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מחבר ספרי שו"ת דרך המלך, אמרי מרדכי, ודרכי המלך על המועדים ועוד
רשת מעונות, ורשת גנים, ת"ת פרי תואר, ובית יעקב פרי תואר, תיכון בית יעקב החדש, ת"ת מאור ישראל,
ישיבה קטנה ארחות יהודה, ביהמ"ד גבוה לרבנים ודיינים "לקח טוב" קופת "מפעל החסד" אלעד
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עיר התורה שקרובה אליך

Parashat Vayishlach

The Requirement to Be Specific When Praying

Our *parasha* teaches us that before Yaakov met with Esav on his way back to Eretz Yisrael, Yaakov prayed to Hashem (32:12), "Please save me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esav, for I fear lest he come and smite me mother and children."

Questions:

- 1- The *Beit Halevi* asks that everyone knows that Yaakov only had one brother. Therefore, the moment he said, "from the hand of my brother," it was obvious that he was referring to Esav. Why, then, did he need to specifically state Esav's name; is this not redundant?
- 2- Furthermore, why was it necessary for Yaakov to say "from the hand" twice, once before mentioning "my brother" and once before mentioning "Esav"?

Prayer of the Congregation

Generally, when people beseech Hashem for something in prayer, they do not elaborate nor specify sufficiently in their prayers. Rather, they pray for what they need in a very general, non-specific manner. They assume that since they are speaking with Hashem they do not need to specify what they are asking for, because Hashem knows everything and nothing is hidden from Him, as the *pasuk* states, "The hidden things are [known] to Hashem, our G-d." After all, Hashem knows what lies deep inside man's heart; therefore what need is there to make specific requests when praying? However, our holy Torah teaches us that this is an erroneous way of thinking; rather, man must make specific requests of Hashem if he wishes that his prayers be hearkened to.

The Zohar's Answer

The Zohar states that from here we see the need to pray in a specific and detailed manner. Even that which is seemingly clearly stated, he should nevertheless specify. For if it was proper for him to rely on the fact that Hashem understands his intentions, then why should he pray at all? Hashem knows what is in his heart! This is as our Sages have taught us in *Esther Rabba* (7:24) about a certain individual who was travelling on the road and very weary. He prayed to Hashem to send him a donkey. Suddenly he saw an officer with a female donkey and its child. The young donkey was weak and could not keep pace with its mother; it was therefore crying excessively along the way. The officer then struck the man and forced him to carry the baby donkey on his shoulders. The man cried bitterly, for he was already having a difficult time travelling, and that is why he prayed that he would be sent a donkey! Yet now he must carry a donkey on his shoulders! Eliyahu Hanavi appeared to him and told him that this matter had befallen him because he had not prayed specifically enough. He should have had prayed specifically for a donkey **to ride upon**, but since he only prayed for "a donkey," he was indeed sent a donkey, but one that he would have to carry on his shoulders. The *Ohr Hachaim* adds that this is why Yaakov needed to elaborate and specify that he wished to be saved both from "the hand of my brother" and "from the



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hand of Esav." In essence, he was saying that if Esav would try to overcome him by resorting to trickery and act like his loving brother, then it was necessary to pray to be saved from that. However, if Esav took a different approach and acted like the wicked man that he was, it also required Yaakov to pray for salvation. Therefore he prayed also to be saved from "the hand of Esav."

Why did Yaakov Repeat the Words "From the Hand" Twice?

However we must still ask that it would seemingly have been sufficient to say, "From the hand of my brother, Esav" - why did Yaakov have to say "from the hand of my brother" and "from the hand of Esav"? The *Beit Halevi* explains that when Yaakov heard that Esav was on his way to meet him, he knew that he faced great danger no matter how Esav would act towards him. For Esav would either choose to wage battle against Yaakov and try to kill him, or his anger would be assuaged and he would want to live together with Yaakov, peacefully as brothers. Yaakov feared both these possibilities, for even Esav's love was bad for Yaakov. Regarding both these possibilities the *pasuk* states, "And Yaakov feared greatly, and it distressed him." For he feared that Esav may kill him, and he was distressed over the possibility that Esav would try to reconcile with him and befriend him. This is why Yaakov said "from the hand" twice. In other words, Yaakov prayed to be saved from two different sets of hands – either the hands of his "brother" and his warmth, or the hand of "Esav" and his wrath. Indeed, his prayer was answered, for initially Esav wanted to kill Yaakov and Hashem saved him. Subsequently, when Yaakov and Esav reconciled, Esav wanted to accompany Yaakov on the way and live side by side. Yaakov however, managed to free himself of Esav's escort, and he was saved from this threat as well. This is as the *pasuk* states, "And Esav returned that day on his way to Seir." In other words, Yaakov was saved from Esav's friendship on that very same day that he prayed; his request was not delayed even a day.

