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RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"L

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# PARSHAS MISHPATIM

WITH

RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"l

BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

## AGAINST THE MULTITUDE

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## Part I. The Wicked Multitude

### The Simple Commandment?

In the Torah we are commanded *לֹא תִהְיֶה אַחֲרֵי רַבִּים לְרָעָה* – *you should not be after the multitude for evil things* (Shemos 23:2), that you shouldn't incline after the majority when they are doing wicked things.

We're talking now about *pshuto shel mikra*, and that's the way to read the possuk: Don't follow the multitudes, the numbers, when they are doing something wrong.

Now at first glance, that seems to be a simple thought, something we ourselves would know without being told; don't do the evil things that others are doing. Only that it seems to be too simple of a thought. After all,

when people are doing wicked things, a rational person — even if he's not such a big *tzaddik* — doesn't find it so appealing.

Let's say, when you see today a lot of people coming together in an organization called Exit — today they changed the name to attract more suckers; they call themselves Death with Dignity. And they have conventions and seminars, and they send you literature about all the benefits of suicide; so naturally, you're not going to sign up. After all, for a sane person, it's quite unappealing. It's revolting, actually.

So the question is, what is the Torah telling us? Do we need such a commandment that we shouldn't go after the multitude to do evil?

### **Multitude Makes Right**

And the answer is that when the multitude does it, *it's no longer evil*. It becomes the *right* thing to do; anything the multitude does is the thing to do. And even something as *meshuga* as killing yourself, as more and more lunatics join in — one of the bestsellers today is how to commit suicide — so it's the style already, and after a while you think that you're behind the times. It doesn't mean you'll sign up, but you begin to see a little bit of the rationale, the *sevara*, and it's not so wicked anymore.

Let's say an example; a true story. A boy called me up from a small town where there is no yeshiva. He goes to a high school there. Now this boy happened to know something about Torah, about Jewish practices, but his parents are ignorant people, and they send him to high school.

Now he's a good boy — he's trying at least. He dresses with some dignity; he wouldn't think of dressing like a bum.

What happened? Everybody in the high school wears blue denim. There isn't a single person, boy or girl, who is not wearing jeans. But not just denim; denim with ragged, artificial patches, artificial splotches on it like somebody poured ink on it or something. So it took only a little time, a few weeks, and he put on jeans.

Now, why would he do such a thing? He told me himself that he doesn't understand it. So the first thing of course is he doesn't want to stand out like a sore thumb. But it's more than that — *it's because it's not so bad anymore* to dress disrespectfully.

Nobody is persecuting him. Nobody is torturing him to put on gentile clothing. But it's the test of *rabbim*; if the masses are doing it, then there must be something there. That itself is a constant pressure. A Jewish *frum* boy who has to go through a high school is going through not one



*akeidah* – day by day he is being tortured on the rack of אַחֲרֵי רַבִּים לְרַעַת, of weakening before the masses.

### The Festival of Numbers

The Gemara in Mesichta Avodah Zarah (54b) says that when the gentiles make a festival for their *avodah zarah* and people come together to witness the spectacle, so the Gemara says among the people who came to look וְדָאֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מוֹמָר הוּא, there's surely a Yisroel *mumar*.

Now what does that mean? Just because a Jew was there, does that prove he's a *mumar*? It could be he's a foolish fellow who wanted to see a spectacle. It could be. But the Gemara says that among the Jews who are there, there is surely at least one Yisrael *mumar*. And Rashi explains. אֵי אֶפְשָׁר בְּכָל הָעוֹבְדִים – it's not possible among all those who are present at the *avodah zarah* service that there shouldn't be one *mumar*.

And he says as follows, pay attention to the words: אַחֲרֵי שְׂרוּזָה אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל – When he sees that the nations of the world who have so much prestige; they come together in great numbers to celebrate their festivals with panoply, with pomp and great ceremony, and he sees that the Jews don't have anything like that, so it's אֵי אֶפְשָׁר, Rashi says, it's impossible that there shouldn't be a feeling of נוֹטָה לְבוֹ לַעֲבוֹדַת כּוֹכָבִים.

