

Parshat Lech Lecha: Og's Odyssey

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

Summary by Channie Koplowitz Stein

The Torah relates that a survivor came to Avraham and informed him that his nephew had been taken captive. Who was this mysterious survivor, and why did he choose to relay this information?

According to the Midrash, the man was Og, a survivor of the Great Flood. Rabbi Wolbe explains that Og was saved because he did not succumb to the sexual depravity of his generation. Even here, Og's informing Avraham of Lot's capture was because he wanted Avraham to die in battle so that he could marry Sarah in a permitted way. In spite of these ulterior motives, Hashem rewarded Og with an additional 400 years of life, notes Rabbi Y. L. Chasman.

Every person is a composite of the lowest and highest elements, dust and the breath of God. That dust is the same material from which animals were created, and thus retains within us the base animal instincts. Only through Torah can we discipline ourselves to overcome these instincts and develop our potential for holiness. Tallelei Orot quoting Rav Shach warns us that there is constant tension within us, and we must always be aware that even the loftiest intentions can be tainted with personal motives. Og represents this duality within each of us.

Rabbi Y. Levovitz suggests we seek out role models who are in control of the negative behavior we are trying to correct. If we can ask them how they can control themselves in situations which are so challenging for us, we will find guidance.

If Og had ulterior motives, why was he rewarded? Even *mitzvot* performed without the proper intention are always rewarded. The wicked may perform some good deeds, but their intentions are based on physical motivations. Therefore, explains Rabbi Tatz, their reward will be granted in the only world they value. On the other hand, the righteous perform their deeds with the motivation of coming closer to God. Hence, they may suffer in this world for their few sins while earning their rewards in the eternal world. It is only through joining the intentions of the mind with the physical acts that one can achieve transcendence and affect both this world and the next.

Avraham was called *Halvri*, the one from the other side because his values were completely different from the values of everyone else. How did he get this way? From a very early age, he practiced reflection and contemplation, writes Daas Schrage, citing Rambam. By observing nature, Avraham realized there had

to a Creator and he became the teacher of monotheism for all time. Akiva the shepherd grew to become Rabbi Akiva, after observing how constant drips of water ate away at solid rock. We, too, must learn to pause and contemplate within our world and recognize God's presence everywhere, and to act with that awareness at all times, writes the Manchester Rav.

Avraham risked his life to save Lot out of gratitude for Lot's not revealing to Pharaoh that Sarah was Avraham's wife. It is this sense of gratitude that also set Avraham apart from others and continues to be the hallmark of *Yehudim* (those who offer thanks), Jews, throughout history. According to Daas Schrage, Og knew this history and counted on Avraham to act on this gratitude and go to war. Similarly, we are all called upon to acknowledge any kindness we receive, regardless of the person's intention, says Rabbi C. Shmuelevitz.

The Mikdash Halevi notes that the survivor was none other than the angel Michael who appeared to Avraham because Avraham was the *Ivri*, the one to stand up for his beliefs. As descendants of Avraham, we too can merit Heavenly assistance when we stand up for our beliefs.

Sorah's Laughter Part II

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

The Ramban says Sarah didn't see the angels and didn't hear their message directly from them, and that is why she denied laughing at Hashem's words. She did not know it was from Hashem. Avraham did not tell Sarah as he reasoned that she was a prophetess and if Hashem wanted to tell her directly, He could have told her. If He kept it from her, there must have been a reason.

The commentators explain that the moment after Sarah laughed, she realized it was wrong and repented. True repentance erases sin. Sarah could say she didn't laugh because the act was no longer extant. The Sefas Emes refers to the laughter of Sarah in *Bereishit* and

Devarim. In *Devarim*, the *Torah* lists the people who were exempt from joining the army. This included people who were afraid of their sins. The Sefas Emes quotes the *Chiddushei Harim* that a sign that someone was forgiven for his sin is when he's no longer afraid of it. The more the sin departs from the person, the more he ceases worrying about it and the closer he can come to Hashem. If he is still afraid, it means a part of the sin is still inside him. He hasn't yet done complete *teshuvah* and cannot yet feel the presence of Hashem that will overcome the fear. The Sefas Emes asks, shouldn't a person who is afraid of sin always be fearful? The right level of fear is sensing the awesomeness of Hashem, not the fear punishment. Repenting means coming to a

point where we cannot comprehend the idea of sinning. We are afraid of a sin when it poses a challenge and we aren't sure how we will withstand it. *Teshuva* means becoming a different person who cannot even relate to the sin. When accused of the sin, we can rightfully say we didn't do. This is the level Sarah reached.

