

Darkei HaChizuk

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

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Good Middos: A Prerequisite to Torah

“Love your fellow as yourself” (*Vayikra* 19:18) — Rabbi Akiva said: This is a great principle in the Torah (*Yerushalmi Nedarim* 9:4). We’ve already explained that “a great principle in the Torah” means that if there is a deficiency in *ahavas habriyos*, no part of the Torah can be fulfilled *b’shleimus*.

Rav Chaim Vital wrote in his *sefer Shaarei Kedushah* (2:1) that the Torah doesn’t discuss *middos tovos* often. For example, the prohibition of *gaavah*, arrogance, is only mentioned once, when stressing that a king may not be a *baal gaavah* (*Devarim* 17:20). The prohibition of anger is not written explicitly in the Torah, though it does say about Moshe Rabbeinu: “And Moshe became very angry.” (See *Pesachim daf* 66.) There, however, Moshe’s anger was permissible; the Torah does not mention prohibited anger. All other negative *middos* — such as jealousy and desire — are not mentioned explicitly in the Torah.

Rav Chaim Vital explains the reason. Good *middos* are a prerequisite for Torah, so if there is a deficiency in *sheleimus hamiddos*, every single mitzvah a person performs will be flawed. For example, when he learns, davens, eats matzah, takes a lulav, sits in a sukkah, all the mitzvos he fulfills will not be complete if his *middos* are flawed. That is why it is “a great principle in the Torah.”

Really, “love your fellow as yourself” is the best *middah*, because if your love for others is on the same level as your love for yourself, then there’s no anger, hatred, or jealousy; after all, the other person is like you — like me, personally! And just as a person is not jealous of his son (*Sanhedrin* 105b), and he is not jealous of his student either (*ibid.*), because he is his own flesh and blood, the same is true regarding any other Yid. If love “as yourself” exists, negative *middos* are nonexistent.

There’s another mitzvah: *V’halachta bidrachav*, “Go in His ways.” Chazal say (*Shabbos* 133, and more), “Just as He is merciful, you shall be merciful too.” Ostensibly, having mercy is part of a person’s natural personality. If someone is born without this nature, how can the Torah command him to be merciful? After all, it’s not part of his nature. How can we be commanded to “go in His ways,” or to “love your fellow as yourself”?

If someone doesn’t have this type of nature, how can he be commanded to behave accordingly?

The explanation is that since it is a mitzvah, it’s a sign that it’s possible. A person can change his nature! Even if someone is not born that way, he has a mitzvah to change his nature by investing the right *hishtadlus*, by acting in ways that will promote change.

The Rambam explains this concept (*Hilchos Teshuvah* 7:3). He writes that there is an obligation to do *teshuvah* for negative *middos*, but *tikkun hamiddos* is more difficult than correcting negative actions. This seems to mean that even if someone is born with negative *middos* — that is, these *middos* are part of his nature, and it’s not his fault — in any case, he is still obligated to do *teshuvah* for it and rectify his *middos*. He must fulfill the mitzvah of “Go in His ways; just as He is merciful...” — and the way to fulfill it is by changing his negative *middos* to good *middos*.

Davening for the Sick and Sharing Their Pain

The coronavirus is still around, and there are many *cholim*, *Rachmana litzlan*. Since we are commanded “Love your fellow as yourself,” we should feel their pain. **We must feel the pain of corona patients! How? Each person should do whatever he would have done, had he himself been in that position.** If he were sick, he would look for other ways, aside from conventional medicine — which he’d be doing in any case — to alleviate his pain and illness. He would look for *segulos*, for unnatural ways to heal himself. **The *itzah* is to daven!**

But davening must be from the depths of your heart; it must actually pain you. If it really pains you and you ask for mercy because of this, then your *tefillah* is called a *tefillah*. But if it doesn’t pain you, and you don’t care, the *tefillah* is not considered *tefillah*.

Rav Yisrael Salanter’s comments on davening for *ruchniyus* are well known. He said it’s tried and true that davening for spirituality works. This is because there are no limits to *ruchniyus*, and one person’s *ruchniyus* won’t come on the *cheshbon* of someone else’s *ruchniyus*, who wants *middos tovos* and *hasmadah*. Since his requests won’t bother anyone else, *tefillah* is certainly helpful. But, as mentioned, it has to be a true *tefillah*, he has to really want it, and it must bother him and pain him if he does not have success in *ruchniyus*.

Rav Yisrael Salanter himself wrote and asked his *talmidim* (see *Ohr Yisrael*, Letter 14, and more) to daven for him to have success in *ruchniyus*. He asked them to make a minyan, to daven for him in a *tzibbur*, and they probably fulfilled his wishes. It seems that all Rav Yisrael's success, the fact that he was such a profound influence and that his influence still continues to this day with special *siyatta d'Shemaya*, was in the merit of davening! In the merit of his own prayers and his *talmidim's tefillos*, who davened for his *ruchniyus*.

