

# 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 Netzavim-Vayeileich 5780

411

## Return to Me and I'll Return to You

We are in Elul, which is a time of *Yemei HaRachamim*, Days of Mercy. There is a hint to this: **אֵלּוּל** is an acronym for **אֲנִי לְדוּדִי וְדוּדִי לִי**, "I am to my Beloved and my Beloved is to me" (*Shir HaShirim* 6:3). Dodi, my Beloved, is HaKadosh Baruch Hu, Whom we are close to and He is close to us. But the order is first "I am to my Beloved," and only then, "my Beloved is to me." First we have to wake up a bit and come close to HaKadosh Baruch Hu, and then He will come close to us.

I once heard from my father, *zt"l*, the following teaching from *Chazal* (*Eichah Rabbah* 5:21): "*Hashiveinu Hashem eilecha, v'nashuvah*, Return us to You Hashem, and we will return: Knesses Yisrael said to HaKadosh Baruch Hu, 'Ribbono shel Olam, it [the responsibility] is Yours — *Hashiveinu*, Return us to You.' HaKadosh Baruch Hu said to them, 'It [the responsibility] is yours, as the *pasuk* states, "*Shuvu alay v'Ashuva aleichem*, Return to Me, and I will return to you.'" We ask Hashem for *siyatta d'Shemaya* to do teshuvah: "*Hashiveinu Hashem eilecha, v'nashuvah*," but Hashem answers us, "*Shuvu Eilay v'Ashuva aleichem*." First return to Me — it all depends on you.

Therefore, even though the month of Elul is *Yemei HaRachamim*, we first have to take action — perform *maasim tovim*. And then we will be *zocheh* to *Dodi li*, "My Beloved is to me."

## Teshuvah in Elul — Wards Off Gezeiros

Now, after *Yemei HaRachamim*, we have *Yemei HaDin*, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Aseres Yemei Teshuvah. In order to be found meritorious in judgment and merit a *ksivah v'chasimah tovah*, we must have *zechuyos*.

What are the *zechuyos*? There are three things that uphold the world: Torah, *avodah*, and *gemillus chasadim* (*Avos* 1:2). Torah is *esek haTorah*, *avodah* is *emunah* and *tefillah* (*avodah she'balev*), and *gemillus chasadim* is *mitzvos bein adam lachaveiro, ahavas habriyos*.

During the *tefillos* of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, we say: "*U'Teshuvah, u'tefillah, u'tzedakah maavirin es ro'a hagezeirah*, Teshuvah, *tefillah* and *tzedakah* can avert the severity of the decree." That is, there is a Yom HaDin, and it could be that there is a decree, and we need *zechuyos* to avert and nullify the decree. Teshuvah,

*tefillah*, and *tzedakah* help avert the severity of the decree.

This is true even when the decree has already been issued, but Elul is still before the *gezeirah*! So if it's possible to avert the decree through *teshuvah*, *tefillah*, and *tzedakah*, how much more will these three things be effective to avert the *gezeirah* before the decree has been issued.

## Teshuvah for Bittul Torah

In order to do teshuvah, one must know what to repent for. And even before that, one must know that he has sins, and which sin he must repent for.

Let's start with Torah. There is a sin of *bittul Torah*. For example, take an adolescent who already utilizes all his time for Torah and does not waste a minute. However, previously, when he was younger — after all, he's responsible for mitzvos from the moment he becomes bar mitzvah — he was not so careful about *bittul Torah*. There may be some individuals who were careful about *bittul Torah* right after their bar mitzvah, but they are the exception. It's very unusual to find someone like this, so most people are guilty of *bittul Torah*, and must do teshuvah for it.

The first step of teshuvah is *azivas hacheit*. This is not so simple when it comes to *bittul Torah*, because the obligation of Talmud Torah is constant, each person according to his ability. If he learns as much as he can — it doesn't matter how much it is, as long as he's doing whatever he can — then he is considered "*adam hashaleim*." But if he can do more, even if he learns a lot, but he could've learned just a bit more, that's considered *bittul Torah*.

*Bittul Torah* can occur in thought as well. Even if at a certain point he cannot learn from a *sefer* — for example, if he's traveling and he doesn't have a *sefer* — but he can think in *divrei Torah*! He can think about *perek* "*Eizehu mekoman*, or *pitum haketores*, all the *pesukim* we recite in davening, as they are all *divrei Torah*. He can think about them, he can think of the explanation of each *pasuk*, and that's how one can be *oseik baTorah* constantly.

There's a story about someone who needed a chavrusa. He asked a certain *masmid* to learn with him. The *masmid* said, "I learn all the time, I don't have a spare minute." They asked him to check his schedule again — maybe he'd find a few minutes. Sure enough, he found a free

time slot, maybe it was 15 minutes or a half hour of available time. Even though he learned with *hasmadah*, he still had some time that was not accounted for, and this is *bittul Torah*.

