VAYISHLACH: What Is the Meaning of the Name Israel?

In Parashat Vayishlach we read that Ya’akob fought with an angel, and the angel blessed him and changed his name from Ya’akob to Israel. Israel became Ya’akob’s second name, and also the name of the Jewish nation.

But is that fair? Why are we, the Jewish people, named only after Ya’akob? Why aren’t we called the people of Abraham, the founder of the Jewish people? And what about Yitzchak? The middle generation is always the hardest one.

Wait a minute. Jewish status goes through the mother. Whatever the mother is, so is the child. So why aren’t we called the people of Sarah, or Ribka, or Rachel, or Leah?

Why are we called Am Israel, after Ya’akob alone?

Now take a closer look at how the name Israel is spelled in Hebrew: □□□□□. You will find in it all of our three patriarchs and four matriarchs.

Yod for Yitzchak and Ya’akob.

Sin for Sarah.

Resh for Ribka and Rachel.

Alef for Abraham.

Lamed for Leah.

They are all there.

Israel is indeed the perfect name for us.


פרשת וישלח
י
יצחק
יעקב
ש
שרה
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רבקה
רחל
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אברהם
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לאה