

Darkei HaChizuk

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

A Sichah from Maran HaGaon Rav Gershon Edelstein *shlita*, Rosh Yeshivas Ponevez • Rosh Hashanah 5781

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Failing to Feel *Eimas HaDin* Is a Mistake

It's human nature that even though the *Yemei HaDin* are upon us — Rosh Hashanah, *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*, and Yom Kippur — a person is still calm. He makes a *cheshbon*: If last year went so well and I didn't have any unusual difficulties, this means I am a tzaddik; after all, Heaven is not punishing me. This also means that my behavior is good; I don't have any sins. After all, if it wasn't proper, why wasn't I punished? This way of thinking and self-reassurance is human nature.

However, I heard from Rav Elya Lopian *zt"l* (in a *mussar schmuess* that he delivered in our yeshivah on Yom Kippur night), that this is an erroneous way of thinking. There is no way to use this claim as proof that a person emerged meritorious in *din*. Regarding Chazal's statement that on Rosh Hashanah the wicked are sealed immediately for death, the Raavad in his *Hasagos al HaRambam (Hilchos Teshuvah 3:2)* wrote that this does not necessarily mean that their death sentence is sealed for this specific year. It could be that their sentence will be sealed immediately for an early death; they'll die earlier than had been originally decreed.

That is, when every single person is born, it is decreed how long he live, whether for 120 years or less. If he sins, he isn't punished immediately, but they decrease the number of years allotted to him. Since he has sins and does not make the most of his life, why should he live? Life was given to us for *kevod Shamayim*, as is written (*Yeshayahu 43:7*), "I created him for My honor" — the purpose of the entire Creation is to bring *kevod Shamayim*. If a person doesn't foster *kevod Shamayim*, he has no right to live.

Therefore, it could be that last year, or even earlier, it was decreed that he'd live less years; either 120 minus one year, or 100 years minus a year — each person depending on his allotted years — and he was already punished, but doesn't know that he was punished. That's what I heard from HaGaon HaTzaddik Rav Eliyahu Lopian, *zt"l*.

Actually, that's what we say in Rosh Hashanah: "Who will live and who will die, who in his right time, and who not in his right time." This is the meaning of "not in his right time," Heaven decreases his years, he dies before his time. Therefore, the fact that he had a good year last year is no proof that he came out meritorious in judgment.

The Fear of Eating Up Reward of Mitzvos in This World

It could also be other things. It's written at the end of *Parashas VaEschanan (Devarim 7:10)*, "And He repays those who hate Him to their face, to destroy them." Rashi explains: "In his life,

He repays him for the good [he has done] in order to destroy him from Olam HaBa." That is, Heavenly conduct is that if tzaddikim have a sin, they are immediately punished in this world, and then they will merit Gan Eden in the next world. But the opposite is true regarding the wicked. When they perform mitzvos and *maasim tovim*, they receive their reward immediately in this world, and then do not receive reward in Olam HaBa.

The reason for this is because the wicked man does not want Olam HaBa — he's looking for Olam HaZeh, not Olam HaBa; after all, why is he a *rasha*? Because he doesn't want Olam HaBa and he's not afraid of Gehinnom. Therefore, in *Shamayim*, they give him what he desires, and since he wants Olam HaZeh, he will receive Olam HaZeh.

It turns out, based on this, that if a person has a good life all year long, it could just be because he is a *rasha* and they're giving him the reward for his mitzvos in this world, instead of receiving Gan Eden in Olam HaBa. Therefore, someone who has a good year is not necessarily a tzaddik.

The truth is, the *Shelah (Maseches Tamid, Perek Ner Mitzvah, 134)* has a special *tefillah* to recite about not eating up one's reward in Olam HaZeh. This is the *tefillah*: "And I am very frightened for my soul that wealth should not *chas v'shalom* be to my detriment — to consume the minimal *zechuyos* I have. And if it is so, please take my blessings away so I will not observe my harm in Olam HaBa, the Eternal world. And if Your good will is for benefit and not for detriment, put in my heart and in the hearts of my family members not to use your gifts for physical pleasures. May it be used to support *baalei Torah*, upstanding people, may it be used for charity and *gemillus chasadim*, for those both near and far, and may Hashem's word be upheld." This is the special *tefillah* not to receive *sechar* for mitzvos in this world, because it could be that a person is given reward for his mitzvos in this world, and instead of Olam HaBa, he'll receive Olam HaZeh, and that's not worth it.

