



Sermon Tidbits

NOVEMBER 26, 2012

Parashat Vayishlach

True Angels

And Jacob sent messengers (Genesis 32:4)

וישלח יעקב מלאכים (בראשית לב:ד)

Although the messengers that Jacob sent to greet Esau are interpreted in the text to be human messengers, Rashi (on 32:4) insists that Jacob sent “actual [celestial] angels.” Using Jacob’s messengers as a model, Rabbi Avraham Yehoshua Heschel of Apt (see *Shivim Panim l’Torah* vol. 1 p. 219) explained that in calling upon the angels to assist him, Jacob set a precedent for his descendants to emulate. “At any time agitators rise up against us, those same true angels that Jacob sent are awakened, and they can be counted on in their mission to appease Esau, and to silence from upon us all of the accusers and attackers.”

According to Rabbi Heschel, whenever Jacob’s descendants are in distress the angels that he sent are awakened to keep them safe. When the state of Israel is threatened by rocket and missile attacks, a different type of angel—a complex missile defense system—is similarly able to save lives.

America has long provided Israel with the political and moral support necessary to defend its citizens from attack. The value of this support was seen during Israel’s recent conflict with Hamas when the Iron Dome missile defense system, Israel’s unique rocket interceptor that was built with American financial support, proved to be a game-changing asset for the Jewish state. As Israeli Ambassador to the United States Michael Oren [put it](#), “The story of the Iron Dome is a metaphor for the story of Israel and an example of Israel’s strong ties with its largest ally, the U.S.” Oren continued to state that three years ago, “Congress decided to support President Barack Obama’s request for more than \$200 million to fund the purchase of four Iron Dome batteries, three of which are operational today, including the battery (Israel’s fifth overall) that was deployed in Tel Aviv this week [on November 17] and began to intercept rockets from Gaza.”

Developed with significant American financing and undergoing its ultimate battle test, the Iron Dome system proved to be a strategic success during Operation Pillar of Defense. The system works by firing an interceptor missile every time it detects that a rocket is heading toward a populated area. According to [The Times of Israel](#), during the operation “The Iron Dome missile defense system scored 421 interceptions, with an overall success rate of 84%.” While each interceptor missile costs the Jewish state approximately \$45,000, the true value of keeping civilians as safe as possible from the terror of rocket attacks is immeasurable. Moreover, as [The New York Times](#) reported, the system gave Israeli leaders the ability to shield Israel’s civilian population without widening the confrontation. Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak described the Iron Dome as “probably the most technologically impressive achievement in recent years in Israel.” Click [here](#) to see the Iron Dome in action.

The United States has strongly supported Israel’s right to self-defense against rocket attacks from Gaza. Soon after Operation Pillar of Defense began President Obama [said](#) that “Israel has every right to expect that it does not have missiles fired into its territory.” Secretary of State Hilary Clinton [expressed](#) that she is, “very pleased that the Iron Dome defense system is performing so well. Our partnership and support of this system represents America’s enduring commitment to the safety and security of the Israeli people, and to Israel’s right to defend itself.” Many

other American leaders and elected officials from both sides of the aisle [spoke out](#) in support of Israel as well. For more on the U.S.-Israel relationship, click [here](#).

Facing a dangerous and potentially deadly confrontation with Esau, Jacob's angels supported him during his difficult time. Over the past few weeks, as Israel faced its own difficult time, the true value of American support has been clear for all to see. ■

Gifts of Peace

And the gift passed over before him (Genesis 32:8)

ותעבור המנחה על פניו (בראשית לב:כב)

When Jacob heard that Esau had gathered 400 armed men to greet him on his return to Canaan he prepared for a military confrontation, prayed for support and salvation, and sent gifts of goodwill to his brother. Jacob himself told the messengers carrying his gifts to explain to Esau that the gifts were sent to “appease him [Esau] with the present that goes before me” (32:21) and avoid conflict. Yet, Rashi (on 32:22) states that fear was not the only emotion that Jacob felt, noting that when Jacob watched as the gifts for Esau “passed over before him” (32:22), “[Jacob] was also enraged that he was compelled to do all this.” Still, despite his anger at his aggressive and violent brother, Jacob nonetheless sent the gifts because he felt a responsibility to avoid bloodshed.

Despite his anger, Jacob understood the moral imperative of sending gifts of peace to his brother Esau. Similarly, despite Israel's obvious frustration with years of rocket attacks emanating from the Gaza Strip, the Jewish state understands the moral imperative of maintaining the fabric of civilian life in Gaza and continues to provide the coastal strip with electricity, medical supplies, and other necessary goods.

Even as Hamas shot rockets at cities and towns across Israel during Operation Pillar of Defense, the Jewish state maintained the essential daily flow of basic foods and other materials into the Gaza Strip, [Reuters](#) reported. During the first few days of the conflict, Israel's Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) said that it had transferred 123 trucks loaded with food, medicine and fuel. The rest of the transfer included 16 truckloads of medical equipment, including “specifically vital equipment, such as medicines, anesthetics and disposable medical equipment,” COGAT said. On any given day, about 130 truckloads of aid—mainly bulk staples—go through the Kerem Shalom crossing from Israel to Gaza. As rockets rained down from Gaza into Israel during Pillar of Defense the Jewish state continued to open this crossing. Moreover, according to the [Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#), Israel supplies 125 megawatts of electricity to the Gaza Strip from the power station in Ashkelon. In a recent article in the DailyBeast, David Frumm summed up the situation, [writing](#) that “Even as the rockets fly from Gaza into Israel, electricity and drinking water continue to flow from Israel into Gaza.”

[The Jerusalem Post](#) also reported that at the same time that Israelis were being attacked, Israeli hospitals were treating dozens of patients of all ages who came to Israel from Gaza to get healthcare unavailable there, and made provisions for accompanying persons. “We at Rambam Medical Center are taking care of sick children and adults, and we are not looking at their religion or where they come from,” Rambam Director-General Professor Rafael Beyar said.

For more on Hamas, click [here](#).

Jacob sent gifts to his brother because he felt a moral responsibility to avoid violence and suffering. It was this same moral compass that led Israel to provide humanitarian aid to the people of Gaza even as Hamas and its affiliates fired hundreds of rockets on Israeli population centers. ■