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The Secret of Jewish Survival

*By Rabbi Ariel Bar Tzadok
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It is no small miracle that the international Jewish community has survived over 1,930 years without the protection of a homeland or statehood. The history of Jewish persecutions and suffering under Christian and Moslem rule (which for centuries has covered most of the earth) has been thoroughly documented and need not be repeated here. Yet, take a moment, pause and contemplate, do you realize that the Jewish people of today are the descendants of the same Jewish people of two thousand (and more) years ago. Does this not boggle the mind?? Let me explain further.

Two thousand years ago there were Jews just like there are today. Two thousand years ago there were Romans, Babylonians and Medians. Today the Jews are still here, but when did you last meet a Roman, Babylonian or Median? Maybe you have met their descendants who have changed their nationalities, cultures and religions, but these people are not practicing Romans, Babylonians or Medians! No, Babylon, Rome and Media are dead. Their cultures which once ruled the earth are gone. Nothing remains of them except notations in history books and ruins at archeological digs. Yet, one of their contemporaries has survived intact, with the same culture, law, land, language, religion and traditions. That's us: the Jewish people.

Many have asked the Jew what is the secret of our survival. Arrogantly the secular Jew attempts to explain the enigma of Jewish survival with all kinds of explanations revolving around sociological, political and economic patterns. These explanations are as shallow as is the soul of that secular Jew. The answer to Jewish survival, as the story of Purim makes clear, is none other than the invisible Hand of All-Mighty G-d. If it were not for the intervening Hand of HaShem, though concealed through "acts of nature", the Jewish people today would be nothing more than a notation in the history books, alongside the Romans, Babylonians and Medes.

How did we survive? What did HaShem teach us to do in order to assure our survival? This answer entails both physical and spiritual actions on the part of Israel.

The source of all Divine communication between HaShem and Israel is our holy Sages and the experiences in their lives and the books of Torah that they have brought to us. It is through these most sacred of all texts, the ones authored by no human mind, that has revealed to us the future, and how we are to live in it.

In Bereshit 32, the Torah relates to us the story of Ya'aqob coming to meet his brother Esav after over 20 years of separation. Esav has sworn to kill his brother Ya'aqob and is preparing to meet him with 400 men. Needless to say, Ya'aqob is quite concerned that he and his entire family are soon to be wiped out at the hands of his brother Esav. Our Sages teach us (B.R. 78:15) that the story of Ya'aqob's preparations to meet Esav is our guide how the Jew in exile (the descendents of Ya'aqob) are to deal with the hostile gentile (the descendents of Esav).

Our Sages have taught that our present long and bitter exile is among the descendants of Esav. It is the family of Esav that built Rome. It is Rome (thus Esav) who destroyed Jerusalem and banished the Jewish people from our Land. Esav, the Roman, has never died. He has only transformed his face, and passed on his mantle of lordship to his adopted child, Christianity. It is Christianity, with Rome at its head, that today is Esav. Western culture and civilization, the by-product of the Church, is today's Esav. Like in Biblical times as in Roman times, Esav (the western cultured gentile) today still hates the Jew.

History has documented the betrayal by all western powers of the Jewish population of Europe during WWII. Both President Roosevelt of the U.S. and Prime Minister Churchill of England had it within their power to save the vast majority of European Jewry, and they deliberately chose not to. History will document, if the truth be told, that the United States and Europe, the descendants of Esav, were just as involved in allowing the Holocaust as was Hitler (a descendent of Amalek, Esav's grandson).

For two thousand years our Sages were guided by the Divine wisdom our Torah teaching us how to interact with the children of Esav, thus assuring our survival both spiritually and physically.

