

# 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 Chayei Sarah 5781

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## Maximizing One's Time and Abilities for Torah

There are talented people who have great abilities, but they don't use their *kochos* to the fullest. For example, there are people who have great *havanah* and excellent memories, they remember what they learn and understand it well. and they're young and if they would use their time wisely, they would sit and learn and finish Shas. And once they'd finish Shas, they'd review it again and they'd remember and understand what they learned. If they would maximize their time, they'd be able to be on a high *madreigah*, they'd be *gedolei Torah*. They have the opportunity, but they don't take advantage of it.

On the other hand, there are those who do use their time wisely. And even though they're young, they finish Shas — without pressuring themselves or investing special effort! They learn with sweetness and curiosity; it's interesting and enticing because there's sweetness in Torah, as the *pasuk* states (*Tehillim* 19:11), "And they are sweeter than honey." And Torah evokes inquisitiveness; it's very interesting, as *Rashi* on the words "which I command you today" (*Devarim* 6:6) states: "The words of Torah are like a new law." Just as the daily news is interesting and people want to be up on the news — what's going on in America... Even though it has nothing to do with them, it's interesting. So too, there is curiosity in Torah, and it's interesting: what's the question, what's the answer...

It's no secret that irreligious Jews learn Gemara, because it's interesting to them and it draws them in. There was a doctor in Russia who was a *baal kishron* and he sat and learned. He did not keep the Torah and mitzvos, but he was a *lamdan*.

Some people do maximize their time and they learn and remember. It's well known that if a person learns Torah because they have *ahavas haTorah*, they will have special *siyatta d'Shemaya* and they merit being *mezakeh es harabbim* to learn Torah. This is the reality. If someone is closely connected to Torah because he loves Torah, not only will he have a happy life and be fortunate, as Chazal say (*Avos* 6:4): "You will be fortunate in this world," but he will also receive *siyatta d'Shemaya* that others want him to be *marbitz Torah*. We see this time and again.

We've already said that positions in *harbatzas Torah* are not attained through *hishtadlus*. Doing *hishtadlus* is a waste of time, because *zechuyos* are the only thing that

helps. *Hishtadlus* does not help at all! This is the reality; this is the *zechus* of *ahavas Torah*.

## Harbatzas Torah — Learning from Talmidim

What is *harbatzas Torah* all about? Chazal say (*Taanis* 7a), "I gained more from my students than from anyone else." That is, teaching *talmidim* increases a person's *madreigah* in Torah. They say further, "I learned a lot from my *rabbanim*, and even more from my friends, and from my *talmidim*, I learned more than from everyone else." This corresponds to three matters with which the Torah is acquired (*Avos* chap. 6): serving *chachamim*, closeness with friends, sharp Torah discussion with students.

"From my *rabbanim*" is referring to Torah knowledge, as well as to the ability to understand one's learning. A rav imparts the knowledge and he also explains and provides understanding. "From my friends," on the other hand, does not refer to facts and knowledge, because one's friend doesn't know any more than he does. Therefore, it's only talking about understanding — closeness to friends increases one's understanding of Torah, because there is the level of understanding that one gains from his rebbi, but reviewing it with a friend provides a deeper level of *havanah*, with greater clarity. As we all know, reviewing a *sugya* together with friends makes it much clearer. This is the meaning of "and even more from my friends."

"And from my *talmidim*, I learned more than from everyone else" also refers to understanding — amid sharp discussion with one's *talmidim*, one's understanding is honed and become clearer. Why? The *talmidim* ask questions and the *rebbe* is forced to explain further, which naturally adds greater *havanah* and clarity. In this manner, the rebbi learns more from his *talmidim* more than he learned from his *rabbanim* and contemporaries.

This following story is told about Rav Eliyahu Mishkovsky *zt"l*, who was a great *lamdan*. He was offered a teaching position in a *yeshiva ketanah* that was not on a very high level. He asked Maran the Chazon Ish *zt"l* if he should accept the job. The Chazon Ish told him that he should, because he would have to explain things that he never even thought about. After all, when one learns in a regular fashion, there are very clear, simple *inyanim* that most people don't spend a lot of time on. When teaching *talmidim* though, and especially young *talmidim*, one will have to explain these matters as well — because the *talmidim* ask,

and they need additional explanations. This is a great benefit for the *melamed*.

