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WITH

# R' AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"l

BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

## The Real World

### Contents:

**Part I.** Mitzvah of Milah - 3

**Part II.** Mitzvah Acts - 7

**Part III.** Mitzvah Bodies - 11

## Part I. Mitzvah of Milah

### **Are The Mohammedans Right?**

The Rambam in his Moreh Nevuchim asks a question about the familiar mitzvah that we read about in this week's *sedrah*: וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי יִמּוֹל בְּשׂוֹר עֶרְלָתוֹ, *And on the eighth day shall he be circumcised.*

“Why is it,” asks the Rambam, “that the Torah commands us to circumcise a boy when he’s eight days old? Why don’t we wait until he’s bar mitzvah and let him do it then? Like he puts on the *tefillin* himself, he’ll choose a *mohel* and he’ll make him his agent to do the mitzvah.

Don’t the Mohammedans do that? Actually long before Mohammed came along, the Yishmaelites, all the Arab nations were circumcised at the age of 13. They still do it, of course. It’s a law on those who descended from Yishmael.

And so it’s a question that bothers the Rambam. Why does the Torah command us to circumcise at the age of eight days? Why don’t Jews do it at a more mature age like the Mohammedans do?

## **We Force Him**

Now listen to the reason the Rambam gives. But don't laugh – you can't laugh at something the Rambam says. The Rambam explains that if we made the *bris milah* when the boy is older, so when they're going to send out the invitations to the *bris* everybody will come to the happy occasion *except for the boy*. The guest of honor will make sure to not be present – if he's old enough to run away, there's a good chance he will. He'll be out in the woods someplace. He'll climb a tree if he has to.

Among the Yishmaelites it has happened that way – not once – that the proud parents prepared a feast for the circumcision of their son and when the day came, he was nowhere to be found. He preferred to remain incognito.

And so, says the Rambam, instead of waiting until he is old enough to do it voluntarily, it's forced upon him before he understands anything. We make sure to bring him into the covenant of Avraham Avinu before he has a chance to refuse.

## **Of Course We Force Him!**

Now this little piece of Torah we have to understand, many *talmidei chachomim* would not be so pleased with this explanation, but what can they do? The Rambam says so!

But this Rambam has to be understood because the truth is, why is it a question altogether? Why *should* we wait? Isn't it a more comfortable procedure when he is more tender? It's less of a trauma to cut a very soft piece of skin rather than wait until it becomes an operation. It's safer this way.

And it's easier on the mother too. You know, at eight days, you're not accustomed to him yet. He's a little stranger so you can be a little cruel with him. But suppose it's eight months, or eight years. You get a little more accustomed to him; he's part of the family now. Maybe he's talking too. He complains. "Ma, I don't want."

And so we have to understand what is the Rambam's question anyhow? Why *shouldn't* we make it as soon as possible? The eighth day is the best time. It's safer for the little baby. It's easier on the mother. Why should we be looking to push it off?

## **Empty Vessels**

So you have to know that the Rambam is concerned about a big problem and that is the subject of *virtuous intent*. The subject of *kavonah lesheim shomayim*. The Rambam knows something that many people don't, that an action done without thought, even a mitzvah, is like an empty vessel.

Now, we won't say it's completely empty because you did the mitzvah after all but if the body is present but the mind is absent, a very important factor is missing. A man has two parts, his body and his mind and when you do something

without the participation of the mind, the chief part of your personality is missing from the mitzvah.

That's why when we pray every day in Uva Letzion that Hakadosh Baruch Hu should put into our hearts the fear of Him and the love of Him, we add לְמַעַן לֹא יִגַּע לְבַהֲלָהּ לָרֵק וְלֹא יִלְדֵּ לְבַהֲלָהּ – *in order that we shouldn't toil in vain and we shouldn't give birth for nothing.* You hear such a thing? It's talking about a person who is doing all of the mitzvos; he's doing everything but if it's without the proper thought, without the attitudes of *ahavas Hashem* and *yiras Hashem*, so he'll give birth to good deeds but it's *larik* and *labehala*; it's for nothing.

