



LOUGHTON SHUL
MORE THAN A SHUL

INSPIRE

CHUKAS - BALAK 12 TAMMUZ - 4 JULY WHO'S AFRAID OF BIG BAD OG?

By Rabbi Yossi Goldman

Believe it or not, there was a time when Moses was afraid. Yes, the greatest leader of all time—the man who fought and vanquished Pharaoh, split the sea, challenged the angels on high for the rights to the Torah—this spiritual colossus was afraid. Who and what could possibly frighten Moses? At the end of the Torah portion of Chukat (Numbers 19:1–22:1) we read that G-d reassured Moses, “Do not fear him.” Why did Moses need reassuring? The story is this. The Israelites were about to go into battle against Og, king of Bashan, a mighty warrior, a man who was literally a giant. And Moses was afraid to such an extent that the Almighty had to assuage his fears. Why did Og inspire such dread in the great prophet? Surely Moses had dealt with more formidable threats in his career. According to Rashi, the story goes back many years. Og (or, according to some commentaries, the ancestor of the current king) escaped from battle during the days of Abraham. This refugee then came to Abraham and informed him of his nephew Lot’s capture in battle. Abraham immediately went into action, fought the kings who had captured Lot, and successfully rescued him. Says Rashi: Moshe was afraid to do battle with Og, for the merit he had acquired when helping Abraham might stand him in good stead. In other words, the fact that Og had done a kindness to Abraham all those years ago might be considered of such special significance that he would be spiritually protected from harm in the merit of Abraham, the beneficiary of his good deed. But was it really such a good deed? The same Rashi (in his commentary on Genesis 14:13) informs us that Og’s motives were not altogether altruistic. Apparently, by telling Abraham that his nephew Lot had been taken captive, Og was actually hoping that Abraham would attempt to rescue his nephew and be killed in battle, so that Og could then take Abraham’s beautiful wife, Sarah, for himself. Hardly an act of magnanimous righteousness! Why would Moses be worried about the spiritual merit of conduct tainted by such ulterior motives? The answer, it would seem, is that although Og’s motives were far from unselfish, the fact is that he had done Abraham a kindness. Abraham was grateful for the information and was, in fact, successful in saving Lot from his captors. So, although Og’s reasons were less than noble, the end result of his deed was good, and Abraham considered it a favor. That’s why Moses was afraid that Og’s spiritual credits might protect him. And that is why the Almighty needed to put Moses’ mind at ease: Do not fear him, for into your hand have I given him, his entire people and his land. It is an incredible lesson in the power of chessed, acts of loving kindness. That one good turn, performed so many years back and out of sinister motivation, could cause Moses himself so much anxiety is surely proof positive of the awesome and long-term positive effects of a single act of kindness. Clearly, from a spiritual point of view, deeds of goodness and kindness have the power to protect us from harm. Performing a single act of compassion, or helping someone in need, really does have the capacity to shield us. In the end, we are not only helping them, but helping ourselves. Let this story inspire us to be a little more considerate to each other, and a little more helpful to those around us. And may our benevolence protect us and our families from any harm.

Who Made God?

A basic principle of physics is the law of conservation of matter. That has me wondering: If God created the world, then where did God come from?

The Aish Rabbi Replies:

Maimonides deals with this question at length. He answers that God is beyond our comprehension, and it is absurd to apply our realm of experience to His. Therefore it is inappropriate to discuss God in terms of past, future or being created, etc. To explain: Everything that is finite has to have been created, but God is infinite and therefore He did not have to be created. Everything in the physical world had a beginning at some point in the past. If you cut down a tree we can see how old it is by counting rings. As a person ages, i.e. he is now 20 years old, that means he had to be one year old at some time. Since everything in this world gets older, it means that everything was created at some point. How was it created? There are only two options: Either it made itself, or it was made by something else. Now, it couldn't make itself, because it did not yet exist. So it had to have been made by something else. Eventually, one must arrive at the conclusion that the world and all it contains was started by something that was not time-bound and therefore did not have a beginning. Since it did not have a beginning, it was not "created." A being that exists beyond time doesn't come from anywhere. He has always existed. If something created God, God would have a beginning and be finite, not infinite. Beyond time means having no beginning and no end, eternal. It means there is nothing that exists before God. "Before" is a time-bound quality that applies only to finite entities. Therefore God is called the "First Cause" - or the Prime Mover - the dimension that has no other dimension preceding it.

