

Your name shall no longer be called Avram, but your name shall be Avraham. (17:5)

In the *Talmud Berachos 13A*, *Chazal* remark that anyone who refers to Avraham *Avinu* as Avram violates a negative and a positive commandment. Interestingly, we do not find this distinction in regard to Yaakov *Avinu*, whose name also underwent a change. We note (in *Bereishis 32:29* and *35:10*) the *Torah* states: “Your name shall not always be called Yaakov, but Yisrael shall be your name.” What difference is there between Yaakov and Avraham? While Yaakov’s name was also changed, it had no *halachic* consequences? We still refer to him as Yaakov.

Horav Zaidel Epstein, Shlita, explains that the difference lies in the reason for the name change. *Chazal* attribute the change in Avraham’s name to the actual change in Avraham’s essence. Originally Avraham “ruled” over two hundred forty three organs of his body. He was in control over almost his whole body. With the advent of his *Bris Milah*, he grew in spiritual stature. He now controlled his entire body. The letter “*hay*” is the numerical equivalent for five, the added number of organs he now sublimated to serve Hashem. To call Avraham by any other name denigrates his stature and undermines his influence over *Klal Yisrael*. The father of *Am Yisrael* was an individual who towered over his entire body. He was in total control. He serves for us as the benchmark of spiritual ascendancy. Indeed, to refer to him by his “old” name is an affront to the Patriarch and to the entire nation.

Conversely, Yaakov’s name change relates to the events of his life. The name Yaakov implies underhandedness and guile, which are, regrettably, necessary characteristics one must apply in dealing with people like Eisav and Lavan. Indeed, in dealing with the wicked, Yaakov must resort to the methods which they understand. When his name was changed to Yisrael, it implied that he had within him the strength and ability to reign over men, to withstand temptation. He had to overcome challenges of both a physical and spiritual nature, to serve Hashem in a manner that projected dignity and nobility. Indeed, Yaakov was to become like a “*Sar*,” a sovereign. Yet, when dealing with Eisav and Lavan, he resorted back to the characteristics of Yaakov. That is the only way that they understand! Yisrael is his name, symbolizing his true essence. Yaakov represents a behavior pattern which, at times, it is necessary to implement. The prayer is that one day it will no longer be necessary to be “called” Yaakov, that we will never find it necessary to act in this manner.