

# Darkei HaChizuk

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

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

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## Life Is a Chain of Nisyonos

The *Mesillas Yesharim* writes (Chap. 1) that all worldly matters are *nisyonos*, every step of life is a *nisayon*. Take poverty and wealth — poverty is a *nisayon*, yet on the other hand, wealth is a *nisayon* as well.

The *Mesillas Yesharim* cites a *pasuk* from *Mishlei* (30:9): “Lest I am satisfied and I deny, and I say, ‘Who is Hashem?’ And lest I become impoverished and I steal.” When a person is content and he has wealth, he is liable to forget Hashem, as it states (*Devarim* 8:12–14), “Lest you eat and are satisfied... and your heart becomes haughty and you forget.” The Torah warns us (*Ibid.*, 8:11): “Guard yourself lest you forget Hashem your G-d.” On the other hand, poverty is also a *nisayon*, as it states, “Lest I become impoverished and I steal.” The same is true regarding all other worldly matters: poverty and wealth; serenity and suffering; they are all *nisyonos* for man.

The *Mesillas Yesharim* writes that someone who withstands a *nisayon* “will be *haadam hashaleim*, a complete person, sanctified in Hashem’s holiness.” Withstanding a *nisayon* gives a person *sheleimus*, perfection, and the *nisayon* makes him *shaleim*, complete. Before the *nisayon*, he does not have a *madreigah*, but withstanding a *nisayon* transforms him into a *baal madreigah*.

## Withstanding a Nisayon Creates a New Madreigah

In connection with Avraham Avinu’s *nisyonos*, the Ramban quotes Chazal who said (*Avos* 5:3) that Avraham Avinu was tested with ten *nisyonos*, as it states (*Bereishis* 22:1), “And Elokim tested Avraham.” This begs an explanation. After all, HaKadosh Baruch Hu knows the future and everything is revealed before Him, and He surely knew that Avraham Avinu would withstand the *nisayon*, so why was it necessary to test him?

The Ramban (*Bereishis* ad loc.) explains that the *nisayon* draws out a person’s potential and transforms it from a passive state to an active state; thus, the person attains a higher *madreigah*. If so, HaKadosh Baruch Hu already knew that Avraham Avinu had the potential to withstand his *nisayon*, but actually doing so brings him up to a higher *madreigah*. Every single *nisayon* adds another *madreigah* and more *sheleimus*. This is why Hashem challenged Avraham with ten *nisyonos* — every *nisayon* added another *madreigah* to his abilities, and this is how he achieved *sheleimus*.

I believe someone writes that each of Avraham’s *nisyonos* followed a specific order. The tenth *nisayon* was the Akeidah — the most difficult of them all. It was only possible for Avraham withstand the test of the Akeidah after he withstood the first nine *nisyonos*. Each *nisayon* added another level to his *madreigah* and degree of *sheleimus*, and thus, he had the ability and emotional strength to withstand the test of the Akeidah. Had he not endured the other *nisyonos*, he would have never been able to withstand the test of the Akeidah.

This is what the *pasuk* means (*Bereishis* 22:12): “Now I know that you are a G-d-fearing person.” Now, after the tenth test, you are a *yarei Elokim* because every single *nisayon* that Avraham withstood brought him up to a higher *madreigah*, and that’s how he attained *sheleimus*. Now! After all the *nisyonos*.

## Difficulties in Esek HaTorah Are Nisyonos

Similarly, in our present situation, we are challenged with the corona pandemic and everyone — even healthy people — has to take all necessary precautions so as not to spread the virus to others, *chas v’shalom*. There is an obligation of *zehirus* — to take all the necessary precautions seriously.

But at the same time, we also have to learn. Although we must be careful about the pandemic and that creates challenges in *esek haTorah*, we still must learn! One must be as careful as necessary and learn as much as possible. **Even though it’s harder, we must learn as much as possible, utilizing all our abilities and strength!**

And this too is a *nisayon* that we must withstand. A person who withstands his *nisayon* “will be *haadam hashaleim*, a complete person,” as the *Mesillas Yesharim* writes. Every *nisayon* increases *sheleimus*, and after passing the test, a person achieves a higher *madreigah*.

