

Darkei HaChizuk

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

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Yissurim — To Arouse to Repentance

Chazal tell us (*Berachos* 33b): *Hakol b'dei Shamayim*, “Everything is in Heaven’s hands.” All world events are from Hashem. They also say (*Berachos* 60b): “Whatever the Merciful One does is for the good.” Everything is from *Shamayim* and is for man’s benefit. Everything — whether difficult or simple, pleasant or not, everything is for the good!

If so, then the coronavirus is also from *Shamayim* and it is also for our benefit, for the good. It is proper to take a deeper look and see what benefit we gained from it.

Chazal actually said (*Berachos* 5a): If a person sees that afflictions are befalling him, he should search out his deeds.” That is, any *yissurim* a person experiences are really for his benefit; they’re meant to cause him to search through his deeds. If not for the *yissurim*, he would not search his deeds and he would not repent. So the purpose of *yissurim* is to make him do *teshuvah*.

When to Attribute Yissurim to Bittul Torah

The Gemara says, “If he searched and did not find, he should attribute it to *bittul Torah*.” It seems he did find a sin if there is *bittul Torah*, so why is it termed, “he searched and did not find”? Indeed, the Gemara’s wording is accurate: they said “he should attribute it” to *bittul Torah*. This means he’s not aware of any specific *bittul Torah*, but he should attribute his *yissurim* to having committed *bittul Torah* at some level, since he can’t find any other reason for them.

If he found another reason, he should surely attribute his *yissurim* to that, and not to *bittul Torah*. After all, he’s *oseik baTorah* as he should, and has not committed *bittul Torah*. He was struck with *yissurim* for a different reason.

Indeed, the Gemara (*Berachos* 2b) relates that Rav Huna had a vineyard. Once 400 barrels of wine from his vineyard turned sour. The *Rabbanan* told him “to search his deeds,” and Rav Huna told them that he searched but couldn’t come up with a reason. “*Adaraba*,” he told them, “if you know the reason why, please tell me.” Now, why shouldn’t he attribute it to *bittul Torah*? The answer is, Rav Huna learned Torah *b’sheleimus*, and it did not make sense that he’d be guilty of *bittul Torah*. So there must have been a different reason. Sure enough, the *Rabbanan* told him about another sin he was guilty of; it was something he hadn’t even considered a sin.

In any case, *yissurim* are from *Shamayim*, and they are for man’s benefit; they are a stimulant to repentance.

If a person searched and did not find, he should attribute his *yissurim* to *bittul Torah*, for even if he is unaware of committing *bittul Torah*, he probably did so in any case. Even a minimal amount of *bittul Torah* is enough to cause *yissurim*, because *bittul Torah* is an extremely serious matter.

Chazal said (*Sanhedrin* 99a) that if someone is able to be *oseik baTorah* but does not, the *pasuk* “For he has despised the word of Hashem,” is attributed to him. The end of that *pasuk* is “that soul shall surely be cut off,” *Rachmana litzlan*. I’ve already mentioned what I’ve heard from my rebbi HaGaon Rav E.E. Dessler in the name of Rav Chaim Brisker that *bittul Torah* can be measured not only in minutes or hours, but in quality as well. If a person can learn with better quality in *havanah*, understanding, and doesn’t delve deeply to understand to the best of his ability, he too is included in those termed: “For he has despised the word of Hashem.”

Therefore, Chazal said to “attribute it to *bittul Torah*,” as there could be a small amount of *bittul Torah* that he isn’t aware of and that’s why he received *yissurim*. Rav Huna, however, probably wasn’t worried that he had even this tiny amount of *bittul Torah*; indeed, the Sages actually found another reason for his troubles.

Look for a Fitting Reason for Yissurim

Rashi there writes, “Searched and did not find”: Did not find a sin for which *yissurim* of this caliber should have come upon him. That is, a person has to look for a reason that parallels his *yissurim*, *middah k’neged middah*.

