



Selflessness and Struggle: Parshat Vayishlach

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles
Summary by Channie Koplowitz-Stein

After twenty years living with Lavan, Yaakov begins his journey home. On the way, he encounters an angel who engages him in mortal combat. But the angel, although injuring Yaakov in the thigh, cannot vanquish him. Yaakov refuses to let the angel go until he blesses him. The angel asks Yaakov his name and then gives him a new name, Yisroel, meaning he has striven with the Divine and with man and has prevailed. Yaakov asks the angel his name and he replies cryptically, "Why do you ask my name?"

Rabbi U. Milevsky points out, *shem*/name is the center of one's *neshamah*/soul. It reveals one's essence and one's mission. Our name should remind us of our mission so that we are not frightened when our *neshamah* is asked if it has fulfilled its purpose. To keep our names in mind, many people have the custom to recite a verse reflective of the name as part of *Shemoneh Esrei*. The angel changes Yaakov's name to imply that by remaining resolute in his righteousness even in Lavan's house, he had fulfilled his previous name's mission. He was now ready to accept a new mission with the name Yisroel.

Does that mean we all need to change our names if we think we have already lived up to the mission of our original name? Not at all, replies *Be'er Hachaim*. Each name contains multiple levels that reach deeper and deeper, providing new challenges and missions. The name Yaakov can be an anagram for *yiboka*/will burst forth and split, as Hashem had promised Yaakov at the beginning of his journey: "*Uforatzta yamah vokeidmah*." But the name Yisroel offers another dimension. Now Yaakov will also be an officer/ruler over *El*/God, for when a *tzadik* makes a decree, Hashem will fulfill it. We create spiritual reality through our words and actions.

But why did the angel refuse to tell Yaakov his name? The Ner Uziel cites Rav Chaim

Volozhiner who reconciles Rambam's seeming contradiction about the laws of Amalek. The *Torah* commands us to destroy Amalek, a *mitzvah* the Rambam states we can no longer perform since we cannot identify the descendants of Amalek. We are also told to erase the memory of Amalek, a *mitzvah* the Rambam maintains is still relevant and which explains why the angel could not provide Yaakov with his name. According to Rav Chaim, Amalek is the generic name of any nation that would try to destroy the Jewish people.

The battle between Yaakov and the angel exists within every one of us writes Rabbi Pincus. It would also refer to those who would destroy us by corrupting our beliefs. The archangel of Amalek could not provide a name because his name changes in each generation. It could be The Enlightenment, Communism, or materialism. But the name *Yisroel* will never change. The Jews will remain constant as *Yisroel*, always maintaining our connection to Hashem.

Getting the name *Yisroel*, which Hashem later confirms, helps us uproot the idolatry of each generation, writes Rabbi Weissblum. In today's society, freedom of self is worshiped. The *Kli Yakar* breaks up the name *Yisroel* into *yashar* and *El*. *Yashar* means to see. *Yisroel* has the ability to see the *El*/the image of God in everyone; there is a world outside the self. Instead, writes Rabbi Weissblum, we live in a world of mirrors where everything we look at and interact with reflects back to my pleasure and importance. This is a major struggle of *Bnei Yisroel* against the world, against Esav. We thank Hashem that He has not made us slaves to ego. We give to others and we carry *Yisroel* within ourselves.

Rav Biederman notes that Yaakov was called *Yisroel* for the struggle. We do not celebrate victory; we celebrate the struggle and the efforts which make us stronger, that reinforce our faith in and commitment to Hashem. The

name *Yisroel* is the symbol of this struggle, and equally the symbol of Hashem's love for us and His desire for our growth.

In contrast, Esav's name already signifies his perception of self as complete, in no need of improvement. Even Yaakov's original name implies someone who is lowly and must pull himself up by his bootstraps to improve. As Rabbi Mintzberg notes, Esav also received a second name, *Edom*/Red. Esav never changes; he is always complete externally. Yaakov, on the other hand, goes from the struggle of being at the heel to ever more challenging struggles, never satisfied with the level he has reached.

The angel, however, has not yet told Yaakov his name. But perhaps he has, speculates Rabbi M. Twerski, and in doing so, has blessed Yaakov with the solution to facing a challenging decision. "Since my identity and mission changes throughout time, I do not have a specific name," says the angel. "But if you want to know how to make the right decision when I confront you, ask yourself 'lamah zeh/for what purpose do I want this.' The answer will tell you whether it will bring you closer to Hashem or distance you from Him. If it is not for a higher purpose, you will know that it is I coming to deceive you... I impart this knowledge to you as the blessing so you will release me." Herein lies the key to the name change of Yaakov. By struggling against the evil that the angel represented, he incorporated the evil that Esav represented, elevated it, and transformed it into spiritual strength.

The *Ma'aynah shel Torah* notes, if we add the numerical equivalent of Yaakov (182) to Satan (359) we get Yisroel (541). May we as individuals and as a nation successfully struggle with the challenges that confront us until we reach the potential Hashem has invested in us.

