



## Wonders of the Torah from our Illustrious Teacher the Arizal

# Moshe Rabeinu Feared Og the King of Bashan because He Contained the Holy Spark of Rabbi Shimon ben Netanel

This week's parsha is parshas Chukas. We learn that Moshe Rabeinu was extremely afraid to go to war against Og the King of Bashan. So much so that HKB"H had to reassure him. Here are the pertinent pesukim (Bamidbar 21, 33):

"ויפנו ויעלו דרך הבשן ויצא עוג מלך הבשן לקראתם הוא וכל עמו למלחמה אדרעי, ויאמר ה' אל משה אל תירא אותו כי בידך נתתי אותו ואת כל עמו ואת ארצו, ועשית לו כאשר עשית לסיחון מלך האמורי אשר יושב בחשבון."

They turned and ascended by way of Bashan; Og, King of Bashan, went out against them, he and his entire people, to wage war at Edrei. Hashem said to Moshe, "Do not fear him, for into your hand I have delivered him, his entire people, and his land; you shall do to him as you did to Sichon, King of the Emori, who dwells in Cheshbon."

Why was Moshe more afraid of Og than he was of Sichon? Rashi explains: **Moshe was afraid to wage war lest the merit of Avraham stand on his (Og's) behalf.** As it says (Bereishis 14, 13): "And the fugitive came"—this was Og, who escaped from the Rephaim, whom Chedarlaomer and his colleagues struck at Ashterot-Karnaim. As it says (Devarim 3, 11): "Only Og, King of Bashan, was left from the remaining Rephaim. We are taught in the Gemara that Og informed Avraham that his nephew Lot had been captured by the four kings; this is the merit that concerned Moshe Rabeinu. Here is the passage in the Gemara (Nidah 61a):

"ויאמר ה' אל משה אל תירא, מכדי סיחון ועוג אחי הוּו, דאמר מר סיחון ועוג בני אחיה בר שמחזאי הוּו, מאי שנא מעוג דקמסתפי, ומאי שנא מסיחון דלא קמסתפי. אמר רבי יוחנן אמר רבי שמועון בן יוחי, מתשובתו של אותו צדיק אתה יודע מה היה בלבו, אמר שמוא תעמוד לו זכות של אברהם אבינו, שנאמר ויבוא הפליט ויגד לאברהם העברי, ואמר רבי יוחנן זה עוג שפלט מדור המבול."

Hashem said to Moshe, "Do not be afraid." Now, Sichon and Og were brothers, as the Master said: Sichon and Og were sons of Achiyah, son of Shamchazai. What was different about Og that he (Moshe) feared him, and what was different about Sichon that he did not fear him? Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai: From the answer Hashem gave to that tzaddik (Moshe), you know what was in his heart—i.e., what gave Moshe cause for concern. He (Moshe) said to himself: Perhaps the merit of Avraham Avinu will stand up for him (Og). As it states: "The fugitive came and informed Avram the Ivri (Hebrew)." And Rabbi Yochanan said: This fugitive was Og, who escaped from the punishment of the generation of the mabul.

### The Holy Spark of Shimon ben Netanel Was Concealed within Og

Our master, the Arizal—who reveals to all of Yisrael insights from the concealed, mystical dimension of the Torah—teaches us a novel reason for Moshe Rabeinu's trepidation concerning Og the King of Bashan. Through his "ruach hakodesh," he perceived that the nitzotz (spark from the neshamah) of Rabbi Shimon ben Netanel, who

feared sin, was concealed within Og. This is taught in the Mishnah (Avos 2, 10):

”חמשה תלמידים היו לו לרבן יוחנן בן זכאי, ואלו הן, רבי אליעזר בן הורקנוס, רבי יהושע בן חנניא, ורבי יוסי הכהן, רבי שמעון בן נתנאל, ורבי אלעזר בן ערך. הוא היה מונה שבחם, רבי אליעזר בן הורקנוס, בור סוד שאינו מאבד טיפה, רבי יהושע בן חנניא, אשרי יולדתו, רבי יוסי הכהן, חסיד, רבי שמעון בן נתנאל, ירא חטא, ורבי אלעזר בן ערך, כמעין המתגבר.”

**Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai had five disciples. They were: Rabbi Eliezer ben Hurkanos, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chanania, Rabbi Yossi HaKohen, Rabbi Shimon ben Netanel and Rabbi Elazar ben Arach. He used to enumerate their praises: Rabbi Eliezer ben Hurkanos is like a cemented cistern that loses not a drop; Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chanania, praiseworthy is she who bore him; Rabbi Yossi HaKohen is a scrupulously pious person; Rabbi Shimon ben Netanel fears sin: and Rabbi Elazar ben Arach is like a spring flowing stronger and stronger.**

Now, in general, Og is described in Scripture as “עוג מלך” “הבשן”. According to the Arizal, the name **בשן** is an acronym for **שִׁמְעוֹן בֶּן נִתְנָאֵל**, alluding to the fact that his holy nitzotz was concealed within Og. As such, Moshe Rabeinu was afraid to kill him lest he also kill the holy spark of Rabbi Shimon ben Netanel. (It is interesting to note that this holy Tanna is not mentioned anywhere else in the Mishnayos or in Talmud Bavli except in this Mishnah.) This is explained in Sha’ar HaGilgulim (Intro. 38) by Rabeinu Chaim Vital, who heard it from his mentor, the Arizal. He asserts that the right and left arms of Moshe Rabeinu were the roots of two sacred Tannaim, who were leaders of Yisrael; all three of them lived 120 years. One was Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai, and the other was Rabbi Akiva. This explains why Moshe Rabeinu, a”h, wanted the Torah to be delivered by rabbi Akiva. In Chesed L’Avraham, authored by the divine kabbalist Rabbi Avraham Azulai (the great grandfather of the Chida), he interpret the reassurance given to Moshe by HKB”H as follows: **“Do not fear”**—do not to worry about the fate of Rabbi Shimon ben Netanel, **“for I have delivered him into your hand”**—namely, your right arm, the the root of his mentor Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai.

Here are sources for the fact that Moshe Rabeinu, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai, and Rabbi Akiva all lived exactly 120 years. We have learned in the Gemara (R.H. 31b): **”כל שנותיו של רבן יוחנן בן זכאי מאה ועשרים שנה, ארבעים שנה עסק בפרקמטיא, All the years of Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai totaled 120 years; during the first forty years, he engaged in business; during the next forty years, he learned Torah; and only during the last forty years did he teach.**

In Sifri (Zot HaBerachah), we find the following regarding the passuk (Devarim 34, 7): **“Moshe was 120 years old when he died.” He is one of four who died at the age of 120. They are Moshe, and Hillel the Elder, and Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai, and Rabbi Akiva. Moshe was in Mitzrayim 40 years, and in Midyan 40 years, and led Yisrael 40 years. Hillel the Elder came up from Bavel at the age of 40, and attended sages for 40 years, and led Yisrael for 40 years. Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai engaged in business for 40 years, and attended sages for 40 years, and led Yisrael for 40 years. Rabbi Akiva (who was 40y.o. when he began learning Torah) studied Torah 40 years and led Yisrael 40 years.**

In the sefer Kehillas Yaakov, authored by the divine kabbalist Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Yalish (a pupil of the Chozeh of Lublin), he explains that Rabbi Shimon ben Netanel is described as one who fears sin, because he was originally mired in the klipah of Og the King of Bashan. Hence, it was imperative for him to be very wary of sin, so that the klipos would not return and take control of him.

### The Wonderful Teaching of the Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh

As a loyal student in the presence of his master, I would like to present to my esteemed audience with the utmost reverence an interpretation I was graced with by Hashem. We were taught by the Arizal that HKB”H comforted Moshe Rabeinu with the remark: **”אל תירא אותו כי בידך נתתי אותו”**. How did this allay his fear that by killing Og he might kill the holy nitzotz of Rabbi Shimon ben Netanel? As explained above, this simply meant that no harm would come to him,

**“for I have delivered him into your hand”**—i.e., he is destined to be under the tutelage of Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai, who is associated with your right arm.

In my humble opinion, the profound intent of the Arizal can be explained based on a wonderful insight found in the writings of the Ohr HaChaim hakadosh. He comments on the statement of Bilam harasha (Bamidbar 23, 10): **“תמות נפשי מות ישרים ותהי אחריתי כמוהו”**—**may my soul die the death of the upright, and may my end be like his!** In the Gemara (A.Z. 25a), our blessed sages interpret this to mean that he wished to die like the holy Avos—Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov—who are described as upright—“yesharim.”

