the Book of Genesis we learn that Joseph also knew the day and hour of his death:

Then Joseph said to his brothers, “I am about to die; but God will surely come to you, and bring you up out of this land to the land that He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.” (Genesis 50, 24; NRSV)

Both patriarchs did not only know the time of their death, but also predicted further events right before their departure, i.e. they died spiritually empowered: they were deeply rooted in the Spirit of God and He revealed future events to them.

Isaac says quite the contrary to Esau:

He said, “See, I am old; I do not know the day of my death... (Genesis 27, 2; NRSV)

Isaac’s spirit was so much weakened that he did not even know the day of his death. Further he goes on to say:

...Now then, take your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field, and hunt game for me.

Then prepare for me savory food, such as I like, and bring it to me to eat, so that I may bless you before I die. (Genesis 27, 3—4; NRSV)

While the human soul is within the body, the spiritual state of a person is tightly connected to their physical condition; that is why patriarch Isaac says: “...prepare for me savory food, such as I like ... so that I may bless you”. It is common knowledge that even prophets often delivered their prophecy while musical instruments were played for them: through physical hearing music is able to bring the human spirit to ecstasy, spiritual delight (1 Samuel 10, 5—6; NRSV). And physical food turns out to have a similar effect.

Esau leaves to hunt, and further it is said:

Now Rebekah was listening when Isaac spoke to his son Esau. So when Esau went to the field to hunt for game and bring it, Rebekah said to her son Jacob, “I heard your father say to your brother Esau, ‘Bring me game, and prepare for me savory food to eat, that I may bless you before the Lord before I die.’ (Genesis 27, 5—7; NRSV)

How could Rebekah hear that? We remember that she was a prophetess, and obviously, the Holy Spirit revealed to her the words of Isaac. Later a similar thing happened, when Esau flew into a rage after losing the blessing of the firstborn son.

...And Esau said to himself, “The days of mourning for my father are approaching; then I will kill my brother Jacob.”

But the words of her elder son Esau were told to Rebekah... (Genesis 27, 41—42; NRSV)

The attention is hardly ever paid to the fact that Esau “said to himself”, i.e. in his mind, and his words were “told” (probably, by God) to Rebekah, who kept in her heart the prophecy concerning her sons, which she received during her pregnancy. It was she who knew the thoughts of Esau from above.

And right after that Rebekah commands to Jacob:

...Go to the flock, and get me two choice kids, so that I may prepare from them savory food for your father, such as he likes; and you shall take it to your father to eat, so that he may bless you before he dies.” (Genesis 27, 9—10; NRSV)

Jacob objects saying:

...My brother Esau is a hairy man, and I am a man of smooth skin. Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall seem to be mocking him, and bring a curse on myself and not a blessing.” (Genesis 27, 11—12; NRSV)

But his mother who knows the future replies to him:

...Let your curse be on me, my son; only obey my word, and go, get them for me... (Genesis 27, 13; NRSV)

Further the following events happen:

Then Rebekah took the best garments of her elder son Esau, which were with her in the house, and put them on her younger son Jacob; and she put the skins of the kids on his hands and on the smooth part of his neck.

Then she handed the savory food, and the bread that she had prepared, to her son Jacob.

So he went in to his father, and said, “My father”; and he said, “Here I am; who are you, my son?” (Genesis 27, 15—18; NRSV)

Great saints — forefathers, prophets — saw remote events of the distant future, even more so ones that happened in their time; but Isaac, having lost his spiritual vision, could

not see the one who was standing in front of him, he could not recognize him. His blindness resulted from the wrong choice, from the excessive meekness towards his unrighteous son... And so, we have a greatest prototype: Jacob wearing goat skins and Esau's garments. This symbol is inexhaustible as well. Let us consider it as a reference both to historical events and to our inner world.

The first layer of symbols implies the direct blood descendants of Jacob, i.e. the Jewish people: it is a nation which maintained its spirit in the guise of other cultures and nations; a nation which contributed much to various cultures, but remained itself, just as Jacob remained himself wearing the garments of Esau and the skins of the kids.

The second layer of symbols — Jacob as a prototype of the true Church. In different cultures and in different civilizations, wearing outer garments of different nations, it remained itself starting from the early times of Christianity up to the present day.

The third layer of symbols: Jacob in the disguise of Esau denotes the Messiah — Christ, who came in the flesh of a human, but inside stayed himself, for through his mouth spoke the Holy Spirit.

In one of his sonnets the great English poet John Donne, following the original Christian tradition, likened Christ to Jacob wearing the skins of kids:

O let me then His strange love still admire ;
Kings pardon, but He bore our punishment;
And Jacob came clothed in vile harsh attire.
But to supplant, and with gainful intent ;
God clothed Himself in vile man's flesh, that so
He might be weak enough to suffer woe.

