YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA

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Dedicated in memory of
Joseph Y. Nadler, z”l, Yosef ben Yechezkel Tzvi

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**PARASHAT SHEMOT**

# SICHA OF HARAV YEHUDA AMITAL *ZT”L*

**Riding Upon Materialism**

Translated by Kaeren Fish

“Moshe took his wife and his sons, and he set them upon the donkey, and he returned to the land of Egypt.” (*Shemot* 4:20)

“This was the special donkey which Avraham had saddled (in order to travel) to the binding of Yitzchak, and it is the same one upon which the Mashiach is destined to appear, as it is written, ‘A poor man, riding upon a donkey’ (*Zekharia* 9:9).” (Rashi, ad loc)

According to some opinions in the midrash, this donkey was one of the creations which God made during the twilight of the sixth day, just prior to Shabbat.

What is the significance of this donkey (*chamor*)? The idea certainly cannot be meant literally – a donkey that is thousands of years old, having once belonged to Avraham and enduring until the final redemption. The plain meaning of the midrash, as the kabbalists explain, is the idea of riding upon materialism (*chomriut*). Materialism must not rule over a person; the spirit, rather, must rule over the material.

There are many kinds of revolutionaries. The revolution waged in the former Soviet Union against Communism was not about spirituality; it was not a war of the spirit. It was waged first and foremost against a material background: people had had enough of the difficult economic situation, the food shortages, the lack of freedoms, etc.

However, *Chazal* speak of three revolutionaries, all of whom wage a spiritual campaign: Avraham, Moshe, and the Mashiach. Avraham “rides upon materialism”; he is wholly focused on spirituality, and his revolution is a spiritual one. Moshe follows his example; he, too, rides atop the material world – and likewise Mashiach.

A person’s body is material. A person must rule over his body and determine its nature. This is a difficult task: riding the material – ruling and controlling it – is a task which is actually above nature, and was therefore created at twilight, the time when several supernatural creations came into existence.

The Maharal writes that the material world is symbolized by water. Water has no form of its own; it changes according to the vessel into which it is poured. A person must not be like water; he must not change with every breeze and trend. Rather, his spirit must give his body its characer, in order that the body will be stable and not something that is constantly changing.

Marx built his philosophy on the material, layer upon layer. This is not our way. For us, revolutions must arise for spiritual reasons. The spirit must rule over the material – both in the general sense, for the nation as a whole, and in the individual sense, for each and every person. We must rule over materialism (*chomriut*); like Avraham, Moshe and the Mashiach, we must “ride the *chamor*.”