

Darkei HaChizuk

ארבעה צריכים חיזוק (ברכות לב:) - שיתחזק אדם בהם תמיד בכל כהו (רש"י)

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Esek HaTorah Is Like the Beis HaMikdash

The mitzvah of building the Mikdash, which is where the Shechinah dwells in the lower world, is explained in *Parashas Terumah*: “And make for Me a Mikdash.”

The Baal HaTurim writes the following on the *pasuk*, “Speak to Bnei Yisrael and take for Me a *terumah*, donation”: “[The word] תרומה is comprised of the letters מ' תורה... ‘And take for Me’ — for My name, for whomever is involved in Torah it is as if took for Me. For HaKadosh Baruch Hu has nothing in His world aside from *dalet amos* of halachah alone.”

This means that *esek haTorah* is like the Beis HaMikdash, as the Shechinah rests on anyone who is involved in Torah. This is what is meant by “HaKadosh Baruch Hu doesn’t have anything in his world” — the Shechinah rests within the four *amos* of halachah, which is the place of *esek haTorah*.

This is Gemara’s actual wording in *Berachos* (8a): “From the day the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed” HaKadosh Baruch Hu doesn’t have anything in His world aside from *dalet amos* of halachah alone. At first glance, it seems that this is true only after the Churban — “from the day the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed.”

But I heard from Maran the Ponovezer Rav *zt”l* that even before the Churban, the Shechinah rested in *dalet amos* of halachah, because the Shechinah dwells with anyone who is involved in Torah, as Chazal say (*Avos* 3:6): “Ten men who sit and are *oseik* in Torah, the Shechinah resides among them... From where do we know that [this is true] even among five... From where do we know that [this is true] even among one...” And this was always true even before the Churban. Four *amos* of halachah at the time of *esek haTorah* is like the Beis HaMikdash, and the Shechinah resides there. The difference is that before the Churban, we also had the Beis HaMikdash, where the Shechinah resided even when people weren’t involved in Torah. So from the day the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed, it is lacking and all we have is *esek haTorah* — four *amos* of halachah “alone,” as the Shechinah had also rested on the Beis HaMikdash when it stood.

That’s what the Baal HaTurim is teaching us: anyone who is involved in Torah, “it is as if he takes Me” — someone who is *oseik baTorah* merits that the Shechinah resides with him.

The Sweetness of and Attraction to Esek HaTorah

Of course, it goes without saying that in order for the four *amos* of halachah of a person who is *oseik baTorah* to be considered the Beis HaMikdash, it depends on how he is *oseik baTorah* and what his Torah learning is like. To determine what constitutes *Torah b’shleimus*, the general rule is explained by the Baal HaTurim further on in *Parashas Terumah* on the following *pasuk* (25:10): “And make for Me an *Aron* of *shittim* wood...” He says the following: “The *gematria* of ארון is [equal to the *gematria* of] נזר, crown, as the crown of Torah is greater than all other crowns. Its length is two-and-a-half *amos*, its width is one-and-a-half *amos* and its height is one-and-a-half *amos* — all its dimensions are broken, half *amos*, to teach us that whoever learns Torah must break and humble himself.” That is, the *Aron* hints to Torah, and the measurements are half-numbers, to tell us that in order for a person to attain *sheleimus* in Torah, he must break and humble himself.

As is his style, the Baal HaTurim writes very succinctly. He writes, “He must break and humble himself.” It seems that he is hinting to two separate issues: “to break,” and “to humble.”

The explanation seems to be the following. It’s known that there are two types of bad *middos*. One is bad *middos* that stem from physical desires and pleasures, such as eating, drinking, and the like — things the body derives enjoyment from. The other is bad *middos* that stem from spiritual desires, such as haughtiness, honor, and power. These are two separate issues: bad *middos* with a physical connection, and those with a spiritual connection. It seems that this was the Baal HaTurim’s intention: to break and humble himself. “To break” is breaking physical desires and pleasures, as Rabbeinu Yonah in *Shaarei Teshuvah* (1:30) writes, “breaking physical desires,” and “to humble” is humbleness and meekness, to distance oneself from the *middah* of *gaavah*.