Mitzvos cost us a lot of money, and a lot of effort too but it might be for nothing – like a woman who carried a baby for so many months and then it was miscarried, stillborn. So when we miscarry our good deeds without having the right intent, without the proper intention, without the purity of the heart, without the enthusiasm to do the good deed, if it's done by habit and without any thought, it lacks all the merit. All the merit?! Yes, that's what we say in our *davening* every morning. "Help us Hashem to acquire the right attitudes, the right frame of mind, so that our mitzvos should mean something! Otherwise, even if we do them, but they're stillborn, they're empty vessels."

### A Noble Feat

And so we come back to the Rambam and we understand now; *that's* the Rambam's *kasha* about *milah* on the eighth day. It doesn't make sense that such an important mitzvah should be done at a time when the most important part of the mitzvah, the mind, is not available to participate.

Wouldn't it have been a much more meritorious deed if we waited until his mind develops and he could enter into the *briso shel Avraham Avinu* knowing what it means and bringing, so to speak, an offering of his blood to Hakadosh Baruch Hu as a covenant? Wouldn't it be so much more noble and laudable if the boy willingly underwent the ordeal for the sake of demonstrating his loyalty to Hakadosh Baruch Hu?

If we would wait until at least *bar mitzvah* and then the child would be persuaded that this is his opportunity to achieve a great feat for the service of Hashem. He would study *seforim*, idealism and *mussar*, and prepare himself. And then he would clench his teeth and submit himself to this operation; it hurts and he might even struggle, but the initial step was his own volition, his acceptance and willingness, and now it's his mitzvah forever; it's his service of Hakadosh Baruch Hu and it's ascribed to his credit forever and ever.

Isn't that a wonderful thing? To have that written down to your eternal credit! In the Next World nothing would be more valuable! So what right do we have to rob every Jewish boy of this glorious opportunity?

## **Practice Comes First**

That's what was bothering the Rambam. His question was why do we perform a *bris* on a little child who doesn't have any kind of volition? He has no kind of intent, no idealism, no *ahavas Hashem* and *yiras Hashem*. He's a baby and his mind is not ready yet for *avodas Hashem*. So why are we robbing him of his glorious opportunity?

And the Rambam answers there's no question that we are right. It *should* have been postponed. We admit, we're robbing this little boy of a glorious opportunity.

But there's another consideration. There's a fundamental consideration that the Jewish nation has to worry about. We're concerned about something that comes first, even before that greatness of the mind, and that is that the Am Yisrael should be loyal to practicing the laws of the Torah *no matter what*. That's number one.

## **No Exceptions**

And in order not to risk an eventuality that some child, some boy, might attempt to avoid *bris milah* – after all, not everybody wants to be a hero and in the course of time there might develop a whole class of uncircumcised ones. There are always weaklings and once there are a few so other weaklings tag along. And that would be a breakdown in the great plan of our forefathers who covenanted that this is going to be a nation that forever and ever, until the end of time, they're going to carry on their flesh the mark of the covenant, a mark on the flesh that means that through thick and thin they're never going to yield their principles.

So therefore the Torah decided, that this is more important; that this takes precedence over the virtue of free will. It's a great thing to be able to choose *bris milah*, but it's more urgent that without exception the Jewish people should perform the *mitzvah*.

Yes, a great part of a Jew's life is to aspire to high idealism, and the Torah is the place to find it. The Torah is full of noble ideals and aspirations and we have to study that and aim for them. And it's important to know that every individual's greatness will be primarily achieved by means of his ideals, his thoughts and attitudes, because it's the mind that makes the man. All that is true. And yet the rock bottom foundation of everything is that the *din* should be fulfilled! We don't want to risk any opportunity, any possibility, of anyone avoiding the actual fulfillment of the *halachah*.