This is the meaning of “from my *talmidim*, I learned more than from everyone else” — the *rav* gains greater clarity and understanding due to his *talmidim*. Who the *talmidim* are and what level they’re on makes no difference — a person gains even from weak *talmidim* — because the rebbi must explain the learning to them.

However, there are young people who don’t understand what they can merit if they’d utilize their time and energy to the fullest. They lack this happy, fortunate life — because that’s their nature: either because they are lazy, or they’ve become used to not working hard, and they’re missing the aspect of “*ashrecha b’Olam HaZeh*.”

### Increase “Yeshivah” and Beg for Mercy

The Gemara at the end of *Niddah* relates (70b) that they asked Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chanina: “What should a man do to become wise?” Meaning, how can one merit *chochmas haTorah* and attain a higher level in Torah? Even if someone is already on a high level in Torah and he learns well, one can always grow more: *va’yechkam*, become wise; attain a higher *madreigah* in *chochmas haTorah*.

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chanina responded that the way to do so is by “increasing sitting” [*yeshivah* in Hebrew]. He meant that learning alone or with a *chavrusa* is not sufficient — a person must learn in a “yeshivah,” where there are friends and *talmidim* and *rabbanim*. (See *Biur HaGra* on *Avos* chap. 2 on the *mishnah*: “*marbeh yeshivah, marbeh chochmah*.”) The *bachurim* in yeshivah are on a variety of levels, so there could be a pair of *bachurim* where one is like the rebbi and the other is like a *talmid*. This pair represents “from my *rabbanim* and from my *talmidim*.” Then there are pairs of *talmidim* who are on an equal learning level; this is “and from my friends.” Furthermore, every *bachur* can be both a *rav* and a *talmid* — with one *bachur* he’s like a *rav*, and with another, he’s like a *talmid*. This is what Rabbi Yehoshua meant: “he should increase in ‘yeshivah’” — as all the possibilities for success in Torah are present in a yeshivah setting.

They asked Rabbi Yehoshua: Many did so and did not see success — there are many *bachurim* who learn in a yeshivah who are not successful in Torah. Rabbi Yehoshua answered, “He should ask for mercy from the One to Whom wisdom belongs.” That is, one needs *siyatta d’Shemaya* as well; therefore one must daven and ask for mercy. While one may experience a certain degree of success in Torah even without davening, but it won’t be such a great success. Davening can bring about such a tremendous degree of success, it’s simply unimaginable! This is the meaning of “he should ask for mercy from the One to Whom wisdom belongs.”

The truth is, we ask in *Shemoneh Esrei, V’choneinu m’Itcha dei’ah, binah, v’haskeil*, “And grant us, from You, knowledge, insight, and wisdom.” This is a *tefillah* about Torah, for even though one’s success in Torah is contingent on his efforts — that is, he must sit and learn in yeshivah — in any case, he needs *siyatta d’Shemaya* to attain *dei’ah binah v’haskeil*. To attain *dei’ah* and *binah*, knowledge and insight, which is a level in Torah, one must daven! This is what Rabbi Yehoshua said, “Ask for mercy from the One to Whom wisdom belongs.” One needs the *zechuyos* of increasing “yeshivah,” and of asking for mercy as well.

### The Merit of Tefillah for Success in Torah

A person must beg for mercy for himself. Sometimes, however, a person does not daven for himself, but others daven for him. The Chazon Ish *zt”l* related the story of a certain *bachur* who was not very intelligent and did not have a quick grasp. Even so, he eventually became a *lamdan* and a famous *rav*. The Chazon Ish said that this was in the *zechus* of his grandmother’s *tefillos* when she lit Shabbos candles. She davened that her grandson would have success in Torah, and his grandmother’s tears gave him the *zechus* to succeed in his Torah. His success was not due to his own merits; it was in the *zechus* of his grandmother who davened for him. A grandmother’s *tefillos* come from the bottom of her heart because she has pity on her grandson and loves him, and davening helps.

All the more so if a person davens for himself and asks for mercy. The following is a true story: A young boy in Yerushalayim wanted to have *hatzlachah* in Torah. He went to shul when he knew there wouldn’t be anyone else there and stood in front of the *aron hakodesh* and begged for mercy that he should have success in Torah. What he did not know was that someone was there and he heard him davening. This young boy grew up to be a famous *gadol baTorah*. (See the introduction to *Hisragshus HaLeiv* about Rav Hirsch Michel Shapiro *zt”l*.)

