

Darkei HaChizuk

ארבעה צריכים חזוק (ברכות לב:) – שיתחזק אדם בהם תמיד בכל כחו (רש"י)

A Sichah from Maran HaGaon Rav Gershon Edelstein *shlita*, Rosh Yeshivas Ponevez • Parashas Terumah 5780

386

Two Reasons for the Mitzvah of Learning Torah

We learned in *Avos* (1:2) about three things the world stands upon: on Torah, *avodah*, and *gemillus chasadim*. The first thing mentioned is Torah.

Similarly, when the *Mesillas Yesharim* explains the various *madreigos* according to the order of the *beraisa* of Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair — caution, alacrity, and all the other *madreigos* — the first thing is referring to Torah, as it explains there at the beginning that Torah brings one to caution.

And Chazal said (*Kiddushin* 30b): “I created the *yetzer hara*, I created the Torah as an antidote to it.” In *Mesillas Yesharim*, chap. 5 it states that if the Creator Who created the *yetzer hara*, and Who is aware of its characteristics, revealed to us that the antidote against it is Torah, it is clear that this is the only cure, and there is no other cure for the *yetzer hara*’s afflictions. The *yetzer hara* is very powerful and Torah is the only antidote and cure against it.

It turns out that there are two reasons for the obligation of *esek haTorah*, learning Torah. The first is connected to the actual mitzvah of Talmud Torah, as we say in *birkas haTorah* “and He commanded us to be occupied (*la’asok*) with *divrei Torah*,” and as it is written (*Devarim* 6:7), “And you shall teach them to your children and you shall speak of them...” and “you shall teach them” (*Ibid.* 5:1). But in addition to the actual obligation of being involved in Torah study, it is also a solution and cure for the *yetzer hara*.

Fully Utilizing One’s Time and Energy: An Obligation of Slavery

It’s well-known that a person reaches perfection, *sheleimus*, when he uses his time to the utmost, when every moment is used to fulfill Torah obligations — by making the most of his time and by the quality of his work.

It’s already been mentioned (*Vayikra* 25:55), “For Bnei Yisrael are servants to Me; they are My servants,” and Chazal expounded (*Bava Metzia* 10a), “And not servants of servants.” That *parashah* also speaks about an *eved kena’ani*, that all the slave’s energies are subjugated to his master. The obligations of our servitude are all the 613 mitzvos, which we are commanded to fulfill with all our strength.

Similarly, in the “*Hineni michavein*” *tefillah* recited before laying tefillin, we say, “may all my strengths and thoughts be enslaved to service of the Blessed One.” This is not a

middas chassidus; it is the obligation of servitude, “For all Bnei Yisrael are servants to Me; they are My servants.”

Indeed, one must utilize all his time and all his energies, as we’ve already mentioned in the name of Maran HaGaon Rav Chaim Brisker, *zt”l*, regarding the following Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 99a): “For he has despised the word of Hashem” — [this is referring to] anyone who could be involved in Torah and is not. Rav Chaim said that this is not only referring to wasting time, **it’s also talking about the quality of one’s learning. If a person can be attached to Torah with complete concentration, with understanding, or with greater depth — and he is lazy and does not delve deeper, this falls into the category of “he has despised Hashem’s word,”** for he does not value Torah; it does not interest him.

The Sweetness of and Attraction to Esek HaTorah

Learning Torah is really interesting and enticing, and there’s inquisitiveness to know *divrei Torah*. There’s also sweetness in Torah, as it states (*Tehillim* 19:11): “And they are sweeter than honey” — yes, sweeter than honey. Honey cannot be eaten in unlimited amounts; if one eats too much honey, he won’t be able to stand it. But the sweetness of Torah never becomes unbearable. On the contrary, the more one is involved in Torah, the more enticing it becomes and the more pleasure and excitement one feels. This is the power of Torah, and this is the meaning of “sweeter than honey.”

The Torah is also compared to wine, to milk, to water, and to bread, as the *pasuk* states (*Yeshayahu* 55:1): “O all those who are thirsty, go to water,” and wine and milk are mentioned later in the *pasuk*. The commentaries explain that these are referring to *divrei Torah*, as is mentioned in a number of places. Similarly, it is written in *Shir HaShirim* (4:11): “Honey and milk under your tongue,” and in *Mishlei* (9:5), “Come, partake of the bread and drink of the wine I have mixed.” These are being compared to various parts of Torah — both revealed and hidden Torah — as there are many parts of Torah and they are compared to all the tastes we’ve mentioned.