This is the condition to attain *sheleimus* in Torah. If a person breaks himself and lowers himself, if he doesn’t have bad *middos*, and his *middos* are good, then it is possible for him to acquire the crown of Torah. For then his Torah will be *b’sheleimus*, and his four *amos* of halachah will be like the Beis HaMikdash. With bad *middos*, however, his Torah is not considered complete, *shalem*.

His Torah Should Not Be Lip Service

Truthfully, there are those who were unimaginable *gedolei Torah*, but even so, their Torah was not considered “Torah.” One example is Doeg HaAdomi, who was “the chief of Shaul’s shepherds” (*Shmuel I* 21:8), which means he was the head of Sanhedrin (*Midrash Tehillim* 52), and he was the greatest *talmid chacham* of all Klal Yisrael. And yet, he possessed extremely bad *middos* and spoke *lashon hara*, as is mentioned explicitly in the *pesukim* in *Tehillim* and in *Sefer Shmuel*.

How could it be that a person with such bad *middos* was able to attain such greatness in Torah? Indeed, Chazal already said (*Sanhedrin* 106b), “Doeg’s Torah was only lip service.” This means that his Torah was like any other subject of knowledge, his wisdom was a result of his abilities, but it did not have an influence on his *penimiyus*, his inner self. It did not have the element of *Torah tavlin*, it did not act as an antidote to the *yetzer hara* and change his nature. He remained with the same bad *middos* he had before learning Torah.

And it could even be that his *middos* got worse, as is known from the Gra (*Even Sheleimah* chap. 1.), that one who learns Torah while steeped in bad *middos*, his Torah learning will solidify his bad *middos*. That is, if his bad *middos* are what brought him to learn Torah, and he learns only to provoke and be boastful (as is written in *Tosfos* on *Pesachim* 50), this is in the category of *shelo lishmah*, which solidifies one’s bad *middos*. Therefore, Doeg’s Torah remained merely lip service, and his end was as they said there in *Sanhedrin*, “Men of destruction and deceit will not live out half their days.”

And so we’ve found regarding Shevna HaSofer (*Sanhedrin* 26a), who had thirteen *yeshivos* —more *yeshivos* than Chizkiyahu HaMelech had and perhaps even more wisdom — as Chizkiyahu had only eleven *yeshivos*. Yet, even so, they said that Shevna was “*keshar reshaim* and is not counted.” This means that even though he had a large number of *yeshivos*, they are considered inconsequential. Now, what was Shevna’s deficiency? The Gemara explains later that they said, “Shevna enjoyed pleasures of this world.” He loved *Olam HaZeh* and was attracted to physical and material desires and pleasures of *Olam HaZeh*, and his Torah, too, was only lip service.

We see that a person who has special talents and abilities can achieve extraordinary levels of greatness in Torah, but it will only be “lip service,” and it won’t be considered the “*dalet amos* of halachah” which are like

the *Beis HaMikdash*. The *Shechinah* does not reside upon him, since he has *taavos* and bad *middos*.

This is what the *Baal HaTurim* wrote: The Torah has to break him and humble him, **because a person’s *middos*, both good *middos* and bad *middos*, set the direction for his deeds. For example, if a person is both haughty and desires honor, then whatever he does includes calculations pertaining to his honor and haughtiness. And even when he learns, he does not take his mind off his worldly aspirations of honor and haughtiness, for this is human nature.** This type of Torah is “lip service Torah” which does not have an effect on one’s *penimiyus*. He can develop his abilities further, but it will still remain lip service!

The Torah is an antidote for the *yetzer hara*, but this is only if the Torah is learned with *yiras Shamayim* and aspirations to attain good *middos*, when the goal is achieving good *middos*, when one learns *mussar* to correct one’s *middos*. Indeed, we find the following about Rav in *Sanhedrin* (7b), that whenever he would receive public honor, he would immediately recite *pesukim* to humble himself. In this manner, Torah can be a *tavlin*, but Torah learned without the *hishtadlus* to correct one’s *middos*, and without attention [to these matters], is not going to be a *tavlin*.