Of course, there are many mitzvos for which a person receives fruits in this world, as is written in the *mishnah* in the beginning of *Peah*: "These are matters for which man eats their dividends in Olam HaZeh, and the principal awaits him in Olam HaBa: honoring parents, *gemillus chasadim*, arising early to the *beis hamidrash*... and Torah study is equal to them all." If anyone has these mitzvos — and the *Shelah HaKadosh* surely did — why would he worry? After all, if he has [an enjoyable] Olam HaZeh, it's just the dividends, and it does not come on account of Olam HaBa.

However, the true concern is that there are other mitzvos for which one does not receive dividends in this world. If he receives reward for them in this world, he will lose Olam

HaBa. So too, even when it comes to mitzvos for which one receives dividends in this world, like Torah study, for example, it could be that he receives more than just the dividends here. If so, he will lose the principal. This is what the *tefillah* is about: that one should not consume his principal in Olam HaZeh.

These are all concerns, for one cannot know if he ate up his principal in this world. Therefore, the fact that the past year was a good one, is no proof that he is actually a tzaddik.

Kavanah When Reciting Berachos

L'maaseh, there are certain things that are very hard to fulfill, but once a person gets used to them, it's not difficult anymore. For example, if one eats a fruit and makes a *berachah* (*birkas hanehenin*), he should feel that Hashem has done a *chesed* with him by giving him a fruit to eat. He should make a *berachah* happily, because he is happy that *Shamayim* gave him this fruit — after all, everything is with *hashgachah pratis*. There are people who don't have any fruit, and he must feel that it's a Heavenly *chesed*, and that's why he's making a *berachah* — *borei pri ha-eitz* — and he's expressing gratitude for the fruit he has.

This train of thought does not come naturally. After all, when a person eats a fruit, or anything else, does he immediately think that it's a *chesed Hashem* that he has this food, so he must express his gratitude?

The same is true regarding *berachos* on mitzvos. For example, if someone wants to eat bread, he has to wash his hands and recite the *berachah* “*al netillas yadayim*,” for the washing is a mitzvah. We actually mention this in the *berachah*: “Who has sanctified with His mitzvos and commanded us...” — we have a mitzvah of *netillas yadayim*, and we must be happy about it, because we are fulfilling a mitzvah and mitzvos bring us joy; through them, we merit Olam HaBa, and we are doing Hashem's will. This is “*simchah shel mitzvah*.”

Aside from actually washing hands, which is a mitzvah, reciting the *berachah* is another mitzvah: *birkas hamitzvos*. The *Sefer Chassidim* writes that when a person makes a *berachah* over a mitzvah, he must be happy and actually feel his obligation of *hoda'ah*, expressing his thanks that he has the ability and opportunity to fulfill this mitzvah and recite a *berachah* over it. He has the mitzvah of washing hands, and the mitzvah of the *berachah*, and then when he goes to eat, he recites the *berachah* “*hamotzi lechem min ha'aretz*” — another *berachah*, another mitzvah!

Eating L'shem Shamayim — Avodas Hashem

When a person eats, if he eats because he needs to, then his actual eating is a mitzvah. See the Rambam (*Hilchos Deios* 3:3) and in *mussar sefarim*, who speak about this concept. If a person wouldn't eat, he would not have the strength to fulfill the 613 mitzvos. After all, he is a servant, a servant of Hashem. Just as a soldier in the royal army must eat to keep his strength up to serve the king, so too, we are

Hashem's soldiers, Hashem's servants, and we must eat to keep up our strength for *avodas Hashem*.

It turns out that the actual eating is a mitzvah; this is why we must eat. Aside from the prohibition of committing suicide, there is also an obligation to eat and be healthy enough to maintain his servitude, and he is serving Hashem through eating.