The Ohr HaChaim hakadosh provides us with a mystical interpretation of Bilam’s pronouncement: **“May my soul die the death of the upright.”** He asserts that Bilam’s words were not scripted on his own but rather via “ruach hakodesh” from a holy spark within him. Instead of dying at the hands of the Malach Hamaves, he yearned to be killed by the upright people of Yisrael. For, if I die in this manner: **“My end might be like his!”**—i.e., the goodness within his neshamah would achieve tikun by attaching itself to Yisrael. The Ohr HaChaim hakadosh explains that every klipah has a spark of kedushah within it that sustains it. Thus, when an evil person is killed by a member of Yisrael, that good spark may be cleansed of its impurities. Occasionally, that good spark will attach to the Yisrael that killed its owner. Hence, Bilam prayed: **“תמות נפשי מות ישרים ותהי אחריתי כמוהו”**—to attach to a member of Yisrael and be like him.

According to the Ohr HaChaim hakadosh, this, indeed, is what happened to the good nitzotz in Bilam. He was killed by Pinchas ben Elazar (Targum YoNasan, Bamidbar 31, 8), and his good nitzotz achieved its tikun by reincarnating into the donkey of his killer’s later namesake Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair. The tikun could not occur immediately with Bilam’s death, because the nitzotz was so badly sullied by Bilam that it required several gilgulim to cleanse it. Ultimately, however, it reached the donkey of Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair from where it could be restored to its original status.

This illuminates for us the remark HKB”H made to Moshe Rabeinu: **“אל תירא אותו כי בידך נתתי אותו”**. Your fear is unfounded. For, on the contrary, specifically by personally killing Og, the holy nitzotz within him belonging to Rabbi Shimon ben Netanel will attach to your arm—the one related to Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai; and Rabbi Shimon will ultimately become his pupil. So, instead of killing him, you will actually be saving his holy nitzotz from the klipah.

### **Moshe Rabeinu Inculcated Yiras Shamayim in Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai**

Let us continue to explore the wonders of the Torah and elaborate on HKB”H’s remark: **“אל תירא אותו כי בידך נתתי אותו”**. We will see that Moshe Rabeinu, with his kedushah, inculcated his “yiras shamayim” into Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai. This empowered Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai to instill in his pupil, Rabbi Shimon ben Netanel, a fear of sin.

We will begin with a teaching in the Gemara (Berachos 33b): **“הכל בידי שמים חוץ מיראת שמים, שנאמר ועתה ישראל מה ה' אלקיך שואל מעמך כי אם ליראה”**. **Everything is controlled by Heaven except for “yiras Shamayim,” as it says (Devarim 10, 12): “And now, Yisrael, what does Hashem, your G-d, ask of you but to fear.”** This prompts the Gemara to inquire: **Is “yiras Shamayim” such a small matter? But Rabbi Chanina said in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai: HKB”H has nothing in his treasure house other than a store of “yiras Shamayim.”** The Gemara answers: **Yes! For Moshe, it was a small matter.** Thus, we see that the fear of the consequences of sinning was a trivial matter in relation to Moshe’s level of kedushah; his “yiras Shamayim” was exceptional.

This was evident when HKB”H first appeared to Moshe in the burning bush. For, it is written (Shemos 3, 6): **“ויסתר”**—**Moshe hid his face, for he was afraid to look at G-d.** The Gemara (ibid. 7a) teaches us that in the merit of covering his face, Moshe was rewarded at Matan Torah with that which is written (Bamidbar 12, 8): **“ותמונת ה' יביט”**—**and at the image of Hashem does he gaze.**

Let us embellish this last point. When it states: **“Moshe hid his face”**—we can presume that he did so with his right hand, the one corresponding to Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai. Thus, in the merit of the exemplary yirah demonstrated by Moshe Rabeinu—avoiding gazing directly at G-d—the right arm (associated with the neshamah of Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai, which he used to cover his face) was endowed with a high degree of yirah.

The following incident demonstrates the high degree of “yiras Shamayim” possessed by Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai. As we know, he was the “gadol hador,” the preeminent teacher of Yisrael in his generation. Yet, when he was about to pass away, he wept bitterly in anticipation of the day of judgment. He even told his students that he was uncertain as to whether he would be sent to Gan Eden or to Gehinnom. Here is the passage in the Gemara (ibid. 28b):

“כשחלה רבי יוחנן בן זכאי נכנסו תלמידיו לבקרו, כיון שראה אותם התחיל לבכות, אמרו לו תלמידיו, גר ישראל עמוד הימיני פטיש החזק מפני מה אתה בוכה, אמר להם, אילו לפני מלך בשר ודם היו מוליכין אותי, שהיום כאן ומחר בקבר, שאם כועס עלי אין כעסו כעס עולם, ואם אוסרני אין איסורו איסור עולם, ואם ממיטני אין מיתתו מיתת עולם, ואני יכול לפייסו בדברים ולשחדו בממון, אף על פי כן הייתי בוכה.