## **Mocking The Law**

Throughout the New Testament, ridicule is directed against the Jewish people, for their adherence to the letter of the law. We are attacked, we are vilified, for our legalism. The Jewish people refused to yield the strict adherence of the law, and for this they were criticized and ridiculed.

Now the truth is that our detractors subsequently manufactured their own *artificial* code of laws; and they insisted that their adherents should stick to the letter of *their* laws. Under the rule of the Pope if somebody would refuse communion, the Inquisition would go after him. Certainly you had to keep everything that the church decreed! A law is a law! Oh, but what about the ridicule that they leveled at the beginning against the Sages for being so legalistic? The answer is that “your legalism is wrong, but mine is right”. That’s always the case with all the charlatans, the idealists. They’re very good at criticizing *our* idealism.

But our forefathers were not dismayed by the criticisms and the ridicule. It was like water off a duck’s back. To this day we still uphold the Torah exactly as it was given to us *without any changes*. There isn’t a single religion that hasn’t changed. Catholicism is by no means what it was years ago. Many fundamental changes were allowed, whereas, among us *lehavdil* there hasn’t been a single change. We won’t yield one iota on the doing! It’s not up to us to yield because it’s not ours to yield. We keep the same Torah that we received from Sinai. And that’s because we always put that rock bottom; everyone must fulfill everything.

## Part II. Mitzvah Acts

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### **Do Without Thoughts**

And so we come back to our Rambam that we began with; he’s telling us that this is the most important objective – *the Torah must be fulfilled!* And even if it means in some instances sacrificing the great application of free will and idealism, nevertheless it has to be fulfilled without any exception. That’s why Jewish fathers take their little boys – they don’t ask them permission – and they circumcise them.

And that’s how the Jewish nation has been a loyal observant nation to this day. Because Jewish fathers and mothers teach their children to *daven*. They don’t know what they’re saying. Don’t you see in shul little boys and girls saying the words and they’re shaking too. So sometimes a fellow wants to criticize, “But they don’t even know what they’re saying!”

“Never mind!” we say. “Say it anyhow!” We’re not going to wait until you grow up and you’re going to choose whether you prefer to *daven* or not to *daven*. It’s too risky. And so we train you right now, we force our little boys to wear *tzitzis* and our little girls to cover their knees. And we say “Don’t eat what’s not kosher”, and “Don’t profane the Shabbos” and so on and so on; number one is ‘do’. And do, and do, and do until you grow up.

### **Action Is Number One**

Now, once you grow up so you’re already habituated to the ways of the Torah – you’re part of the loyal Am Yisroel; you’re a doer – so now it’s up to you to

add idealism. Now that it's easy for you to keep Shabbos because you're acclimated to it, so now you can begin putting in the great ideals of Shabbos; the ideals of 'creation from nothing' and all the great teachings that the Shabbos exemplifies. And all the other ideals of the Torah too. You can now add idealism to eating kosher meals and to your *tefillin* and *tzitzis* and *davening* and *tznius* and everything else.

But all that comes later. First, the number one requirement from the beginning is that we teach our children to fulfill the letter of the Torah. That's the most precious and fundamental aspect of Torah living, to fulfill the laws of the Torah. And that's why the Torah insists *וְשִׁנַּנְתֶּם לְבָנֵיכֶם* – *you should teach them diligently to your children*, *וְדַבַּרְתֶּם בָּם בְּשִׁבְתְּכֶם בְּבֵיתְכֶם* – *and you should always talk in these laws*. The laws! With all of their details!

What's the first thing in training our youth? What's the first thing if you are a *baal teshuvah*? What's the first thing for ourselves? Number one you start keeping the laws of the Torah.