The Rambam writes there about sleeping as well, and cites Chazal's statement (*Avos* 2:12): “May all your actions be for the sake of Heaven.” That is, all your physical actions, your physical needs, should be *l'shem Shamayim*. For example, when a person goes to sleep, he should think that he's obligated to sleep now, like a servant who must sleep so he will have the strength to awaken the next day and serve his master — to serve Hashem, the Creator of the world. If a person lives with this mindset, “it turns out that his sleep is service of Hashem” (*Rambam*, *ibid.*). He serves Hashem in his sleep! Even sleep, which is a *shev v'al taaseh*, passive behavior, and all the more so, eating, which is *kum v'aseh*, active, — and one's actions all day long — is *avodas Hashem*.

But if a person eats more than necessary, this is not *avodas Hashem*. Although for some people, eating more is necessary for his *yishuv hadaas*, as is written in *Mesillas Yesharim* (end of Chap. 1) that all materialistic matters which are necessary for *yishuv hadaas* are considered an obligation. But if it's not needed for his *yishuv hadaas*, and he just wants to eat more because he enjoys it, and not for health reasons — if he eats too much he'll actually harm his health, as the Rambam says (*Hilchos Deios* 4:15) most illnesses are the result of overeating — then it is not *avodas Hashem*.

In the *Iggeres HaGra*, it says that all worldly pleasures turn into *marah* in the grave. This means that if the pleasures were just “*stam*,” and not a necessity, it is a sin. Of course, these are very high *madreigos*, but we must know that this is the reality.

Simchah shel Mitzvah All Day Long

The Rambam (*Hilchos Yom Tov* 6:20) cites the *pasuk* in the *Tochachah*, “Since you did not serve Hashem your G-d with joy and with good-heartedness (*Devarim* 28:47). He explains that the *Tochachah* was about the lack of joy in *avodas Hashem*; that people perform the mitzvos and serve Hashem, but without joy — they aren't happy while serving Hashem. This is the sin mentioned in the *Tochachah*. In the same place, the Rambam discusses *simchas Yom Tov*, which must be the result of “joy that includes service of the Creator of all.” *Simchah* of *avdus*, servitude! If one is lacking this joy of servitude, it's also a sin. Based on what we've mentioned, every single person is involved in *avodas Hashem* and if so, he must be joyful in his every action. He must be happy all day long.

The Gemara (*Berachos* 9b) tells us about Rav Bruna, who “connected *geulah* to *tefillah*, and his smile did not leave his face that entire day.” That is, he was happy about this

all day long. This seems to be saying that if not for this he wouldn't have been happy all day.

But really the Gemara's wording is that "a smile did not leave his face," meaning, he was especially happy and walked around with a smile all day. Well, of course, a person is supposed to be happy with his lot and be happy with his *avodas Hashem* all day, but to walk around with a perpetual smile is a special level of *simchah*. He reached this level that day when he merited the special act of "connecting *geulah* to *tefillah*."

Seeing Yiras Shamayim Has an Effect

We are in the final days before Rosh Hashanah. Rav Yisrael Salanter wrote in a letter (*Ohr Yisrael* 14): "In the earlier years, every single person was terrified when he heard the voice calling out 'Kodesh Elul.'" On Shabbos Mevarchim Chodesh Elul, there was such terror and fear of judgment, they were horrorstruck! That's how it was before Rav Yisrael Salanter's times — when he wrote the letter, times had already changed because there was *yeridas hadoros* during Rav Yisrael's generation. But just a number of decades ago, there was fear with horror, and then it was lacking.

Rav Yisrael explains why this changed. "When there were no longer any great *yirei Hashem*, whose terror of the awe of judgment showed on their faces and made an impression on those around them." That is, in the past there were many great *yirei Hashem*, people with *yiras Shamayim*, and the fear was apparent on their faces. Seeing *yiras Shamayim* influences the entire *tzibbur*. As we know, when there are great *yirei Shamayim*, and others see their *yiras Shamayim*, it has an influence.

The story is told about a person from many years ago who traveled to one of the great tzaddikim of his time and came back home full of wonder. They asked him, "What did you see in his court, and what influence did he have on you?" He said, "I saw clearly that there is a Ribbono shel Olam." They asked him, "Didn't you know that before?" He said, "Before I *knew* it, but I didn't *see* it. At the tzaddik's house, I *saw yiras Shamayim*."

