



Noteworthy Names

A name, we know, signifies one's essence, one's core identity. Chazal teach, "*shema garim*," a name causes or influences a person's reality. As a result of the famous struggle between Yaakov Avinu and the archangel of Eisav, Yaakov's name is changed to Yisrael. What is the significance of this new name? Yaakov Avinu tries to find out the angel's name, but the angel responds, "Why do you ask for my name?" What is the meaning of this reply? The *Kli Yakar* teaches that the name "Yisrael" is a composite of two words, "*Yashar*" and "*Kel*". He explains the word "*yashar*" as meaning "to see," as in, "*ashurenu v'lo karov* – I behold it but not soon". (*Bamidbar 24:17*) The Jew's essence is to be able to 'see' Hashem in every circumstance. The world referred to as "*olam*" from the root that

means "hidden." It is a place of concealment, where Hashem's presence is obscured. A Jew is challenged to pierce through the mask and see the Hand of Hashem orchestrating everything. The archangel of Eisav represents the glitter and externalities of this world. Yisrael's victory over Eisav is not physical. It is a bequest to his progeny the ability to live an elevated existence in a world that tries to snuff out spirituality.

Rav Biderman in *Be'er Hachayim* notes a fascinating observation. The Torah tells us that Yaakov was given the name Yisrael, "*Ki sarita im Elokim ve'im anashim vatuchal* – Because you have struggled with G-d and with man and have prevailed." (*Bereisheet 32:29*) Yisrael is related to the word "*sarita*" meaning "to struggle". Is it not fascinating that Yaakov is given a name that expresses struggle as opposed to something that expresses victory? Would it not have been more appropriate to take his name from the word "*vatuchal* – you have prevailed"? Yet we learn from here that the essence of

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a Jew, a Yisrael, is to contend and grapple, not necessarily to win. Our mission involves struggle, the outcome is never in our hands. After 120 years we will not be asked what we accomplished, rather, what we sought to accomplish. A parent is not held responsible for what his child becomes, only for his *tefilah* and his sincere effort to give his child the best tools to succeed. Western culture is goal oriented, Yiddishkeit, 'Yisrael', is process and struggle oriented.

As the name Yisrael reflects the nature of the Jew, the angel's response characterizes our nemesis, the *Yetzer Hara*. Rav Shmuelevitz explains that the angel did indeed answer Yaakov Avinu's question. "Why do you ask my name?" It perfectly expresses the angel's core identity. If we were to pause and ask his name, we would realize that it has no substance, it is just an illusion and the desires he is tempting us to gratify are momentary pleasures removing us from a world of sanctity. If we were to stop and focus on his 'name', his essence, we would realize the temptation no longer seems as inviting.

One small interchange holds the secret of the continuous battle between us and the forces of evil. When we focus on the essence of names, we unlock the secret to success and victory. ■

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