ועכשיו שמוליכים אותי לפני מלך מלכי המלכים הקדוש ברוך הוא, שהוא חי וקיים לעולם ולעולמי עולמים, שאם כועס עלי כעסו כעס עולם, ואם אוסרני איסורו איסור עולם, ואם ממיטני מיתתו מיתת עולם, ואיני יכול לפייסו בדברים, ולא לשחדו בממון, ולא עוד אלא שיש לפני שני דרכים, אחת של גן עדן ואחת של גיהנום, ואיני יודע באיזו מוליכים אותי ולא אבכה.”

**When Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai fell ill, his students went to visit him. When he saw them, he began to cry. His students said to him, “Lamp of Israel, the right pillar, the mighty hammer, why are you crying?”** With a life as complete and meritorious as yours, what is upsetting you? **He answered them,** “I cry in fear of heavenly judgment. **If they were taking me before a king of flesh and blood, who is here today and in the grave tomorrow, if he is angry with me, his anger is not eternal. If he incarcerates me, his incarceration is not an eternal incarceration; if he kills me, his killing is not an eternal death.** Moreover, **I can appease him with**

**words and bribe him with money. Even so, I would cry when standing before him.**

**Now that they are taking me before the King of Kings, HKB”H, Who lives and endures eternally, if He is angry with me, His anger is eternal; if He incarcerates me, His incarceration is an eternal incarceration, and if He kills me, His killing is for eternity. I cannot appease Him with words or bribe Him with money. Moreover, I have two paths before me—one of the Garden of Eden and one of Gehinnom, and I do not know on which they are taking me. Should I not cry?”**

In keeping with what we have discussed, the exceptional yirah of Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai is attributable to Moshe’s reverent behavior at the “sneh”—the divine revelation at the burning bush. For, the root of his neshamah was in the right arm of Moshe Rabeinu, which Moshe used to cover his face “כי ירא מהביט אל האלקים”. And even though Moshe was the mentor and most renowned of all the neviim; nevertheless, the Torah attests to his extreme humility (Bamidbar 12, 3): **“והאיש משה עניו מאד מכל האדם אשר על פני האדמה”**—**the man Moshe was exceedingly humble, more than any person on the face of the earth!** Thus, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai inculcated in his pupil Rabbi Shimon ben Netanel the “yiras Shamayim” he received from the arm of Moshe Rabeinu—the same arm that killed Og the King of Bashan causing the nitzotz of Rabbi Shimon to attach to it.

This then is the message HKB”H conveyed to Moshe: **אל** “תירא אותו כי בידך נתתי אותו”. All the fear of sin of Rabbi Shimon ben Netanel will come from you, because I am placing his nitzotz in the arm with which you are going to kill Og the King of Bashan. We can suggest that this is why his father’s name was Netanel. For, **נתנאל** is composed of the two words **“נתן-אל”**—alluding to the fact that **HKB”H gave his holy spark to Moshe Rabeinu.**

### **It Was the Nitzotz of Rabbi Shimon ben Netanel in Og that Saved Lot**

So, we actually have two reasons explaining the trepidation of Moshe Rabeinu regarding Og the King of Bashan. Firstly,

in the revealed dimension of Torah, in the Gemara, we are taught that Og had the merit of notifying Avraham Avinu that his nephew Lot had been taken prisoner. Secondly, in the concealed, mystical dimension of Torah, the Arizal teaches us that Moshe was afraid of killing the holy spark of Shimon ben Netanel concealed in Og. This is alluded to by the name ש'מעון בן נתנאל which is an acronym for ש'מעון בן נתנאל.

I was inspired to connect the two reasons. We will refer to a question posed in the Zohar hakadosh in relation to the passuk (Bereishis 12, 5): **וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָם אֶת שְׂרַי אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאֵת לֹט בֶּן אַחִיו—Avram took his wife Sarai and Lot, his brother's son.** The Zohar questions Avram's motive for taking Lot with him, seeing as Lot was not upstanding. The Zohar answers that Avram foresaw via "ruach hakodesh" that David HaMelech was destined to descend from Lot. Therefore, he took Lot with him to protect the holy nitzotz of the future King of Yisrael.

