

LET'S LEARN CHASSIDUS

With Rabbi Shais Taub



YES, WE CAN RELY ON MIRACLES WHY YOU HAVE TO BE A LITTLE CRAZY TO EAT MATZAH

Og, the giant who escaped the Flood, informed Avraham that his nephew Lot had been captured by the Four Kings.

Now, there was no way that Avraham could defeat the Four Kings, but Og wanted to marry Sarah. In his mind, if he could goad Avraham into going out on what was essentially a kamikaze mission, he could move in afterwards and marry Avraham's widow (*Bereishis Rabbah* 42:8).

But here's a question. If going to battle against the Four Kings meant certain death (which was precisely Og's idea), why would Og think Avraham would fall for it?

Yet, it turns out that Og was right to think Avraham would fall for it! Avraham *did* do something completely unreasonable and pursue the Four Kings... and a miracle happened and he was victorious.

But how did Og *know* that's how Avraham would react? There is, after all, such a thing as a lost cause. If Og was serious about trying to get Avraham killed, he should have tried to talk Avraham into a dangerous situation that *seemed* harmless. What made Og think he could get Avraham to walk into an *obvious* deathtrap?

And another mystery: The Medrash tells us that when Og arrived to tell Avraham about Lot, Og found Avraham baking matzah.

(Do not wonder how Avraham could have baked matzah 400 years before the Exodus. Chazal tell us [*Kiddushin 82a, Yoma 28b*]: "Avraham fulfilled the entire Torah before it was given.")

But why does the Medrash tell us this detail—that Avraham was baking matzos—as part of the story of how Og tried to set up Avraham? Why is it relevant?

Og arrived and saw Avraham baking matzah. Then he tried to talk him into getting himself killed. But what's the significance of matzah in this story?

Yes, the Medrash explains the significance of matzah here by pointing out how Og's name is similar to the word "*ugos*" (cakes) as in, "They baked the dough that they had taken out of Egypt as

ugos matzah..." (*Shmos 12:39*). But that doesn't explain why matzah is significant to this particular story. To the contrary, Og's name is always Og. Seemingly, the Medrash could have told us about this play on words any of the other times that Og is mentioned. What's the connection between matzah and Og convincing Avraham to go on an impossible mission?

LIVING UNDERWATER

There's an old joke. A new flood was predicted and nothing could prevent it. In three days, the waters would wipe out the whole world. (Don't ask about Hashem's promise never to destroy the world by flood again. It's a joke.)

The Dalai Lama appeared on worldwide media and pleaded with humanity to follow Buddhist teachings to find enlightenment.

The Pope said everyone should become "saved."

The Chief Rabbi of Israel said, "My people, we have just three days to learn how to live under water!"

The joke is that the "secret" to Jewish resilience and survival is that there really is no secret. What's the rational "explanation" for our still being here? There is none. Our whole story doesn't make sense. So the fact that we are still here, that we have gone through everything we have gone through, and that we are here to tell the tale, and to pass it down proudly to our children... none of that makes any sense! It's preposterous. And to live in such a way, ongoing, is absolute *chutzpah*, shameless audacity!

Yet this seems to be the prevalent Jewish attitude.

I saw a sign at a print shop in Brooklyn that was run by a religious Jewish family. The sign said: "We don't believe in miracles here. We RELY on them!"

Rabbi Yossy Gordon, CEO of Chabad on Campus International, when presented with "insurmountable" obstacles, is known to say, "Reality is no place for a Jew."

The famous, beloved *chossid*, *shliach* and *mashpia* Reb Itchke Shpringer used to say, "*Mir farlozen zich nisht oif nissim, mir zogen*

Tehillim!" ("We don't rely on miracles—we say *Tehillim!*")

Indeed, even Ben Gurion who was officially a "secular" Jew was known to say: "In Israel, in order to be a realist, you must believe in miracles."

We know that Chazal tell us (*Pesachim 64b*) the principle of *ein somchin al haness* – that we are not to rely on miracles. However, the Rebbe deals with this at the *farbrengen* of *Shabbos Parashas Tazria 5749*: What was yesterday's miracle is today's normal. Thus, once miracles have become natural, one can rely on such miracles in the future and one can then proceed to increasingly higher miraculous levels.