In the episode with Rav Huna, the *Rabbanan* told him that the reason his wine soured was because he didn’t give his sharecropper a portion of vine twigs from his vineyard. Since the sin was connected to the vineyard, the barrels of wine from his vineyard soured, *middah k’neged middah*. This follows Rashi’s comments that the punishment and the *yissurim* parallel the sin. However, if he searched and did not come up with a reason — something that parallels his *yissurim*, he should attribute them to *bittul Torah*.

The Coronavirus Is Middah K’neged Middah

Currently, we are suffering from coronavirus, which is also *yissurim*. There are many physical and spiritual challenges, such as *tefillah b’tzibbur* — it’s impossible to daven with the entire *tzibbur*, with a large number of people together.

Torah learning also cannot take place in large groups. Although there is Torah and *tefillah*, it's taking place in smaller groups.

It is incumbent upon us to take a deeper look: what sin are we guilty of that brought upon us these difficulties of *bittul Torah*, of being unable to daven in a large group, as the *pasuk* states (*Mishlei* 14:28): “*b’rov am hadras melech.*” There is also a deficiency in the quality of our *tefillos*, because there is greater *kavanah* when davening with a larger group, and one can concentrate more.

What sin parallels this punishment? It would seem that if the punishment is a deficiency in Torah study, it's *middah k'neged middah*; the sin must have been in Torah study. If the punishment is a deficiency in *tefillah*, the sin must have been in *tefillah* as well.

It's well known that there were decrees in the Tosfos Yom Tov's times. He wanted to know the reason for these decrees. He searched and found an answer. I don't know if he performed a “*she'eilas chalom,*” or if he came up with an answer some other way, but it was revealed that the decrees were due to disrespect for and weakening or negligence in *tefillah*. In his days, the *gezeiros* were terrible decrees, *Rachmana litzlan*, but in any case, the *middah k'neged middah* is surely applicable.

Therefore, if we see a deficiency in Torah study and in *tefillah*, in addition to deficiencies in *mussar seder*, which is also Torah, and weakening in *maasim tovim* — there are certain people who performed many good deeds, and now they can't continue on the same scale as before, it seems to be that this is all *middah k'neged middah*. We must strengthen ourselves in these areas: Torah, *tefillah*, and *maasim tovim*.

Four Matters Require Strengthening

Actually, Chazal said (*Berachos* 32b): “Four matters require strengthening: Torah, *maasim tovim*, *tefillah*, *derech erez*.” That is, even without any special reason, these four matters require constant strengthening, as Rashi there explains: “A person should strengthen himself in them constantly, with all his strength.” *Chizuk*, to strengthen oneself, means to continue doing so constantly, never to stop, and to pull all his energy into it — each person according to the best of his abilities.

Four things are mentioned here: Torah, *tefillah*, *maasim tovim*, and *derech erez*. Torah and *tefillah* are things we can understand — they are applicable to us; *maasim tovim* is also applicable to us — we should increase our acts of *chesed*. Every person should add something: greeting other warmly with a smile, treating others nicely, acting with *ahavas habriyos*, as it says (*Vayikra* 19:18), “Love your fellow as yourself.”

Rabbeinu Yonah writes in *Shaarei Teshuvah* (3:13) that a person is obligated to busy himself with his nation's welfare... This is one of the most serious principles required of a person, as it says “What does Hashem

demand of you, if not to perform justice and loving kindness.” It does not say “acts of kindness,” it says “loving” kindness — love for doing *chesed* must be ingrained in a person's heart. Rabbeinu Yonah discusses this idea a number of times (see *Shaar Gimel*, 35–36) — *ahavas chesed* is imperative, *V'ahavta! l'reiacha kamocha*. There are many levels in this mitzvah.

If so, we now understand what the Gemara meant regarding *chizuk* in Torah, *tefillah*, and *maasim tovim*. But we must understand the fourth concept as well: how does *derech erez* need strengthening?