The Effect of Torah: Only When One Learns Without Interruption

On the one hand, there can be a situation where there is a lot of Torah, but a lack of *middos*. On the other hand, the opposite can be true: he might have wonderful *middos*, but **if he’s deficient in the *sheleimus* of *osek baTorah*, if he doesn’t have *deveikus*, attachment, and *retzifus*, learning uninterrupted, in Torah, then the entire effect of Torah won’t be present, and the innate good *middos* he already has can change, due to the *yetzer hara* and luring matters.**

Esek haTorah must be done with *sheleimus*, not just with good *middos*, but also with *hasmadah*, *deveikus*, and *retzifus* in Torah. These characteristics are really important, for without them, one will not experience the influence of Torah learning! If there are interruptions in learning, his Torah will not be like the “*Beis HaMikdash*.” An example of this is on *erev Shabbos* and *Shabbos*, or other times when there is *bitul Torah*. If the *bitul Torah* occurs unnecessarily, for reasons not included in necessary *miut sichah*, “minimized conversation,” then his *retzifus* and attachment to Torah is lacking, and he will not enjoy the fruits of Torah’s influence.

An Address at an *Asifah* in Yeshivas Ateres Shlomo, Modiin Elite

It's known that currently, the situation is that everything that is holy is in danger. What's the solution? After all, everything is in Heaven's hands, and we need *zechuyos*. Without *zechuyos*, there cannot be any success. If we want to have the opportunity to continue in the Torah's path, in *chinuch*, and in everything else, in *esek haTorah*, and in whatever the Torah demands of us, we need *zechuyos* for this. The practical action is to vote, to vote for Gimmel, but to have success and *siyatta d'Shemaya*, one also needs *zechuyos*. We need *zechuyos* of *shev v'al taaseh*, and also of *kum v'asei*.

The first thing in *shev v'al taaseh* is what we say every day in davening, three times a day: *Elokai netzor lishoni me'ra* — “Hashem, guard my tongue from speaking evil, and my lips from speaking deceit.” We must be careful about not speaking *lashon hara* and deceit. This is the Amoraim's prayer, as is mentioned in the Gemara (*Berachos* 17a) that one of the Amoraim said this prayer — an Amora who had the power to revive the dead! He davened and asked for mercy to be saved from *lashon hara*.

And since the *yetzer hara* is very strong and can have an influence on an Amora, *chas v'shalom*, to make him talk *lashon hara*, the *tefillah* is necessary. Without *tefillah*, it is impossible to stand up against the *yetzer hara* of *lashon hara*. The Amoraim's *tefillah* was on a high *madreigah*, they reached the level of nullification of physicality, as is written in the *Shulchan Aruch siman* 98 regarding what constitutes prayer. We are not on that *madreigah*, but we need *tefillah*! To merit *siyatta d'Shemaya* to guard our tongues from speaking evil, from *lashon hara*. Even though it is a very difficult thing, one can start getting used to it, and the same is true regarding “protect my lips from deceit.”

The *tefillah* continues: “and to those who curse me, my soul should remain silent.” “Those who curse me” are those who disgrace me, “my soul should remain silent” means that I shouldn't care if people disgrace me, because after all, who am I and what am I? Am I a *tzaddik* that has no sins? From the day I became bar mitzvah, have I never been guilty of *bitul Torah*, *lashon hara*, or a plethora of other *aveiros* that people stumble in? After all, a person needs a *kapparah*, atonement, for all the *aveiros* he commits, and *yissurim* cleanse. Gehinnom is even worse, and when a person suffers embarrassment it is instead of Gehinnom, so he should be happy about it. Therefore, “my soul should remain silent.”

And then we ask: “Open my heart to Your Torah.” This is a *kum v'asei*, Torah, *esek haTorah*, which is the antidote to the *yetzer hara* — there's no other replacement! Without Torah, it is impossible to stand up against the *yetzer hara*. Torah is the only antidote to the *yetzer hara*.

