

Rescue me, please, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Eisav. (32:12)

Yaakov *Avinu* had but one brother. Why, then, does he ask Hashem to spare him from his brother, from Eisav? His brother was Eisav. The *Zohar HaKadosh* teaches that when one prays he must be specific in his prayer, articulating exactly about what and for whom he is praying. In some instances, one refers to a close friend as brother. Indeed, Avraham *Avinu* referred to Lot, his nephew, as brother, *Anashim achim anachnu*; "We are brothers." Yaakov could also be referring to an Eisav who was not his brother. Thus, he said, "My brother, Eisav, to clarify exactly whom he meant. Nevertheless, he could have simply said, *Mi'yad achi Eisav*. Why does he reiterate, *mi'yad achi, mi'yad Eisav*?

The **Bais HaLevi** distinguishes between: the enemy named Eisav, the brother, who harbors a vicious hatred towards Yaakov; and the *achi*, brother, who employs brotherly love to ensnare the unsuspecting Yaakov and causes his downfall through assimilation and, eventually, apostasy. One represents physical annihilation; the other symbolizes spiritual extinction. While both forms of destruction are devastating, when physical annihilation occurs, we, at least, die as Jews, connected with the Almighty. In contrast, when spiritual extinction occurs, we lose everything, our destiny and, eventually, our lives.

Not all assimilation stories have a bad ending. The following vignette not only has a good ending, it also demonstrates Divine Providence and encourages us never to give up. We always have hope. We are all part of a Divine Plan. When they came to Auschwitz, entire families were separated one from another. Women were lined up on one side and "prepared" for their martyrdom. As the Jewish women were lined up to be searched, their clothing removed, two Polish women stood on the other side of the fence, hoping to catch anything of value the Nazis would throw away. These Polish women were poor farm people who used the adversity visited upon the Jews as an opportunity for their benefit.

Two women waited patiently by the fence. They were in dire need of warm clothes. The Jews would not need their warm clothing anymore. Suddenly, they saw a Jewish woman who had an aristocratic bearing. She wore a fur hat and a heavy coat. She was holding onto the coat for dear life. The way she seemed to be doting on it, it must be a very expensive coat. The Nazi came over to her and demanded that she remove her hat and coat, throw them both over the fence and continue walking in the line (which was proceeding to the gas chamber). The woman refused to give up her coat. The two Polish women grabbed her and tore off her coat. The woman gave a shriek that was so loud it must have pierced the heavens. It was to no avail. The women were gone and, with them, the coat. The woman was taken to the gas chamber where she gave up her life to sanctify Hashem's Name.

The two women came home with their prize. They searched the pockets of the heavy coat and

discovered jewelry. Yet, they sensed that the coat was still heavy. Finally, they decided to slice open the coat's lining in the hope that they would find more jewelry. How shocked they were to discover a beautiful, sleeping infant girl. They were overwhelmed with the child's beauty. One woman said to the other, "Listen, you have no children. You take the baby, and I will take most of the jewelry. This will be a reasonable trade."

They made the split, with the woman who took the infant keeping only a small amount of jewelry. There was one small chain which she placed upon the baby's neck. Years went by. The little girl was as brilliant as she was physically attractive. She possessed a sterling character as well as refined qualities and social graces. She majored in science and pursued a doctorate in medicine, graduating at the top of her class. Her Polish surrogate mother had excelled in raising her to be not only a successful physician, but also a complete *mentch*. Her surrogate mother became ill and passed away before she had the opportunity to share the details of her birth with her.

The other woman felt it incumbent upon her to clear the air. It troubled her that this wonderful young woman was living a lie. She was not a Polish Christian, and it was about time that she should be made aware of her true heritage. "You are not Polish," she began. Obviously, the young woman was shocked. "What do you mean?" she asked. "Your mother was not your real mother. Your biological mother was murdered by the Nazis in Auschwitz. You are Jewish."

The young woman demanded proof that this new revelation was true. "Here is a bracelet with strange lettering that we took from your mother's coat. It is yours." Hearing all of this was truly a shock, and it demanded some time to digest. She decided to take time off from her work to fly to New York where she had heard there was a large aggregate of observant Jews. Perhaps, over time, she might clear her head and get to the bottom of her true identity. She went to Brooklyn where she met a group of *Chassidic* Jews. She questioned them concerning the inscription on her bracelet. They looked it over and read the words, *Shema Yisrael*. "Perhaps you should make an appointment with our *Rebbe*, our leader," they suggested. "He will advise you what to do."

The woman met with the *Rebbe* who listened intently to her story: "Your story is compelling. No doubt you are one of us. I encourage you to seek out your heritage. Go to the Holy Land and take a position as a doctor. Until now, you have treated gentile children. Now you will treat Jewish children. Hashem will guide you and you will achieve success." She followed the *Rebbe's* advice and made *Aliyah* to *Eretz Yisrael*, where she quickly worked her way up in the field of medicine. Before long, her fame as a compassionate and caring physician, who was an equally brilliant diagnostician, spread. She met a wonderful observant man, and they married and raised a family. Like the *Rebbe* had predicted, the pieces were falling into place.

Nonetheless, in the back of her mind, she was still troubled about the bracelet that had the words *Shema Yisrael* engraved on it. She felt that it had some significance. She prayed to Hashem, Who listened to her prayers.

One day she and her husband were taking a stroll in Yerushalayim, when they suddenly heard an explosion coming from the Sbarro restaurant up the block. This was the infamous terror attack on August 9, 2001, which took the lives of fifteen civilians and injured 130. As a doctor, she immediately ran to the scene of the bombing. When she arrived, she heard an elderly man moaning, "My granddaughter, my granddaughter!" She went over to him and questioned him. Apparently, he had been wheeling his infant granddaughter in her carriage, and they had been separated during the bombing.

The doctor accompanied him in the ambulance. When they arrived at the hospital, she told him that she would search among the children for his granddaughter. After searching from room to room, she found the child. How shocked she was to discover that the little girl wore a bracelet (*Shema Yisrael*) identical to hers! She returned to the child's grandfather and conveyed to him the good news that his granddaughter was alive and well. She had sustained only minor injuries. She then asked him about the bracelet. He explained that, years ago, he had made two such bracelets: one he gave to his infant daughter; the other he gave to his granddaughter.

Well, anyone reading this knows the rest of the story. When she told the man that she, too, had such a bracelet, and she related her life story, it was apparent that after all of these years, she had found her father. Father and daughter had been reunited after a separation of a lifetime. Her father had survived the war, remarried and raised a family. He had always wondered what had happened to his infant daughter. Now he knew.