

Darkei HaChizuk

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

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Chizuk in Elul

Baruch Hashem we were *zocheh* to *siyatta d'Shemaya* that the Elul *zman* started and all *yeshivos* were able to open, even under the health guidelines. Until now, there were difficulties, but now the *yeshivos* are continuing *b'shleimus*, with *siyatta d'Shemaya*. *Ah zechus fun Elul*, it's in the merit of Elul.

Elul is a time when one needs *chizuk* and preparation for Rosh Hashanah. We start blowing the shofar on Rosh Chodesh Elul, in order to arouse the *tzibbur* to teshuvah, and to arouse ourselves to rectify whatever needs *chizuk*. We also say "*L'Dovid Hashem Ori*," which is a *perek* of teshuvah and *chizuk*.

The truth is, these *minhagim* — blowing shofar and saying "*L'Dovid Hashem Ori*" from Rosh Chodesh Elul — are not mentioned in the Gemara. They were probably instituted in the period of the Rishonim. During the Tannaim's times, these customs were unnecessary because they were strong enough spiritually without it. They didn't need this added *chizuk* of shofar and "*L'Dovid Hashem Ori*."

But after the times of the Gemara — or maybe even later — there was a period of *yeridas hadoros*, and that's when they started with these *minhagim*. There was *yeridas hadoros* in *emunah*, in actually feeling *eimas ha-din*, the fearsome awe of Yom haDin. Actually, during the time of the Mishnah, shidduchim were made on Yom Kippur (as is written at the end of *Taanis*), and this was no paradox: Yom Kippur with *eimas ha-din* and shidduchim! But it is not like this nowadays, and we need *chizuk*.

The Advantage of a Year Starting Off "Poor"

We learn in Gemara about the required *chizuk* on Rosh Hashanah (*Rosh Hashanah* 16b): "Rabbi Yitzchak said: Every year that is 'poor' at its start will be 'wealthy' at its end, as it states, 'From the beginning [spelled רשית, which can mean "poor"] of the year until its end' — it will have an 'end.'" This means, the fact that ראשית (beginning) is written without an א, is לשון רש ועניה, denotes poverty and indigence, and it comes to teach us that if there is poverty at the beginning of the years, there will be wealth at the end of the year.

What kind of poverty is this referring to? Rashi explains, "That Klal Yisrael makes themselves 'poor' on Rosh

Hashanah, and they recite תחנונים ותפילות (supplications and prayers), as it says (*Mishlei* 18:23): "תחנונים ידבר רש 'A poor man speaks with supplications.'" That is, poverty is referring to a person who pleads and begs in prayer, like a poor man asking for mercy and benevolence. This is "poor at its start" — a person feels he is poor in *zechuyos*, he does not have enough *zechuyos*, and he needs Heavenly mercy for a good year.

However, the Tosfos has another explanation: "Since Klal Yisrael is poor, their hearts break and *Shamayim* has mercy on them." That is, "poor at its start" is to be taken literally — the person is actually indigent, he has the challenges that come along with being poor, and therefore, Heaven has mercy on him. His physical poverty and difficulties are a merit and advantage for him, as it causes his heart to break, which then causes Heaven to have mercy on him and grant him a good year.

Now, the Gemara's wording is "a year that is poor 'at its start,' which means *on Rosh Hashanah*, because the year starts on Rosh Hashanah, not in Elul. So that was during the Gemara's times, but we cannot merely start on Rosh Hashanah, we need prior preparation due to *yeridas hadoros*, so we start saying Selichos in Elul just before Rosh Hashanah, and the Sefardim start from Rosh Chodesh Elul. So too, we blow shofar and say "*L'Dovid Hashem Ori*" because we need *chizuk*.

As we mentioned, during the times of the Gemara, they did not have these customs. Selichos, too, were introduced in the Rishonim's times, and some Selichos, such as "*Malachi Rachamim*," and *Yisrael Noshah*" (authored by Rabbeinu Shefatyah) were recited even during the period of the Geonim. However, during the times of the Gemara, they didn't say Selichos; they only started with this later on when Klal Yisrael needed more *chizuk*, after *yeridas hadoros*.

The Mistake of Desiring Money and Honor

Let us take a deeper look at which matters need *chizuk*. In some matters, the human nature opposes *chizuk*, so we need *chizuk* against this inborn nature. For example, desiring wealth is a natural inclination. Of course, a person needs money to live — that's not considered "desiring money." But if he wants more, if wants to have lots and lots of money, as they say (*Koheles Rabbah* 1:13), "One who has a hundred wants two hundred." That's the nature of desiring money. And then he does *hishadlus* to earn more money, and even though he has

enough for his needs, he wants more, and he even demands more from others. The desire for money causes him to make demands; he demands that others help him, and if he doesn't receive what he demands, he has a *kpeidah*.

