

Darkei HaChizuk

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

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A Community *Tzarah* Should Arouse to Teshuvah

There is a second wave of the plague, and it has come back in a very grave way. We are obligated to adhere to all the health guidelines, just as everyone here is adhering to the guidelines. Whoever takes the right precautions will be healthy, *b'ezras Hashem*.

All in all, there is a plague and it is a *tzarah* for the *tzibbur*; this means there is a sin. The *tzarah* is from *Shamayim* to arouse the community to teshuvah. We must devote thought as to which sin we should be doing teshuvah for.

The Churban Beis HaMikdash is a *tzarah* that's been continuing for so many years, and we know which sin brought it on. Indeed, Chazal say (*Yoma* 9b), "Why was the Second Beis HaMikdash destroyed? Because of *sinas chinam*." That is, the Churban was a sin for bad *middos*, and the teshuvah for it is *tikkun hamiddos*, but we still haven't rectified our *middos*.

The Rambam in *Hilchos Taanis* (5:1) writes that the fasts our Rabbanim instituted *Zecher l'Churban* (Tishah B'Av, Shivah Asar B'Tammuz, Asarah B'Teves, and Tzom Gedaliah) are meant to arouse us to do teshuvah for the sins that caused the Destruction. We know what these sins are: *sinas chinam* and bad *middos*.

But the current plague is a new *tzarah*. It seems that there must be other sins, and we must think about what they may be. We must do teshuvah for them.

Torah, Avodah, and Gemillus Chasadim

The truth is, there are three matters that include the entire Torah, as Chazal say (*Avos* 1:2): The world stands on three things: "Torah, *avodah*, and *gemillus chasadim*." Torah is *esek haTorah*, *avodah* is *emunah*, faith, and all the 613 mitzvos, and *gemillus chasadim* is *bein adam lachaveiro*.

The sin that caused the Churban was *bein adam lachaveiro*: *sinas chinam* and *bad middos*. If there is another *tzarah* now, it sees that it's a sign that there's another sin. What could it be if not bad *middos*? Torah and *avodah*. In the realm of "Torah," it could mean that there is *bittul Torah*, that we aren't using our time to be *oseik baTorah* properly. Indeed, Chazal said (*Avos* 6:2), "Woe unto the creatures from the degradation of Torah."

In the realm of "*avodah*," it could be *emunah*, to believe, and to act based on *emunah*.

Practically speaking, *emunah* means to believe that everything is in Heaven's hands, *hakol bidei Shamayim*, any good thing or any difficulty or challenge a person experiences. Some people blame others, saying "It's all so-and-so's fault — he caused my difficulties." But the truth is, everything is from *Shamayim*, and if so-and-so wouldn't have "caused" the challenge, it would have come some other way. Because it's coming from *Shamayim*.

"Whatever the Merciful One does is for the good" (*Berachos* 60b). The difficulty is from *Shamayim*, and for my benefit! What is "my benefit"? That these difficulties should be a wake-up call to teshuvah. Just as a communal *tzarah* is in order to arouse everyone to teshuvah, so too, each individual's *tzarah* is there to arouse him to teshuvah. What should we be doing teshuvah for? We should learn the mussar sefarim and search through *Shaarei Teshuvah*, *Mesillas Yesharim*, *Chovos haLevavos*, and figure out what about us is not *b'shleimus*. If a person searches, he will probably figure it out.

Tefillah and Adhering to the Health Precautions

Avodah includes *tefillah* — to daven that this plague passes, to daven that healthy people should not get sick and that sick people should recover and be healthy. This is the *chizuk* we need now in *Torah* and *avodah* — increasing Torah study and increasing our prayers.

There are many *perakim* in *Tehillim* that are requests for *rachamim*, and there are *perakim* of praise and thanksgiving. For example, Chapter 119 is entirely requests for *rachamim* regarding Torah and good deeds. It's a prayer with thanks as well as requests. The entire *Tehillim* is full of *perakim* with all sorts of requests.