But aside from sweetness, there’s also curiosity. Torah learning is very interesting, as Rashi writes on *Devarim* 6:6: “And may these matters that I command you today” — Like a new decree that all run toward it. That is, *divrei Torah* are like a new law the king has just issued, which everyone is interested in and wants to know what it’s about. So too, *divrei Torah* are interesting. In the section of “*V’haya im shamo’a*” (*Devarim* 11:13), it states: “which I have commanded you today.” Rashi explains: “You should

consider them new, as if you just heard them this very day.” This is the reality, truly, *divrei Torah* are very interesting and intriguing.

We see that *esek haTorah* is not hard, because a person is naturally inclined to it. It’s innate human nature to be drawn to Torah to an extraordinary degree, as is written in *Mishlei* (5:19): “You shall always be intoxicated with her love.” And in the Gemara (*Eiruv* 54b) it states: “They read this verse on Rabbi Elazar ben Pedas who would sit and learn Torah in the lower marketplace of Tzippori, while his garment would be lying in the upper marketplace. This is what the *pasuk* “You shall always be intoxicated with her love” is referring to — due to his love of Torah he acts like someone who lost his mind, that he forgot where he put his garment. On a similar note, the Gemara relates (*Shabbos* 88a) about Rava who squeezed his finger while he was learning, and even though it started bleeding, he didn’t notice because he was so engrossed in Torah. This is the power of Torah!

Follow Your Natural Inclination in Learning; Utilize Your Time Better

What does this have to do with us? I am not coming to give *mussar*; I’m just giving some friendly advice. If you pay attention to all the times a person learns, notice when he feels inquisitive, and when he does not. It’s easy to see which *seder* is more interesting to him, and which is less.

It seems to me that usually — for most people — night *seder* is most interesting. It’s because then everyone learns according to their natural inclination, whatever interests them, and they enjoy it very much. During afternoon *seder*, the *limud* is less interesting. During first *seder*, it’s even less, because then they learn slowly and spend too much time on the same *inyan*, which is against human nature. When one learns against his natural inclinations it’s less interesting and there’s no *hatzlachah*. While there are those who utilize every moment during morning *seder* as well, it’s not like that for everyone. For some, morning *seder* is less interesting. **The gauge is if they learn with *hasmadah* and if they feel that every second is precious, or if they feel like they have plenty of time and don’t hurry to come on time to morning *seder*.**

This is true regarding *avreichim* as well. Usually, those who cover more ground quickly are the ones who hurry to arrive at *seder*, because every minute is precious. They don’t stop in the middle of *seder* either, because their learning is enticing and interesting. But the majority of those who learn in great depth, which is against their nature, don’t rush to come to *seder* on time. And in the middle of *seder*, they’re bored and have to step out to take a drink... Because the learning is not in sync with their natural inclinations.

For most people, *pashtus* is more interesting, so when they learn slowly in morning *seder*, it’s going against their nature. Of course, there are many people who learn in a way that is in sync with their nature, and then every moment is utilized and they arrived to *seder* on time, but it seems that this does not occur across the board.

The Yeshivah’s *Sedarim* and Learning *Mussar*

There’s something else that’s important to know: *yeshivos* have *sedarim*. There’s davening Shacharis, then morning *seder*, Minchah, then second *seder*, Maariv, and then night *seder*. **It’s well known that when someone keeps to the *sedarim* and conducts himself according to the yeshivah’s schedule, he will be successful. But someone who learns — even much more — without following the *sedarim* in yeshivah, he will not have success. Even if he thinks he’s successful, it’s not the same *hatzlachah* he would have if he had followed the yeshivah’s *sedarim*.** No further explanation is necessary; this is the reality — whoever keeps to the yeshivah’s *sedarim* is successful. This includes all *sedarim*: davening Shacharis with the yeshivah, morning *seder* with the yeshivah, Minchah in yeshivah, starting second *seder* on time, and then *mussar*, and Maariv, and night *seder*.

We’ve already discussed many times that lots of people aren’t aware of the importance of *mussar seder*. A person needs *chinuch*, repeated practice, he needs to be structured, with structured behavior according to the Torah. When a person learns *mussar sefarim*, it has an effect on every part of his behavior and leads to a happy life. I’ve already mentioned that many people — even men with families already — have told me that when they started learning *mussar* daily, even for a short amount time, as long as it was constant, their entire household made a transformation! The mood in the house was different, the home became a happy home, with *simchas hachaim*. This was all the result of making a set schedule for learning *mussar* every day.

A person who lives with a plan and has an organized day — not following the nature of his *yetzer hara*, but by following his mind according to the Torah, his life is entirely different; he is happy. This relates to married men as well, and all the more so to *bachurim*. If a *bachur* plans his day according to the yeshivah’s *sedarim*, he will be happy and will be successful. That’s the reality.

