

**PARSHAT VAYISHLACH -**

**FROM YAAKOV TO YISRAEL - part two**

There must be something important about names in Parshat Vayishlach, for we find that Yaakov's name is changed to Yisrael; and it happens twice!

In the following shiur, we attempt to understand why, by considering its connection to the theme of 'bechira' in Sefer Breishit.

**INTRODUCTION**

Yaakov's name change to **Yisrael** is very different than Avram's name change to **Avraham**. In regard to AvraHAM - a single letter ["heh"] is added to his existing name (see 17:1-5); in contrast - **Yisrael** constitutes an entirely **new** name. Furthermore, Yisrael serves as an alternate name for Yaakov, while the name **Avraham** serves as a replacement.

What is even more peculiar about Yaakov's name change - is that it happens twice:

Once, in the aftermath of his struggle at Pni'el, prior to his confrontation with Eisav (see 32:24-30);

And later, at God's revelation to him at Bet El (see 35:9-13).

With this in mind, we begin our study with a comparison of those two stories; afterward, we will discuss why Yaakov's name change is both similar and different than Avraham's.

**YAAKOV'S RETURN TO BET EL**

Let's begin our discussion with the second time when Yaakov's name is changed to Yisrael; for it contains some rather obvious textual parallels to the key psukim that describe how Avraham Avinu was first chosen. Those parallels will help us understand how his name change relates to a key stage in the bechira process. Our conclusions will then help us appreciate the meaning of the first time Yaakov's name is changed, i.e. the site of Pni'el.

Yaakov's return to Bet El, as described in 35:9-15, could be considered as the prophetic 'highlight' of his return to Eretz Canaan. Recall that this it was at this very site where God first appeared to him, promising him that he was indeed the 'chosen' son (see 28:12-14). Furthermore, it was at Bet-El where God had promised to look after his needs during his journey to (and stay in) Charan.

[Recall as well from our shiur on Parshat Lech Lecha that Bet El was also the focal point of Avraham's 'aliya', where he built a mizbeiach and 'called out in God's Name'.]

Let's take a look at the Torah's description of this 'hitgalut', noting how God not only confirms Yaakov's bechira but also changes his name to Yisrael:

"And God appeared again to Yaakov on his arrival from Padan Aram, and blessed him: You, whose name is Yaakov, shall be called Yaakov no more, but **Yisrael** shall be **your name**.

Thus He named him Yisrael, and God said to him: I am **Kel Shakai**, be fertile and increase... The **land** that I have given to Avraham and Yitzchak I give to **you** and to **your offspring** to come... (35:9-16).

God's confirmation of 'zera' [offspring] and 'aretz' (the Land) echoes His numerous earlier blessings of bechira to Avraham and Yitzchak. [See 12:1-7, 13:14-16, 15:18, 17:7-8, 26:1-5, 28:13.] In fact, these seem to be the key two words in just about every hitgalut when God discuss any aspect of the 'bechira' process with the avot.

However, this particular blessing carries additional significance, for it is the **last** time that we find it in Sefer Breishit, thus suggesting that the bechira process has finally come to an end!

Therefore, the fact that this blessing also includes Yaakov's

name change to Yisrael suggests a thematic connection between this name change and the **conclusion** of the bechira process!

If indeed the 'filtering' stage of the bechira process is finally over, then this name change reflects the fact that now **all** of Yaakov's children (and grandchildren etc.) are chosen.

[In contrast to the children of Avraham and Yitzchak, where only **one** child was chosen.]

In other words, from this point onward, all the children of Yaakov will become the nation of Israel- and hence the name change to Yisrael.

With this in mind, let's discuss the incident at Peniel, when his name is **first** changed to Yisrael - to appreciate the thematic significance of specifically this name - i.e. **Yisrael**.

**THE EVENTS BEFORE THE STRUGGLE**

Even though the Torah only tells us that a 'man' ['ish'] struggles with Yaakov at Peniel (see 32:25), the continuation of this story [when this 'man' blesses Yaakov etc / see 32:26-30] certainly supports the Midrashic interpretation that he was the 'angelic minister of Eisav' - intentionally sent by God to confront Yaakov.

[Note that the Hebrew word ish is often used to describe an important and/or powerful man, and not only the male gender / see Shmot 2:12 & Bamidbar 13:3.]

But why would God send this ish at this critical time?

To appreciate why, we must consider the events in the life of Yaakov that lead up to this final 'showdown' with Eisav.

1. Yaakov, using 'trickery', buys the 'bechora' from Eisav.
2. Yitzchak plans to bless Eisav with prosperity and power; using 'trickery', Yaakov 'steals' that blessing..
3. Yaakov must 'run away' to Padan Aram (in fear of Eisav).
4. Yaakov spends twenty years with Lavan; often suffering from Lavan's 'trickiness'.
5. Yaakov 'runs away' **from** Padan Aram (in fear of Lavan).
6. Yaakov prepares for his confrontation with Eisav.  
[Note how he plans a total subjugation to his brother.]
7. God sends an ish to confront Yaakov.