The RaMBaN (Rabbi Moshe ben Nahman) in his commentary on the Torah (VaYishlah) writes regarding this episode of Ya'aqob our father meeting with Esav. He writes:

"This portion was written to inform us how the Holy One, blessed be He rescues His servant and redeems him from the hand of the one who is stronger than him. He sent his angel who rescued him. We are also taught that he (Ya'aqob) did not rely upon his own righteousness, but rather tried to save himself all that was possible. Herein there are even more hints for future generations for all that befell our father (Ya'aqob) with Esav his brother is sure to be forever repeated with Esav's descendants. It is thus appropriate for us to follow in the path of the righteous (Ya'aqob) and prepare ourselves

for three things that he (Ya'aqob) prepared himself for. {These are} prayer, financial appeasement and deliverance by means of war."

The first weapon that Ya'aqob our father used in his physical wars against his enemies was the psychic weapon of prayer. Now, do not underestimate the power of prayer!! Prayer is not a simple wish list that you ask G-d to magically grant you. Prayer is not just the recitations of your desire and the wishes of your heart. Prayer is a psychic tool that has the ability to inter-dimensionally penetrate many different realms. Prayer, when "offered and received" correctly has the ability to manipulate the minds of men, the course of their actions and the outcome of all human affairs.

So what is prayer and how is it to be used? This is a question best answered by the experts. Rabbi Haim Vital, the Master Kabbalist and successor to the Ari'zal documents throughout all his works the power that prayer has to manipulate the course of human events. The following section from Sefer Olat HaTamid (4B) neatly summarizes the Kabbalistic understanding of the power of prayer. I will comment on the text so as to offer insights into its meaning that might not be clear.

"Know that there is not anything in all creation that is not an aspect of the "seven kings that died in the land of Edom" (referred to in Gen. 36). All the worlds, all of them are aspects of these kings. If these kings did not die and thereby become nullified, making them the source of the klipot (shells), they could have been cleansed and rectified by themselves. However, they did die, they were nullified and did become the source of the klipot (shells). Thus all holiness left in them must be rectified, cleansed, purified and bleached white, so only the refuse, which are the real klipot (shells) remain below. When this cleansing and purifying process is completed, there will not remain even a spark of holiness left below; for all the sparks of holiness shall have risen. Then the refuse, the real klipot (shells) shall be left by itself below, without any life whatsoever. Thus shall be fulfilled the verse saying "He (G-d) will destroy death forever" (Is.25:8). This shall only be after the coming of the Mashiah (the Messiah).

Now, it is impossible to cleanse all the sparks of holiness from the klipot (shells) unless the action of cleansing be performed by an individual. By the prayers and proper actions of mankind below is the cleansing performed by the ten supernal sefirot of Atzilut (G-d). Those who are below are always in need of help from above to complete what they have to do. The powers above also need the help of those below; as it is written in the verse "Ascribe (lit.-give) strength to G-d"12 (Ps.68:35). . .

It is the power of prayer that is the one specific thing, the principle and essence of what we are discussing here. Nothing works greater to cleanse the fallen vessels than prayer. Therefore have the Sages taught "Prayer is one of the greatest things in the world" (Ber.6b). For by prayer mankind causes the upper (sefirotic) union to occur and thereby are the kings cleansed and raised above."

There are many different types of prayers and praying. Real prayer, the type that transforms worlds, is not a rational mental function, but an “irrational” one. By “irrational” I mean above the rational mind or supra-rational.

In the book of Samuel (Ch.1), we have recorded the incident and the prayer of Hannah. She had been barren for many years and was understandably very bitter. Hannah went to Shiloh where the Ark of the Covenant was to pray to HaShem. She prayed with “bitterness of soul” and “wept bitterly” to have a son. Her prayer was only a mumbling, “her lips moved, but her voice was not heard” (1:13). Eli the High Priest, had witnessed her pray. He recognized that she was not praying in the normal way. He admonished her, thinking she was drunk and thus out of her rational mind.

Eli was half right. Hannah was out of her rational mind, but she was not “irrational” rather she was supra-rational. It was this level and style of prayer that after years of praying was finally “heard”.

We must ask what was so special about this prayer of Hannah? Why was this prayer answered and all the other prayers that she had prayed for so many years not answered? The answer to this question reveals to us the true power of prayer.

