

# TORAS AVIGDOR

AUTHENTIC TORAH THOUGHT FOR LIFE

RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT" L

## PARSHAS SHEMOS

WITH

RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT" L

BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

### THIS PEOPLE I CREATED

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## Part I. A Difficult Nation

### The Great Refusal

When Hakadosh Baruch Hu proposed to Moshe Rabbeinu that he should become the leader, that he should return to his people in Mitzrayim and lead them to freedom, everybody knows the story of how extremely reluctant Moshe was. He refused seven times! Seven times the Almighty had to urge him.

Now a great man like Moshe when he's offered a noble mission such as this – and it's Hakadosh Baruch Hu doing the offering – it seems to us he should have accepted it immediately. That would have been the most proper thing, to not refuse even once.

### Rules of Refusal

You know, there's a rule if you're sitting in the synagogue and someone proposes that you should go to the *amud* and conduct the prayers, so the proper etiquette is that at first you should refuse. That's an expression of humility. At the second request you should shrug yourself a little bit as if you're undecided. And at the third time, the third request, you should run to the *amud*. We understand

that it's *derech erez* to not show what you really are, that you really are eager to lead the prayers, so you hesitate a little.

But that's only when a private person is asking you to lead the prayers. Suppose however that an *adam chashuv*, let's say the *rav*, the rabbi, requests, so then the rule is that **אין מקרבין בגדול** – you don't refuse a *gadol* and immediately, the first request should be accepted.

Now, it may be that a *gabbai* in a synagogue also has that *din* because he is the one responsible; he's asking on behalf of the rabbi or on behalf of the congregation and so it could be that you shouldn't refuse the *gabbai* either. But whatever it is **אין מקרבין בגדול** – you don't refuse the request of a *gadol*, of someone with authority. That's a rule.

### Accept the Mission

So although Moshe Rabbeinu certainly had motives of humility – like he said to Hashem, **מי אנכי, who am I to be the one who leads and goes to Pharaoh on behalf of the people** (Shemos 3:11) – nevertheless he should have looked at the One Who was requesting it. If the *Gadol shel Olam* was urging him, so how many times could he refuse?

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It's a big question. After all, politeness requires there should be a limit to humility. If somebody refuses six times when the *rav* asks him to go to the *amud*, we would think very poorly of him. And so Moshe certainly should have manipulated his humility, he should have manipulated that *middah* and agreed to this great mission right away.

### Mission Impossible

The answer is that it wasn't only humility here. Moshe Rabbeinu refused for a sound reason and he said the reason: וְהֵן לֹא יֵאֱמִינוּ לִי – *They won't believe me (ibid. 4:1)*. “You're sending me on an impossible mission,” Moshe said to Hashem. “You know who these people are! They're the toughest people on earth to convince about anything.”

Moshe knew them well. It's going to be very difficult to persuade them. You're sending me to tell them a story that Hashem appeared to me in the wilderness? A man will come along to them and say Hashem appeared to him and they'll just accept it? Did Hashem appear to Yosef? No, Hashem never appeared to Yosef Hatzaddik. Did Hashem appear to Reuven? To Shimon? No. It doesn't say that anywhere in the Torah. After Yaakov Avinu it says nowhere that Hashem spoke to anybody. So you're going to tell me all of a sudden an unknown man comes out of the wilderness and he says, “Hashem spoke to me.”?

Now had it been Egyptians or the Midyanim so it's possible. Sure. Among them you'll find customers everywhere that will believe you. There are plenty of suckers in the world. In America too. Don't you see when they advertise a lecture and a guru comes, a fifteen year old guru from India, and it's crowded? People come to listen and they pay admission too. So everywhere there are fools who are influenced by superstitions.

But the Bnei Yisroel? They're not that kind of a people. You can't just pull the wool over the eyes of the Am Yisroel. וְהֵן לֹא יֵאֱמִינוּ לִי – *They won't believe me.*

### A Difficult Nation

By nature the Am Yisroel is a difficult nation. You know some people are always agreeable when you talk to them. They never argue with you; they're willing to go along with you. But that's very unusual among original Jews. I say “original” because once the Jews adopt gentile ways you'll also find docile Jews. But among original Jews each man stands on his own feet.