This is one big mistake, because everything is in Hashem's hands, and whatever the Merciful One does is for the good. Even poverty is in Heaven's hands and for the person's benefit. We mentioned the Tosfos that it's for his own benefit, that Heaven will have mercy on him and grant him a good year. If so, why should he have a *kpeidah*? There's no reason to be *makpid*, since everything is for the best.

Similarly, the desire for honor is innate. For example, people want honorable positions. Take someone who already has a job, but he wants a job in a more respectable place. Even though he is making ends meet, he wants more honor.

It's well known that for the pleasure of honor in this World, one will lose a lot in Olam HaBa, more than he would have lost due to other physical pleasures. This is because honor is an emotional pleasure, more pleasurable than the pleasure of money or other worldly pleasure, (see *Kesser Rosh, ose 137*, and see the Chafetz Chaim's explanation in *Chafetz Chaim al HaTorah, Parashas Behaalosecha*. As a result, one loses Olam HaBa, because this is not a pleasure that he needs to give him *chizuk*; it's just pleasure from honor. So if he loses Olam HaBa, what has he gained?

Wanting honor is human nature, and the desire for honor is real, and people make efforts to receive honor. Even those who don't try to gain honor are happy when they are honored. This too is a mistake. Why be happy — it's at the expense of Olam HaBa!

Even someone who doesn't enjoy honor must be wary of the influence of honor. He should make sure it doesn't give him a feeling of importance, as we've seen about Rav in the Gemara (*Sanhedrin 7b*). Rav had many *talmidim*, so there was a large *tzibbur* who attached themselves to him, and large *tzibbur* who listened to his *shiurim*. They would walk along with him and accompany him with great honor on the way home. Rav was concerned about the influence of this honor, and he would murmur *pesukim* about lowliness so that he shouldn't feel important. Rashi there explains: So that he should not become prideful. That is, he wasn't actually a *baal gaavah*; he was merely concerned about not becoming prideful. It was possible that he might feel a bit of importance, and then he wouldn't be considered humble anymore — and that's related to haughtiness.

The truth is, there's no reason to feel important, because whatever a person has is from *Shamayim* and in Heaven's hands. Everything is *chasdei Shamayim*, and has nothing to do with him personally. Even his power

of thought is in Heaven's hands, so why should he feel important? However, it is human nature to feel important, and that's why Rav recited these *pesukim*. The Gemara there also mentions Mar Zutra Chassida who would say *pesukim* to neutralize feelings of importance.

Even if someone doesn't actively look for honor, he is interested in knowing if people respect him. This is a strong rule of nature. He respects himself for who he is, for whatever *maalah* he has, and he's curious if others are also aware of this *maalah*. Even if he doesn't discuss it, it's in his heart. This is human nature. Deep down, he wants people to know about his *maalos* because he respects himself and he wants others to know about his importance. This is the desire for honor.

The following story took place over 100 years ago: A certain *bachur* was considered the best *bachur* in his yeshivah, but he didn't know it. He never thought about whether people respect him or esteem him. Many years later, people told him that had been considered the top *bachur* in his yeshivah, and he was very upset. Why did they have to tell him? Why did he have to know about it? Knowing that he was respected and admired just bothered him. But as we said, human nature is just the opposite. The desire for honor and money are real, and we need *chizuk* to distance ourselves from it.

Now, during Elul, we need to prepare for Rosh Hashanah, for the Yemei haDin. We need *zechuyos*; we need to strengthen ourselves in matters that require *chizuk*.

The Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Dovid Povarsky *zt"l*, once said that if a person would remember that it's Elul, that would give him *chizuk* as well. Just the knowledge and thoughts to remember that it's "ELUL" now, gives *chizuk* and has an influence. Of course, the primary influence is to learn *mussar sefarim*, which give real *chizuk*. But just remembering that it's Elul gives *chizuk*.

Everything Is for the Best

Elul is also the time that young boys move up from *cheder* to *yeshivah ketanah*, and from *yeshivah ketanah* to *yeshivah gedolah*. Things can happen during this time that can cause people to have *kpeidos*, for example, if someone wanted to get into a specific yeshivah, a very respected yeshivah which really is right for him. However, he's not a top, top *bachur* and if he learns there, he'll be one of the weaker *bachurim*, but there are other *bachurim* like him there, and he truly wants and aspires to be accepted there. His father also wants him to go, but in the end he is not accepted. So he goes to another yeshivah, where he is one of the better *bachurim* and he enjoys a level of success that he would not have reached in the first yeshivah.