### The Psychology of Numbers

Pay attention to what we just heard. The power of the nations of the world *without any arguments* is enough to lead people's minds astray. When you pass by a big university, if it was a small place with a broken down building, so you could despise them and you'd laugh at their theories. But because they have huge buildings and they cover a great deal of space with a big campus, therefore people are impressed and the *minus* certainly enters the minds of some people. אֵי אֶפְשָׁר, it's not possible there shouldn't be at least one Yisroel *mumar* present. It doesn't mean only one. It could be many. But it's certain that there's at least one *mumar*. And even the ones who aren't so weak to go so far, but they are affected.

Because that's a fundamental principle of human psychology. We look up to the successful. We look up to the powerful ones. That's what we see in Mishlei (14:20). In Mishlei we read as follows: גַּם לְרֵעֵהוּ יִשְׂנֵא רָשׁ – A poor man is despised even to his friends, even to other poor people. Not only is he despised by the rich, but even poor people look down at him. His own relatives look down on him. A *shlemazel*. אוֹהֲבֵי עֲשִׂיר רַבִּים – But there are many that love the rich man. Not merely because they expect to get

something out of it. No. Even though the rich man is far away from them and they will never have any contact with him, but they admire a rich man.

Now what is he telling us here? That the way of the world is to admire success and to despise the one who is on a lower level of affluence. That's how a person's mind functions naturally. And that's why, when Jews see the smallness of the Jewish people and the great numbers of everyone else — the nations, the newspapers, the scientists, the churches, everything — so the Jews themselves גם לרעהו ישנא רש they are weakened. At least a little bit. *Lo yimaleit.*

### **The Persecution of Numbers**

And that's the most difficult of all tests. Don't think that the persecution that our forefathers endured in the Middle Ages was merely the physical and material pressures. It's true that the persecutions were abundant. They certainly were expelled, they were mulcted, they were harassed and sometimes were massacred. We have no picture today of what they went through.

But all that was nothing compared to the constant 'persecution' of the fact that they were in the shadow of the cathedrals. Not *one* cathedral — wherever they went, there was another cathedral. And they were filled with people. All the masses worshipped these gods, the saints.

The Jews in Spain, when they saw — I'm talking about before 1492 — when they saw the masses gathered together, walking on their knees, don't think it didn't have an effect. Imagine a hundred thousand people walking on their knees in devotion as they carry the statue of the saint through the streets. And there's music and there's incense. The pressure of public opinion is terrific! We're not talking about arguments now — they don't have any arguments — but just the fact that it was a *rabbim* was a terrible *nisayon*. A Jewish child, if he was able to withstand that he was a martyr!

### **A Purposeful History**

The Jew was hated because of his foolishness. It was so 'open'. Everybody 'knew' the miracles! Everybody 'knew' the statue they were carrying through the streets was bleeding at these and these wounds — the places where the first one bled. They showed you, "Look at the wounds bleeding there!" And everybody saw it as clear as day. And if you didn't believe you were considered a dog! The stubborn Jew was considered worse than a dog!

That's why they called us the most stubborn and obstinate people. "They are the worst people in the world." That's what they said; open statements by them, by the great teachers of the church. "The synagogues are worse than brothels. They are worse than robbers and murderers. If they can see such open signs and they refuse to yield to such a publicly accepted attitude, then these are the worst people in the world!"

And so you're hearing now the purpose of a Jew. If we want to epitomize the history of the Jewish people, if we want to characterize the function of the Jew in the world, it's the resistance against the *rabbim*. That's the test that we're passing through in our history.

And it's not an *accident* of history. Our nation was *created* for this. The Am Yisroel was given this historic mission to go out in the world as a minority and to resist all the forces that tend to overwhelm them. The entire world, with all of its foreign ideals and attitudes was sent by Hakodosh Boruch Hu as a test of our nation, so that we should fulfill our national function of being the **מַעֲט מִכָּל הָעַמִּים**, of being the smallest of all the nations aligned against the rest of the world (Devarim 7:7).

### **The 'Smallest' Nation**

Now, you might say, "Is that literally true? Are we the smallest nation?" You mean to say you cannot find little peoples, isolated tribes somewhere on the globe that have their own languages and own racial characteristics? Certainly, you could. Anthropologists will tell you that there are tribes living in the islands of the South Sea and they've been isolated for a long time and they have a distinctive language and distinctive racial characteristics.

Language and racial characteristics, those are the two chief bases for distinctive nationality. And they're much smaller than the Am Yisroel. They're little groups. So what's the Torah telling us that we're the smallest of all nations?

