

MESSENGER MITZVOS

by Shlomo Katz

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Today's Learning:

Bikkurim 3:3-4

Orach Chaim 201:2-4

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Chagigah 23

Begin Seder Mo'ed on Thursday

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Ketubot 31

As Yaakov returns to Eretz Yisrael from his sojourn with Lavan, he says to his family (35:3): "Then come, let us go up to Bet El; there I will make an altar to the 'Kel'/G-d Who answered me in my time of distress and was with me on the road that I traveled." R' Elie Munk z"l (see box on page 3) observes:

Of the various attributes of the Supreme Being, the Divine name "Kel" is the one which Yaakov invokes most frequently. It recurs several times in this chapter and figures both in the name Yaakov gave to the place where Hashem appeared to him ("Bet El") and in the new name given to Yaakov himself ("Yisrael"). The midrash teaches that this name denotes the middah/attribute of

rachamim/mercy; indeed, it is one of the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy in the verse (Shmot 34:6), "Hashem, Hashem, Kel, Rachum . . ." Not only did Yaakov's character tend towards the principle of rachamim (so Kabbalists teach), but his life itself bore the stamp of Midat Harachamim. In contrast to the living conditions of his grandfather Avraham and his father Yitzchak, Yaakov's destiny was under dark clouds and the shadows of night. His life was one long series of painful ordeals, while external joys were granted to him rarely and only for short periods. But just as the night is always followed by morning, bringing with it the certainty that there exists a G-d of mercy Who faithfully watches over those who sleep, so too those who suffer feel that there is a protecting and righteous G-d Who never abandons us, even in life's darkest hours. This is why Yaakov is credited with initiating the night prayer, Ma'ariv. This prayer even begins [for Ashkenazim, on weeknights] with the words, "V'Hu Rachum"/"And He who is Merciful . . ." (Call of the Torah p. 470)

"Then Yaakov sent angels before him to Esav his brother . . ." (32:4)

R' Elyah Lopian z"l (1872-1970; Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva Etz Chaim in London - see page 4) asks what is added by the words, "before him." He explains as follows:

We are taught in Avot (Ch. 4): "One who does a mitzvah acquires one advocate. One who commits a sin acquires one prosecutor." In other words, from every mitzvah that a person does, a "good" angel is created. For example, it is well documented that R' Yosef Karo z"l (author of the Shulchan Aruch and other works) was regularly visited by an angel who identified himself as "The Mishnah." (R' Yosef Karo had undertaken a special study of mishnah, and, after a time, this angel began to speak to him on a regular basis.) The good angels that are created by a person's mitzvot go before the Divine Throne and lobby on the person's behalf. On the other hand, from every sin that a person commits, an impure angel is created who attempts to harm the person.

This sheds light on the meaning of the words "before him." Yaakov did not want to "trouble" angels from Heaven to go to Esav. He therefore chose his own angels, who were "before him" as a result of the mitzvot that he had performed, to send to Esav.

(Esav, too, had angels that were created as a result of his deeds, in his case, bad deeds. It was from these that he chose the 400 "men" who were traveling with him to meet Yaakov.)

From the above, a person should realize that his fate is in his own hands. A person has the ability to create good angels to assist him in his spiritual and material endeavors and he has the ability to create impure angels to harm him. Each person can make this choice for himself.

The gemara (Berachot 15b) says: "If one reads Shema and is meticulous in pronouncing its words, Gehinnom is cooled down for him." What would a person not do to escape from even a moment in Gehinnom? Here the gemara demonstrates to us that one's fate is within his own control. (Lev Eliyahu: Ma'amar "Ki Malachav Yetzaveh Lach")

How did Rashi (to verse 4) know that the "malachim" that Yaakov sent to Esav were angels rather than human messengers? ["Malachim can have either meaning.]

R' David Pardo z"l (Bosnia and Israel; 1710-1792) writes: When Yaakov left Eretz Yisrael, at the beginning of last week's parashah, he envisioned angels in a prophetic dream. When he returned to Eretz Yisrael, at the end of last week's parashah, he saw the angels while he was awake. Yaakov understood from this that he was to make use of these angels, and Rashi understood from this that Yaakov did make use of them. This is what the midrash means when it comments on our verse, "What is written above? It is written, 'And Yaakov said upon seeing them, "This is the camp of G-d"'. The midrash means to emphasize that our verse should be interpreted in light of the fact that Yaakov saw the angels. (Maskil Le'David)

"Therefore Bnei Yisrael are not to eat the gid ha'nasheh on the hip socket to this day, because he struck Yaakov's hip socket on the gid ha'nasheh." (23:33)

R' Samson Raphael Hirsch z"l (Germany; 1808-1888) observes: The fact that this is being immortalized in a law of the Torah is only understandable if some fundamental lesson is connected with it. What is that lesson?