In a similar vein, one of our former talmidim who now holds a public position, told me the following: His job involves lots of pressure — and he's often pressured to do things that aren't completely honest. It's a big challenge, but he says he withstands the *nisayon* because he learned in Yeshivah and saw the Ponovezer Rav and the mashgiach Rav Yechezkel *zt"l*. He saw the *yiras Shamayim* on their faces and he gained *yiras Shamayim* from that. When a person sees *yiras Shamayim*, it has an influence. Just the bare knowledge is not enough, one must see it. Seeing is something different entirely.

Rav Yisrael Salanter wrote that in the past, there were great *yera'im*, whose *yiras Shamayim* was so great, and it was visible on their faces, and they made an impression of *yiras Shamayim* on the entire *tzibbur*. Now, just a few years later — in Rav Yisrael Salanter's times — he writes,

"the great *yerei Hashem* have disappeared." They've already passed away and there's no one to influence us. Rav Yisrael himself was a tremendous influence, and he had great *talmidim* who were influences, but they were individuals. It wasn't the same level of influence that had existed previously. We don't have great *yera'im* to influence us, as there were in the past.

Chavakuk Came and Condensed Them into One

Yiras Shamayim is *emunah*. Chazal said (*Makkos* 24a), "Chavakuk came and condensed them into one, as it says, 'A tzaddik shall live through his *emunah*.'" Before that, Dovid came and condensed them into eleven principles (*Tehillim* 15): "Hashem, who will live in Your tent... one who walks in innocence and acts with righteousness..." Then Yeshayah came and condensed them into six principles, Michah came and condensed them into three, and in the end, Chavakuk came — at end of the period of the prophets — and condensed them into one: *emunah*.

This means as long as *emunah* was strong, they had to add *chizuk* through other worthy behaviors — as Dovid said, "One who walks in innocence and acts with righteousness, and one who speaks truth in his heart..." (The Gemara there explains what each description means.) But in Chavakuk's generation, *emunah* diminished due to *yeridas hadoros*, and if there is a lack of *emunah*, one cannot strengthen anything else! That's why Chavakuk said that *emunah* must be strengthened before working on anything else. Everything is in Heaven's hands, and *yiras Shamayim* is *emunah*.

But this is not simple, and when one sees *yiras Shamayim*, it has an influence. But if one doesn't see it, there's no influence, and then what should one do? The *eitzah* is to learn *mussar*! See what's written in the *mussar sefarim*, in *Chovos HaLevavos* and all the other *sefarim*, *emunah* and *yiras Shamayim* is discussed there.

Emunah is a positive mitzvah; it is one of the *Aseres HaDibros* (*Shemos* 20:2): "I am Hashem your G-d Who took you out from the Land of Mitzrayim." This is the mitzvah of *emunah*, the first mitzvah of the *Aseres HaDibros*, and we heard it from Hashem Himself (*Makkos* 24a). Believe, believe, believe — put it in your heart and don't forget about *emunah*.

The Obligation to Add Levels of Yirah

Rabbeinu Yonah writes in *Shaarei Teshuvah* (*Shaar* 1, 17, 20; *Shaar* 3 15,17, 164) that *yiras Shamayim* is a mitzvah that has many levels. One must increase his *yiras Shamayim* — not only must one take care not to go down in his level of *yiras Shamayim*, he must take care to increase it! *Yiras Shamayim* encompasses many levels.

For example, the Chazon Ish sometimes was so weak that when he had to eat, he ate without reciting a *berachah*. He knew that if he'd make a *berachah*, he would faint, and if he wouldn't eat, he'd be in the category of *pikuach nefesh*, and he was obligated to eat. But the *berachah*, too, was

pikuach nefesh — saying a *berachah*, feeling that he is speaking to HaKadosh Baruch Hu. But if he'd recite the *berachah*, he'd faint. This is a level of *yirah*.