Rashi explains the meaning of *derech erez*: “If he is a craftsman, [strengthen] his craft; if he is a businessman, his business; if he is a warrior, his warfare.” That is, if a person is involved in some sort of craft for his parnassah, he must strengthen himself in it so he'll have a source of income. Without income, he will be hungry; he won't have food to eat and won't be able to function, and then there will not be any Torah, *tefillah*, or *maasim tovim* either. How does this pertain to us [*yeshivah bachurim* – Ed.]? We must take care of our health and physical needs, which are necessary for all *maasim tovim*.

Therefore, in the present situation, the solution is to strengthen ourselves in all these matters: Torah, *tefillah*, *maasim tovim* with *ahavas habriyos*, and *derech erez* — maintaining an organized daily schedule regarding our physical needs in order to serve Hashem properly.

The Obligation to Exhibit Caution Nowadays

There are *yeshivos* and *cheders* that follow the health guidelines; they wear masks and follow all the other rules — and they learn! Places that didn't pay attention to the rules had to close down due to the danger. It's important to know that on one hand, **it's a grave sin not to be careful, because then you harm and infect others and you also harm yourself. On the other hand, a person who is careful accrues great merit. Thanks to his cautiousness, others are able to function and fulfill their obligations** in Torah, *tefillah*, and *maasim tovim*.

There's something else that's *l'maaseh*. It's the wedding season now, and it's very hard to be careful at weddings. That's why there's a limit on attendees. Family members must attend, but *bachurim* who are not related do not have to go. If they go, it's hard to be careful; it's a danger. It's better to stay in yeshivah and learn.

As we said, it's important to strengthen ourselves in Torah, *tefillah*, and *maasim tovim*. The way to do so is with *mussar sefarim*. We've spoken about this often — any *mussar sefer* that's interesting is *mechazek*. If the *sefer* is boring, it will not have an effect, only whatever's interesting — an interesting *perek*, or interesting *sefer* — that's the *chizuk* for Torah, *tefillah*, and *maasim tovim*. Learning *mussar* also strengthens *ahavas habriyos*, fortify your heart with *ahavas habriyos*, as it says “*V'ahavta l'reiacha kamocha,*” strengthen *ahavas habriyos*. And when people work on themselves there is *siyatta*

d'Shemaya, as Chazal say (*Yoma* 38b): “One who comes to be purified is helped.”

fulfill the duties of the heart. May we merit *hatzlachah* in whatever we need!

These are the important *inyanim* in a nutshell. *Yehi ratzon* that we all merit *siyatta d'Shemaya* to strengthen ourselves in whatever is necessary: in actions and in our heart, to



Q & A with the Torah Umesorah Convention

Since the annual Torah Umesorah Convention could not take place in person due to the coronavirus, the organizers asked Rabbeinu some questions which would be forwarded to all participating teachers and principals.

Q: During this time when schools are closed, there are some good kids who learn exactly as much as the school requires, but no more. They feel like it's vacation already....

Rabbeinu shlita: Why don't they learn over the phone?

Q: Learning over the phone only works for a short time. The children don't have patience to spend a long time learning over the phone. The question is: should we pressure them to do more?

Rabbeinu shlita: Forcing children to learn is not *chinuch*; it's not a good idea to force them. Just explain the situation to them, encourage them, give them incentives so they'll want to learn. There are many ways to give a child *cheishek*.

Q: What about the girls? Is there an *inyan* for girls to learn, or is it okay to let them off, as if it's vacation?

Rabbeinu shlita: They need *yiras Shamayim*. *Yiras Shamayim* is the main thing, and *Yahadus* lessons teach *yiras Shamayim*.

Q: The teachers say they only have a limited time on the phone to learn with the girls. What should they teach the girls? Chumash? Mussar? Emunah? Halachah?

Rabbeinu shlita: Whatever's interesting. *Yahadus* is interesting. Teach them concepts in *Yahadus*, but it should also be interesting.

