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SEFER BEREISHIS - THE CHOPP HOLDINGS EDITION

IN HONOR OF MY DEAR FRIENDS: MEIR & RUCHI SINGER

TORAS AVIGDOR

RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT" L

וירא

Don't Look Back!

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SEFER BEREISHIS

THE **CHOPP HOLDINGS** EDITION

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Year 4 | Issue 7

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פרשת וירא

WITH

R' AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"l

BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

Don't Look Back!

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Part I. Looking Back

An Extraordinary Place

In this week's *sedrah* we read about a remarkable incident that took place in *Eretz Canaan*; the *mehapechas Sedom v'Amorah* – the overturn of Sedom and its sister cities. Today, if you visit *Eretz Yisroel* you'll see that the most desolate place in the land is in the south, in the plain where these cities formerly existed. The cities of Sedom, once large and thriving centers of commerce, are now nothing at all.

You know, there was a time when the Bible critics denied that there ever were such cities; they said that the entire story of Sedom was invented from thin air to explain the utter desolation of that area. Unfortunately for them however, it has become

abundantly clear from the recently unearthed archives of Ebla – Ebla was a thriving city in ancient times – that they were doing a big commerce with the cities of Sedom. They have found many clay tablets, letters written on tablets, that detail negotiations back and forth with Sedom about the buying and selling of all types of merchandise.

And not only was Sedom a thriving city, but it was a very fertile area. Surrounding the city of Sedom were lush fields and beautiful gardens, all of them well watered by the Jordan River. It was so remarkably beautiful that the Torah describes it as *k'gan Hashem*, as delightful as *Gan Eden* was. Now, whether it was exactly like *Gan Eden*, probably not. But it was certainly something extraordinary.

Destruction and Rescue

It didn't last however. Because of their sins –“they did not support the hand of the poor and needy” (Yechezkel 16:49); and there were other sins too – Hakodosh Boruch Hu passed a sentence of destruction upon the entire district of the five cities of Sedom. It was a frightful scene to behold. וַיִּקְפֹּץ אֶת הָעָרִים הָאֵל – *Hashem overturned those cities*. “Overturned” means that it didn't happen gradually. It wasn't due to a slow erosion of the soil or some similar deterioration; it took place instantaneously. The Torah describes how a hail of burning chemicals – ignited sulfur together with salts – rained down in enormous abundance and everything became mineralized. Even today, nothing grows in that area. It's a desert, but not of sand – it's a desert of chemicals. Today they scoop up not only salt from the Dead Sea but many other minerals as well.

Instead of a garden of Hashem, it became a place of desolation; so much so that even many years later when the *navi* wanted to speak of an example of a total ruin he quoted Sedom as the example (Yirmiyahu 49:18). Forever, Sedom became the model of a burned out country – almost nothing in that sinful city escaped the wrath of Hakodosh Boruch Hu.

I say 'almost' because every little child knows that immediately before the torrent of chemicals came raining down, Lot and his wife made an escape from the city. What happened? Hashem had compassion on Lot – after all he was one of Avraham's closest relatives, and even more so, he was his disciple – and so Hashem sent messengers to warn him to flee the city along with his and thereby save their lives: הוּצָא מִן הַמְּקוֹם – “Take everything you can and run!” they told him. הִהָרֶה הַמַּלְאֲכִים – “Escape to the mountains!” וַיִּצְאֵהוּ – They seized him by the arm and urged him: הַמַּלְאֲכִים עַל נַפְשֶׁךָ – “Flee for your life!” And that's exactly what they did – Lot and his wife escaped with the *malachim* towards the outskirts of the city.

The Warning

Now, we must note that in addition to the efforts of the *malachim* to rescue Lot and his family, they also added a word of caution as they were making their escape. Just before fire descended to destroy the city, the *malachim*, *al pi Hashem*, gave one final instruction to Lot and his wife: אַל תִּבְטֵא אַחֲרֶיךָ – “Don't look behind you” (ibid. 19:17), they warned.