Don't think that the masses of Williamsburg or the masses of our Eastern European Jews of seventy years ago were a docile herd that were driven by their religious leaders. Some people think that's how it was. No. The *rabbanim* always had a great deal of difficulty with the people. It's like becoming a teacher not of a kindergarten; it's becoming a teacher, let's say, in a *kollel*, a *kollel* of elderly rabbis like you have in Yerushalayim. And whatever you say, you'll give a *shiur* or propose an idea, so it will be challenged by every one of them. Everyone knows everything already; he heard everything already and so your authority, your proposition, has to be based on proofs. It has to be based on logic.

### A Tough Kollel

I was once present in the *kollel* in Slabodka, the Slabodka *kollel*. A black beard was a rarity there. A *kollel* of grey bearded men. They married at the age of forty. They were old *yeshivah* men who had been through *shas* again and again, All the *yeshivah shiurim* they had heard at least seven times already. At least seven times! And therefore let's imagine you're appointed now to *rosh yeshivah* of this *kollel*, a *kollel* of men who are well-founded in their Torah learning and in their way of thinking, and you want to introduce a new idea to them. It's like pulling teeth.

Now, difficult as it would be to have to give lectures in *halachah* to such an academy of sages, it was immeasurably more difficult to give instruction to the generation that was going out of Egypt. They

were all great men and they were not regimented to just follow instructions.

### **Jewish Contrariness**

Even today Bnei Torah are not regimented like that. It doesn't mean they shouldn't be disciplined but it's not easy because if you'll propose an idea of discipline, of behavior, to a *yeshivah* man so he'll come up with a better idea of discipline, a different idea. Let's say you're starting a new town of *yeshivah* men and you tell them, "Let's introduce green and red lights at the traffic intersection."

So one will say, "Why not orange and blue lights?" Another will say, "Why lights? Why not something else?" You'll have a whole argument before you can convince them. Whereas in a gentile town all you need is a city ordinance and it's accepted. You'll give them fines and that's all.

### **An Enormous Job**

And so Moshe knew that to persuade the people of Yisroel to do anything in concerted action is a difficult project. They're a nation that by their nature is not docile and so a proposal like this, that we'll all leave Mitzrayim now as one, better be backed up with good *svarahs*, with cold, hard and unassailable logic.

Even to get ten Jews together for a small project is not easy. Try it; it's quite a task to unite ten Jews. You'll say, "Let's come together and *daven* at this and this address tomorrow morning," you'll end up the next morning with ten different addresses. And so to get a big nation – they were already very numerous in Egypt – to get them to unite all together on one thing, Moshe Rabbeinu knew that it wouldn't be just difficult – it would be a miracle.

And so it's not that Moshe Rabbeinu was reluctant to do a good deed or that he was so humble that he had to be asked seven times. Hakadosh Baruch Hu, if He asks once it's enough. Forget about your humility when Hashem tells you to do something. It was something else altogether – **וְהָיָה לֹא יִאֲמְנוּ לִי** – Moshe Rabbeinu knew that it was an enormous job he was being burdened with; he

knew that he was being sent to a nation that was going to be difficult to deal with.

### **Created in the Beginning**

Now, there's something very important that you have to understand. It's not just a matter of chance, a random development, that the Bnei Yisroel were a tough bunch. It was a people made to order. That's what we say in our davening, in *Aleinu*; three times a day we declare: **עָלֵינוּ לְשַׁבַּח לְאֲרוֹן הַבַּל** – *It's incumbent upon us to render our praise to Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, **לְיוֹצֵר בְּרֵאשִׁית** – *to the One Who created in the beginning*, **שֶׁלֹא עָשָׂנוּ כְּגוֹיֵי הָאָרְצוֹת** – *that He did not make us like all the nations of the lands*.

