

And they captured Lot and his possessions – Avram's nephew – and they left; for he was residing in Sodom. (14:12)

Upon reading the *pasuk*, one cannot help but note that the word *rechusho*, “his possessions,” is out of order. The way the *pasuk* reads is: and *rechusho*/his possessions, the son of Avram's brother. Surely, *rechusho* was not Avram's nephew! In his *Shevilei Pinchas*, **Horav Pinchas Friedman, Shlita**, cites the **Arizal** in *Likutei Torah*, who comments that the *neshamah*, soul, of the famous *Amora*, Rava, had its roots in the *neshamah* of Naamah ha'Amonis, descendant of Lot. Thus, Rava's *neshamah* was held “captive” within Lot. If something were to happen to Lot, there would be no Rava. Hence, Avraham *Avinu* went to war in order to extricate Rava's *neshamah*. This is alluded to by the words, *rechusho ben achi* (Avram), the first letter of each word – *reish*, *bais*, *aleph* – spelling Rava. Furthermore, the Kabbalists explain that the Patriarch was on a mission to extract the sparks of *Torah She' Baal Peh*, Oral Law, which would be disseminated in *Bavel* /Babylon during the period of Abaye and Rava, its primary exponents.

Rav Friedman extends this idea further, demonstrating that Rava was the expounder of several unique *halachos* which, if not for him, would have evaded us. The *Talmud Megillah* 7B states: “Rava says, ‘One is obligated to imbibe on *Purim* to the point that he is unable to distinguish between (the meaning of) *Arur Haman*, let Haman be cursed, and (the meaning of) *Baruch Mordechai*, let Mordechai be blessed.’”

In his *Shtei Yados*, **Horav Avraham Chezkuni** observes that prior to Rava, there had been no such obligation. It is not mentioned anywhere in *Torah She' Baal Peh*. He wonders why it was Rava who merited to be the one to reveal this *chiddush*, novel *halachah*. He advances his question with another novel wine-related practice executed only by Rava. The *Talmud Berachos* 35B, relates that Rava would drink wine throughout *Erev Pesach*, so that he would have a greater appetite for *matzoh*. While both of these practices are novel and thought-provoking, why was it Rava who seemed to have a “pre-occupation” with wine?

When we factor in Rava's “history,” we have a better understanding of his two statements. Wine played a significant role in Rava's existence. Heralding from *Naamah ha'Amonis*, who herself descended from Lot's daughter, Rava was acutely aware of the role of wine. Lot's daughter gave her father enough of the intoxicating beverage so that he became inebriated, and he lost control of his faculties, impregnating his own daughter. Rava's *neshamah* was revealed to the world through the medium of wine. In order to “repair” the wine that eventually catalyzed Rava's birth, the *Amora* merited to teach two *halachos* concerning wine used for the purpose of *mitzvah*.

Rava taught us another powerful *halachah* which can be attributed to his “geneology.” The *Talmud Chagigah* 15B states: “Rava expounded, ‘What is the meaning of the *pasuk* in *Shir HaShirim* 6:11, I went down to the garden of nut trees to look at the green plants of the streams? This verse is an allegorical description of Torah scholars. Why are Torah scholars compared to an egoz, nut tree?

To teach you that just as it is true of a nut, that even though it becomes filthy with mud and dung, nonetheless, whatever is within does not become repulsive; likewise, it is true of a Torah scholar, even though he sours, his Torah does not become repulsive.”

Chazal were addressing the problem of Acher, *Rebbe* to Rabbi Meir, himself once a great scholar, who had soured. At first, he kept his spiritual flaws to himself, then he openly acted with scorn and derision toward Torah, its teachings and its disseminators. The question was: Could one accept Acher's earlier rulings? Rabbi Meir did, discarding Acher's openly sinful behavior and drawing out his valuable teachings. At first, Rabbi Meir's honor was in question for continuing to study under Acher. Later, however, after *Rabbah bar Shila* voiced his position in support of Rabbi Meir, the sage was vindicated.

In any event, it was Rava who compared a Torah scholar that had soured to an *egoz*. *Rav* Friedman sees poetic justice in this statement. *Rava's neshamah*, being held captive within Lot, was much like a Torah scholar that was externally covered with grime. Once the shell is removed, as it is with a nut, the internal portion is fine. This was supported by Avraham's risking his life to save Lot – all because of the spark of holiness imbedded within him.