What Should One Do if He Cannot be Specific?

The *Sefer Chassidim* (*siman* 789) offers the following advice for an individual who does not know how to properly specify what he is asking for in his prayers: He writes that if a person hears that people from a certain city are coming to harm him, he should not say, "Master of the World! Save me from the people of that city!" Rather, he should be asked to be saved from them and from all of his enemies, for perhaps there are men from other cities who also joined these people. This is as we see from the *pasuk* (*Bamidbar* 21:2), "If you will give this nation into my hand." Since they did not know if these gentiles were Canaanites or Amalekites, they simply said, "this nation."

But Why is it Necessary to be Specific?

Yet this must be understood. For if one person is asking his friend for something, then he must not leave out a detail, to ensure that his friend understands what he wants. But when somebody asks something from Hashem, who knows man's most innermost thoughts – why must he specify that which he wants? Hashem knows what his intentions are even if he doesn't include every last detail. The question becomes even stronger when we consider what our Sages teach us that when praying for the ill, one

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need not be so specific. This is as the Gemara states in *Masechet Berachot* (34) that Rav Yaakov said in the name of Rav Chisda: Anyone who beseeches mercy on behalf of his friend, does not need to mention his name. This is as we learn from Moshe's prayer for Miriam when she was stricken with *tzaraat*. Moshe said only, "Please G-d, please heal her," but did not mention her name. The *Maharsha* there explains that Hashem sees into man's heart, and he therefore knew that Moshe was praying for Miriam. Is this not a contradiction to what we stated above?

Malachim Bring the Prayers Up to Heaven

We are taught that the prayers we recite are transported to Heaven by way of *malachim*, angels. Therefore we are additionally taught that *malachim* do not transport prayers that are recited in *Arameic*, for that is a language they do not understand. The exception to the rule is if the prayer is recited by a congregation in unison, for then the Divine Presence is present, and the prayers therefore are not dependent upon angels carrying them up to Heaven. Similarly, when an individual is sick, the Divine Presence is hovering over him, as it were. Therefore prayers from an ill individual also do not need *malachim*. We can also apply this to our question as well. If someone does not include enough details in his prayer, the *malachim* do not take it up to Heaven. Maybe this is due to the fact that a prayer without specific details cannot be considered a complete one; it is an unclear prayer, therefore it cannot be brought before the Almighty. Thus we have answered our question: Of course nothing is hidden from Hashem; however, He has established that all prayers must first be handled by the *malachim*, and they can only transport a prayer which they can completely understand. Only prayers recited by the congregation in unison as well as prayers on behalf of the ill go directly to Hashem without first going through the *malachim*.

Story About Rav Akiva Eiger

The *sefer Meoran Shel Yisrael* (*chelek* 1, pg. 344) relates that Rav Akiva Eiger was once asked by his son, Rav Shlomo Eiger, to pray on behalf of a woman who had not yet merited bearing children. Sometime later, Rav Akiva Eiger sent a letter to his son that he had prayed for Sara Bat Rivka, but his prayer was not answered – perhaps there was a mistake in the name he had been given? Rav Shlomo Eiger investigated the matter thoroughly and discovered that, indeed, there had been a mistake; her name was actually Rivka bat Sara. He then sent his father a letter containing the correct name. Sometime later, Rav Akiva Eiger responded with a letter of his own – he had prayed, and his prayer was answered.

Words of Mussar

The Chatam Sofer wrote that the Jews at *Yam Suf* did not merit having their prayers answered immediately. The reason for this is because they prayed a general prayer. They said, "Save us Hashem!" but did not specify which salvation they wanted. Therefore Hashem responded, "Why do you scream out to Me?" In other words, "Why do you pray to Me in such a manner? - Specify what you want!" For when a *tzaddik* specifies what he wants and Hashem gives it to him, there is a great *kiddush Hashem*,

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greater than if he had prayed in a vague fashion. However, when they prayed in such a manner, Hashem immediately told them to journey forth for their prayer had been accepted. Therefore, every person must try to offer a detailed request, and as such we will merit that our prayers are accepted with kindness and mercy, and Hashem will grant all of our wishes with *bracha*. Amen ve'amen.

Shabbat Shalom,
Rav Mordechai Malka