We're thanking Him because He made us the chosen nation, a separate nation, but there's something strange in those words. Because it says that we give thanks **לְיוֹצֵר בְּרֵאשִׁית** – *to the One Who created at the beginning* and it seems out of place, those words. Because this prayer, if it would be an expression of gratitude to Him for creating us, if we're thanking Him as our Creator, then the words **לְיוֹצֵר בְּרֵאשִׁית** – *the One Who created everything in the beginning* – make sense. But here, the whole *tefillah* of *Aleinu*, we're not talking about creation at all; we're thanking Him for electing us as His chosen people and that did not take place at the beginning. At the beginning of the world we weren't yet in existence.

### **The Tailor Made Nation**

And so the answer is as follows: At the beginning of the world, when Hakadosh Baruch Hu made the universe He already had in mind the holy nation. He foresaw that the Am Yisroel would stand up and choose Him *and therefore He chose us already then*. And what does it mean that He chose us? It means that He made us.

That's what it means that we are thanking the **יוֹצֵר בְּרֵאשִׁית** – *the Creator of everything from the beginning of time*, **שֶׁלֹא עָשָׂנוּ כְּגוֹיֵי הָאָרְצוֹת** – *that He made us different from the nations of the world*. He was preparing a people for a great function and

that means He created us with the necessary qualities.

I want you to get that point. *He made us in a certain way.* “You did not make us like the nations of the world” – it means we were made differently. Included in *maaseh Bereishis* was the creation of a special nation; a special nation with special qualities.

And that's what Yeshayah Hanavi said in the name of Hashem: **עַם זֶה יִצְרַתִּי לִי** – *This nation I created for Myself* (Yeshayah 43:21). It's a declaration of the greatest importance: Not I chose for Myself – I made them for Me, for My purpose. It means we are custom made. The Am Yisroel is a nation that was made to order and it was made to order by a quality Artisan Who wants to turn out the best product. We were made to be great. We were made to be righteous.

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## Part II. A Fiery Nation

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### Three Special Traits

Now, being made 'righteous' doesn't mean what you think. Nobody is made righteous; there's no such thing. Even a nation, no. What it means is that Hakadosh Baruch Hu made them a nation that would be more *capable* of righteousness, a nation more *capable* of achieving everything that He wants from them. And for that purpose He made us with various characteristics, various qualities.

Now before I surprise you with our tailor-made qualities that are our subject for tonight, I'll sugarcoat our discussion by mentioning some qualities that we won't be talking about: **שְׁלֹשׁ מִדּוֹת – טוֹבוֹת נֶתַן הַקֹּב"ה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל: רַחֲמָנִים, בְּיִשְׁוּנִים, וְגוֹמְלֵי חַסְדִּים** – *When Hakadosh Baruch Hu made the Am Yisroel He put in them three especial qualities: they have compassion, they're modest, and they like to do favors* (Medrash Tehillim 1:8)

That's why the Gemara (Yevamos 79a) says that when you want to marry somebody and you want to know if he's a true blooded Jew, so how do you check him out? **כָּל מִי שֵׁשׁ בּו ג' סִמְנִים הִלְלוּ רְאוּי לְהִרְבֵּק**

**בו** – *If he has these three signs then it's fitting to marry him.* **רַחֲמָנִים** – Is he a man with pity, compassion? **בְּיִשְׁוּנִים** – Is he a person of modesty? Is he ashamed of certain things? **וְגוֹמְלֵי חַסְדִּים** – And also does he like to do favors?

If he doesn't have these three or any one of them you have to be worried. Now, it could be he's a true Jew only it's atrophied because of disuse. Could be; you have to investigate further. But if he has them it's a sign that he is a descendant of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov.

### Three Not So Special Traits

But those aren't the only qualities we were made especially with. Those are the ones we like to hear our Chachomim talk about – it warms the Jewish heart to hear such things – but there's more to the story. Because when we read in the Medrash (Shemos Rabbah 7:3 ) how Hakadosh Baruch Hu describes the special nature of the Am Yisroel, you'll be surprised at the description. But you can trust Him; He knows best how to describe them because He made them that way. It's included in **עַם זֶה יִצְרַתִּי לִי** – *this nation I created for Me, for My purposes, שְׁלֹא עָשֵׂנוּ כְּגוֹיֵי הָאֲרָצוֹת*, *that He made us different than the gentiles.*

Hakadosh Baruch Hu describes us with three adjectives: **בְּנֵי סָרְבָנִים הֵן, רַגְזָנִים הֵם, טַרְחָנִים הֵם** – My children are *sarvanim* and *ragzanim* and *tarchonim*. *Sarvonim* means they are refusers. They're stubborn people. *Ragzanim* means they're excitable; they become aroused, passionate. And *tarchanim* means they can be bothersome; but not just bothersome – they are aggressive, they can be aggressive about it.

