

Shabbat shalom

One thing struck me in this week's parasha. It was this: What was so special about Yaakov's name-change? Because, for example, God also changes Avraham's name. But with Avraham, the change was absolute. In Talmud masechet brachot it says that "Whoever calls Avraham 'Avram' violates a prohibition of the Torah. Because it's written, 'No longer shall your name be called Avram.'"

On the other hand, Yaakov was also told, "No longer shall your name be called Yaakov," But he still gets called both names afterwards. There are even passages and verses where the text alternates between the two names.

Avraham goes from being an exalted father, an Av-Ram, to an Av-Raham, an "exalted father of the multitudes".

But his new name includes all the letters, and meaning, of his old name. The change is the letter heh, symbolizing God's presence.

So to call Avraham "Avram" is to reduce him to his prior self and significance.

So you can't do it.

On the other hand, Yaakov and Yisrael are two very different names, with two very different meanings. Yaakov remains his name as both the third Patriarch and as a name for the Jewish people as a whole.

He was born grasping the heel – the ekev – of his older twin, Esav; so he was named *Yaakov*, "at the heel."

And years later, when he disguises himself as his brother to receive Esav's blessings, Esav says that it's no wonder he is called Yaakov, cunning!

Yaakov has to deal with the worst aspects of his own environment. He's in a bitter, hostile world. He's inadequate and threatened.

His whole life is a struggle and a collection of challenges. But he can't give up. Because within him is goodness and purity.

Within him is the capacity to change.

Within him is Yisrael, the name given to him after he struggles with God and wins. There is a core to him that meets the divine.

There is a part of us that is Yaakov and a part of us that is Yisrael.

Part of us serves – and part of us finds meaning.

Part of us answers a call out of duty, and part of us answers a call out of vision.

We don't 'solve' one to become the other. They are both us. These two parts define us as individuals and as a community: embattled servants of higher causes, grappling with our relationships and trying to make things

better, while at the same time forming beacons of light for our surroundings.

They are both us. Or at least, they are both who we aspire to be.

We are Yaakov and Yisrael.

These past three months I've been privileged to see these aspects of our community as the CEO of our Jewish Federation.

And I've learned three things in this Yaakov-Yisrael identity that I think are important.

First, I've learned that only a Jewish federation can convene the forces of Yaakov and Yisrael in a respectful and effective dialogue. We might not always do it well. But no one else can replace the capacity of a federation to bring everyone together.

These last few months I've seen conversations with JCCs, day schools, synagogues, camps and Israel initiatives to

talk about the affordability, viability and inclusiveness of Jewish life in our community.

Just two weeks ago we brought rabbis together from different streams to meet with local social agencies and schools and Hillels and talk about global Jewish issues. If we didn't do this kind of thing as a community we'd have to create a whole new structure to do it.

But this structure would pretty much look like a federation anyway.

Second, I've learned that we've had too many instances these past few years where we expect 'someone else' to take care of the burning issues.

The Jewish refugee crisis in Ukraine, Superstorm Sandy, Protective Edge in Israel. Someone else will do that; someone else will step up, someone else will Yaakov, will follow through.

I believe that our Federation is the ‘someone else.’ It is the embodiment of our deepest core values.

It allows us, through our philanthropy and activism, to own the responsiveness and values of what being a Jew should and can be today.

Some things don’t change.

Being a caring, committed Jew is one of them.

And we need an organization that can be flexible enough, smart enough and Jewish enough to provide for our response in Israel, around the world and here in our community.

We may not always do it well. But we do it better, and kinder, and more effectively than anyone else.

And third, I've learned that only a federation can create the frameworks to welcome new people and new ideas into our community. The Yisrael, the striving for great vision.

We won't have all the answers. But we should aspire to be flexible and respectful enough to promote and pull new ideas together. And there are lots of good ideas coming out of the Federation right now.

Because here's what worries me: if everything in our community is created at the whim of single-issue organizations and foundations and causes – then pretty soon we won't have a diverse community with multiple entry-points.

Instead we'll have a small sector of strong projects that are the flavor of the month, and very little real innovation or thinking. Very little caring for the vulnerable, or the 'routine' important stuff.

And no funding for the really important stuff that makes us proud to be Jewish when the time comes for standing up for what we believe in.

You have to support lots of Jewish organizations. They're important. They're necessary. They help us define the strength of our community.

But you don't get to have a community without three things.

You have to care, you have to build and you have to save.

You need to promote caring, kind, compassionate Jewish community life, which has a ripple effect on the world around you. You have to build Jewish life, and leadership and learning for all. And you have to save the world. One person at a time. Every day.

I know that there are some good organizations that do some parts of these. They're important. We should support and nurture them.

They reflect some parts of our values, of Yisrael and his highest elevations.

There are many more organizations that don't do any of these.

But there's only one that does all of these – care, build, save – and that's a Jewish federation.

That's why tomorrow you're hopefully going to get a call. Because tomorrow is Super Sunday.

And it's the most important day of the year to build up the annual campaign for showing our community's strength and vision.

To help the vulnerable at home, in Israel and around the Jewish world. To build up Jewish leaders and organizations. And to save lives.

The person who calls you tomorrow is probably going to be a volunteer. It won't be me. Unless you really want me to call you, which I'm happy to do.

So, please, be nice.

It's really difficult to call someone you don't know and ask that person for money.

Be nice to the caller and thank them for allowing you to do a mitzvah.

And if you haven't given a gift before: please consider a good gift. Think of the money you spend on Starbucks, or useless stuff around the house.

And think of the person that you want to be. The person that you want to look at in the mirror after you hang up the phone from your Super Sunday call.

The kind of Jew you want to be.

The Yaakov who confronts his struggles and wrestles with them.

And the Yisrael who aspires to greatness, to the divine spark, to the Jewish People.

So don't just do good tomorrow. Do great.
Shabbat shalom.