This is the power of *tefillah*; one can merit greatness through Torah, as Chazal say (*Yoma* 38b), “One who comes to be purified is helped.” Elsewhere (*Berachos* 50a) Chazal expound on the *pasuk* in *Tehillim, Harchev picha v’amalahu*, “Open your mouth and I will fill it”: This is referring to *divrei Torah* — “*harchev picha v’amalahu*,” just ask, and you will receive!

We’ve already mentioned what’s written in the *sefer Yearos Devash* on the *derashos* of the Baal HaTumim (vol. 1, *derush* 4), who testified about himself, “When I don’t daven with proper *kavanah*, my Torah learning is not up to par, and I am despondent, but when the opposite occurs and I cry out to Hashem from the walls of my heart in prayer to the One Who grants me wisdom because I am very poor due to my many sins, He has mercy on me and opens my eyes to His Torah.” Success

in Torah is dependent on asking for mercy, even though he had the Tumim's abilities! Maran HaGaon Rav Elazar Menachem Shach *zt"l* related that the Netziv said that whenever he does not cry in "*Ahavah Rabbah*," he does not have *hatzlachah* in Torah that day. A person needs the *siyata d'Shemaya* attained through davening. Without davening, *hatzlachah* in Torah is impossible.

The story is told that after the Ketzos published the first volume of his *sefer Ketzos HaChoshen*, he wanted to receive a *haskamah* from a certain rav. He sent the *sefer* to this rav via a messenger. But the rav said that the *sefer HaTumim* on *Choshen Mishpat* already covers everything there is, and there's nothing to add to the *Tumim*; it's simply not *shayach*. At first, he refused to peruse the *sefer*, but in the end, he did, and he saw that this *sefer* was like the *Tumim* also! It was *shayach* to write another *sefer* like the *Tumim*. This was the Ketzos, with the Ketzos's *emunah* and *tefillah*! This is the general rule: there are many *madreigos* in Torah and a person's *madreigah* depends on his *zechuyos*! *Maasim tovim* is the way to acquire *zechuyos*, through *esek haTorah* and *tefillah*.

### Tefillah and Zechuyos for Yiras Shamayim

There's another aspect to *yiras Shamayim*: to influence others to *yiras Shamayim* and to be a *yarei Shamayim*. The way to do so is the same as in Torah — if someone wants to be a *yarei Shamayim*, he needs to daven and beg for mercy.

Even though Chazal said (*Berachos* 33b), "Everything is in Heaven's hands except for fear of Heaven," and they learned this from the *pasuk*, "What does Hashem your G-d ask from you? Only to fear Him," since fear depends on the person himself. But there are many prayers for *yiras Shamayim*, such as in the *berachah* of *Ahavah Rabbah* — "and place in our hearts to love and fear Your name." In *Kedushah d'Sidra*, we ask, "and place in our hearts love and fear of Him." Similarly, in *Sefer Tehillim* there are many requests for *yiras Shamayim*.

The explanation is that although *yirah* depends on the person himself, there are various disturbances to success in or increasing of *yiras Shamayim*, so one must daven that there are no disturbances. Then we can attain *madreigos* in *yirah*.

If so, *yiras Shamayim* is similar to Torah, in that *tefillos* are necessary.

When it comes to Torah, there are specific *zechuyos* that increase one's success in Torah, like *zechuyos* of *zikui harabbim* in Torah. Take for example, a person who influences the masses to be meritorious in Torah when he is asked to do so — as the Gemara says (*Nedarim* 54a) "he makes himself like a *midbar*, a desert, which is ownerless and available to everyone." If he makes

himself ownerless and teaches Torah for free to anyone; if he teaches Torah to anyone who asks, then in this *zechus*, he will become a *gadol baTorah*.

The same is true when it comes to *yiras Shamayim*. When others want to acquire *yiras Shamayim* and they ask him: Share with us some *divrei chizuk* in *yiras Shamayim*. Then, when he offers them *chizuk* and encourages them, he himself merits *siyatta d'Shemaya* for *yiras Shamayim* — *middah k'neged middah*. Since he influenced others to grow in *yiras Shamayim*, he too receives *yiras Shamayim*, and Heaven gives him many opportunities to acquire more *yiras Shamayim*.

