

## **Vayishlach**

***" No longer shall your name be called Jacob; rather, Israel shall be your name. For you have struggled with the divine and with men, and you have prevailed" ([Genesis 32:29](#)).***

**In this week's Torah portion Parashat Vayishlach, Jacob wrestles with an angel of God throughout the night. At daybreak, the angel, defeated, gives Jacob a new name; Yisrael. However, unlike his grandparents Avraham and Sarah ,whose original names cease to be mentioned after they receive their new names, Jacob, his original name AND his new name, YISRAEL, both continue to be used in both the Torah as well as our liturgy.**

**Our sages teach us that the names Jacob and Yisrael both embody paths to Divine service; each with their own unique traits and characteristics. Sometimes we walk the "Jacob" path and sometimes we walk the , "Yisrael" path.**

**I think it's something deeper- more -human-than that.**

**Jacob caused a lot of heartache in the time he spent with his family.**

**The pain he inflicted on his brother would prove to be incredibly hard to heal....**

**To me, the name, "Jacob" represents the past. It is his given name. This name is a symbol of how our actions in the past effect who we are, who we will become, and how we will impact and shape others in the future. Did we self reflect honestly and own up to our mistakes? Did we learn from them and course correct? Did we- when we inevitably repeated unhealthy behaviors and actions as we learned and grew, apologize and reassess how we would handle that situation in the future?**

**Last week, through a dream, Jacob forged a beautiful and unique relationship with God. This week, Yisrael no longer carries the future of a people on his shoulders because he stole it, but because he earned it. Yisrael understands the wrongs he has committed and has learned from his mistakes. Yisrael can allow himself a relationship with God not DESPITE his past, but BECAUSE of it.**

**So why in the Torah is he still called Jacob and not consistently called Yisrael? Because Jacob falls short. The missteps of his parents he makes with his own family and children; the favoritism, the jealousy, and the animosity. All the characteristics that led to him having to flee home, he passes on to the next generation. Though he and his brother make peace, their ancestors struggle with each other all the way down through the Purim story, when Mordechai- the descendent of Jacob, and Haman-the descendent of Esau struggle in Shushan....**

**He has 'Yisrael' moments, but to truly BE Yisrael, the hatred and discontent that started with his parents must stop with him. Instead, they only multiply. He is forever half Yisrael and half Jacob.**

**What does that mean for us? We are, after all, called, "The Children Of Israel". But If Jacob couldn't do it,Is it possible to become, "Yisrael"? Do we even need to try? Jacob was good enough for God, so maybe that's good enough for us too.....**

**Rabbi Tarfun says, "Lo alecha hamlacha ligmor" It is not upon us to finish the work, "v'lo ata ben chorin I'hibatel mimena", but neither are you free to desist from it. Being human is to make mistakes. We have inherited problems from the generations that came before, and because of those problems, we have made advances in technology, medicine, and communication. There is renewable energy, desalinization of water, and systems to make even the most barren of land bring forth crops where before there was none.**

**Maybe, we are Yisrael...**

**We have saved lives with medical advances such as Insulin, Antibiotics, Mammograms, organ transplants, Brain mapping.... We are Yisrael.**

**But with all of our awe inspiring advances, we still see homelessness, poverty, lack of access to clean drinking water, sex trafficking-**

**We are Jacob.**

**We overlook bullying in our schools, racism, xenophobia..... We are Jacob**

**We, as individuals and communities must overcome our own demons and find peace within. We cannot love others if we do not love ourselves. However, if we continue down the road we are on with our own descendants, then no, we have not done enough. If we perpetuate- or turn a blind eye- to the destructive behaviors occurring in our homes, communities and the world, from one generation to the next, we will forever be Jacob... and that is not good enough. We were given a blessing and a responsibility.**

**It is upon us to stop the cycle. Only then can we truly become Yisrael. May it happen in our own time.**

**Shabbat shalom**

**Sar**