Q: Is that better than Halachah?

Rabbeinu shlita: Let them teach Halachah too. A little Halachah. Whatever's applicable *l'maaseh* each day.

Q: The children have been home for two months and have only been interacting with their siblings. They haven't contacted any friends during this time. Should we encourage a child to keep up with his friends?

Rabbeinu shlita: Yes, it's a good idea. But only with good friends.

Q: Parents ask: In the current situation, how much time should they devote to their children; how long should they play with them daily? Must they spend as much time as the children need, even if it means they'll lose their own learning time or work time?

Rabbeinu shlita: Yes, of course. That's *chinuch*.

Q: Children are used to seeing their father use his time properly — either he goes to a *shiur*, or he goes to work. Now, due to the situation, since everyone is home [lockdown], sometimes their father doesn't have *menuchas hanefesh*. He rests more, wastes more time. What can we do so that this will not harm the children's *chinuch*?

Rabbeinu shlita: The father has to understand the situation. He needs *seichel* to understand.

Q: In America, there were a lot of tragedies and many families lost close relatives, *lo aleinu*. How can we explain this to children; how can we give them *chizuk*? Especially children who say that they davened so hard, and wonder why their *tefillos* weren't answered.

Rabbeinu shlita: I've spoken about this already. In the Gemara in *Kesuvos daf 8* it discusses an Amora who lost an infant. They told him, "You are *chashuv* so you atoned for the entire generation." Meaning, the generation needed a *kapparah*, and the *chashuv* people atone for the entire generation. The pain of the *chashuv* people is an atonement, those who passed away are *chashuv*. They are more *chashuv* and they don't lose out from it — they are in Gan Eden.

Q: A general *chinuch* question: A child learns seriously, but he has no *cheishek* in learning. He only learns because he knows that what he's supposed to do. How can one impart *cheishik* in learning?

Rabbeinu shlita: The child should be given opportunities to learn up a Gemara on his own. Not that he's just listening, but that he himself says the Gemara. The rebbi/parent should start something and let him finish by himself.

Q: There are so many *nisyonos* nowadays. Since there are so many *nisyonos*, it is right to give children more than what parents gave children in the past, such as more trips, activities, and the like? What's the right *derech*?

Rabbeinu shlita: As much as is necessary so that the child will feel good, that he won't be sad. It's imperative that children are happy, but in a kosher way — with *kashrus*, not with *prikas ol*.

Also, a child must learn what interests him, interesting topics, he must feel that he can succeed. He has to feel important, that he can do it, he can understand on his own. When he has a *taam* in learning, he won't look for other pastimes.

Q: Some children are very social. They are good, solid kids, but they rule the class, and sometimes other children get hurt as a result. How should they be treated?

Rabbeinu shlita: It's important to explain to them to respect the other children, and to give others a chance to shine. Explain that they don't want to give themselves a bad name. A child who insults others gives himself a bad name and then he'll end up losing out.

Q: The Rav constantly speaks about learning *mussar*. Some children — more mature children — claim that learning *mussar* makes them depressed.

Rabbeinu shlita: If it makes them depressed, it's *assur*. *Mussar* that makes people depressed is not a good idea. But they can learn, for example, *Orchos Tzaddikim* — that's a very interesting *sefer* and it's very easy. *Orchos Tzaddikim* is good for children too, it's not scary.

Q: Does that mean that there are *sefarim* that really are not meant for children?

Rabbeinu shlita: *Shaarei Teshuvah*, for example, is not for children. But there are *perakim* in *Chovos HaLevavos* that would be good for kids, like *Shaar HaBitachon*.

Q: Can we ask for a *berachah* for the principals, teachers, and parents?

Rabbeinu shlita: May there be *siyatta d'Shemaya* in children's *chinuch*.

Dedicated by
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להצלחת בניהם ובנותיהם
בתורה וביראת שמים

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