



# Rambam המתמיד

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זמנים for Lawrence N.Y.

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## What's In a Name?

In Parshas Vayishlach, we read that Esav's ministering angel told Ya'akov "Your name will no longer be Ya'akov, rather Yisrael..." Similarly, in Parshas Lech Lecha Avram's name is altered to Avraham. In Maseches Berachos the Gemara comments: "he who calls Avraham by the name Avram transgresses the scriptural ordinance of 'Your name will no longer be Avram'."

The Gemara asks, why then, when one calls Ya'akov by the name Ya'akov and not Yisrael, does he not transgress the command "Your name will no longer be Ya'akov, but Yisrael"? The Gemara answers that the two situations are different, in that, once Avram was given the name Avraham, he is never again referred to by his original name. The name Ya'akov, however, is mentioned in the Torah even after he was given the name Yisrael.

The question remains though, why does the Torah refer to Yisrael as Ya'akov after it explicitly states "Your name will no longer be Ya'akov, but Yisrael"?

In his seminal Chassidic work, Likkutei Torah, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi explains that the names Ya'akov and Yisrael symbolize two levels of Divine Service that every Jew must strive to achieve. There are times when an individual must serve in the manner of Ya'akov, while at other times the person should serve in the manner of Yisrael. The name Yisrael denotes a loftier form of spiritual service, but there are times when the more worldly service of Ya'akov must be employed.

The difference between Ya'akov and Yisrael in terms of spiritual service is that the name Ya'akov reminds us that

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**Aryeh  
Shemmelzman**  
*Sophomore*

## Optical Illusions and Behavior

Parshas Vayishlach records the final confrontation between Yaakov and Esav, in anticipation of which Yaakov sends gifts – or, more accurately a bribe – in an attempt to appease his brother. As he sends out the messengers assigned to bring Esav the herds of animals sent as the bribe, Yaakov instructs them, "Ve'revach Tasimu Ben Eder Le'ven Eder" – "make a space in between each herd and the next" (32:16). Yaakov had his messengers deliver the animals in small installments, rather than bringing them all at once. Rashi explains that Yaakov made the bribe appear larger than it actually was. Even though Esav would receive the same number of animals whether they came all at once or in small increments, they would appear more numerous if they would arrive in several installments. Yaakov therefore ordered that the animals be delivered in installments, in the hope of currying favor with the greedy and base Esav.

This incident demonstrates just how deceptive our simple visual perceptions can be, how that which we see is often illusionary, giving us an inaccurate picture of reality.

We find other examples of vision's deceptive power earlier in Sefer Bereshis.

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**Aaron  
Kattan**  
*Senior*

## **What's In a Name?** *continued*

the blessings received by Ya'akov from Yitzchak came about as a result of deception, as he was able to outwit his brother Esav. The name Yisrael, however, indicates that the blessings were received from Yitzchak in an upright manner, since "the deeds of our forefathers are an indication to their descendants". In terms of our own lives, there must be a manner of service similar to that of Ya'akov and a manner similar to that of Yisrael.

In order to receive Yitzchak's blessings, which involve physicality, both Ya'akov and his mother Rivka exhibited self sacrifice in their deception, with Ya'akov donning the garments of Nimrod, etc. This was done so that Ya'akov could elevate the sparks of holiness found within the material world. Herein a lesson on how to serve in the manner of Ya'akov.

A Jew's approach to eating, drinking and other such physical matters is to be that of deception. The nature of a deceiver is not to reveal his true intent; he seems to be in complete agreement with his opponent, but when ultimately, he acts in complete conflict to his opponent's desires. So too, a Jew must be involved in purely physical matters such as eating and drinking, business and the like. Yet his intent should be spiritual, not simply to indulge gross physical drives. He puts on "Esav's clothing," in order to refine and elevate the sparks of holiness found within these physical pursuits.

Yisrael's spiritual service is quite different. The blessings for the "dew of heaven and the fat of the earth" were received by Yisrael in an open and completely bona fide manner. At this level, a Jew need not hide his spiritual intent in involvement with physical things, for physicality does not hinder his spiritual service, nor does it conceal G-dliness.

