

## Darkei HaChizuk

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

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### The Virus Is for Every Single Person's Benefit

Some things are so simple that everyone knows them. First of all, that everything is in Heaven's hands. Whatever happens to a person — whether good or difficult — is from *Shamayim*. Also, *Kol mah d'avid Rachmana, l'tav avid*, "Whatever the Merciful One does is for the good" — everything's for the good. The purpose is to benefit man, even difficulties are for his benefit.

Indeed, presently we experienced, and are still experiencing, the virus, Corona, *lo aleinu*. And it's simple that everything is from *Shamayim* and everything is for the good. But it would be proper to think about and know what exactly is good about this plague. After all, the virus caused a lot of *bittul Torah*; it has also created challenges regarding davening in a minyan *b'shleimus*; the virus is disrupting many spiritual matters — what kind of benefit does this provide?

The answer is that whenever anyone experiences some sort of difficulty or challenge, physical or spiritual, it is from *Shamayim* and is for his benefit. The benefit is that it can bring him a *tikkun*, it can cause him to correct his ways. He needs to rectify something, and Heaven is giving him this challenge to inform him that he needs a *tikkun* and to cause him to make a *cheshbon hanefesh* and figure out what he needs to correct.

The same is true when the challenge is a communal one. If 1000 people experience difficulty, the purpose is to benefit each one of them — each person based on his own personal situation and circumstances. One person may have to do *teshuvah* for X, while another needs to repent for Y. Every person might have a different *tikkun*, but it's all orchestrated to benefit each person individually, so that he can correct what he needs to correct and achieve *shleimus*.

So when Heaven sends us difficulties, the purpose of them all is to remind us to search out what needs rectification. Each person has to look inward and figure out where "I" need a *tikkun*, and what "I" have to correct. There are physical challenges and spiritual challenges in Torah and *tefillah*, but everything is for my benefit — so that I'll correct what needs correction. Therefore, each individual must find and correct what he needs to fix, based on his condition and *madreigah*.

### Challenges in Torah Study Require Us to Rectify Our Torah Study

For example, in Torah. Currently there is much less Torah, *esek haTorah* is taking place under difficult conditions and it's not what we are used to. When there is a yeshivah with a *tzibbur*, there is *shimush chachamim*, *dibbuk chaverim*, and *pilpul hatalmidim*, but now all that is lacking. We must think and figure out why this is missing; what is the sin and what is the *tikkun*. After all, when someone suffers, it's a sign that he must correct something — that's why he's experiencing difficulty, because he needs a *tikkun*.

Most probably, if there's difficulty in Torah, it's a sign that our Torah wasn't *b'shleimus* — after all, everything is *middah k'neged middah*. We must correct this and increase *shleimus* in Torah. There are many levels in *esek haTorah*.

There's *deveikus baTorah*, clinging to Torah, as Chazal relate (*Eruvin* 54b) about Rabbi Elazar ben Pedas, who would be sitting and learning Torah in the lower marketplace of Tzipori, while his *sadin* (outer garment) was in the upper marketplace of Tzipori. He simply forgot that he left it there because he was so engrossed in Torah. About him, they said (*Mishlei* 5:19): *B'ahavasa tashgeh tamid*, "He was always intoxicated in his love of Torah." He was so attached to Torah and his love of Torah that when he learned Torah, he forgot about everything else.

The Gemara (*Shabbos* 88a) tells us about Rava, who pressed his finger so hard while he was learning Torah that he began to bleed. And he didn't even realize. A Tzeddoki said to him, "You are an impetuous nation." But this is the way of Torah. He was engrossed in Torah, and deep immersion in Torah causes the learner not to feel anything.

A similar thing occurred with Maran HaGaon Rav Baruch Ber [Leibowitz] *zi"l*. A *talmid* came to him once to ask his advice about an important matter. Reb Baruch Ber heard what he said, but the words didn't register and he couldn't follow the question because he was so engrossed in his learning. He had been in middle of learning and couldn't pull himself away from his Torah thoughts. That's how engrossed he was in his learning! He would delve very deeply and he just couldn't pull himself away from his Torah to comprehend what his

*talmid* was asking. Having no other choice, he asked his son-in-law HaGaon Rav Reuvein [Grozovsky] *zt"l* to listen to the *bachur* and answer instead.

This is the *deveikus baTorah* that the *pasuk* is referring to: "He was always intoxicated in his love of Torah." This is *deveikus* in quality. However, there's also *deveikus* in quantity — to utilize one's time to learn as much as possible, without *bittul Torah*. Even when learning from a *sefer* isn't an option, one can learn *ba'al peh* and think in *divrei Torah*.