Our Sages have taught us that prayer is a duty of the heart. Whenever the Torah speaks of the heart it is speaking of that level of human consciousness wherein which the mind and emotion merge into one. This aspect of consciousness is not a rational mode of thinking but a supra-rational one. As a supra-rational function, this mode of thinking corresponds to the right lobe of the brain, the home of the non-verbal communicative skills. Hannah’s prayer was non-verbal. It was felt, but not heard. Her spiritual communication, her, prayer to G-d was successful because of her this.

The Torah is teaching us that in order for prayer to be “heard” above, it must be spoken in the language that “above” understands and responds to. This language is non-verbal, and comes from that place within the human mind where thought and emotion merge as one.

When Ya’aqob met Esav, he too was, shall we say, emotionally charged. Ya’aqob knew everything that he had worked for was in jeopardy. His prayer to G-d reflected this level of consciousness wherein which his thoughts and emotions were one.

In the Book of Esther, which tells the Purim story, we find Mordechai and Esther to be of a similar mind set. They fasted and prayed for days and as with Ya’aqob and Hannah before them, they were not answered with fanfare and miracles from Heaven. They were answered with the force of opposition being removed. In Ya’aqob’s case, his opposition was Esav’s resolve to kill him. Somehow Esav’s heart had been changed. In Hannah’s case, her opposition was her barrenness. Somehow her physical nature was changed. In Mordechai and Ester’s case, their opposition was Haman and Ahashverosh’s decree. Ahashverosh changed his mind, and Haman was hanged on a

tree. All this was only accomplished due to the communication from that place where thought and emotion merge. This is what Torah refers to as prayer.

Prayer can have dramatic effects. It can change the course of human affairs. Prayer can manipulate the consciousness of others. Mere wishing is not enough. One must be united in heart and mind, and project out a psychic scream that will be heard throughout all the levels and planes of spiritual existence. When one communes in this fashion, one creates an image in one's mind. The desire within the individual strongly charges that image and actually creates it in the upper spheres. The more a person contemplates his created image the more reality is added to it, until such time when the reality of the created image outweighs the reality of outside forces that block its manifestation. When this occurs the created image is able to manifest itself in the "real" world, neutralizing all competing realities.

Without the power of a created image, the power within prayer is nullified. Prayer becomes sterile, and is thus not "heard". Prayer therefore has to be meant. One must have intention (kavana) when one prays. Mere recitation of words does nothing. The sounds of those words just hover in the air, but never do they rise up. They cannot, for they do not have the strength.

When our Sages advised us that the first method of self defense Israel should apply against the descendants of Esav is prayer, they intended that the individual Jew achieve the power of manipulating the time, space and consciousness of our enemy. It served our father Ya'aqob very well, so should it serve his children.

The Jewish people have survived thousands of years of suffering under the hand of the children of Esav in the same way that our father Ya'aqob was saved from him. No matter what evil decrees we were subject to, somehow, some way the G-d of Ya'aqob was there for His people.

Our Sages were quite wise in ordaining for us the standard prayer, the Amidah. Aside from the Kabbalistic level of the Amidah, which is a step by step guide to building and rectifying the sefirotic Faces of Atzilut, non-Kabbalistic prayer still requires a level of intention (kavana) in order for one to have fulfilled one's obligation of prayer as outlined by our Sages.

The Shulkhan Arukh (Code of Jewish Law, Orah Haim 98:1) states regarding prayer:

"One who prays must devote his heart to the meaning of the words that come forth from one's mouth. One must imagine that the Shekhina stands opposite him. All extraneous thought must be removed so that ones' thoughts and intent in prayer will be pure. One should imagine as if one is speaking to a king of flesh and blood before whom one's words would be prepared and conscientious, G-d forbid to make a mistake. All the more so [should one be this careful] before the King, Who is the King of kings Who examines every thought. Thus was the way of the pious and the men of renown: they would meditate and direct their attention to their prayers until they reached the level of

detachment from the physical world and the dominance of the power of mind. They would almost come to the level of prophecy. If another thought comes to one during prayer, one should be silent until that thought is nullified. One must meditate upon those things that humble the heart, and direct [one's heart] to his Heavenly Father."

