

Haran died in the lifetime of his father... in Uhr Kasdim. (11:28)

Rashi quotes the *Midrash* that interprets the word *al pnei* as *mipnei* to mean “because of” Terach. Terach produced idols. His son, Avraham, saw the folly of idol worship and decided to do something about it. So, he smashed Terach’s wares. Fatherly love was trumped by both economics and fidelity to the evil king Nimrod. Terach felt that his son needed to be taught a lesson. Nimrod was only too happy to comply. Avraham *Avinu* was sentenced to be burned to death in the fiery caldron. Haran, Avraham’s brother, was challenged to choose between Avraham and Nimrod. Not being a man who took chances, he hedged his response, thinking to himself, “If Avraham emerges unscathed, then I, too, will enter the flames. If, however, Avraham dies, there is no reason that both of us should die. I will capitulate to Nimrod. Avraham was sincere in his commitment and conviction; thus, he was spared. Haran’s commitment was contingent on his safe passage through the flames, which was insufficient reason for being spared. While Haran’s self-sacrifice was far from perfect, he did ultimately perish sanctifying Hashem’s Name. We have a rule that Hashem never shortchanges a person’s reward (*Bava Kamma* 38b). Anyone who expends effort to serve Hashem in any way will receive his due reward. How was Haran rewarded for his less-than-perfect act of self-sacrifice?

The *Rama m’Panu, zl* (*Gilgulei Neshamos*), writes that the *neshamah*, soul, of Haran was *nisgalgeil*, transmigrated, to the body of Yehoshua *Kohen Gadol*, who is referred to as *ud mutzal mei’eish*, “firebrand saved from the fire.” Yehoshua survived *galus Bavel*, the Babylonian exile, to return to Yerushalayim. He was a holy man, which is attested to by his survival and return to the Holy City. He, together with Zerubavel ben She’altiel, a group of *Neviim* in which Zecharyah *HaNavi* was included, proceeded to rebuild the *Bais Hamikdash*. Rebuilding the Temple does not ensure that the people living in the country are spiritually committed to its spiritual demands, its altered culture and the way of life it would promote. Assimilation had begun to make its way among the people, with a number of prominent Jews descending into the abyss of intermarriage with their non-Jewish neighbors. Even some of Yehoshua’s sons were guilty of this calamitous infraction. This presents the backdrop for the confrontation between *Satan* and Yehoshua which is described in Zecharyah’s prophecy.

The *Navi* describes Yehoshua *Kohen Gadol* standing before the Angel of Hashem, with *Satan* standing on his right to accuse him. The Angel of Hashem denounces the *Satan*, claiming that Yehoshua is a firebrand saved from a fire. Nonetheless, a “stain” on Yehoshua’s family was evidenced by the *Navi*’s reference to Yehoshua’s “filthy” garments. This was an implication concerning Yehoshua’s lack of excoriating his sons for their iniquitous marriages. The Angel commanded that Yehoshua’s sons leave their forbidden wives in order to expunge the stain on Yehoshua’s garments.

The term *ud mutzal mei’eish* requires explanation. On the surface, it refers to Yeshoshua’s being flung into a fiery furnace by Nevuchadnetzar, king of Bavel. Apparently, two false prophets, Achav ben Kulyah and Tzidkiyahu ben Maasyah, prophesied to the king that they had been dispatched by

Hashem. The king decided to test the veracity of their statements by throwing them into the same fiery furnace from which Chananya, Mishael and Azaryah emerged unscathed. If they were truly prophets, they, too, would enjoy being spared. The two false prophets countered that they were only two, while their predecessors in the fire were three. Nevuchadnezzar instructed them to select a third person to join them. They selected Yehoshua *Kohen Gadol* with the hope that, in his merit, they would be spared. Yehoshua survived; thus the appellation: a firebrand saved from the fire; they did not. An inspiring story, but why should Yehoshua be absolved for not criticizing his sons? Being a survivor does not mitigate his refusal to censor his sons. [Veritably, when Yehoshua was flung into the furnace, he emerged, but his clothes were burnt. This could have been considered a sufficient message to him.]

Horav Pinchas Friedman, Shlita, cites the *Rama mi'Panu* to explain Yehoshua's unique nomenclature: *ud mutzal mei'eish*. Being that Yehoshua was the *gilgul* of Haran, he had already been burned in his previous life. Therefore, Hashem spared him from Nevuchadnezzar's nefarious decree. At the end of the day, Haran acted appropriately by sacrificing his life for Hashem. His failing was that his intentions were faulty and not *lishmah*, purely for the sake of Heaven. Haran lacked pure thought, which was later repaired by Yehoshua who went into the flames with full conviction and complete commitment to Hashem. An *ud mutzal mei'eish* is a charred remnant of Haran! The Angel of Hashem confronted *Satan* with this message: Yehoshua is special, having already once been through the flames. True, he might require a reprimand for not castigating his sons, but he twice sustained the fires, which absolves him from any iniquity. As Haran's *gilgul*, Yehoshua repaired Haran's less-than-perfect act of self-sacrifice. We now know the "other side of the story."