THE EX-REFUSENIK AND GORBACHEV

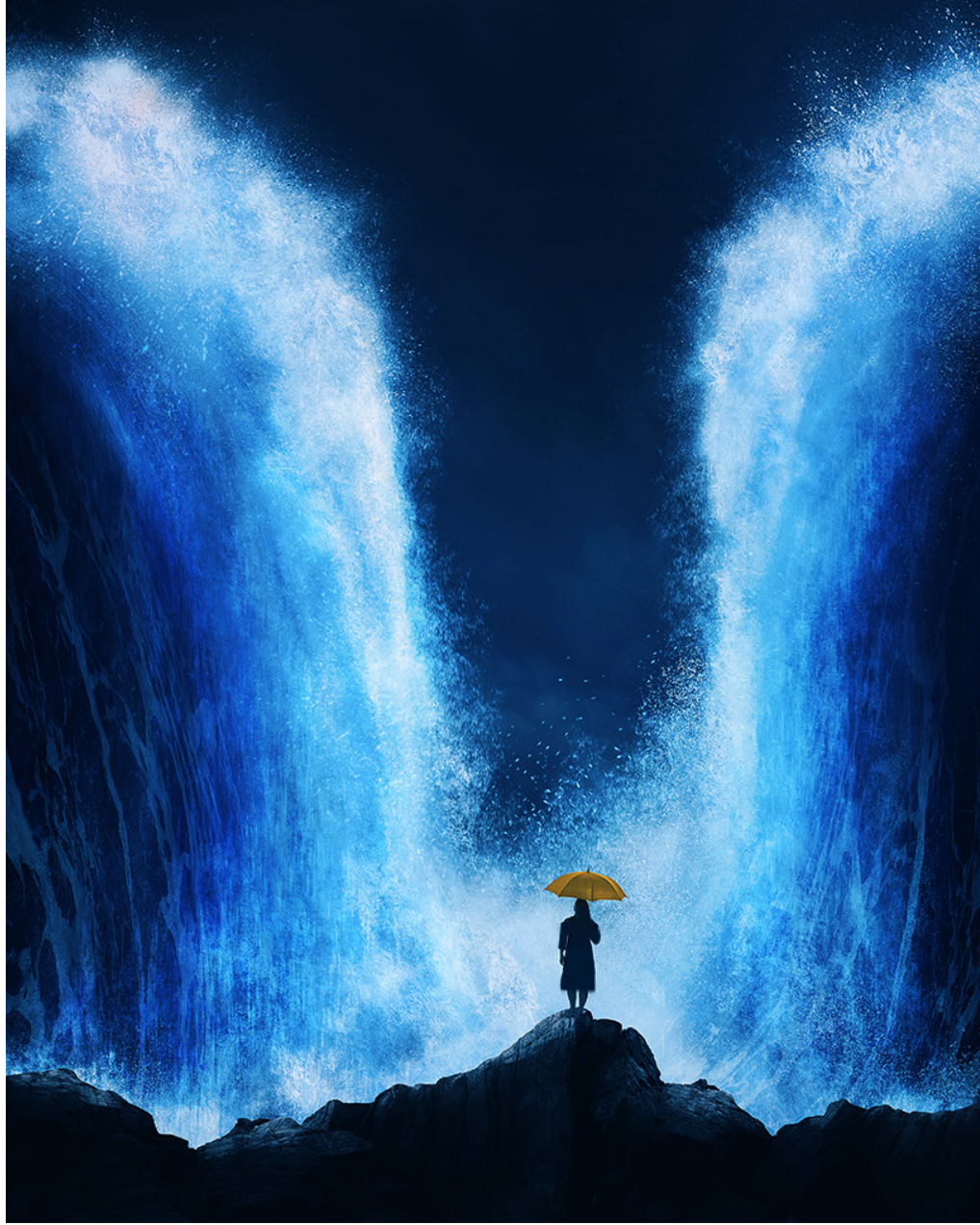
Professor Yirmiyahu (Herman) Branover, ex-Soviet refusenik and world-renowned authority on magneto-hydrodynamics, left Russia for Israel in 1972. Professor Branover said:

"In the spring of 1985, I received word from the Rebbe's office that the Rebbe wanted to speak to me. I arrived at 770 as soon as I could and the Rebbe informed me of his desire that I relay a message to various persons in Russia. But not in my *wildest dreams* was I prepared for the content of the message."

Remember, this was 1985. The people in the Soviet Union and particularly its Jews lived under a brutal, repressive, decades-old Communist regime. The Rebbe proceeded to describe in precise detail the unbelievable change that was going to take place in Russia. A new era of openness and freedom would begin. Waves of Russian Jews would immigrate to Eretz Yisroel.

Two years after this conversation, in 1987, in expectation of this wave of immigration, the Rebbe raised the issue with Branover again and outlined a plan to build housing in Jerusalem for the future immigrants.