When Sarah denied her laughter, Avraham countered that she did laugh. What did he mean to imply? There is *teshuvah* from fear, recognizing the awesomeness of Hashem, and there is *teshuvah* from love which transforms sins to merits. Sarah did *teshuvah* out of fear. Avraham wanted her to go beyond that to

Continued on page 2

Sorah's Laughter Part II

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn
Continued from page 1

repentance out of *ahava* (love), to admit that she did sin so that it would become a merit.

In truth, the laughter was necessary, and the proof is that Hashem called the child Yitzchak. Sarah herself later said, "*Zechok asa li Elokim.*" She turned the laughter into something positive. Why was it all necessary? There was a need before Yitzchak was born to introduce into the foundation of the Jewish nation the spiritual DNA of *teshuva*. Yitzchak symbolized din, justice and self-control. He only asked from Hashem what he deserved

and did not wait for mercy or compassion. But the Jewish people cannot exist this way. Therefore, before Yitzchak's birth, the forefathers needed to implant into our spiritual DNA the concept of *teshuva m'ahava*. This combination of mercy and justice would be the foundation for all generations. The Sefas Emes concludes that he was called Yitzchak so that the sweetness of mercy would be implanted into his essence of strict justice and the combination would be rooted in our genes.

The birth of the Jewish people was meant to be supernatural. We are not bound to the laws of nature. For a non-Jew to laugh and claim he didn't laugh would not be true. It's beyond nature in terms of our relationship with Hashem. Every sin is death, a detachment from Hashem, the source of life. *Teshuva* is the resurrection of the dead. Hashem deliberately did not speak to Sarah nor did she know that angels had brought the tidings. This was so that the whole process of *teshuva* would take place and be implanted within us.

Muktza, Part 7: Muktza Machmat Gufo Part II

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Shimon Isaacson

Can you convert something that is *muktza machmat gufo* into non-*muktza* so that it can be used on Shabbat? One cannot decide on Shabbat to pick up a random stone and use it to play marbles. This is based on a principle discussed in the Gemara in Beitza and Shabbat. The *halacha* is that if something is *muktza* at the onset of *Shabbat* it retains its status all day long. This becomes very relevant when studying the *halachot* of a basis. A tray that supports candlesticks remains *muktza* all Shabbat even when the candles are no longer burning. This is because what triggers the prohibitions of *Shabbat*, is the onset of *Shabbat*. The Gemara discusses several conditions needed to convert a *muktza* item into non-*muktza*. As the object has no status of a vessel, one must do a physical act to it to transform it. If you want to convert branches of a tree that were cut down for the purpose of fuel into a chair, you must tie them together. This is in keeping with Rashi's view. Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel disagrees and says you only need *choshev* (intention) before *Shabbat* to use the object for the permitted purpose. Rav Asi's opinion is that you have to actually use the object for the permitted purpose

before *Shabbat*. For example, you have to physically sit down on the branches. Even if you have no formal intent, the fact that you sat on it indicates the nature of the object. Tosfos concludes that Rav Shimshon Hazaken ruled like Rav Asi. It is sufficient to use it beforehand. Rabbeinu Tam concurs with Rashi that one must do something to the item to convert it.

When you set aside a *muktza* for non *muktza* use, do you need to set it aside permanently? Is it permitted to set it aside for one day? The Ran says it depends on the object. There are some objects that one would normally use for one day. In that case, it's enough to set aside the object for one *Shabbat* because that is the normal use for the object. For example, the normal use for pieces of wool is to make garments. It's not normal to use it for insulation. Therefore, if you want to use it for insulation, says the Ran, it has to be in a permanent fashion.

The Shulchan Aruch writes that branches cut for the purpose of firewood are *muktza*. If you sat on it a little before Shabbat, even without having anything in mind, it's enough. Certainly, if you did an action or had intention to use it in

a permitted way, it would not be *muktza*. The Shulchan Aruch is stringent with bricks as its inherent nature is to use it for building and therefore something more formal is needed to convert it to non-*muktza*. The Rema disagrees and treats it as any other *muktza machmat gufo*.

The Shulchan Aruch prohibits covering a bottle with a stone or a wedge of wood as they are *muktza*. Even if you had intention before Shabbat, it's still *muktza* unless you said it aside for that use permanently. One *Shabbat* is not enough. If the object is normally used for a permitted purpose, it would be adequate to set it aside for one *Shabbat* according to the Ran. The most stringent view is that of Rabbeinu Tam who holds that one must do an action to the object itself. According to *halacha*, we are lenient and assume intention is enough.

It used to be that people would stick pennies in their Penny Loafers. Could one do this on *Shabbat*? If this was the normal use for shoes, then setting aside the penny for one *Shabbat* would be permitted. If it was no longer the style, then one would need to set aside the penny permanently for this purpose.