If so, when davening for another person's *yeshuah*, for their physical or material needs — in which case it doesn't benefit you, and you're not asking for something for yourself — the power of this type of *tefillah* is certainly beneficial. There are special *tefillos* one can daven for others; there is already a special prayer for *cholim* printed in *siddurim*.

When Chizkiyahu HaMelech was sick, it was decreed that he should die, but he davened and said, "I have received a tradition from the house of my grandfather: even if a sharp sword is resting on a person's neck, he may not hold himself back from begging for mercy" (*Berachos* 10a). Sure enough, his *tefillah* was answered. I also heard about one of the *gedolei hador* who was in critical condition. He davened and promised that if he'd recover, he'd become "*kulo Torah*," completely Torah, and the Torah's merit would stand by him. Sure enough, he recovered and lived for another fifteen years. He spent the rest of his life learning Torah; and did not have any other occupation. This is the power of *tefillah* with *zechuyos*.

[The effects of] davening for others really all depends on how much you care about them and their *matzav*. Some people's nature is to really take others' pain to heart. I heard about someone who lived in Eretz Yisrael and his brother was in Russia. The government officials were not happy with him, so they sent him to Siberia for a few years of harsh labor. For all those years that this man was in Siberia, his brother in Eretz Yisrael slept on the floor. He did not want to sleep on a comfortable mattress; he said: **My brother is suffering, so how can I enjoy myself?! This is the nature of sharing others' pain. If one davens with this perspective, his tefillos surely help and are accepted.**

Pain over the Churban Beis HaMikdash

The *Shulchan Aruch*, *Orach Chaim siman aleph* writes, "Every G-d-fearing person should be pained and worried about the Churban Beis HaMikdash." That is, we must be saddened and pained every single day about the fact that we don't have a Beis HaMikdash. The Shelah gave a suggestion (cited in the *Mishnah Berurah* ad loc.): At every meal, before reciting Birkas HaMazon, say "*Al Naharos Bavel*." This includes a prayer about *galus*, about Yerushalayim, and about the Beis HaMikdash. On the days we don't say *Tachanun*,

one should instead recite "*Shir HaMaalos b'shuv Hashem...*", as this mentions the joy we will experience when Hashem returns the captives of Tzion, when the Beis HaMikdash will be rebuilt.

What is the pain over the Churban? What are we missing without the Beis HaMikdash? We are missing the influence of *kedushah*, as the Beis HaMikdash infused the entire world with *kedushah*. As a result, the world's conduct was different — in Torah, *tefillah*, and *maasim tovim*, everything was different as a result of the Beis HaMikdash's influence of *kedushah*.

The *Mesillas Yesharim*, chap. 19, cites the *Tanna D'bei Eliyahu*: "Any wise man in Klal Yisrael who innovates true *chiddushei Torah*, and moans over HKB's *kavod* and the *kavod* of Klal Yisrael his entire life, who desires to see and is pained over the honor of Yerushalayim and the Beis HaMikdash, and hopes that the *yeshuah*, salvation, will occur imminently, and waits for the ingathering of the exiles, merits *ruach hakodesh* in his words." That is, we must be pained over the lack of *kevod Shamayim*. This is a high *madreigah* and is connected to *ahavas Hashem*. Indeed, the *Mesillas Yesharim* explains that if someone is on the level of *ahavas Hashem*, it means that he cares about and is pained over the lack of *kevod Shamayim*. This is the *madreigah* of "a wise man in Klal Yisrael" — "one who innovates true *chiddushei Torah*."

Do We Care About Kevod Shamayim?

In Shemoneh Esrei, we ask: "See our pain and fight our wars, and redeem us quickly, for Your Name, because You are a strong Redeemer." This is a prayer about the *geulah*, but **what is geulah? What are we lacking, and what are we asking for? "For Your Name"?! Kevod Shamayim!** This is the *geulah* and this is what we ask for. We are not only asking for physical redemption, but for spiritual redemption, we ask to achieve a level in *ruchniyus*: "For Your Name." Of course, it is a high *madreigah* to care about *kevod Shamayim*. If someone does not care and isn't pained about the lack, how can he say "For Your Name"? After all, he doesn't care; he's lying when he says "For Your Name"? In any case, we see that it is possible to attain a level of caring about *kevod Shamayim*.

