

# 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 Toldos 5781

417

## Belief in Hashgachah Pratis

*Yiras Shamayim* is a mitzvah, as it states (*Devarim* 10:20), "Fear Hashem your G-d." Another *pasuk* states (*Devarim* 10:12), "What does Hashem ask of you aside from to fear Him?" This is a *mitzvas aseï* of fearing Hashem; one must "create" *yiras Shamayim* — without doing so, it's impossible to have *yirah*.

That is, if a person doesn't think about anything, without devoting any thought to the matter, there's no *yiras Shamayim*. He must entertain thoughts that arouse fear of Heaven.

And what are the thoughts? Belief in *hashgachas Hashem*! Chazal say (*Avos* 2:1), "Know what is above you: an eye that sees, an ear that hears, and all your deeds are written in a book." Remember that a Heavenly eye sees whatever you do, whether it's a good deed or a bad deed. This brings about *yiras Shamayim*.

Aside from the fact that *yiras Shamayim* is a mitzvah on its own — a *mitzvas aseï* of fearing Hashem — it also causes a person to perform good deeds and prevents sin. How? By remembering that there is "an eye that sees," there is *sechar* and *onesh*, reward and punishment, both in this world and the World to Come."

## Active and Passive Yiras Shamayim

How does one fulfill the mitzvah of *yiras Shamayim*? Through behavior. *Yiras Shamayim* shapes one's behavior, and when a person acts in accordance with the dictates of *yiras Shamayim*, he will remain in a state of *yiras Shamayim*.

*Yiras Shamayim* can also be manifested in a passive state. When a person wants to commit a certain sin, yet does not, he is thus fulfilling the mitzvah of *yiras Shamayim*. Rabbeinu Yonah in *Shaarei Teshuvah* (1:49, 3:9) writes that if a person is drawn to committing a sin, but his *yiras Shamayim* prevents him from doing so, he fulfills the *mitzvas aseï* of *yiras Shamayim*.

For example, if he has a strong urge to speak *lashon hara* — there a certain excitement in speaking *lashon hara* — but he's frightened and does not say the *lashon hara*, this is *yiras Shamayim*. He has just fulfilled the positive mitzvah of *yiras Shamayim*. The same is true when he holds back from telling a falsehood.

Similarly, when one refrains from performing *melachah* on Shabbos, this is *yiras Shamayim*. There are 39 *avos melachos*, and *toldos*, and the intricate laws of *muktzeh*, and many other

rabbinic prohibitions. If he is scared of desecrating Shabbos and refrains from doing any sort of *melachah*, from speaking mundane talk, or conducting verbal business affairs — the prohibition of *mimtzoh cheftzecha v'dabeir davar* — this is *yiras Shamayim*.

Until now, we were discussing passive observance, preventing sin, but *yiras Shamayim* is also present in active commitment — performing good deeds such as learning Torah, *oneg Shabbos* and *kavod Shabbos*, and all other good deeds. There's also *tefillah*, and davening with *kavanah*, which is *avodah she'balev* and is also a positive mitzvah.

## Why Aren't There Many Masmidim?

There's something that's very surprising. Chazal say at the beginning of *Peah*: "These are the matters whose fruit a person enjoys in this world and the principle awaits him in Olam HaBa: honoring parents, *gemillus chasadim*, and many other things and learning Torah is equal to them all. That is, through Torah learning one merits this world and the future world, on a level equal to all other *mitzvos*. If so, we must understand, **why isn't there more hasmadah? Why isn't everyone masmidim? After all, limud Torah is such a good thing; through it one merits both Olam HaZeh and Olam HaBa — what a wonderful life! So why aren't there many masmidim, every second is so precious!** One can merit its fruits in this world, while its principle awaits him in the next world.

Chazal say (*Avos* chap. 6), "This is the path of Torah: eat bread with salt... If you do so, you will be fortunate and it will be good for you. Fortunate — in this world; good for you — in the next world. If you toil in Torah — and toil does not mean to exert extraordinary effort, it means each person should learn according to his ability, learn and be *osek* in Torah. And since Torah is also interesting and *divrei Torah* are sweet, you will be fortunate in this world and it will be good for you in the next world — Olam HaZeh and Olam HaBa, just as is mentioned in *Peah*. If so, it's really surprising why there aren't multitudes of *masmidim*. Why isn't this convincing enough?

Rav Dovid Povarsky *zt"l* related that Rav Naftali Tropp *zt"l* once expressed his astonishment about the fact that people can sleep: If he doesn't know Shas yet, commented Rav Naftali, he has to learn Shas, and it's interesting and sweet, and it's a mitzvah. So how can he go to sleep instead of being *osek baTorah*? If he already knows Shas, well then, can a person who knows Shas fall asleep? Isn't his train of thought stuck on Shas which is so interesting and sweet? How can he fall asleep? That's what Rav

Naftali said. And it's a real question: why aren't there more *masmidim*?