And finally, one more great prototype: Jacob points to our inner nature, the spiritual man. Our inner nature is bound to assume the physical body in order to perform actions, using material forms of this world in order to receive the blessing from above, because the way we behave here, in this body, determines the reward which expects us at the Judgement of God. And only the voice as the evidence of mind, thought, spirit speaks on behalf of the genuine man who dwells inside the outer man; the incorruptible within the corruptible.

And so, when Isaac asked: "Who are you?", Jacob replied to his father:

...I am Esau your firstborn. I have done as you told me; now sit up and eat of my game, so that you may bless me. (Genesis 27, 19; NRSV)

It would seem that Jacob said an untruth: "I am Esau your firstborn..." But from the spiritual point of view what he did was absolutely justified. Moreover, an authorized heir has a

legal right to speak for the one whose rights he has inherited. Jacob called himself the firstborn because, according to his agreement with Esau, he already possessed the lawful birthright (Genesis 25, 30—34).

But Isaac said to his son, “How is it that you have found it so quickly, my son?” He answered, “Because the Lord your God granted me success.” (Genesis 27, 20; NRSV)

The sacramental moment of the blessing has arrived; this blessing is related to the origination of the whole people of God from Jacob, and of the sacred “seed” — Christ — as well. So Jacob calls the Lord to be the witness of his rectitude— as if giving Isaac a hint that all this has been arranged by the Almighty. In case there was any falsehood, lie, godless cunning, as though Jacob had swindled to appropriate the birthright and the blessing, could God have tolerated that His name was called therein and that the blessing was handed that way? Jacob acted the way the Spirit commanded him from above.

“Now sit up... so that you may bless me...” The blessing is connected with an intense inner action, with the activeness of both the spirit and the soul of man. The blessing is not handed down in an outward, ritual manner, but through the great love of the father, who is inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Then Isaac said to Jacob, “Come near, that I may feel you, my son, to know whether you are really my son Esau or not.”

So Jacob went up to his father Isaac, who felt him and said, “The voice is Jacob’s voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau.” (Genesis 27, 21—22; NRSV)

Apparently, Esau was not used to talking about the Lord, and Isaac found his son’s speech unusual, because the name of God was mentioned. There might have been some other reasons for the father’s suspicion aroused by his intuition.

...When people looked at Jesus Christ, they saw a man who was standing in front of them; but when he spoke, they heard the voice of the Spirit of God, the voice from above. A similar thing happens to the people of Israel, which assumes the clothes of other cultures, but remains itself. The same is with the inner nature of man: we see in front of us an outward man, behold his body, his animal nature; but when he starts speaking, we can hear his voice, which reproduces the inner state of the spirit, as if drawing out the abundance of the heart to the surface. The sounds of words radiate meaning and give evidence of the spiritual nature, whereas the outward appearance of man presents his animal nature: “The voice is Jacob’s voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau.” And Jacob’s hands were covered with the skins of kids, as we remember, for the spirit of man penetrates into his animal essence.

He did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau’s hands; so he blessed him.

He said, "Are you really my son Esau?" He answered, "I am." (Genesis 27, 23—24; NRSV)

Isaac is still in doubt; something still prevents him from accepting Jacob as Esau. And Jacob affirms that he is Esau for the second time, because, as we have already mentioned, the real spiritual birthright could belong to him only.

Then he said, "Bring it to me, that I may eat of my son's game and bless you." So he brought it to him, and he ate; and he brought him wine, and he drank.

Then his father Isaac said to him, "Come near and kiss me, my son." So he came near and kissed him; and he smelled the smell of his garments, and blessed him, and said, "Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field that the Lord has blessed." (Genesis 27, 25—27; NRSV)

But the coming of Esau is described as follows:

Then Isaac trembled violently... (Genesis 27, 33; NRSV)

According to the tradition, when Jacob neared Isaac, the latter felt the odour of paradise and therefore he said: "Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field that the Lord has blessed..." However, when Esau approached, the father felt the stench of hell and "trembled". "The breath" of both paradise and hell announce the fates of the spiritual descendants of the two antagonistic brothers.

And finally Isaac blesses Jacob as the firstborn. We know that through the mouth of Isaac the Holy Spirit is speaking:

May God give you of the dew of heaven, and of the fatness of the earth, and plenty of grain and wine.

Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may your mother's sons bow down to you. Cursed be everyone who curses you, and blessed be everyone who blesses you!" (Genesis 27, 28—29; NRSV)

The first thing with which Isaac blessed Jacob is the dew of heaven. But when Esau came, he received a blessing in which the entities of nature are enumerated in the reverse order:

...Thy dwelling shall be the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above... (Genesis 27, 39; KJV)

For Jacob "the dew of heaven" is in the first place, but "the fatness of the earth", i.e. everything earthly, in the second. For Jacob's offspring, for men of God, spiritual life is the most significant, but everything earthly, bodily is minor. Foremost for Esau is "the fatness of the earth", everything material; however, he also is not quite deprived of the spiritual blessing,

for it goes on to say: “and of the dew of heaven from above”...Thus, in case Esau himself and his followers turn back to the Lord, they will also inherit the wonderful spiritual blessings; but Jacob receives them immediately.

We should be very attentive to the words said to Jacob by his father: “...Cursed be everyone who curses you, and blessed be everyone who blesses you!” We keep in mind that similar words were addressed by God Himself to Abraham, when He brought him out of Haran into the land of Canaan:

I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse...
(Genesis 12, 3; NRSV)

And now Isaac hands down God’s blessing to Jacob. This blessing also refers to everything implied by the image of Jacob — firstly, to the people formed by his posterity. We know that everybody who cursed this people became cursed themselves: lost power, regressed, and finally, those leaders who persecuted, cursed and slaughtered the people of God, vanished. Thus it was, for instance, with Nazi Germany, which was so tragically defeated, losing millions of its citizens. Whereas those who blessed the Jewish people were blessed themselves from above and are still being blessed.

Those who cursed the Church of Christ denoted by Jacob suffered damnation themselves, too; those who blessed it, inherited the blessing. These words have a special meaning for the attitude towards the Messiah — Jesus Christ: the one who blesses him inherits the blessing, but the one who curses suffers heavy retribution.

And lastly, the one who blesses his own inner spiritual nature feels the action of an abundant blessing; the one who curses it, draws damnation upon himself, according to the word of the apostle: “If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit” (Galatians 6, 8). We should be very cautious and mindful of the ideas expressed above in order to maintain the heavenly blessing ourselves.

So, Jacob was awarded with his father’s blessing and went out from his presence.

As soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, when Jacob had scarcely gone out from the presence of his father Isaac, his brother Esau came in from his hunting. (Genesis 27, 30; NRSV)

Just when Jacob goes out, Esau enters. As soon as a good idea, a righteous intention leaves a person, an opposite idea or intention arises.

Esau repeats the same words as Jacob:

He also prepared savory food, and brought it to his father. And he said to his father, "Let my father sit up and eat of his son's game, so that you may bless me."

His father Isaac said to him, "Who are you?" He answered, "I am your firstborn son, Esau."

Then Isaac trembled violently, and said, "Who was it then that hunted game and brought it to me, and I ate it all before you came, and I have blessed him?—yes, and blessed he shall be!"

When Esau heard his father's words, he cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, "Bless me, me also, father!"

But he said, "Your brother came deceitfully, and he has taken away your blessing." Esau said, "Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has supplanted me these two times. He took away my birthright; and look, now he has taken away my blessing." Then he said, "Have you not reserved a blessing for me?" (Genesis 27, 31—36; NRSV)

Let us recall how easily Esau sold his birthright to Jacob; how can he claim the blessing, which is secured by the birthright? Having denied the birthright, he also denied the blessing — it is absolutely clear.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews we can find a warning which is very important for all believers:

...See to it that no one becomes like Esau, an immoral and godless person, who sold his birthright for a single meal. (Hebrews 12, 16; NRSV)

It is stressed here that the spiritual birthright can be sold for a meal — for some worthless material reward, not for something which seems decent, but for something unworthy, trifling. For example, one of Jesus Christ's apostles is known to have betrayed his teacher not for some higher spiritual benefits, but for thirty silver coins. But Esau received even less — just pottage:

...Who sold his birthright for a single meal.

You know that later, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, even though he sought the blessing with tears. (Hebrews 12, 16 —17; NRSV)

Naturally, God tests all of us, and each of us surely comes across a moment in life when we are tempted to sell our birthright "for a single meal"...

Isaac answered Esau, "I have already made him your lord, and I have given him all his brothers as servants, and with grain and wine I have sustained him. What then can I do for you, my son?"

Esau said to his father, "Have you only one blessing, father? Bless me, me also, father!" And Esau lifted up his voice and wept. (Genesis 27, 37 — 38; NRSV)

He literally wrung the blessing from his father with this loud weeping:

And Isaac his father answered and said unto him, Behold, thy dwelling shall be the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above... (Genesis 27, 39; KJV)

Thus, Esau's spiritual heirs always solve the problem whether to choose the earthly life — the inherited "fatness of the earth", or still to strive for "the dew of the heaven"; because nobody, no matter how low they have fallen, how far they have run away from God, is deprived of this promise of "the dew"; they can turn back and the dew will come down onto them.

