

## Noah

### *Killing the Giant*

*And only Noah remained, along with all those with him on the ark.*

Bereishis 7:26

When Moshe went up to Sinai to get the Torah, he was confronted by some angels.<sup>1</sup> They were asking Hashem to please rethink giving the Torah to men, and rather leave it in Heaven with the angels. These angels in fact had begun their complaints at the beginning of time. When Hashem decided to make man, these angels complained that this would be a mistake. Men are filled with falsehood. They fight. They are insincere. Why give them the Torah? Moshe was the one who corrected their mistake.

Hashem turned to Moshe and said, “Moshe, give them an answer,” and Moshe did. He told those angels, “The Torah says, ‘Honor your father and your mother’<sup>2</sup> – do you have parents? The Torah says, ‘Do not murder,’<sup>3</sup> – do you battle jealous feeling<sup>4</sup> that might lead you to commit murder?” You see, angels are far wiser than men. They have perfect memories, and they certainly know all the Torah. But they do not experience challenge. A person can know everything that there is to know about honoring one’s parents – every Gemara and Rambam. He can know everything that every Torah scholar has said about a topic, and have brilliant intellectual insights into every part of the subject, but if he does not have parents to honor – something worthwhile to challenge his character with accomplishing – he cannot use the Torah.

Moshe showed the angels, and more importantly the Jewish people, that what qualifies humans to receive the Torah is, in fact, their weaknesses and the fact that they face challenge.<sup>5</sup> That we are human means that we have something to earn, and something to perfect. Moshe showed that it was, indeed, worthwhile to create man – and not *despite* his imperfections, but precisely *because* of them!

Let us look at a fellow called Og. The Torah writes clearly that only Noah and his family remained alive after the Flood. Yet we are taught in the Gemara<sup>6</sup> that hidden in the verse<sup>7</sup> is the fact that Og,

<sup>1</sup> Shabbos 88b.

<sup>2</sup> Shemos 20:12; Dvarim 5:16.

<sup>3</sup> Shemos 20:13; Dvarim 5:17.

<sup>4</sup> Though Rashi to Bereishis 1:26 seems to indicate that there could be jealous feeling in angels, this is addressed by Maharal in *Gur Aryeh* there.

<sup>5</sup> See R. Avraham Palaggi’s *Avraham Es Einav* on Shabbos 88b, where he says that in Hashem instruction to Moshe of *bachzer lahem tshuva* – give them an answer – Hashem hinted to Moshe, “Respond to them: *tshuva*.” Hashem was telling Moshe to express the levels that man can reach as a result of his follies, for we know what heights one can reach through *tshuva*.

<sup>6</sup> Zvachim 113b

<sup>7</sup> See *Baal Haturim*, that the expression “only Noah” hints to Og as well, for “*ach Noah*” shares the same *gematria* as “Og.” The same is brought by *Daas Zekenim Mibaalei Hatsofos* to Bamidbar 21:34.

**Commented [Sara Rose1]:** TYPESETTING: Please enlarge the footnote numbers to be of normal size, matching the rest of the text. Thanks.

eventual King of Bashan, made it through the Flood as well! Og was kept alive by Noah.<sup>8</sup> He was later killed by Moshe.<sup>9</sup> What is the meaning of this? Why is it that Noah kept alive the very man whom Moshe was to kill?