Apparently, it's because this is human nature — people want to rest; it's the yetzer hara.

Therefore, **a person needs something that will obligate him to learn with *hasmadah*. For example, having a chavrusa creates a commitment, as does learning a *mussar sefer*, because it leads to *yiras Shamayim* which then obligates him to learn. If a person does his *hishtadlus*, he will have *siyatta d'Shemaya*, as Chazal say (*Yoma* 38b), "One who comes to be purified will be helped."**

### **Tefillah for Success in Torah Is Beneficial**

I heard from my rebbi Rav E. E. Dessler *zt"l* in the name of Rav Yisrael Salanter, who said that it's tried and true that davening for *ruchniyus* is effective. There are so many *tefillos* about Torah, so a special prayer is not necessary. There are so many requests for success in Torah built into our daily prayers.

For example, in the *Birchos HaTorah*, we ask: Please make Torah sweet in our mouths. This is a request for Torah, to experience the sweetness of Torah. In *Birkos HaShachar*, we ask: Accustom us to study Your Torah. In the *berachah* of *Ahavah Rabbah*, we ask at length for success in Torah study, and in *Shemoneh Esrei*, we recite: Grant us from You, knowledge, insight, and understanding; Return us Our Father to Your Torah; Place our portion with [those who] study Your Torah. In *Elokai Netzor*, we say, Open my heart to You Torah; in *Kedushah d'Sidra* we say, He will open our hearts to His Torah, and in *Brich Shmei* when the Aron Kodesh is opened, we say, Open my heart to your Torah. We ask for success in Torah in many, many places in our prayers.

If one concentrates in these places in his prayers, he will have *siyatta d'Shemaya*. It is clear that he'll have *siyatta d'Shemaya*, because "one who comes to be purified will be helped." Davening for *ruchniyus* is effective.

The same is true regarding all matters of *ruchniyus* — it is worthwhile and one's logic obligates it. But despite it all, a person nature is that he wants to relax. One needs *siyatta d'Shemaya* to overcome his nature. And through davening, one will merit *siyatta d'Shemaya*.

### **The Level of Avraham Avinu's Yirah**

After the Akeidah, Hashem told Avraham Avinu (*Bereishis* 22:12), "Now I know that you are a G-d-fearing person." That is, during the Akeidah it was clear that Avraham had *yiras Shamayim*.

It would seem that *yirah* is fear, and this begs an explanation. After all, Avraham Avinu went to the Akeidah with joy, as Rashi explains (*Bereishis* 22:6), "And the two went together" — he went willingly and with joy. Similarly, a few verses earlier, the *pasuk* states: "And Avraham arose early in the morning and he harnessed his

donkey." Rashi explains, "He did the mitzvah with alacrity... love perverts the natural course." If so, he was happy and went quickly, he was not afraid. So why did Hashem take this opportunity to say, "Now I know that you are a G-d-fearing person."

We can explain this as follows: The term G-d-fearing refers to *yiras haromemus* (awe of the majesty of Hashem) not *yiras ha-onesh* (fear of punishment). The Rambam wrote (*Hilchos Teshuvah* 10:1) that *yiras ha-onesh* is a lowly *madreigah*, which is taught to women and ignoramuses. *Yiras haromemus* is a lofty, special *madreigah*, and this is what Hashem was referring to when He said, "Now I know that you are a G-d-fearing person" — you have *yiras haromemus*.

### **Why Didn't Avraham Want Eliezer to Inherit Him**

Avraham Avinu told HaKadosh Baruch Hu (*ibid.* 15:2-3), "What will You give me; I am childless and the steward of my household is Damesek Eliezer." That is, You did not give me children, so my servant will inherit me — Avraham was upset that his servant would inherit him. This is puzzling. We can understand why he'd be upset if he didn't have children, but why should he care if Eliezer inherits him? Is it a problem that Eliezer will take his possessions?

Our forefathers' possessions were holy — all their sheep and cattle, servants and maidservants. Why did they need all these possessions? They surely weren't money hungry. The answer is simple, and I believe the Rishonim offer this explanation, everything was used for *avodas Hashem*. I don't know how and in what manner, but in any case, it was all used for *avodas Hashem*. They did not need their possessions; it was merely a means toward *avodas Hashem*.

The *Mesillas Yesharim* writes (chap. 1), "It is a great upliftment for all creatures to serve the complete person, who is sanctified with the sanctity of Hashem *Yisbarach*." When an *adam shaleim* uses any part of creation, it becomes sanctified. Chazal say (*Chullin* 91b) about Yaakov Avinu that all the stones gathered in one place and said, May the tzaddik place his head on me. Each stone was sanctified when Avraham placed his head on it, because the physical actions of a holy person are sanctified.

