

And he said, “Your name shall no longer be called Yaakov, but rather Yisrael, for you have striven, im Elokim and with people, and you have prevailed. (32:29)

In defining the phrase, *im Elokim*, which should be translated, “with G-d,” we find a difference of opinion among the commentators. *Targum Yonasan ben Uziel* defines the word *Elokim* as referring to angels of G-d. Thus, Yaakov *Avinu* fought with an angel. *Targum Onkelos* explains that the term *Elokim* refers to Hashem Himself, while the word preceding it, *im*, has the meaning of “before,” rather than “with.” Thus, the *pasuk* is translated such that the word *im* has two meanings: “You have striven **before** G-d and **with** people, “and” you have prevailed.”

Horav Aharon Soloveitchik, zl, applies both of the aforementioned explanations to the relationship the Jewish People should maintain with the secular and non-Jewish society outside of the Torah camp. From the interpretation offered by *Targum Yonasan*, we can deduce the proposition that the name *Yisrael* was conferred upon Yaakov as a result of his successful contention against the forces of nature and against people. To put it succinctly, the essential quality of Yaakov was his unique ability to counteract both a hostile physical environment and a social climate that was antagonistic to his way of life. Yaakov was willing to contend against these forces and issues when necessary – when his Torah way of life was threatened.

Targum Onkelos seems to find Yaakov in contention **only** with those forces which struggle with him “before G-d” in matters of theology and spirituality. When it comes to our *ruchniyus*, spirituality, he does not condone compromise. A Jew cannot adapt to the prevailing spiritual environment. Concerning matters of ethics and religion, a Jew does not countenance any path other than one prescribed by the Torah. Just as our Patriarch, Avraham *Avinu*, we stand as an *Ivri*, one who remains on a different side, while the rest of the world is on the “other” side.

Regarding secular matters, completely unrelated to theology or religion, a Jew may assume a different approach. He should pursue a policy of peaceful coexistence, harmony and respect. In civic, scientific and economic matters, he may integrate into the existing society – as long as he experiences no threat whatsoever to his religious standing and views.

At this point, *Rav Soloveitchik* takes his thesis one step further. The mandate of religious segregation implied by the name *Yisrael* applies to any potential religious or spiritual association with any group, regardless of its non-Jewish or Jewish background. If its religious doctrine runs counter to the Torah way, then **religious** affiliation is to be negated. While the Torah requires us to show love and friendship toward anyone who was created *b'tzelem Elokim*, in the image of G-d – Jew, Gentile, religious or non-observant – it still exhorts us against fellowship of a religious nature with non-religious groups. This is the mandate that accompanies the name *Yisrael*.

The question which now confronts us is how the struggle “before G-d” is to be realized. This is

where *Rav Soloveitchik* teaches us how a Torah Jew contends with forces that are either antithetical to, or undermine religious life. Yes, even in “struggle,” there are two ways: the “wrong” way, and the Torah way. We must note that the Torah does not use the word, *nilchamta*, “you have fought,” as in *milchamah*, war. Instead, it uses the word, *sa’risa*, “you have striven,” as in *sar*, officer/leader. We can draw a clear distinction between *nilchamta* and *sarisa*. *Nilchamta*, “you have fought,” implies involvement in a conflict which entails physical force and verbal strife, and only has one aim: vanquishing the opponent. *Milchamah* is a battle between two sides, with one emerging the victor and the other the vanquished.

The term *sa’risa*, however, implies striving for leadership, as it is derived from the word *sar*, leader. A leader does not really involve himself in fighting. He attempts to prevent the battle. He is one who perseveres in trying to arouse the latent good and noble qualities inherent in each person. A leader continually seeks to resolve conflicts that arise among his people. He also endeavors to calm and soothe the inner conflicts within the depths of the human soul. A leader is one who aspires to recapture the true personality of the individual by inspiring and stimulating the maximum spiritual potential in that person. To put it simply, *nilchamta*, “for you have fought,” seeks to focus on the negative, finding a way to overpower it. *Sa’risa*, “for you have striven,” does not imply a fight. On the contrary, it focuses on the positive – finding a way to interact, so that there can be a meeting of the minds, with respect and dignity.

Yaakov struggled against Eisav before G-d: not with brute force or verbal dissension, not with bans, denouncements, nor interdiction; and certainly not with curses and other inflammatory remarks aimed at the non-Jewish and non-religious world. Rather, Yaakov struggled against Eisav through the medium of *sa’risa* – with courage and sincerity, with dignity, firmness, dedication and piety – demonstrating a love for all people and a burning desire to sanctify Hashem’s Name.

Yaakov was not looking to put Eisav down, but rather to raise himself up. He endeavored to be a leader over people and a ruler over the various forces in the world. He did this: by asserting his own uniqueness, by reconciling and unifying the various conflicting forces that wreak havoc on the human soul – and by harmonizing the earthly with the Heavenly, the *Yaakov* with the *Yisrael*. Our Patriarch was a diplomat – not a rabble-rouser. This does not mean that it hurt him any less when he observed a desecration of Hashem’s Name. He just had a different, more refined way of dealing with the issue. We see now why Yaakov epitomizes the attribute of *tiferes*, beauty.

The previous *Parsha* commences with Yaakov’s dream of a ladder that was set on earth, with its top reaching toward Heaven, and Heavenly angels ascending and descending upon it. The ladder represents the connection between Heaven and earth, the spiritual and the physical, *Yaakov/Yisrael*. Consistent with this idea, every Jew who earns the name *Yisrael* represents the ability to counteract the environment by sublimating its conflicting factors into one harmonious entity. This is our *raison d’etre*. By acting like *Yisrael*, we create the opportunity for *kavod Shomayim*, whereby Hashem’s Name is glorified, revered and loved.