As we said, *bittul Torah* can occur in thought. The story is told about Rav Chaim Brisker and his son Maran the Brisker Rav *zt"l*. During the *bris* of the Brisker Rav's son, Rav Chaim spoke to him in learning and asked him a question so he'd be thinking in learning even when all the guests were coming over to him at the *bris*. Although they were the *baalei hasimchah* and they had to interact with all their guests, they also had an obligation of *esek haTorah*, not to divert their minds from Torah. That's how far it goes.

Now this is a special *madreigah*, but each person has to accept it on his level. If he can add even one minute of Torah to his day, it is still Torah!

When I was in Yeshivas Lomzhe, I heard the following from the Mashgiach HaGaon HaTzaddik Rav Abba Grossbard *zt"l*: Before his passing, the Vilna Gaon made a *cheshbon nefesh* and found that he was guilty of some minutes of *bittul Torah*. Only minutes! Not hours, but even minutes is *bittul Torah*, and the Vilna Gaon did teshuvah with *vidui* for it.

### Teshuvah According to the Gemara's Guidelines

I heard that one Elul, the Chafetz Chaim saw that the *bachurim* in his yeshivah in Radin were very worried and tense, because they had to do teshuvah and didn't know how to go about it. The Chafetz Chaim told them that he didn't understand the difficulty or why they were so scared; after all, teshuvah can be done easily, just by having regret for one's past deeds, accepting not to do them again in the future, and leaving the sin. So what's so hard about doing teshuvah?

When the *bachurim* related this to the Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Naftali Tropp, *zt"l*, he said, "The Chafetz Chaim is right that teshuvah can be accomplished with *charatah*, regret, but the *charatah* must be genuine. Genuine *charatah*, as is described in *Shaarei Teshuvah* in the first gate, must be accompanied by pain and sorrow over the sin, and it's not simple! The Chafetz Chaim felt and lived with the truth, so for him it was simple, but for everyone else, it is hard to merit attaining the right level of *charatah*."

However, I saw in *Kesser Rosh* (Letter 131) in the name of Rav Chaim of Volozhin, that *charatah* as described in *Shaarei Teshuvah* — that it must be accompanied by pain and sorrow over the sin — is *middas chassidus*. He writes: "It is easy to fulfill the mitzvah of teshuvah according to *dina d'Gemara*, the Gemara's rules, which means, he must unequivocally decide not to return to his foolishness, and heartfelt bitterness is even better." That

is, in order to fulfill the mitzvah of teshuvah, it is enough to have *charatah* with a little bit of pain, to show he regrets it and is bothered by the sin. But "heartfelt bitterness with grief," to be so sorely pained to such a pronounced degree is not a requirement, it's just "even better."

### Holy Thoughts and Utilizing Time Wisely

In the *Hineni mechavein* prayer recited before putting on tefillin, we say, "And may some of the *shefa* of the mitzvah of tefillin be extended on me to merit a long life, a flow of holiness, and holy thoughts." Tefillin sanctify a person, so we are asked that the tefillin should bring down holiness on us and cause us to have holy thoughts.

The commentators explain that one needs *siyatta d'Shemaya* to have holy thoughts, that one shouldn't have *devarim beteilim* swimming in his mind — only holy thoughts. It's a *madreigah*, and the *shefa* of the mitzvah of tefillin can provide a person with the necessary *siyatta d'Shemaya* necessary to attain it. But it's not simple; it's a very high level to have holy thoughts all the time.

It's well known that Rav Yisrael Salanter was once asked about a person who was very busy and had only a half hour a day to learn. What should he learn, Gemara or Mussar? Rav Yisrael said he should learn *mussar*, because then he'll realize that he has more time — he'll find another half hour to learn. This is how it is: people don't even realize that they're not utilizing their time wisely and that there's *bittul Torah*. That's the *inyan* of Torah.

### The Levels of Kavanah in Tefillah

Then there's the *inyan* of *tefillah*, davening with *kavanah*, which is *avodah she'balev*. Having *kavanah* throughout the entire *tefillah* is very difficult. There may be *baalei madreigah* who can do it, but it's extremely difficult.

The *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim* 98:1) writes that Shemoneh Esrei should be recited with *hispashtus hagashmiyus*, nullification of one's physical senses, as if the person doesn't have a body. The *sefer Kuzari* writes (3:5) that during Shemoneh Esrei, "one's limbs should stand at attention like frightened subjects ready to carry out their leader's command, and they should not feel anything feelings, and if they face losses, they should not notice." He should be so involved in his davening that he shouldn't feel he has a body, because he is standing before the King! With such nullification of the senses.