And so, Isaac continues his prophetic blessing:

...By your sword you shall live, and you shall serve your brother... (Genesis 27, 40; NRSV)

Dire predictions — "to live by the sword"! Esau the thief, Esau the despot, Esau the founder of tyrannical states; and the red mantel which accompanied his birth — the king's robe — is now complete with a sword: "...by your sword you shall live..."

...But when you break loose, you shall break his yoke from your neck." (Genesis 27, 40; NRSV)

This part of the prediction received a full-scale realization in the XXth century. What is denoted by the "yoke of Jacob"? Jacob is the preacher of monotheism; he is the Lord's minister, who speaks about the name of God and from the name of God to all the nations; and his descendants, Israelites, became the first bearers of monotheism: both Christianity and Islam sprang from this root like shoots. In the XXth century Esau "broke loose" and "broke the yoke" of Jacob: absolute atheism got established on part of the earth. "The breakers of the yoke" are the Nazis who discarded the basis of humanism — the commandment to love one's neighbor; and also those God's opponents who refute the existence of God and His Law... It is them who "break the yoke of Jacob from their neck". Of course, there have been many attempts to "break the yoke of Jacob" in history. The Second psalm speaks of this wish of the ungodly:

The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and His Anointed, saying,
"Let us burst their bonds asunder, and cast their cords from us." (Psalm 2, 2—3; NRSV)

...Let us follow the story of Jacob and Esau further:

Now Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing which his father had bestowed upon the latter, and Esau said to himself, “The days of mourning for my father are approaching; then I will kill my brother Jacob.” (Genesis 27, 41; NRSV)

As the Gospel says, the good person brings good things out of the treasure of his heart, and the evil person brings evil things; “for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matthew 12, 34—35). And so, Esau said “to himself”, i.e. “in his mind”: “The days of mourning for my father are approaching...” — and these words expose his wish that his father, who loved him so much, would die as soon as possible (and we know from the Scripture that Isaac lived a long life afterwards...). “...Then I will kill my brother Jacob,” — such is his attitude to his own brother...

Imagine that the one who intended to kill his brother and wished an early death to his father had obtained the birthright! For as we know from the Sermon on the Mount, the thought and the will of man are the basis of his actions...Any other man in Esau’s position would have meekly accepted his fate, understood that it is all in God’s hands. But Esau contemplated murder, which is typical of him, according to the prophecy: “...by your sword you shall live...” However, God did not tolerate such an evil doing.

Now we can better see how unworthy Esau was to inherit the legacy of his forefathers Abraham and Isaac and to become the Lord’s messenger among the nations...

But the words of... Esau were told to Rebekah... (Genesis 27, 42; NRSV)

The prophetic mother had learned what plan there was in her son’s heart. In order to save Jacob from his brother’s rage, Rebekah sends him to Haran (Harran), her own motherland, to her brother Laban; but first she says the following words to Isaac:

I am weary of my life because of the Hittite women. If Jacob marries one of the Hittite women such as these, one of the women of the land, what good will my life be to me? (Genesis 27, 46; NRSV)

Hittites worshipped idols, which was proved during the excavation of the Hittite capital city of Hattusa in Anatolia in 1920s. Obviously, both Hittite wives of Esau were followers of a pagan cult; Isaac turned a blind eye on that, but Rebekah’s conscience revolted against it, so she says: “...I am weary of my life because of the Hittite women...”, as if forcing Isaac to send Jacob in search for a wife to the place where his own wife came from, i.e. Haran (Harran).

The 28th chapter of the Book of Genesis narrates what Esau did in reaction to the words of his mother, to her complaints and rebukes:

Now Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away to Padan-aram to take a wife from there, and that as he blessed him he charged him, “You shall not marry one of the Canaanite women,”

...

So when Esau saw that the Canaanite women did not please his father Isaac,

Esau went to Ishmael and took Mahalath daughter of Abraham’s son Ishmael, and sister of Nebaioth, to be his wife in addition to the wives he had. (Genesis 28, 6—9)

It is very interesting: here the behaviour of a person is described who is not even willing to understand what God wants from him. Esau did not repent, nor did he forsake his former way of life, nor tried to turn his wives to God of Abraham, to cure them from idolatry; he just took one more wife above previous ones from Ishmael’s posterity, that is, from the line of Abraham. Thus Esau wished to please his father and mother, but, naturally, he failed. This is the way one tries to do something which seems to him a good deed without conviction of his former sins and an attempt to atone them...

Let us go back to Jacob. We read how Isaac blessed Jacob and sent him to Haran (Haran). His father gave him such instructions:

May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and numerous, that you may become a company of peoples.