The answer is what we're talking about now, that the rest of the world is one big conglomerate. They're divided into different categories of dupes and fools — whether they're fools who believe in evolution or fools who believe in Muhammad, or Yoshkeh, or socialism or humanism or voodoo worship, but whatever it is, it's all one conglomerate of idiocy. And we are expected to be the **עַם הָקָטָן וְנִבְוֹן**, the one little nation, a wise and understanding nation, that stands boldly against the rest of the world.

That's why we are always a minority in the world. If we were a majority, it would be easy to be a Jew — we would be ashamed *not* to be Jews. All

the blacks and Puerto Ricans would grow beards and peyos. All of them. No question about it!

But Hakadosh Baruch Hu doesn't want that. He wants there to be a test — he wants us to prove our mettle, to show our dedication to Him by not budging one iota from the Torah way of living, even when we are faced with a *rabbim*, a whole world who have on their side the power of a majority.

## Part II. Overcoming The Multitude

### Strength of Character

Now, it's one thing to identify a problem and to understand that we're facing a difficult test being the *מָעַט מְכַל הָעַמִּים*. That's already something, to recognize the problem. But we have to do something about it too. *לֹא תִהְיֶה אַחֲרֵי רַבִּים* is a mitzvah, a mitzvah to be on guard always, to constantly strengthen ourselves in overcoming this *nisayon*.

And that's why number one is strength of character. This mitzvah needs a certain amount of strength, a boldness, to resist the environment. And that's why at the beginning of the Shulchan Aruch, at the beginning of the Tur, he quotes the Mishna in Avos, *לְעֹשׂוֹת ... עַז כְּנֶמֶר* ... *יְהוּדָה בֶּן תֵּימָא אָמַר עָלֵינוּ עַז כְּנֶמֶר* ... *רַצּוֹן אָבִיד שְׁבַשְׁמִים* – Yehuda ben Teima used to say always the following: “Be strong as a leopard to do the will of your Father in Heaven,” That's the introduction to the Shulchan Aruch, to being a Jew.

Now a leopard is not the strongest animal. There are other strong animals; an ox, let's say. So why talk about a leopard?

And the answer is, the *meforshim* say, because a leopard is bold. An ox is stronger than a leopard, yes, but a leopard has a certain *azus* to him, a boldness. All the other animals are afraid—they generally back out when they see a human being. But a leopard won't back down, no. And so why does the Shulchan Aruch begin with this selection? Because the most important quality that a Jew needs in order to survive in this world is the quality of boldness, to be able to survive the pressure of the multitude against him.

### The ABC of Judaism

That's the foundation of the Shulchan Aruch and it's a foundation of the entire history of the Jewish people. *We have to be bold against the*



world! We have to ridicule the world. Now, not to their faces; we should treat everyone with respect, absolutely. But we have to know that as many as they are, they are nothing.

We have to be *mevatel* all the colleges, all the *chachmei haumos*. Evolution? The whole story is so stupid. Anybody who has a little common sense knows that you can't make life from nonlife. The whole thing is built on millions of lies, one on top of the other. The professors are actually bigoted, blind fanatics. They're not using inductive reasoning or objective proofs. It's only tradition. Which tradition? Is it a *הִלְכָּה לְמִשְׁפָּחָה מְסִינִי* that Adam was created as a monkey? So what tradition are they following? The answer is they're following an invented tradition of Darwin that is contradicted by all the facts. Just the basic facts of geology contradict them.

So therefore it ought to be easy for us to ridicule them. But because there are so many, wherever you turn, that's where they are, the newspapers and the magazines are all on their sides. The government is on their side. All the high schools! Big universities! Actually, we should be laughing our sides off at the whole idea — only that it's not easy to laugh at a great majority.

And that's why it says “be bold as a leopard to do the will of your Father in Heaven.” You have to learn how to despise the outside world. We have to say the evolutionists are scoundrels! They're liars! They're criminals! That's what they are!

### **Ridiculous Religions**

And what about the Christians and the Mohammadians? You can't say much better about them either. I know among a certain group of Jews — I don't want to say who they are — in America, whenever they're talking about *oso ha'ish*, they call him, “The *mamzer*.” Among themselves, they always call him, “The *mamzer*.” They're bold — they're trying to strengthen themselves against the majority.