Rav Gav Friedman – Serving Hashem on an Elevated Level

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

There's one particular idea which I always feel connected to on Chanuka and that is the *halacha* that states until when one is allowed to light the Chanuka candles- "*Ad sheitchle regel min hashuk*- Until people are no longer walking in the marketplace (streets)." We can read *regel* as *hergel*- the way one is used to doing things. The light of Chanukah is meant to lift us above routine. When you light the Chanuka candles, take a moment to study the flames. See how it dances and flickers and never gets tired, always wanting to consume more and grow bigger and higher. What message are we meant to take from this? Are we living our lives in a way that we want to

climb higher or are we just floating through routine?

Chovos Halevovos speaks about different ways to serve Hashem. You can serve Him through reward and punishment by just doing what the Torah tells you to do. Or you can serve Hashem through *sechel* which is a higher level. When it comes to serving Hashem just through *Torah*, there's a boundary and an end. But *sechel* goes beyond that. You can get deeper into understanding *avodat Hashem*. It's more than service of the body. We have to be connected with our heart and there's no limit to how deep that goes. And that's one of the reasons why it's a greater

level to serve Hashem with *sechel*, through understanding and depth than just doing the *mitzvot*. Are we passionate about *mitzvot* or is it just rote? We need to be excited and connected.

Think about these ideas. Ask Hashem for help to be able to get there. Sit by the Chanuka flames and observe how it keeps going until the oil is completely consumed. Get rid of *hergel*. Connect to Hashem and live life with passion and joy, climbing higher and higher. May it be a happy, elevated *Chanukah!*

Tehillim 136- Hashem's Love is Eternal and Universal

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Dr. Esther Shkop

Tehillim 136 is called *Hallel Hagadol* in *Mesechet Brachot*. It opens with three verses all beginning with the word *hodu* and ending with *hodu*. The phrase- "*Ki lolam chasdo*," is repeated 40 times throughout *Tanach*. In this *mizmor* it appears 26 times.

This phrase also appears in the 33rd chapter of *Yirmiyahu*. *Yirmiyahu* is primarily known as the prophet of gloom who foretold the destruction of the first *Bet Hamikdash*. But he also tells us that in this very place, *Yerushalayim*, that has become so desolate, we will yet hear the voice of rejoicing of a chosson and kallah. People will exclaim, "*Ki tov hu Hashem ki lolam chasdo*." Hashem promises, we will again have occasion to thank Him. In hindsight, we will see that His hand led us all along.

"*Hodo l'Elokai elokim...*" *Seforno* and *Metzudah* explain that *elokim* refers to the forces Hashem created to run the world. They can be winged ethereal beings or physical forces such as gravity, magnetism, genetics, the stars or armies and leaders. But *Chazal* say, we can transcend fate. Rav Hirsh notes that *elokim* refers to idols. People didn't actually worship the statues, they worshipped the forces of nature whether physical or social human forces. *Unkelos* says it refers to the judges who impose law and order in our

society. But it's Hashem who pulls the strings. He is the master of all masters and above them all.

"Who performs great wonders alone," Ibn Ezra explains, this refers to the invisible wonders and the daily miracles Hashem does for us as he sustains and provides for us. "Who made the great luminaries ... the sun to rule by day and the stars and the moon to have governance in the night..." Rav Bazak notes the differing structure of the words here in *Tehillim* as opposed to description of the luminaries in *Bereishit*. This is because when Adam was created, the power of the moon and sun were limited and dominion was handed over to man. The next section of this *mizmor* moves to the particular way in which Hashem manifested himself in *Mitzrayim*. Only the last plague of *makot bechorot* is mentioned. This is not only because it brought an end to our enslavement but rather because it clearly showed that Hashem lifted *Am Yisrael* above the Egyptians and that they were beloved to Him.

"And he took Israel out from their midst ... with a strong hand..." This is to indicate how strong the Egyptians were that Hashem had to fight them or that we needed to be pulled out against our will. According to the Redak the *mizmor* moves from the general to the specific to emphasize Hashem's praise.

"An inheritance to Israel His servant." This indicates that the land was given to us on condition that we serve Hashem. "In our lowest state you remembered us." *Rashi* says this refers back to *Mitzrayim* but Rav Hirsh differs and concurs with *Redak* that it refers to the long exile when it looked like it would be the end of *Klal Yisrael*. Then Hashem remembered us.

The *mizmor* then veers off, "Who gives bread to all flesh..." to emphasize the idea of *hashgacha pratit*. Not only does Hashem perform miracles and manipulate world powers but he watches over every living being. All natural phenomenon are really part of Hashem's *chesed*. *L'olam* signifies that Hashem's love is forever but it also means that it extends to the entire world.

Rashi explains based on the Midrash that the phrase- *Ki lolam chasdo* refers to the 26 generations from creation till *Matan Torah* when the world subsisted on Hashem's unconditional kindness. After the *Torah* was given, the world exists in the merit of those who observe and learn *Torah*. Twenty six is also the value of *yud keh vav keh*, the name of Hashem, which signifies *chesed*. Therefore, we reiterate 26 times- *Ki lolam chasdo* to accentuate that His love is eternal.