Yaakov's successful fight with the angel assures us that the spirit of Esav will not be able to conquer Yaakov throughout the long ages of darkness on earth. Nevertheless, Esav will be able to hamstring Yaakov, to prevent him from standing firmly on both feet. This lack of stability is a necessary factor in ultimately opening Esav's eyes. If Yaakov stood firmly, as Esav stood at the head of his 400 men [see verse 7], the fact that Yaakov cannot be conquered would never show the Finger of G-d in history. Therefore, the descendants of Yaakov (who just because of their material weakness are "Yisrael," the sign of the sole conquering power, G-d) are not to eat the gid ha'nasheh.

Whenever we sit down to a meal, R' Hirsch continues, the admonition from this story of our wanderings comes to us. We are not to feel as if we are less enduring through the ages because we are not armed with the sword as Esav is. Our strength lies in other, higher factors which cannot be weakened by Esav. (The Hirsch Chumash p. 509)

"He encamped before the city." (33:18)

The midrash says: "He arrived during the twilight and he established boundaries."

The work Avnei Ezel explains: Twilight is when the shadows lengthen and boundaries become less clearly defined. Yaakov's strength was that he was capable of setting boundaries where they were needed.

Particularly when Yaakov reached the first town where he would settle in Eretz Yisrael, that was a

time to set boundaries. A line must be drawn between the Torah's conception of settling a land and building a country and the rest of the world's conception of the same activities. (Quoted in Ma'ayanah Shel Torah)

Rabbi Dr. Lord Immanuel Jakobovits z"l (Harav Yisrael ben Harav Yoel)

This week marks the shloshim of Rabbi Dr. Lord Immanuel Jakobovits, Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth from 1967 to 1991. Rabbi Jakobovits was born on February 8, 1921 in K'nigsberg, Germany (now Kaliningrad in Russia). His father, Rabbi Julius (Yoel) Jakobovits, fled from Nazi persecution to England where, until his death in 1947, he was a member of the bet din of the United Synagogue in London.

Young Immanuel arrived in England in 1936, two years before his father. He studied at the Jewish Secondary School, Jews' College and Yeshiva Etz Chaim in London (where he received semichah), and also earned a Ph.D. degree at London University. His rabbinic career began in London at the age of 20, soon becoming Rabbi of the Great Synagogue in East London. In 1949 he accepted a call to Dublin as Chief Rabbi of the small Jewish community in Ireland (a position previously held by Rabbi Dr. Yitzchak Isaac Herzog z"l, later Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Israel).

In 1958, Rabbi Jakobovits became the first rabbi of the new Fifth Avenue Synagogue, a small, but wealthy orthodox congregation in New York. He would later write of his years there: "My challenge has been to make Orthodoxy elegant and fashionable and to show that you don't have to live in squalor to be a strictly traditional Jew." In 1967, he returned to London to become British Chief Rabbi. The search for a Chief Rabbi to succeed the retiring Rabbi Israel Brodie came as the authority of the Chief Rabbi was being assailed by both the right and left wings of orthodoxy as well as by the Reform and Liberal sections of the community. Rabbi Jakobovits was a staunch upholder of the German Jewish tradition of R' Samson Raphael Hirsch z"l, and in his induction sermon in April 1967, he made clear his unyielding adherence to Tradition. He would uphold the belief in Torah min hashamayim/the divine origin of Torah, but at the same time would "do all within my power to close the gaps within our people." (Rabbi Jakobovits was the first Chief Rabbi to abandon the uniform worn by his predecessors in favor of the kapote/coat worn by Central and Eastern European rabbis.)

Within the Anglo-Jewish community, R' Jakobovits' main contribution was the expansion of facilities for Jewish education through a trust of which he was the founder and principal fundraiser. It has been said that he saw himself as the chief executive of the community and he involved himself in administrative, organizational and political issues as well as spiritual, for he saw no valid boundaries between the various manifestations of organized Jewish life. By the 1970s, Rabbi Jakobovits was becoming well known outside of Judaism for his advocacy of traditional moral values. In 1981 he was knighted and, in 1988, he became a member of the House of Lords, the upper house of the British

Parliament. In his speeches there, Lord Jakobovits (as he was known) frequently spoke in support of what Americans call "family values."

Rabbi Jakobovits was the author of Jewish Medical Ethics, and was a frequent writer and speaker on that subject. He also published several volumes of collected speeches, sermons and articles. Other books included Jewish Law Faces Modern Problems (1965), Journal of a Rabbi (1966), The Timely and the Timeless (1977) and If Only My People . . . Zionism in My Life (1984).

In 1949, Rabbi Jakobovits married Amalie Munk, daughter of Rabbi Elie Munk of Paris. They had six children. (This article is primarily based on an obituary in The Times of London, November 1, 1999.)

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The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ("lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah"), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at [Project Genesis](#) start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page. Text archives from 1990 through the present may be retrieved from <http://www.acoast.com/~sehc/hamaayan/>. Donations to HaMaayan are tax-deductible.