Now, it's a mistake to think that Hakadosh Baruch Hu was criticizing His people, that He was blaming them for these qualities. No, that's not it. We're going to see that these qualities, when they're used appropriately, they are fundamental and necessary for the success of our nation.

## Refuse to be Deceived

*Sarvanim* means it's a nation of 'refusers'. It doesn't mean they refuse to do good things, but it's the Jewish nature to look through superficiality; they refuse to be taken in and deceived by words.

You know the gentiles live by words, by verbiage. Even when the gentile scientists write, it's mostly talk. If you read a science magazine, you'll see that everything that could have been said in the simplest language is made difficult on purpose. That's an ancient gentile practice to use verbiage.

If you listen to the radio – you shouldn't unless it's just to hear the weather; otherwise, it's a waste of time – but if you ever listen to the radio, you see there's no brains to these people, no intelligence. It's nothing but verbiage. They're like plumbers; a plumber knows how to twirl a monkey wrench and the radio person knows how to twirl his tongue.

## Slabodka Speeches

Now, gentiles and people who listen like gentiles, they're impressed by the flow of words. It dazzles them and they can't say no. Whatever the radio man said, it's monkey see, monkey do. But an original Jew however is not impressed by a speaker, by someone who has good delivery. You know, when I went to Slabodka some of my *rebbeis* on principle refused to use oratory. They expressed in four words what others would say in forty. They spoke only in half sentences, sometimes half words. But we heard greatness in those words.

A wise man can stammer and stutter, but he can think! Wisdom, logic, that's what impresses the Jew. He was made a *sarvan*; he refuses to be taken in by words, pie in the sky ideas. He's accustomed to seeing through verbiage; he's created that way.

That's why when a missionary for *Yoshke Pondra* comes to a Jew with his stories, *bubbeh maisehs*, the Jew is not impressed. And the gentile missionary is baffled by that. After all, he's saying such good stories. But the Jew is not dazzled by words because Hakadosh Baruch Hu made him a *sarvan*, a refuser;

he refuses to buy your garbage. Hakadosh Baruch Hu created us to be tough customers.

## Fiery Jews and Phlegmatic Germans

The second quality is *ragzanim*. The Am Yisroel is an excitable nation; they're fiery and passionate. They're not calm, stolid, phlegmatic. They can't look on at injustice and remain quiet. You know, the history books describe the phlegmatic Germans: They're standing with Tommy guns in front of a ditch full of dead bodies and the calm German is phlegmatically shooting down the naked Jews.

Of course, he took off their clothing first. The phlegmatic Germans didn't want to waste any clothing so they saved the Jewish clothing in big piles. And the Jew had to pile his boots in one pile and his shoes in another pile, underwear in another pile. Then he was made to stand at the edge of the deep ditch and the German calmly shot him dead and he toppled into the ditch. Only a phlegmatic nation could be turned into killers like that.

## The Wickedness of 'Ja Ja'

The German had no mind of his own. All he needed was a broadcast from Berlin that the Jew is vermin, that the Jew must be exterminated, and "ja ja," the German said as he listened to his radio. If headquarters in Berlin gave instructions that you should shoot down Jewish men, women and children, so *ja ja*. They didn't stop to argue.

When I passed through Germany in 1932 I saw that the Germans were obedient and disciplined. I was impressed by that. But later I understood how it could be that when the orders were given to massacre without exception, babies too, it was only *ja ja, ja ja*. The order was given from Berlin so the Germans did it calmly without questions.

Now, the Germans were especially phlegmatic but all the gentile nations are the same. They don't get excited. It's like a cow. A cow can chew her cud calmly while another cow is being slaughtered. As long as she is not touched, she is not excited. That's why we find among gentiles wickedness happens on the streets and injustice takes place in the

courts, and nobody is excited. Because they don't have this special quality.

