

NEITHER A THREAD NOR A SHOELACE

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 212, Non-Jews and Kibbud Av. Good Shabbos!

Reward May Come -- Even For Small Deeds, Even Many Years Later

After the war involving the King of Sodom (among others), "the escapee came and told Avram that Lot was captured" [Bereishis 14:13]. There is a Rabbinic tradition that this escapee was Og, the future King of Bashan, who actually 'escaped' from the Flood by holding on to the back of the Ark. However, the Rabbis attribute sinister and diabolic intentions to Og's deed. Rather than merely wishing to participate in the meritorious act of redeeming captives, Og really wished to take Sarah for himself. His plan was to draw Avram into a hopeless battle of trying to rescue Lot, have Avram die in battle, and then take Avram's widow -- Sarah -- for himself.

Nonetheless, the Talmud tells us [Niddah 61a] that many years later, G-d had to reassure Moshe prior to his battle with Og. Moshe feared that in the merit of Og delivering the message of Lot's capture to Avram, Og would be protected now in his battle against the Jewish people. Rav Leib Chassman points out, based on Moshe's concern, that the Torah gives significant credit to even a small, imperfect, mitzvah. This small good deed of Og was performed with the worst of motives. Chessed (kindness) was the furthest thing from Og's mind. Og had diabolical motives. However, since Og was in fact responsible for the rescue of Lot, Moshe was afraid to fight against him hundreds of years later.

This is a great lesson regarding the power of a single mitzvah.

I will relate a true story that may help to bring this lesson down to our own level. The incident involved a family named Hiller -- a husband, a wife, and a small boy named Shachneh, who lived in Krakow in 1942. At that time, the Germans were drafting able-bodied people into work details. Those that were strong were able to survive; children, as a general rule could not make it. The family had a dilemma -- what to do with their little son.

The situation deteriorated to such an extent that they realized that their only option was to give their

son to a non-Jewish family whom they knew in Krakow, named Yakovitch. This was a childless family -- friends, whom they trusted. They decided to take the drastic move of giving over little Shachneh to this family. On the night of November 15, 1942, Mrs. Hiller -- at risk to her life -- walked through the Jewish Quarter of Krakow to the non-Jewish Quarter of Krakow, and brought her child to her friend, Mrs. Yakovitch. Mrs. Hiller said, "If we ever make it through the war, please return our child to us; but if we do not make it through the war, here are two letters -- addressed to relatives in Montreal and Washington, DC. When this terrible war is over, please contact them and they will take Shachneh. We ask only one thing, that he be raised as a Jew.

As fate had it, the Hillers were killed in the Holocaust. Mrs. Yakovitch raised the child as her own. Mrs. Yakovitch, who was a religious Catholic, started taking the child to Mass. After a while, the child learned the Hymns and became, for all intents and purposes, like a Christian. In 1946, Mrs. Yakovitch decided that it was time to baptize the child. She took the child to the parish priest and asked him to baptize the child. The priest, seeing the 10-11 year old boy, wondered aloud how it was that a boy of this age was not already baptized. He had a discussion with Mrs. Yakovitch, in which she related all the details of the story.

The priest told her she was acting improperly. The wishes of the boy's dying family must be honored. After this discussion, Mrs. Yakovitch had second thoughts and contacted the families in North America. Finally, in June 1949, through the efforts of the Canadian Jewish Congress, this child - - together with 13 other orphans from Poland -- came to Canada. Ultimately, in February 1951, through a special bill signed by President Truman, the boy came to the United States, to his family in Washington, DC.

The lad grew up in the United States, but kept in touch with Mrs. Yakovitch, to whom he felt sincerely indebted. He sent her letters, packages, and money. He grew up as a religious Jew. He became the vice-president of a corporation, did very well for himself, and always felt a debt of gratitude to Mrs. Yakovitch.

Finally in 1978, Mrs. Yakovitch, who was getting older, wrote a letter to him, telling him for the first time of her terrible dilemma and her initial decision to have him baptized. In that letter, she revealed the name of the parish priest who convinced her otherwise: Karol Wojtyla, more commonly known as Pope John Paul II.

