

# Gov. Abbott played major role in adopting Bluebonnet curriculum

For the past several weeks, I've read a number of high-profile articles in the TJP and national news outlets about the troubling passage of the Bluebonnet Learning Curriculum in Texas public schools, which, by a narrow vote of 8-7, was adopted by Texas' State Board of Education a few weeks ago. Much ink has been devoted to describing this troubling Bible-infused curriculum, which presents an overwhelming emphasis on Christianity at the expense of other religions and is replete with factual errors and pedagogic inadequacies. This inherent bias potentially puts children of other faiths or no faith at risk of being ostracized, bullied or worse.

What has not received much attention in the Texas press is the fact that Governor Greg Abbott played a major role in orchestrating this outcome. Amanda Tyler, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee and lead organizer of Christians Against Christian Nationalism, remarked, "This measure passed



**OP-ED**

**By Cantor Sheri Allen**

only because Gov. Greg Abbott handpicked his appointee to sit in the vacant District 13 seat, one that had been held by a Democrat until August and that was just won on Nov. 5 by Dr. Tiffany Clark, who would have voted no on this curriculum. Gov. Abbott's political move subverted the will of the voters."

Far from tamping down the rising tide of antisemitic action and rhetoric that has been growing since Oct. 7, 2023, I fear that the emphasis placed on Christian-based Bible stories in this new curriculum will only stoke it. And this move is only the tip of the iceberg.

During the last legislative session, Gov. Abbott signed SB763 into law, requiring every school district to vote on whether they wanted to hire chaplains to replace licensed school counselors. A coalition of Jewish community organizations across Texas vehemently opposed this measure and they were at least successful in convincing the majority of Texas school districts to keep unqualified, unlicensed chaplains out of the classroom.

Now that lawmakers are emboldened by the implementation of the Bluebonnet curriculum, I

have no doubt that when the Texas legislature is back in session next month, the push to display the 10 Commandments (specifically, the Christian interpretation) in every classroom will no doubt be resurrected again after failing to be adopted last session.

I find it sadly ironic that only a few months ago, when Gov. Abbott was a featured speaker at the Dallas Federation's memorial gathering marking the one-year anniversary of Oct. 7, he proclaimed, "Texas stands with the State of Israel and the Jewish community." (<https://gov.texas.gov/news/post/governor-abbott-honors-victims-of-october-7th-hamas-terrorist-attack-on-israel>) Those who gave him a standing ovation undoubtedly found these words comforting. But his past actions and recent State Board of Education appointment will undoubtedly serve to empower the Christian Right — proving that although he might claim to "stand with Israel," Governor Abbott is no friend of the Jews in his home state.

Sheri Allen is the cantor and co-founder of Makom Shelanu, an inclusive, affirming synagogue in Fort Worth.

## LEWIN

continued from p.28

### Stretching the land

Esoteric commentaries delve deeper, emphasizing the holiness of Israel and Yaakov's mission. Moving to Israel is often described as making aliyah — a spiritual ascent. The land itself carries a unique sanctity, distinct from the diaspora.

Yaakov's major accomplishment during his time in Charan was infusing a reflection of Israel's holiness into a spiritually resistant environment. By laboring there and raising his family, he built a heavenly bridge between two opposing realms. The angels of Israel crossed the border not merely

to honor him but to mirror his achievement, reflecting the holiness he had infused into foreign land.

The deeper message is clear: Just as Yaakov brought the values and ambience of Israel into Charan, we, too, can uplift and transform our surroundings — bringing the spirit of Israel into our homes, workplaces and communities. This hints at a profound purpose of exile: to refine and elevate the world. In the future, as explained by the classical prophecies of our sages, the borders of Israel will expand due to the spiritual groundwork laid throughout Jewish history. A foreshadowing of this is found in Yaakov's episode, in line with the saying, "The actions of the forefathers are a model for their descendants."

### Preparing for war, hoping for peace

Yaakov's relationship with angels didn't end there. Later, as he prepares to return to the Holy Land after 20 years in Charan, he learns that his brother Eisav is on the warpath. The Torah recounts:

*"Yaakov dispatched angels ahead of him to his brother Esau, to the land of Se'ir, the field of Edom."* (Genesis 32:4)

Rashi notes that the term *malachim* here refers to actual angels, not human messengers, as the Torah would have used the more common term *shlichim* for the latter.

Yaakov's mission was not an ordinary diplomatic encounter. By sending angels, he demonstrated the seriousness of his approach, ensuring a spiritually potent representation to influence Eisav on a deeper level.

### A practical and spiritual strategy

Yaakov's approach was multifaceted. Alongside material preparations — sending gifts and preparing for war — he prayed and relied on spiritual strategies. Sending angels was a way to disarm Eisav's potentially destructive intentions, awakening a more positive response. Indeed, when they finally met, Eisav had a momentary change of heart and embraced him.

This teaches us an essential lesson: We all face situations when much feels at stake — important meetings, negotiations or personal encounters where we feel the weight of the outcome. It's easy to focus entirely on practical preparation, forgetting to prepare spiritually — through

prayer, Tehillim, extra study and more. Others may have the opposite void: sensing the fragility, becoming overwhelmed and turning to G-d for divine assistance, yet in their humility neglecting to use their head or actively ensure their efforts to work through natural channels are also in place.

Yaakov's story reminds us that true success comes from a balance — combining effort in the material realm with prayer and seeking divine assistance. Just as Yaakov relied on all fronts, so, too, when we meet stressful obstacles, we should engage in both practical and spiritual preparation when facing life's challenges.

Rabbi Dan Lewin is director of the nonprofit Maayan Chai Foundation. For information, visit [www.maayan-chai.org](http://www.maayan-chai.org).

## FRIED

continued from p.28

hands of Esau." The Talmud explains this to mean that when the voice of Jacob is strong and

powerful, with the sound of Torah reverberating in the study halls, then the "hands of Esau" are powerless to harm us. But when the voice of Jacob becomes weak, Esau's hands are then empowered and able to harm

us and take us over. The angel of Esau, by minimizing the support of Torah and touching the support of Jacob, crippling his legs, was preparing the stage for later troubles he would cause to the Jewish people.

Those individuals who, indeed, stand up and wholeheartedly and generously support the Torah become the "legs of Jacob," the support of the Torah itself. Upon them the Torah bestows the blessing, "*Baruch asher yakim es*

*divrei haTorah hazos* — Blessed is he who upholds this Torah!"

Sincerely,  
Yerachmiel Fried

Rabbi Yerachmiel D. Fried is dean of DATA-Dallas Area Torah Association.