Since Avraham needed all his possessions for *avodas Hashem*, they were like Yaakov Avinu's stones, which became sanctified when he used them.

### **Eliezer Will Put an End to the Sanctity**

If this is the case, once Avraham passes away, all this *kedushah* will come to an end because Eliezer was not on the same *madreigah* as Avraham Avinu. If he'd inherit Avraham, all the sanctity will come to an end. That's what Avraham was concerned about: What will happen to the *kedushah*? The influence of holiness will stop, and how will that affect *kevod Shamayim*?! But if he'd have his own son, his son would have the same *chinuch* as Avraham

himself, and he'd continue the *kevod Shamayim*. He too will sanctify all Avraham's possessions.

Let us understand why Eliezer couldn't continue the *kevod Shamayim*. After all, on the words "And he was Damesek Eliezer," Chazal comment (*Yoma* 28b): He would draw out his rabbi's Torah and water others with it." Avraham would teach him Torah, and Eliezer would explain it to everyone else. He learned Torah, he had a yeshivah, as Chazal say (*Yoma*), "Eliezer the servant of Avraham was elderly and he sat in yeshivah." All the Avos had yeshivos, as did Shem and Ever, and they would teach Torah. So Avraham was the rosh yeshivah, but Eliezer was the one who explained his Torah. If so, he was a *gadol baTorah*. So why would Avraham's possessions lose their sanctity if he'd inherit them?

### "Cursed" with Bad Middos

The Midrashim relate, and it's cited in Rashi (24:39) that Eliezer said, "Please my master, perhaps the woman will not follow me." Eliezer was hinting that he had a daughter of marriageable age and he was hoping and waiting for an opportunity to suggest his daughter as a wife for Yitzchak. Avraham told him, "My son is blessed and you are cursed. Cursed cannot cling to blessed." Eliezer's daughter was probably brought up according to Avraham's *chinuch* and Eliezer thought she'd be a match for Yitzchak, but Avraham told him, No. You are cursed, and my son is blessed. Cursed cannot cling to blessed.

Why was Eliezer cursed? He was *osek* in Torah and he served Avraham. "Cursed" refers to bad *middos*; Eliezer was a descendant of Canaan, who was cursed. His bad *middos* were passed down to his descendants, so Eliezer's nature was that he had bad *middos*. Avraham was unique in his extraordinary *middah* of *chesed*, and his son, Yitzchak had good *middos*. Although his special *middah* was *gevurah*, strength, he inherited Avraham's *middah* of *chesed* as well. Eliezer and his daughter, on the other hand, did not have good *middos*.

Even though a person can change bad *middos* can change his nature (see Rambam, *Hilchos Teshuvah* 7:3; *Ohr Yisrael* 14), there is a difference between a Jew and "cursed." A Jew's bad *middos* are not ingrained in his nature. After all, there is a mitzvah of "love your fellow as yourself," which is mitzvah of acting with good *middos*. If it's a mitzvah, it's obviously part of our innate nature. Love is impossible if it's against our nature, so **it must be that a Jew's nature is to have good middos. Acting with bad middos is simply the nature of the yetzer hara, but it's not a Jew's true nature, it's just an external nature.**

Non-Jews do not have this nature. As is known, when one Jew hears about another Jew's pain, even if he's in a distant country and the first Jew does not know him at all, he still is pained and wants to help him. American Jews send financial assistance to other Jews in distant countries. Non-Jews do not have this characteristic. Even members of the same country don't care for others; they just think,

what does his pain have to do with me? Why should I give him my money?

See *Derashos Hod Tzvi*, written by my father zt"l (p. 32): "It seems that among the descendants of Eisav, there is only murder, violence, robbery, and all negative *middos*. They are as far from the trait of kindness as east is from west. If, for example, someone were to approach Ivan and tell him about his own neighbor who must see a doctor quickly or he may die, and then ask for one ruble to help the sick neighbor, Ivan will surely be surprised and wonder if the person asking him to help is a human being. After all, why should Ivan help his neighbor; Ivan's money is for Ivan, and not for anyone else."

In non-Jews, the innate nature of good *middos* is non-existent. They may have some organizations, but it's not their nature. A Jew's nature, on the other hand, is to have good *middos*.

Therefore, the Rambam writes that even a Jew who was born with bad *middos* can change his nature. Even though he has bad *middos*, he has the good nature of *middos tovos*, and his bad *middos* are just an external nature connected to the yetzer hara. Therefore, a Jew's innate good nature can overpower the bad *middos* and he can change them.