Now to us that seems queer. “Don't look back”?! Why not? As long as you're running away, as long as you're getting out of the danger zone, who cares if you look back? You can still run even though you turn your head back for a moment! As long as you're not delaying your departure, what's the problem?

No Table Salt

And not only were they warned not to look back but we see that it was punished by death. וַתִּבְטֵא אַחֲרָיו וַתִּהְיֶה נְצִיב מֶלַח – *When Lot's wife looked behind him she became a pillar of salt* (ibid. 19:26). At that moment she was hit by a blast of burning sulfur and chemicals falling from the skies and immediately she was mineralized – she became a fossil. The impact of the blast of burning chemicals paralyzed her and in a short time, perhaps in a course of a few hours, she became a “pillar of salt.” It doesn't mean ordinary table salt; *netziv melach* means she became a pillar of

chemicals. That's what a fossil is; as a result of the exchange of minerals for proteins, organic material undergoes the process of being ossified, of being changed into rock.

And thereafter, for years and years, wayfarers who passed through this desolate place would point to this pillar as a testimony to what had taken place. Everybody knew by tradition that this column of salt had once been a human being who had become petrified while on the run to escape the destruction; a woman had turned her head to take one last look at her dying city and she was therefore sentenced to remain with that city forever.

What's Wrong?!

Now, that's not something that's easy to understand because what's the big crime after all? It's true that she transgressed the admonition of the *malach* – he said, “Don't look behind,” and she did; she cricked her neck to look back at Sedom, but is that such a serious crime? Is looking back at the city where you lived for so long a sin that deserves a punishment of death? It's a big question actually and it means that we have to begin to understand what it means to look back; what's so wrong with peering behind.

The *medrash* tells us that the wife of Lot had fallen in love with Sedom. She liked the place because it was a place of wealth and conveniences. It was a luxurious city with many attractions, and that's why they chose to dwell there. It was a city where only the well-to-do, the prosperous, lived and Lot and his wife were happy there; they identified with Sedom. And that's why when it came time to leave it wasn't easy for them.

Now, Lot himself, when he followed the instructions of the *malachim* and made sure to not turn around and look back, he demonstrated what he was, where his mind was. *Sof kol sof*, he was a disciple of Avraham and when it was necessary, when he saw the judgment of heaven and he realized how great was the wickedness of this place so he fully sympathized with that attitude and he faced away from Sedom; he turned his back on Sedom – he was finished with them. Lot was man enough to say goodbye entirely.

He learnt a lesson and he faced resolutely forward to a new future by means of forswearing any connection with the wickedness that Hakodosh Boruch Hu disapproved of.

Loyal to Family and City

But Lot's wife not so much. You know that a woman is more committed to her environment; she more easily amalgamates with the neighbors and therefore even though her husband was able to divorce Sedom from his heart – at least when he was urged to do so by the *malachim* – Lot's wife couldn't do it. She was acclimated to the culture of Sedom and when the time came to leave she was quite displeased. It was a good living in Sedom, and she was most reluctant to leave.

Of course she was prepared to leave the city; absolutely. She had no alternative; the *malochim* were urging her and her husband was leaving. In those days everyone was loyal to the family ideal. No woman would separate from her husband and break up a family. And therefore when Lot fled from Sedom, his wife went along with him.

But one thing she couldn't resist; she couldn't resist taking one last parting look at her beloved home. And so, as she was making her way from Sedom she turned around for a moment and she stole one glimpse over her shoulder. The *possuk* doesn't tell us but it could be she even shed a tear on behalf of the beloved city where she had lived so happily and enjoyed life for so many years. *וַתִּבֶּט אִשְׁתּוֹ מֵאַחֲרָיו* she looked back towards Sedom.

Symptom of Sympathy

We have to understand that looking back is a very significant symptom; it's a symptom of hankering, of where your mind really is. That's why the *malach* who came to rescue them made that a condition. He didn't only warn them against stopping on the plain. Of course if they would stop, if they would turn around and reconsider, they wouldn't survive. But Hashem demanded more than that. "Don't look back!" Any demonstration of a reluctance to

separate, that's already a symptom of rot; it shows that your heart is still in Sedom. It's a demonstration of where your sympathy lies and therefore Hakodosh Boruch Hu won't consider you worthy of being spared their fate.