Of course, we learn idealism too. We learn good character. We learn to understand the attributes of the divinity. We learn an outlook on the laws. We learn understanding of Jewish history. There's a great deal to learn besides for the legalism. But first and foremost we learn what to do and what not to do. That's the basic requirement of being a Jew. What you are inside will make you great, but what you are outwardly decides if you belong to us or not.

### **The Lifeguard-At-Heart**

We don't accept the attitude of "But I'm a Jew in my heart." Many times you experience that; you urge somebody to do this or not to do that, and he says, "But I am a Jew in my heart."

Well, imagine that this "heart-Jew" went swimming. And he went out a little bit beyond his depth and now he has cramps and he is shouting for help. And the lifeguard is sitting on the beach and looking on.

So you say to the lifeguard, "A man is drowning!"

He says, "Is that so?"

So you tell him, "What do you mean 'Is that so?' Don't you want to help?!"

And he says, "Sure I want to help him. In my heart I want to help him very much!"

With just a heart you are not going to do anything. Torah-life is expressed by *deeds*. The truth is that if a person really has something in his heart, he would express it by deeds. The fact that he doesn't do those deeds – that itself demonstrates that he is a nothing-Jew. That's the very best evidence that it's not in his heart.



## Expressing The Heart

And so, the criterion of a person is not what he claims is in his heart, but what actually is in his heart. And the only way that a man can know if he is deceiving himself or not is how he expresses that Jewishness. The heart is only meaningful when it is expressed in actions. If a person likes knishes and he's proud of Medinas Yisroel and he says he has a Jewish heart, we tell him that there's nothing Jewish about that. A Jewish heart starts with doing. And it starts with doing everything.

That's your mark of the brotherhood of the Jewish people. Do you keep the Torah? Do you keep Shabbos? Do you keep *kashrus*? Certainly, as you develop you should add understanding, you should put more content into what you're doing, but number one is to do.

That's why when the Navi Micha came to the people and said do you know what Hashem requires of you? He says **הַגִּיד לְךָ אֲדָם מַה טוֹב** – *Hashem is going to tell you what is good*, **וּמַה ה' דוֹרֵשׁ מִמֶּנּוּ** – *and what He requires of you*. Oooh! That's an important subject and the Navi is going to tell us now that the whole Judaism stands on three foundations.

First, **עֲשׂוֹת מִשְׁפָּט** – *to do judgment*. Not how the world translates it, “to do justice.” That's wrong. Asos *mishpat* means “To do judgment; to fulfill the laws of the Torah.” Then the Navi mentions the other things. Number two is **וְאַהֲבַת חֶסֶד** – *love to do kindness*. A career of doing favors and being helpful to others; charity and friendliness and making peace with people. And the third is **וְהִצַּנֵּעַ לְכַת עִם אֱלֹקֵיךָ** – *to walk secretly with Hashem*. That's a separate subject that will be explained at a different opportunity, but right now we'll go back to the number one. What's the first thing that Hashem wants, the thing that without that it's all nothing? Number one is to fulfill all the laws of the Torah. That's number one. Without that, everything else is nothing.

## Practicing Morality

And that's why Jews gather in their synagogues and their *yeshivos* and they study not merely moral injunctions, to be good, to be holy. All this kind of stuff is easy to say. No! We're not satisfied with protestations, with declarations of nobility. We're not Reform Jews, talkers. We do talk about social injustice. We talk about the greatness of helping mankind. We talk about that plenty! But the difference is we do it. We do it too!

Don't you see that there's nobody who gives as much charity as the observant Jew? It's a fact. Where do you find people who give a tenth of their income to poor people? And you find it *everywhere* amongst orthodox Jews. You go into an orthodox synagogue in Williamsburg or in Boro Park, they don't let you *daven*. Constantly you're being asked for money. And people give.

There are all kinds of organizations for help. Every Jewish wedding as you want to walk in, there's a whole committee to greet you. And a *rachmanus*, at every funeral, people are walking around with charity boxes. The Orthodox Jew gives more than anyone else. Because the Orthodox Jew is a doer. He's not a mouth-Jew or a heart-Jew – he's that too but he's also a doing Jew.

