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Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888, Germany) understands names as reflecting different emotional states of our ancestors throughout their lives. While the name Yaakov connects with the stooped, downcast man, the name Yisrael connotes hope and reinvigoration.

Put differently, Yaakov's birth name, Yaakov, hearkens back to how Yaakov entered the world. Derived from the word עֶקֶב meaning the heel of the foot, this name highlights Yaakov's struggle against his brother Esav, which began in utero. The early wrestling would lead to outright trickery and deception as Yaakov trades stew for Esau's birthright and eventually steals the firstborn blessing. Though a simple tent dweller, Yaakov's life begins with him clutching at the heel of his brother while perpetually wandering the land on foot from Canaan to Egypt.

Yisrael, the name given to Yaakov by God, is related to the word שָׂרָה which means to prevail or have dominion over. This new name reflects both his growth and overcoming of adversity and his newfound material and spiritual elevation - all byproducts of a life of wrestling. This new name represents Yaakov's transition from the physical struggle of his youth to the spiritual quest of his adulthood. Moreover, as Rav Hirsch teaches, Yaakov's new name is not just his name, but the name of an entire nation - B'nei Yisrael. It is a name that also signifies the nation's journey from physical struggle to spiritual accomplishment.

While we may not all have two names, we all contain dualities within us - our physical self and our spiritual self, our "better" self and our "worse" self. Like our ancestors, it is not uncommon to have to learn how to grapple with and grow from these dualities. The usage of both Yaakov and Yisrael, even at the end of his life, reminds us that even as we are shaped by our individual and shared experiences, by our physical struggles and our moral and spiritual awakenings, we carry it all with us - both who we were and who we have become.

But when looking at what lives on after us, the legacy that we leave, the emphasis is not on where we started, but on where we finish - not on our struggles, but on our accomplishments. May we merit to remember, bring honor to, and exemplify the name, Yisrael.

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## TORAH SPARKS

### Parashat Vayehi

January 11, 2020 | 14 Tevet 5780

Annual | Bereshit 47:28-50:26 (Etz Hayim p. 293-311; Hertz p. 180-191)  
Triennial | Bereshit 47:28-48:22 (Etz Hayim p. 293-298; Hertz p. 180-183)  
Haftarah | 1 Kings 2:1-12 (Etz Hayim p. 312-314; Hertz p. 191-192)

## D'var Torah: What's in a Name

*David Helfand, Conservative Yeshiva Student and Rabbinical Student at AJU's Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies in Los Angeles, CA*

In the 2015 Broadway masterpiece, Hamilton, Aaron Burr exclaims, "Get your education, don't forget from whence you came. And the world's gonna know your name, what's your name, man!" A name says a lot about a person. Our names connect us to a loved one's memory, they may be inspired by our own journey, and they may even change over time.

In Parashat Vayechi, we bid farewell to Yaakov our Patriarch. In the opening verses, Yaakov is called by two different names:

וַיְחִי יַעֲקֹב בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם שִׁבְעַת עָשָׂרָה שָׁנָה וַיְחִי יְמֵי-יַעֲקֹב שְׁנַיִם חֲמִישִׁים וְשִׁבְעִים וְשָׁנָה וַיִּקְרָבוּ יְמֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל לָמוּת וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו יְהוָה וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ אִם-נָא מְצָאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ שִׁים-נָא יָדְךָ תַּחַת יְרֵכִי וְעָשִׂיתָ עִמָּדִי חֶסֶד וְאֱמַת אֶל-נְאֻם תִּקְבְּרֵנִי בְּמִצְרָיִם:

"Yaakov lived seventeen years in the land of Egypt, so the span of Yaakov's life came to one hundred and forty-seven years. And when the time approached for Yisrael to die, he summoned his son Yosef and said to him, "Do me this favor, place your hand under my thigh as a pledge of your steadfast loyalty: please do not bury me in Egypt." (Genesis 47:28-29)

Notably, Yaakov is the Biblical character whose new name, Yisrael, does not cancel all use of his birth name. And while it's not uncommon for the Torah to use one name in one story and the other in a different one, it is odd for the Torah to do so in consecutive verses. And of all places for the Torah to do so, why does it do so here, in a passage about Yaakov nearing the end of his life?

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## D'var Haftarah: David the Godfather?