May he give to you the blessing of Abraham, to you and to your offspring with you, so that you may take possession of the land where you now live as an alien — land that God gave to Abraham.” (Genesis 28, 3—4; NRSV)

According to the traditional narrative, as soon as Isaac made the right choice between the brothers affirming Jacob’s birthright, he regained his eyesight immediately. The patriarch recovered from blindness, and the one who had recently been unable to discern who of the brothers was standing before him, was now capable of seeing a vivid picture of the distant future and prophesying. Such are the good effects of a right choice.

A spiritual man, just like Jacob, must “take possession of the land where they now live as aliens”: all the experience that we obtain in the earthly world is taken by us to the spiritual world after the death of our bodies...

Jacob left Beer-Sheba and went toward Haran.

He came to a certain place and stayed there for the night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place.

And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. (Genesis 28, 10—12; NRSV)

Jacob viewed the endless road of the human spirit: the ladder stands on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; there is a multitude of steps for the ascension of the spirit, and the angels of God ascend and descend them. The patriarch beheld the spiritual way of his own descendants by blood as well as by spirit and of the humanity on the whole.

There are numerous meanings of the ascending and descending of angels in the vision of Jacob. We are going to mention only two of them. Firstly, they are guardian angels who are sent to protect Jacob and his descendants on all their ways. Such serving angels “ascending and descending upon the Son of Man” are described by Jesus Christ (see John 1, 51). Secondly, those are human spirits: a human spirit can ascend, rise spiritually, or descend, fall from the height. It is said in the Book of Ecclesiastes:

Who knows whether the human spirit goes upward and the spirit of animals goes downward to the earth? (Ecclesiastes 3, 21; NRSV)

The earthly, bodily, life of the spirit affects the outline of its way in future. The human spirit may even become an angel. In the psalm it goes as follows:

Who maketh his angels spirits; his ministers a flaming fire (Psalms 104, 4; KJV)

Spirits of men can be “recreated” as angels if they reach a high step of serving God, becoming “a flaming fire”, i.e. being ardent in faith and love on the earth.

Jacob viewed this mysterious relation between the earth and the heaven; he saw that the way of the human spirit starts on the earth, but it can reach the heavenly height; he beheld the symbol of the Church, and the prayer, which are also a spiritual ladder for the ascension.

And what was there on the top of the ladder?

And, behold, the Lord stood above it, and said, I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed;
And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. (Genesis 28, 13—14; KJV)

“...In thee... shall all the families... be blessed...” — i.e. directly in Jacob, in his earthly descendants, for the people of Israel is called upon to write down and preserve the Holy Scripture and deliver the blessing of the true faith to the whole world; whereas the words “in thy seed” refer here, as well as in the blessing gifted to Abraham, to the Messiah, to Christ, who will atone for the sins of the people with his blood and save the nations from the curse.

Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you. (Genesis 28, 15; NRSV)

It is worth noting in what succession the parts of the world are enumerated in this blessing: "...and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south..." The word יָם <yam> has in Hebrew two meanings at the same time: "sea" (in this case the Mediterranean Sea to the west of the Holy Land), and "west". After the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 AD, a great number of Jews were taken to Rome and other cities situated to the west of the Holy Land and sold as slaves. Then it is said: "to the east". After that many Jews found themselves in the east, in Babylonia, Parthia and other eastern countries, where they massively escaped to fleeing from the land of Israel devastated by the Roman troops, and where by that time vast Jewish colonies existed. Further it goes: "to the north". Later most Jews settled in European countries located to the north of Palestine. And finally, "to the south", i.e. a new returning to the Holy Land is predicted, the restoration of the state. Here we can see a prophetic enumeration and succession of the ways and directions where the people of Israel were settling.

In quite another way the settlement of Abraham's descendants is described: the parts of the world are enumerated in a different order:

The Lord said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, "Raise your eyes now, and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward... (Genesis 13, 14; NRSV)

Quite another succession of directions — why is it so? Whereas Jacob receives the prediction of the dispersion of Israelites, his blood descendants, Abraham is told about the spreading of monotheism, for Abraham is the forefather of all believers; the faith of Abraham gave rise to all the three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity, Islam. And so, it is said that monotheism is going to spread "northward", for it was exactly to the north of the Holy Land that Christianity became predominant religion. Then "southward", because exactly from Arabia Islam sprang in the VII century AD. Later on "eastward" because both Christianity and Islam were accepted by numerous nations inhabiting the territory to the east of the Holy Land, due to missionary preachers as well as to conquerors. And finally, "westward": moving directly to the west of the Holy Land, we cross the ocean and find ourselves in America, where Christianity spread in the end. This is the reason for the difference in successions of the parts of the world in two enumerations.

