



Ohr Somayach Light Lines

Published by OHR SOMAYACH INTERNATIONAL • Jerusalem, Israel 19 Kislev 5761 • December 16, 2000 • Parshat Vayishlach • No. 115

Light Insight

Burning Soul

*“Please save me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau.”
(Genesis 32:12)*

“Then Jacob looked up and saw Esau coming in the distance; immediately he looked heavenward, cried, and begged for mercy... until G-d promised to save him from every tribulation by the merit of Jacob.” (Bereishit Rabba 75:13)

Can we ever erase from our minds the terrible frightened faces of the six million? Standing in lines on railway platforms. Dressed in drab European grays and browns.

We will never know how close we came to seeing those ranks of holy martyrs swelled by the gold kaftans of Yerushalmi Jews and the khaki shorts and blue hats of kibbutzniks.

In 1942, Rommel and a huge tank-force stood at the gates of Palestine. Nothing was between him and the Jewish settlement. The British forces prepared to evacuate Palestine. They started to burn documents.

At this very moment, Rabbi Kahanaman purchased a lot near Tel Aviv and laid the cornerstone

for a new Yeshiva. People thought he was crazy. He responded that G-d hadn't brought him to Israel to be murdered by the Nazis. (Rabbi Kahanaman went on to build the Ponevezh Yeshiva, one of the largest in Israel today.)

In the desert in 1942, the only thing holding the Germans back was a lack of drinking water. They discovered that the British had laid a water pipe through the desert. The British had just finished this pipeline and they were checking it for leaks. Instead of wasting valuable drinking water, they were pumping sea-water through the pipeline to check its integrity. The Germans guzzled the sea-water from the pipes and surrendered in terrible agony.

A miracle, or a coincidence?

We live in an era where it's very difficult to see G-d's hand in the world. When you see a wall, you know that something is blocking your view. When there is no wall you can think that you see everything.

The Torah itself tells us that G-d will “hide His face from us.” That we won't see Him. The expression the Torah uses is “*hasteir*

astir” — “I will surely hide My face.” The verb is doubled. It is as though G-d is telling us that He will hide even the fact that He is hiding.

The greatest concealment is that the concealment itself is concealed.

Jacob saw our generation some three and a half thousand years ago. He saw “Esau coming in the distance.” He saw Esau executing “the Final Solution.” And he saw him fail.

He also saw the other face of Esau, when he pretends to be our brother. Jacob saw that Esau would try to smother us with a brotherly embrace. A brotherly embrace that wants to tell the Jewish People that three thousand years of miraculous survival is merely coincidental; that there is no One behind the wall, because there really is no wall at all and we can see everything. We have the technology!

Jacob saw this silent holocaust of Jewish souls “coming in the distance.” He looked heavenward. He cried and begged G-d for mercy for his children; that whether Esau would try to burn our bodies or our souls, he would ultimately fail.

www.ohr.edu

Billions of Bytes of Jewish Literature and Information

LOVE of the LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and the Land of Israel

Kissing the Earth

*"For Your servants hold dear her tones and cherish even her dust."
(Psalms 102:15)*

The touching scene of Jews kissing the earth upon their arrival in the Land of Israel has its roots in the words of King David and in the

actions of our Talmudic Sages. Rabbi Abba kissed the rocks at the port of Acco. Rabbi Chiya bar Gamda rolled in the dust of the land. Rabbi Chanina went even further by repairing the roads so that his beloved country would not have a bad reputation with those who traveled upon them.

Response Line

Bless Me, Scottie

Heiko Evermann wrote:

I have a question concerning a greeting found in the Star Trek series, which, as someone told me, has a Jewish origin, and I would like to know more about it. Mr. Spock from the planet Vulcan greets people with "live long and prosper" while holding his hand towards them with a gap between his thumb and first finger, and a gap between his middle and third finger, forming something like the letter "W". I was told that Leonard Nemo, the actor who plays Mr. Spock, has Jewish parents. I have also seen this hand symbol on plaques and souvenirs in Israel when I visited that country last year. It showed two hands forming this sign and around it was a Hebrew blessing, as I was told. I would like to know more about this and thought that you might be able to help me. Thank you in advance for your efforts.

Rachel Orbart wrote:

I have always heard that there is special relevance as to Jewish tribe concerning the wide separation of the third and fourth finger, and that doing this with both hands has a special mystical meaning. What does it mean if you can do this? What does it mean to be from a certain tribe with the ability to do this, and is this folklore? Tell me as many tidbits as you know, I am very interested.

Dear Heiko, Rachel and all you Trekkies out there,

Yes, Leonard Nemo is Jewish, and his "Vulcanic" hand-gestures originate from the Torah.

The Torah commands the *kohanim*, the descendants of Aaron, to bless the Jewish people. They are to stand in front of the congregation, raise their hands to shoulder level and pronounce the "priestly blessings" found in the Book of Numbers (6:22): "May G-d bless you and keep you...."

This commandment has been performed by kohanim in synagogues until this very day. The prevalent custom today is that the hands are held together palms-down, and the fingers are split such that there are 5 spaces: One space between the thumbs, a space between the thumb and first finger of each hand, and a space between the second and third finger of each hand. The 5 spaces are an allusion to the verse in Song of Songs 2:8 which states that G-d "peeks through the cracks in the wall." In other words, G-d protects and watches the Jewish people even when He is hidden.

As mentioned, a kohen is someone descended from Aaron (Moses's brother) and therefore from the tribe of Levi. Even if a Kohen can't split his fingers in the proper manner, he can still give the priestly blessing. The ability to split your fingers in the proper manner is absolutely no indication that you are from the priestly tribe.

By the way, "Captain Kirk" (William Shatner) is also Jewish. (My wife went to the same camp as his daughter.) The phrase "Set your phasers to stun," however, is found nowhere in the Talmud.