

“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)

The names “Yaakov” and “Yisrael” allude to two distinct periods in the spiritual condition of our People. *Horav Meir Shapiro, z.l.*, presents an historical perspective based upon these two names. The name Yisrael, symbolizing strength and sovereignty, was evident in the period of “*hoda*,” glory, in the life of our nation: when *Torah* and *mitzvah* went side by side; when their study and observance were part and parcel of every Jew’s “*weltenshaung*,” when faith in the Almighty beat in everyone’s heart. A period of “*shiflus*,” lowliness, unfortunately was also manifest in our nation: when we descended to the nadir of depravity; when many of our people, regrettably, turned their backs on their faith and ultimately on their Father in Heaven, when we attempted to acculturate and assimilate, striving to act like the nations around us. The name Yaakov was applicable during this latter period.

Chazal have taught us, “*Yisrael, af al pi she’cha’tah, Yisrael hu*,” “Even though a Jew has sinned, he is still considered to be a Jew.” Regardless of how low we have descended, how far we have declined, we remain Hashem’s nation; we are still considered Jews. The nations of the world are still by far more spiritually and morally deficient than we. During such a period, our People are not worthy of the name Yisrael, but we are still Jews; we are “Yaakov.” The name Yaakov is taken from “*his hand was grasping onto the akeiv, heel, of Eisav*.” Only as a result of the spiritual and moral dysfunction of Eisav’s descendants, are we still considered to be the sons of Yaakov. In other words, it is not our own attributes, which have earned us this name. Rather, we are called Yaakov as a consequence of our relative superiority over Eisav.

David Ha’melech says in *Sefer Tehillim*, 66:7, “*He rules in His might forever, His eyes oversee the nations*.” When Hashem is about to judge *Klal Yisrael* with *middas ha’din*, strict attribute of justice, He looks at the nations, at their abominable lifestyle, at their reprehensible activities and immoral behavior. He sees the vast distinction between their way of life and ours. Even after he has fallen prey to sin, the Jew is still on a much higher moral / spiritual plane than the members of the other nations.

This is the profound meaning of the *Kohen Gadol*’s prayer on *Yom Kippur*, “A year in which Your people, the family of *Yisrael*, is not dependent upon one another, or upon another people.” He implored Hashem that *Klal Yisrael* never be in the condition to be compared to the nations of the world. It should never happen that our only line of defense, our only justification for being sustained, is our relative good in comparison to the nations of the world. We ask Hashem for a year in which our own *maasim tovim*, good deeds, and positive behavior are our greatest advocates. Our splendor and majesty should justify our continued relationship with Hashem.

When Yaakov *Avinu* triumphed over Eisav’s guardian angel, he was blessed with the name

“Yisrael.” The majesty and splendor of *Klal Yisrael* should always be on a level to deserve the name that signifies strength and sovereignty. We should be worthy of Hashem’s beneficence based upon our own merit – the merit of Yisrael.