## **Optical Illusions and Behavior**

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Chava made the fateful decision to partake of the forbidden fruit in Gan Eden because of the fruit's attractive appearance. As the Pasuk states: "The woman saw that the tree was good to eat and that it was appealing to the eyes" (3:6). She understood full well that God had designated this fruit as "off limits," but its appearance distorted her logical processes and she succumbed to temptation. Similarly, in Parshas Toldos (25:30), the Torah tells that Esav entered the home as Yaakov prepared a stew, and Esav asked his brother to feed him "some of this red stuff," agreeing even to relinquish his birthright in exchange for a portion. Here, too, the appearance of the food led Esav to afford it far greater importance than it really deserved, to the point where he gave away the eternal privileges of the birthright for some of this food.

The importance of visual perception is expressed in Halacha as well. The great Mitzva of Bikur Cholim, visiting the sick, should preferably be performed in the middle of the day, rather than early in the morning or late at night. The reason is that in the morning, after a good night's sleep, the patient appears revitalized and refreshed. The visitor might therefore conclude that the patient's condition is not serious, and he will not pray as strenuously on the patient's behalf. Conversely, at night the patient appears worn and fatigued, and the visitor might reach the conclusion that there is little hope for the patient's survival. Halacha therefore urges visitors to come specifically towards the middle of the day, when they will get an accurate visual impression of the patient's condition.

This Halacha applies even though the visitor will presumably speak to the patient, perhaps even the doctor, about his illness and will learn the precise diagnosis. Logical knowledge is not always consistent with visual impression, and therefore despite what the visitor hears, the patient's outward appearance will have a significant effect on his assessment of the situation. Likewise, there is a widespread practice to cover one's eyes as he recites the verse of "Shema Yisrael." The declaration of "Shema Yisrael" constitutes an affirmation of the fundamental precept of Jewish faith, the oneness of God and His authority over the universe. When one takes a superficial look around the world, however, he receives a different impression; G-d's stewardship is not immediately apparent.

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## Wisdom and Analysis in Halachic Value Judgments

### *A Treatment of the Unfortunate Incident at Shechem*

**Rabbi Noam  
Horowitz**  
*Rebbe*

In the middle of Parashas Vayishlach (chapter 34) we find the account of Shechem's violent abuse of Dinah, Yaakov's daughter. In response to this horrific offense, Yaakov's sons devise a scheme to avenge their sister's honor. When Shechem meets with Yaakov and his sons to request Dina's hand in marriage, the brothers express their consent on condition that the entire male population of Shechem undergoes circumcision. The men of Shechem agree, and while they are recovering from the procedure, Shimon and Levi capitalize on the people's weakened physical condition, and kill the city's male population and seized the women, children and property.

This narrative concludes with a brief exchange between Yaakov and these two sons concerning the propriety of their violent reaction to Dina's defilement. Yaakov berates his sons, exclaiming, "You have brought trouble on me, making me odious among the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and the Perizites; my men are few in number, so that if they unite against me and attack me, I and my house will be destroyed" (34:30). Shimon and Levi, however, insisted on the justness of their course of action: "They answered, 'Should our sister be treated as a harlot?'"

Wherein lies the precise point of dispute between Yaakov and his sons?

At first glance, this exchange seems to revolve around the conflict between principles and pragmatism. Yaakov, seemingly, disapproved of his sons' conduct only because of its practical results - the enmity of the surrounding people. Shimon and Levi, however, felt that practical considerations cannot interfere with the immediate need to avenge the honor of Dina and the family. The reaction of the land's inhabitants, which concerned Yaakov, does not change the fact that Dina had been treated dishonorably; a proper response was thus in order.