### **Holy Explosions**

But the Jew is not phlegmatic. *Ragzanim* means it's an excitable nation. That's why many times there are explosions in Jewish synagogues, dissensions and flare ups. And people say, "Would this happen *lehavdil* in a church?" And the truth is wouldn't! Because they weren't made that way.

And Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave us that quality for a purpose. Of course, we should always seek harmony. Of course we should protect the good name of the Jewish people. Of course sometimes you can misuse this gift and become passionate about foolishness; sometimes you'll make *machlokes* over an unimportant thing. But we're made that way because a nation of ideals and principles has to be passionate about it. And sometimes the flare-ups are over worthwhile issues. It's ideology. It's principles involved. And that's part of being a righteous nation. Hakadosh Baruch Hu tailored a nation made to order, to be a nation of the Torah. They should be *ragzanim*.

### **A Nation of Criticizers**

And the third quality is **טִרְחָנִים** – they're bothersome. It means they're an aggressive people; they take action. If they see their leaders doing wrong, they criticize their leader; they won't let him be.

But we have to know that this is said in praise of our forefathers. They criticized their leaders because they expected the best from them. A leader was forced to be perfect – else he was exposed to criticism.

Now in America it's not so – don't think that they criticize President Nixon because they demand perfection of their leaders. No, not at all. The only reason they're angry at him is because poor Mr. Nixon made the mistake of showing that he wasn't a vandalistic liberal. He showed that he wants to conserve American institutions and that he's for law and order. He showed that he wants to battle

permissiveness and wasteful government spending. That was his big 'mistake'; and that's why they hate him. But actually they don't expect anything but crookedness from their leaders. They understand it's par for the course.

But among Jews a crooked leader was unthinkable. They were *tarchonim*; *they were created that way*, to be aggressive and to attack their leaders. That's the only way they could be a successful nation. A nation needs that its rabbis should be afraid of the congregation. But not afraid he might lose his salary, no – when a *rav*, a *rosh yeshivah*, a *talmid chacham* is afraid of the people because of money, that's the worst thing. But suppose he's afraid that he's not *frum* enough. He's afraid that he's deviating from the Torah and he's worried they'll throw bricks because he's playing loose with the Torah. That's a nation of *tarchonim*!

### **The Tough Nation**

And so when Moshe Rabbeinu said **עוֹר מְעֵט וְיִסְקְלָנִי** – *a little more and they'll stone me* (Shemos 17:4), so we are horrified by that. We think, "What kind of an unruly rabble they were!" But it's just the opposite. These words should be put on a banner and displayed as the greatness of our forefathers. Even Moshe Rabbeinu couldn't escape their criticism. Authority meant nothing when they saw something wrong.

Now these words, these descriptions, should not be taken lightly. It's an index of the qualities of the Jewish nation from the beginning of the world. We're a tough people because that's what Hashem needs in from His one nation! He wants to engrave the Torah on our hearts forever and only a tough nation can handle that.

### **The Forever Nation**

Like the Alter of Slabodka *zichrono levrachah* once said. Let's say you want an engraved tablet on your wall. Why bother with a stone tablet? When you have to engrave in stone it's a difficult job. You need chisels and hammers. You break fingernails. Better to take a big chunk of butter and one, two,

three you can engrave words on it. It's so much easier.

The difference is, the Alter said, how long it's going to last. So if we would be a butter nation it wouldn't be difficult to write on us, to make us a Torah nation. But the question is how long will it endure? Easy come, easy go.

And so the Am Yisroel was made not an easy nation. סָרְבָנִים הֵם – *They are a people who refuse.* They have independent minds. רַגְזָנִים הֵם – *They're an excitable nation.* טָרְחָנִים הֵם – *And they won't back down.* That's how we were made from the beginning and these qualities make us endure forever. Once you engrave on the Am Yisroel, it's there.

We are going to keep His Torah for thousands of years even though all around us we have *ovdei avodah zarah*. There are nations all around us. Even to this day, the Jewish nation is stubborn. We don't care what they do. We ignore them. They are a big majority but we don't care. We are going to be, up till Moshiach we are going to keep our Torah. And that's because עַם זֶה יִצְרַתִּי לִי – *this nation I created for Me.* They were made for that purpose.