### **Kingdom Of Lawyers**

And that's what Hakadosh Baruch Hu told us at the beginning of our history when Moshe was told “Go to your people and tell them to prepare for the giving of the Torah and tell them **וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ לִי מְמַלְכֵת כֹּהֲנִים** – *You are going to be for Me a nation of kohanim, of lawyers.* That's what He told them. People say “a nation of priests.” No; a *kohen* is not a priest. A priest you understand is someone who claims to be holy, who claims to have powers, who walks in with special garments and makes an external impression on you.

No! Here is a man, a pushcart peddler and he has a little cap on his head, a ragged cap. He's a pushcart peddler. This man, however, has *tzitzis* underneath his shirt. Maybe they're sticking out too. This man will eat only kosher. This man still has the marks from the straps of the *tefillin* on his arm. This man wouldn't do a thing on Shabbos. His pushcart is not there on Shabbos.

He's a holy man because *he's* a priest but not in the sense that the world knows a priest – he's a *kohen*, a practitioner of the Law. And if he doesn't know the law, he goes to somebody else. He says, “What the *din*?” He he has to know what to do and what not to do.

His wife opens a chicken and finds something there that looks queer so he runs to the rabbi. “What's the law if you find a needle sticking inside of the *pupik* of the chicken?”

We are a nation of lawyers. But not like lawyers who study law to know how to get around the law. We're all practitioners of laws. We study law, technicalities, because we want to know how to fulfill the law. That's what it means to be a *Mamleches Kohanim*, a nation of law-doers. Men and women, boys and girls, wealthy and poor, old and young, we all keep the laws. Certainly we understand that there are great principles involved; and the older you get the more you should try to understand the principles. But number one at the beginning and always is the fulfillment of the letter of the law.

### **We Mean Business**

And that's why Hakadosh Baruch Hu loves our people. That's what He said about Avraham, **כִּי יִדְעָתִי** – “My mind is on Avraham; it means “I love this man Avraham.” Why do I love him? **לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר יֵצֵא אֶת בְּנָיו וְאֶת בֵּיתוֹ אַחֲרָיו** – Because he's going to command his children and his house after him, **וְשָׁמְרוּ דְרָדָה** – and he'll make sure they follow everything.”

Because when Avraham undertakes something he means business. He won't get lost in phraseology. He won't get lost in empty idealisms, in empty declarations. He's going to stick to My laws through thick and thin. And he's going to see to it that his children do it too. He'll lay down the law and he'll see to it that his progeny will fulfill the letter of the law.

And when Avraham gave Yitzchok a push and he said "My son, I want you to obey the letter of the law," he said it with such a fire that the fire entered Yitzchok's blood and it didn't stop burning until this day. The letter of the law, that's the Jewish people. To this day a Jewish father gets angry if he sees a child who transgresses something. And the child learns from his father and he gets angry at his son. "You don't understand?! You don't want?! Too bad! It's not only you. There's an entire nation that's relying on you."

And so it's going to be until the end of all the generations. The Jewish nation will never stop observing the Torah. Certainly the unfortunates will be influenced by the gentiles and will wander away and get lost. And therefore we know that despite all those branches who drop off of our tree, the trunk will remain forever, because we're loyal to the *mitzvos*. We're an eternal people and we're going to fulfill the law of the Torah until the end of time without any change. It's been a long time already. And if we would be amenable to any change, we would have changed. But we're not. We're going to keep *doing*, no matter what.

## Part III. Mitzvah Bodies

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### **Answer Of The Biologist**

Now we have to understand that this lesson that we learn from the eight-day-old boy at the *bris* ceremony, the principle of doing things even without idealism and volition, just the mere legalistic practice, is not as superficial as it seems. Because besides what we said up till now, that it's the 'doing', the fulfillment of the laws, that is the glue that keeps our nation the Am Hashem, there's more to the doing than just that.