Noah and Moshe were similar. They both had what the Torah calls a *teivah*.<sup>10</sup> While Noah had water fall on him for forty days and nights,<sup>11</sup> Moshe spent the same amount of time receiving the Torah,<sup>12</sup> which is compared to water.<sup>13</sup> The *Zohar*<sup>14</sup> speaks of the contrast between Noah and Moshe. Noah, though he saved himself, did nothing for his generation. Moshe, however, put it all on the line, telling Hashem, “Wipe me out of your book”<sup>15</sup> if you do not save the Jewish people. For this, the Flood was called *mei Noah*,<sup>16</sup> the waters of Noah, for on some level, Noah bore responsibility for the negative behavior of the people that he could have potentially influenced. The Talmud<sup>17</sup> tells us that Moshe is hinted to in the verse telling us about Noah, and Hashem wanting to bring the Flood. In fact, the *Tikkunei Zohar*<sup>18</sup> teaches us that Noah was reincarnated as Moshe. When the Torah writes that Moshe was named “Moshe” because he was saved from the water, referring to how the daughter of Pharaoh took him from the waters of the Nile,<sup>19</sup> it is also hinting to the waters of the Flood, from which he was saved long before that. It explains that when Moshe said “Erase me,” he corrected the flaw of Noah. By putting himself on the line for others, he corrected his shortcoming that he displayed the first time that his soul was here. In fact, writes the Arizal, this is remarkably hidden in the very words of the Torah, for the spelling of the word “erase me,” *Macheini*, (*mem, ches, nun, and yod*) are the same four letters that make up the two words *mei Noah* – the waters of Noah!<sup>20</sup>

In light of this connection, we must take a serious look at the fact that Noah kept Og alive, and Moshe finished him off. What is the message behind this?

Man is a being that lives in society. “It is not good for man to be alone.”<sup>21</sup> His job is to go from being a lonely person to a person who can relate to others. When Hillel was asked to teach the entire Torah in one principle, he said, “What you do not like done to you, do not do a friend.”<sup>22</sup> Rashi<sup>23</sup> teaches that this means that just as one does not like it when others don’t listen to him, so does Hashem not like it when you don’t listen to Him. Hillel teaches us to be sensitive – just as we relate to others, we must relate to Hashem, for He is our “Friend” as well. The relationship with someone other than

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8 *Pirkei Dirabbi Eliezer* 22 explains that Og was, therefore, a slave to Noah and his children, since he was saved along with him. See also Netziv’s comments in *Haamek Davar* to Bereishis 7:1, that Noah brought along slaves onto the Ark, for his merit allowed him to bring people along with him, whom he needed for personal reasons.

9 Bamidbar 21:35

10 Bereishis 6:14, Shemos 2:3

11 Bereishis 7:12

12 Shemos 24:18

13 Bava Kamma 17a; Avodah Zarah 5b

14 .Vol 1, 67b

15 Shemos 32:32

16 Yeshaya 54:9

17 Chullin 139b

18 69, 113a, see also *Megaleh Amukos*, Veeschanan, *ofen* 167, where he explains that Noah only had the soul of Moshe for a time.

19 Shemos 2:10

20 *Likkutei Torah*, Ki Sisa; see also *Megaleh Amukos*, *ibid.*, and *Kedushas Levi* to Noah s.v. *ki oscha raissi*.

21 Bereishis 2:18

22 Shabbos 31a

23 Ad loc.

oneself is fundamental to our mission in this world.

At Sinai, the entire Jewish nation was together like “one person with one heart.”<sup>24</sup> This was the prerequisite for receiving the Torah. The very first thing that Hashem told the Jewish people after the giving of the Torah was “return to your tents” – the Jewish people were sent to resume living as families. The ability to relate to others, as only humans can, is something that the Torah demands. The Torah teaches us to relate to others, both humans, and the ultimate *Other*, Hashem Himself, which is what we were created for. This is a uniquely human ability. Marriage can only be for humans. Sinai was compared to the wedding of the Jewish people and Hashem.<sup>25</sup> We can marry one another – and we can even “marry” Hashem, so to speak. Angels can do neither.

So who was Og? Our Sages teach that, in fact, Og was a descendant of those angels mentioned at the creation of the world.<sup>26</sup> When the world was falling apart, in the times approaching the Flood, the angels told Hashem, We can do better than those humans at fulfilling the Torah; give us bodies and send us down! But those angels failed miserably. They wound up falling for “the daughters of man,”<sup>27</sup> and they fathered offspring. Og was one of those offspring. He, however, managed to maintain a level of purity in areas of illicit relationships that others in his generation failed to do,<sup>28</sup> so Noah spared him from the Flood. Og held on to the back of the ark, where Noah fed him,<sup>29</sup> and Hashem even cooled off the waters around the ark so that he would not be scalded to death.<sup>30</sup>