My father told me about Rav Baruch Ber's behavior before every *berachah* he recited. When he started saying, "Baruch," he would stand there in fear and seriousness; he'd feel the *berachah*, feel what he was saying and to Whom he was speaking. What a preparation for reciting a *berachah*! And the Chazon Ish would at times reach a state of *pikuach nefesh*; what a level of *yiras Shamayim*!

Of course, there are many other levels. There are many other levels between our level and the Chazon Ish's, but we must progress. How does one progress? I can't speak about it, because I am not on that level, but this is just a suggestion, a documented one: *mussar sefarim* increase *yiras Shamayim* and have the same influence one can gain from seeing *yiras Shamayim*.

Mentioning Hashem's Name Stimulates Sacred Thoughts

The *Shulchan Aruch* states (*Orach Chaim siman aleph*), "I place Hashem before me always' is a great principle in the Torah and in the attributes of the righteous." The Rambam (*Moreh Nevuchim*) also mentions this that a person must always remember that there is Divine supervision, as it says (*Avos 2:1*): "Know what is above you: an eye that sees, an ear that hears, and all your deeds are inscribed in a book." When a person remembers this, his behavior is completely different; he acts with *yiras Shamayim* (as the *Shulchan Aruch* mentions further on, that through acting this way, one will attain *yirah*).

The *Shulchan Aruch* primarily mentions the influence this has on one's actions — all his actions and movements change when remembering this principle of "Shivisi." However, it also effects one's thoughts, as Rabbeinu Yonah writes in *Shaarei Teshuvah* (3:27), "One of the warnings dependent on the heart is 'Guard yourself, lest you forget Hashem your G-d...' With this warning, the Torah enjoins us to remember *Hashem Yisbarach* at all times. A person is obligated to try to acquire behaviors derived from this admonition of 'remembering,' such as *yirah*, *tzni'us*, *kishut machshavos*, and *tachsis hamiddos*, because Hashem's holy children will attain every beautiful behavior that embellishes its owner by remembering *Hashem Yisbarach*, as it states (*Yeshayah 45:25*), 'Through Hashem shall all *Bnei Yisrael* find righteousness and boast.'"

That is, by remembering *Hashem Yisbarach*, which is "Shivisi Hashem l'negdi tamid," one arrives at *kishut machshavos*, beautifully adorned thoughts! Like a piece of jewelry, an adornment, with beauty, his thoughts will be so beautiful and decorated, they will be thoughts of a high *madreigah*! In the "Hineni" prayer recited before laying tefillin, we ask Hashem to bring down a holy flow upon us and holy thoughts, due to the tefillin's holiness, and we need a special tefillah for this, notwithstanding the influence of the tefillin's holiness. And here Rabbeinu Yonah is telling us that there's a way to attain these holy thoughts — by remembering and mentioning Hashem's name! Remembering *Hashem Yisbarach* influences our thoughts to be holy thoughts.

The *Biur Halachah* (*siman aleph*) cites the *Sefer HaChinuch*, that there are six constant mitzvos a person can always be involved with; they can be fulfilled by thought, and they are mitzvos of *emunah* and *yichud Hashem*. One of these mitzvos is "Do not stray after your heart and after your eyes" — don't lend importance to other things. And there are other similar mitzvos that one can fulfill through his thoughts, and merit unimaginable reward merely by thinking! The *Biur Halachah* mentions them in short, and the *Chayei Adam* discusses them at greater length.

If so, we now have many practical ideas how to acquire *zechuyos*. The most important one is to increase *yiras Hashem* in heart-related mitzvos, as well as in deeds — such as reciting *berachos* with *kavanah*, more *kavanah* in davening. There are many methods and *eitzos* about performing good deeds, which will help us attain merit for the Yom HaDin.

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One thing that's very important to keep in mind regarding the current corona pandemic is that we must adhere to all the health and safety precautions, and we must not make light of them. There is an obligation to be careful because it is a plague and it's not simple at all. Just like here, where everyone is being careful and wearing masks and keeping a distance from each other, as well as following all the other requirements — this must be followed on the Yamim Noraim as well. And we must take care not to make light of all the health regulations. *B'ezras Hashem*, may we be *zocheh* to *siyatta d'Shemaya* and a *ksivah v'chasimah tovah*!

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להצלחת בניהם ובנותיהם
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