We've already spoke about Maran the Chazon Ish and Maran the Brisker Rav *zt"l* who didn't hear if people spoke to them while they were davening Shemoneh Esrei. Their sense of hearing was paralyzed due to their

intense concentration on davening. The nullification of physicality was so strong.

The truth is, this level is attainable, but who can reach it? The *gedolim* were able to reach it, but there are many other *madreigos* of how much a person feels that he's standing before the King, before he actually reaches this level. The *Shulchan Aruch* states that *tefillah* is like standing before the King, and we really must feel this!,

The *Mesillas Yesharim* writes (chap. 19), "A person must truly look and contemplate well... that he is standing before the *Borei Yisbarach Shemo*, and interacting with Him, even though the human eye cannot see Him. Telling a person to imagine it, to paint a real picture in his heart, is difficult because our senses can't help us in this situation. However, an intelligent person who just thinks a bit and pays attention can place this truth in his heart: how he comes and interacts with Hashem Yisbarach, and beseeches Him, asks from Him, and Hashem listens just as when man speaks to his fellow, his fellow listens." That is, even though it contradicts our senses, an intelligent person can feel it; this is a *madreigah*.

### Hashem's Name and Kavanah in Berachos

There's another matter in *tefillah*, and that is paying attention each time you mention Hashem's name, and say it with fear, as Rabbeinu Yonah writes in *Iggeres haTeshuvah* (Os 10): "A person should be careful not to mention Hashem's name in vain, as it says, 'Hashem your G-d you must fear...' When a person states Hashem's name, or an appellation, he must say it with fear and trembling. And those who do not do so, do not know Hashem, as it states, 'Yisrael did not know, My nation did not contemplate.'" (See *Shaarei Teshuvah* 3:61.) That is, if one says Hashem's name without fear, it is a sin. And this is not a simple matter.

Every *berachah* one recites also must be recited with fear. The *Mishnah Berurah* (*siman hei*) writes in the name of the *Sefer Chassidim*: "When he washes his hands or makes a blessing on fruit, or on the mitzvos —blessings people are used to making — he should direct his heart for the sake of his Creator Who showered kindness upon him and give him the fruit or bread to enjoy and commanded him to fulfill the mitzvos. He should not act like a person who does things out of rote and spews words from his mouth without heartfelt thought. And Hashem was angry at His nation for this, and sent us a message through His prophet Yeshayah. He said, 'Since this nation approached with its mouth and honored Me with its lips, and its heart was far from Me.' See there the lengthy description of the punishment for this."

Every *berachah* a person recites, such as *Birkas HaNehenin* — when he eats and recites a *berachah* before eating — as he recites the *berachah* he must feel in his heart: "I am obligated to thank Hashem. It's a

kindness from Hashem that I have this food, and I must thank Him and praise Him for it." Every single time a person makes a *berachah*, he must have this thought in his mind! If not, it's a sin, as is written in *Sefer Chassidim*.

The same is true when reciting a *berachah* on a mitzvah — one must have a feeling of joy in his heart; he must be happy to be thanking Hashem for the merit of performing this mitzvah. Likewise regarding *Birkos HaShevach*, *berachos* of praise — one must feel that he is obligated to give praise. These are the matters of *tefillah*, which are related to *emunah*.

### Emunah Prevents Conflict and Kpeidos

We've already spoken many times about remember that everything is in Heaven's hands, and that "whatever the Merciful One does is for the best." If so, there will be no conflict or *kpeidos* between people. It is human nature that if someone spoke against him or disturbed him some way, he is upset. But with the belief that everything is from *Shamayim*, and if so, I deserve it and it's good for me. Why is it good? So I know that I must do teshuvah, that because of some sin I deserve this pain or difficulty. There is no reason to be upset at the one who caused the pain, because it is *Shamayim* that is causing the pain.

The reality is, though, that there are arguments between people, neighbors, or even in business, there are disagreements and *kpeidos* over money matters. Sometimes this can even be harmful to one's health, because when a person is angry and worked up and screams, it harms his health. And why is he getting so angry? For something that's not even so terrible!

When a person is *mevater*, he always benefits. I've already told about a taxi driver who works for a company. The dispatcher in his taxi company keeps track of which driver is next on line to get a call. Whenever a call comes in, he sends the driver who's first on line to take the job. Once, the dispatcher skipped him and gave another driver the job instead of him. He kept quiet; he did not react. Right afterward, another call came in. It was a long trip with a substantial financial gain. The dispatcher couldn't skip him a second time, so he secured this long trip, with its financial gain, in the *zechus* of keeping quiet and being *mevater*. This always is the reality: anyone who is *metaver*, gains, because everything is in *Shamayim's* hands.