### "Cursed" — His Behavior Cannot Change

However, Eliezer was "cursed" — he did not have innate good *middos*. If so, how would his descendants have good *middos*. It's simply impossible to go against his nature; just as an animal retains his original nature, and one cannot change an animal.

A famous story is told about the Rambam (some attribute it to Rav Yonason Eibeshutz). Some people trained a cat to act with etiquette. For example, not to take food without permission, only to eat what it is served. They thought they succeeded in changing the cat's nature. So they made a big party and sat the cat at the table, just like everyone else. He sat there politely and only ate what he was served. The Rambam had brought along a mouse in a small box. In middle of the party, he opened the box and released the mouse. The cat immediately jumped up and ran after the mouse, overturning the whole table in the process. That's a cat's nature, and an animal's nature is unchangeable.

That's why Avraham told Eliezer that he is cursed; that it is his true nature, and it cannot be changed. One can only accustom himself to different **behavior**, but his **nature** remains cursed. Therefore, Eliezer's daughter could not marry Yitzchak, as he is blessed and has the innate nature of good *middos*.

### Eliezer Served Avraham Faithfully

However, Chazal tell us (*Yalkut Chayei Sarah* 109) that Eliezer went into Gan Eden alive, because he served the tzaddik Avraham faithfully (see *Maseches Kallah Rabbasi*, end of chap. 3; *Bereishis Rabbah* 60:7) What was this faithfulness? That when Avraham sent him to find a wife

for Yitzchak, he had to daven for this, and he did. He said (24:12): Please make me chance upon her today and do a kindness with my master Avraham.” this was a prayer and request for Heavenly assistance in finding Rivkah.

This was against his nature. He wanted his daughter to marry Yitzchak, but he gave up his desires and davened to find a *shidduch* that Avraham would be pleased with! His *tefillah* was answered, so it was obviously a true *tefillah* — he wanted it with all his heart. And his heart changed; the prayer that left his heart encapsulated everything he wanted for his daughter, but he transformed it and asked to find Rivkah for Yitzchak.

### **A Miracle: Cursed Transformed to Blessed**

This shows that Eliezer’s nature changed. He originally had bad *middos*, and suddenly he had good *middos*. This is very uncommon. A Jew has good *middos* by nature, but Eliezer was cursed, with bad *middos* by nature. And yet, he still changed his *middos*.

This was a miraculous change, and he merited the miracle by special *siyatta d'Shemaya* because he served the tzaddik faithfully. His nature changed; because he served Avraham faithfully, he became like a newborn baby and a new man was created, a different man, it was simply a miracle. He entered Gan Eden alive in the merit of his faithfulness.

The Midrash says (*Bereishis Rabbah* 60:7) that Eliezer was no longer considered “cursed,” and was instead included in those “blessed.” His nature actually changed and he became “blessed.” We learn this from Lavan’s welcome, when he told Eliezer, “Come, the blessed one of Hashem.”

Now, Lavan surely had no understanding in these matters, and when he said, “Come, the blessed one of Hashem,” he didn’t mean it. But if it’s written in the Torah, it’s the truth that he was blessed. His nature changed because he served Avraham faithfully.

### **The Solution for Us: Learn Mussar**

Things like this can happen to Avraham Avinu and Eliezer, they can merit such levels of *siyatta d'Shemaya*, but we are not on their *madreigah*. What can we, on our level, do in order to rise in *madreigah*?

There is only one solution: learn *mussar*. If one learns *mussar* on a regular basis, then it will slowly but surely have an influence on him. Married men should learn *mussar* every day; *bachurim* have a set *mussar seder* in yeshivah for a half-hour a day, but married men can learn less. Maran HaRav Shteinman *zt”l* once said that learning *Mesillas Yesharim* for even five minutes daily can change a person, as long as it’s on a steady basis.

I’ve already told you about the young *bachur* who, due to extenuating circumstances, could not learn all day. However, he would come to yeshivah every day to learn *mussar* for a half hour before Maariv. He told me that he feels like it gives him life and invigorates him for the entire day. This situation was one of “one who comes to be purified,” and he actually merited *siyatta d'Shemaya* that his circumstances changed and he joined the yeshivah. Today, he is a *marbitz Torah* and a *mashpia ruchani*, he showers others with Torah and *yiras Shamayim*. All this is in the merit of his half hour of *mussar*, which he enjoyed. He was *zocheh* to *siyatta d'Shemaya*, as Chazal say, “One who comes to be purified is helped.”

Chazal say that learning Torah is an antidote for the yetzer hara, and the *Mishnah Berurah* (*siman aleph*) writes that they were referring specifically to learning *Toras hayirah*, *mussar*. If one learns *mussar* on a daily basis, it has an influence and can elevate a person greatly. *Yehi ratzon* that we all merit *siyatta d'Shemaya* on all levels.

***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.