And the Lord goes on to say to Jacob: "...and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you". Similar to the way Jacob returned from Haran (Harran) to the Land of Canaan, his posterity was promised to return to the land of fathers, to the land of Israel, for the life of Jacob symbolizes the history of the whole nation of Israel.

Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, “Surely the Lord is in this place—and I did not know it!” (Genesis 28, 16; NRSV)

Jacob did not know yet that God is ever-present: “...The Lord is in this place—and I did not know it!”, — such are the words that everyone can say who gets to believe into and to feel the ever-presence of God. But the holy place, where Jacob was staying at that moment, is specially distinguished: according to the traditional narrative, at the night when Jacob slept dreaming of the ladder, he found himself in Jerusalem, at the place of the future Temple of Solomon, i.e. at the place where the earth and the heaven are to be connected with “the spiritual ladder” by means of the prayer and sacrifice. That is exactly the place of a special, constant presence of God.

And he was afraid, and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.” (Genesis 28, 17; NRSV)

And many centuries later the Temple erected at that very place became a true “gate of heaven”...

Further it is described how Jacob made an altar out of the stone that he had put under his head when he slept. Jacob poured oil on the top of it and made a vow to the Lord that he would serve Him on that place.

The next chapter starts with the following words:

Then Jacob went on his journey, and came to the land of the people of the east.

As he looked, he saw a well in the field and three flocks of sheep lying there beside it; for out of that well the flocks were watered. The stone on the well’s mouth was large. (Genesis 29, 1—2; NRSV)

It is common knowledge that quite often patriarchs meet their future wives by a well; and the fact that Jesus Christ met the Samaritan woman by the well was some kind of conclusion of the Old Testament narration about holy wells. Moses met his future wife Zipporah by a well; Hagar saw a well of living water when the angel appeared to her...

Also Jacob meets Rachel by the well, and there are three flocks of sheep around that well. The Hebrew word באר <be’er>, “a well”, is derived from the verb באר <ba’ar>, which means “to dig”, “to deepen”, “to excavate”, “to trace”, as well as “to research”, “to explain”, “to expound”. So, באר <be’er> is not only a well, which is dug, but also a deep research, an interpretation of the Holy Scripture. A well, a symbol of a spring of living water — the word of God, is one of the images we meet throughout the Bible. For instance, the Book of Numbers describes some mysterious well which was dug by the leaders of the nation:

Then Israel sang this song: “Spring up, O well!—Sing to it!—

The well that the leaders sank, that the nobles of the people dug, with the scepter, with the staff.” (Numbers 21, 17—18; NRSV)

Apparently, the scepter belongs to Moses, and the leaders of the people did not dig the well literally — that could be done by common people; But the leaders and the nobles dug the well of the investigation of the word of God, i.e. they sank with their wisdom into the meaning of the Law and commandments with the help of the Holy Spirit...

Such is the implication of the description of the well that Jacob saw.

And when all the flocks were gathered there, the shepherds would roll the stone from the mouth of the well, and water the sheep, and put the stone back in its place on the mouth of the well. (Genesis 29, 3; NRSV)

Herein a great prototype is implied: the word of God, “a well of living waters”, — and “three flocks of sheep”, i.e. the three world monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. All of them gather by one and the same spring — the word of God, for the Quran retells the same commandments of God as in the Bible of the Jews and Christians. But there is “a large stone” lying over the mouth of the well: the truth is concealed from most of the people, from the uninformed, and it is difficult for people to gain an insight into the word of God by themselves. But only when “all are gathered”, i.e. representatives of all the teachings based on God’s revelation unite and focus on the most important — on the Almighty Himself and on the spiritual way towards Him, on the inner dialogue with the Lord, forgetting their arguments, differences and “basic disagreements”, — then “the stone” is “rolled”. But after people take some water, drink it and put the stone back in its place on the mouth of the well, the word of God is again concealed from them — it is not just under “the veil” (see 2 Corinthians 3, 14—15), but under a huge heavy stone, which can only be moved together with everybody else...

