

I sent messengers from the wilderness of Kedmas To Sichon King of Cheshbon words of peace saying: (2:26)

Rashi quotes the thought that went through Moshe *Rabbeinu's* mind. "Although Hashem did not command me to reach out to Sichon, I nonetheless derived a lesson from Hashem Himself when He prepared to give the Torah to *Klal Yisrael*." He first approached Eisav and Yishmael and gave them the right of first refusal. Hashem was clear that they would not accept the Torah, but, for the sake of peace, He offered it to them. Thus, I did the same by offering Sichon a peaceful resolution to allow us through. Sichon, of course, acted in the manner that was expected of him and refused us entry. Thus, he and his compatriots met with the end they deserved.

What about Og, King of Bashan? We do not find Moshe offering him a peaceful embrace. The *Baalei Tosfos* explain that the majority of Sichon's land belonged to Ammon and Moav, two nations with whom Moshe had not been commanded to destroy. It is not as if there were anything positive about them. They were pagans as all of the rest. They just were not part of the *shiva ummos*, seven nations, against whom Hashem had declared war. Og, however, was king of the land of the Refaim, who were included among the seven nations. They were not deserving of a gesture of peace.

In his *Maayanei Chaim*, **Horav Chaim Zaitchik, zl**, offers an alternative explanation – one that goes to the crux of the evil manifest by Og. There is a concept in *halacha* of *shناه u'pireish*, referring to one who had learned Torah, had been observant, then decided to eschew his learning, demean and renege his observance, and take up the life of a non-practicing Jew. We distinguish between one who had neither been exposed to, nor had experienced, the beauty of Judaism, to one who had, but left. Obviously, the *shناه u'pireish* deserves a greater and harsher punishment. His transgression is more pronounced and is indicative of greater evil.

Og was a survivor of the *Mabul*, Flood. He was saved by holding on to the *Teivah*, Ark. As such, he had merited the unique opportunity of observing first-hand how Hashem deals with *reshaim*, wicked people, and the reward that He has reserved for the righteous. He saw how Noach was cradled in Hashem's *chesed*, kindness, as a result of his overwhelming devotion to the Almighty. This was not all; Og had incredible longevity. Thus, he merited to attend the *seudah*, festive celebration, tendered by Avraham *Avinu* in honor of Yitzchak *Avinu's* birth/weaning. This was a celebration attended by the Almighty. Despite all of this revelation and exposure to truth, Og chose to move on and turn his back on Hashem. That is a *shناه u'pireish*.

Furthermore, Og was the *palit*, survivor of the War of the Kings, who had escaped in order to inform Avram of the capture of Lot, the Patriarch's nephew. He came to Avraham as the Patriarch was baking *matzos* for the *Seder*. The *matzos* were called *ugos*, because of their concentric form. As a result of Og's timely and positive visit during the *ugos/matzo* baking, he was given the name Og for participating and assisting Avraham.

Clearly, such exposure to *kedushah*, holiness – such closeness to the saintly Avraham and the righteous Noach – left an impression. It might have been tainted and somewhat dispassionate, but it was a positive spiritual

influence/inspiration nonetheless. Yet, despite all of this, Og had the opportunity to observe first hand: Hashem's system of reward and punishment; Avraham *Avinu's chesed*, care and concern for all people; a *seudas hodaah*, celebration of thanksgiving which was attended by the greatest and most distinguished personages of the time – including Hashem's Presence. Yet, Og turned his back on it all and was *pireish*, separated himself, turned away. He just was not interested. Later on, he went out to battle against the descendants of the saintly Avraham.

Og recognized Hashem's greatness, the lofty spiritual level evinced by the Jewish nation; yet, it meant nothing to him. Such a person neither has hope, nor deserves hope. He knows; yet, does not care. He knows; yet, rejects it. He knows, because he personally had been a beneficiary of Hashem's kindness. Yet, this did not move him. It left no lasting impression on him.

He is a *shannah u'pireish*. Perhaps I am treading where I should not, but one cannot ignore some of the (at times) subtle and (more often) blatant disregard for the *shannah* of one's youth, one's upbringing, his many years in *yeshivah*, followed by continued learning on a post *yeshivah* level. Then he leaves the walls of the *bais hamedrash* and, while there are many challenges out there in the "outside" world, all of those years of learning should have prepared him to triumph over them. Apparently, for some it is insufficient; others simply do not care. They have shirked off the shackles of restriction. While they are certainly *frum*, observant, Torah-committed Jews, they have been *pireish*, removed themselves, from their previous lifestyle. It is so much more difficult to return once one has wandered off.