

# A Jew In All Circumstances

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Parshas Vayeishev begins just after the Torah lists the members of the House of Esav. Rashi comments (Bereishis 37:1) that when Yaakov beheld this mighty family (each of Esav's sons was a general), he became worried. "Who can conquer all of them?" he thought to himself. In response comes the first verse of Vayeishev: "These are the generations of Yaakov: Yosef." Explains Rashi (based on Ovadia 1:18), Yaakov is likened to fire; Yosef, a flame; and the House of Esav is straw. "One spark from Yosef will burn up all of these (descendants of Esav)." Indeed, when Yosef was born, Yaakov understood that he could now return to Eretz Yisrael and face Esav (Bava Basra 123b).

The sages say that Yosef was the one who fought Amalek, a descendant of Esav (ibid.). *Moshiach ben Yosef* will be the one to fight Gog and Magog in the end of days.

Rav Chaim Friedlander asks: All of Yaakov's twelve sons were exceptionally righteous. Why was Yosef singled out to fight Esav?

Additionally, from this parsha until the end of Bereishis, the focus is on the events that brought about Klal Yisrael's going down to Egypt and settling there. At every turn, we see awesome displays of Hashem's overseeing of all worldly matters great and small (*hashgacha*), and in particular, how Hashem protects and helps Yosef (*hashgacha pratit*). The prime individual through whom all these events occurred was Yosef. Why was Yosef the vehicle by which Klal Yisrael was brought to Egypt?

Rav Friedlander answers that this stemmed from Yosef's *emuna* and *bitachon* that Hashem was before him at all times. Yosef was attached to Hashem in all circumstances—even when placed in the most trying circumstances any human being can face.

Even non-Jews noticed Yosef's *emuna* and *bitachon* in Hashem. His Egyptian master, Potiphar, saw that "Hashem was with him" (Bereishis 39:3), and Rashi (ibid.) adds that "Hashem's name was always on Yosef's lips." Pharaoh described Yosef as "a man within whom is the spirit of G-d" (Bereishis 41:38). Yosef's *bitachon* was so great that when he made even a simple effort to gain release from prison (asking the *Sar Hamashkim* to mention his plight to Pharaoh), he was punished with another two years in prison! Even though this effort would have been a minimal amount of *hishtadlus* for the average person, Yosef was on a level where he did not need to make any *hishtadlus* to save himself. His *bitachon* in Hashem was so great that otherwise normal *hishtadlus* was deemed for him punishable (Beis Halevi).

Nefesh Hachaim (1:7) states that commensurate with one's level of *emuna* and *bitachon* is the extent to which Hashem shows him *hashgacha pratit*. This is why Yosef, whose *emuna* and *bitachon* in Hashem was so great, merited on numerous occasions that Hashem redeemed him from what seemed like utterly hopeless situations. Moreover, Hashem turned these very situations into the springboard for positive outcomes.

Also, says Rav Friedlander, such a person merits to be the vehicle by which Hashem's *hashgacha* is revealed in the world. When a person lives attached to Hashem, Hashem shows that He stands by him. This is why all the events that led to Klal Yisrael's coming to Egypt were through Yosef. Yosef was the vehicle to display Hashem's *hashgacha* in the world.

This is also the reason why Yosef is the one who fights Esav and Amalek. Yosef lived with the sense that Hashem was with him always, whereas Amalek was the one nation that despite witnessing the awesome miracles of the Ten Plagues, the Exodus and the Splitting of the Red Sea, could deny Hashem's *hashgacha*, claim that everything had happened by chance and wage war against Klal Yisrael. The initial seed of denial of Hashem's *hashgacha* was in Esav. When Esav came to receive his father's blessing, only to learn that Yaakov had already received it, he heard his father say: "Who was the hunter of game who brought from all before you came and I blessed him—*may he too be blessed*" (Bereishis 27:32). Esav knew what this meant—Yitzchak Avinu confirmed the bracha he gave to Yaakov. And yet, Esav began planning how he would kill Yaakov (ibid. 41). Esav denied Hashem's *hashgacha*. The role of fighting these deniers of *hashgacha* therefore went to Yosef, who is the example of how one can live attached to Hashem in all situations.

We live in a time of *hester panim*; Hashem's overseeing of the world is concealed from us. We are expected to learn from Yosef and strengthen his attribute of living with the awareness that Hashem is before us and leading us always.

How can we do this?

Rav Yerucham Brodiansky suggests, based on Rabbeinu Yonah's explanation of the verse, "In all your ways, know Him" (Mishlei 3:6), that whatever we are doing, great or small, we should pray to Hashem that He help us succeed. For example, if you are in need of new shoes, even if you have the money and know your shoe size, turn to Hashem and ask: "Please, Hashem, I need shoes. Help me, lead to me to the right pair of shoes, a pair that will fit properly and be good for me, shoes that I will be able to use in good health."

Through praying even for what seem to us small matters, we gain recognition that Hashem is the One bringing about all the details of our lives. He is the reason behind it all. If we say such prayers consistently, over time, we will grow in awareness that Hashem is with us always.

Rav Brodiansky (based on Shaarei Teshuva 3:17) also advises that we think about the *chassadim* Hashem did for us throughout our lives. Doing this helps us realize that Hashem was always with us, and this will build in us the awareness that Hashem is with us right now, as well.

My father lived this way. He often spoke about *chassadim* Hashem had done for him. He would also remind others, saying: "Look back a few years, try to remember where you were then. Now, ask yourselves: Did you really think, back then, that you would make it to where you are today?"

One of the stories he shared with us was about when he received a draft notice from the U.S. army.

"I went to the draft office on the appointed day," my father said, "and waited with a lot of other young men to get called in to the inspecting officer's room. When my turn came, the officer started checking me, and at one point, he told me to take off my shirt. When I did so, he saw my tzitzis.

"'What are these?' the inspecting officer said, confused. He looked at me in a strange way and gave me an exemption!

"Every time I think about this, I can't help but wonder: This certainly was not the first time this officer had seen tzitzis. There were even a few *bachurim* that same day who were wearing tzitzis. Look at the great chessed Hashem did for me!"

May we *feel* that Hashem is with us always!