If someone is living a decent life but inwardly he yearns for the gay and loose ways of the outside world, so he is identified as a member of the outside world because a person is not what his body does. It's where your mind is that marks you! That's a great principle. Your mind is most important! That's why the wife of Lot suffered that terrible fate; she was sentenced as an inhabitant of Sedom because that's where her mind was.

Listening in Lithuania

It's like the Jews who had to leave Germany when Hitler came to power and it broke their heart because they loved Germany; they identified with the German culture and German lifestyle. Somebody once described to me a scene, a true scene. A German Jewish family had barely escaped with their lives from Hitler's Germany over the border into Lithuania, into a border town in Lithuania. And now they were sitting on the eve of December the 25th listening to the radio as the strains of the festive carols came out of the radio from Berlin. And they were weeping tears of nostalgia, tears of sentiment for their Fatherland. "Ahh, in the good old days we sat on December the 24th in the evening and we listened enthralled to the 'holy music.'" They identified with the land of their destroyers, with the land of their tormentors and persecutors and it broke their heart that they had to leave.

Instead of saying "What a wicked nation! What a filthy nation! A nation of murderers!" The Germans are worse than the cannibals in Africa – the cannibals at least only kill people when they're hungry! Instead of saying, "We are happy to be rid of them and we turn our faces away to a new future; we'll face forward now with the Am Yisroel; we'll turn our backs on these wicked gentiles who are murderers of our people and never look back;" instead of that,

they couldn't tear out of their hearts the allegiance to their Fatherland. They looked back!

This slavish subjection to the gentile environment is what was expected of Lot and his wife to sacrifice. That's why the *malach* said, "Don't look back!" It means that it's not enough just to distance ourselves from the sinners; you can't say, "I'm leaving; I'm running away from the wicked ones and that's enough." No! That's far from enough. What Hakodosh Boruch Hu wants is that while we're running away, we shouldn't look back; we shouldn't even want to look back.

Part II. Looking Away

Reform Conversions

In *Tehillim* (45:11) we read the following words of Dovid Hamelech: שְׁמַעִי בַת – Listen O' daughter. He's talking here to a young woman, a convert who has forsaken her gentile family and joined the *Beis Yisroel*. And she's a *giyoreess* according to all the conditions of *geirus* – she fulfills everything without exception; she wouldn't be accepted otherwise.

It's not like the reformers today; the Reform movement because their ranks are dwindling – their children are intermarried and are going lost – so they've embarked now on a big campaign to bring in new converts. A convert campaign! You can understand already what kind of converts they have. They are converted by a piece of paper, that's all; they don't have to do anything because their sole purpose is to swell the ranks of the Reform Temple.

Real Conversions

But *Tehillim* is not talking about such fraud; in the days of Dovid Hamelech there was no such thing. He's talking to a real convert: שְׁכַחִי עַמִּי, – "Listen, my daughter," he says to her, וְנִבֵּית אֲבִיךָ, – Forget your people, and forget about the house of your

father. Forget? What forget?! She already left – she’s a *frum* lady already; she covers her hair and she davens three times a day; what more do you want from here?

Oh no! “That’s not enough!” says *Tehillim*, “Forget your people! And forget your family too!” She’s being admonished that if she wants to have a full *geirus*, if she wants to be part of the Chosen People, she must strengthen her heart to not ever look back over her shoulder at the place she left from.

A *ger* has to say farewell to his old life and to his family! And if he won’t, if he continues to maintain relations with his family, that’s not a full *ger*. I understand that what I’m saying is not the trend today, but here we don’t follow the trends. It’s a big error when a *ger* continues to look over his shoulder. There are cases like that and they think they’re perfect *geirim*. Oh no! It’s far from perfect! If he still has some connections to his family, it’s a flaw in his *geirus*. He must turn his back on his relatives, even on his father and his mother, and not look back. From now on, he should look only to Hakodosh Boruch Hu as his Father. It’s not easy but nobody said it’s supposed to be easy.