There is a metaphysical idea here that you have to understand: and that is, what are we? What is a human being? I'll speak first like a biologist, from a biologist's perspective. What is it that makes up a human being?

And so we'll say we are chemicals. We are gasses. We are seventy percent water and water is a vapor. Eventually, a person dies and the water leaves his body and returns to the atmosphere. Nitrogen is one of the main components of meat, of our bodies, and it's also a gas in the atmosphere – the nitrogen that is part of us will return to the atmosphere. Oxygen is one of the big components of carbohydrates, a part of the biological body, and so it returns to the atmosphere too. And so in the final analysis we're mostly air. We are nothing: *hevel*, which

means a breath, *vanitas* in Latin. We are materials that by themselves represent almost nothing. And so the question is, how is it that a few nothings together end up being a human?

### **Burning Water**

Now in order to build up the subject we'll take as an example water. Water is, as everybody knows, the formula is  $H_2O$ . It means two molecules of hydrogen and one molecule of oxygen. But hydrogen is a gas and oxygen is a gas. If you'll take these two gasses and mix them together you couldn't quench your thirst. It wouldn't put out a fire. On the contrary, oxygen would burn. Hydrogen burns too. All the specific qualities of water are not found in the two original gasses. So what do we see? That the combination of the gasses creates a new characteristic, a new entity that has no connection with the previous materials. The original elements have none of the properties that are found in the end product.

So when we come back to Man we understand that he is a combination of chemical elements but he's not the sum total of those elements. Man is not just carbon and nitrogen and water and all the elements that make up man. If you take all the carbon in man, it might be enough carbon to make a lead for half of a lead pencil. All the nitrogen in man might be enough nitrogen to fill a little paper bag. And so on. Water would be a sizable amount, maybe a couple of gallons of water. But man is not the sum total of all these things. Man is something different.

And not because he has a soul, the soul is a very important subject, but our subject now is the body. And an important part of our function in life is to make something new out of our bodies. The same way that our body is transformed into something entirely new by means of the combination of elements, our function is to continue to transform the body by adding another element into that chemical combination. A Jewish body can, as long as it's still alive, continue to change. And that is by means of the *maaseh hamitzvah*, the physical act of doing the mitzvah.

### **Getting Married On A Stroll**

That's something you have to think about. Every mitzvah you do makes a change in the carbon and oxygen and nitrogen in your body and the chemicals actually become different. Just like they become different when they combine into each other, they'll be different when they combine with a mitzvah. The mitzvah is the catalyst, the enzyme, that changes the physical constitution of these elements and the body is transformed.

That's why the Gemara says **מִצְוָה בּוֹ יוֹתֵר מִבְּשִׁלְיָהּ** – *it's better to do a mitzvah by yourself than to have an agent do it*. Let's say you're getting married tonight but you're too busy to go to the wedding. You decide to stay home. So you can send an agent. Most mitzvos, you're allowed to do by means of an agent. It's perfectly legal; it won't be done but it's perfectly legal. You could send an agent of yours to the wedding, and he stands under the *chuppah* and he says to the bride, "*Harei at*

*mekudeshes*, I betroth you, the *kallah*, to Mr. Chaim So-and-So who sent me here with this ring, *kedas Moshe veYisroel*.”

The *kallah* also, in case she's too busy or maybe she wants to take a walk with the *chosson*; both of them can take a walk on the avenue while in the hall her proxy and his proxy are going through with the ceremony. His proxy gives her proxy the ring and he says, “The one who sent you is the *mekudeshes* to the one who sent me *kedas Moshe veYisroel*.” Perfectly legal.