And Islam? So what if there are a billion Muslims in the world? It's all a big joke. A Koran came down from heaven to this desert fellow, Muhammad, this wild fellow. The Rambam calls him a lunatic.

Mohammed wasn't a prophet — he was a ventriloquist; he was just throwing his voice through Allah's mouth. Mohammed swore that every word came from Allah, but what it really meant is that he was holding

a big puppet named Allah on his arm and he's talking into his mouth: "Mohammed! There's no prophet like Mohammed."

### **Patriotism and Pressure**

And therefore inwardly we should have the full opposition, of disgust for the *rabbim*, for lost people, degenerates. America? America is the most powerful country in the world and you see what's doing today. I'm a patriot for this country, but today it's a filthy place — all the *taavos*, the worst ideas are normalized in America. Materialism and entertainment and sports and so many things. And it's a pressure on our heads; no question that it's a pressure on many Jews.

And so when you walk on Broadway at five o'clock and the tall office buildings pour out; hundreds of thousands of people in the street. Thousands of people dressed in suits — some undressed in suits — so you should know, it's nothing but water and waves. It's a good thing to practice that thought: "אֵין בָּהֶם מָמֶשׁ". I'm not impressed in the least bit by the numbers all around me." He should think he is walking in the country among trees. There is grass all around him. Not people. כָּל הַבָּשָׂר חֲצִיר. It's all like grass all around me; not people (Yeshaya 40:6).

Of course, if they bump into you, act nice. Say, "I'm sorry." You have to be polite always. But you have to know that all around you, all the masses of humanity blundering in the darkness of their beliefs are nothing compared to you, who is walking with the truth.

### **Motto Of The Lunatics**

That's important. If you are not a *baal gaavah*, then you cannot be a *frum* Jew. You have to be bold — "I won't bend. I won't weaken in my ideals in front of the *rabbim l'raos*."

So here is a *frum* Jew with a beard and peyos and a black hat, and he's walking in the street, on all sides are *chofshim*, people without hats, so he has to feel proud of himself. They think he's a lunatic, an ultra-orthodox — that's what ultra-orthodox means to them; a lunatic — but he doesn't cringe. He's bold like a leopard. He's not impressed by the *rabbim*. He's willing to be a lunatic in their eyes.

It's like a certain Tanna in the days of the second Beis Hamikdash who had certain principles and they told him he should yield these principles because otherwise he's losing out, he's losing the favor of the other people. And he said a statement then that really is the motto of the Jewish people. "מוֹטָב לִי לְהִקָּרָא שׂוֹטֵה כָּל יְמֵי" — It's better for me to be called by people all my

days a lunatic, וְלֹא לַעֲשׂוֹת שְׂעָה אֶחָת רָשָׁע לְפָנַי הַמְּקוֹם – I shouldn't be a rasha even one moment in the eyes of Hashem (Ediyos 5:6).

### Who's The Sane One?

Now that's easy to say but it's not so easy to do. Because when it's a *rabbim*, even if you're the sane one, you begin to feel like you're the lunatic. I once went into an insane asylum, to Downstate, to visit a yeshiva bochur who was sick. I went in after hours; it wasn't the visiting hours so they gave me a big guard as high as the ceiling to protect me. They make him big so that patients shouldn't use any violence on him. I came into a hall and there were three hundred lunatics sitting and looking at me and they were all grinning. For a moment I felt abashed. Three hundred *meshugaim* are sitting and looking at me, and they are laughing at me. I had a beard. In those days nobody had beards and they were pointing and laughing.

For a moment, I was taken aback. Three hundred people laughing! It was a *rabbim* and I was only one. I wasn't afraid; the big security guard was there, but for a moment I felt weak.

But then I thought, "They're all *meshugaim* though." I caught myself. "They're all lunatics," I said. "I can walk out soon; they can't walk out."

And therefore that's an important attitude. They're all *meshugaim*. What does it matter how many there are? A thousand *meshugaim*, ten thousand *meshugaim*, they're still only *meshugaim*.

### Personal Pressures

But I want to say something now that expands the subject a little more. Because to be bold against the *rabbim* doesn't mean only the *rabbim* of the evolutionists and the false religions and all the false philosophies. There's also a *rabbim* among ourselves, among the *frum* Jews, where we have to apply this admonition. It's a sensitive subject and maybe I'll step on people's toes, so please forgive me, but it's important.