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## Part III. A Torah Nation

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### A Fire of Humility

Now what did Hakadosh Baruch Hu say to Moshe Rabbeinu when he was refusing to go to the people? “I want to let you know,” He said, “that when I take My people out of Mitzrayim I'm going to bring them to Har Sinai and I'm going to give them the Torah. תַּעֲבֹדוּן אֶת הָאֱלֹקִים עַל הָהָר הַזֶּה – *And on that mountain the nation will humble themselves before Me (ibid. 12).*”

תַּעֲבֹדוּן means that they'll become *avodim*, servants, that are humbled before Him. “The Torah I'm going to give to the Am Yisroel,” Hashem said, “was created by Me to fit perfectly with the character I created them with. It's going to humble all of those qualities I gave them and make them the perfect nation.”

About this the Gemara in Mesichta Beitzah (25b) quotes a *possuk*, מִיְמֵינוּ אֲשֶׁר דָּת לָמוֹ – *From Hashem's right Hand there was given a Torah of fire to them (Devarim 33:2).* It's talking about what happened at Har Sinai, how Hashem gave us the Torah, and it says that a *das* of fire, a fiery Torah, was given to the Am Yisroel.

### Fight Fire With Fire

But the Gemara finds in these words a hint of something more. Because actually the word *das* implies something besides Torah; *das* means ‘custom’ or ‘ways’. And so we have to understand what does it mean that Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave a ‘*das*’ to Yisroel? If He gave us laws, that's Torah; it's not *das*. *Das* means something besides the laws of the Torah.

So the Gemara says something cryptic about that: רָאוּיִן הֵלְלוּ שֶׁתַּנַּתַּן לָהֶם דָּת אֲשֶׁר – *It's fitting for this nation to receive a Torah of fire. Why? דִּתֵּיהֶם שָׁל אֵלוֹ אֲשֶׁר – Because their nature is fire.* The Jewish nation received the Torah because of their nature; we received the Torah because it fits with our nature. That's the Gemara without any embellishments: Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave to the Am Yisroel a fiery Torah according to their fiery nature!

And now the Gemara adds some explanation, a secret. Maybe you already know it but it's a secret to the world: אֵלֶּמְלָא נִתְּנָה תּוֹרָה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל – *If the Torah would not have been given to Yisroel, אֵין כָּל אַמָּה וְלָשׁוֹן יְכוּלִין לְעַמּוֹד בְּפָנֵיהֶם – then no nation could have withstood them.* The nation of Yisrael has such a fiery nature that without the Torah they would have been a great disturbance to mankind. They would have been impossible to live with. And therefore Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave them such a Torah; He fought fire with fire.

### Taming the Fire

Isn't that a novel idea? We were given a Torah of fire because otherwise we would be a menace, a menace to ourselves and to the world. If it wasn't for the Torah the world couldn't tolerate the Am Yisroel. That's why liberal Jews, Jews who forsake

the Torah, are very dangerous people. Because they're fiery people without a fiery Torah to control them.

We shouldn't publicize it but among ourselves we can say that the irreligious Jews are the biggest of all nuisances. All the corrupt ideas that the gentiles think of, they take and go *meshugeh* with them. All of the qualities they were made with they use for the opposite of what it was intended for. They're *sarvonim* and *ragzonim* and *tarchonim*; they're pushy and demonstrative and wild, and so they make the biggest trouble.

### **Fire Untamed**

Who were the defendants in the Chicago trial? Ruben, Friedman, all Jewish names. Jewish bums. And who goes on NBC and CBS and ABC to promote all the gentile craziness? Who poisons the country with their television and radio programs? It's liberal Jews. They're tearing everything down, ruining everything.

And most of all, they're ruining themselves. You remember Abbie Hoffman, *alav hashnubbel*? A Jew. He could have made something from himself. Instead he ruined his young life by trying to be a rebel against the establishment. He was full of fire, raising the sky with his tumult. Finally the newspapers reported that at the age of fifty two he committed suicide. A waste of a fiery Jewish soul.

