

The
CHASSIDUS
PERSPECTIVE
with Reb Yoel Kahn

Prepared by
 Rabbi Yehudah Leib Altein



To hear this talk in Yiddish, visit:
MerkazAnash.com/cp/vayishlach5780

A NAME CHANGE WITH A DIFFERENCE

Two of our three forefathers had their names changed, but only one was permanent.

The Gemara says that it is forbidden to call Avraham "Avram," because the *possuk* says, "No longer will your name be called Avram." If so, asks the Gemara, we should not be allowed to use the name "Yaakov," because the *possuk* says, "No longer will your name be called Yaakov, rather Yisroel"? The Gemara explains that Yaakov is different, because the Torah itself uses that name later on.

However, the fact that the Torah continues to use the name Yaakov is just a *proof* that there is no prohibition. What, indeed, is the reason for this difference? Why did Avram become obsolete while Yaakov did not?

The answer is that the *spiritual significance* of both of Yaakov's names are relevant today. Unlike Avraham, which completely replaced the name Avram, both Yaakov and Yisroel are necessary in our *avodas Hashem*.

When Hashem switched Yaakov's name to Yisroel, He was saying that the *avodah* of Yaakov alone is not enough, and the higher level of Yisroel is required as well. This did not negate Yaakov but rather added to it.

A LESSON IN DECEPTION

What is the difference between Yaakov and Yisroel?

Rashi explains that Yaakov means trickery while Yisroel means authority. This is the reason his name was changed: "No longer will it be said that you received the *berachos* with trickery and deceit, rather authoritatively and openly."

Why indeed did Yaakov employ trickery to receive the *berachos*? This serves as a general lesson to us, teaching us that we must approach *gashmiyus* with "deceit."

What is deceit? Deceit means that you pretend you are one person when really you are someone else. Take a spy, for example. His goal is to extract confidential information from another group. To do so, he mingles with his opponents and befriends them. On the outside it appears as if he is one of

them, when in reality he is there to uncover their secrets.

This is how we must approach *gashmiyus*. Inherently, a Jew has nothing to do with *gashmiyus*. Our "home" is *ruchniyus*—learning Torah, davening, and doing *mitzvos*. When we do get involved in *gashmiyus*, on the outside it seems that we "belong." However, in truth we have an inner objective: We wish to uncover the "secrets" hidden in *gashmiyus*, the sparks of holiness concealed within.

The *possuk* describes desert travelers as "hungry and thirsty, their souls are weak (*tis'ataf*) within them." This *possuk*, explains the Baal Shem Tov, gives insight into why we become hungry and thirsty. There is a "soul" wrapped up (*tis'ataf*) within the food and drink. Our *neshamah* wants to elevate these hidden sparks, and that is why Hashem makes us hungry.

This is the *inner* reason why we eat, drink, and are involved in commerce. Externally, however, our material pursuits seem to be just like those of a non-Jew. We are expert tricksters: We pretend to be like everyone else, making them think we have *gashmiyus*

in mind, when in reality our focus is *lesheim shamayim*!

In this way, we are like Yaakov. Yaakov's true self was a yeshiva student, preoccupied with Torah in the study halls of Shem and Ever. When it came time for him to deal with *gashmiyus*—to receive *berachos* consisting of material abundance—he needed to disguise himself as Esav. Moreover, Esav's clothing first belonged to Nimrod, who rebelled against Hashem. What does Yaakov have in common with such clothing? Absolutely nothing! Yet, Yaakov "deceptively" donned these garments, all in order to extract the *kedushah* hidden in *gashmiyus*.

OUT IN THE OPEN

This approach to *gashmiyus* is reflected in the name Yaakov, trickery. Yisroel, however, represents a higher approach, in which there is no need to fool anyone: Our *gashmiyus* is connected to *kedushah* openly, for all to see.

The reason Yaakov's name was changed to Yisroel was "because you have mastered over men and angels (*Elokim*) and have succeeded."

The way Yaakov received the *berachos* teaches us that we must approach *gashmiyus* with "deceit."

Elokim is the name of Hashem associated with concealment, where *gashmiyus* conceals *Elokus*. From this perspective, in order to connect *gashmiyus* to *kedushah*, we must employ deceit. Essentially, however, a Jew is above and beyond such obstructions, and there is nothing to hide.

These two approaches reflect the difference between the weekdays and Shabbos.

During the week, eating is not a *mitzvah*. To the contrary, if we are not careful, it has the potential to spiritually desensitize us. When involved in *gashmiyus*, we are “fooling” everyone, doing a non-holy activity for a holy purpose—to give us energy to daven and learn.

Shabbos is different. On Shabbos, the world is higher and more refined, and a deeper level of our *neshamah* is revealed. Therefore, it is a *mitzvah* to enjoy tasty foods and fine drinks, just as it is a *mitzvah* to wear *tefillin*. *Gashmiyus* is openly connected to *kedushah*.

During the week we are Yaakov, a name related to *eikev*, heel. A lower dimension of our *neshamah*—its “heel”—is at play. *Gashmiyus* is therefore perceived as a contradiction to *kedushah*, and we must fight it, just as Yaakov fought with Esav’s angel.

By contrast, on Shabbos we are Yisroel, which includes the same letters as *rosh*, head. We are privy to a deeper level of our *neshamah* (its “head”), rising to a level where nothing conceals *Elokus*. We are like Yaakov *after* he mastered the angel; there is no need to fight, as the *gashmiyus* itself is a *mitzvah*.

THE YAAKOV-YISROEL CYCLE

These two types of *avodah*—the weekday Yaakov and the Shabbos Yisroel—are intertwined.

In order to reach the level of Shabbos, in which *gashmiyus* itself is holy, we must first toil throughout the week to do our physical

activities *lesheim shamayim*. Conversely, being on a higher level on Shabbos empowers us to go out during the week and interact with the world in the right way.

This is one of the reasons we say on Motzoei Shabbos the *piyut* “*Al tira avdi Yaakov*” (Do not fear, My servant Yaakov). (Although this *piyut* is not part of our *nusach*, Chassidus explains a number of customs and liturgies that are not *nusach Chabad*.)

On Shabbos we are Yisroel. We have an extra *neshamah*, and we look at the world in a different light. The day is filled with davening and learning; even when we eat and drink, that is a *mitzvah* too.

But then Shabbos comes to a close. Our *neshamah yeseirah* leaves us, and we are faced with yet another week, in which we are Yaakov once again, forced to deal with *gashmiyus*. We might therefore be afraid to go out to the world, a world that conceals *Elokus*.

We therefore say, “Do not fear, Yaakov!” Shabbos gives us the power to enter the week full of spiritual energy, ready to

delve into *gashmiyus* with the right intent, *lesheim shamayim* and not for personal pleasure. And so it continues, with each week preparing for Shabbos and each Shabbos influencing the following week, spurring us to ever higher levels of Yaakov and Yisroel.

This is why both names of Yaakov and Yisroel are in use today. We must apply both methods in our *avodas Hashem*, at times battling with and deceiving *gashmiyus*, and at times being on a level where nothing obstructs us and *gashmiyus* itself is holy.

For further study, see *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 3, pp. 795–799.

Shabbos empowers us to enter the week full of spiritual energy, ready to delve into *gashmiyus* with the right intent.



merkazanash.com
info@merkazanash.com
347.471.1770

Dedicated in honor of
the tireless director of **Sichos In English**
Rabbi Yonah Avtzon עי"ה
who led the way in disseminating
English Chassidus
by his children
Rabbi Yitzchok and Chanie Wolf שי"ח