Here's a man who is in dire straits financially; he's on the verge of bankruptcy. But he has to marry off a child. And it costs him \$50,000. He can't help himself because his wife is pressing him, "How can we have less? We'll be ashamed to face our friends. How can we not have this or that?"

So this man thinks that he is a prisoner of circumstance, and so he goes even more deeply into debt — he borrows to make an expensive wedding. What a fool! Who cares what the relatives will say! Who cares what the neighbors will say!

## Wild Weddings

Everyone is doing it? So what! **לֹא תִהְיֶה אַחֲרֵי רַבִּים לְרֵעוֹת**. In every aspect of life, we have to learn to be independent – independent of the foolish pressures from outside the home. Even the invitations. You get invitations today, each one outdoes the previous one. Bigger, more ornate – *the invitations alone are a wickedness!*

It's so important for a husband and wife to make up their minds; they don't care what people say. A bar mitzvah doesn't call for all that expensive arrangement as if it was a wedding. All other simchos, and many things like a *kiddush* in the synagogue can be waived. It's not necessary. People have plenty to eat at home, why should they stuff themselves with your food and go home and not be able to eat again?

I'm not saying it's easy but it's an obligation of the Torah not to be pulled along with the crowd. Everyone is going bowling? So what? Call me a lunatic, but I think it's not important to go on trips on Chol Hamoed. Everyone is spending money on electric toys, gadgets, for their children, for themselves? So what?

And so of the greatest importance to create an atmosphere of independence in your family – “We don't follow the crowd!” It's important. It's very important.

And therefore it's of the utmost importance to have a backbone! Stop being a weakling! That's one of our big tests in this world. A Jew has to have a strong backbone. He doesn't bend or even cringe before the *rabbim* that are **לְרֵעוֹת**.

## Part III. The Good Multitude

### Bending Before the Best

Now, another one of the great antidotes to this disease of **אַחֲרֵי רַבִּים** **לְרֵעוֹת** is given to us in the same *possuk*, the last three words in the *possuk*. Hakadosh Baruch Hu says, **אַחֲרֵי רַבִּים לְהִטּוֹת** – you *should* incline after the majority.

**לְהִטּוֹת** means bend yourself over; bend over and follow the majority. It means when there's a good majority, you shouldn't treat it like something that has nothing to do with you. No; you should utilize that strength in numbers. Outside, yes there are very big numbers and to them we say **לֹא**

תְּהִיָּה אַחֲרֵי רַבִּים לְרַעַת. But among ourselves, we have numbers too! And so אַחֲרֵי רַבִּים לְהַטּוּת! Bend your mind and soak it in!

Of course, the first thing is to put yourself in a good environment. Because in this battle of being strong against the *rabbim* one of the most important elements is being around a lot of good people. When you associate with the right numbers, with the good *rabbim*, it's a different story.

### Contagious Character

Now, I'll explain that to you. Weakness of character is a contagious sickness, and all the *reshaim* have no character; they are weak. They may act like they are strong, but they are weaklings. What others do, they imitate.

The fact that so many of the youth have fallen into the use of narcotics is not because their logic tells them that's the happiest existence. It's merely because they yielded to what you call peer pressure, the pressure of other stupid people like themselves, but today there are so many stupid people that it has become difficult to resist.

Even the attitudes of a typical goy or irreligious Jew. פְּתִי יֵאֱמָר לְכָל דָּבָר – What they are told, they believe. That's why on all sides mankind is becoming worse and worse; they yield to the wickedness of the Marxists, of the wicked evolutionists, wickedness of the false religions. All of mankind is being lost in a *mabul* of *meshugas* and materialism.

Only one little group is standing on an island of truth, and therefore in order not to be drowned in this *mabul*, in order to be a loyal Jew, you must try to first of all live among *frum* Jews. And not only the *frummer* the better, but the more the better!

### Good Neighborhoods

There was a woman here who wanted to move.

I said “Where does your son go, to which yeshiva?”

So she tells me, “He goes to Ateret Torah.” Ateret Torah? Ateret Torah is a very great institution.

I asked her, “Where are you going to move?”

“I want to move to West Orange.”

Oyyyy! West Orange!? “What kind of environment will your son have there?”



“No,” she said. “We’re Orthodox Jews! We’ll never give up our orthodoxy.”