But the Gemara recommends that they should be present. For what reason? Because *מִצְוָה בּוּ יוֹתֵר מִבְּשִׁלּוּחוֹ* – *it's more a mitzvah to do it yourself than to do it by means of your agent*. And we have to study that principle because it's the idea that your body becomes ennobled when you do something good.

### **Put Up The Mezuzos Yourself**

Now that's a very important point that most people never thought about. *לְקַדֵּשׁ אֶת הַגּוּף עִרְיָד* – *it's better to make your body holy*. Whatever you can do personally is going to change not only your *neshamah*, not only it will change your intellect but it changes your physical body.

Let's say, you have to put up a *mezuzah*. So you can call a Jewish carpenter and he'll do a neat job; you'll pay him to put up all the *mezuzos*. But if you'll hear this lecture, you'll decide to do it yourself. Why? Because by doing the *mitzvah* with your body, your body becomes holy. That's why before you do a *mitzvah* you say *אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו* – *You have made us holy by means of Your mitzvos*. It means your body is becoming holy.

Oh sure, the soul becomes holy. But we have to understand that the *body* also becomes holy. The body, the hand that nails the *mezuzah* to the doorpost is becoming elevated. It's being changed; it's becoming ennobled. That material that went into creating your physical body, just as there was a change that made it different from the original oxygen and carbon and nitrogen, it was transformed into something entirely different; something else is being added now, and that's the spirituality of the *mitzvah*. This spirit goes into these materials and makes them even more different than they were.

Without any idealism and free-will, the mere fact that you fulfilled the basic requirements is going to make a change in your chemical constitution. Certainly the more thought you put into it, the more you'll take out of it, but the mere fact of doing a *mitzvah* with your physical body, the *mitzvah* itself is a *zechus* that makes the body holy, it is going to make a change in your chemical constitution.

### **Royal Dog Food**

I'll tell you a story just to emphasize the point. The *Gemara* tells of Queen Izevel, a very wicked woman who had many sins on her head. She was a convert from the neighboring country of Tzidon and she brought strange gods with her and

she introduced idolatry in the ten tribes. Then she executed the true prophets of Hashem. She was an example of a *marsha'as*; Izevel, the wicked woman.

Now finally the Navi came and he prophesized that the dogs would eat her up. That's what the Navi said, that she would become dog food. And that day finally came – it's a long story; we're just telescoping it down to make it brief – the day came when her servants pushed her out of the window and she died in that plunge. As she was lying there in her blood there were some wild dogs that sniffed her blood and they came and began devouring her.

Now, at that time there was a big turmoil. Nobody was paying any attention to what was doing because there was a lot of execution going on; Yehu was executing the worshippers of the false gods. But finally, after they finished the job, they looked around because they wanted to bury Izevel. After all, she was a princess so they wanted to give her a decent burial. And when they found her, they found that the body was all gone except her hands and her feet.

Now dogs that could eat a body are not so finicky that they leave over hands and feet, and so the soldiers who found her said there must be a reason why her hands and feet remained. And the soldiers remembered that this queen Izevel had had certain good qualities. She lived in the palace but when she would hear the music of a bridal procession passing by she used to come out of her palace and encourage the bride by clapping her hands together and stamping with her feet. A mitzvah! *Mesameach chosson v'kallah!* With her hands and feet! And that's why those limbs remained.

### **The Body Returns**

Now this story is told by the Navi for a purpose. The Jewish body even if it's laid in the grave and it's destined to disintegrate, it's not going lost. Because the physical body is not just the chemical elements. Those chemical elements that make up the body are transformed into something entirely new when they combine with the *maaseh hamitzvah*. Once upon a time it was nothing but *bosor*; it was just an ordinary body. But now it's an object of *kedushah*, an object of the greatest holiness.

That's why the Jewish body will never go lost. Not only will the nation dedicated to fulfilling the *maaseh hamitzvos* never go lost but every individual Jewish body will not go lost because of those same *mitzvos*.

