



# Good Shabbos SYDENHAM!

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## Who's Afraid of Big, Bad Og?

by: Rabbi Yossy 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?

The end of Parshat Chukat tells us that G-d reassured Moses and said *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 he 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, and successfully rescued Lot. Says Rashi, Moshe was afraid to do battle with Og lest 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 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 of Og lest his spiritual credits 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 *chesed*, acts of loving kindness. That one good turn, performed so many years back, and out of sinister motivation on top of it, 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

memory, once discussed this concept his voice choked up with tears: "Why must we have this distress . . . the Shechinah in exile . . . Moshiach in exile . . . every single Jew in exile, with no end in sight?"

The Rebbe concluded that we cannot understand pain because G-d does not want us to understand it. He does not want us in any way to accept, justify or rationalize it. He wants us to protest against it and work to put an end to it. And if we were to understand pain, even in the slightest way, it would reduce our motivation to eliminate it.

It is written in the book of Isaiah that when Moshiach comes we will say, "Thank You, G-d, for You have been angry with me." In other words, we will realize then that the painful events we have experienced, the manifestations of G-d's anger, were actually supreme good.

But it is too early now for appreciation. As long as the suffering is ongoing, as long as there is any creature alive in pain or in exile, we are not ready to thank G-d for the pain. Only when the exile is over will we have the luxury to look back and thank G-d for all the hidden blessings. For now, we can only demand of G-d to fulfill His promise to "swallow up death forever, and wipe away the tears off every face.

## What Does "Shanda" Mean?

**Shanda** (pronounced *SHAN-deh*) is Yiddish for something scandalously shameful.

In Yiddish, the word *shand* is used as "shame" is used in English. So after a *shanda* takes place, the protagonists of the event may feel that they are being put *tzu shand*, "to shame."

While doing shameful stuff is a *shanda*, shame itself is not bad. On the contrary, our sages tell us that the three hallmarks of Jewish people is that they are merciful, bashful, and doers of kindness. In our daily prayers we ask G-d that we not sin so that we "not be shamed, nor disgraced, or stumble for all eternity." Our inborn sensitivity to shame before G-d is a motivating factor to live good, G-dly lives.

Perhaps it is this innate bashfulness that leads us to the expression *ah shanda far di goyim*, "a dis-

grace before the nations." Jews have long recognized that they are constantly scrutinized by those around them, often being held to a higher standard, as would be appropriate for the people chosen by G-d to be a "light for the nations," representing Him and His will in the world. Transgressing the Torah or acting shamefully is bad enough, but to do so in public is a double *shanda*.

## Live & Laugh

Rachel walked into a room and saw her friend Stephanie whooping and hollering. "What's the matter?" Rachel inquired. "Nothing at all. I just finished a jigsaw puzzle in record time!" Stephanie beamed.

"How long did it take you?" "Well, the box said '3 to 5 Years' but I did it in a month!"

### What's Nu?!

**The Barmy Boy  
Jared Gordon**

Mazal Tov to Nicole Gordon & Larry Gordon and to grandparents Ivan & Brenda Blecher and David & Nurit Gordon.

### Calendar

- ◆ Shacharis: 8:30 am; Shtibl 8:45 am
- ◆ Brocha in the Seeff Hall.
- ◆ **Halacha of the Week: Doctors & Healing** by **Rabbi Yossy Goldman**
- ◆ Mincha: 4:50 pm
- ◆ Pirkei Avos: Chapter 5
- ◆ Shabbos Ends: 5:59 pm
- ◆ Mincha next week: 5:20 pm

- ◆ **Nathan Fine** of Ideal Furnishers at Midway Mall, Bramley Gardens wishes all congregants a Good Shabbos. Call 011-887-5456/082-854-5706. **Furniture, Bedding & Appliances.**
- ◆ **Vehicles wanted. Any make, any condition. Best prices. Phone ARNOLD ORKIN 082 823 7826**
- ◆ **Lisa Milner**, Rental Consultant 082 362 4870 e-mail: lisam@jawitz.co.za
- ◆ Acknowledgements: Chabad.org,
- ◆ Please take Good Shabbos Sydenham home if you will only carry it within the Eiruv.

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, a little more helpful to those around us and may our benevolence protect us and our families from any harm.

## Parsha Pointers

*Chukas: Artscroll Chumash pg 838;  
Living Torah pg 757*

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 forty years of journeying through the desert, 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 honour of the miraculous well that provided the water in the desert. Moses leads the people in battles against the Emorite kings Sichon and Og and conquers their lands, which lie east of the Jordan.

## Why Do People Die for Judaism?

*By Rabbi Elisha Greenbaum*

This past week, I was speaking to a few medical professionals about the specific cultural practice of *brit milah* (circumcision) from a Jewish perspective, and how it differs from a routine medical circumcision. One of the nurses asked me to explain the origin of the practice and the centrality of *brit* to our reli-

gion.