No, no, that’s a terrible mistake. That’s what you hope, but you should know that once you move away from a *frum* neighborhood where you have many *frum* Jews, you’re not the same person anymore. You’re losing out on the great benefit of אֲחֵרֵי רַבִּים לְהִטּוֹת.

### Don’t Be an Observer

But not just to *be* there, to be an observer on the sidelines. אֲחֵרֵי רַבִּים לְהִטּוֹת means you should take advantage of the good *rabbim*. That’s what Hakadosh Baruch Hu is saying to you, “You should incline after the majority. לְהִטּוֹת means bend yourself over. Follow the majority. You see many *frum* Jews — be like they are. Utilize them. Soak in the environment.

You know there are a lot of people in this neighborhood who wear their tzitzis out. Not only yeshiva people; it’s remarkable how many people around here wear their tzitzis out. It became a style on these streets, in this neighborhood, because there are yeshiva people here, so even plain people do that too. They followed the good crowd. It’s a big mitzvah! I’m not talking about the tzitzis now; I mean the bending before the good crowd.

The Syrian Jews too; they did that. Many of them put on black hats. Nothing wrong, nothing wrong. A Syrian boy sees an Ashkenazi Jew, he shouldn’t say, “A black hatter.” Oh no, he should respect a black hat. That’s beautiful. He should soak it in. Nothing wrong if he puts one on too. I’m not saying he must; the ways of the *sefardim* are holy, but nothing wrong if he’s influenced by his environment to put on a black hat. I say he’s fulfilling the mitzvah of אֲחֵרֵי רַבִּים לְהִטּוֹת.

### A Happiness of Opportunity

And so there’s a tremendous benefit of living among a good *rabbim*. I read an article, a clipping, from a certain newspaper whose name I don’t want to mention, and it was telling that in Miami, they’re noticing that young Orthodox Jews are increasing and multiplying down there. A modern Orthodox Jew was describing a visit to a pizza shop, a kosher pizza shop and he ordered a piece of pizza. “I had to wait thirty minutes before it was served. It was jammed with people. Young Orthodox people are filling up the place.”

He wasn’t complaining; he was happy. It’s a *simcha* when more Jews move into the neighborhood. There will be kosher grocery stores, more

shuls. Very good! But we have to know that this is not only a very big *simcha* but it's also a big *opportunity*. Because when you see a Jewish neighborhood, full of Jews, and you walk in the streets and you see Jews – *frum* Jews, *shomrei Torah* – we have to feel that it's an opportunity to become better, to be dragged along with the crowd.

You see signs everywhere, *glatt kosher*. *Glatt kosher* everywhere. You see *yoshon* now, many stores have signs outside for *yoshon*. There are *shomer Shabbos* cosmetics advertised in the drugstore. Seforim stores, shuls, all good things. Don't be reluctant. Don't be so resistant. Don't be so stubborn. Give in and become one of them. Identify with them. Look like them.

### **Bustling with Buses**

That's what Hakadosh Baruch Hu intended. Of course sometimes the *middah* of *akshanus* is required. When we came over as immigrants and there were not very *frum* Jews and America was populated by gentiles only and even the Jews who were here were socialists, so **לֹא תִהְיֶה אֲחֵרֵי רֵבִים** – **לִרְעוֹת** – be stubborn. That's when stubbornness has a place. Be stubborn and fight back against all the wrong things around us.

But when you have a good *frum* environment, when on Friday you walk out on the street Friday, tomorrow you go outside at 12 o'clock and buses are coming from all directions bringing boys from the yeshivas, bringing girls from the Beis Yankev, buses and buses, all sides, *baruch Hashem*!

It's an opportunity when the yeshivos close down on Friday and the buses start rolling down. Twenty buses from this yeshiva and twenty from that yeshiva. All over the town, buses full of yeshiva boys and yeshiva girls are riding home.

All hurrying home for Shabbos! Mobs of *frum* girls with long dresses, *frum* girls coming home, going to school, coming home for Shabbos, shopping for Shabbos, the place is bursting with people preparing for Shabbos, *challos* in the store windows. Those who bake *challos* at home, even better. Everywhere, preparing for Shabbos. *Baruch Hashem*! That's what Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants us to enjoy. It's our happiness. And opportunity, soak it in, bend!

The fact that you see so many other Jews makes a tremendous impression on you if you're willing. The effect can be quite powerful. If you have people who are together with you, and you soak it in, it causes you to have much more loyalty, much more steadfastness, much more

strength. Just because you see so many other *frum* people, you become fortified, you become *oifgelebt*!