It's well known that when the Brisker Rav was on the run during WWII, he was constantly thinking in Torah, and he came up with outstanding *chiddushei Torah* at that time. Another story is told about his extraordinary level of *deveikus baTorah*. When he was a young man and was making a *bris* for one of his sons, his father HaGaon Rav Chaim approached him while he was greeting the guests and asked him a *sheilah* in learning. This was so that the Brisker Rav would not take his thoughts off Torah. Even while he greeted the guests and exchanged *mazel tov* wishes, he continued thinking in Torah. These are great levels of *deveikus baTorah*.

### Difficulties in Tefillah — Tikkun in Tefillah

The same is true regarding *tefillah*. There are many levels in davening with *kavanah*. We've already mentioned what's written in the *Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 98:1)* that during *tefillah*, one can reach *madreigah* of *hisbatlus hagashmiyus*, nullification of one's physical senses — the person who is davening doesn't even feel his body. This is also documented in the *Kuzari (Maamar 3, chap. 5)*. Stories are told about Maran the Chazon Ish and the Brisker Rav *zt"l*, who didn't hear people who spoke to them while they were davening. Their senses simply were inactive because they were so engrossed in prayer.

This was the story about the Brisker Rav: It was either on Chol HaMoed or Rosh Chodesh and he forgot to say *Ya'aleh v'Yavo*. He usually davened *Shemoneh Esrei* out loud (this was when he davened *b'yechidus*, not in a minyan where it would disturb others) because he had better *kavanah* that way. People standing near him heard that he forgot *Ya'aleh v'Yavo* and tried to remind him. They said: *Ya'aleh v'Yavo, Ya'aleh v'Yavo!* But he didn't hear. When he finished davening, they told him that he forgot *Ya'aleh v'Yavo*. He was surprised and asked: Why didn't you tell me?! He simply didn't hear them talking to him. A similar story occurred with the Chazon Ish. There was once a matter of *pikuach nefesh* and people tried talking to him in middle of davening, but he didn't hear them.

These are *madreigos* of *hispashtus hagashmiyus* in *tefillah*. Of course, they are very high levels — there are many levels that precede this: davening with *kavanah*, then more *kavanah*, and more *kavanah*, and even more

*kavanah*; to constantly feel what we are asking and saying. There are many levels of *tefillah b'kavanah*. Davening with a *tzibbur* brings *tefillah* to a completely different level. And even if there's less *kavanah*, *tefillah b'tzibbur* is a *ma'alah*.

**During this most recent period, we experienced difficulty davening *b'tzibbur*. In some places, people were able to join together in yards or on balconies of apartment buildings and daven with a minyan, but those minyanim were very small, and it's not the same as davening with the entire *tzibbur*. So if there's a deficiency in *tefillah b'tzibbur*, it's a sign that we need a *tikkun* in davening. Our *tefillah* was not *b'shleimus* as it should have been, so *middah k'neged middah*, we didn't have it. From now on, we must do *teshuvah* for *tefillah*; our *tefillah* should be *b'shleimus*.**

### Feeling a Fellow Jew's Pain — Good Middos

Besides for Torah and *tefillah*, one must act with good *middos*, to feel his friend's pain. If someone has a difficulty, it should bother you too! This is the *teva* of Klal Yisrael, as Chazal said (*Yevamos 79a*): "There are three signs in this nation: they are *rachmanim* (merciful), *bayshanim* (bashful), and *gomlei chasadim* (perform good deeds)." This is *rachmanim* — they have mercy on others and feel his pain. This does not exist in other nations. If a non-Jew hears about another non-Jew who is in pain or suffering, it doesn't bother him or cause him any pain. But a Jew is pained when another Jew suffers. This is the *teva* of Klal Yisrael — but there are levels in this behavior.

### Shleimus HaAdam Is Individual

Rav Yisrael Salanter's *talmid*, the *tzaddik* Rav Naftali Amsterdam, once confided in him that he's not *sameach b'chelko*. How could I be happy, he questioned his rebbi, it's one thing if I had Rabbi Akiva Eiger's head — talent and greatness in Torah; the Yesod v'Shoresh HaAvodah's heart — an outstanding *madreigah* in *avodah*; and excellent *middos* like the rebbi, Rav Yisrael Salanter. If I had this, I'd be happy with my lot. But in my present situation, without such a sharp head, good heart, and top *middos*, what am I worth? What kind of *madreigah* can I reach?