## Constant Growth through Nisyonos

The truth is, this is not specific to the pandemic we are presently experiencing. A person is constantly facing tests, even under regular circumstances, as the *Mesillas Yesharim* writes in Chapter 6: “A person’s natural inclination weighs him down, because the earthiness of physicality is coarse, and therefore he will not desire toil and work.” A person by nature wants to rest and enjoys

resting, but he has an obligation of *avodas Hashem* — *l'ovdo*, to serve Him! Torah, *avodah* and *gemillus chasadim*. And there are 613 mitzvos which we must fulfill with all our ability. On the one hand, there is our natural inclination — which is the yetzer hara — which means a person wants to rest and not fulfill the mitzvos. And the other hand, there is a *chiyuv*, one's obligations as a Torah observant Jew. This is a *nisayon*, and anyone who withstands it rises in *madreigah*. Every *nisayon* increases a person's *madreigah* and *sheleimus*!

It turns out that if a person utilizes his time and abilities *b'sheleimus*, he will constantly be rising and rising, achieving one *madreigah* after another: *madreigos* in Torah, *madreigos* in *avodah*, and *madreigos* in *gemillus chasadim*, as it says in *Avos* (Chap. 1): "The world stands on three things: Torah, *avodah*, and *gemillus chasadim*."

### When to Stop Learning Torah to Do Chesed

It was decreed upon the members of Eli HaKohen's household that they would not live long. The *pasuk* states (*Shmuel I* 2:33), "And all those raised in your house will die young." In the next *pasuk*, Hashem says, "Therefore I have sworn to the house of Eli, that neither sacrifice or *minchah* will be an atonement for the iniquity of the House of Eli forever." Chazal comment (*Rosh Hashanah* 18a): "There will be no atonement through sacrifice or *minchah*, but atonement can be achieved through Torah and *gemillus chasadim*." *Korbanos* would not be effective in nullifying the decree, but Torah and *gemillus chasadim* would help. If they would be involved in Torah and *gemillus chasadim*, they would enjoy long lives.

The Gemara there relates the following about Abaye and Rabbah, who both descended from the House of Eli: Rabbah was involved in Torah, and he lived 40 years, while Abaye was involved in Torah and *gemillus chasadim*, and he lived 60 years. This is perplexing. If this was the case, why was Rabbah only involved in Torah — by being involved solely in *esek haTorah*, he only lived to age 40, and if he would've been involved in *chesed* as well, he would have lived another 20 years. So why didn't he do *chesed* just as Abaye did?

The explanation is simple. ***Gemillus chasadim* is a mitzvah only when it's necessary. If it's not necessary and there are others who can do the chesed, then one certainly may not stop his learning to do chesed. Torah learning precedes chesed**, and a mitzvah that can be done by others does not push off Torah study (see Rambam, *Hilchos Talmud Torah* Chap. 3). If someone else can do the *chesed*, you must learn and not go around looking for other mitzvos.

Abaye was involved in *gemillus chesed* in addition to Torah study, because Heaven arranged matters in such a way that *chasadim* that could not be done by anyone

else fell into his lap. He was obligated to stop learning Torah in order to carry out those *chasadim*. But there were other people in Rabbah's circles who did *chesed*, and if he would have stopped learning and looked around for *chasadim* to do, his *chesed* would not have granted him longevity!

Life is full of *nisyonos*, and every additional test adds another *madreigah* and more *sheleimus*. And thus a person can rise ever higher his entire life; he can experience spiritual growth daily, and even hourly; he will constantly be rising and rising by withstanding his *nisyonos*.

### Torah and Mitzvah Observance out of Love — Not a Nisayon!

There is a level of Torah study that does not involve a *nisayon*. Indeed, Chazal (*Eiruvin* 54b) relate that Rabbi Elazar ben Pedas would sit and learn Torah in the lower marketplace of Tzipori, and his upper garment was strewn in the upper marketplace. This means he was busy learning Torah all day long and didn't notice that he left his upper garment somewhere else. They attributed the following *pasuk* to him (*Mishlei* 5:19), "You shall always be intoxicated with love [of Torah]." Due to his immense *ahavas haTorah*, Rabbi Elazar didn't even realize that he wasn't wearing his cloak.

This is the level of Torah learning that is not even a *nisayon*; to the contrary, it is so enticing and attractive that he cannot stop. When there is *ahavas haTorah*, the love draws him in and it's hard to stop! I know of a certain *yeshivah bachur* who started to learn with *ahavas haTorah*. He learned for a long time with great *hasmadah* and couldn't stop, until he eventually became so weak that he needed some serious rest to regain his strength. When someone has this level of *ahavas haTorah*, it is not a *nisayon* because the Torah draws him in deeper and deeper, and he is so attracted to it that he cannot stop.