The Gemara (*Berachos* 20a) relates that Rav Pupa asked Abaye: What's the difference between us and between the previous generations? In their times, when there was a drought, they would institute a fast day with five *inuyim*, afflictions. When they had just begun the fast and Rav Yehudah removed his first shoe, so as not to be wearing leather shoes, the rains began to fall. We, on the other hand, are *oseik* in more Torah than they had been — as they had just been *oseik* in Nezikin and we have a lot of *yeshivos* (as is written there in the Gemara: we learn in 13 *mesivtas* — see Rashi in *Taanis* 24) who are *oseik* in the entire Torah, and yet we fast and pray, but

the rain does not fall. So what is the difference between us and them?

Abaye answered, “They were greater than us in that they cared about *kevod Shamayim*, and they acted with *mesirus nefesh* for *kiddush haShem*. There was a *maaseh* with Rav Ada bar Ahavah who noticed a non-Jewess wearing a red garment, which is *pritzus*. He did not know that she was not Jewish so he ripped the garment off her. In the end, it became clear that she wasn’t Jewish and he was fined. He had to pay her 400 *zuz*. This is *mesirus nefesh* for *kiddush haShem*. After all, he didn’t act this way because he was a hot-head; he did this because he cared and was pained over the lack of *kevod Shamayim*. We are not on that level, so our *tefillos* for rain aren’t answered.”

A similar story is related (*Taanis* 24a) about Rabbah, who instituted a fast when there was a drought, but it didn’t help. They asked him, “What is the difference between us and the previous generations, when Rav Yehudah only began to act in accordance with the laws of a fast day, and the salvation occurred immediately?” Rabbah answered: “What can the *gedolei hador* do if this generation isn’t on par with the previous generation?” Rabbah knew that the *gedolim* of his generation weren’t guilty, because they truly cared about *kevod Shamayim*, just as much as the previous generations. It was just the *tzibbur* that was guilty; the generation that wasn’t on par with the previous generation. Their *tefillos* weren’t answered because of this.

It’s quite remarkable how they were able to appraise themselves. In Rav Yehudah’s time, the generation was also good, and in Rabbah’s time, the generation experienced *yeridas hadoros*, but the *gedolim* were still *b’shleimus*. In an even later generation, during Rav Pupa and Abaye’s time, the *yeridas hadoros* was even more pronounced. Even the *gedolim* didn’t care as much as the previous generation about *kevod Shamayim*.

The truth is, these are all *madreigos*: “Love your fellow as yourself,” “For Your Name.” How can we attain these *madreigos*? Of course, the way to do so is by learning *mussar*; *mussar* gives guidance and arouses a person.

One example is the *Chovos HaLevavos*, which explains how to fulfill the obligations of the heart; so that the heart should function as it should. Rav Chaim Brisker said that the *Chovos HaLevavos* is the *Shulchan Aruch* of Yiddishkeit, which elucidates the obligations of the heart according to the Torah’s laws. This is something a person cannot know on his own, and he needs guidance in it. *Chovos HaLevavos* provides this guidance.

In *Shaar Avodas Elokim* (chap. 5, and further), it writes that the *seichel*, logic, and the *nefesh* were talking, and the *nefesh* asks logic to give her a suggestion how to

strengthen herself so that the heart would be *b’shleimus*. The *seichel* gave the *nefesh* guidance how to influence the heart.

Rav Yisrael Salanter and His *Talmidim*

We’ve mentioned that Rav Yisrael Salanter said that it’s tried and true that *tefillah* for *ruchniyus* helps. We said that Rav Yisrael himself had a great influence on the world. He had *talmidim* the likes of the Alter of Kelm, the Alter of Slabodka, and the Alter of Novardok, as well as Rav Itzele Blazer from Petersburg, who wrote the *sefarim Ohr Yisrael* and *Pri Yitzchak*. All the *mussar* learned nowadays in *yeshivos* is the direct result of Rav Yisrael Salanter’s influence, who taught his *talmidim* in this *derech*. How was he *zocheh* to such power of influence? Probably by davening! When a person davens for *ruchniyus*, he merits *siyatta d’Shemaya*.

The Alter of Slabodka had profound understanding of *kochos hanefesh*, human nature and abilities. I heard that experts in *kochos hanefesh* were astounded and couldn’t understand how he acquired such deep insight, to such a level that he was able to understand human nature and knew how to influence every single individual and be *mechanech* every single *bachur*.

The Ponevezer Rav told me about the Alter of Novardok. Every night, before he went to sleep, he would think about each *bachur* in his *yeshiva*: how was he doing and where was he holding. He would not go to sleep until he had thought about what each *bachur* needed and how he could help each one spiritually, and he was *zocheh* to *siyatta d’Shemaya* in this. The Alter of Slabodka’s great understanding of psychology was also only due to *siyatta d’Shemaya*. Indeed, Chazal say (*Yoma* 38b), “One who comes to be purified is helped.” *Kal v’chomer*, if one who comes to influence others and purify them, he is *zocheh* to *siyatta d’Shemaya*.

