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The Or Hachaim and the Lion

Rabbi Chaim Ben-Atar, known as the holy Or Hachaim for his famous commentary on the Torah, was born in 5456 (1696) in Morocco. Even as a young man, he was known as a holy and scholarly man of God. Near the end of 5501 (1741), he made aliyah to the land of Israel, settling first in Acre and afterward in Tiberias and Peki'in. By 5502 he had moved to Jerusalem, establishing his yeshivah, Midreshet Knesset Yisrael. The Ba'al Shem Tov said that the holy Or Hachaim was the Mashiach of the generation. The Or Hachaim himself alluded to this, writing, "the name of the Mashiach is Chaim." His Torah commentary was honored throughout the Jewish world and particularly among the disciples of the Ba'al Shem Tov. The Rebbe Rayatz related that the Or Hachaim wrote his commentary from the Torah lessons that he would teach his daughters. The Or Hachaim passed away on the 15th of Tamuz, 5503 (1743) and is buried on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem.

Rabbi Chaim Ben Atar made his way to the land of Israel in a caravan of camels in the desert. Shabbat was approaching and the *Or Hachaim* asked the leaders of the caravan, who were Arabs, to stop and rest where they were so that he would not have to desecrate the Shabbat. They refused. Despite the danger involved, the *Or Hachaim* decided that he would not continue with the caravan so as not to desecrate the Shabbat – despite the danger of wild animals, robbers and murderers in the desert. He desired to fulfill the words of the verse, "Abide every man in his place, no man may go out of his place on the seventh day" (Exodus 16:29) with self-sacrifice. When the Shabbat arrived, a large lion approached the *Or Hachaim*, and laid down next to him for the entire Shabbat. Obviously, no robbers or murderers wanted to come near the *Or Hachaim* and his ominous friend. When the Shabbat was over, the lion rose up on his feet, bent his head down as if he was bowing, signaling the *Or Hachaim* to climb up onto his back. Rabbi Chaim sat himself on the lion's back and the lion raced toward the caravan, depositing his passenger safely back with the group.

At first, it seems that the *Or Hachaim* practically committed suicide. The desert is a distinctly dangerous place and it does not seem reasonable to stay there alone. Recklessness and suicide are a blemish in the *sefirah* of kingdom, about which it is said that "its feet descend unto death" (Proverbs 5:5). But in truth, this story is a rectification of kingdom, because all was done with self-sacrifice for the sake of honoring the Shabbat queen. By fulfilling the directive, "Abide every man in his place" the holy *Or Hachaim* precluded the danger

of kingdom's legs, which as noted, "descend unto death." On the contrary, he was able to nullify the evil inclination for suicide (and perhaps was able to do so for all Israel).

In general, this entire story is kingly: The lion, king of the jungle, sits and guards the *Or Hachaim* throughout the Shabbat, which is a very regal thing to do, also cause for a rectification of the *sefirah* of kingdom. After Shabbat, the lion bows down to him and takes him on his back – similar to King Solomon, who, according to the sages, would fly from place to place on the wings of his eagle. In this story, we see the messianic, kingly character of the holy *Or Hachaim*.