WISHING ALL THOSE WITH YARTZEIT THIS WEEK CHAIM ARUCHIM

Osborne Kay Husband Boruch Meir ben Yaakov 11 Tammuz
Rains Raymond Daughter Tova Shoshana Rivka bas Zalman 12 Tammuz
Rains Richard Sister Tova Shoshana Rivka bas Zalman 12 Tammuz
Rosenbaum Gary Wife Tova Shoshana Rivka bas Zalman 12 Tammuz
Scott Irvin Father Chutzkel ben Yonah 12 Tammuz
Weigler Marilyn Father Chutzkal ben Yonah 12 Tammuz
Williams Karen Mother Esther Maika bas Dovid 12 Tammuz
Wrightman Geoffrey Uncle 12 Tammuz
Kurt Alan Father Shmuel ben Avraham 14 Tammuz
Piatkus Brian Father Yosef ben Binyamin 15 Tammuz
Sugarman Susan Mother Chana Devora bas Moshe HaCohen 15 Tammuz
Curtis Daniel Father Shlomo Ben Mendel HaKohen 17 Tammuz
Piatkus Brian Brother Asher ben Yosef 18 Tammuz

SHUL TIMES

Shabbat Times

Candle Lighting

9:08pm

Shabbat Ends 10:35pm

Friday, 26 June

7pm with Rabbi Yanky

Kabbalat Shabbat on
zoom

Sunday, 28 June

10:00 am Cheder

PARSHA SUMMARY

Moses is taught the laws of the Red Heifer, whose ashes purify a person who has been contaminated by contact with a dead body. After 40 years of journeying through the desert, the people of Israel arrive in the wilderness of Zin. Miriam dies and the people thirst for water. G-d tells Moses to speak to a rock and command it to give water.

Moses gets angry at the rebellious Israelites and strikes the stone. Water issues forth, but Moses is told by G-d that neither he nor Aaron will enter the Promised Land. Aaron dies at Hor Hahar and is succeeded in the High Priesthood by his son Elazar. Venomous snakes attack the Israelite camp after yet another eruption of discontent in which the people "speak against G-d and Moses"; G-d tells Moses to place a brass serpent upon a high pole, and all who will gaze heavenward will be healed. The people sing a song in honor of the miraculous well that provided the water in the desert. Moses leads the people in battles against the Emorite kings Sichon and Og (who seek to prevent Israel's passage through their territory) and conquers their lands, which lie east of the Jordan. Balak, the King of Moab, summons the prophet Balaam to curse the people of Israel. On the way, Balaam is berated by his donkey, who sees the angel that G-d sends to block their way before Balaam does. Three times, from three different vantage points, Balaam attempts to pronounce his curses; each time, blessings issue instead. Balaam also prophesies on the end of days and the coming of Moshiach. The people fall prey to the charms of the daughters of Moab and are enticed to worship the idol Peor. When a high-ranking Israelite official publicly takes a Midianite princess into a tent, Pinchas kills them both, stopping the plague raging among the people.

HAFTORAH SUMMARY

Micah 5:6-6:8. This week's haftorah makes mention of the incident of Balak the king of Moab hiring the sorcerer Balaam to curse the Jewish people — the main topic of this week's Torah reading. The prophet Micah prophesies about what will occur after the war of Gog and Magog, the war which precedes the coming of the Messiah and the Final Redemption. "And the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many peoples — like dew sent by G-d, like torrents of rain upon vegetation that does not hope for any man and does not wait for the sons of men." The prophet describes how G-d will remove the idols and sorcerers and how He will destroy the Jews' enemies. The prophet Micah then goes on to rebuke the Jewish people for not observing G-d's commandments, calling as witness the "mountains and hills" — a reference to the Patriarchs and Matriarchs — and reminding them of the great things G-d had done for them. He took them out of Egypt and replaced the curses that Balaam son of Beor wanted to utter against them with blessings. The Jewish people respond by saying that they do not know how to serve G-d and ask for guidance. The prophet reminds them of the Torah, and that all they need to do is contained within it: "He has told you, O man, what is good, and what G-d demands of you: but to do justice, love kindness, and walk discreetly with your G-d."

JEWISH HUMOR

A large two-engine train was crossing New York and at the helm was a train engineer who had recently moved from Israel — Itzik Hadari. After they had gone some distance, one of the engines broke down. "No problem," Itzik said and carried on at half power. Farther on down the line, the other engine broke down and the train came to a standstill. Itzik decided he should inform the passengers about why the train had stopped, and made the following announcement, "Ladies and gentlemen, I have some good news and some bad news. The bad news is that both engines have failed, and we will be stuck here for some time. The good news is that you decided to take the train and not fly."