"If I had heard these words from anyone but the Rebbe," recalled Branover, "I would have dismissed them as complete fantasy. As such, I was neither surprised nor offended when



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various people in Russia whom I contacted by phone were skeptical. ‘Are you sure this is exactly what the Rebbe said?’ they asked again and again. And, may I add, these people were not unfamiliar with the Rebbe. Quite the contrary, these were his own people who were directing the Lubavitch underground activities in Russia. It was simply that the Rebbe’s prediction seemed so far-fetched. *The New York Times* had published front-page articles predicting that Gorbachev’s government would follow a Communist hard line. This was felt even more powerfully by people who were living in the Soviet Union.”

When Branover related the response from Russia to the Rebbe, the Rebbe instructed Branover to reassure his contacts that these changes would indeed take place.

Of course, we know that the Rebbe’s words came true. And in 1992, when Gorbachev visited Israel, Professor Branover was introduced to him and told him what the Rebbe had predicted seven years earlier in 1985, that the Rebbe knew what Gorbachev was going to do before the rest of the world. Gorbachev was stunned. “When I assumed power, I myself would never have predicted that this is what I would do!”

TAKING YOUR MEAL TO-GO

That's Jewish history in a nutshell. Nobody using any kind of regular logic could predict our story. If it were a novel, nobody would publish it. Too far-fetched. So, yes, we rely on miracles. And what's "crazy" for everybody else is "normal" for us. Where does this come from?

It comes from our covenant, our agreement with Hashem. It all started back in Egypt. We saw no realistic way out of Egypt. According to all logic, there was no way out. It was impossible. Unthinkable. If you remember 1985 and what that was like, imagine someone would tell you then that in seven years there wouldn't be enough housing in Israel for all the Russian immigrants. Imagine they would tell you that there would soon be a public Chanukah menorah lighting in Red Square (which is precisely what happened).

Well, Egypt was like that. There was no way out. We were never going to get out. Never. It was impossible. Not one slave was ever able to successfully escape for 210 years.

And yet, Hashem did the impossible for us. That's why it says in the *Haggadah*:

"We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, but Hashem brought us out from there with a strong Hand and an outstretched Arm. Had the Holy One, blessed be He, not taken our ancestors out of Egypt, then we, our children, and our grandchildren, would still be enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt."

Heard that? If Hashem hadn't intervened, we would still be there now. But He did for us what we could never have done for ourselves.

And our part? Our part is to set aside logic and agree to go along for the ride.

And what is the symbol of our willingness to go along with Hashem's "crazy" plans for us? What is the symbol of our faith that Hashem can do miracles for us in the blink of an eye and all we have to do is follow Him?

Matzah. Bread of faith. Don't think. Just grab your things and let's go. And before you even have time for your bread to rise, Hashem is doing miracles on your behalf.

And now we can understand the Medrash about Og.

How did Og know that Avraham would agree

to such a set-up and walk into a hopeless situation?

Because he found him baking matzah.

"Hey, what are you baking?"

"Matzah."

"Why?"

"Because someday my descendants will be slaves to the greatest superpower the world has ever known and then one day they will walk out of there with their heads held high and it will all happen so quickly that the bread won't even have time to rise!"

"Nice. So, hey, did you hear that your nephew was just taken captive by the Four Kings? But don't worry. I think you can take them."

My friends, we are the Jews. We don't just believe in miracles... we rely on them.

Our part is to do what we know Hashem wants from us. We know what He's asking of us—each one of us on his or her own level. We do our part and then Hashem makes everything else work out even if it makes no sense at all.

You're Jewish.

Act Jewish.

Live miraculously. ❀

This article is based on the Rebbe's notes for a dvar Torah to be delivered at the 1942 bar mitzvah of the son of Harav Shlomo Aharon Kazarnovsky, recorded in Reshimos (Choveres 17), which discusses the story in Parashas Lech Lecha (Bereishis 14:13-14): "The fugitive [Og who had escaped the Flood] came and told Avram... that his kinsman [Lot] had been taken captive, and he armed his trained men... and pursued [the enemy]..."

What you just read is the sixth installment in a series of articles for the N'shei Chabad Newsletter entitled "Let's Learn Chassidus With Rabbi Shais Taub." Visit nsheichabadnewsletter.com/archives to read the first five. Rabbi Shais Taub has delivered Torah classes and lectures on six continents and is one of the most sought-after speakers in the Jewish world today. He currently serves as scholar-in-residence at Chabad of Five Towns. For more teachings from Rabbi Taub, visit SoulWords.org. For speaking engagements contact info@SoulWords.org.