מדרש

Midrash

ON GENESIS 17:23

Even selfish actions can earn reward for the good done

Bereshit Rabbah 42:8

Even a figure acting from selfish motives can merit reward for the good he inadvertently brings about: Og, nicknamed for "chasing after Abraham's ugot" (cakes), is rewarded with long life for bringing Abraham the news of Lot's capture, yet because his hidden intent was to see Abraham killed so he could take Sarai, he is destined ultimately to fall before Abraham's innumerable descendants. The midrash also explains why Abraham is called "Ivri" (the Hebrew/one from the other side), tying his identity to his ancestry, language, or spiritual position apart from the rest of the world. Finally, among Abraham's three allies, only Mamre urged him to heed God's command to circumcise himself despite his age and past dangers, while Aner and Eshkol discouraged him; as reward, the Shechinah (Divine Presence) later appeared to Abraham specifically in Mamre's territory, showing that faithful encouragement toward fulfilling a mitzvah (commandment) draws the Divine Presence near. AI SUMMARY

“The refugee came and told Abram the Hebrew, and he was dwelling in the plains of Mamre the Emorite, brother of Eshkol and brother of Aner, and they were allies of Abram” (Genesis 14:13). “The refugee came” – Reish Lakish in the name of bar Kappara: This is Og; he is the “refugee.” Why is he called Og? Because he came and found Abram sitting and engaging in the mitzva of baking [unleavened] loaves [ugot] [for Passover]. His intentions [in informing Abraham] were not to act for the sake of Heaven. Rather, he said: ‘This Abraham is a zealot. If I say to him now: Your nephew has been taken captive, he will go out to war and be killed, and I will take his wife Sarai.’ The Holy One blessed be He said to him: ‘By your life, you will receive reward for your strides that you walked [to travel to Abraham], in that you will live long in the world. But because you thought to kill that righteous man, by your life, you will see thousands upon thousands and tens of thousands upon tens of thousands of his descendants, and the end of that man will be only to fall into their hand,’ as it is stated [by Moses]: “The Lord said to me: Do not fear him, as [I have delivered him]...into your hand” (Deuteronomy 3:2).

“And told Abram the Hebrew [Ivri]” – Rabbi Yehuda, Rabbi Neḥemya, and the Rabbis, Rabbi Yehuda says: The entire world was on one side and he was on the other side [ever]. Rabbi Neḥemya said: Because he was among the descendants of Ever. The Rabbis say: It is because he is from the other side [ever] of the river, and he spoke the Hebrew [Ivri] language.

“He was dwelling in elonei Mamre” – Rabbi Yehuda and Rabbi Neḥemya, Rabbi Yehuda said: [This means] in the plains of Mamre. Rabbi Neḥemya said: In the palace of Mamre. According to the opinion of Rabbi Yehuda, it is a place whose name is Mamre. According to the opinion of Rabbi Neḥemya, it is a person whose name was Mamre.

And why was he called Mamre? Rabbi Azarya in the name of Rabbi Yehuda in the name of Rabbi Simon: It is because he was brazen-faced regarding

Abraham. When the Holy One blessed be He told Abraham to circumcise himself, he went and consulted with his three friends. Aner said to him: 'You are already one hundred years old and you are going to bring pain upon yourself?' Eshkol said to him: 'What, are you going to put an end to yourself in the midst of your enemies?' Mamre said to him: '[This is] your God who stood by you [during your ordeal] in the fiery furnace, and during [your war with] the kings, and during the famine, and in this matter that He has said to you, to circumcise yourself, you do not heed Him?' The Holy One blessed be He said to him: 'You gave him counsel to circumcise himself; by your life, I will not appear to him in Aner's palace, nor in Eshkol's palace, but only in your palace.' That is what is written: "The Lord appeared to him in the palace of Mamre" (Genesis 18:1).