And further we read about Jacob’s asking the shepherds if they know Laban, the son of Nahor —

While he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father’s sheep; for she kept them. (Genesis 29, 9; NRSV)

Jacob’s extraordinary love to that very girl made him agree to serve Laban for seven years in order to marry her. So this is their first meeting:

Now when Jacob saw Rachel, the daughter of his mother’s brother Laban, and the sheep of his mother’s brother Laban, Jacob went up and rolled the stone from the well’s mouth, and watered the flock of his mother’s brother Laban. (Genesis 29, 10; NRSV)

Jacob symbolizes love, just as Abraham — faith and Isaac — hope. Jacob’s whole life is the manifestation of love: his love for Rachel was so strong that the seven years of serving

Laban seemed to him but a few days (Genesis 29, 20); he loved Joseph more than all the rest of his sons; and after Joseph had disappeared he loved Benjamin, and it is said that Jacob's life was bound up in the boy's life (Genesis 37, 3 and 44, 30). Only the one who is full of true love can alone roll the huge stone lying over the well's mouth — the stone, which can only be moved from its place by many people working together. Only the one who is full of true love can solve the mysteries concealed in the Holy Scripture, the meaning of which is hidden from theologians of various religions. And he is not the only one who drinks from that mysterious well, but he also lets many other people drink from it — this is what love can accomplish. For God asks for true love — the love for the Creator and one's neighbour; the one who becomes full of it, receives the power to do more than many "shepherds" with their "flocks"...

Further it goes about Jacob's coming to Laban and serving him for seven years for his younger daughter Rachel. When he grazed sheep, by day the heat consumed him, and the cold by night, and he did not fall asleep all night watching Laban's flocks (see Genesis 31, 40). But all that brought him joy, for he was full of deep and true love.

However, when the wedding day came, under favor of the darkness Laban gave him Leah to be his wife — his elder daughter instead of the younger one. And when in the morning (and the bride used to be brought to the bridegroom wrapped in a veil, just as it happens now in the East) she turned out to be Leah, Jacob was filled with horror. He asked Laban: "What is this you have done to me?" And Laban replied that it was their local custom — not to give the younger daughter before the firstborn, and then he required serving him another seven years for his second daughter (Genesis 29, 25—27). However, Rachel was already brought into Jacob's tent seven days later than Leah, but under the agreement he was to serve for her seven years more (Genesis 29, 28—30). All this was done by Laban because he had realized and made sure that as long as Jacob stayed with him, God gave a plentiful and total blessing to all of his business and to his entire house. It was Jacob who received the blessing; no matter where he was staying, all went very successful. Laban's prosperity was beyond a doubt related to Jacob, and he tried to hold Jacob near him by right or wrong.

It is said about Leah and Rachel as follows:

Leah had weak eyes [Orthodox Jewish Bible translation]; and Rachel was graceful and beautiful.

Jacob loved Rachel... (Genesis 29, 17—18; NRSV)

Leah and Rachel are another two deep and truly inexhaustible images. The name of "Leah", לאה <'Lea> is derived from the verb לאה <la'a> — "to be exhausted", "to droop", "to lose one's strength". Leah symbolizes the part of the human soul which gives its strength to the earthly, sensual life. It is "weak eyed", in the meaning of spiritual eyesight. The name of "Rachel" רחל <Ra'khel> denotes "a sheep" and is derived from the verb רחל <ra'khal> — "to graze", which is close to the verb רגל <ra'gal> — "to pave one's way". Rachel stands for as tender as a sheep, finest and deepest part of the soul, full of

intuition, which is born in a person not at once, nor it immediately makes connection with one's earthly identity. These two daughters of Laban, as well as their maids Bilhah and Zilpah gave birth to Jacob's twelve sons, the patriarchs of the twelve tribes of Israel (see Genesis 29, 31 — 30, 24; 35, 16 — 18). Their names stand for the spiritual states of a person ascending in faith.

The first son born from Leah receives the name of "Reuben", the Hebrew ראובן <Reu'ven>, from the verb ראה <ra'a> — "to see" and the noun בן <ben> — "son", literally — "Look, a son!" What is the spiritual meaning of this name? The union of "Jacob", i.e. the inner man, the human spirit, and "Leah" — the part of the soul which is exhausted, strains, tries hard, fulfilling God's will — gives birth to a firstborn son "Reuben", i.e. the spiritual eyesight, spiritual intuition (see also Acts 9, 18).

The second son is Simeon, the Hebrew שמעון <Shim'on>, from the verb שמע <sha'ma> — "to hear". It symbolizes the unfolded spiritual hearing. At this stage one definitely knows that God hears him and answers his prayer; and one also hears the voice of God. That is the second stage of spiritual growth (see also John 3, 8).

The third son who was destined to become forefather of the tribe of priests is Levi, לוי <Le'vi>, from the verb <la'va> — "to cling to", "to join"; this word symbolizes a special intimacy, "clinging" of man's spirit to God (see also Deuteronomy 13, 4).

The second son is Judah, יהודה <Yehu'da>, — "praising God", derived from the combination of the name of God and the word הודא <hoda'a> — "praise", "glorification". Here we can see the symbolic presentation of the stage of spiritual ascent, at which a person constantly praises the Creator.