Let Go!

A *ba'al teshuva* too; if he looks back fondly to the olden days it’s a flaw. The first step of coming close to Hashem – it’s the middle step and the last step too – is to cut loose from all sources of influence from the gentile world. Of course he has to learn *daas Torah* too. He has to learn the *seforim* that will teach him new attitudes and give him a new set of values. You must learn! *Mesillas Yesharim*, *Shaarei Teshuva*, *Chovos Halevovos*; there’s so much to learn! You must go to the places where you’ll hear these ideas and acquire a new set of values.

But all of the learning won’t help you become a genuine *eved Hashem* if you’re looking back. It’s like a man who by accident grabbed hold onto a bush of thorns. And now he’s holding onto the thorn bush and he’s crying out, “Ouch! Bring the peroxide!”

So we say to him: “What are you crying about medicine?!” It means what are you worried about *seforim* and *daas Torah*? The first thing is to let go! Let go of the thorns! He wants to be better, but he sits and reads, let’s say, newspapers. So the newspapers are a constant source of replenishment of all of the false ideas that he claims to want to run away from. He’s still grabbing onto the thorns! He’s still looking back at the place he ran away from. Whether it’s the Algemeiner Journal or the Jewish Press or the New York Times. Each one on a different level, but הַצֵּד הַשְּׂוֹה שְׂבָהֶם וְשָׂמְרָתָם עֲלֵיךָ – you’re not going to get better from them!

Sedom and America

Not only a *baal teshuva* – every *frum* Jew who has a stirring in his heart to succeed in this world must cut loose and never turn his head around to look back. Otherwise you’re still in the gutter with the gentile. And today, more than ever before, the gentile street is depraved. Once upon a time, the streets in America were kosher streets. Yes, the gentile streets. They weren’t holy, but they were kosher. You could walk in the streets. Someone who didn’t work and just wandered the streets was arrested. The policeman would yell at him, “What are you doing?!” If he was doing nothing it means he was looking for trouble and he would be arrested. Nowadays, they would arrest the policeman for yelling at him.

And so, the world is crazy today. The streets today are filthy! It’s worse than Sedom; a thousand times worse. And I’m not exaggerating. I want to tell you that I’m very much worried about it. Will Hashem continue to keep quiet about America? I’m very worried. America is becoming so wicked today, I don’t know what to expect. I don’t know what’s going to happen in the future. I’m worried that Hashem will not continue to keep quiet. How can He?!

And therefore our only option is to cut loose from them! How much should you cut loose? You’re going to come over to me after I finish talking, “You mean I shouldn’t do this or I shouldn’t read

that?" I won't tell you what you shouldn't do; it depends on how much you're ready to do something for yourself. But as much as you cut loose that's how much you'll help yourself – the less contact you have with the gentiles, the purer you're going to be.

The First Step

Forget now about learning Torah and learning how to become better. A Jew doesn't say in the morning, "I thank You Hashem that You made me a Jew." No! **וְלֹא עָשִׂינִי גוֹי** – "I thank You that You didn't make me a gentile." That's the first thing! The first thing is not to be a gentile. About being a Jew, that's a different story; that's the next step. The first step is to turn away and not look back.

You know some people want to try to do both things at once. They want to run away from Sedom – it means they want to be a good Jew – and at the same time they want to turn their heads around and look back; they want to be good Jews and yet at the same time they want to be gentiles too.

Tznius and Meforshim

How is it that *frum* women today wear such short dresses today? Who would have ever imagined such a thing?! Here's an Orthodox woman and when she sits down she tugs at her skirt so that it should cover her knees – today that's a nice Jewish woman. But such a thing was unheard of just sixty years ago! A dress that you'll have to pull down otherwise it'll uncover your knees?! And sometimes even, I don't want to say who – *rebbetzins* sit like that.