There is a level of *gemillus chesed* that quashes the *nisayon* of doing *chesed*. Avraham Avinu reached this level. He sat in the opening of his tent in the heat of the day, on the third day after his *bris* and looked for people with whom to do *chesed*! Because he loved *chesed* and wanted to do *chesed*. He craved doing *chesed* and it was so enticing for him that without doing *chesed*, he simply didn't feel well! When a person reaches this level of *chesed*, it is not a *nisayon* for him — to the contrary, it is enticing because he loves *chesed* so much.

Of course, there are other *nisyonos* because there are other mitzvos, such as *Shivisi Hashem l'negdi tamid*, "I place Hashem before me always," as the *Shulchan Aruch* explains (*Orach Chaim siman aleph*). And there are many other things as well. In any case, this level of *chesed*, where it is not a *nisayon*, does exist. Just as there is a characteristic of *ahavas haTorah*, in which the

Torah is so enticing that it's hard to stop learning, so too, in *chesed*, there is a characteristic of *ahavas chesed*, of loving kindness.

As we mentioned, there are three things: Torah, *avodah*, and *gemillus chassadim*. In *avodah*, which includes davening as well, there is a level of loving *avodah*. The *Shulchan Aruch* discusses the concept of nullification of one's physical senses during *tefillah*, which is almost like the level of prophecy, where the prophet doesn't feel his body. It is told about the Chazon Ish and the Brisker Rav, who davened with such concentration that they didn't hear people speaking. All their physical senses were nullified as they davened. This is the level of loving *tefillah* — with such *deveikus* in *avodah*!

Every aspect of *ruchniyus* has many levels, and one can rise higher and higher until he reaches the level of "*ahavah*" — at this stage, it is no longer a *nisayon*, it just happens naturally. Then there are other *nisyonos* in other matters, in higher *madreigos*, and one can rise even higher and higher.

### Hishtadlus and Siyatta D'Shemaya Go Hand in Hand

How does one merit reaching these *madreigos*? Everything depends on *hishtadlus*, it depends on how much *hishtadlus* he does! If a person tries and does *hishtadlus*, he will receive *siyatta d'Shemaya*, as Chazal say (*Yoma* 38b), "One who comes to be purified will be helped." One simply needs to come to be purified, and then Heaven sends help. If a person comes to be purified in Torah, he receives help to succeed in Torah; a person who comes to be purified in *chesed*, receives help to succeed in *chesed* — it all depends on "one who comes to help," *hishtadlus*. The level of *siyatta d'Shemaya* one receives reflects the level of *hishtadlus* he invests.

But if a person doesn't try, well, Rabbeinu Yonah writes in *Shaarei Teshuvah* (3:17), that a person must try to advance in all the lofty *madreigos*. This refers to *mitzvos aseï*, and there are many levels in each of these *mitzvos*: *yiras Shamayim*, *ahavas Hashem*, *ahavas chesed*, *ahavas haTorah*. He writes as follows: **"A person was created in order to attain these levels. So what hope is there for a creature if he does not place the labor of his soul and his primary business in matters for which he was created?"** That is, man was created for this purpose; this is why he is alive, and this is why he has strength and abilities — to utilize them to fulfill his obligations. If he does not do so, what hope is there for him?

A similar idea is written elsewhere in *Shaarei Teshuvah* (1:10): If a person has *kochos* and does not utilize them, why should he continue to receive those *kochos*? **"And since I was created for this, and the opposite is occurring, why should I deserve life?"** If I don't fulfill the purpose I was created for, what merit do I have to remain alive? I am living to bring honor to Hashem, and

if I don't create the *kevod Shamayim* I am able and obligated to create, *lamah li chaim* — why should I deserve life? What merit to I have to live?

### The Obligation to Utilize One's Abilities for Kevod Shamayim

As is known, and as we've spoken about in the past, Chazal say (*Yoma* 22b), "Shaul [sinned] with one, and he lost his kingdom, David [sinned] with two, and he did not lose his kingdom." That is, David HaMelech committed two sins, yet retained his kingdom, while Shaul only had one sin — that he did not fulfill the *mitzvah* of totally eradicating Amalek — and as a result, he lost his rulership. Let us try to understand the difference between the two kings and the reasoning behind this.

The *Sefer Halkkarim* writes (*maamar* 4, chap. 26) that David HaMelech's sins were on a personal, individual, level; they were not connected to his kingdom. He carried out his role as king *b'sheleimus*. Shaul HaMelech's sin was his negligence in eradicating Amalek, which is one of the obligations connected to a kingdom. The obligation to destroy Amelek only comes into effect when there is a king (see *Sanhedrin* 20b) — this is one of the obligations of the royalty. Shaul HaMelech did not fulfill this *mitzvah* completely; he left Aggag and the sheep alive. Since he did not carry out his role as king *b'sheleimus*, he lost his rulership! He was given *malchus* in order to fulfill his role as king; if he does not fulfill his role, he has no right being king.