I would like to believe, however, that Yaakov's condemnation of the attack against Shechem stems from far more substantive concerns than its pragmatic repercussions. In fact, Yaakov's vehement reaffirmation of his stance much later in his life proves that his rejection of his sons' violence was a matter of principle, rather than practicality. Just prior to his death, in addressing each of his sons, Yaakov takes the opportunity to once again condemn Shimon and Levi's violent behavior: "Shimon and Levi are a pair; their weapons are tools of lawlessness. Let not my person be counted in their assembly... for when angry they slay men..." (49:5-6). Despite the fact that the brothers' vigilantism does not appear to yield the hostility Yaakov had feared, he nevertheless reiterates his firm objection to their scheme. And here he speaks not of the practical repercussions of violence, but rather of the inherently problematic nature of "tools of lawlessness."

How, then, can we understand the argument between Yaakov and his sons?

To a great extent, this issue hinges on a fundamental debate between the Rambam and the Ramban concerning the halachic implications of Shechem's crime and his constituents' indifference to it. The Sheva Mitzvos Bnei Noach, binding upon all mankind, include the obligation of "dinim" - the institution of a legal system. According to the Ramban, this obligation entails the establishment of a comprehensive system parallel to the halachic system of civil law. Thus, the population's failure to respond accordingly to Shechem's crime did not violate the obligation of "dinim," since they still followed a system of civil law, however imperfectly it was implemented. Shimon and Levi, therefore, overstepped halachic bounds by executing the city's population in avenging the family's honor. They erred in reacting to the situation rashly and impulsively, without ensuring the halachic propriety of their actions. According to the Rambam, however, the basis for Yaakov's condemnation is far less clear. In Hilchot Melakhim (9:14), the Rambam claims that the mitzva of "dinim" obligates every community to enforce the other six Noachide laws. The city of Shechem thus violated this obligation by failing to prosecute Shechem for his abduction of Dina - a violation of the Noachide law forbidding theft and kidnapping. But if this is correct, then why did Yaakov object to his sons' reaction? Weren't the people of Shechem liable to the death penalty for their flagrant violation of one of the Noachide laws?

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## Wisdom and Analysis in Halachic Value Judgments

*A Treatment of the Unfortunate Incident at Shechem -continued*

Rav Michael Rosensweig, suggests that in the Rambam's view, this incident demonstrates that technical halachic permissibility does not necessarily justify or sanction extreme measures. In his words, Yaakov here "projects the principle that halachic conformity alone is not always sufficient to justify radical conduct when other halachic principles and values are at risk." When reaching important decisions - not to mention those of life and death - one must recognize the complexity of the situation and take into account the broad range of issues involved, a process that often entails adjudicating between conflicting interests and values. The fact that the people of Shechem violated a precept that the Rambam deems a capital offense did not mean that Shimon and Levi acted properly. Yaakov argued that the long-range repercussions of their violent response, the inherent - and not merely pragmatic - importance of maintaining a reputation of integrity and magnanimity, outweighed his sons' intrinsically altruistic ambition to protect the family's honor. Interestingly, in his deathbed rebuke towards Shimon and Levi, Yaakov condemns in the same breath these brothers' assault on Shechem and their cruelty to their brother, Yosef (see Rashi, 49:6). In both instances, Shimon and Levi's narrow, single-issue focus blinded them to the broader range of concerns and considerations, resulting in their extreme, unbalanced response to the situation at hand.

It is clear then, that whereas the Ramban understood Yaakov's response as an objection to a clear-cut halachic error, Rambam maintains that Yaakov criticizes his sons for their failure to consider the broader range of concerns. Halachic decision making requires slow, patient and thorough analysis of the multiple considerations at stake, and may never be conducted through a single-minded focus on only one of many values or ideals involved.

## **Optical Illusions and Behavior**

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When one sees disasters, tragedies and corruption, it is less obvious that there is a Supreme Being governing the world. World events are an illusion of sorts, which could potentially mislead a person and undermine his faith. Therefore, when we declare "Shema Yisrael," we cover our eyes so that we do not look upon this illusion, and we can then affirm our belief in God definitively and wholeheartedly, without any reservations or confusion.

In summation, appearances can be misleading, and can leave us with a distorted perception. We must use simple visual perception merely as an aid in influencing our behavior, not the sole determinant.

Dedicated by the Pearl Family

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**שבת שלום**