Shiurim* in Yeshivah — *Shimush Chachomim

There are also *shiurim* in yeshivah, and these fall under the category of “*shimush chachamim*.” In *Avos*, chap. 6, Chazal say that the Torah is acquired through *shimush chachamim*, *dibbuk chaverim*, *u’bipilpul hatalmidim* — “serving the sages, clinging to friends, and sharp discussion with students.” Similarly, the Gemara (*Taanis* 7a) says, “I learned much from my teachers, and even more from my friends, but from my students, [I learned] the most of all.”

There are two aspects to *shimush chachomim*: *yedios*, knowledge, and *havanah*, understanding. Besides for the simple knowledge of the Gemara, there are many more *yedios* in the Rishonim and Acharonim, like the *Ketzos* and the *Nesivos*, and *Rabbi Akiva Eiger*, and one needs a rebbi for this. A person needs *shimush chachomim* for *havanah* as well, in order to understand the depth of things with *seichel yashar*.

There's another aspect of *shimush chachomim*, regarding *hanhagah*, conduct. A person needs direction as to the right way to conduct himself, and this is another matter. But, as we mentioned, there are two aspects to *shimush* in Torah: *yediah* and *havanah*.

Reviewing Shiurim — Dibbuk Chaveirim

Clinging to friends, which is more than “from my teachers,” is not referring to knowledge, *yedios*, as it's impossible to learn more from one's friends than from his rebbi. Rather, this is referring to *havanah*, understanding, which is what one gains from *dibbuk chaveirim*. When one reviews a *shiur* with his friend, the review gives him more clarity and *havanah* on what he heard during the *shiur*. And it's known that the *bachurim* who reviewed the *shiurim* many times — because a lot of other *bachurim* would ask to learn and *chazer* together with them, and they reviewed with anyone who asked them to — they became exceptional *gedolei Torah*!

This is the *inyan* of *dibbuk chaveirim*, which gives a person more clarity in *havanah*.

Pilpul HaTalmidim — Explaining the Shiur to Friends

Pilpul chaveirim also increases the rebbi's *havanah*, because his *talmidim* ask him questions that he hadn't thought of, and now he must explain them. Each of these explanations gives the rebbi himself more clarity; he gains better *havanah* through his *talmidim*'s questions.

This pertains not only to the rebbi, but to the *talmidim* between themselves. If one *bachur* understands more and another understands less, the first one is like a rebbi and the second, a *talmid*. When the second asks questions and asks his friend to explain it to him, the questioner is gaining *shimush chachamim*, while for the explainer, it's *pilpul hatalmidim*. If they are both on equal standing in *havanah*, it is called *dibbuk chaveirim*, as this too increases clarity. But if someone needs to explain the *sugya* to his friend who doesn't understand, he will gain even greater clarity.

A great *talmid chacham* was asked to teach young children, around the age of sixth graders. He asked Maran the Chazal Ish *zt"l* if he should take the job. The Chazon Ish told him that not only was it a good idea because of the *zikkui harabbim* involved, but it would be for his own personal benefit, since he'd have to explain simple ideas, things that he didn't think about at all when he had learned the *sugya*. Furthermore, children ask questions that he would not have asked, so explaining the answers to them would constitute *pilpul hatalmidim*, which is extremely beneficial.

It is also very important to prepare the *Gemara*, *Rashi*, *Tosfos* before the *shiur*. For some *gemaras*, it's necessary to prepare twice, since these are slightly more complicated *sugyos*. This is what we have to say about Torah.

Davening Should Be Heartfelt

Then there's also *avodah*, *avodah she'balev*, *u'leovdo bechol levavchem* (*Devarim* 10:12), *avodah she'balev zoh tefillah* (*Taanis* 2:1). According to the Rambam's opinion, at the beginning of *Hilchos Tefillah*, it's a *mitzvah d'Oraysa* to daven every day.

Avodah she'balev must be with *lev*, heart. If a person only parrots the words and does not include his heart, if there's no arousal of his heart, this is not *avodah she'balev*, service of the heart. It's merely *avodah she'bapeh*, lip service. It must be *avodah she'balev*, at least to slightly understand and feel what he's saying and asking. Indeed, the *Mesillas Yesharim* writes in chap. 19 that if someone has proper intelligence, then with just a little contemplation and attention, as he davens he can feel that he is standing and speaking with HaKadosh Baruch Hu, just as a person speaks to his friend, asks him for something, and waits for an answer. There are people like this; their *tefillah* is on this level.

There's another level written in the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim* 98a): *tefillah* occurs through nullification of one's physical senses, and can come close to the level of prophecy. It's well known that when the Chazon Ish and the Brisker Rav davened Shemoneh Esrei all their senses were nullified, they didn't feel or hear what was happening around them. When people spoke to them during davening, they did not hear them because they were so focused on their prayers. This is the level of concentration one can achieve, to the extent of nullification of all one's physical senses. This is a high *madreigah*.

