

# PRAY FOR ME

*by Shlomo Katz*

## Parshas Vayishlach

### Pray for Me

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Today's Learning:  
Eruvin 9:2-3  
O.C. 473:1-3  
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Eruvin 73  
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Pe'ah 7

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As this week's parashah opens, Yaakov prepares to meet, and possibly to battle, Esav. Ramban z"l writes that this parashah contains lessons that should influence all dealings between Jews and foreign powers.

The Torah relates that Yaakov divided his camp in two. He said (32:9), "If Esav comes to the one camp and strikes it down, then the remaining camp shall escape [literally, 'shall be for an escape']. The Midrash comments: "If Esav comes to the one camp and strikes it down"--this refers to our brothers in the South; 'then the remaining camp shall survive'--this refers to our brothers in the Diaspora. Rabbi Hoshiya said, 'Even though they are the survivors, they still fast on our behalf on Mondays and Thursdays'."

What is this Midrash teaching? In particular, what did R' Hoshiya mean? Also, why did Yaakov divide his camp--might he not have found strength in numbers? R' Ovadiah Hedayah z"l (see biography) explains as follows:

Yaakov's division of his camp was his way of praying that at any time in the future when the Jewish People find themselves in danger, Hashem should ensure that part of the Nation will remain safe in another place. In this way, no matter how outnumbered our oppressed brethren are, the Nation will

survive.

Of course, such a division leads to another possible danger, i.e., that the part of the Jewish People that is safe will become complacent and take no interest in its brothers' and sisters' fate. This is what R' Hoshiya meant to address, says R' Hedayah. R' Hoshiya was bothered by the wording of the verse. Why did Yaakov say that the remaining camp would be "for an escape" rather than saying that the remaining camp would escape? Yaakov did not mean only that one camp would escape; rather, he meant that the remaining camp was to attempt to provide an escape for the distressed camp, through physical means if possible, but also through prayer and fasting. (Shalom Avdo)

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*"Rescue me, please, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esav, for I fear him lest he come and strike me down, mother and children." (32:12)*

R' Shlomo Alkabetz z"l (1505-1584; author of the Friday night hymn Lecha Dodi, among other works) writes that Yaakov referred in this verse not (only) to Esav, but to Esav's descendant, Haman who planned "to exterminate all Jews, young and old, children and women" (Esther 3:13). Thus, immediately after Yaakov's prayer (32:14), the Torah says, "He spent the night there." Note that the final letters of the Hebrew words in this phrase spell "Haman." Also, the Hebrew word "at night" appears three times in our chapter, alluding to the three days and nights of the fast that Mordechai and Esther decreed.

(Manot Ha'levi to Esther 7:7)

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*"You shall say, 'Your servant Yaakov's. It is a tribute sent to my lord, to Esav, and behold he himself is behind us'." (32:19)*

"Accept my tribute from me, inasmuch as I have seen your face, which is like seeing the face of Elokim." (33:10)

Why did Yaakov tell his servants who took gifts to Esav to point out that Yaakov would soon follow in person? Also, what did Yaakov mean when he equated seeing Esav to seeing the face of Elokim? R' Shlomo Kluger z"l (1783-1869; rabbi of Brody, Poland) explains:

Halachah requires that just as there were representatives of the kohanim and levi'im present in the Bet Hamikdash every day, so there must be representatives of the yisraelim present every day. The Gemara (Ta'anit 26a) explains this by asking rhetorically, "Is it conceivable that a person's sacrifice could be offered and he is not present?!" R' Kluger asks: Why is it so inconceivable that a person's sacrifice could be offered when he is not present?

Another question: We read (Bereishit 18:8) that when Avraham served food to his guests, "he stood over them beneath the tree and they ate." What does the Torah mean to teach us?

Says R' Kluger: When a person offers food to a guest, he may have one of two motives--either to feed a hungry person or to honor the guest. How can we tell what the host's motives are? When the main purpose is to relieve the guest's hunger, then the food is the main thing. The host need not "offer himself" to the guest as well, i.e., he need not be present. On the other hand, if the main point is to show honor to the guest, then the host's presence is more important than the food.

When we offer sacrifices in the Bet Hamikdash, we do so to honor Hashem. Obviously, he does not need our food. That is why it is inconceivable that our sacrifices could be offered without our representatives standing nearby. That also is why Avraham stood over his guests while they ate. Although they may have been hungry (assuming he did not know they were angels), he wanted to honor them with his presence as well.