And what kind of Torah is an antidote? All of Torah, but the *Mishnah Berurah* in *siman aleph* already wrote that the main *tavlin*, antidote, is *Toras hayirah*, Torah of *yiras Shamayim*, which is *mussar sefarim*. That is the Torah that is the antidote to the *yetzer hara*. Even though all of Torah is an antidote, in reality we see that a person could learn Torah and still speak *lashon hara*. So the only true solution to being *b'sheleimus* is by having a set learning session in *Toras hayirah*, in *sefarim* that deal with *mussar* and *yiras Shamayim*, like *Mesillas Yesharim*, *Shaarei Teshuvah*, *Chovos HaLevavos*, *Orchos Tzaddikim*, and others.

All *mussar sefarim* increase *yiras Shamayim*. Having a daily learning session in *mussar sefarim*, even if only for a short time, has an influence and changes the person. It's well known, and many people — even older men with families — have already told me that they started learning *mussar* daily and immediately felt a change in their entire household. Their house became a happy house with a pleasant atmosphere. Learning *mussar* regularly is imperative.

Practically speaking, the way to act with good *middos* is to be careful with your friends, and with every single person, that no one should suffer because of me or be hurt by me. No one should have anxiety or pain because of me. This is *bein adam lachaveiro*, and these are the greatest *zechuyos*! Torah and *yiras Shamayim* and *middos tovos*, to take not to speak *lashon hara*, not to speak critically about anyone, not to entertain any criticism at all, for no benefit is gained from criticism, so it falls into the category of *devarim beteilim*,

unnecessary speech. A person must do just what he is obligated to do and to ask for mercy. We need *tefillah* for *siyatta d'Shemaya* to merit performing good deeds and not to stumble in prohibitions. This is the way, there is no other, to succeed in meriting and bringing merit to the public.

Whoever votes Gimmel should know that aside from his personal merit of sanctifying *Shem Shamayim*, he is also bringing merit to the public. And one who is *mezakeh harabbim* earns the merits of *maasim tovim* performed due to his influence. One's merits grow exponentially through *zikui harabbim*! Every single person, whatever he is due to his essence and his conduct, can influence others. When he is among a large crowd and people see how he behaves — his genuine, honest behavior according to the Torah — this has an influence on others, even without saying a word. This is *zikui harabbim*, and we cannot even imagine the *zechuyos* involved in this. *B'ezras Hashem*, may we all merit to benefit the public, and may we be *zocheh* to *siyatta d'Shemaya* and to have whatever we need.

An Address to Rabbanim and Activists for Russian Immigrants in Israel

All of you here today are men of great influence, especially among Russian immigrants. It's not a secret that due to the present situation, there is a great need: there's palpable danger in the elections to Knesset. They are inciting a large sector against the *chareidim*, and the incitement has an influence, and this is dangerous. *Chas v'shalom*, they should not succeed, for if they do succeed in their incitement, woe is us! They will disturb us and interfere in any matter that has to do with *kedushah*. There is great danger that they will succeed in coming to power. Therefore, we have a great obligation to prevent this, to prevent difficult decrees, and this can only happen by voting for the Gimmel party.

Therefore, anyone who has an influence on the *tzibbur* has a great, grave obligation. First of all, it is *kiddush Shem Shamayim* and announcing that *Hashem Hu HaElokim*, and by voting Gimmel, we are declaring that we are following the Torah, for what is the purpose of Gimmel? Torah and *mitzvos, taryag mitzvos*. That is the purpose, nothing else. As we said, there is also danger now, so it is a grave obligation to prevent the danger. Anyone who is influential and can influence others, is obligated by a *chiyuv gamur*, a total obligation, to influence others to vote Gimmel. Anyone who can influence and does not, *chas v'shalom*, meaning anyone who can save another and does not do so, about him the *pasuk* says (*Vayikra* 19:16): "Do not stand by on your brother's blood." This means both physically and spiritually, and it is a very grave matter. We hope that everyone understands this and will accept this, and exert their full powers of influence to persuade others. And all those who assist in this and influence others will merit *berachah* and *hatzlachah*.

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להצלחת בניהם ובנותיהם
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