One point that is quite clear from all Torah literature: the physical world and the spiritual worlds are integrally intertwined. As such, physical action has an effect in the spiritual realms and spiritual activity has an effect on the physical realm. The Halakha in the Shulkhan Arukh outlines to us how this is done.

First, "one who prays must devote his heart to the meaning of the words that come forth from one's mouth". This is obvious, but how many people truly devote their hearts to prayer when they are praying. Remember the lesson of Hannah. True devotion of the heart in prayer means that ones mind and ones emotions are harmoniously joined. "All extraneous thought must be removed". This is the definition of focus of the mind. How many people truly achieve this?

"Thus was the way of the pious and the men of renown: they would meditate and direct their attention to their prayers until they reached the level of detachment from the physical world and the dominance of the power of mind. They would almost come to the level of prophecy. These pious ones spoken of here are the Talmudic Sages. Yet, this ability of concentration has never ceased among the Jewish people. Kabbalists to this day achieve this level regularly. As they transcend the physical world, they commune with spiritual reality and thus manipulate "supernal lights" in that manner known to them. They thus cause changes in time, space and human consciousness. It is they who "Ascribe (lit.-give) strength to G-d" (Ps.68:35).

Today's Kabbalists, aware of the multitude of sins that secularism has brought upon the Jewish people, fight an uphill battle against the forces of evil that in every generation attempt to wipe out the Jewish people. The weapon at their disposal is the power of correct prayer. Their job is to enter into the spiritual realms and to create the necessary thought and emotional patterns that will reverberate in the collective unconscious of the Jewish psyche rectifying it of mistaken thoughts, feelings and actions. This function of the Kabbalist is the sifting of the fallen kings of Edom.

Jewish history in the Edomite exile has been rather difficult. But it could have been worse. The present situation in the Land of Israel with enemies both Jewish and gentile surrounding the righteous on every side create a very bleak picture and prognosis for the future of Judaism and Israel. But not to worry! The power that the Kabbalist has is invincible. The Kabbalist has learned well the lessons of Ya'aqob our father, of Hannah and of Mordechai. Like them, the Kabbalist of today endeavors to make himself any empty vessel, a vessel that, like a vacuum, is empty and yet draws into itself, while never becoming full.

This power of prayer, however, is not exclusive to the Kabbalist. Anyone who achieves the proper level of consciousness can achieve the same results from prayer as does the

Kabbalist. And just who can achieve this right state of mind? The one who like Ya'aqob our father and like Hannah, Mordechai and Esther is so overwhelmed by the present circumstances of his physical surroundings that he has no choice but to create another. Creating alternate realities is not a rational act which can be explained acceptably to the logical mind. One must go beyond the limits of the conscious mind and allow feeling, need and desire to intermingle and bond with thought. This turns ones prayers into a supra-rational form of spiritual communication. In other words, one is speaking G-d's language. Performing this type of prayer is not only good advice; it is the Halakha. More than anything else it is this type of prayer prayed by the everyday man and woman that shakes the supernal realms and changes the course of human events.

This is how miracles occur. They are first created above with correct thought and feeling. The image is carved above in the collective unconscious. When the image becomes clear enough due to the desperation of the person, that person then becomes a vacuum, empty of anything else. One thus enables that newly created image to come and fill the newly vacated space. The creation of the new reality has become manifest. Don't think that this is "magic" or "make believe". This happens to everyone of us. Prayer is the manipulation of the mind and the psychic factors with which the mind comes into contact. Our Sages have correctly said, "Prayer is one of the greatest things in the world" (Ber.6b). For by prayer mankind causes the upper (sefirotic) union to occur and thereby are the kings cleansed and raised above."

It is the sincere prayer from the honest and pure heart that creates the most miraculous reality. This is the secret of Jewish survival: Jewish tears and Jewish prayers. None of our enemies will ever be able to stand against it.