

Darkei HaChizuk

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

A *Sichah* from Maran HaGaon Rav Gershon Edelstein *shlita*, Rosh Yeshivas Ponevez • *Parashas Devarim 5780*

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Sins Brought about a Second Wave

The coronavirus is still around — it's actually gotten worse — even young people are getting sick and are suffering greatly. This is physical *tzaar*, physical difficulties, but it involves spiritual challenges as well. *Esek haTorah* cannot take place with a large *tzibbur*; the entire *tzibbur* cannot learn Torah together. Our *tefillos* cannot take place “*b'rov am hadras melech*,” as in the past. It seems there is some sin; there must be some sin that caused this.

We don't have prophets or prophecy to know exactly what the sin is, but there are three general matters, as Chazal say (*Avos* 1:2): The world stands on three things: Torah, *avodah*, and *gemillus chasadim*. We must strengthen ourselves in these matters; there is obviously a weakening, and the weakening caused these difficulties.

Chazal also said (*Berachos* 32b): “Four matters need strengthening: Torah, *maasim tovim*, *tefillah*, and *derech eretz*.” The first three are the same as Torah, *avodah* — which is *tefillah*, and *gemillus chasadim* — which is *maasim tovim*.

But there's a fourth concept: *derech eretz*. Rashi there explains: “If he is a craftsman, it refers to his craft; if he is a businessman, it refers to his business.” That is, *derech eretz* applies to working men, who need to build up their business. There are a lot of *bnei Torah*, however, who don't work, and *baruch Hashem*, they manage, they have what they need. *Ashrecha* in this world, they manage and are happy without having to be involved in *parnasah*.

Bnei Torah Aren't Looking for Wealth

The Gemara tells us (*Bava Kama* 8b) that Rabbanan don't need guarding. That is, every city needs a watchman to guard it from robbers and bandits, and the city residents pay taxes to cover the cost of guarding the city. Rabbanan are exempt from this tax because their Torah protects them, and they don't need a human guard. Who is called Rabbanan? The Rosh writes, “It seems that a *talmid chacham* who also has a trade or a little business just to support himself, but not to become wealthy, and he spends all his free time from work learning Torah and reviewing Torah, this is called ‘*Toraso um'naso*’ — Torah is his trade.”

That is, if a person learns as much as he can, and even if he must go out to work to bring in *parnasah*, but he only works in order to cover his basic needs and is not “hasty to become rich” (see *Mishlei* 28:20) — he only does what is absolutely necessary for his sustenance, and spends the rest

of his time learning. And even if he could become wealthy and earn more, he learns, because every second is precious to him. If he is sent a Heavenly opportunity to earn more, okay, but if he has put in more *hishtadlus* to earn more, that's considered being “hasty to become rich.” He could have learned another five minutes during that time, and if he looks for wealth instead of learning, that is *bittul Torah*.

There are stories of *bnei Torah* who were *oseik baTorah*, who had the opportunity to earn a lot of money by doing something specific, but it involved some *bittul Torah*. Since they got involved just to earn money, and they wasted a little time from learning, in the end, they lost everything. This is “hastens to become rich.” **If a person is *oseik baTorah*, but is looking for wealth instead of learning, in the end he will lose more!**

I heard about a businessman who created a boundary for himself: never to take loans. He would only buy and sell with available funds. This was a good *geder* and commendable behavior — not to borrow, as we ask in *Birkas haMazon*: “Please, don't make us needy... and not to come to their loans.” If we ask and daven for this, it is apparently a proper way to act. Indeed, he always managed without taking loans, and would earn enough to support himself.

Once, a business opportunity came up. If he'd borrow a sum of money, he'd be able to earn a tremendous profit. He decided that it was worthwhile to borrow in order to complete the deal. He took out a loan, and since then, he is still borrowing. He went into debt and never got out of it. Beforehand, when he kept to his rule not to borrow, he lived a good life and never had to borrow, but once he broke his rule and borrowed, he continued borrowing!

This is because it's a good custom not to borrow, and since he broke his custom, he was punished. There's another story about someone who had a minhag to wear woolen *tzitzis*, because a woolen garment is obligated in *tzitzis mi'd'Oraisa*. It's a *machlokes haposkim* if garments of other material are obligated or not. This man asked the Steipler if he could start wearing non-woolen *tzitzis*. The Steipler told him no, since this is a minhag related to a mitzvah, and we don't absolve a person from a minhag of a mitzvah. He was told to continue wearing woolen *tzitzis*.

