

# The Secret Power of *Shema Yisrael*

*Haftorat Parashat Vayislach*

*Ovadiah, Chapter 1:1-21*

*In this week's haftorah I found an allusion to what I have been practicing in spiritual healing. Reciting the Shema with complete mindfulness has the power to overcome Esav – the source of negative energy. In spiritual healing, we recite the Shema to remove negative energy from a place, person or object. It was very reaffirming to find a source for this in our haftorah. I hope you will read on, and learn with me about accessing the power of Yosef and Rachel in order to eradicate the descendants of Esav and bring the final geulah (redemption).*

## The Secret Power of Shema Yisrael to Overcome Negative Energy

This week's *haftorah* is the Book of Ovadiah, which prophesizes the downfall of Edom, the descendents of Esav. This reflects the main theme of our Torah reading: Ya'acov's struggle with Esav's spiritual energy (angel). Just as it was his son, Yosef, that empowered Ya'acov to face Esav, and overcome him, so, too, during the future redemption, it will be the descendents of Yosef who shall triumph over the Roman Empire descending from Esav. "The house of Ya'acov shall be fire, and the house of Yosef flame, and the house of Esav for straw, and they shall kindle in them, and devour them and there shall not be any remaining of the house of Esav; for Hashem has spoken it" (*Ovadiah* 1:18). Tiferet Shlomo explains that the angels that Ya'acov sent to Esav, were created by Ya'acov's recitation of the *Shema* prayer (*Keriat Shema*). This is alluded to in the verse quoted above that the house of Esav will become straw, (שק *kash* in Hebrew), consisting of the letters *kuf* and *shin*, the initials of the *Shema* prayer שמע קריאת. Today, as well, the angels that emanate from reciting the *Shema* with great intention have power to overcome the destructive spiritual energy of Esav. Ya'acov transferred his ability to recite the *Shema* with such special intensity, to his son Yosef. When he was reunited with Yosef in Egypt, Ya'acov recited the *Shema*, (see *Rashi, Bereishit* 46:29). The Maharal explains that when Ya'acov saw how Yosef had become the king, he finally understood the big picture and the reason for his suffering all these years. This realization filled his heart with great love and awe for Hashem, and enabled him to recite the *Shema* with the very highest *kavana* (intention) (*Gur Aryeh, ibid*). Since, the reunion of Ya'acov and Yosef completed the manifestation of Hashem's unity in the world, therefore, at that very moment, Yosef's power to eradicate the negativity of Esav, became anchored in the world, through the secret of the *Shema Yisrael*.

## The Tikun of Yosef and Rachel

The ability to overcome Esav, originated at the time of Yosef's birth. This is why Ya'acov waited until Yosef was born, before he felt secure to face Esav. The *midrash* explains, "Esav does not fall except through the children of Rachel..." (*Bereishit Rabah* 75:5). It was Esther and Mordechai, Rachel's descendants, who defeated Haman, the descendant of Esav, during the Purim story. It was Yehoshua, the son of Efraim, and descendent of Yosef, who conquered the Land of Israel. In the future, it will be through the power of Yosef, son of Rachel that we will ultimately overcome the oppressing nations descended from Esav. When Ya'acov's four wives and eleven sons bowed down before Esav, why did Yosef and Rachel approach last? (*Bereishit* 33:6-7). *Tiferet Shlomo* explains, that everything that happened to Ya'acov and his wives teaches us about the future. The final *tikun* (rectification) is that

of Yosef and Rachel, as we learn from the fact that the statement, “The house of Ya’acov shall be fire, and the house of Yosef flame” (*Ovadiah* 1:18), is followed by the prophesy about the end of days, “Liberators shall ascend upon Mount Tzion to judge the mountain of Esav; and the kingdom shall be Hashem’s” (Ibid. 1:21). Likewise, the final *geulah* (redemption) will be in the merit of Rachel, as it states, “Thus says Hashem...Rachel is crying for her children...and your children shall return to their own borders” (*Yirmeyahu* 31:14-16).

### The Power of Awe, Self-Restraint and Tzniut

What are the qualities that Rachel and Yosef embody, which ultimately will defeat Esav and bring redemption? Rav Tzaddok of Lublin explains that it is the quality of Yosef’s fear/awe of G-d that has the power to overcome Amalek, Esav’s grandson. Amalek lacked this quality completely, as it states about him, “He did not fear G-d” (*Devarim* 25:18). Yosef, however, attributed this quality to himself, as he proclaimed, “I fear G-d” (*Bereishit* 42:16). Yosef’s fear of G-d was connected with his *gevurah*, the power and strength to overcome temptation. This is manifested by his ability to withstand the seduction of Potifar’s wife. Yosef, is, therefore, known to be the “guardian of the *brith* (covenant)”, referring to his holiness and chastity in action, speech and thought (*Machshevot Charutz* 13, *Pri Tzadik*, *Purim* 7). Yosef received this power from his mother Rachel, who is praised for her *tzniut* (*Yalkut Shimoni*, *Bereishit* 29:125). Rachel did not reveal to her sister, Leah that she and Ya’acov were in love. When Lavan seized the presents Ya’acov sent to Rachel and gave them to Leah, Rachel remained silent (*Midrash Tanchuma*, *Vayetze* Chapter 6). It is interesting to note that in spite of the fact that Rachel, the shepherdess, is called “the revealed world” in contrast to Leah, who represents “the hidden world” (*Sefer Etz Chaim*, *Sha’ar* 38, Chapter 2), Rachel is praised particularly for being hidden, silent, and modest. This teaches us that we specifically need modesty to survive spiritually in the outer world of affluence and physical attraction.

### Spiritual Survival in the Outer World Depends on Being Inward Bound

Like his mother Rachel, Yosef was involved in “the revealed world” while being the master of modesty and restraint. In his role as the ruler of the most powerful empire of his time, he was involved in worldly affairs to the highest degree. Yet, all his power, honor, and wealth did not mar his inner holiness. Yosef did not let any of the worldly glamour influence him in the slightest. Rather, he remained unaffected in his fear of G-d and chastity. This is in contrast to Esav who was known for flaunting his assets. The *midrash* notes that Esav resembled a pig with its split hooves that makes it look outwardly kosher. Only when we look internally and perceive that it doesn't chew its cud do we realize that despite outward appearances it is a non-kosher animal (*Bereishit Rabah* 65:1). In contrast, our spiritual survival in exile depends on being modest while nurturing our internal holiness.

### Developing Our Inner Fire

Esav’s power is specifically overcome by the *tzniut* of the children of Rachel. Even when involved in the world, whether in business, academics, arts, as farmers or doctors, they remain modest, G-d-fearing, and anchored to the Torah. It is quite a challenge to develop the character of *tzniut* in the competitive outer world, which values the external accomplishments of good grades, degrees, money and social prestige. As Gila Manolson writes in *Outside Inside*, true *tzniut* is to understand that “What I do” does not take the place of “Who I am.” Maintaining our spiritual center entails the awareness that the roots of our identity extend far beneath our performance. The more we realize that we are

only vehicles for Hashem's light to shine through, the less we care about being famous and powerful, and the less we depend on the praise of others for our self-gratification. When we stop "casting our gems to the boars," and learn to focus our light inward, then our *tzniut* will generate a potent inner force that allows the Divine light that we reflect to eradicate the immorality of Esav. This process can be compared to a magnifying glass that concentrates the light of the sun into one inner point to create fire. The deeper we internalize the essence of *tzniut*, the more our internal light will become fire and flame to consume Esav's external stubble of self-indulgence, greediness and hatred.