

The Weekly Daf



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Niddah 60-66

Week of 13-19 Elul 5757 / September 15-21 1997
Rav Weinbach's insights, explanations and comments for the 7 pages of Talmud
studied in the course of the worldwide Daf Yomi cycle

Grants and Gratitude

After conquering Sichon and his Emonite forces, the Israelites under Moshe Rabbeinu approached the border of Bashan, where they faced an army led by the giant king Og. Hashem assured Moshe (*Bamidbar 21:34*) that he need not fear Og, for he would be granted victory over him just as in the case of Sichon.

Sichon and Og were both gigantic sons of the fallen angel Shamchazar (Midrash on *Bereishis 6:4*). Why, ask our Sages, did Moshe require reassurance in facing Og, and not in facing the equally formidable Sichon?

The answer lies in the Torah account (*Bereishis 14:13*) of a refugee from the great war of the four kings versus the five kings who reported to Avraham Avinu that his nephew Lot had been taken captive. Who was this mysterious "refugee"? He was none other than Og, who was a refugee from the deluge that had destroyed the world in the days of Noach.

This kindness which Og showed to Avraham by alerting him about the danger facing Lot and thus enabling him to rush to his rescue was considered such a great merit for him that Moshe was afraid that it would render him invincible to the Israelite forces. He therefore needed Hashem's reassurance that he would nevertheless be victorious.

What place does this reference to Og have in our section of the Talmud which has just dealt with the issue of an "evil tongue" and how to relate to gossip? Tosefos points out that Og's report to Avraham was also an example of an "evil tongue," because his intention in spurring Avraham to take his tiny household to war against the mighty armies of the four conquering kings was to assure that he would fall in battle and thus enable Og to marry his widow Sarah.

If Og's report to Avraham was so selfishly motivated, why was Moshe afraid that he would not be able to overcome him because of this merit?

Man owes a debt of gratitude to anything or anyone from whom he has benefited, regardless of a lack of any kind of intention on the part of the benefactor. Moshe could not strike the water or the sand of Egypt to precipitate the first three plagues because he had been saved by these elements in his early years. "Do not distance the Egyptian," says the Torah (*Devarim 13:8*) "for you were a sojourner in his land." Even though the Egyptians welcomed the Israelites into their land for selfish reasons, and eventually turned upon them in such cruel fashion, they nevertheless provided us with hospitality when we were in need, and we have a debt of gratitude. Even Og's selfishly motivated action demanded a gratitude which virtually neutralized Moshe from battling against him until he received Divine reassurance.

Niddah 61a

Sharing the Problem

A woman once came before Rabbi Yochanan with a strange medical problem which prevented her from maintaining a normal family life. Rabbi Yochanan analyzed that she must be the victim of other women in her community who were jealous of the very special relationship between her and her husband. He therefore urged her to divulge her problem to these women.

There are different versions of why he urged her to share her problem with the others. One version is that by divulging to them that her problem was straining her relations with her husband, she would remove their envy which was having such a harmful impact on her. Another version is that by letting others in on her problem she would motivate them to pray for her recovery.

The source of this latter approach, says the Talmud, is the Torah command (*Vayikra 13:45*) for the *metzora* to call out to those who pass him by while he lingers in isolation outside the camp that he is "*tamei, tamei*" (impure). The apparent purpose of such an announcement is to warn the passersby that he is impure and that they should keep their distance from him to avoid spiritual contamination. But our Sages saw in the Torah's use of a double proclamation of his impure state a *lesson* that one who suffers from a problem should share it with others so that they will be moved to pray for his relief.

In reference to this approach Rabbi Yosef told of an incident which took place in the Babylonian community of Pumpedisa, and the affected woman followed the advice of the Sages. Those who learned of her plight indeed prayed for her and she was healed.

Niddah 66a

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