The Bluzheve Rebbe (Rav Yisreol Spira; 1890-1989) said that although we are not privy to G-d's ways, we can perhaps speculate that G-d chose to reward this young parish priest for his noble action by raising him to leadership as the Pope.

A Seemingly Arbitrary Linkage of the Word 'KOH' in Different Locations Provides a Source of Merit for the Priestly Blessing

The pasukim [verses] in this week's parsha say, "After these matters, the word of G-d came to Avram in a vision saying: Fear not, Avram. I am a shield for you; your reward is very great... ..And He took him

outside and said, 'Gaze, now towards the Heavens, and count the stars if you are able to count them!' And He said to him, 'So shall your offspring be. [KOH Yiheyeh zar- echa.]" [Bereishis 15:1, 5]

There is an interesting Medrash on Parshas Lech Lecha. The Medrash discusses the source of merit by which the Jewish people deserve the Priestly Blessing. The Medrash gives three opinions. For our purposes, we will zero in on the opinion of Rav Nechemia who held that the merit stemmed from Yitzchak: As it is written regarding the Akeidah [Binding of Yitzchak], "And I and the lad will walk to this place (ad KOH)" [Bereishis 22:5]. For this reason the Jewish people merited the priestly blessing which begins with "Thus shall you bless (KOH teVarchu.) the Children of Israel" [Bamidbar 6:23].

This Medrash seems very strange. How does a seemingly arbitrary linkage of the word 'KOH' in two remote locations provide a source of merit?

The Tiferes Tzion gives a beautiful interpretation: First the Tiferes Tzion describes a Medrash in Bamidbar which explains that all conceivable physical and spiritual blessings in the world are included in the formula of the Priestly Blessing. The Medrash asks, from where do we see this great privilege that the Kohanim do not need to be poetic or expansive or original; but that through the mere recital of these words everyone's needs will be met? The Medrash answers that they merited this privilege from the words "And I and the lad will walk unto this place (ad KOH)."

The Tiferes Tzion notes that the word 'KOH' seems out of place. The smoother reading would be 'ad sham' [I and the child will walk there]. 'Koh', if anything would mean 'here'; not there -- as Avraham truly intended. The Tiferes Tzion explains that when Avraham said 'Ad KOH' at the Akeidah -- he was referring to the word 'KOH' that is used here in Lech Lecha -- "KOH' Like this (i.e. like the stars) will your children be".

At the Akeidah, G-d seems to be telling Avraham to take his only son, upon whom Avraham was pinning all his hopes, and kill him. Avraham's response is that "we will nevertheless continue to proceed 'ad KOH' -- wondering what will happen to this blessing of 'KOH Yiheyeh Zarecha'. But even if we do not understand how 'KOH Yiheyeh Zarecha' will be fulfilled, it does not matter, for we will still willingly accept 'and serve G-d' [Bereishis 22:5]."

Even if an explanation appears elusive, and we have questions and cannot understand what is happening to us, we nevertheless have faith in the blessing of "KOH (like these stars) will be your children". We will not be deterred.

It was through this faith in G-d's promise of 'KOH' that the Jewish people merited receiving the Priestly Blessing. Birkas Kohanim, with its magic-like formula introduced by the word 'KOH', came about as a result of the pure faith in G-d's Promise, which was introduced by the word 'KOH'.

Transcribed by [David Twersky](#); Seattle, Washington.

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This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Lech Lecha are provided below:

- Tape # 028 - Conversion (Geirus)
- Tape # 070 - Bris Milah: The Metzizah Controversy
- Tape # 119 - Conversion for Ulterior Motives
- Tape # 166 - The Childless Couple in Halacha
- Tape # 212 - Non-Jews and the Mitzvah of Kibbud Av
- Tape # 256 - Mohel and Baby: Who Goes to Whom
- Tape # 302 - The Mitzvah of Yishuv Eretz Yisroel
- Tape # 346 - Trading Terrorists for Hostages
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