Sometimes there are *kpeidos* over *kavod*. If a person thinks he should be honored, but he is not. For example, when the gabbai gives out *kibbudim* and he gives someone else a *kibbud*. It bothers the first person, who wonders why he wasn't honored.

But the Torah is acquired by one who distances himself from honor! (See *Avos* 6:6.) And honor in this world

detracts from honor in the next world, because honor is an emotional pleasure. All worldly pleasures detract from Olam HaBa, but *kavod*, which is an emotional pleasure, detracts the most (see *Kesser Rosh, Os 137*). It's not worth it; it's not worth it to receive honor! And someone who does want honor? He wants Gehinnom, and does not want Olam HaBa!

### To Rejoice and Be Pained with His Fellow

There's another aspect to *bein adam lachaveiro*, and that is *v'ahavta l'reiacha kamocha* (Vayikra 19:18). This is a great principle in the Torah (*Yerushalmi Nedarim 9:4*), and feeling pain when your fellow is in pain and rejoicing with him during his happy times, are also included in this mitzvah.

I heard that the *baalei mussar* say that feeling pain for your friend is easier — if the friend is pained, so am I, because I pity him. I know a story of two rabbanim who were friends. One took some tests and found out that he was very sick with an incurable illness; in the end, he passed away from his illness. When this rav left the doctor's office, he met his friend and told him that he was very sick. When the friend came home and shared the news with his family, he began to cry! He had such *ahavas habriyos*, *v'ahavta l'reiacha kamocha*, such a *madriegah*, that he cried. The sick man himself didn't even cry, but his friend cried for him.

Rejoicing in another person's *simchah* is an even higher *madriegah*; being happy that his friend has something that gives him joy. This is a *madriegah*. I was familiar with people on this level, but it's not common to be able to rejoice in your friend's joy. After all, what does he gain from his friend's happiness? In order to really be happy with his friend, he must be on a level of *v'ahavta l'reiacha kamocha* — *kamocha mamash*, truly "like yourself." The *Mesillas Yesharim* writes that this is a high *madriegah* indeed; it is not simple.

### Ahavas Chesed — Benefiting Others

We are obligated in *ahavas chesed*, as well as *v'ahavta l'reiacha kamocha*, which is also *chesed*. Rabbeinu Yonah writes in *Shaarei Teshuvah* (3:13), "A person

must work hard to benefit his nation and help his friend, whether he is poor or wealthy, and this is one of the most severe, most important matters required of man, as it says (*Michah 6:8*), "I will tell you man what is good and what Hashem requires of you. Just to perform justice and *ahavas chesed*, loving kindness."

This means there is an obligation to "work very hard" to do favors for others. Rabbeinu Yonah writes that it is from the "severe, most important matters required of man" — it's severe, Hashem requires it, as it says, "what is good and what Hashem requires of you." That is, it is good for man and worthwhile, but at the same time, it is a requirement that Hashem requires of him. "Just to perform justice and *ahavas chesed*, loving kindness" — it's not enough to do *chesed*, it must be "*ahavas chesed*," loving kindness! The *chesed* should be out of love, with *ahavas chesed*.

This is similar to Avraham Avinu's *chesed*, he loved *chesed* so much that he was pained when no guests arrived on the third day of his *bris milah*, and he had no one to do *chesed* for. He sat at the opening of his tent and waited for guests, until Hashem had mercy on him and sent three angels, whom he thought were guests. He was on this *madriegah* of *ahavas chesed* — if there was no one for whom he could do *chesed*, he was pained. This is one of the principal matters required of man: *ahavas chesed*!

אִישׁ לִרְעֵהוּ וּמִתְנֹה לְאֶבְיֹנִים (Esther 9:22). This teaches us that Elul is also a time of *ahavas habriyos* and *ahavas chesed* for our fellow men.

These are all merits for the Yom HaDin, all the *maasim tovim* we discussed: Torah, *tefillah*, and *chesed*. All behavior *bein adam lachaveiro* brings about *zechuyos* for the Yom HaDin to nullify the decree — *Teshuvah u'tefillah u'tzedakah maavirin es ro'a hagezeirah*. All the more so is it beneficial to prevent *gezeiros* and to cause us to be written immediately for life, for a *kesivah vachasimah tovah*. *Yehi ratzon* that each one of us truly has *siyatta d'Shemaya*, together with all Klal Yisrael. May we all merit a *kesivah vachasimah tovah*!

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

For donations or dedications of the Hebrew and English flyers, or to receive the *sichos* to your email, please contact:  
[darkei.hachizuk@gmail.com](mailto:darkei.hachizuk@gmail.com)

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