### Numbers Trump Arguments

Nothing to do with arguments. You can always find arguments to show how ridiculous all the theories of the nations are. Even if you're one Jew by yourself, and you're living let's say, in China — a *frum* Jew living all by himself in China could easily show how ridiculous Christianity is or how ridiculous the *avodah zarah* of the Chinese is. He could bring proofs to show how Islam is nothing and nothing. He could show how evolution is *ah pusta chalom*, empty dreams. But even without any arguments and *sevaras*, just the *chizuk* of living among *frum* Jews — you begin to love the *minhagim* and the *mitzvos* that Jews do. You come to love the service of Hashem and the ways of the Jewish nation.

It doesn't mean that a Jew somewhere out West, in a little agricultural town, and he's all by himself among gentiles, it doesn't mean he can't be strong, but there's a big difference, however. There's nothing like being in a big Torah community, where there are many *frum* Jews. No comparison. The conviction, the firmness of his belief is reinforced by the numbers. It's a very important principle; the power and conviction of numbers.

I once went to see the Satmerer Rav, the old Satmerer Rav, *zichrono livracha*, on Hoshana Rabbah. The place was packed. It was jam-packed with people and the *Hoshanos* were four hours! Four hours! Now, I consider myself a *misnaggid*; my family didn't practice any *chassidus* and neither did my rebbes. But no matter; just being among all the *frum* Jews, all wearing *shtreimelach*, it was a *chizuk*. Just seeing so many *frum* Jews for hours and hours can have a profound influence if you're willing to let it be so.

I'm not saying only there. You can go to other places. When the Agudas Yisroel made a *siyum*, twenty thousand Jews came. It knocked the eyes out of the New York Times. It hurt them to no end. Very good!

### Soaking in Good Numbers

And you don't need a *Siyum HaShas* to knock out their eyes. All the black hats, the *frum* Jewish children with *yarmulkes*, the *frum* boys on bicycles with their *tzitzis* flying, the *frum* Jewish women pushing baby carriages, two inside the carriage and five running alongside the carriage! A reporter came from the New York Times to Brooklyn so he wrote in the article, "There are so many baby carriages in Brooklyn." That's what

an impression it made on him; his heart hurt him when he saw that. In Manhattan there are no baby carriages.

But who cares about the New York Times; that's nothing. It's what we can achieve by being among good Jews, by being among a *rabbim* of good Jews. You know what that means? A tremendous *chizuk*! You may not admit it. You're a philosopher, you're a *chacham*, you want to read the Kuzari, you want to read the Chovos Halevavos. Fine. But this is more important than anything else. You don't have to be a philosopher if you're willing to live among the *rabbim* of *frum* Jews and fulfill the mitzvah of אַחֲרֵי רַבִּים לְהִטּוֹת.

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## Let's Get Practical

### Not Following the Crowd

This week, I will *bli neder* work on fulfilling אַחֲרֵי רַבִּים לְרַעוּת by choosing one area where I feel the pull of "everyone does it." It may be spending habits, social expectations, clothing trends, or anything that comes from the multitude rather than Torah.

Once a day, when I face that pressure — even in a small way — I will pause and tell myself: "Just because it's the majority doesn't make it right."

By practicing this small moment of independence each day, I train myself to be the kind of Jew the parsha describes — someone who stands firm even in face of the *rabbim*, and who refuses to let the world's noise weaken his loyalty to the Torah.

This week's booklet is based on tapes:

**279** – Judah the Lion | **340** – Chanukah VI | **594** – A World of Tests

**E-12** – Together at Sinai | **E-63** – Strength of Character

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## Shabbos Inspired

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### What Is a Melachah?

Maseches Shabbos seems to start backward. The first Mishnah discusses the *melachah* of *hotza'ah*, "carrying." This *melachah* entails transferring an object from one domain to another.

Why does it start with this? As Tosafos point out, the tractate dealing with Shabbos should really follow the order of Shabbos itself. It should begin with the halachos of *erev Shabbos*, proceed to the halachos of the onset of Shabbos, and then discuss the thirty-nine *melachos* —the very last of which is *hotza'ah*.