Another story about *parnasah*: Someone once came to the Chazon Ish and asked for a *berachah* for *parnasah*. The Chazon Ish blessed him that he should have *parnasah* — and this person actually did have *parnasah*. On the other hand, someone else came to the Chazon Ish and said, “I don't have work; how will I have *parnasah* if I don't have

a job?" He asked for a *berachah* to find work, and the Chazon Ish blessed him accordingly. Sure enough, this man found work — but he had to work, and work, and work. And the *berachah* was fulfilled. The first person asked for *parnasah*, and didn't have to work much. He had enough *parnasah* by working just a little bit. But the other person who asked for a *berachah* for "work" had to work a lot and he worked very hard. Everything is in Heaven's hands, based on the requests!

Chizuk in the Three Pillars of the World

Let's return to the coronavirus. If it is continuing, it's a sign that there is some sin — we don't know what it is, and we don't know what to improve in. Therefore, we must improve in whatever needs *chizuk*. As we mentioned, there are three general matters: Torah, *avodah*, and *gemillus chasadim*, and we must improve in these three areas.

Chizuk in Torah: Learn a few more minutes, or strengthen yourself in thinking in Torah — even when you cannot learn from a Gemara inside, think about what you learned, review what you learned in your mind, entertain holy thoughts. This is also *chizuk*. **In davening:** this is *avodah she'balev*. There are many levels of concentration in *tefillah*: which *berachah* to say, how to have *kavanah* — there are many levels, and we can all improve, each person according to his abilities, of course. In *gemillus chasadim*: This is *middos tovos*, *v'ahavta l'reiacha kamocha*, share in your friend's pain, think about the other person, and join in his pain.

Chazal said (*Sanhedrin* 99a) that if someone can learn Torah but does not, the following *pasuk* refers to him: "For he has despised the word of Hashem." That is, if he could have learned some more, but did not, even if it's a small amount, he is already called someone who despises Hashem's word. He does not see Torah as something important, because when something is important to a person — for example, if there's money lying around free for the taking, who wouldn't go take it? Someone who doesn't think it's important won't take it, but someone who knows how important it is will surely take it. And Torah is the best merchandise: *ki tov sachrah m'kol s'chorah!*

Torah Takes Care of Those Who Learn It

Regarding the importance of Torah, there's a well-known story involving *Maseches Chagigah*. It's brought down in *Menoras HaMeor* (Ner 3, Klal 8, vol. 3), quoting Midrash Tanchuma: A pious Jew would seclude himself in a certain place and learn *Maseches Chagigah*. He delved into it, and learned it beautifully a number of times, until he knew it well and was proficient in it. He was alone in his house when he passed away, and no one knew of his death. The image of a woman appeared, stood over him and began wailing. Her cries and lamenting were so loud that they drew a large crowd.

She told the people, "Eulogize this pious man and bury him, and [give] honor to his *aron*, and you will be *zocheh* to Olam HaBa. For he honored me all his life, and I was

not abandoned or forgotten." Immediately, all the women gathered and sat with her, and made a tremendous eulogy over him. The men busied themselves with his *tachrichim* and all his burial needs and buried him with great honor. That woman cried and wailed. They asked her, "What's your name?" She told them, "My name is Chagigah." Once the pious Jew was buried, the woman disappeared. Everyone realized right away that it had been *Maseches Chagigah* — which had appeared in the form of a woman to eulogize him, cry over him, and ensure that he received an honorable burial, since he constantly learned and delved into *Maseches Chagigah*.

This shows that the *masechta* takes care of the *kavod* of someone who learns it. I heard a story that happened recently. There was a *levayah*, and there were only nine people at the *levayah*. Because of coronavirus, they couldn't find a minyan. Suddenly, a man came and completed the minyan, but he left right after the *levayah*. Before he left, someone asked him his name, and he said, "Ganzfried." Afterwards, they found out that the *niftar* had learned the *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* — written by Rav Shlomo Ganzfried — many times. Apparently, the author himself had come to complete the minyan, to honor him with a minyan at his *levayah*. This is Torah. If someone learns *Maseches Chagigah*, the *masechta* takes care of him, and if someone learns *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*, the *mechaber* Rav Shlomo Ganzfried takes care of him.

Don't Push to Get Your Son into Yeshivah

I want to mention something that people make a mistake about. Many *bachurim* are finishing *yeshivah ketanah* now and are working on getting into *yeshivah gedolah*. The new *zman* starts in Elul, and every *bachur* is deciding which *yeshivah* he wants to attend. He does his *hishtadlus* and puts in effort to make the *yeshivah* want to accept him. Sometimes he wants to go to specific *chashuv* *yeshivah*, but they don't accept him. If he pushes, he might get in. His parents do all sorts of *hishtadlus* and ask the *yeshivah* to accept him.

