



# March Madness

## Craziness In All Sectors

March Madness is a national championship basketball tournament featuring colleges across the United States. And let me tell you, it is not your average tournament. From mid-March to early April, for a period of three weeks, millions of people try their luck in betting on which teams will come out as winners.

The level of excitement and anticipation is simply unmatched. Fans from all over the country gather to cheer on their favorite teams, and even employers understand that during this time, employees may be less focused on work and more engaged in following the sports events.

Now, I think there's also a spiritual March Madness. Whenever we see something in the secular world, there is always a spiritual counterpart.

These three weeks usually lead up to Pesach with frenzy activities. We clean our homes, replace our chametz kitchen with a pesach one, and rush to buy all the necessary items for the holiday. And let me tell you, it can get pretty hectic.

Some people even choose to bake their own matzah, and form groups known as 'Chavuros.' It's like a spiritual basketball team, except instead of dribbling a ball, they're rolling dough.

And have you ever been to a kosher store before Pesach? It's like a

scene out of a movie. The crowds are grabbing items off the shelves like they're about to run out of food for the next century. You'd think they were announcing a toilet paper shortage, not just preparing for a holiday!

It's a holy "March Madness."

This year's March Madness isn't just confined to the sports world or the spiritual realm, but also the financial sector.

In recent days, we've seen a wave of bank failures due to a sudden panic from depositors who all want their money back at once. It's like everyone suddenly remembered that their mattress is a much safer place for their savings than a bank. Unfortunately, this has led to the destruction of at least three banks in the United States, because no bank can withstand a sudden demand from all its customers to withdraw their funds at once.

## **The Opposite Madness**

In this week's Torah portion, we encounter the same madness — but in the opposite direction.

In this double portion of Vayakhel-Pekudei, we witness the actual construction of the Mishkan, a physical representation of atonement for the Golden Calf incident. Moses gathers the children of Israel on the day after Yom Kippur, the day after he received the second tablets from Mount Sinai, and informs them that G-d has forgiven them. On the following day, he tells them how they can make amends: by building a home of gold (and silver and copper etc.) for G-d.

Moses tallied all the necessary materials and ingredients for constructing the Mishkan, and then, the Torah tells us that "all the children of Israel went out from before Moses." According to the Midrash (Hagadol), this passage teaches us something very significant. It teaches us that the moment the Children of Israel

learned about the Divine request to build the Tabernacle, they were practically jumping out of their seats with excitement!

They eagerly responded to the call. The Torah reports that everyone came running to donate whatever they had. This is truly remarkable; I happen to know from experience that usually, when funds are raised for a particular cause, individuals must be sought out and solicited for donations. However, in the case of the Mishkan, the people voluntarily came forward to offer their contributions.

One unique aspect of the Torah's description is the phrase "and the men came with the women." According to the Midrash, this teaches us that the women were more enthusiastic than the men. The Rebbe often quoted from Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer, that during the sin of the Golden Calf, it was the men who were primarily responsible, while the women did not want to contribute. However, in the donation of the Mishkan, the women took the lead and inspired the men to follow their example. The Midrash therefore concludes that "The women of that generation were more meritorious than the men — they entered the Land of Israel, and the men did not."

The Torah also tells us how long the "charidy campaign" lasted. According to the Midrash, all the necessary materials were donated in just two mornings! (Midrash Tanchuma, Terumah 3). The people were so eager to give that it was a "giving-madness." Unlike the recent bank madness, this was a frenzy of giving, and the women were the first to participate.

## **Our Golden Calf**

What does this all mean to us in the year 2023?

The Rebbe often noted that the sin of the golden calf is not just a historical event that happened over three thousand years ago. It is something that is still happening today, right here and now.

We have a modern-day idol that we worship, and it is called money. We all too often find ourselves bowing down to this golden calf. We work day in and day out, chasing after the allure of material success, while forgetting about the things that truly matter in life. We live in a culture where those who have more money are seen as more important, and where the phrase “the owner of the hundred is the owner of the opinion” rings all too true. We all bow down to the golden calf.

The solution to the Golden Calf, therefore, is by contributing to the Tabernacle. When we donate the money that we have worked hard for, with our blood, sweat, and tears, and when we do so with enthusiasm and joy, we affirm that we are not held captive by our wealth, but rather, we are the ones in control.

In the talk, the Rebbe imparts a special message to women: “Our generation is a reincarnation of the generation in the desert. Therefore, just as the Israelites were tasked with building the Mishkan, women today must create a sanctuary in their homes, and leave no room for a ‘Golden Calf.’

But what about the necessary ‘Golden Calf’? Can we really survive without money? The answer is that money is necessary to provide for our basic needs such as food, drink, and clothing. But when we don’t spend our money the way G-d wants, we end up spending it on taxes or healthcare expenses. They just become a source for more anxiety.

And ultimately, these efforts pay into eternity. The Golden Calf was grounded into dust, while the Ark and the Tabernacle are eternal.