It's happening all the time. Here is a Jewish girl from an Orthodox school sitting on a bus and opposite her is sitting a *yeshiva* man or a rabbi and her knees are uncovered – sometimes even more than her knees. And she's talking to her friend, she's talking about the *chumash* she's studying for the Beis Yaakov. "And what does the Abarbanel say? And what does the Malbim say?" The real question is, "What do your knees say?!" It doesn't even enter her mind that she is so shameless – you can see all the way up and

she's saying Malbims. A gentile woman sixty years ago wouldn't have done such wicked things!

Battling That Fly

It could be she has long sleeves; she also has a full dress up to the neck. So on top she has won the battle against the *yetzer hara*; up to her waist she's orthodox. But the *yetzer hara* is like a fly. The *yetzer hara* is called a fly, a *zvuv*. You know what a fly is? The Chofetz Chaim explained it like this. He said the fly attacks you here. So you brush him off. You think you finished? Now, he's over here. You brush him off again; now he's over here. The fly will come from all angles and he'll keep on coming.

So the *yetzer hara* once tried up here with the Jewish woman; *boruch Hashem* the Orthodox women battled and they were victorious. No more short sleeves by the Orthodox! Anyone who has it cut down over here by the neck or short sleeves, they don't belong to the Orthodox camp. That's clear today. Modern Orthodox, yes, but that's not Orthodox. So what happens? The *frum* women think that the battle is won. Sheitels, long sleeves, everything. No! Now the battle is being lost on the bottom. The *yetzer hara* is coming in now from the other side.

Only how could such a thing happen? You know how it happened? The poor woman is fighting a battle. She wears a dress down to her knees – at least when she's standing it's down to her knees. And as she walks down the block her face is flaming because all the women are pointing at her and saying, "Look at that old-fashioned one." She's a martyr for covering her knees!

The Enemy of Mankind

And why are the neighbors saying that? Because in Paris there's a wicked man, Dior, may his name be erased, who's corrupting the whole world. There's an enemy of Mankind, sitting in Paris, manufacturing all sorts of styles. Now, the truth is what should we care about some *meshugeneh* in Paris?! Only that the

Jewish women – maybe the men too – are looking over their shoulders at Paris.

Take a look at all the magazines today, all the advertisements. It's all Paris! And Paris is Sedom, no question about it! So what will it help if you run away to Flatbush and Lakewood and Williamsburg, if you're still looking back at Paris. You're still there! You're a Parisian, a Sedomite!

Losing Olam Habo

And the media! If you're looking back at the gentile media, it's a question if you'll make it. Any Jew who means business with the Yiddishkeit, must know, there's no two ways about it; you must get rid of that infernal machine in the house. Those machines must get out of the house. There's no use talking about it. You can dodge the subject, but you have to know that that's the plain truth – because those machines mean that you're in direct contact with all that's wicked in the world. Even smart *goyim* are saying today that this machine is corrupting the youth. And we know that it's corrupting the minds of the adults too.

Yesterday a man called me up on the telephone. A modern orthodox man who lives in Queens. Among other things he mentioned to me that every Wednesday night he goes to the movies with his wife. I said, "You go to the movies still?! Forty years ago it was a different story but today you still go to the movies?!" I told him, "If you go to the movies nowadays, I can tell you *ein licha cheilek l'olam habo*."

And there's no question in my mind about it. I'll prove it to you right away. A *yeshiva* man asked me, "Where did you get that?" It's a Gemara in Sanhedrin. The Gemara there (100b) says "*Hakorei seforim chitzonim – If man reads dirty books; that's what Rashi says over there; if he reads sifrei agavim, dirty books, then he has no share in the World to Come. Now look, if you read a dirty book you're only seeing words. There's no question that it doesn't have the slightest comparison to the potency of a dirty movie. And which movies today aren't dirty? You'd have to look high and far*

for them. And still you won't find one. So if you watch dirty movies – which means any movies – so you know for certain that you're the one our sages are speaking about. There's no *machlokes*, no difference of opinion. *Ein lo cheilek l'olam Haboh!*

It's only those Jews who are aloof from the nations of the world who can succeed. There are no two ways about it; otherwise you are looking over your shoulder at the *umos ho'olom*. It could be that outwardly you'll become better; a man can put on a black hat and he could even wear a long coat and grow his *peyos*; a woman can put on a cloth over her hair and she can daven; but inwardly they're still receiving a supply from the sewer main that's pouring sewage from the street into their minds! It's like taking a filthy pot and then putting expensive meat into it and good onions and other condiments. What's going to be the result? It won't be good. You have to have a clean pot if you want to cook something good. And so the first thing is, don't look back.