That's one of the great teachings of the Torah: **וְנִצְמְךָ אֶתְּךָ לְהַחְיִית מַתִּים**. It's the great principle of resurrection, that the Jewish body does not go lost. That's one of the fundamentals of the Torah, that Hashem is going to revive the dead. And it's based, not on the idea of the soul's indestructibility. Yes, the soul is eternal. The soul came from Hashem; certainly, it's eternal like He's eternal. But the body also is eternal! If the body is invested with *kedushah* by means of doing *mitzvos*, it also will be forever.

And then when the time comes – the body will come back with all of its perfection; a beautiful body with *shleimus*, with all kinds of degrees of greatness; and it will be reunited with the *neshamah* just because of its *kedushah*.

### **Imposing Eternity**

And therefore all of these legalities, these laws that we impose upon the Jewish body, they're not merely superficialities. By doing mitzvos you become eternal. When you take that eight-day-old boy to the bris you are bestowing on him an eternal quality. His body becomes eternal by that.

When you teach a child to put on *tefillin* and *tzitzis* and to eat kosher and to dress with *tznius* you're making that child's body eternal and when the time comes – as it comes to everybody – it's not the end of the body's existence. For others, it's nothing but a hole in the ground but the Jew knows that eventually his soul and his body will be reunited. Even the body cannot go lost because of the effort that was put in to sanctify it by doing *mitzvos*.

That's the great principle we're learning. It's true that we will be forever the *mamleches kohanim*, the nation of law-fulfillers, because that's the foundation rock of Yiddishkeit. But that's not all. We also become the *goy kadosh*. By merely doing and doing, and doing more, the *mitzvos* makes a chemical change in our bodies. We call it a chemical, but it's more than chemical because it's forever; it's a change that makes the body live forever. That's why we'll forever be the *mamleches kohanim v'goy kadosh*.

### **Have A Wonderful Shabbos**

## **LET'S GET PRACTICAL**

### **Gaining Holiness by Practicing Mitzvos**

The mitzvah of *milah* teaches us that we enter the covenant of practicing *mitzvos* before we can consent to it. Our job is to practice *mitzvos* whether we understand them or not, and this transforms our bodies. Our bodies become holy Jewish bodies by means of participating in physical acts of *mitzvos*. This week, as I say “*asher kidshanu b'mitzvosav*”, I will *bli neder* keep in mind that this physical activity that I'm doing is transforming me for all eternity.

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# QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

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שאל אביך ויגדך זקניך ויאמרו לך



**How should we understand the sins of the students of Rabbi Akiva that caused so many thousands of them to die?**



There's a certain tradition that in the time of *sefirah* many *talmidim* of Rabbi Akiva perished by a plague. And we have a tradition that it was because לא להגו כבוד זה בזה – they didn't treat each other with respect. So I'll explain this to you.

If you look for chametz, you might find some forgotten piece of bread that is hidden away. If you don't look, you won't find. It doesn't mean you don't have some chametz stacked away. Everybody has some chametz stacked away; a bottle of whiskey here or a biscuit there. If you don't look, you'll have chametz in your possession. The Jew always looks for chametz, for sins, all year round and therefore he discovers wrong things of which he rids himself.

Now, there was a plague. And so the disciples of Rabbi Akiva said, "*Chatanu!* It's our fault. We weren't polite enough to our comrades. We mistreated them."

Now, we don't have any *bas kol* that tells us that this was the reason for the plague. They themselves told us that. They searched in their hearts and couldn't find anything else. If they could find other sins, they would have told us, "For these sins we're being punished." But they couldn't find anything. So they finally said, "It's probably because you weren't polite enough to each other."

That's a monument, a testimonial, to the greatness of the old generations. They blamed themselves. And therefore today every *Sefirah* we think about it and we decide we're going to be more and more polite to each other. That's how we should learn.

Read the full text of this Q&A in the book *Toras Avigdor on Moadim vol. 1*

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