After that Leah ceases giving birth to sons. Seeing that she bears Jacob no children, Rachel gives him her maid Bilhah. Her name בלהה <Bil'ha> is derived from the verb בלה <ba'la> — "to grow old", "to get exhausted", and means "dilapidated". If we read the verb "bala" from the end, we get הלב <ha-lev> — "heart", which in the Bible denotes the united entity of emotions, thinking and intuition. "Bilhah", i.e. a dilapidated heart, a decrepit heart receiving from the spirit a new impulse becomes renewed (Psalms 51, 10), becomes capable of "bringing fruits". "A renewed heart", which is mysteriously connected with the concealed deepest part of the soul (Bilhah as Rachel's maid), brings "Jacob" — the spirit of man — an opportunity of receiving new conditions and perceptions ("bears" two more "sons"). The name of the first is Dan: דן <Dan> means "judgement". At this stage a person conceives God's judgements with a renewed heart. The name of the second is Naphtali: נפתלי <Nafta'li> means "my wrestling", "my contest". In this condition one receives strength to lead a spiritual war, a spiritual struggle against the forces of evil.

Seeing that Rachel gave her maid to Jacob, so that she could bear from her children (let us recall the story of Sarah and Hagar), Leah does the same: she gives Jacob her maid Zilpah — זלפה <Zil'pa>, from the verb זלעף <za'laf> — "to burn", "to be inflamed". This maid symbolizes inner fire, desire, passion. And now, "Jacob", the spirit of man, conjoining

with passion, spiritualizes and elevates it, so that she gives birth to two sons: “Gad” — גד <Gad>, which means “happiness”, and “Asher” — אשר <A’sher>, i.e. “bliss”. Before its uniting with the spirit of man, before its spiritualization “Zilpha”, the passionate part of the soul, could give birth neither to happiness, nor to bliss: for one cannot feel happiness or bliss being in a fleshly, animalistic or semi-animalistic state, when they are seized with numerous longings and passions, no matter if they are fulfilled or not. Only the desire conjoined with the spirit, with “Jacob”, bears “Gad” and “Asher” — happiness and bliss. Then at last a person begins to feel a true, spiritual joy (see also 1 Thessalonians 5, 16).

Then Leah herself gives birth to Jacob’s two other sons. The first of them is יששכר <Issa’khar>. This name is derived from the words יש <yesh> — “essence”, “being”, “existence”, and שכר <sa’khar> — “payment”, “reward”. Thus, it means “there is a reward” or “the essence of recompense”, i.e. a person sees with one’s own eyes what kind of reward is expecting them in this as well as in the future world for the obedience to the Law of God. And the last son of Leah, Zebulun, זבולון <Zevu’lun>, from the verb זבל <za’val> — “to dwell”: the inner man becomes a permanent dwelling of God, his heart turns into the Most Holy of the Temple, where the Spirit of God dwells (see also 1 Corinthians 6, 19).

And at last the Lord opened Rachel’s womb (Genesis 30, 22—24): the deepest, concealed part of the human soul conjoins with the spirit, “Jacob”, and it bears “Joseph”, its firstborn son. The name of יוסף <Yo’sef> is derived from the verb יסף <ya’saf> — “to add”, “to enclose”. It points at the plentiful spiritual fruits which are beginning to be constantly brought in one’s life (Galatians 5, 22—23).

The second and last son is born by Rachel, when she dies, after Jacob’s family has returned to the Land of Canaan. This returning is the prototype of the entrance of the human spirit into God’s dwelling, its ascent to the heavenly Jerusalem, the higher homeland. Rachel’s second son’s name is בן אוני <Ben-O’ni>, which means “the son of my suffering”, “the son of my torment”. That is the name that his mother gave to him before her death. But Jacob, fearing, obviously, that the name would affect the child’s fate, renamed him so that the new name were assonant with the first one, but bearing some other meaning: בנימין <Bin’ya’mi> which stands for “the son of the right hand”, or “the son of the right side”. What prototype is implied here? The prototype suggesting that the spirit of man which has suffered many torments on earth (Ben-oni) is saved! For, to the right of the throne of God the righteous will be placed, and they will hear the words: “Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world...” (Matthew 25, 34). And it is the last, the highest level of the ascent of the spirit: the one who has come through the sufferings becomes “Benjamin” — “the son of the right hand”. At this stage, “Rachel”, the soul of the man, “dies”, and only the immortal spirit is left. In the book of Deuteronomy, when Moses gives his blessing to Benjamin, he says about him such words:

Of Benjamin he said:

The beloved of the Lord rests in safety— the High God surrounds him all day long — the beloved rests between His shoulders. (Deuteronomy 33, 12; NRSV)

Such is the description of the spiritual path, concealed in the names of patriarch Jacob's wives and sons.