'Like a Bridge', European Bibliodrama Workshop 2025, Hōōr, Sweden

How did a Jewish woman from Liverpool get involved with European Bibliodrama? In 2011, I was invited to run a short workshop from a Jewish perspective at the European Bibliodrama Congress in London. I stayed for the entire 4 days and have been a Bibliodrama enthusiast ever since!

This year I travelled from Denmark with 2 colleagues from Finland and Germany. As we neared the Øresund Bridge, our excitement grew. With good reason. This phenomenal structure stretches for nearly 8 kilometres. As the train speeds along, water and sky extend as far as the eye can see, as if we are travelling on a long boat. Extraordinary that our workshop 'Like a Bridge', should start in this way.

We are warmly welcomed by Helene Isborn, representing the Swedish organising team, who opens the workshop inviting us 'to reach across bridges and build bridges, human bridges.' This is followed by an exploration of ways of 'reaching across' through connections to place, language and music, including of course 'I believe in Angels' by Abba.

The following day, we are treated to a lecture by Marcel Martin, priest, academic, psychodrama practitioner and theologian, often seen as the father of Bibliodrama. He introduces us to the text, from the Book of Genesis, 32:22-32, in which Jacob wrestles with God. He reminds me of aspects of the story that I had long forgotten, for instance when Jacob was born, he was holding Esau's heel as if trying to hold him back – the sibling rivalry existing even before birth. Following Jacob's deceit of pretending to be his brother, in order to receive the older twin's inheritance, many years of struggle and retribution pass before Jacob and Esau's eventual meeting, triggering a pattern of reconciliation and separation. In the wrestling between Jacob and the angel of God, the subject of our text, there is no winner. They emerge changed but neither has overcome the other. After this rite of passage, Jacob has transformed and is given a new name 'Israel'. Esau understands that he no longer needs to be afraid and can now approach him as a brother.

Genesis 32, 28

And he said, "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have struggled with God and with humans and have prevailed."

Gerhard Marcel Martin's translation of the New International Version (NIV) and Bill T. Arnold: Genesis, Cambridge 2009, 278

Marcel reflects that Jacob's relationship with God and humans is one of constant struggle and doubt. Drawing on a depth psychology model, he also reflects that the story could be viewed as one of initiation, Jacob's journey from 'Mummy's boy' to 'trickster' to transformation and hope. This is an inspiring and helpful introduction to the themes of the text.

There are five groups, each co-facilitated and offering different approaches to exploration of the text. I have chosen 'Like a Bridge: about blessing and pain' co-facilitated by an experienced locally based Christian practitioner and a young Swedish facilitator of Turkish origin, who offers us a Muslim perspective. Fifteen of us begin the process of trust, of getting to know eachother, through action and movement activities. Our Genesis text is accompanied by some verses from the Quran.

Surah Al-Baqarah (the cow), 2:155-157

155 We will certainly test you with a touch of fear and famine and loss of property, life and crops. 156 Give good news to those who patiently endure, who say, when struck by a disaster, "Surely to Allah we belong and to Him we will 'all' return."157 they are the ones who will receive Allah's blessings and mercy. And it is they who are 'rightly' guided.

We get to know both texts little by little, at our own pace. The Quran is skilfully discussed and compared with the Bible by our facilitator. We learn that Jacob is mentioned 30 to 40 times in the Quran. She explains how God cannot be portrayed as an image, because then the image itself may be worshipped. Judaism also takes this approach and I enjoy discussing the similarities between our 2 traditions, during the breaks. I was brought

up in the Orthodox tradition where we never write or speak the word God, in English writing G-d. And in Hebrew there are a wide range of words for God, which represent but are not the word itself. I note that even though I am now a progressive Jew, I still struggle with these issues and am learning each day to honour my ambivalence.

In groups of 5, we are invited to each choose a phrase from either text, share them and then put them together in a performance. Two of us choose 'patiently endure', two 'touch' and one person chooses 'guided'. It is just as powerful embodying, playing with and performing these interpretations as it is watching the other groups' scenes.

Once more we each choose meaningful phrases and embody them as a group. We are then invited to choose a challenging and a comforting phrase and express them with the art materials. I choose the words 'wrestled' from the Bible and 'guided' from the Quran. I take blacks, browns… for me colours of mud, of confusion, of ambivalence. I close my eyes and smear them over the paper, making sharp zig zags of anger and explosion. Then my intuition tells me to choose a deep green as the word 'guide' and with my eyes open I paint a rather strange green line which makes its way through the muddy mess, sometimes visible, sometimes not. Finally a few flashes of bright yellow splash their way into the picture. This green line has become a personal support mechanism, green representing nature, growth and peace even in the midst of chaos. It reminds me that even when chaos abounds, and I feel lost, there is deep and enduring guidance within me.

The Green Line, 14th August 2025

There seems to be mounting tension as we get nearer to the final session. We are now in 2 groups, preparing a final 'scene' and in my group we argue and argue. In this group we have discussed some really challenging issues but now we argue about whether we work inside or outside, how we work, one wants to work like this, the other one like that. It intensifies and we become like small children, like rival siblings, like Jacob and Esau. As we become calmer we agree to try out some of the ideas, using the word 'bridge' as the stimulus. And slowly, we stop 'wrestling', wordlessly connecting to our deeper selves and to the group. And we start to bless eachother, in our own individual ways. As we show our work to the other group, spontaneously we bless them and they reciprocate. I cannot express in words how powerful this was. I am deeply grateful to the group and particularly to our facilitators who really attuned to us, listened deeply, allowing us to find our way through our struggles safely and emerge, eventually united as a group.

The times together as a whole community were also enriching. The food was delicious and the staff were friendly and hospitable. Each evening was different, one evening spontaneously singing songs from our different backgrounds and the final night an amazing party with everyone sporting hats, some crazy, some functional and some both. I was moved by a local Swedish participant who works with puppets and supported some of us in putting on a short piece of puppet theatre, which was enjoyed by participants on the final evening. I am now committed to learning more about creating a sacred space through puppetry.

At this time of war and division, the potential for making bridges through Bibliodrama becomes increasingly important. I am grateful for the rich experience and learning, for the quality of thought and hospitality that echoed throughout the event and for the open-heartedness and willingness to learn from eachother's cultures, faiths and traditions.

Mandy Carr, London, September 2025

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