While reviewing this progression, note how Yaakov's life was replete with a need to either employ trickery or 'run away' in order to either survive, or to attain what he felt was necessary (to become the 'chosen son'). Indeed, Yaakov had become an expert at survival; but appears to have lacked experience in 'frontal combat' - a trait that Eisav was best at.

As we explained in our shiur on Parshat Toldot, it may have been for this very reason that Yitzchak had originally intended to bless Eisav, for he understood that in order to establish a nation, the traits of an 'ish sadeh' are essential, i.e. the qualities necessary to provide leadership in worldly matters. In contrast to his brother, Yaakov, the 'ish tam', certainly lacked this character.

However, now that it had been divinely determined that Yaakov was to be the **only** chosen son, one could suggest that God found it necessary for Yaakov himself to develop those traits as well.

This may explain why upon his return to Eretz Canaan, God intentionally initiates a direct confrontation between Yaakov and Eisav. [Recall from the fact that Rivka never sent for him, it may be that Eisav is indeed still planning to take revenge.]

However, when we analyze Yaakov's apparent strategy - as he prepares to meet Eisav (see 32:13-21), we find once again that he was not quite ready for this direct confrontation.

One could even suggest (as Rashbam does), that Yaakov's original plan was to run away from Eisav, taking his own family in one direction, while sending several 'staged' messengers to Eisav as a decoy to 'slow his advance'! If so, then God's purpose in sending this ish to struggle with Yaakov, was to stop him from running away - stalling his retreat until Eisav arrives.

And when Yaakov does see Eisav at dawn (after his struggle with the 'ish'), again he plans 'capitulation' - bowing down profusely before his brother - showing him that in reality, he never received the blessing that he had tried to steal.

[By bowing down to Eisav, Yaakov wishes to show his brother

that the 'stolen blessing' of power and dominion over his brother ("hevei gvir le-achecha, yishtachavu lecha bnei imecha...27:29) was indeed awarded to Eisav. Ironically, Yaakov resorts to trickery once again; this time to show his brother that his original trickery used to 'steal' the brachot was meaningless.]

**REALISM OR LAZINESS**

Note how Yaakov's struggle with the ish takes place at a very critical point in his life; i.e. **after** his preparation to bow down to (or run away from) Eisav, but **before** the actual confrontation. Let's explain why this may be significant.

A controversy exists among the commentators as to whether Yaakov was correct in this total subjugation to his brother. Some hold that Yaakov should have openly confronted his brother while putting his total faith in God (see Rashbam on 32:29), while others maintain that due to the circumstances, his timid strategy was appropriate (see Seforno on 33:4). [Note how this 'hashkafic' controversy continues until this very day!]

Regardless of the 'political correctness' of his actions, the situation remains that Yaakov is unable to openly confront Eisav. Nevertheless, God finds it necessary that Yaakov prove himself capable of fighting, should such a situation arise in the future. Yaakov must now demonstrate that his subjugation to Eisav stems from political realism rather than spiritual laziness. He must prove that, when necessary, he will be capable of fighting.

[Sooner or later in Jewish history, confrontations with the likes of Eisav will be encountered when establishing a nation.]

Possibly for this reason, God must first 'test' Yaakov's potential to engage in battle with his enemy **before** he meets Eisav. Yaakov finds this struggle difficult, for he is untrained; the contest continues all night until the 'break of dawn'. [Possibly, night represents 'galut'; 'dawn' redemption. See Ramban 'al atar'.] Although wounded and limping, Yaakov emerges victorious from this confrontation, thus earning his new name:

"Your name shall no longer be Yaakov, but Yisrael, for you have **fought** with beings divine ('Elokim') and human ('anashim) and **triumphed**" (32:29).

Thus, the name Yisrael may reflect the character of one triumphant in battle. Yaakov's new name is significant for it reflects his capability to engage head on in battle. In order to become a nation, this trait - represented by the name 'Yisrael' - is crucial.

Yet his name also remains Yaakov, for there may be times as well when 'passiveness' will be the proper avenue.

**WHY TWICE?**

For some reasons, receiving this 'new name' from this mal'ach did not appear to be sufficient; for God Himself found it necessary to later confirm that name - Yisrael, together with his bechira, at Bet El (the very site where he was first promised the bechira). Thus, it appears as though the blessings that Yaakov received throughout that entire episode of his trickery must now be bestowed upon him properly (and formally).

First, God names Yaakov - 'Yisrael', symbolizing the traits of worldly leadership (see 35:9- 10). Afterwards, God confirms the blessing that Yitzchak had given him (see 25:11-12 / compare with 28:1-4).

Note the obvious parallel between these two blessings:

**FROM YITZCHAK**  
**(before departing)**  
(28:3-4)

May "**kel Shakai**" bless you,  
make you fertile and multiply,  
to become an **assembly** of peoples  
May He grant you the -  
blessing of Avraham  
to you and your offspring  
that you may possess the Land

**FROM GOD**  
**(upon arriving)**  
(35:11-12)

I am "**kel Shakai**":  
Be fertile and multiply,  
An **assembly** of nations  
shall descend from you...  
The Land I gave Avraham...  
..to you and to your offspring  
to come, I assign the Land.