Part III. Looking Inward

Masses vs. Minority

Now we can understand one of the fundamental plans of Hakodosh Boruch Hu in our history; not only in our history – in the history of the world. Hashem says to us (Devorim 7:7): **אַתָּם הַמִּצְטַמְּתִים הַמִּצְטַמְּתִים** – *You, the Am Yisroel, will be the smallest of nations.* Now, it has been explained here already that actually it's not true – we're not the smallest of all the nations; in the South Sea Islands, other places too, there are nations much smaller than us.

What *me'at mikol ha'amim* means is that all the nations together are like one huge nation against us. When I say against us, I don't mean they're opposed to us; maybe they are, but that's not the point. What it means is that they are all different from us – there's no nation in the world that is even remotely similar to the *frum* Jews. And that's a big test of **אַתָּם הַמִּצְטַמְּתִים הַמִּצְטַמְּתִים** – we're

standing all alone against the whole world and when you are a little minority so you might think that maybe there's what to see over there. Even if we're *frum*, sometimes we might look back over our shoulders. It's a great test: Will we yield to the vast masses of humanity – to their ideals and fads and styles and trends – or will we remain resolute in our ways?

Dreary Misnagdim

And now friends, that's why we have to appreciate with all our hearts the part of the Jewish nation called *chassidim*. It's a sad fact that some of our fellow Jews have a certain antipathy to *chassidim*; now I'm not a *chossid* and therefore I'm not going to be the one to convert you but there's one thing I want to tell you now about the *chassidim*. When this new group came along about two hundred years ago, of all the things they accomplished one of the most important features of their movement was this teaching: *Turn your backs on the gentile world and don't ever look back!*

You know, Jews used to sit in Kovno and Lemberg in the coffee houses and dream about the gay cities of the gentiles. "Ah, how nice it would be in Berlin and Paris and London. Ah! What culture they have there! What good times!"

But the *chassidim* knew the truth: "It's all a pipe dream!" they said. "You know where the good times are? In Kovno and Lemberg!" That's where you'll find happy times! You know how happy our forefathers were when they weren't looking over their shoulders at the gentiles?! They waited for Shabbos with anticipation – it was *mamish* a happiness! The day before Shabbos everybody bathed and changed their garments. And they all went to the synagogue, the whole city, and they came back from with beaming faces to a home of *kedusha*. The mother of the house is there and the candles were burning; the whole family is dressed up and the table is set. Everyone, boys and girls, are decked out in their finest and they're all singing *shalom aleichem*. From all the windows you could hear the Shabbos songs. The happiness was pouring out of the homes!

Joyful Chassidim

That's where the happy times are! The *Am Yisroel* sings songs and the whole Jewish nation are brothers together. Grandfathers, sons and grandsons. Grandmothers, mothers and daughters. The whole nation celebrated – they were on vacation. Like the Kuzari says. The Kuzari (3:10) writes that our nation is on vacation one sixth of its life. Shabbos and Yomtiv is one sixth of your life on vacation. And it's not when you're old and too sick to enjoy it. We start our vacation, our retirement, right away.

Only that the *yetzer hara* came along and persuaded us to look back at the gentiles. "Nah, it's no good here. Here it's unhappiness; it's dreary and monotonous. Where are the good times? Look back over your shoulders a Paris that's where the good times are. In London there are good times. In Berlin, in New York." "Oh no!" said the *chassidim*. "If there's anything to admire it's only inside. Outside there's nothing to see – it's just a dream, a mirage; a chimera."