This is also taught by Chazal in a Midrash (B.R. 41, 4) on the passuk (ibid. 13, 5): **"Also Lot who went with Avram had flocks, and cattle, and tents." Rabbi Toviyah bar Yitzchak said: Lot had two tents—Ruth the Moabite and Naamah the Ammonite.** Similarly, it is written (ibid. 19, 15): **"Get up, take your wife and your two daughters who are found here etc." Rabbi Toviyah bar Yitzchak said that this refers to two tents—i.e., two noteworthy descendants of Lot. Rabbi Yossi the son of Rabbi Yitzchak said: This refers to two finds—Ruth the Moabite and Naamah the Ammonite. Rabbi Yitzchak said (Tehillim 89, 21): "I found David, My servant." Where did I find him? In Sedom.**

We will now introduce another teaching from the Zohar hakadosh (Bereishis 59a) concerning the kedushah of David HaMelech, who prayed (ibid. 86, 11): **ה' הורני ה' דרכך אהלך באמתך—teach me, Hashem, Your way that I may walk in Your truth; make my heart one to fear Your name.** David HaMelech is the chariot for the sovereignty of Heaven, which is the midah of yirah a Jew must have to fear and revere the King of the world. As such, David HaMelech speaks about yiras Hashem often. For instance (ibid. 34,

12): **"לכו בנים שמעו לי יראת ה' אלמדכם"—go sons, heed Me, I will teach you the fear ("yirah") of Hashem.** Also (ibid. 111, 10): **"ראשית חכמה יראת ה'—the beginning of wisdom ("chochmah") is yiras Hashem.** And (ibid. 119, 120): **סמך—"מפחדך בשרי וממשפטיך יראתי"—my heart shuddered from dread of You, and I feared Your judgments.**

Here is another passage from the Zohar hakadosh (Mishpatim 101b) that focuses on David's yirah: **That elder began and said (ibid. 131, 1): "ה' לא גבה לבי ולא רמו עיני וגו'."—Hashem, my heart was not proud, and my eyes were not haughty etc. David HaMelech made this declaration, because he was the supreme king and ruled over all the greatest kings and rulers in the East and the West. He never contemplated straying from the path and always belittled himself in relation to His Creator. When he studied Torah, he was mighty like a lion, and his eyes were always cast downward out of yirah for his Creator.**

In summary, we have learned that the wicked Og King of Bashan informed Avraham Avinu that Lot had been taken hostage. This was orchestrated to rescue the neshamah of David HaMelech which was hidden in Sedom (with Lot and his daughters). Og was granted this privilege on account of the holy nitzotz of Rabbi Shimon ben Netanel concealed within him, who feared sin. Both he and David HaMelech were paradigms of yirah. Thus, the two reasons for Moshe Rabeinu's fear of Og—the one given by the Gemara and the one given by the Arizal—go hand-in-hand magnificently.

With immense pleasure, we will conclude with a teaching from the Ben Ish Chai. In his sefer Ben Yehoyada, he comments on the teaching in the Gemara (Berachos 54b) regarding how Og the King of Bashan planned to combat Yisrael:

**Og, King of Bashan, thought to himself, "How large is the encampment of Yisrael? Three parsas by three parsas. I will go and uproot a mountain measuring three parsas; I will toss it on top of them; and thus I will kill them." He went, uprooted a mountain measuring three parsas and carried it on his head. HKB"H brought ants onto it (the mountain); they bored holes in it; and**

it dropped down to his neck. He attempted to remove it from his neck, but, miraculously, his teeth extended downward (into the mountain) to this side and the other side, and he was unable to remove it. This is the implication of that which is written (ibid. 3, 8): “You have broken the teeth of the wicked” ... Do not read this as it is written—“shibarta,” meaning You have broken—but rather (read it as if it is written) “shirbavta”—You have extended—referring to the extension of his teeth into the mountain.

The Ben Yehoyada explains the miracle as follows: The word שׁן (tooth) is an acronym for either נִשְׁמַת שִׁמְעוֹן—the neshamah of Shimon—or נִיצוֹץ שִׁמְעוֹן—the nitzotz of Shimon—or שִׁמְעוֹן נֵתַנְאֵל—Shimon Netanel. This teaches us that the nitzotz of the neshamah of Shimon ben Netanel that Moshe Rabeinu, a”h, was concerned about, helped Moshe Rabeinu, a”h, kill Og, a force of the klipah. The extension of Og’s tooth indicated that the neshamah of Shimon ben Netanel would leave him, and Og would no longer have any sustenance or power from Shimon ben Netanel.



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