Tosafos offer several answers to this question, and the following Midrash points to an additional approach. The wicked Turnus Rufus challenged R' Akiva: "If Hashem honors Shabbos as you say, He shouldn't make the wind blow on Shabbos, nor should He make it rain or make plants grow." R' Akiva answered him: "I will explain it by way of a parable. If the homes of two people share a courtyard, and one of them fails to participate in the *eruv*, neither may carry in the courtyard. But if only one person's home opens to the courtyard, he is permitted to carry throughout the courtyard. And so it is with Hashem. For Him there is no other domain, since the whole world is His! Thus, He is 'permitted' throughout the world." (*Bereishis Rabbah* 11:5)

What was the debate all about? Turnus Rufus asked R' Akiva how Hashem can do *melachah* on Shabbos. Hashem moves things from place to place by means of the wind, He brings down the rain, and He makes the plants grow. R' Akiva answered that for Hashem, the entire world is one private domain, since everything is His. Hashem may move things around freely, as a man would do within his own courtyard.

Does this answer the question? Apparently not. It indeed explains why Hashem moves things from place to place by means of the wind, but Turnus Rufus asked a more general question, involving additional *melachos*. For instance, he asked about making plants grow —this is the *melachah* of *zore'a*. What did R' Akiva answer him about that? He answered him that the *melachah* of *hotza'ah* expresses the nature of all thirty-nine *melachos*, as we shall explain.

Refraining from *melachah* means desisting from a certain type of act. On the seventh day of Creation, Hashem desisted from any act connected to this world, and instead He seated Himself on His Heavenly Throne of Glory, as we say in Shabbos morning prayers: "ביום השביעי התעלה וישב על כסא כבודו" — Who on the seventh day ascended to sit upon the Throne of His Glory. Similarly, our refraining from *melachah* on Shabbos means that we desist from any act connected to this world.

But what type of *melachah* is actually forbidden on Shabbos? Only *meleches machsheves* —a creative *melachah*. The Torah did not forbid us to work. By Torah law, one may carry heavy burdens around his yard on Shabbos. Only creative acts are forbidden. Why? When a person creates something, he ventures out of his limited framework. He goes beyond his boundaries and builds something new. This is the nature of the thirty-nine *melachos* forbidden on Shabbos.

And this was R' Akiva's answer to Turnus Rufus: When a person carries an object within his own domain, he's not creating anything. Only when the object has been transferred in a significant way has something new taken place. So it is with the entire world, as far as Hashem is concerned: The things Hashem does in His already created world are not creative acts. They're not *meleches machsheves*, so they don't contradict the halachos of Shabbos. They're like carrying within a private courtyard. That is why Maseches Shabbos begins with the *melachah* of *hotza'ah*, because this *melachah* reveals the nature of all the *melachos*!

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# Q&A

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## QUESTION

**When Adar comes in, we try to make more simcha. What does that mean?**

## ANSWER

I want you to understand that it's not difficult at all. We have within us a fountain of *simcha*. Because when Hashem blew the *neshama* into man, He also blew in a fountain of *simcha*, an endless fountain of happiness. And all you need is to turn on the faucet and it starts pouring out.

It's remarkable how much joy there is in a human heart. Of course, you have to be a good plumber because sometimes it's plugged up. But if you know how to unplug it, you'll understand to look at the sunlight and say, "ומתוק האור – *How sweet is the sunlight!*" and you enjoy it; you become happy with the sunlight. Imagine that! Happy with sunlight!

So all year round you're busy with all kinds of things, but in Adar you take a little extra time to look at the sun, and you become *malei simcha*, full of happiness. It says: ומתוק האור – *How sweet is the light*, השמש – *How good it is to see the sunlight* (Koheles 11:7).

Now, once you start practicing, you'll be amazed how much happiness you have in your heart. When you walk outside and breathe the air, even cold air, it's a happiness. It's good, clean air, and the cold helps clean the air; it makes it free of germs. When you breathe it in, you're so happy. It comes into your lungs; it invigorates you and it makes your blood become more red and you're so happy. And so, משנכנס אדר מרבין בשמחה, "I'm so happy I'm breathing!"

In the yeshiva they used to say that the biggest *simcha*, of course, is Torah: אין שמחה כהתרת הספיקות – *There's no happiness greater than clarifying Torah concepts*; and so when you learn more in Adar, when you're succeeding in your learning, that's the biggest *simcha* of all.

February 1995

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