

He said, “No longer will it be said that your name is Yaakov, but Yisrael, for you have striven with the Divine and with man and have overcome.” (32:29)

Yaakov/*Yisrael* are two names, each with unique implications. The name Yaakov heralds back to the birth of the Patriarch, *v'yado ochezes b'akeiv Eisav*, “his hand grasping on the heel of Eisav” (*Bereishis* 25:26). Yaakov *Avinu* emerged into this world holding onto the heel of his brother Eisav. This clearly does not imply strength or assertiveness. Later, at the convincing of his mother, Rivkah *Imeinu*, he appropriated the *b'rachos*, blessings, from Eisav, under what appears to be in less than a forthright manner. Eisav declared, *Hachi kara shemo Yaakov vayaakveini zeh paamayim*, “Is it because his name was called Yaakov that he outwitted me these two times?” (*Bereishis* 27:36). Once again, the name Yaakov connotes stealth, cunning, acting somewhat surreptitiously.

This is in contrast with the name *Yisrael*, which is derived from *sarisa*, “You have striven/contended.” *Sarisa* is derived from *sar*, which means officer, dignitary. Thus, *Yisrael* is a name which denotes dignity and pride, strength, openness, authority – definitely the opposite of deceit and treachery.

It is, therefore, interesting to note that the Torah calls the righteous women of our nation by the appellation *Bais Yaakov*, the House of Yaakov, while the men are referred to as *Bnei Yisrael*, the sons of *Yisrael*. This is evidenced in *Shemos* 19:3, when Hashem instructed Moshe *Rabbeinu* to inform the nation of the terms of the covenant. He distinguished between the men and women – referring to the men as *Yisrael*, while the women were called Yaakov. Why is this so? What is it about the righteous women of our nation that connects them to the Yaakov name?

In his *Livyas Chein*, **Horav Cohen, Shlita**, offers a fascinating understanding of the dichotomy between the role of women versus the role of men, based on the women’s guiding principle in life of: *Kol kevudah bas melech penimah*, “All the honor of the daughter of the king is within” (*Tehillim* 45:14)). We must refer back to the role played by Rivkah *Imeinu* in Yaakov’s ruse to relieve Eisav of the blessings. She did not act without guidance from Above. Through *Ruach HaKodesh*, Divine Inspiration, she was able to perceive that the blessings were to be given to Yaakov. The problem was that Yitzchak had made it clear that his intention was to give the blessings to Eisav. What does a righteous, chaste, but principled and logical, woman do when she perceives a conflict between Divine Inspiration and her husband’s personal proclivity? One thing that she does not do is confront her husband. This is not the way a *bas melech*, princess, conducts herself.

Most women have gentler characters. They are not aggressive. Thus, when Hashem told Moshe to convey the covenant to the women, He used the term *tomar*, “say,” to *Bais Yaakov*. Men are by nature much more assertive and bold. Their imperious nature demands a strong form of communication. Thus, Hashem told Moshe, *v'sagid*, “and speak,” to *Bnei Yisrael*.

Kol kevudah bas Melech penimah is much more than an adjunct description of the character of womanhood. It asserts the very definition of the role and position of woman in Judaism. The soft-spoken, genteel, dignified, but modest, way of the Jewish woman is not only desirable, it is a requisite. Thus, the righteous woman understands that the tactics which princes and soldiers employ are hardly appropriate for her. She must focus on a non-confrontational, almost passive, way of influencing those around her. *Binah yeseirah*, a surplus of understanding, was given to the woman. Thus, she should utilize her intuition and wisdom to prevail in life.

This, explains Rav Cohen, is exactly what Rivkah did when she instructed her son, Yaakov, to appropriate the blessings through a maneuver that appears to be subterfuge. In an attempt to avoid an outright confrontation with her husband, she turned to her son, Yaakov, and instructed him on how to obtain the blessings that were due to him, covertly. She was able to see her son blessed without having to catalyze confrontation or discord.

Rivkah *Imeinu* set the tone for women of future generations. *Chochmas nashim bansah beisah*, "The wisdom of women has built the house" (*Mishlei* 14:1). In building her home, Rivkah used good judgment as the mortar to hold the bricks of Torah and ethics together, so that her home would flourish, thereby ensuring the continuation and success of the Jewish People through the blessings bestowed upon her son, Yaakov. A Jewish woman employs her wisdom and intuition *l'shem Shomayim*, for the sake of Heaven, discretely and without fanfare, developing her home into a bastion of Torah and *yiraas Shomayim*, fear of Heaven.

We now understand the significance of – and the necessity for – calling the Jewish community of women by the appellation, *Bais Yaakov*. Recalling the name of the Patriarch who was guided by guile and wisdom, who was crafty when necessary, who listened to his mother's wise advice, serves an important function. It teaches the generations of women to follow and strive to emulate the ways of the Matriarch Rivkah. She brought blessing to her home: neither by grabbing, nor by protest; by eschewing the limelight; without aggressiveness – but with strength, modesty and gentleness. Every Jewish woman must avail herself of her unique qualities of wisdom and intuition, in order to remain the paradigm of the true *Bais Yaakov*, the revered princess, which personifies her essence and enables her calling.