I heard that Rav Ahron Kotler learned in Slabodka as a *bachur*. He was an unbelievable *masmid*; he would fall asleep over his Gemara. When the Alter of Slabodka saw this, he told another person who was present: Do you see? This is a living *sefer Torah*, *ah leibidker sefer Torah*! These were his feelings, this is how he viewed Rav Ahron, like a *sefer Torah*. Because when someone is *oseik* in Torah, he is like a *sefer Torah*. It depends how much he is busy with Torah — when he is *oseik* in Torah with such *hasmadah* like Rav Ahron Kotler, he is a living *sefer Torah*.

The Mind’s Authority over Desire

There was another story told about the Alter of Slabodka. I heard from someone who I believe was present at the time. As is known, the Alter of Slabodka gave extra attention to *baalei kishronos*, talented individuals, because they would be able to have a greater influence on others. He wanted to be *mechanech*

them and cultivate them to become *mashpi'im*. Once, he heard of a great *illui* who was extremely talented, who learned in a different yeshivah in Yerushalayim. The Alter, who was in Chevron at the time, wanted to meet this *bachur* and perhaps have an influence on him and be *mechanech* him.

Soon enough, the opportunity arose. A group of *bachurim* from Yerushalayim traveled to Chevron to the Mearas HaMachpelah, and this *illui* came too. The *bachurim* paid the Alter a visit. While they were visiting, the Alter spoke to them about Chazal's statement (*Vayikra Rabbah* 1:15), "If a *talmid chacham* has no *daas*, a *neveilah* is better than him." It was clear that he was referring to this *illui*, this talented individual.

Afterwards, they asked him why he had spoken in that manner; what did he want from the *illui*? He told them, "Didn't you see? I saw that nothing would come out of him!" What did he see? While the *bachurim* were sitting at the Alter's table, the Rebbetzin served them tea with sugar. When the tea was mixed, some sugar granules fell on the table. This *illui* wet his finger, picked up the sugar, and licked it off his finger — in front of the Alter of Slabodka!

That was enough to show the Alter that he would not amount to anything, because his intellect did not control his desires. Even though he only took a little bit of sugar, he was sitting with the Alter of Slabodka, who was no simple person. He was a great man indeed! So why wasn't the *bachur* embarrassed to behave that way; was there no shame left in the world? Where was his *seichel*? The answer is that his *taavah*, desire, controlled his *seichel*, intellect. Even though he was talented, his talents were subjugated to his desires, and so was his intellect. His *seichel* was not in control.

That's exactly what happened. Nothing came out of him. At first, he was a rabbi, then he went to learn law, but he was disqualified from practicing law. In the end,

he left the Torah path completely because he followed his *taavos* without using his mind. Even after he was a rabbi, he had a *taavah* for more. The honor and salary of the Rabbinate was not enough for him, he wanted more money and more *kavod*. He thought he'd get it if he was a lawyer. But he was a lawyer without *seichel* and with *taavos* and he did not behave like a lawyer at all. Nothing became of him. The Alter of Slabodka noticed this in a moment.

The truth is, if one's intellect does not control his desires, this is absolutely the worst thing, as we've mentioned the *Chovos HaLevavos* (*Shaar Avodas Elokim*), who says that the *nefesh* asks the intellect to guide it to overcome desires. Even when the person is not a big *baal taavah*, every person needs guidance to move forward, because progress is a little bit against nature. The *Chovos HaLevavos* provides guidance how the *seichel* can give suggestions to the soul.

This is the solution for anyone who wants to rise to higher *madreigos*: get involved in learning *mussar sefarim*! The *Mesillas Yesharim* really has everything in it, it includes all traits in it, but it is very concise. The *Chovos HaLevavos* explains everything in greater length. Actually, Rav Chaim Volozhin told his *talmid* Rav Zundel of Salant: "It's good to learn all *mussar sefarim*, but *Mesillas Yesharim* should be your guide." All *mussar sefarim* are good and have an influence, but the *Mesillas Yesharim* is the director, as goes according to a person's *kochos hanefesh* and provides a path and method how to progress and attain all *madreigos*: Torah, caution, alacrity, cleanliness, purity, modesty, and all other attributes, up until holiness, *kedushah*.

However, one needs *siyatta d'Shemaya* for everything. And we can all be *zocheh*. *B'siyatta d'Shemaya* may we merit to advance higher and higher in all the good attributes!

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the Kroll Family, Los Angeles
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בתורה וביראת שמים

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