

## Go for yourself... and I will make of you a great nation. (12:1,2)

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The term/class/status, minority, implies deficiency to a certain extent. Indeed, in contemporary society (and probably much earlier), the appellation, minority, relegates its members, or member, to an implied second-class status. This, of course, is dependent on the individual or individuals who fall under this status, either imposed by the members of the majority or self-imposed – due to a desire to segregate themselves from the majority. Having said this, we will analyze our People's status – both vis-à-vis the world community and among ourselves.

*Horav S. R. Hirsch, zl*, lived during a period of turmoil within the Jewish community of Germany and, by extension, Western Europe. The scourge of the *Haskalah*, Enlightenment, had begun to rear its head following the French Revolution, and Jews were falling prey to its allure. They preached assimilation: Why remain a minority against the entire world? Why be different? The average Jew, whose level of education matched the pride he had in his heritage, had long ago succumbed to the economic and social hardships that have challenged our People at every juncture, gobbled up their poisonous rhetoric and soon thereafter reneged his commitment to Judaism. *Rav Hirsch* succeeded in stemming the tide and, ultimately, reversing the trend. He taught them that for a Jew to be a minority is a privilege, an honor, and an integral aspect of his identity.

*Avraham Avinu* established this principle when he listened to Hashem's call of, *Lech Lecha*, "Go for yourself!" – go your own way. Do not concern yourself with what others will think. Do not fear isolation – not if it means separating yourself from hedonistic pagans bent on destroying the very fibre of moral values, the core principles upon which the nation of which you will be the progenitor will build their future. Without morals, we are not a nation; indeed, we are not human. It is no less true today than it was thousands of years ago, when our Patriarch had to stand up for what was proper and true.

It was a time in which isolation was denigrated. The *dor haflagah*, generation of the Dispersion, declared, *Naase lanu shem*, "Let us make ourselves a name." They built a tower to glorify their collective selves – not the individual. It was all about centralization – not individual self-worth. Centralization recognized the group – not the status of the individual who was merely an underling, a cog in the wheel, a brick in the cooperative structure. This concept, explains *Rav Hirsch*, gives rise to the false notion that the majority holds the power of authority and that everything which the majority decides is good is automatically considered good and mutually accepted by the group.

Judaism believes in the power of the majority, but this is only when it represents all that is truly sacred and sublime. When the majority expounds and is attached to the sacred truth, then we join

with them in total harmony. If not, then we adhere to the principle of *lech lecha*, go your own way. We do not determine the veracity or suitability of our actions based upon those idolized by the majority. Our Patriarch Avraham taught us, by example, that the majority does not have the power to hold sway over the individual.

We have survived throughout the millennia because we are imbued with Avraham *Avinu's* courage to be a minority. This was the very first Jewish directive: Stand up for what is just and proper. If it is not the paradigm of absolute truth – leave! We do not “go with the flow.” It takes courage, resolution, and conviction. It requires strength – not physical prowess, but emotional stamina. Hashem said to Avraham, *V'e'escha l'goi gadol*, “I will make you into a great nation,” not a large nation – a great nation. We are measured by quality – not by quantity. We stand alone, as a minority, singular in our belief, proud of our heritage, and strong in our relationship with Hashem – which takes precedence over everything.

When a Jew feels the need to impress; to be accepted on par with everyone else, to follow the pattern of life and perspective which has become the standard of the minority – then this Jew is deficient in his Judaism. What could be more satisfying than walking with G-d? What could be more edifying than daring to be alone? What could be greater than being a member of the nation made great by

G-d?

*Lech lecha*: go for yourself. This is the reason that some have difficulty reconciling themselves with being in the minority, with standing resolute against the allure and misguided beliefs of the majority. In order to “go for yourself,” one must know and acknowledge himself/herself. One must come to terms with who he/she is. One must confront his/her own identity. If one does not know his/her *lecha*/yourself, then the *lech* – “go” – is of no value.