I started off my crash course in *milah* by discussing our forefather Abraham (the first Jew to be circumcised—and at age 99!) and his son Isaac (the first Jew to be circumcised at eight days old). I described how all Jews throughout history, and in every circumstance, have universally circumcised their children. The group was fascinated to learn how even otherwise unobservant parents are so dedicated to this one mitzvah that they will, if necessary, arrange for a *mohel* to fly in, just to ensure that their precious new-born child has a kosher *brit*.

They were even more blown away when I told them the story of my wife’s great-grandfather Rabbi Yitzchak Raskin, who was a mohel in Leningrad in the dark years of Stalinist Russia and, despite knowing the risks, repeatedly risked his life to perform circumcisions. And, indeed, he was ultimately arrested by the Soviets and executed for his “crimes.” When he was being led, manacled, out of his home, the final words he addressed to his children were, “*Kinderlach, ir zolt gein in di veggen oif vos men nemt mir avek.*” “Dear children, you should dedicate your lives to that for which I am being arrested.” While I was telling this story, there was an audible intake of breath from those present, and one doctor even screamed out “No!” in surprise.

At the time, I was somewhat surprised by the visceral reaction. However, thinking about it later, I realized that I had grown up hearing stories of faith, courage and self-sacrifice. My grandparents lost most of their families in the Holocaust. Every family had its own story of murdered relatives and miraculous escapes from oppression. There were people in every synagogue with numbers on their arms.

But to someone from a different cultural background, you can well imagine that the fact that someone would be willing to risk his life for an act of faith, or—knowing the consequences—encourage his children to do the same, would be

considered extraordinary.

In this week’s Parshah, we learn that one who comes in contact with a corpse becomes ritually impure. The topic is introduced with the words “This is the Torah, [when] a man dies . . .” The Talmudic sages creatively interpret these words as an inspirational message that “the Torah will survive only through those who sacrifice their lives for it.”

Not everyone is called on to die for the Torah, yet how many of us are willing to live our lives as if we were? Virtually every Jew alive today is the progeny of someone who was willing to risk his or her life for Judaism. And whether there will be Jews following in the path of Judaism tomorrow depends on the sacrifices we make today.

I sincerely hope that my kids will never see me led away from our home for keeping mitzvahs, but I’m embarrassed to consider what they actually see me doing with my time now. Do I prioritize Torah and actively seek out opportunities to do mitzvahs, or do I waste time on inanities and inessentials?

As Jewish parents, we want our children to stay Jewish, marry Jewish and bring us Jewish *nachas*. And although we can say whatever we want to our kids—asking them, nudging them and begging them to go in the ways of Torah—our kids understand actions more than words, and learn our real priorities by watching.

When our children see that we are willing to sacrifice anything and everything for a mitzvah, then we can guarantee that they will follow in the path of Torah and Judaism, and that mitzvahs will be kept by future generations forever.

## Hidden Good

*By Chaya Shuchat*

The venom of the African black mamba snake is one of the deadliest poisons known to man. The bite feels at first like a slight sting, then a tingling. Within minutes the central nervous system begins to shut down, culminating in paralysis, convulsions and a suffocating death.

Researchers have recently discovered that this deadly venom also contains two potent pain-

killers, known as mambalgins, which are as effective as morphine. Moreover, unlike morphine, mambalgins do not lead to tolerance or addiction, and have no dangerous side effects. The same snake that causes horrible death also holds the key to incredible relief.

Similarly, in this week’s Torah portion, when the Jewish people were struck by poisonous snakes, G-d told Moses to fashion a snake out of copper and display it in the camp. All those who looked upon the snake would be healed. (This is the source of the well-known medical sign of a snake on a pole.)

How does the agent of destruction become the agent of healing?

Because there is no absolute evil. Every evil has hidden within it the potential for good. A prime example of this is that the *gematria* (numerical value) of the Hebrew word for “snake,” *nachash*, is equivalent to the value of the word *Moshiach*. Moshiach will bring an end to exile and repair the damage done to the world through the sin of the Tree of Knowledge, which was caused by a snake.

“That’s nice,” you may say, “but I don’t see it. I see a world filled with evil and pain. Why would G-d create evil just for the potential for good?”

I could argue that suffering ennobles us, makes us more compassionate and sensitive to the suffering of others. I could contend that suffering provides the contrast which allows us to appreciate the good. I could maintain that we need to go down in order to go up. And I could even assert that suffering is actually a sublime, hidden form of good.

But you wouldn’t be satisfied. “G-d is the master of the universe,” you’d say. “He designed this world and everything in it. He could have allowed us to achieve the ascent without the descent, the refinement without the suffering, the redemption without the exile. It was His choice to create evil, or at least that which we perceive as evil. He created the venom, and He created the antidote.”

And I could not answer you.

When the the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, of righteous

Sydenham Shul 24 Main Street, Rouxville, 2192.

Telephone: 640-5021, Fax: 485-2810

E-mail: [sydshul@sydshul.co.za](mailto:sydshul@sydshul.co.za)

Website: [www.sydshul.co.za](http://www.sydshul.co.za)

[www.facebook.com/sydenhamshul](https://www.facebook.com/sydenhamshul)