What they don't know is that everything is in *Shamayim*'s hands, and "Whatever the Merciful One does is for the best." **He will be successful in a yeshivah that wants to accept him, but if there's a yeshivah that doesn't want him, and he applies pressure to get in, he will not be successful! This is the reality, tried and true!** Because whatever the Merciful One does is for the best, and everything is from *Shamayim* and for the good, for his benefit, that he'll be successful in a *yeshivah* that wants him. But a place that doesn't want him is not for his benefit and if he exerts pressure on something that's not for his benefit, he will lose out from it.

Bein HaMetzarim — The Time of the Churban

The weeks between Shivah Asar B'Tammuz and Tishah b'Av are called Bein haMetzarim, between the straits. The *Mishnah Berurah*, at the end of *siman* 551, writes in the name of the Arizal, "During these days, after midday, he should mourn and cry for about half an hour." That is,

because there is something to cry about! Over the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash that took place in those days — it began on 17 Tammuz, when the city was breached, and on 9 Av the Churban itself took place.

Chazal say (*Taanis* 30b), “Whoever mourns over Yerushalayim merits to see its [future] joy, but one who does not mourn over Yerushalayim will not see its [future] joy.” They learned this from the *pasuk*, “Rejoice with Yerushalayim and exult over her all those who love her; rejoice with her a rejoicing, all who mourn over her.” One who mourns over Yerushalayim merits witnessing her joy, but a person who does not feel that he’s missing the Beis HaMikdash, someone who is not bothered by the lack of the Beis HaMikdash, has no right to the Beis HaMikdash and will not witness its future joy.

The Three Weeks are a time of Churban, a time of *middas ha-din*. The *poskim* say (*Orach Chaim* 551) that **there are certain things one should be extra careful about during this time, as *middas ha-din* is present in them, and one must be very careful.**

Awakening to Rectify the Sins of the Churban

The Three Weeks are a time to repent for the sins of the Churban. The Rambam writes in *Hilchos Taanis* (5:1) that the four fasts Chazal instituted to remember the Churban are times of *middas ha-din*. These fast days were instituted to arouse the Jewish people to repent for the sins that caused the Churban. That is, Shivah Asar b’Tammuz and Tishah b’Av, and Asarah b’Tammuz, when the siege around Yerushalayim began, and Tzom Gedaliah, which was also a great *tzarah*. Gedaliah ben Achikam was killed, and the last remnants of Jews in Eretz Yisrael left.

If the Churban is still present, it’s a sign that the sins are still present, as Chazal say (Yerushalmi, *Yoma* 1:1): In every generation that the Beis HaMikdash is not rebuilt, it is as if it was destroyed in its time.” That means the generation is to blame for the perpetuation of the Churban, because they are continuing the same sins that caused the Churban. If the sins would have stopped, there would not have been a Churban anymore, and our sins are what is causing the Churban to continue, as it says (*Daniel* 9:16), “It is due to our sins and our fathers’ sins that Yerushalayim and Your nation have become a disgrace to all those surrounding us.” If we would have rectified our sins, the Churban would not be present anymore. That is why the fasts days were instituted, so that we’d remember and know that we are continuing the sins that caused the Churban, and that’s why the Churban is still present. It is supposed to make us wake up and do teshuvah.

While the Tannaim and Amoraim and all the tzaddikim surely are not to blame for the Churban, only the generation — which means the general *tzibbur* who are not tzaddikim — is to blame, for they have *sinas chinam*, which is negative *middos*. They carry on the *bad middos* that caused the Churban. We must rectify our *middos* and replace *sinas chinam* with *ahavas chinam*. Actually, it’s

not *chinam*, baseless — it’s the halachah: *V’ahavta l’reiacha kamocho*, “Love your fellow as yourself”!

If the entire *tzibbur* would act this way, or at least most of the *tzibbur* — the Tannaim and Amoraim and all the tzaddikim were a minority — if most of the *tzibbur* would rectify this, the sin of the Churban would be corrected. The fact that the Churban is still continuing is because this sin of bad *middos* is still present. If so, there is a solution to how to rectify the Churban: by acting with *middos tovos*.

Learning Mussar: Helps Identify Sins

However, unfortunately, most of the time, people don’t feel that they need to change their *middos*. Chazal say (*Yoma* 9b), “The [people of the] First [Beis HaMikdash], whose sin was revealed, the end [of their exile] was revealed. The [people of the] Second [Beis HaMikdash], whose sin was not revealed, the end [of their exile] was not revealed.” During the Churban Bayis Rishon, it was revealed that they’d return from *galus* after seventy years and rebuild the Second Beis HaMikdash, but during the Churban Bayis Sheni, their end was not revealed.

During the first Beis HaMikdash, their sins were obvious: idol worship, immorality, and murder. Since everyone knew what the sins were, they were able to repent and build the Second Beis HaMikdash. But the sin during the Second Beis HaMikdash was *sinas chinam*, which is not a clear-cut sin — each person thinks he’s right and does not think his hatred is baseless hatred; he thinks it’s grounded and for good reason. Since people don’t recognize their sin, they don’t repent for it and the Churban is still continuing.