This comparison clearly shows that God's blessing to Yaakov at

Bet El constitutes a confirmation of Yitzchak's blessing to him after the incident of the stolen brachot. Hence, we may conclude that the name of Yisrael marks the conclusion of the bechira process, as includes the necessary character that Am Yisrael will require to later become God's special nation.

**THE FUTURE**

Although Yaakov's worldly traits may lie dormant for several generations, it must be inherent to his character before his bechira receives final Divine confirmation. [Later, Yaakov will bless his two most able sons, Yehuda and Yosef, with the leadership in this realm (see 49:8-26).]

Throughout the rest of Chumash, the name Yaakov interchanges with Yisrael. This suggests that each name reflects a different aspect of his character. There are times when 'Am Yisrael' must act as Yaakov, the ish tam, and there are times when the more active and nationalistic characteristics of Yisrael must be employed. Ultimately, as the prophet Ovadia proclaims, the day will come when:

"Liberators shall march up on Har Zion to wreak judgement on **Har Eisav**; and the **kingdom** shall be that of **God**" (1:21).

Based on this understanding of the significance of the special name of Yisrael, one could suggest a reason for the necessity of the 'bechira' process to continue one generation past Yitzchak. [Or re-phrased, why was it necessary for Eisav to be rejected, given the importance of his worldly traits?]

Our original assumption, that both the traits of an ish sadeh and an ish tam are necessary in order to establish a nation, remains correct. Nevertheless, it is important that they are not perceived as equally important. As we explained in our shiur on Parshat Toldot, the fundamental character of Am Yisrael must be that of an ish tam (Yaakov). Only once that characteristic becomes rooted, the traits of an ish sadeh can be added. Had Eisav been included in Am Yisrael, our perception of the relative importance of an ish sadeh may have become distorted. A disproportionate emphasis on 'nationalism' and strength - despite their importance - would have tainted mankind's perception of God's special nation.

In the formative stage of our national development, our outward appearance as 'Yisrael' must stem from our inner character as 'Yaakov'. We must first speak with the 'voice of Yaakov' (see Rashi 27:22), only then may we don the 'hands of Eisav'.

shabbat shalom  
menachem

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**FOR FURTHER IYUN**

**A.** There is a Midrash telling us 'Yaakov avinu lo met' - Yaakov never died. Relate this Midrash to the fact that the bechira process concludes with Yaakov, and that all of his offspring have been chosen. Relate this also to 49:33 in comparison to 35:29 and 25:8.

**B. TOLDOT EISAV**

Yitzchak was chosen. Therefore, we need to follow the toldot of Eisav, just as we needed to follow the toldot of Yishmael & Lot.

Based on this assumption, explain perek 36.

Based on the above shiur, why do you think there is an emphasis on the kings who ruled in Edom before a king ruled over Bnei Yisrael (see 36:31)?

**C. BRIT MILA & GOD'S BLESSING TO YAAKOV**

A quick analysis of God's final blessing to Yaakov at Bet El (35:9-15) immediately shows that it is reflective of brit mila (Breishit perek 17). The name of Kel Shakai; 'pru u-revu'; 'kehal goyim & melachim'; 'shem Elokim'; and the concept of 'lihiyot lecha le-Elokim' can all be found at brit mila. Note that the bracha of brit mila which began in perek 17 with Kel Shakai telling Avraham 'hithalech lefanai - ve-heyeh **tamim**' is being given now to Yaakov - the **ish tam**.

Try to explain the significance of this.

Carefully compare Yitzchak's bracha to Yaakov before he departs to Padan Aram (28:3-4) to God's blessing of Yaakov at Bet El (35:9-13)! Note that they are almost identical.

Relate this to the last two shiurim.

Note that God's name 'be-shem Havaya' does not appear unto Yaakov from the time that he arrives in Eretz Canaan! Note also God's promise to Yaakov at Bet El, before he left to Padan Aram, (28:13-15) which was given be-shem Havaya. Are any aspects of that bracha repeated in Bet El when Yaakov returned? If so, which?

Note the single use by Yaakov of shem Havaya in his prayer prior to his confrontation with Eisav (32:9-12). What promise does he remind God of at that time? Where is the source of that promise.

Relate to the relationship (be-shem Havaya) between brit bein ha-btarim, the bracha at the akeida, and this tefilla. Note - 'kochvei ha-shamayim' and 'asher lo yisafer me-rov'.

How does this relate to the nationalistic aspect of these revelations, i.e. the concept of 'yerushat ha-aretz'.

Could one consider from a nationalistic perspective that even though Yaakov returned from Galut Aram, his stay in Eretz Canaan was only a short stopover on his way down to Galut Mitzrayim?

Relate this to 'arami oved avi, va-yered mitzrayim...' (Devarim

36:3-10). Compare the language there to brit bein ha-btarim!

Why do Chazal interpret this pasuk as referring to Yaakov? Could the fact that Yaakov understood that the time for the fulfillment of brit bein ha-btarim had not yet come, explain his timid behavior when he confronts Eisav?