*Rabbi Mordechai Silverstein, Conservative Yeshiva Faculty*

This week's haftarah opens benignly enough with David's command to his son and successor as king, Shlomo, to keep faith and maintain loyalty to God and the Torah. What follows seems to read like the end of "The Godfather", as David charges his son to "even the score" with a number of his enemies and former allies who during the course of his career as king had betrayed him. Yoav ben Zeruiah, David's nephew and one of his military leaders, is first on the list: "And what's more, you yourself know what Yoav ben Zeruiah did to me, what he did to the two commanders of the armies of Israel, Avner ben Ner and Amasa ben Yeter – he killed them, and shed the blood of war in peace... you must act in your wisdom, and do not let his gray go down in peace to Sheol." (2:5) This disquieting order can only be understood when we see what Yoav was responsible for in the past and the threat he represented to Shlomo's reign.

What Yoav did to the two commanders is spelled out clearly. Avner, who had been closely associated with David's predecessor, Sha'ul, was on his way to make peace with David, when Yoav met him on the road, and, feigning a gesture of peace, killed him. (2 Samuel 3:22-27) In a similar manner, he killed Amasa, who had taken Yoav's place as David's chief military attendant. Meeting Amasa on the road, he greeted him in peace, only to murder him in an act of trickery. The cruelty of the manner of this murder was extraordinary (See 2 Samuel 20:8-9) These incidents, while not betrayals of David's trust, established Yoav's capacity for duplicity and cold-bloodedness, and his disregard for the rules of war.

What really captured David's ire were the two occasions when Yoav was disloyal. When David's son, Avshalom, rebelled against his father, David sent Yoav to quell the rebellion with the clear understanding that Avshalom was to remain unharmed. Yoav's soldiers, upon finding Avshalom stuck in a thicket, follow David's orders. Yoav, however, stabs Avshalom with 3 darts and has his men finish the job. (2 Samuel 18:14-15) And of course, Yoav then allied himself with another of David's sons, Adoniyah, who sought to usurp the monarch from David. (1 Kings 1)

If that weren't enough, one midrash also pins on Yoav responsibility for making known David's part in the death of Uriah the Hittite, husband of Bathsheba! (See Tanhuma Buber Masei 9)

It should be easy to see both why David harbored great animosity toward this one-time ally, and why he saw Yoav as a threat to Shlomo's rule as king. All of this serves to remind us that the world of statecraft is, unfortunately, a world shaped by both morality and realpolitik. Mastering this volatile combination is not easy and requires great wisdom. This is what David tried to teach his son Shlomo before departing the world.

## Parashah Study: Closing the Book of Brotherly Relations

*Vered Hollander-Goldfarb, Conservative Yeshiva Faculty*

### Text: Bereshit 50:15-21

(15) And Yosef's brothers saw that their father was dead, and they said, "if Yosef bears resentment against us, he will surely pay us back for all the evil we caused him." (16) And they commanded [messengers to go] to Yosef to say, "**Your father commanded** [us] before his death, saying, (17) 'Thus shall you say to Yosef, 'Forgive, pray, the crime of the servants of your father's God.'" And Yosef wept when they spoke to him. (18) His brothers then came and flung themselves before him and said, "Here we are prepared to be your slaves." (19) But Yosef said, "fear not, for am I instead of God? (20) While you meant evil toward me, God meant it for good, so as to bring about at this very time keeping many people alive. (21) So fear not. I will sustain you and your little ones." And he comforted them **and spoke to their hearts**.

- After an elaborate funeral, our text states "Yosef's brothers saw that their father was dead". Surely this is not referring to eyesight, what was it that they saw?
- The brothers forward to Yosef a message from their father. What is the message? Do you believe that Yaakov left that message for Yosef? Why?
- Why do you think that Yosef cried when they spoke to him?

### Commentary: Rashi 50: 16, 21

**Your father commanded:** *They altered the facts for the sake of peace. Yaakov gave no such command, since he did not suspect Yosef.*

- Rashi does not believe that Yaakov left the instructions that the brothers forwarded in his name, so why did they convey it in his name? Can you think of other 'alterations' that are made for the same reason that Rashi gives?

**and spoke to their hearts:** *Convincing words. 'Before you came down here, they [the Egyptians] were spreading rumors about me that I was a slave. Through you it became known that I am a free man. Now if I kill you, what will people say? "He saw a group of young men and glorified himself through them by saying, 'They are my brothers' and at the end he killed them!" Is there such a thing as a brother who kills his brothers?'*

- What type of arguments are at the foundation of Yosef's reassuring words to his brothers? Why are they effective?
- This comment by Rashi is one of his last on this book full of brotherly rivalry. Think about his closing line while considering the book from the beginning. How would you describe his closing line? What light does it shed on the book of Bereishit?