WEEKLY DVAR TORAH • VAYISHLACH

# Why You Can't Become Someone New by Hating Who You *Used to Be*



4G SENIOR MECHANECH

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לֹא יַעֲקֹב יֵאָמֵר עוֹד שִׁמְךָ

*"Your name shall no longer be called Yaakov."*

**BEREISHIS 32:29**

וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא יַעֲקֹב יֵאָמֵר עוֹד שִׁמְךָ כִּי אִם־יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי־שָׂרִיתָ עִם־אֱלֹהִים וְעִם־אֲנָשִׁים וַתּוּכָל

*"Your name shall no longer be called Yaakov, but Yisrael, for you have struggled with the Divine and with men and have prevailed."*

**BEREISHIS 32:29**

After wrestling with the malach throughout the night, Yaakov Avinu receives a new name. He is no longer to be called Yaakov. From now on, he will be called *Yisrael.*

Except that the Torah continues to call him Yaakov.

The Gemara in Berachos (13a) makes a fascinating distinction between Avraham Avinu and Yaakov Avinu. Once Hashem changes Avram's name to Avraham, it is forbidden to call him Avram. His old name is no longer to be used. But when it comes to Yaakov Avinu, the Gemara says:

לֹא שֶׁיַּעֲקֹר יַעֲקֹב מִמְּקוֹמוֹ אֶלָּא יִשְׂרָאֵל עִיקָּר וְיַעֲקֹב טָפֵל לוֹ

**BERACHOS 13A**

The name Yaakov is not uprooted. Yisrael becomes his primary name, while Yaakov becomes secondary.

Why the difference? Why does Avraham leave his old name behind while Yaakov retains his?

The Gemara explains that Avram originally meant that Avraham was a father to Aram. Once he became Avraham, he became a father to the entire world. His mission had expanded, and his original name no longer adequately described him.

Yaakov's transformation was different.

Chassidus explains that Yaakov and Yisrael represent two forms of avodas Hashem. Yaakov represents serving Hashem while struggling with the challenges of this world. Yisrael represents a higher level, where a person is able to confront those same challenges from a position of greater strength.

But even after Yaakov becomes Yisrael, there is still a place for the avodah of Yaakov. The struggle itself has value. Becoming Yisrael doesn't mean that everything about being Yaakov needs to disappear.

I think there's an important lesson here about how we approach personal growth.

Imagine you were jealous of a friend, so you said something not nice about them. Maybe you were afraid of being left out, and so you joined in when everyone was talking about them.

Today, you would never behave that way. At least you hope you wouldn't. But remembering what happened still makes you uncomfortable. You cringe when you think about the person you were back then.

And sometimes that discomfort turns into a deep dislike of the earlier version of yourself. You wish you could erase the old version of yourself entirely.

The problem is that when we become ashamed of who we were, it becomes surprisingly difficult to be honest about what we did.

Suppose someone confronts you about something hurtful you said. If you can acknowledge that you're a good person who did something wrong, you can probably hear what they're telling you. It might be painful, but you can admit it. You can apologize and try to understand why you behaved that way.

But what if, deep down, you believe that doing something wrong means you're a bad person?

Now you're not simply being asked to acknowledge a mistake. Your entire sense of self feels threatened. And so rather than taking responsibility, you defend yourself. "I was only joking."

Instead of trying to understand why you behaved the way you did, you're busy proving that you weren't wrong. And the more ashamed we are of ourselves, the harder it can become to take responsibility for our behavior.

We think that if we're hard enough on ourselves, we'll finally change. But often the opposite happens. We're so frightened of what our mistakes might say about us that we cannot look at them honestly.

That person who was so desperate to fit in wasn't necessarily a terrible person. They were afraid of being rejected. They wanted to belong, and they didn't yet know how to handle those feelings in a healthy way.

That doesn't excuse what they did. They may have hurt somebody, and they need to take responsibility for that. But if all they can do is hate themselves for being insecure, how are they ever going to understand their insecurity well enough to work through it?

> *There's a difference between wanting to change something about yourself and wishing that the person you used to be had never existed.*

When Yaakov Avinu becomes Yisrael, something genuinely changes. As Rashi explains, his brachos will no longer be described as having come through עקבה ורמיה, cunning and deception, but through שררה וגילוי פנים, dignity and openness. The same person who once had to navigate the world through struggle and calculated survival now stands differently. Yet the name Yaakov remains. The one who struggled is not erased; he is carried forward into the one who has grown. The old ways are transformed, not disowned.

That is the difference between real change and self-rejection. Growth does not require hating the earlier version of yourself. It requires allowing the person who struggled to become part of the person who can now face life with greater honesty and strength.

Later, when Hashem speaks to him in Be'er Sheva, the Torah says:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים לְיִשְׂרָאֵל בְּמַרְאֹת הַלָּיְלָה וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב יַעֲקֹב

*"Hashem spoke to Yisrael in visions of the night and said, 'Yaakov, Yaakov.'"*
**BEREISHIS 46:2**

Hashem speaks to Yisrael, but calls him Yaakov.

I wonder how many of us are still angry at the people we used to be.

TAKE IT WITH YOU

## Think about the person you were three years ago.

They probably made some mistakes. Imagine that person walked into your room today, struggling with the same insecurities you remember so well.

Would you help them grow? Or would you tell them how embarrassed you are of them?

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SOURCES

Bereishis 32:29 (sefaria.org/Genesis.32.29) · Rashi on Bereishis 32:29 (sefaria.org/Rashi_on_Genesis.32.29) · Berachos 13a (sefaria.org/Berakhot.13a) · Bereishis 46:2 (sefaria.org/Genesis.46.2)