Rav Yisrael told him that he's looking at it the wrong way. Heaven does not demand such levels of him; in *Shamayim* they demand that you serve Hashem with your head, your heart, and your *middos*! They don't demand any more than that! Every person is required to perform according to his abilities; if he fulfills his potential, he has reached *shleimus*. It doesn't matter what *madreigah* he's on — if that's all he is able to do, he is perfect.

On the other hand, there are people who are not aware of their abilities; they think, “what am I already, what can I do, I can’t accomplish more than I’ve already accomplished. My achievements reflect my abilities and I don’t have the energy to do any more.” They are making a big mistake. They can use their *kochos* to do much more. Even if they don’t have the great *kochos* of Rabbi Akiva Eiger etc., whatever they do have is enough to propel them to achieve much more! If they really do whatever they can, that is *shleimus*.

**This is what we need now; the virus hasn’t passed completely, and the reason for this is solely to benefit us — so that we’ll correct whatever needs correcting, especially in Torah and *tefillah*, and also in *maasim tovim*.** We must act kindly *bein adam lachaveiro*, help our fellow Jews — each person to the best of his ability — we need to think of others, that’s what this *matzav* demands of us. This is the *l’tav avid*, “for the good,” in our situation.

If this happens — if everyone takes upon himself a *tikkun* in Torah and *tefillah*, and does something extra in the realm of *maasim tovim* as well, as much as he can based on his abilities; not more than he’s able, but as much as he can — then we will have reached *shleimus ha’adam*.

### **Mussar Sefarim — Stepping Stones to Change**

*L’maaseh*, there’s a simple solution how to improve — it’s by learning *mussar sefarim*. Anyone who thinks that he is perfect already and has maximized his potential and can’t grow any more — he is wrong. It’s not true! Every single person can reach higher and higher in every aspect. All he has to do is learn *mussar sefarim* which give him guidance and instruction. There are many *mussar sefarim*; each person can learn what interests him, whether it’s a *sefer* or specific chapter he’s interested in. Whatever’s interesting has an influence.

Many people, even family men, have already told me that they started learning a little *mussar* every day, just for a few minutes, and interestingly, their lives were turned around. Their homes changed as well, and became happy homes with a pleasant atmosphere. All this occurred due to learning *mussar*.

There are many *mussar sefarim*, but *Mesillas Yesharim* is the best. But each person should choose what suits his nature, whatever he feels attracts him and will have an influence on him. There’s also *Chovos HaLevavos*, *Shaarei Teshuvah*, and *Orchos Tzaddikim*. Every individual can choose which *sefer* he wants to learn. There are other *mussar sefarim* that offer guidance, such as *Pele Yoetz*, by the tzaddik Rav Eliezer Papo. This *sefer* contains much *chizuk* and advice. It covers many topics and is set up in *aleph-beis* order. It’s a wonderful *sefer*! When one learns from and is involved with *mussar sefarim*, he advances further and further. Everyone can progress and become an *adam gadol*.

At the end of *Mesillas Yesharim*, he writes that even a simple laborer who is not involved in Torah all day can become an *adam gadol*, if he does what is required of him based on his *madreigah* and situation. There was a shoemaker in Tel Aviv, Rav Moshe Yaakov Rabikov *zt”l* who was a holy man. *Rabbanim* would go to him for advice and *berachos*. A person’s level is not dependent on his occupation; it depends on the *shleimus* of his behavior and actions. Even a simple laborer can be a great tzaddik, as is written in *Mesillas Yesharim*.

I’ve already mentioned the story of a young teenager who wanted to learn, but due to extenuating circumstances, he could not. Every evening, he would come to yeshivah and learn *mussar* for a half hour before Maariv. I asked him why he chose to come specifically then. He told me that he feels learning *mussar* invigorates him and gives him *kochos* for the entire day. In the end, he was *zocheh* to *siyatta d’Shemaya* in the merit of the *mussar* he learned, and he was no longer prevented from learning full time. He joined Ponevezh’s *yeshivah ketanah* (high school age) continued on to *yeshivah gedolah* (*beis midrash*) and now he is a *mezakeh harabbim* and a *marbitz Torah*. It’s like Chazal say (*Yoma* 38b), “One who comes to be purified is helped.” Since he came to be purified in *mussar* learning, he merited *siyatta d’Shemaya* to become a *marbitz Torah*.

As we said, learning *mussar* leads a person to a happy, good life. One who learns *mussar* lives the happy life, and his family is happy too with the pleasant atmosphere at home. It’s well known. *Yehi ratzon* that each one of us merits to do what is necessary to advance further *b’shleimus*!

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