

# What Is Your Spiritual Legacy?

Have you ever heard a song which brings tears to your eyes? For me that was a Jewish song learned at an NCSY retreat called המלאך הגואל אותי, “The angel which redeems me,” based off a verse in this week’s Torah portion. Many synagogues sing this when they call up the children for their Aliyah on Simhat Torah-and we do when we have kids present at our morning service.

These beautiful words come from this week’s Torah portion. Jacob blesses his grandsons with them, stating “The Angel who has redeemed me from all harm-bless the youths. In them may my name be recalled, and in the names of my ancestors Abraham and Isaac. May they multiply on the earth as fish do (in the sea).”<sup>1</sup> Jacob’s blessing presupposes a number of things. First, as Rashi indicates, there is a guardian angel sent to us when we are in trouble.<sup>2</sup> God’s actions on earth are performed by

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 48:16

<sup>2</sup> Rashi on Genesis 49:16 ד"ה המלאך הגואל אותי מכל רע

intermediaries-it might be a chance encounter or feel like a coincidence but each of us has guardian angels or messengers (מלאכים).<sup>3</sup>

We also learn from Jacob's teaching that we should be called by the name of Jacob-Israel. Israel is Jacob's spiritual name, and Jacob is bequeathing unto Ephraim and Menasseh his spiritual legacy, going back to his father Isaac and grandfather Abraham. He is saying, as emphasized by Rashbam, that their offspring and the offspring of their offspring will live on.<sup>4</sup> Third-that we will multiply in number, and while that might not be true in physical terms, just look at the contributions of Jews to so many aspects of the world in which we live, whether in terms of the sciences, the arts/culture or literacy.

Often in life we focus on our physical legacy. We act philanthropically, endowing departments at universities or giving to organizations whose work we value. We also focus on the financial resources we will leave to our children. Here, however, Jacob is imparting on his grandchildren his spiritual legacy-that they will truly be

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<sup>3</sup> ד"ה המלאך הגואל אותי מכל רע 49:16 Radak on genesis

<sup>4</sup> ד"ה ויקרא בהם שמי 49:16 Rashbam on Genesis

בני ישראל, guided by the example that he as Israel has set. Similarly we should take the time to think about our spiritual legacies: how we will encourage our children and grandchildren to follow in our footsteps, valuing Judaism in all its beauty. We have the opportunity to write an ethical will in addition to a physical will, thinking about what are the values and teachings we want to leave for our descendants. We should model for them what is important to us through taking them to shul or fun holiday events. Most children and teens who I've spoken to say their best Jewish memories are when they make *haroset* or matzah ball soup or were home for the Passover Seder led by a parent or grandparent.

Let us strive to be like Israel, valuing what we have to contribute spiritually. When things don't go our way, let us not take this a sign of failure of "G-d frowning on us" but rather as a message either to try again or to try to learn from the experience. Similarly, when unexpected positive developments occur, let us not take all the credit but give some of it to G-d working through us. May we always strive to think about our

spiritual legacy and how we can strengthen it through the example we make in this world.