

Vayishlach D'var Torah - Dec. 10, 2022

By Noah Klein

Shabbat Shalom!

My name is Noah Klein, and that fact is more important than you think. Just a disclaimer, I'm going to talk about my name for five minutes now, so I *really* hope that none of you forget it. *joke*

Why are names in the Torah (and in general) important? What do they signify in a character/person?

My first name is Noah, like the character in the Torah: His name (my name), נח, has a nice significance, it means comfort. So, in the Torah we immediately know Noah will be comforting in a world of discomfort. My parents named me Noah because they wanted me to be comforting too, like the role model from the Torah.

My last name is Klein, meaning short in German, so that name is clearly a little inaccurate. *joke*

Noah's great great... grandfather, 10 generations Noah's father, Adam (אדם), had a very literal name, he was made of the land so he was named after the land/Earth. His wife was named Eve, in Hebrew Chaya (חַוָּה) (the root "life, to live") because she was the mother of all living things.

Noah's great great... grandson, 10 generations Noah's son, Avram and his wife Sarai had normal names when they were normal people, but when they sealed their pact with G-d they received new names (אברהם), (a letter from G-d's name) Avraham and Sarah, to signify the everlasting covenant with G-d.

Isaac (יִצְחָק) was named after laughter (root of "to laugh") because of the jubilation and surprise that Avraham and Sarah felt when Isaac was born.

These are the first biblical characters, and they all have nice names, and the importance of their names is to show how the characters are important to the world-how they impact the world for Good.

However, when the star of this week's parsha, Jacob (י.ע.ק.ב.) was born, he was named after his greedy traits. He grabbed at Esau's ankle coming out of the womb, showing he was always eager to cheat and win. Also, he stole Esau's blessing, and rightfully his brother became very angry. So, why does Jacob's name seem to imply that Jacob is a bad, greedy person?

To answer that question, we can look in this week's parsha, where Jacob is looking to repent for his sins against Esau. He has decided to give Esau many gifts of livestock, and finally he is feeling regret and remorse for his bad deeds! He prays to G-d and admits all the wrongdoings he's committed, hoping for a better future. Jacob travels with his camp to meet Esau and say sorry.

But, Jacob is separated from his family on the road, so he takes the opportunity to fight his inner demons. He fights an angel that can be interpreted as both real and a metaphor. The angel could be seen as Esau's guardian angel, fighting to bring Esau justice.

But, the metaphorical meaning here may be more important. The fact that Jacob has now chosen to right his wrongs and fight his inner demons/inner angels shows an improvement worthy of divine recognition: so Jacob is blessed by the angel to receive a new name that shows how Jacob conquered his struggle with the past.

Jacob is named Israel, meaning you struggled with the divine, signifying how he fought against a divine being and conquered a divine problem--his greed.

So, problem solved. Jacob's original name showed how he was lacking in empathy, but his new one shows how he fixed the problem. The significance of Jacob's new name is a reminder to try and do better in life, to struggle with the divine.

But, there's one more thing named Israel, it's been in the news a lot recently, you know five elections in four years, *joke-ish* and that's the country of Israel. The name of the state is very interesting. When it was first being created, there were many different opinions about what the state's name should be. Many thought names like Judea or Zion would show the country's past roots, while others a name like "Irvi" (meaning a Hebrew) could help recognize the Jewish people themselves. However, in the end the choice was Israel, but why?

The name Israel has two meanings.

1. It connects to Jacob's struggle with his divine problems. Sarita means you struggled and El means with the divine.
2. But, the word also has another meaning. Sarita El could instead mean G-d prevails, or G-d is superior.

So the name is perfect for the state. It shows two sides of Israel. It shows the side of struggling, with the many elections, the conflicts, and the rockets being fired. But the name does more than show our struggle. It shows that Israel and the Jews, with the help of G-d, will surpass and succeed through our struggles. The country can overcome what faces it now, and the future is hopeful!

Shabbat Shalom!