"The good times are by us!" they taught. "You want good times? We'll give you good times!" And they came together and they danced and they sat down and drank whiskey and told stories of righteous men. And they lived with inspiration – inspiration from what's inside, without looking back. Anything admirable, anything noble, is right here. When they looked out of their little villages it was only to see the *rebbeh*. A few times a year they travelled to the great *rebbeh*, far off. Thousands traveled and they sat together for hours listening to him. And they were singing and dancing *b'chedva* – they enjoyed every minute of it.

The Great Days

The good times, the nobility of character and dress, the excellence of behavior and ethics, it's all by us. The only things that will come in from the outside are harmful injurious things; there is nothing good that we could gain from the outside. And that's why we must make the *simcha shel mitzvah* in our homes most prominent. Make your home a place of the happiness of

mitzvos. Purim should be a great day of happiness and excitement; a good Jew makes Purim a big occasion in his life. Purim is on Tuesday? Take off from work if you can; at least part of the day. Make it a great day in your calendar.

Chanukah also should be made into a big *simcha*. Make Chanukah great in your home. And then, when Thanksgiving comes, see to it that it should be a day like any other day. Don't go out to visit others for supper and if people want to visit you, tell them you cannot; you're busy today. There shouldn't be the slightest sign of festivity on Thanksgiving – that's one of the methods of not looking back.

You should take all the opportunities that you can and make them happy occasions. *Chamishah Asar B'shvat* you should celebrate. Shabbos, of course, and every *Yom Tov* should be made into happy occasions. The *melavah malkah*, if possible, is a very fine opportunity to fill your home with *simchah shel mitzvah*; the home of Hashem is a place of happiness – a place of fulfillment – and to look anywhere else means you never learned the story of *ishes Lot*; you never made use of that the enduring testimony, the eternal warning of that petrified pillar of rock that stood for centuries in the desolate plain outside of Sedom.

The Stragglers

That's one of the great lessons of the destruction of *Sedom*; not only does a Jew go into his little house but he turns his back on the influence of the *umos ho'olom* and he never looks back. We are only capable of living rich Jewish lives when we are inside of our own homes, inside of our Jewish districts, and we're not look back and hankering after the gentile practices. Anything different than that means that we are in danger. אַל תִּבִּיט אַחֲרֶיךָ – *Don't look behind you because those who look back eventually go lost.*

You'll remember how as soon as the *Am Yisroel* went out of *Mitzrayim*, so *Amalek* come and וַיִּזְנֹב בָּהֶם כָּל הַיְשׁוּשִׁים אַחֲרֶיךָ – *they cut off all of the stragglers.* It was a terrible disappointment – a big letdown! Hashem had just rescued the nation from the powerful

empire of Egypt and He did it in such an open and grand scale! And here comes an *am boz*, a little despised nation, to attack us and He doesn't intervene to save us?! What's that all about?

You have to understand the word *necheshalim*. It doesn't say *nechelashim* which means people who are weak. It's a different word – *necheshalim* means “those people who made themselves slow.” As we were leaving Egypt, the nation left with a rapid stride; they were happy that the *ananei hakavod* were leading them. They were going towards their destiny; towards their rendezvous with Hashem. Forward march! Onward to Sinai!

But even when you're walking forward together with the *Am Yisroel*, there's always the test: Will you march with your head forward or will you peek back over your shoulder?

Egyptian Culture

Some looked back to Egypt. There were some stragglers, *necheshalim* who made themselves slow by means of looking back. They were walking with the rest of the people, but they couldn't help themselves and they fell behind because of that.

They were going ahead to receive the Torah but in their hearts they had a certain admiration yet. They had a certain sympathy with the culture they were running away from. There were interesting things to do there, things to see in Egypt, and they were talking about it. “Can you still see anything of *Mitzrayim*?” They had things there – they could go bowling in Egypt maybe, or roller skating. Maybe there were art museums and beautiful Egyptian buildings they could visit.