You see it still today. I was walking on Kings Highway, I saw a fat man waddle out onto the street. A Jew; I'm sure it was a Jew. A big fat man with a big belly and across his belly were the words: "Abbie still lives!" He's still fired up about Abbie.

Because they're taking the fiery character that the Yotzer *Bereishis* made them especially with and they're misfiring. Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave them a fire for the purpose of serving Him and they're ruining themselves. They were made with special qualities, fiery qualities, that are dangerous if not tempered and controlled by a fiery Torah. A fiery nature is a great tool but it's dangerous; it has to be kept within bounds, and therefore He gave us a

Torah of fire. It's an important principle you're hearing now, a *chiddush*: When Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave the Torah, one of the reasons was to keep our fiery characters under control.

### **Taamei Hamitzvos**

And so if you're looking for reasons for *mitzvos*, this is an excellent one: the Am Yisroel is put into a straitjacket. When we are forced to live according to all the details of the Torah, to do things just so or just so, we are being trained in self-control. We are taming our fiery qualities.

It doesn't mean that's the only reason but the mere fact that you cannot do whatever you wish to do, that you constantly have to consult the Torah – "What does the *halachah* say?" – is a balm for our fiery character.

So if you ask, "Why is it that I can't buy a suit unless I first check it for *shatnez*?", the first reason is that you're being put in a straitjacket. Just the fact that you cannot buy a suit in any place unless it has a non *shatnez* label inside, it's a very great success in achieving control of your character. You can't just do whatever you want.

### **Kosher Control**

Here's a man walking in the street and there are all kinds of restaurants, all kinds of foods are being advertised, and you cannot use any of them. Each time he passes by he's practicing self-control! And if you want to eat a packaged food, also; you must first see: is there a *hechsher* on it? And sometimes it costs more too because of that. It's a tremendous achievement in self-control.

A Jewish boy runs in by recess to his *rebbe* and shows him a package of candy. "Rebbe, can I eat this candy?" The *rebbe* says no; there's no *hechsher* on it. The boy takes the candy and casts it into the wastebasket. It's an achievement.

Boys and girls learn self-control by living according to the Torah. We don't realize the greatness of the Jewish home where self-control is the *modus operandi*. It's the way of life. Little boys



and girls eat meat. They say “Ma, can I have some ice cream?”

“No. You have to wait six hours.”

Six hours after meat to wait for ice cream is a long time! But the little boy and little girl accept that.

The mother walks out to the store and he's alone in the kitchen with the refrigerator with ice cream in it. He doesn't go there. He has learned self-control. Do you know what an achievement that is for a child?

### **Shabbos, Shul and Shatnez**

Shabbos, you can't do this. You can't do that. Even if you want to move a pen from the table you have to look up in the *seforim*, how and when. Shabbos! It's a day of excellence of character. If only Abbie Hoffman would have kept Shabbos ...

Even just to be in the shul where there is a strict *rov* who doesn't let you talk. At least during *chazoras hashatz* you have to keep your mouth closed. Isn't that a wonderful thing? Every day you come to the synagogue and you practice taming your fire. It's very good practice. During *krias hatorah*, if you're in a strict *minyán*, they don't let you talk. Wonderful!

Now of course that's not the only reason for Shabbos and *kashrus* and *shatnez* but even had it been the only reason it would have been sufficient.

And so we should not complain of the fact we have *chukim*, certain laws for which no reason seems available. Don't worry. There's a reason for it. But it doesn't mean it's for your benefit to know the reason. Your benefit is to do, and by doing you become a different personality. You're transformed. When we obey the Torah laws on the highway of life – even the hair splitting little details – we learn the great excellence of self-control. We're changing ourselves. We're transforming our personalities.

### **Lift Off!**

Now, once we have our fiery nature under control, now that fire can be used with the best results. That's the fire that raises us up; like old-

time balloons. If they wanted the balloon to go up in the air, a big balloon that had some passengers in it, so first you made a fire under the balloon and the hot air came into the balloon and made it swell and then the balloon began to rise because of the fire underneath it.