There are many other *madreigos* one must achieve before reaching this one: the *tefillah* should be *avodah she'balev*; the place of *tefillah* is important — “*Tefillah* should take place in a joyous place” (*Berachos* 6a), one should have a set place for davening (*Berachos* 6b), it should be in a place where learning occurs (*Berachos* 8a); one should daven with a minyan, and with *kavanah*. This is *avodas hatefillah*.

Pleasant Speech

The third thing mentioned is *gemillus chassadim*, *bein adam lachaveiro*, and this is a very important thing. For example, this includes greeting everyone with a sever *panim yafos*, a happy countenance (*Avos* 1:15), and making sure he speaks pleasantly to others (*Yoma* 86a), as it is written in the Iggeres HaRamban, “all your words should be expressed pleasantly.” It's already written (*Koheles* 9:17): “The words of the wise are spoken pleasantly,” his manner of speech should be pleasant; his fellow should feel pleasant when speaking with him.

Be Careful Not to Criticize Others

There is another component of *bein adam lachaveiro*. It's very hard to fulfill, but it's something one can get used to,

and once he's used to it, it's not hard: to be very careful not to criticize other people. At first, it's very hard to stay away from this, from anything that can be considered criticism. Even true criticism, which isn't a lie, is still criticism — saying that someone has a deficiency and discussing it. Even if others don't hear, and even if the person you are talking about doesn't know you are discussing him, it is still wrong. If he would find out about it and it would reach him, it would cause him pain, and it's *mamesh lashon hara*! But even if he doesn't hear and doesn't know anything about it, there's no benefit from this criticism, and it is *lashon hara*. About this it says (*Tehillim* 34:14): "Guard your tongue from evil!" It is very hard to be careful about this, but once you get used to it, it's not hard.

The Chafetz Chaim writes in *Shemiras Halashon* (*Shaar HaTevunah* chap. 3): "If at times he must speak about someone, it should be extremely brief, and he should not speak for a long time. I heard about the Gaon Rav Refael of Hamburg, who retired from the rabbinate four years before his passing. When people would visit him, he would ask them not to speak in his house about anyone. I heard the same about another *gadol hador*, who was extremely vigilant not to mention the name of any person." He was so careful that he didn't even mention names of people so that he should not come to the possibility of *avak lashon hara*.

Judging Favorably

In any case, this is something that is worthwhile to become used to: not to let a word of criticism escape your lips, and to judge others favorably in your heart, as we've already mentioned the Gemara's words (*Shabbos* 127b), that someone who judges others favorably, then in Heaven, *middah k'neged middah*, they will judge him favorably as well. The Gemara relates a story of someone who judged favorably in a matter that seemed very unfavorable. Yet, he still judged the man favorably, saying perhaps some far-fetched reason caused the man to fail to give him what he

deserved. In the end, it turned out that this was actually the reason. The man then told him, "Just as you judged me favorably, may Hashem judge you favorably."

Middah keneged middah, look at what benefit and success one receives for wholeheartedly judging others favorably! If I don't suspect him in my heart, but rather judge him favorably, well, in *Shamayim* they know my thoughts, "Hashem knows man's thoughts" (*Tehillim* 94:11). So *middah keneged middah*, they judge me favorably in *Shamayim* for all the misdemeanors I perform, wherever I stumble. They judge me favorably, as if I did it by mistake or under duress, and I am not guilty.

These matters are extremely applicable to every single person at every single moment — don't criticize others, even in your heart, and judge others favorably. Indeed, this is what the *pasuk* says (*Vayikra* 19:18): "Love your fellow Jew as yourself." In *Mesillas Yesharim* chap. 11, it says: "Literally like yourself." **If someone loves his fellow "like yourself," it's not hard, and automatically his behavior will be *b'sever panim yafos*, and he'll judge favorably, because that's what "like yourself" means: literally like yourself!**

Just as mentioned at the beginning, we aren't coming to give *mussar*; it's simply good advice how to act with *sheleimus*. However, regarding a *mussar seder* — this is imperative, and it's simply spiritual *pikuach nefesh*. Of course, one must learn an interesting *mussar sefer*, because if one is bored when he learns, it will not have an effect on him. But there are many *mussar sefarim*, and there are many interesting parts. Some people are interested in everything, but each person needs to find a *mussar sefer* that is interesting and will influence him to be a *baal madreigah*. If so, "*ashreinu, mah tov chelkein*" that this is in our hands and we can become *baalei madreigah*, with Hashem's help.

Dedicated by
the Kroll Family, Los Angeles
להצלחת בניהם ובנותיהם
בתורה וביראת שמים

For donations or dedications of the Hebrew and English flyers, or to receive the *sichos* to your email, please contact:
darkei.hachizuk@gmail.com

The *sichos* are transcribed and translated from a weekly *va'ad* in Rav Gershon Edelstein's home.