“Nothing wrong,” you say. “I'm a pious Jew; it's just interesting. I go to Manhattan to the museum to see the beautiful works of art, but I'm still a very good Jew.” “Oh no,” says Hashem, “It means you're looking back over your shoulder.”

And so, when Hakodosh Boruch Hu saw those who were straggling; the ones who were walking a little more slowly behind the rest of the people, He sent Amalek to get rid of them. Hashem

allowed Amalek to chop off from us the **זַחְסָלִים**, the people who were straggling behind. **וַיִּזְנֹב** – *He chopped off the tail of our people.* That was the purpose of Amalek. We're not animals; we don't need any tails.

Loyal Citizens

It means that we don't want the kind of person who has a certain amount of reservations. Yes, he goes along but he has in his heart some reservations; he has a certain admiration for the culture and entertainment and way of life of the outside world. He's constantly looking over his shoulder at the *umos ha'olam* and that's a sign of where his heart belongs. **אַל תִּבְיֵט אַחֲרָיִךְ** – *Don't look behind you.*

Now, I must repeat what I always tell you – there's nothing wrong with the genuine sciences. Nothing wrong with physical accomplishments, mechanical accomplishments. And sometimes you must mingle them, for business, for other purposes. And of course we're never impolite; by no means! We're loyal to our country and polite to everyone. We pay our income tax and we're loyal to the flag. Certainly a Jew should be loyal; nobody should be more loyal than the *frum* Jew. America was a good country to us. It took us in when our grandparents were being persecuted in Russia and everywhere else. We came here and we gained equal rights. Certainly we're grateful to America.

Moshiach Is Coming!!

And yet the day will come when Moshiach will come; the time will arrive when we'll have to leave America. Imagine; Moshiach is here now and all of us are getting ready to board super airliners. We'll fly to Eretz Yisroel *al kanfei nesharim*, on the wings of eagles, all together now. And what will be the most important thing to remind ourselves of then? The same thing that makes us successful even today: Don't look back! Maybe you can see the skyscrapers of New York from your home in Williamsburg? Forget about it. Look only forward to your great future.

If you want to be eternal, if you want to have the lot of those who are forever under the wings of Hakodosh Boruch Hu you must walk forward with the *Am Yisroel* without ever looking back; you must give up your sentiments that connect you to the nations of the world. Every Jew who yearns for that great and glorious future of our people makes sure to identify only with the *Klal Yisroel* as much as possible. And those are the ones who will march together with all the rest of the *Am Yisroel* when the great *geulah* comes and we are redeemed in the final great and splendid demonstration of the *yad Hashem*.

Have A Wonderful Shabbos

LET'S GET PRACTICAL!

A Minute a Day as I Walk

If we want to be good Jews we must make sure we're not constantly peeking over our shoulders at the gentile world. Let's take a minute each day as we're walking through the streets to evaluate our leanings. Can I identify a few things in my life that would be considered 'looking back at Sedom'? How attached am I to the gentile media and literature and fads? How much do I peek over my shoulder into the news and politics of the day? I will try to choose one detail every day to improve. I will make a conscious decision to stop looking back at the gentile world, and focus inward at the beauty of *avodas Hashem*.

————— **This week's booklet is based on tapes:** —————

R-7 - Taking a Hint | 259 - Preface to Pesach VI | 393 - Why Hashem Favors Israel | 413 - Test of Abundance | 780 - Night of the Locked Doors

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

שאל אביך ויגדך זקניך ויאמרו לך

Q:

What do you say about weddings that go till late at night?

A:

Why should weddings take so long?! You need hundreds of people to ruin their health just because you want to make a wedding?! People should go home early – it's a crime to keep two hundred people up till very late at night! The next day two hundred people will be walking around looking like ghosts because of you. It's a strain on the heart and a strain on the kidneys. It's too much!

The truth is that it's too much to expect even of a good friend. Even a good friend should sneak out! Don't bother to go over and excuse yourself. Because then he'll start importuning you. Just sneak out and forget about it. He'll be angry? Your body will also be angry at you if you stay, and it's more important to be friends with your body.

TAPE # 87

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