

Insights from the Meshech Chochma

רב מאיר שמחה הכהן מדווינסק זצ"ל

פְּרָשֶׁת דְּבָרִים תִּשְׁפ"ו

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כִּי רַק עֹג מֶלֶךְ הַבָּשָׁן נִשְׁאַר מִיָּתֵר הָרִפְּאִים הִנֵּה עָרְשׁוֹ עָרֵשׁ בְּרָדָל הִלֵּה הוּא בְּרִבַּת בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן תִּשַׁע אַמּוֹת אָרְכָּה וְאַרְבַּע אַמּוֹת רָחְבָּהּ בְּאַמַּת אִישׁ. (פרק ג' יא)

For only Og, king of the Bashan was left of the remaining Rephaim-behold! his bed was an iron bed, in Rabbah of the children of Ammon-nine cubits was its length and four cubits its width, by the cubit of that man.

This perek begins with Moshe Rabbeinu continuing to recall the triumphs on the east bank of the *Yarden* with a focus on the conquest of King Og and the Bashan territory. Moshe is overly descriptive of Og's extraordinary physical features to the point where he even includes his bed's dimensions and location-what can only be considered historically irrelevant information. Was it just to impress us with the unnatural and intimidating size of these *Rephaim*, including Og, or was there a deeper message being imparted?

Rashi tells us that these are the *Rephaim*, giants, who were mentioned back in ה'ראשית יד' and were killed in the battle against Amrafel and his allies. All except for one, Og, who was able to escape and eventually took the crown in Bashan. The pasuk tells us that his bed's size- *nine cubits was its length and four cubits its width* and that the cubits were measured בְּאַמַּת אִישׁ. What is an אִישׁ? Rashi tells us that it means the *amah* of Og. Sifsei Chachomim explains that Rashi was bothered by a statement in ברכות מד: that Og was able to uproot a mountain that was three *parsah* squared, implying that Og was indeed a great giant. Yet our pasuk writes that his bed was *nine amos long and four amos wide*. If this refers to the *amah* of the average man, then Og was eight *amos* tall-only twice as tall as an average person plus another *amah*. If so, how then was he able to uproot a mountain? Therefore, Rashi explains that בְּאַמַּת אִישׁ is the *amah* of Og i.e., these cubits were not measured from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger of an average person but rather measured by Og's arm's length, a considerably longer size. Sforno adds that the only reason the Torah tells us this interesting but seemingly non-vital piece of information is to underscore that the conquest of the *Rephaim* by the people of Ammon was accomplished only through the will of Hashem.

Why did the pasuk tell us that Og's bed was *in Rabbah of the children of Ammon*? Ramban explains, "It is in the city of *Rabbah* which was his dwelling place, and when the Ammonites destroyed the *Rephaim* as is mentioned above, and Og's capital, *Ashtaroath*, was captured, Og alone was saved from their hands. It is this which is stated, כִּי רַק עֹג מֶלֶךְ הַבָּשָׁן נִשְׁאַר מִיָּתֵר הָרִפְּאִים. His bed was left there in *Rabbah* which now belonged to the children of Ammon, and the Ammonites preserved it as testimony that they destroyed a great and tall people... This is the sense of the word (in our pasuk) הִנֵּה i.e., Moshe pointed to his bed in *Rabbah* as evidence of the great giant whose kingdom Klal Yisrael had destroyed and said, 'Behold, the proof of

Og's strength still exists; it is the iron bed, very long and wide, and is to be found in *Rabbah* of the children of Ammon!"

Rav Meir Simcha's approach to this pasuk is a fusion of the above with his own particular slant, and in which he reveals to us an impressive degree of secular knowledge. He informs us that "in ancient times, pagans, and even currently, there remain people who are עֹבְדֵי הָאָדָם i.e., worship human beings, who have particular גְּבוּרַת הַגְּבוּרָה, extraordinary strengths and powers, as gods. And not only the person but even his accessories that symbolized his greatness. (He refers to a place חֵינָא-perhaps China? where this is still practiced. And he also tells us that is discussed בְּשִׁירֵי יוֹן, in Greek songs.) Og was an amazing anomaly. His lifespan dated back to the days of Avraham and combining this with his physical presence and abilities, was worshipped as a god. And so was his bed considered "holy." And that is why the Ammonites stored it in their house of worship in *Rabbah*. But Moshe was telling Klal Yisrael that although the rest of the world was awed by him, Og was nothing more than a freak of Nature-there was certainly nothing G-d like about him. And that is why Moshe used the words בְּאַמַּת אִישׁ i.e., as Rashi told us, Og was measured by the size of *his amah*, but at the end of the day, he was no more than an אִישׁ!

He concludes this piece with a reference to ב' משניות נדה where there is a discussion of the halachic implications of various unusual menstrual discharges-shapes of insects, fish or animals, and Rambam, in his commentary, tells us, "Do not doubt that it is impossible for a woman to give birth to all (the abnormalities) that I have mentioned here. It is possible and even more than this has been testified to; the philosophers have written about all these strange occurrences: 'All natural matters follow the majority, and the strange and bizarre fall within them.'" Nature follows the middle of the Bell curve but outliers exist on both sides of the spectrum. And as Moshe Rabbeinu taught us with a demonstrative הִנֵּה, Og was one of them and certainly not a G-d!

לזכר נשמת אבי מורי ר' ישראל מנחם בן ר' שלום ז"ל
לזכר נשמת אמי מורתי רחל בת ר' אלחנן אביגדור ע"ה
לזכר נשמת חמי מורי ר' יעקב נתן בן ר' ישראל שלמה ז"ל
ולזכר נשמת הרב יהודה בן ר' אברהם שמחה (קופרמן) זצ"ל
מחבר הגהות על ספר משך חכמה