RIDDLE OF THE WEEK

What two things did the Mayflower bring in November that the Native Americans did not want?

Answer to last week's Riddle.
Your word

STORY TIME

Ibrahim the Muslim and Refael the Jew had been business partners for many years. Ibrahim, who lived in the Tunisian city of Kairoan, where the soil was excellent and the price of produce low, was Refael's wholesale supplier of wheat and barley. Refael would then resell the grain in his city of Tunis. Although Ibrahim was outwardly pleasant and polite toward Refael, in his heart he was bitterly jealous of his success. One day Ibrahim came up with a plan. "I'm getting too old for this business," he told Refael. "Why don't you come to Kairoan and buy the grain yourself? I'll tell you where to go and introduce you to all the right people." Refael looked at his partner in surprise. "But you know that it is forbidden for a Jew to set foot in Kairoan..." "Nonsense!" Ibrahim reassured him with a wave of the hand. "You speak Arabic fluently. If you dress like one of us, no one will ever know that you are Jewish." Back in the not so distant past, Kairoan had been a bustling center of Jewish life. With its fertile soil and well-developed commercial infrastructure, the city had been an important stop along the North African trade route. In fact, there had been so many Jewish merchants in Kairoan that they had formed the backbone of the city's economy. The Arabs had even coined a clever phrase: "A marketplace without Jews is like a judge without witnesses..." Gradually, however, the Muslims had begun to make life difficult for their Jewish neighbors. Many Jews simply abandoned their homes and businesses and settled elsewhere. But even this was not enough; they declared Kairoan a "holy" city and off-limits to anyone Jewish. The law had stood for several generations. Despite some misgivings, Refael agreed to the plan. He dressed up as an Arab and nonchalantly walked through the gates of Kairoan. Ibrahim quickly led the Jew into a narrow alleyway. "Stay here, I'll be right back," Ibrahim told him. A few minutes later he returned with two policemen. "There he is, the despicable Jew who dared set foot in our holy city!" he cried, pointing at Refael. By the time Refael figured out that his partner had betrayed him, his hands and feet were in chains. The policemen then threw him into a dark cell. For three days and nights Refael languished in his cell without anyone even checking to see if he was alive. Lucky for him, he still had his knapsack, so he was able to eat some food he had brought along. Refael's fourth night in jail was Shabbat. After making Kiddush on the last of his bread Refael began to sing zemirot, the traditional Shabbat songs. Tears rolled down his cheeks as he thought of happier times and circumstances. When he had finished singing, he began to recite the Psalms he knew by heart. Suddenly, there was a rustling sound from the doorway. Refael held his breath, too frightened to breathe. A minute later he could discern a thin strip of light at the edge of the room. When he went over to investigate he found that the door was open a crack. With a slight push the door was completely open. His heart pounding, Refael crept outside and began to run as fast as his feet could take him through the darkened streets. When he reminded himself that he was dressed as an Arab, he slowed down to avoid arousing suspicion. By the next morning he was already home in Tunis. Refael knew that his life was still in danger; the police would surely come after him when they realized that he had escaped. He decided to seek the advice of the saintly Rabbi Yeshua Bassis of Tunis. "Go to your house and wait there," the Rabbi reassured him. "Everything will be all right." Now, at that time the ruler of Tunisia was Chamuda Pasha, a wise and temperate leader who paid no attention to the Muslims' incitement against the Jews. On the contrary, he was grateful for the Jews' contributions to society, and considered Rabbi Yeshua Bassis his personal friend. When Rabbi Yeshua told the Pasha what had happened to Refael, he immediately issued an order for "the rebellious Jew who dared to enter Kairoan" to be brought before him. A few days later the police were forced to admit defeat. Embarrassed by their incompetence, they stood before the Pasha empty-handed. At that very moment the Pasha sent for Refael, who was waiting in the next room. The Pasha declared to his shocked audience, "G-d made a miracle and released him from prison. No doubt, it is also a sign that He wants the Jews to return to Kairoan..." The decree against the Jews was rescinded, and the Jews of Tunisia were not restricted as to where they could live.

FOOD 4 THE SOUL

Wherever light radiates, it does not find darkness. For light, darkness does not exist. Wherever darkness spreads, it does not find light. For darkness, light does not exist. In a time yet to come, the two shall meet and know one another in perfect union. At that nexus we will see the One who created all things. In the meantime, we glimpse a premonition of that wonder. For this is the human being: A breath of the divine within a material body; light and darkness face-to-face within a single being.