If we would be on the *madreigah* that we’d feel our sin and practice “Love your fellow as yourself” *b’shleimus*, there would not be a Churban anymore. The Churban is continuing, because the sin is continuing.

The solution to this is that each person should search his deeds by learning *mussar sefarim*. Indeed, the *Mishnah Berurah*, in the first *siman*, writes about Chazal’s statement that Torah is the antidote to the *yetzer hara*: even though the entire Torah is an antidote, the principal antidote is *Toras hayirah* in *mussar sefarim*. *Mussar* is also Torah, and it is the more effective antidote against the *yetzer hara*. Why? Because when a person learns *mussar*, he slowly, slowly figures out his sins. He learns what bad *middos* are and what good *middos* are, since all the *mussar sefarim* explain this.

The *Chovos HaLevavos* explains the duties of the heart at length — how one’s heart should be. *Shaarei Teshuvah* and *Mesillas Yesharim* explain it too, but there it’s more concise, and the *Chovos HaLevavos* explains it more at length. If someone has a steady *mussar* seder, he will progress and find the path to *shleimus*.

One Who Learns Mussar Is Called a Tzaddik

The *Shaarei Teshuvah* (2:10) writes that if a person takes it upon himself to learn *mussar* and to carry out whatever he

learns, it's as if he's saying "na'aseh v'nishma," with "na'aseh" preceding "nishmah." He is considered a *tzaddik gamur* from the moment he accepts to learn *mussar*, because he is already on the right path to rectify all his deeds *b'shleimus*.

In the past, there were *maggidim* and ethical mentors called *mochichim*, admonishers, who would rebuke the *tzibbur*, but nowadays, we have the *mussar sefarim*, which also give rebuke. A person who has a steady *seder* in *mussar* will eventually reach many high *madreigos*. If he makes a strong *kabbalah* — if he's sure he will learn *mussar* on a

steady basis — then, as Rabbeinu Yonah writes, he becomes a complete *tzaddik* from that point on. He can rectify his soul in one short moment, and he merits the reward for all his future good deeds.

Therefore, setting up a *mussar seder* is something that gives a person many, many *zechuyos*. This is the *eitzah* to continuously rise from one *madreigah* to the next, this is how a person can become a *ben aliyah*! *Yehi ratzon* that we all merit becoming *bnei aliyah*, *b'ezras Hashem*.

Chizuk for Avreichim During Coronavirus — Thursday, Shivah Asar B'Tammuz

Currently, doing what we are supposed to do is challenging, but Torah is the most important thing: *Talmud Torah k'neged kulam*. *Esek haTorah* comes first, and it carries the greatest *zechus* — we reap its fruits in this world and the principle remains for Olam Haba. Learn as much as possible!

But it must be in a pleasant manner. Every family member should feel comfortable at home; there shouldn't be any tension, it should be *b'simchah*. There should be a pleasant atmosphere, which will make it easier to use one's time wisely and do whatever else has to be done; it will also have an effect on *tefillah b'kavanah*. When a person is calm, it affects his functioning in every realm! In *bein adam lachaveiro*, greeting people cheerfully, without anger or tension, without *lashon hara*, *chas v'shalom*. Everything should be according to halachah, which brings a person to a happy, good life. Living a life of Torah and mitzvos is a happy life.

It's important now to withstand the *nisayon*, which is a great *zechus*. "According to the effort is the reward" (*Avos* 5:23). Withstanding the *nisayon* to be careful not to speak *devarim assurim*, not to criticize anyone — which is *lashon hara* and a grave sin, instead speak in *divrei Torah*, Torah and *mussar*, *emunah* and *yiras Shamayim*. [Be careful in] *bein adam lachaveiro*, "Love your fellow as yourself" is the most important, as it is a "great principle in the Torah." The entire Torah is different when there is *ahavas habriyos*.

As mentioned, it is very important, especially during challenging times, to withstand *nisyonos* and fulfill the Torah's expectations: *ahavas habriyos*, speaking gently and nicely to everyone — both at home, and with everyone else, for example when speaking on the telephone. Everything should be as pleasant as it should be, with *ahavas habriyos*. Utilize the difficulties to withstand *nisyonos* and reap tremendous *zechuyos*!

In this *zechus*, may we merit that the coronavirus pass quickly, may it be over already, may everyone be healthy, and no one should catch the plague, *b'ezras Hashem*. May we merit *siyatta d'Shemaya* in everything.

Dedicated by
the Kroll Family, Los Angeles
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The *sichos* are transcribed and translated from a weekly *va'ad* in Rav Gershon Edelstein's home.