Perhaps we can explain why Noah was the one to keep Og alive. Noah lived his life in isolation. Rather than taking responsibility for those around him, as the *Zohar* teaches he should have, he instead focused on his own perfection. He was therefore blamed for the Flood. It is such behavior that keeps an Og alive. The myth that an angel is better than a man is Og. He is the one who seems to maintain purity. But that purity is meaningless when it is not a product of withstanding challenge. Og represents the myth that living as an angel would, in fact, be better than living as a man. And when Moshe is told to fight him, Moshe is actually frightened and needs reassurance.<sup>31</sup> Moshe is the one whose entire life is about standing up to Og, and showing that it is man that deserves the Torah, and not angels. Moshe is here to kill Og,<sup>32</sup> to teach us that the great man is not an angel, but, in fact, the one with the greatest drive to do wrong – and the greatest resolve to fight those impulses. Noah, who is the one to keep Og alive, did so by living as an angel. By not involving himself in society and taking responsibility for others, he perpetuated the myth that it would be better to be an angel than human, and thus kept Og alive. But when Noah came back as Moshe, this time to turn the *mei Noah* into *macheni*, he taught us that it is mankind that is the greatest creation ever. It is we who can reach perfection. We don’t strive

24 Rashi, Shemos 19:2

25 Tanchuma, Ekev 11; *Psiketa Rabbasi* 5 s.v. *Davar acher: Vayibi biyom kalos Moshe mah kasar*. See also *Maharsha* to Kesuvos 7b, s.v. *pirush livrichas eirusin*.

26 Niddah 61a, *Pirkei Dirabbi Eliezer*, ibid.; Yalkut Shimoni 44 quoting Midrash Abkir

27 Bereishis 6:1–4. See Rashi.

28 *Tzidkas Hatzaddik*, 96

29 *Pirkei Dirabbi Eliezer*, ibid.; Targum Yonason to Bereishis 6:4.

30 Zvachim 113b

31 Bamidbar 21:34: “Hashem said to Moshe, ‘Do not fear.’”

32 See *Regel Yesharu* (*samech*, 18) where R. Zvi Elimelech of Dinov elaborates upon the *Megaleh Amukos* Veeshchanan, *ofen* 130, and explains that Og is the *klippah* (husk or negative force) that is opposite Moshe, and is at the back of him, “facing his neck,” and that Sichon is the same to Aaron. Perhaps this sheds light on the fascinating fact, first pointed out to me by Mr. Judd Magilnick, that the letters that are written on the back of the mezuzah, *kuzu bimuchsaz kuzu* are the combined *gematria* of Sichon and Og! See also *Agra Dipirka* 235, and *Bishvili Nirra Haolam* of Rabbi Shmuel Brazil, p. 123.

to simply be angels, we strive to be humans. And a human who acts like an angel out of his own free will is far greater than any angel could ever be.

On Shavous, some have a custom to eat milk products, and then, after that, meat. When angels visited Avraham, they ate milk and meat together.<sup>33</sup> We want to emphasize that the Torah was given to people, who do have physical boundaries, and not angels, so we make a clear separation of milk and meat on this day, which angels cannot do.<sup>34</sup> People are the ones who got the Torah, and when we learn that, and care for other people as Moshe did, we will then truly deserve the Torah. It is the reaching out to others that makes us ready for the Torah. It is our responsibility as people to devote ourselves to those Jewish people who need us, for they are the only reason that we have any connection to the Torah in the first place. Noah did not save his generation, but Moshe did, and he is the one who brought us the Torah. We have so many brothers and sisters who need us to bring them close to Torah. It is our job to save them – it is our ability to do this that got us the Torah.

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33 According to Midrash Shocher Tov 8. See also *Shita Miktubeitz* to Bechoros 6b, *os* 2, citing Yerushalmi, and *Birchas Peretz* to Vayera.

34 *Be'er Heitev, Orach Chaim*, 494