But at the same time, one must not forget our obligations — a binding obligation on everyone — **to adhere to all the health guidelines, not to become infected or infect others. Unfortunately, not everyone is careful, and we are all obligated to take the right precautions!**

Torah and Prayer in Thought

As we said, we need *chizuk* in Torah, to be careful about *bittul Torah*, to increase Torah learning, each person

according to his own abilities. We've already mentioned the *Mesillas Yesharim*, at the end of the *sefer*, that if a person does what he can according to his abilities and potential, then even if he is a very simple laborer, he is a complete tzaddik, since he has done whatever he could. Anyone who does whatever he can, to the best of his abilities, is an *adam mushlam*.

One can be *osek baTorah* in thought, even when he can't sit and learn, when he needs to rest, he can still think in Torah. If it's hard, he can't, but if it is possible, then he should be *osek baTorah* in thought!

Tefillah can also be done in thought. While all the regular *tefillas* cannot be fulfilled in thought — they must be expressed verbally — throughout the day, one can add all sorts of *bakashos*, requests. If a person lacks something, he can ask Hashem for *rachamim* about that matter via *tefillah balev*. It can be a spoken *tefillah*, or a wordless prayer in his heart. Even *tefillah balev* is considered *tefillah*.

I've already told the story of an irreligious Jew who came from Chutz LaAretz and went to the Kosel, because that was what "everyone does." While at the Kosel, he began to think about *emunah*. He thought, "I don't believe, but if *emunah* is true, I want Heavenly help to become a believer." At that very moment on, a kiruv activist approached him and asked him if he'd like to learn about Judaism. He was *zocheh* to receive *siyatta d'Shemaya* immediately through his wordless *tefillah*.

The Power of Praying for *Ruchniyus*

Moreinu HaGaon HaTzaddik Rav E. E. Dessler *zt"l* in the name of Rav Yisrael Salanter that it's tried and true that *tefillah* for *ruchniyus* is effective. Even a silent prayer in one's heart is considered *tefillah*. So if a person davens for *ruchniyus*, even in his heart, his prayers help and have an influence. But a prayer must be a true prayer; he must truly want what he's asking for, and then he will merit *siyatta d'Shemaya*.

Prayer Alone Won't Help for *Tikkun HaMiddos*

But regarding *tefillah* for *middos*, Rav Yisrael Salanter wrote (*Ohr Yisrael*, Letter 14), that if a person davens for *tikkun hamiddos* without learning *mussar*, which is what leads to *tikkun hamiddos*, then he's like a person davening to see without eyes. That is something that's impossible realistically, and his prayer is called a *tefillas shav*.

However, the following story took place many years ago. An elderly *dayan* became blind. People started rumors that he became blind because he took a bribe, and "bribery blinds the eyes of the wise." When he heard these rumors, he davened and begged for mercy that his eyesight should be restored so that people wouldn't suspect him of bribery. Sure enough, his

eyesight returned completely! He wrote a *sefer*, Hashem Nissi, in reference to the *neis*, miracle, that was done for him. (See the Chida's *Shem HaGedolim*, *Maareches Gedolim* 40:9).

So we see that miracles *can* happen, but according to *derech hateva*, it's not possible to see without eyes. So too, *tikkun hamiddos* cannot possibly occur only by *tefillah* — that would be like seeing without eyes, which is impossible *b'derech hateva*. A person must involve himself in the proper means that stimulate *tikkun hamiddos* — which is learning *mussar*.

While prayer alone is not effective for *tikkun hamiddos*, prayer can help a person find the right medium and tools for rectifying his *middos*. *Tefillah* can help him find the answers in the *mussar sefarim*: *Mesillas Yesharim*, *Chovos HaLevavos*, *Shaarei Teshuvah*, and *Orchos Tzaddikim*. The prayer won't directly affect his *middos* rectification, but it will be effective for achieving the right tools that lead to *tikkun hamiddos*.

Rectifying the *Middah* of Anger

For example, just as we've already discussed regarding the *middah* of anger, there is a solution to control one's anger: just to be quiet and not to shout when one is angry. (The *Orchos Tzaddikim*, at the end of *Shaar HaKaas*, writes: "Silence nullifies anger, as does a quiet voice. Therefore, when a person sees that his anger is overpowering him, he should be quiet, or speak quietly, gently. He should not raise his voice in anger, because one who raises his voice in anger will stimulate more anger, whereas a gentle voice and keeping quiet will silence the anger.")

