

"We turned and ascended by way of the Bashan, and Og King of the Bashan went out towards us ... and Hashem said to me, 'Do not fear him.'" (3:1,2)

Rashi cites the *Midrash* which explains that Moshe was apprehensive that the merit which Og earned in assisting Avraham *Avinu* would shield him from defeat. How did Og assist Avraham? When Lot, Avraham's nephew, was captured, Og brought the news to Avraham. The *Midrash* explains that the merit did not help Og, because his intention was actually to hurt Avraham, not to help him. He hoped that by informing Avraham of Lot's imprisonment, he would entice Avraham to be drawn into a war which would eventually cost Avraham his life. Thus Og would be enabled to marry Sarah. Since Og's intention was malicious, Hashem decreed that Og would be killed by the descendants of Avraham.

Horav Chizkiyah Cohen, z.l., derives a profound lesson from this *Midrash*. Although Og's intention was unscrupulous, the merit of his deed was sufficient that Moshe feared its effect. This is remarkable! An individual performed a wonderful deed motivated by a nefarious intention. Nevertheless, he was entitled to a reward on the level that the great *tzaddik* Moshe, the unparalleled leader of *Am Yisrael*, stood in awe of this merit. Obviously, one tiny merit swimming in a sea of evil overcomes its environment and retains its positive quality.

Yet another lesson can be gleaned from this *pasuk* which defines the essence of a *gadol*, *Torah* giant. *Chazal* have recounted Og's extraordinary physical prowess. He was a giant who could uproot mountains with his bare hands. Yet, this did not phase Moshe *Rabbeinu* at all. Man's **physical** strength, his ability to overpower others, was not sufficient to frighten Moshe. The material success man enjoys is subject to Hashem's approval.

If Hashem desired that Moshe emerge triumphant, then no one, regardless of his physical/material might, would defeat him. Moshe only feared his contender's **spiritual** merit, for this warranted a reward which could decide the conflict in his favor. We derive from this *pasuk* that *Torah* and *mitzvos* -- and only *Torah* and *mitzvos* -- give us the power and sustenance to succeed in life.