This was Yaakov's message to Esav: I am not sending you a gift because I think you need it. I want to honor you, and I am following right behind my gift. And when Esav balked at accepting the gift, saying (33:9), "I have plenty," Yaakov reiterated: Seeing your face is like seeing the face of Elokim, i.e., my whole intention was to bring an offering to someone who does not need it, merely in order to show him honor.

(Ma'amar Esther to Esther 5:8)

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"Yesod Ve'shoresh Ha'avodah"

("The Foundation and Root of Divine Service.")

This year, we are presenting excerpts from the work Yesod Ve'shoresh Ha'avodah by R' Alexander Ziskind z"l (died 1794). In the section entitled Sha'ar Avodat Ha'lev, the author has been encouraging us to look at every event as an opportunity to please our Creator. In the last excerpt that we presented, the author stated that a tool for accomplishing this is to fulfill the mitzvot of "You shall love your fellow as yourself," and "With righteousness you shall judge your fellow." In Sha'ar Avodat Ha'lev, chapter 8, the author explains why fulfilling these mitzvot in particular furthers our goal of pleasing the Creator.

It is well known that when a person is sad, his sadness will be lessened somewhat if he sees that others share his pain. [Likewise, a person's joy is increased when he has someone to share it with.] Our Sages teach that, in some sense, the Shechinah is sad when we suffer. It follows that if we perform the mitzvah "You shall love your fellow as yourself" [which the author defined in the previous chapter as sharing in the pain and joy of others, thus decreasing their suffering or increasing their joy], then we lessen Hashem's "pain" and give pleasure to Him as well.

R' Alexander Ziskind writes: Before one performs this mitzvah, he should say out loud, "I am hereby prepared and ready to perform the affirmative commandment of the Torah, which my Creator commanded me-- You shall love your fellow as yourself." He adds: One should regularly recite this

formula aloud [i.e., before performing other mitzvot].

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## R' Shalom Hedayah z"l

R' Shalom Hedayah was the head of the bet din / rabbinical court of the Sephardic community in Yerushalayim and the rosh yeshiva of Yeshivat Bet El, an academy devoted to the advanced study of kabbalah. He was born in Aram Soba (Aleppo) in 1864 to R' Moshe Chaim and Sabtiah Hedayah, and studied at first under R' Moshe Swed and R' Yitzchak Bechor Mizrachi. He considered his main teacher to be R' Refael Yaakov Chaim Yisrael Alfiah.

When R' Hedayah was 18 years old, he began to correspond with many leading (Sephardic) poskim / halachic authorities of the era. He also began to delve more deeply into kabbalah, as well as the in-depth study of Tanach. In particular, it was said that he knew the commentary of the Malbim almost by heart.

In 1884, R' Hedayah married Sarah, daughter of R' Yitzchak Labaton, a leading rabbi in Aram Soba. In 1898, they settled in Yerushalayim together with the Labaton family. There, R' Hedayah became an assistant to and student of the Rishon Le'Zion (title given to the Sephardic Chief Rabbi), R' Yaakov Shaul Elyashar. Eventually, R' Hedayah himself was appointed a judge on the Sephardic bet din, and, in 1930, he was appointed Rosh Av Bet Din / Chief Judge.

R' Hedayah was known not only for his knowledge of the Talmud and halachah, but also as an expert in kabbalah. Beginning in 1927, he headed the Bet El Yeshiva. Interestingly, one of R' Hedayah's regular correspondents on matters of kabbalah was the Lithuanian rosh yeshivah R' Elchanan Wasserman.

For a period in his life, R' Hedayah lost nearly all of his vision. Although he had a photographic memory and could study Torah by heart, he said that what bothered him most was not being able to see when Torah scholars approached so he could rise in their honor. Eventually, he traveled to Egypt for surgery that restored much of his eyesight.

R' Hedayah was extremely concerned about the poor financial situation of Torah scholars, and he encouraged whoever was able to accept responsibility for the livelihood of one scholar. He pointed out that the fact that Torah scholars appear downtrodden is the primary reason that young men do not choose to devote their lives to Torah study, which is a tragedy for the Jewish people as a whole.

R' Hedayah passed away on 13 Kislev 5705 (1944) and was buried on Har Ha'zeitim / The Mount of Olives. One of his sons, R' Ovadiah (died 1969), also served on the Sephardic bet din and later was Chief Rabbi of Petach Tikva. Both father and son authored several Torah works. A daughter of R' Shalom was married to one of the leading Syrian rabbis in Brooklyn, New York. (Sources: Kedoshim Asher Ba'artez, p.223; Aleppo: City of Scholars, p.215)

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The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **Torah.org** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page. Text archives from 1990 through the present may be retrieved from <http://www.acoast.com/~sehc/hamaayan/>.

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