It's human nature for a person to shout when he is angry, but if he controls his nature and doesn't scream, keeping his anger inside instead then he will be able to overcome his anger. At first, it will be hard, but it gets easier with each successive incident, till there is no challenge at all and he does not get angry anymore. Truthfully, there is no reason to get angry; getting angry is tantamount to *avodah zarah*.

This is mostly applicable to people who are community activists, as in those cases, there are sometimes reasons to get angry. But anger doesn't help at all. The solution is to at least be quiet, even if there is a reason to get angry, for what will the anger do? It won't help at all.

I know of a 10th grade rebbi, who taught in the afternoons, which is the hardest time to maintain classroom control, but he had complete control without even specifically trying. Once when we were talking, he offhandedly mentioned that he simply can't bring himself to hurt people, so even if a student isn't acting with *derech eretz*, he does not get angry and he simply cannot be *makpid* or hurt others. As a result, his students

respect him, and when there's respect and *yiras haromemus*, there is classroom control!

While this person had a special personality and was born with these *middos tovos*, even if someone is not born this way, he has to work on himself and change. This is a *madreigah*.

Rectifying the *Middah* of Arrogance

As mentioned, it is against nature to rectify one's *middos* solely through *tefillah*; it's impossible. A person must put in natural effort in things that lead to *tikkun hamiddos*, such as we mentioned regarding anger. When it comes to arrogance, *gaavah*, there are two chapters in *Mesillas Yesharim* (22-23) that discuss how to eradicate the *middah* of arrogance.

Arrogance is when a person feels that he's important. Usually, if someone has some sort of *maalah*, he feels important, and wants others to know about this *maalah*. Even if he doesn't talk about it, deep inside, he's still happy if people know about his *maalah*. He actually thinks about and tries to find out if people know about the *maalah* he has. Indeed, it says in *Mishlei* (16:5), "All arrogant of the heart is an abomination to Hashem." It is an abomination, *Rachmana litzlan*.

He has to reach the point where he doesn't care if people aren't aware of his *maalah*; *aderaba*, he should prefer that they don't know! How does he benefit from the fact that they know? What does he need it for?

The *Mesillas Yesharim* speaks at length about modesty, which is the opposite of arrogance. He mentions that there is no reason to feel self-important. Just as Moshe Rabbeinu, who was "the humblest of all men," recognized his strong points and *maalos*, and knew he was an *anav* — after all, he wrote it about himself in the

Torah — he still remained an *anav*. He didn't consider himself important!

Modesty means to understand that there's no reason to consider yourself important, because whatever a person has is a *chesed* from Hashem; it is not due to his own power or strength. Even if a person is an *anav*, which is due to his own ability, his power of thought comes from *Shamayim*, and all of a person's *kochos hanefesh* are a *chesed* and a gift. He is like a poor man who receives *tzedakah* — he has food, but he received it from someone else, and there's no reason he should feel important about it.

Regarding *anavah*, one must understand that there's no reason to feel important, because whatever he has is a *chesed* Hashem. It is not the results of his own strength. Even if he's an *anav*, which is the result of his own *kochos hanefesh*, he received his power of thought from *Shamayim* and they are all a *chesed* and a gift. He's like a poor man who received *tzedakah* — while he has food, he received it from others, and there's no reason to feel important because of this.

Our Current Duty

L'maaseh, in our current state, since the coronavirus has made such a dramatic comeback here in Eretz Yisrael, aside from adhering to the health guidelines, it is necessary to be extremely careful, and we must also beg for *rachamim* in our prayers. We must be *mechazek* ourselves in *tefillah*. We must improve in whatever needs *chizuk*: in Torah, *tefillah*, and *emunah*.

There are certain *perakim* in *Tehillim* that are requests for *rachamim*, and the Noda B'Yehudah instituted a number of *perakim* to say when davening for a sick person. (18 chapters: 6, 20, 25, 30, 32, 38, 41, 51, 86, 91, 102, 103, 107, 116, 118, 130, 139, 142). *Yehi ratzon* that we merit *siyatta d'Shemaya*.

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

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