### Cultivate Good Middos through Habit

The same is true regarding good *middos*, such as *v'ahavta l'reiacha kamocha*, *ahavas habriyos* and *ahavas chesed* — one must put in effort. Even if someone is born with bad *middos*, the Rambam (*Hilchos Teshuvah* 7:3) says that he must fix them, and there are ways to do so.

For example, regarding *chesed*, the Rambam's words on the *mishnah* (*Avos* 3:15), "Everything is [judged] in accordance with the number of positive deeds." The Rambam comments: If a person gives 1000 *zuz* to charity at once, this is a *madreigah* — he gave a large sum to *tzedakah* and it surely has an influence on him to increase *ahavas chesed* and give charity again. But if he'd give 1000 *zuz* over 1000 times, giving one *zuz* each time, it would have a much greater influence on him, because this act of giving is comprised of 1000 deeds. Now, even though he is giving a smaller amount each time, the abundance of deeds has an influence and brings him up to an entirely different *madreigah*. Thus, he attains a much greater level of *ahavas chesed*.

If so, if someone does not have the *middah* of *ahavas chesed*, or if he only has a tiny spark and he wants to strengthen this *middah*, he must carry out many acts of *chesed*. In this manner, he will regulate himself to *ahavas chesed*. The *Sefer HaChinuch* mentions often that the deeds influence one's nature and when a person uses his nature and performs an action, it has a good influence on his nature.

The converse is true as well. When a person is careful about a "*sheiv v'al taaseh*," it also has an influence on his nature. I've already told you about someone who often lost his temper on Fridays; Fridays are sometimes short and stress levels at home are high. The stress would make him get angry and shout at his family members, and he wanted to stop. Anger is a very bad *middah* and he wanted to get rid of his anger. He asked for help, and was told that whenever he loses his temper, he should keep quiet — or at least make sure not to shout! He should try to keep in his anger.

He tried this. The first week, he worked very hard controlling himself not to scream when he got angry, because he was really angry, But he controlled himself; he went against his nature! It was very difficult for him, however, and he was concerned that he would not be able to continue. He had no idea how he'd manage exerting such efforts to control himself every Friday. But in the end, the next Friday was easier — even though he was still angry, it wasn't as hard not to shout. And so it was, every Erev Shabbos became easier and easier, until he finally stopped getting angry at all because *hergel na'aseh teva*, "habit becomes nature" — this is actually human nature. Just as in an active mitzvah "habit becomes nature," the same is true with a passive mitzvah; habit becomes nature and one gets used to not becoming angry.

However, if someone wants to get angry and scream and is only quiet because he is scared of the other person, it will not help. His nature will not change. It can only change if he intentionally decides that he wants to overcome his anger. Then his habit will become second nature and will break his middah of anger. But if someone else forces him not to scream, and he really wants to scream and be angry, it probably will not help him or change his nature — because he's being forced and he really wants to scream. *Adaraba*, he's even angrier now that he cannot scream...

Just as when a person gives tzedakah, if he is forced to give 1000 times, it will not have any influence on him. To the contrary, it will be worse. I heard in the name of the Chazon Ish *zt"l* that if a person gives tzedakah against his will, if it's not *ahavas chesed* that's prompting him to give, but rather he's feeling stingy when he gives tzedakah, it will cause him to hate giving tzedakah. Giving when one is forced to do so will regulate him to hate *chesed*. This is what pertains to the matter of *middos tovos*.

### Learning Torah during Trying Times

Maran the Chazon Ish *zt"l* once told me, "*Torah mitoch hadachak, der Eibershter hut doss lieb*," Hashem loves Torah that is learned during trying times. Someone who learns Torah during trying times or under financial stress is beloved by Hashem!

And *avreichim* and fathers of young families who sit and learn — how much *gashmiyus* do they have? They are *osek baTorah mitoch hadachak*, and that is a tremendous *zechus*.

The Gemara at the end of *Sotah* (49a) states: Rav Yehudah the son of Rav Chiya said, "He is satiated with the *ziv haShechinah*..." Rav Acha the son of Chanina said, "Even the *pargod*, curtain, remains unlocked in front of him." This corresponds to the Chazon Ish's comments that he is beloved to Hashem. Compare this to what Chazal say (*Avos* chap. 6) that one who is *osek*

*baTorah lishmah* is called a friend, beloved... First he is called "a friend," and only afterward is he called "beloved," which is a higher *madreigah*. Learning Torah during trying times or under financial difficulty is a tremendous *zechus*. How much *gashmiyus* do today's *avreichim*, those with families, have? And they're *osek baTorah*!