The same is true regarding every single person. Hashem gave him life and abilities to fulfill the 613 *mitzvos* according to his abilities and with all his strength. If he does not, then as Rabbeinu Yonah writes, "*lamah li chaim*" — in what merit does he deserve to remain alive!?

### One Who Comes to Be Helped Is Helped

Despite all this, there is a solution. Teshuvah! If a person does teshuvah with regret (*charatah*) and with leaving the sin (*azivas hacheit*), then he is helped: one who comes to be purified is helped. His intentional sins are turned into unintentional sins, or even into merits (see *Yoma* 86b). Everything changes. When a person has sinned already, and then does teshuvah for his sins, these sins become more challenging since he has already gotten used to committing them. And once he overcomes his nature, he is given the *zechuyos* of "one who comes to be purified" and *Shamayim* helps him. All his intentional sins are retroactively transformed into unintentional sins and merits!

How does one put himself in the category of "one who comes to be purified?" As we've said numerous times, it can only happen through having a steady *mussar seder*, even if it's only a few minutes daily. If the *mussar seder*

is steady every day, it has an influence on one's entire life and influences him to fulfill his obligations. One needs *siyatta d'Shemaya* to fulfill his duties, and "one who comes to purified is helped."

*Baruch Hashem*, we are all *osek baTorah*, each person according to his abilities, and we do mitzvos and *maasim tovim*. We also live with *emunah*, we trust in Hashem, with perfection in *emunah* and good *middos*.

*Ashreinu, mah tov chelkeinu!* How fortunate we are!  
How good is our lot!

However, there are many *madreigos* to reach and to grow in, many levels to attain. The way to do so is through learning *mussar sefarim* and through *hisbonenus*. *Yehi ratzon* that Heaven grants us *siyatta d'Shemaya* so that every single one of us will merit rising higher and higher in all these *madreigos*.

As of now, we are still faced with the corona pandemic, *lo aleinu*, and there are many people suffering and in pain as a result. There are also many challenges. We must remember that everything is in Heaven's hands, and *Kol mah d'avid Rachmana, l'tav avid*, "Whatever the Merciful One does is for the best." What is the *l'tav avid* in corona? The simple answer is "Hashem did this so they should fear Him" (*Koheles* 3:14) — so that we should have *yiras Shamayim*! Since we know that everything is in Heaven's hands, and coronavirus is also in Heaven's hands — who should get sick and who should not — people automatically are frightened about what's happening in Heaven, about what the Heavenly court will decree on him, his family, and his friends. He's frightened about what Heaven will do.

Therefore, the solution is that there should be *rachamei Shamayim*, Heavenly mercy. But in order for Heaven to have mercy, we must beg for mercy and we must increase *yiras Shamayim*. This is the purpose — "so they should fear Him!" We should be cognizant of the fact that everything is in Heaven's hands. Who should we turn to? To the *Rofeh cholim*, the Healer of the sick, *Rofeh kol basar*, the Healer of all flesh, and we should beg for mercy: "Heal us Hashem, and we will be healed, "for You are the Faithful, Merciful Healer." Then our *tefillah* will be *avodah she'balev*, service of the heart, *tefillah* with *yiras Shamayim*. This is the *l'tav avid* — to bring our *tefillah* and *yiras Shamayim* up another level.

If so, the purpose of this all is so that we increase and strengthen our *yiras Shamayim*. There are many levels of *yiras Shamayim*, as Rabbeinu writes in *Shaarei Teshuvah* (3:17) that *yiras Shamayim* is one of the lofty *madreigos* that encompasses many levels. One can always increase his level of *yirah*. Indeed, the *Shulchan Aruch* writes in the first section regarding *Shivisi Hashem l'negdi tamid*, "I constantly place Hashem before me" — one should always remember that the king sees whatever I do. Not only that, He is always aware of my thoughts, whether I am thinking meaningless thoughts or holy thoughts. And it is possible to have holy thoughts! Just as *bittul Torah* exists in thought, *kiyum Torah* exists in thought. True, it is not simple, and it is difficult, it's not so easy — but it is possible.

Excerpted from Rabbeinu's *sichah* in his home on Chol HaMoed Sukkos

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