It turns out that everything was from *Shamayim*, and it was for his own benefit that he wasn't accepted to the first yeshivah. That's how he was able to succeed in the second yeshivah. But human nature is that we don't think about this; instead people are upset that they weren't accepted. But everything is in *Shamayim's* hands! *L'tav avid*, It's for our own benefit! And just as he saw that the second yeshivah was better for him, there is no reason for him to have a *kpeidah*. Having a *kpeidah* is a mistake.

There are many such *kpeidos*; many similar stories that happened or could have happened. For example, if someone is involved in *zikui harabbim* in a place where there is a principal, and he makes a request on behalf of a family member, a very reasonable request. But the principal refuses, so he gets upset at the principal and leaves his position of *zikui harabbim*. Now is this justified? After all, everything is in *Shamayim's* hands, and it's for his benefit. So why does he give up the *zikui harabbim*; it's all a mistake! But people do not think about this; they don't think that everything is in Heaven's hands, *l'tav avid*. And there are many similar stories.

The Merit of Forgiving Sights

Chazal said (*Rosh Hashanah* 17a), "Whoever forgives slights, they forgive him for all his *pesha'im*." That is, when there is a reason to be angry and have a *kpeidah*, but the person is forgiving and is not *makpid*, he merits that Heaven overlooks all his sins.

The *sefer Shaarei Kedushah* (1:6) writes: "Overlooks all his *pesha'im* — and all the more so his *avonos* and *chata'im*." We know there are three levels of sin: *cheit*, *avon*, and *pesha*. *Cheit* is unintentional sin, *avon* is intentional, and *pesha* is even more severe, sins committed out of rebelliousness. And here they said that his "*peshaim*" are overlooked — even those most severe sins. So all the more so, he is forgiven for his intentional sins and unintentional sins.

This is *middah k'neged middah*. Since he overlooks slights *bein adam l'chaveiro*, Heaven overlooks his *pesha'im bein adam laMakom*.

Rabbeinu Yonah writes in *Shaarei Teshuvah* (1:28) that this — the fact that one can merit so much by being *maavir al middosav* — gives one "great hope." Once, a certain person commented that this is an extremely difficult thing. He's right — according to human nature, it's very hard, but what about *emunah* that everything is in Heaven's hands, and whatever the Merciful One does is for the good? So what's the problem and what's the hardship?!

The Gemara (*Taanis* 25b) tells about Tannaim: one whose *tefillos* were answered, and one whose *tefillos* were not answered. They said, "Because this one is

maavir al middosav, and the other one is not." This begs an explanation — why wasn't he *maavir al middosav*? (See Rav Yisrael Salanter's explanation in *Ohr Yisrael, maamar* 28.)

Elsewhere in the Gemara it states (*Bava Metzia* 49a and others), "There's only a *ta'aromes*, grievance, against him." That is, if one cannot say that he is a *mazik*, that according to halachah he did not cause harm, but he did cause you some loss of money — in this case, you cannot claim it legally, but there is a "grievance" on him, it is permissible to be upset. There is some *kpeidah* here that disturbs the litigant.

This is hard to understand. Why does he have a grievance if everything is in Heaven's hands, and whatever the Merciful One does is for the good? It's true that the other fellow did not act properly, but the litigant should internalize that everything is in Heaven's hands and whatever the Merciful One does is for the good. We need to explain the *pshat* in the Gemara — what place does "grievance" have here? (See what the *Nesivos Ohr* in *sefer Ohr Yisrael* writes about this.)

The story is told about someone who was very close to the Chazon Ish. He asked the Chazon Ish if he has any "*ta'aromes*" on him, and the Chazon Ish responded: "I do not know what '*ta'aromes*' is." This is a *madreigah*, the Chazon Ish's *madreigah*, not to know what it means to have a grievance against someone.

Learn Mussar for Chizuk in Elul

Now in Elul we were *zocheh* that all the *yeshivos* are set up. However, there is a pandemic, and while we are taking all the safety precautions, and the *zman* began *b'shleimus*, we must make sure that our Elul really is strengthened, full of *chizuk*! During Elul we increase the time for learning *mussar*. Usually throughout the year, *mussar seder* is a half hour before Maariv, and in Elul we add fifteen minutes before Minchah. This is to add *chizuk* by learning *mussar*.

Mussar seder is vital. It is the best *chizuk* that can be. The *Mishnah Berurah* (*siman aleph*) writes in the name of the Kadmonim the following about Chazal's statement "I created the yetzer hara; I created the Torah as an antidote to it": the most effective antidote is *Toras hayirah* — learning *mussar sefarim*, which increase *yiras Shamayim*. *Yiras Shamayim* is also Torah. Indeed, the *pasuk* in *Iyov* says (28:28): "*Yiras Hashem* is wisdom." Wisdom is Torah, *Toras hayirah*.

