

Good Shabbos Everyone. In this week's parsha Vayishlach, the Torah tells us how Yakov fought with a *malach* - an angel until the break of dawn. On the simplest level, the verses are describing how Yakov had a knock down, drag out fight with an angel. After fighting, the angel gave Yakov a new name, Yisroel. The name Yisroel can also denote "Yashar K[el]" meaning "direct to G-d."; every Jew can have an individual relationship with Hashem, a Jew needs no intermediaries.

On the marriage certificate from their fundamentalist X-tian wedding in 1990, their names were listed as Roy and Pamela. On their ketuba, signed this past September, their names are Levi Yitzchak and Penina Leah. Pamela grew up in an assimilated Jewish home in Northern California where she attended the local Conservative synagogue for Sunday school.

"The Judaism I had been given wasn't enough. I needed a big G-d; I wanted to believe that the Bible is true." Instead, Pamela was expected to limit her spiritual yearnings to the few hours at Sunday school where she was taught that G-d doesn't have much to do with our lives and how to refute the miracles of the Bible. Pamela remembers watching many of the X-tian holiday television programs. For her, the holiday specials were just as enjoyable as the televised sermons and masses. And so, at the age of 13, after one very inspiring holiday special, Pamela offered her own prayer: "If all of this is real, show me a sign and I will believe that X-tianity is true." But no sign was forthcoming. Pamela finished high school and left home to attend college. Right before her nineteenth birthday, her boyfriend broke up with her. At the ice cream parlor where she worked part-time, a co-worker, who was part of a fundamentalist X-tian organization on campus, told her: "You're devastated because you don't have a relationship with G-d. The way to have a relationship with G-d is to accept [the Nazarene] into your heart. If you say this little prayer, you'll have a relationship with G-d. Say this short prayer, you'll feel better." Pamela hesitated but then said the prayer. "I did feel better! And I suddenly felt that this was the sign that I had prayed for when I was 13 years old." Pamela got involved with the missionaries on campus and, she says, was somewhat of a star. "I was special to the X-tians because I validated them. Even non-fundamentalist, mainstream churches that don't actually missionize Jews give a tremendous amount of money to organizations whose main objective is missionizing Jews." Pamela's parents told her to speak to their rabbi, but "he had no idea how to work with someone who had been missionized," she recalls. "He had no answers. He couldn't refute any of the missionary claims. He reinforced my feeling that Judaism doesn't have answers and that X-tianity is true."

Pamela moved back home, at her parents' insistence, and began taking courses at the local junior college. She attached herself to the Maranatha Church which was preaching on her campus. Two years later, in 1984, Roy Weese appeared in Pamela's life, sort of. Roy came from a X-tian family and had been part of the Maranatha Church in Alabama. Unable to find an engineering job there, he wanted to try his luck in California. Roy began doing administrative work for the church in San Jose and looked for an engineering job. Pamela had noticed Roy at church and was interested in finding out more about him. After a few years of very casual interaction, Pamela privately submitted his name to the church. From that time on she was not permitted to show any interest in him. If and when Roy submitted her name, they could date. Roy revealed to her six years later when she finally confronted him and asked him what he thought of her, "I've always wanted to marry you but I didn't think you would want me." Pamela and Roy were married soon after that revelation in a "very X-tian wedding."

Needless to say, Pamela's parents did not attend. "I'd been missionizing to them for years, telling them that they were going to hell. I had hurt them too much," says Pamela. Two weeks after they returned from their honeymoon, Pamela and Roy began looking for a new church. They had left the Maranatha Church after it had merged with another denomination. "We began attending a fundamentalist church, but it was huge and wealthy and very fancy. We didn't feel as if we fit in. We went to a smaller church that was more casual but we just couldn't make friends. It was as if G-d was pushing us along, showing us that there was no place for us in X-tianity. We tried a Messianic church but the services were long and boring. We were thinking about how we would raise our family. We wanted tradition, a short prayer service, nice music..." Soon after, Pamela and Roy decided to convert to Catholicism because, as Pamela explains, the Catholics seemed to have answers to the questions in the Bible that still disturbed them. "We were still searching for Truth." The Weeses became disenchanted with Catholicism when they had major disagreements with policies of the Pope. "My husband eventually shared with me that he had always had trouble with the trinity. 'Maybe we should see what Jews believe,' he suggested. Personally, I was tired of telling people that they were going to hell. I was tired of feeling guilty when I wasn't preaching, but preaching is really there was. You're either a slave to their god or to the devil. It's all emotion."

Pamela decided to learn how to do things Jewishly. She went to a Jewish bookstore and bought "how to" tapes from Chadish Media. She called Rabbi Mordechai Rosenberg, of Chadish Media, who told her, "You must go to Chabad." Pamela and Roy went to meet with Rabbi Yosef Levin, of the Greater South Bay. "After talking with Rabbi Levin I realized that Judaism did have answers. Rabbi Levin was so nice to both of us," Pamela recalls. "He treated us both so well. He was totally non-judgmental." Even though their experience had been so positive with Rabbi Levin, Pamela decided to speak with other rabbis because, "I didn't think my husband would want to be Chasidic. I went to another rabbi but he just kept telling us over and over again, 'Your marriage is a problem.' My husband was so hurt. Our marriage was all we had! We went back to Rabbi Levin which was the best thing that ever happened to us." To show how serious Roy was about Judaism, he and Pamela separated. Roy built a shack in their backyard and slept there each evening. "We were very grateful with the rabbis who were supervising Roy's conversion during this whole process," says Pamela. Roy studied Torah and began observing some mitzvos. The Weese's moved to Palo Alto to be closer to the shul and Roy built a new shack. After Roy's conversion, we began planning for our wedding. "My parents wanted to give us a trip to Israel as a honeymoon, rather than make a lavish wedding," says Pamela. But she told them, "'This is the only real wedding I'm ever going to have.' My mother didn't believe I could pull together anything decent. But I found a dress and Rabbi Levin helped us get the JCC. We had a caterer, flowers, and hassidic dancing. My mother said that had we booked the band a year in advance, we couldn't have done better!" I am finally home, with my Jewish soul-mate. I feel proud of my heritage, and have answers of why I am a Jew. This void is gone, and my search of being a Jew is finally over after many years." **Good Shabbos Everyone**