



**A Change of a Name
Parshas Vayishlach**

We stood at the entrance to the home of Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky in Bnei Brak and prayed. I was there with Alon. He was an outstanding student at Migdal Ohr and was suffering from a severe ailment.

Alon (Oak in Hebrew) was a great student and a good son who brought joy to all. One day he knocked on my door and shared his terrible secret with me - after suffering for several months, the doctors discovered he was suffering from colon cancer and was to undergo chemotherapy.

I was very upset. He was only 14 years old and had previously fought bitter battles to achieve what he had, and had overcome adversity at home. I could not hold back my tears.

After offering some consolation, I offered to go with him to Rabbi Kanievsky to receive a blessing from the holy man. He was excited by the idea and we decided to go.

When we entered Rabbi Kanievsky's room he received me warmly, as always. I told him of Alon's plight.

"Alon? Is that a name?"

He took out the Book of Yeshsayahu and read: "And when there is yet a tenth of it, it will again be purged, like the terebinth and like the *Alon* (oak), which in the fall have but a trunk, the holy seed is its trunk."

"Rabbi Yitzchak - do you understand?" He asked. "'Will again be purged, like the Alon in the fall.' Alon is not a good name. His name is Yisrael. 'My servant, Yisrael, about whom I will boast.'"

We left after Rabbi Kanievsky wished him a full recovery. We knew a righteous person's word had affect and waited for the outcome.

In our weekly parsha we read about the battle between Yaacov and the angel.

"And he [the angel] said, "Your name shall no longer be called Yaacov, but Yisrael, because you have commanding power with an angel of G-d and with men, and you have prevailed."

Yaacov then asks the angel for his name, but is declined an answer. "And Yaacov asked and said, "Now tell me your name," and he said, "Why is it that you ask for my name?" And he [the angel] blessed him there."

A question arises - if the angel admits that Yaacov has prevailed, how dare he not respond to Yaacov's inquiry about his name?



A person's name denotes to his essence. Jews name their children after righteous individuals, and while each individual has free will to do as he wishes, his name serves as a reminder. If he is named after a righteous person, he is reminded to follow in his righteous path.

When the angel announces Yaacov's new name he is also announcing Yaacov's new "prevailing" nature and essence.

On the other hand, an angel has no essence beyond his defined mission, and when Yaacov asks for his name and essence, he says he has none, as it varies based on the mission he is sent on by the Heavens. There is point in asking the angel's name, as he has no defined and constant essence.

Years passed, Yisrael recuperated and moved on to establish a family. After being married for several years and meriting no children, he returned to me for advice. We decided to return to Rabbi Kanievsky for another blessing.

In the meeting, I reminded Rabbi Kanievsky that Yisrael had changed his name from Alon over a decade ago, and was now again in need of a blessing.

Rabbi Kanievsky smiled slightly and said: "Call him Yaacov Yisrael. Yaacov our father had 12 tribes, this is a good name for offspring."

I asked him to add a blessing that the children would grow to become good and righteous people.

"Nu, Yaacov Yisrael is the name of my father, and I am sure his righteousness will stand as a merit for you as well," the Rabbi told Yaacov Yisrael.