Therefore, it is very important to set time for learning *mussar* in Elul. It's important all year long, because it increases *chizuk*, and increases *emunah* and *yiras Shamayim*.

Yiras Shamayim is a mitzvah, and we are obligated to increase it on a constant basis. There are many

madreigos in *yirah*, as Rabbeinu Yonah writes in *Shaarei Teshuvah* (3:17): *Yirah* is one of the most exalted *maalos*, all of which have many levels, and we are obligated to be involved in *yirah* and try to attain all the many *madreigos* of *yirah*. How to increase more and more *yirah* is a mitzvah dependent on the heart, and there are many *madreigos* to it.

The Chazon Ish commented about three *gedolim* that one's *yiras Shamayim* is in his head, the second's is in his heart, and the third's *yirah* is "tangible," as if he can see it tangibly. These are the levels of *yiras Shamayim*, and one can slowly progress in them by setting daily times for learning *mussar* and thinking thoughts of *mussar*. Increasing *yiras Shamayim* is an obligation.

Tefillah to Strengthen Emunah

I heard that the Alter of Kelm said the following: Why don't we see that the Rishonim had set times for *mussar*; why did it only start in the recent generations? The Chafetz Chaim writes (*Beis Yisrael* chap. 9), that in his time, the *gedolim* admitted that there was no choice and no other *eitzah* — learning *mussar* daily became a necessity. But during the Rishonim's times it was not so. The Alter of Kelm said the Rishonim's *tefillos* were an expression of nullification of *gashmiyus*, and with such a level in *tefillah*, there was no need to learn *mussar*. Their davening gave them the same *chizuk* that *mussar* would have given. Their *emunah* was strengthened and they attained clarity in *emunah*, even tangible *emunah*, as the Chazon Ish mentioned.

Indeed, the Kuzari wrote (*Maamar* 3, chap. 5, cited in the Siddur HaGra), that *tefillah* is food for the soul; it gives the soul *chizuk*. Just as the body needs food three times, or twice, a day, so too, the soul needs food to strengthen it in *yiras Shamayim*. Each *tefillah* provides another *madreigah* for the soul and satisfies it and elevates it, until the next *tefillah*. Then the soul becomes weakened and one must daven again. The three daily prayers are what perpetuate the soul's *shleimus* and *chizuk*.

So the Alter of Kelm says that for the Rishonim who davened and reached nullification of their *gashmiyus*, their *tefillos* were instead of *mussar*. Such a *tefillah*

elevates the person and gives him *chizuk* in *yiras Shamayim* just the same as *mussar* does. But in the later generations, when *tefillah* is not like this, we must have set times for learning *mussar*.

While the Brisker Rav learned *mussar* every day — people said they saw him learning a chapter of *Mesillas Yesharim* every day, and when he finished, he'd begin again — his *tefillah* was on the level of nullification of *gashmiyus*. People spoke to him while he davened, but he didn't hear. Once, as we've already mentioned, he davened Shemoneh Esrei out loud to increase *kavanah* — which is permissible because it wasn't disturbing anyone else — and once he had to say *Yaaleh v'Yavo*, and other people heard that he skipped. So they told him, "Yaaleh v'Yavo," but he didn't hear them, because he had reached nullification of *gashmiyus*.

In any case, learning *mussar* is something that is *mechanech* a person, it is not *middas chassidus* — it is imperative, and must be done daily. Chazal say (*Berachos* 32b), "Four require *chizuk*: Torah, *maasim tovim*, *tefillah*, and *derech eretz*." Rashi there explains: **Require *chizuk*** — A person should strengthen himself in them constantly and with all his strength. **Constantly** means on a regular basis every day, at least once a day. **With all his strength means** with all his concentration, with all his *kochos hanefesh* and his power of thought.

Chizuk is achieved through learning *mussar*. While Rashi achieved *chizuk* through *tefillah*, because as the Kuzari writes, during the times of the Rishonim, *tefillah* was *b'shleimus*, and it gave them the same *chizuk* that *mussar* would have given them. In our generation, though, we need to learn *mussar* so that our *tefillah* can reach that level of nullification of *gashmiyus*, which is how the *Shulchan Aruch* (98:1) says it should be. Nullification of *gashmiyus* is close to the level of prophecy.

These are the matters that require *chizuk*. And what's most important is to continue to increase *chizuk* without stopping, *b'retzifus*. May Hashem help us all attain *chizuk*.

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