I heard about a certain family who ate dairy at their Shabbos *seudah* because they didn't have meat. Their young daughter said: We have the *nisayon* of wealth, because we have food to eat and we're full. And that's the *nisayon* of wealth. That's what a little girl said! This is the atmosphere of *ashrecha baOlam HaZeh*, "you are fortunate in this World," together with *pas b'melach*, eating bread dipped in salt.

### Torah Is Acquired by Minimizing Pleasures

Just as Chazal said in *Avos* (chap. 6), "This is the path of Torah, eat bread dipped in salt and drink measured water, and sleep on the ground, and live a life of pain, yet still toil in Torah — you are fortunate in this world. They used "bread in salt" as an example that one must minimize his physical pleasures. Indeed, one of the 48 that Torah is acquired is "minimizing pleasures." This is how it should be from the outset: minimizing pleasures!

There's a question here: If so, how can we explain what Chazal tell us (*Avodah Zarah* 11a) about Rabbeinu HaKadosh who always had on his table radish and horseradish, both during the summer days and rainy season. That is, he was very wealthy and kings' delicacies were always on his table; all year long, he even served fruits not in season. This begs an explanation: how could it have been? Isn't it necessary to minimize pleasures?

Tosafos already wrote one answer (*Avodah Zarah* *ibid.*). Rabbeinu HaKadosh personally never ate or enjoyed any of the delicacies on his table. It was just there for others, not for him.

There's another explanation (see *Biur HaGra*, *Orach Chaim*, *siman* 231, and in the *Tur* *ad loc.*). Rabbeinu actually did eat those special foods, but it was *l'shem Shamayim* because he needed it for health purposes. He didn't intend to derive pleasure from it; it was solely *l'shem Shamayim*. Chazal say (*Kesubos* 104a) that right before Rabbeinu HaKadosh passed away he lifted his fingers toward Heaven and said, "I did not enjoy the pleasures of this world even with my pinky finger." This explanation is that the delicacies were not eaten for physical enjoyment, but *l'shem Shamayim*, because he had to. He didn't enjoy it.

These are all *madreigos*, they are all an aspect of "You are fortunate in this World!"

Perhaps even now, our struggle with the corona pandemic is here to tell us something. The coronavirus has created so many difficulties in Torah learning. And yet, we are still learning Torah, and we are *osek baTorah* despite our challenges. Now, everything is in Heaven hands, and whatever the Merciful One does is for the good. And what is the good here? The fact that we are learning Torah *mitoch hadachak*! This Torah is a powerful *zechus*, more than when one learns without difficulties. When one faces challenges, his Torah is on a different level: *Torah mitoch hadachak*.

This is “*ashrecha baOlam HaZeh*,” as Chazal say: “This is the way of Torah, eat bread dipped in salt — and you will be fortunate in the World.” This is the current reality. It would seem that “*ashrecha baOlam HaZeh*” refers to the *nisayon* of wealth... But the truth is, whoever is on this level has already surpassed the *nisayon* of wealth and he does not have the *nisayon* of wealth.

The following story took place in Minsk, Russia. Many wealthy men lived there and they gave large sums to *yeshivos* and were heavy supporters of Torah. During

the Russian Revolution, they lost all their possessions and became paupers; they had nothing left. One of them asked Maran Rav Chaim Brisker *zt”l*: “How could this have happened, and why do I deserve such treatment?” Rav Chaim answered, “You already were given the *nisayon* of wealth and you withstood it beautifully. Therefore, *Shamayim* gave you another *nisayon*, the test of poverty. Wealth is also a *nisayon*, and you withstood it, so now you are receiving another test, since every *nisayon* brings you up to another *madreigah*.”

The rule is that whatever the Merciful One does is for the good. Anyone who lives with this faith, that everything is in Heaven’s hands and everything that happens is for the good, he will never be upset at anyone, because if anyone disturbs him, he knows it’s from *Shamayim*, and since it’s from *Shamayim*, it is for his benefit. Even if he doesn’t understand why, it is all for the good. One must always be happy with his lot, and this way he will have a happy life. Of course, all of these are *madreigos*, which aren’t so simple to acquire — one needs *siyatta d’Shemaya* to merit these *madreigos*.

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