Hashem says, “Get going! Lift off! You're not in this world to stand still. I want you to fly! And I created you with a fire just for that.” *אֵשׁ הָיָה לָמוֹ* – He gave them a fire of Torah!

And because at Har Sinai they were given such a fire, the fire continued to burn brightly and hotly for many generations. And now you have a fiery nation ascending the scaffold to be burned in fire for the sake of the Torah. The Jews suffer fiery ordeals for the sake of the Torah!

Jews give up jobs. Jews give up careers for the sake of the Torah. Men and women sacrifice, *kollel* wives. *Kollel* wives endure poverty so that their husband should continue to learn.

Men get up early when it's still dark outside to go to the *beis medrash* for a *shiur*. It requires a fire to come out from under the warm blanket. Or at least the wife has to have the fire to chase him out of the bed. Women labor all their lives raising families taking care of a big family of children. Boys and girls give up all types of ‘good’ times because they have a fire burning inside them. It's a fiery ordeal but they do it with love because they have a fiery love for the Torah, for Hashem, in their hearts.

### **A Nation of Greatness**

And every Jew should realize that he's capable of all these things because *he was created for this*. Every Jew was created with fiery qualities that are intended for his perfection. It's much easier for Am Yisroel to accomplish greatness in their lives because inherently they possess these qualities; qualities whereby every Jew is endowed with the capabilities of becoming great.

Every man, every woman, every boy, every girl! There is nobody little in the Jewish people because we were tailormade for this. That's the lesson we're

learning. We have been tailored. We're made to order for this purpose. Everyone can attain greatness. Now some more than others but everyone who is descended from our forefathers should realize that Hakadosh Baruch Hu had him in mind from the beginning of the world and He endowed him with these gifts. And these gifts are our heritage and we're expected to use them.

And we have to say *Aleinu L'shabeiach* for that opportunity. Every day by Shacharis, Mincha and Maariv we thank Hakadosh Baruch Hu **שְׁלֵא עָשָׂנוּ בְּגוֹיֵי הָאָרְצוֹת** – *that He didn't make our lot like the nations of the earth*. The nations of the earth live for the earth and the end is they go back to the earth.

But the Am Yisroel, they're made differently. They're created for ideals, for perfection, for eternity. And for that they were made with fiery qualities and given a fiery Torah. And this fire ascends after they finish the span of their lives; it ascends and returns to Hakadosh Baruch Hu to remain with Him forever!

### Have a Wonderful Shabbos

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## Let's Get Practical

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### Connecting to the Fire

When Moshe Rabbeinu refused Hashem's request to lead the Jewish people, it was because he was well aware of the difficulties this entailed. Hashem created us for greatness and made us a fiery nation. It is for this reason that it is so important to connect to the fiery Torah. This week, as I recite *Aleinu* thrice daily, I will *bli neder* take some time to reflect on this lesson.

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This week's booklet is based on tapes:

- 22** – A Stubborn Nation | **50** – Chosen Beforehand
- 260** – This People I Created | **552** – Kabolos Hatorah
- 874** – A Nation of Self Control



### QUESTION

**How does one curb the desire of his family to keep up with the Joneses?**

### ANSWER

Let them listen to these tapes. Play the tapes in your home for your family.

It's of the greatest importance to create an atmosphere of independence in the family: "We don't follow the crowd." It's very important.

Here's a man who is financially on the verge of bankruptcy but he has to marry off a child. It costs him 50,000 dollars. He can't help himself. His wife is pressing him. "How can we have less? We'll be ashamed to face our friends." And so he goes even more deeply into debt. He borrows to make an expensive wedding.

What a *shoteh* that is! Who cares what the relatives will say?! You can make a wedding even without the *smorgasbord*. Of course that's 'apikorsus' to say such a thing. But say you're a German. German Jews don't make a *smorgasbord*. And therefore you have a good model to follow.

In every aspect of life, we have to learn to be independent because constantly we're under pressure to spend money and to keep up with the relatives and with the friends. And therefore it's a treadmill. You're a prisoner of nothing, of a false ideal. You're laboring and spending your substance for something that Hakadosh Baeuch Hu never required you to do. You won't get any reward for in this world or in the Next World for keeping up with the so-called Joneses or Levys.

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