

Darkei HaChizuk

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

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

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Hoda'ah and Hallel During Chanukah

Chanukah is coming to a close; we kindle the eighth light on Thursday. There are mitzvos specific to Chanukah, such as lighting the menorah. Now, the *nusach* of "Al HaNissim" does not mention lighting Chanukah candles. Only two things are mentioned: *l'hodos u'lehalel*, to express thanks and praise to Your great name." *Hoda'ah*, expressing thanks, is the recital of *Al HaNissim* in the *Modim* blessing in Shemoneh Esrei. *Hallel*, to give praise, refers to the full Hallel we recite on every day of Chanukah. The main reason for establishing the days of Chanukah for all future generations is for *Hoda'ah* and *Hallel*, to thank and praise Hashem for the miracles.

What are we thanking and praising for? For saving us from the Yevanim's decrees. They wanted *l'hashkicham Torasecha u'leha'aviram meichukei retzonecha*, "to cause them to forget Your Torah and to remove them from [fulfilling] Your statutes" — they didn't want us to keep the *chukim*, mitzvos whose reasons are unknown to us. They specifically issued decrees against Torah learning, *bris milah*, and Shabbos observance. (See the story of someone who rode a horse on Shabbos in the times of the Yevanim, *Yevamos daf* 90. See too *Sanhedrin* 46a, and Rashi.)

Mesirus Nefesh for Mitzvos Aseh

The Jews gave up their lives and kept these mitzvos, even at the expense of giving up their lives. The Midrash relates (*Vayikra Rabbah* 32a): "Why are they taking you out to be stoned? Because I circumcised my son. Why are they taking you to be burned? Because I observed the Shabbos." And in the *Mechilta* (*Yisro* 6): "Why are they taking you out to be burned? Because I read from the Torah." They were killed; they gave up their lives for this.

This requires an explanation. Even during times of *shmad*, when we are obligated to be *moser nefesh* for the entire Torah, this is only referring to *mitzvos lo ta'aseh*, mitzvos that one transgresses actively. But one is not obligated to give up his life for *mitzvos aseh*, which are transgressed just by failing to perform them. There is no halachah of *yehareig v'al yaavor*, "one should be killed and not transgress," regarding *mitzvos aseh* even when it's a time of *shmad*, as the Ramban, Rashba, and Ran write on *Shabbos daf* 49.

Now, the Yevanim's decrees were against *mitzvos aseh*: not to learn Torah, not to circumcise one's sons, and not to observe Shabbos. Failing to do so is *shev v'al ta'aseh*, mitzvos for which one is not obligated to give up his life.

As such, the situation is *pikuach nefesh*, and one may not give up his life for it. The Rambam writes (*Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah* 5:4), "Anyone about whom it says: 'He should transgress and not be killed, and he does not transgress, and he is killed because he did not transgress, he is liable.'" So how can he be allowed to be *moser nefesh* for this?

Hora'as Sha'ah to Strengthen Yiddishkeit

Let us explain what the *Nemukei Yosef* (*Sanhedrin* 74b) writes: "If he was a great person and a pious, G-d-fearing man, and he noticed that the generation was immoral, he may sanctify Hashem's name and give up his life even for a light mitzvah, so that the nation will see and learn to fear Hashem, and to love Him with all their hearts." This means that during times of decrees, if the generation needs it and it's a necessity to strengthen Yiddishkeit, it is a mitzvah and it is permissible to give up one's life even for a *shev v'al taaseh*. This is a special *heter* to go against the Torah's general instruction and to be *moser nefesh* even if he is not obligated to do so.

Eliyahu HaNavi acted this way on Har HaCarmel, when he sacrificed *shechutei chutz*, animals slaughtered outside the Beis HaMikdash. The Gemara says about this (*Yevamos* 90b), "*L'migdar milsa shaani*." That is, he did so because the situation and time necessitated it. The nation was serving the Baal and Eliyahu knew there was a need and a special *heter* of *hora'as sha'ah* to transgress the Torah's words in order to disconnect them from idol worship.

The same *gemara* discusses the episode of a man who rode a horse on Shabbos and was subsequently stoned by *beis din*. Now, he wasn't liable for stoning, as riding an animal on Shabbos is only a rabbinic prohibition, but since it was a *tzorech ha-sha'ah*, a need specific to that time, *beis din* stoned him even though halachah did not mandate stoning in this situation. When it is *tzorech ha-sha'ah*, *beis din* is authorized to beat and punish wrongdoers even when the actual halachah does not require it, in order to make a *siyag laTorah*, a fence around the Torah. Indeed, the Gemara states: "*Tzorech ha-sha'ah* is halachah." The *Shulchan Aruch* (*Choshen Mishpat siman* 2) states that this is the case in our times as well: *beis din* is authorized to beat and punish wrongdoers even when halachah does not require it.

This is the *heter* and mitzvah that occurred during the times of the Yevanim. The same was true regarding Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Chanina ben Tradyon, who gave up their lives for *mitzvos aseh* which are not subject to the halachah of *yehareig v'al yaavor* — since it was a necessary path to follow in those times. Indeed, this is as the *Nemukei Yosef*

writes, that if it is necessary for strengthening Yiddishkeit, a great person is allowed to give up his life even for a light mitzvah.

In the Days of Mattisyahu and His Sons

In Al HaNissim, we say: “In the days of Mattisyahu son of Yochanan Kohen Gadol the Chashmona’i and his sons.” On Purim, we say “In the days of Mordechai and Esther.” Let us understand why this is mentioned. Why is it important for us to state who lived then?

The explanation is that we are recalling their merit — we’re mentioning the people whose merit brought about our salvation. On Purim, when Haman attacked the Jewish nation, our salvation came about in the merit of Mordechai and Esther. On Chanukah, when the wicked kingdom of Yavan attacked us, we merited a salvation due to Mattisyahu and his sons, who were tzaddikim and they were willing to give up their lives for us. Indeed, the prayer continues: “You gave the strong ones in the hands of the weak ones, many in the hands of few.” This was a miracle, not *k’derech hateva*. Due to their *mesirus nefesh*, they merited seeing a miracle. Therefore, the prayer states: “In the days of Mattisyahu and his sons” — to inform us that the miracles were in their merit.

The prayer then continues: “...in the times of the wicked Greek kingdom.” In some places, the word “Greek” is omitted (see *Berachos* 61; *Shabbos* 15, and more), and it could be that they the name was omitted out of fear — they were afraid the non-Jews would stir up trouble for the Jews.

Expressing Gratitude for the Chanukah Miracles for Generations

The decree was to “make them forget Your Torah and to make them transgress Your statutes.” The miracle occurred in the merit of Mattisyahu and his sons, and they established the days of Chanukah to express thanks and praise Hashem. We too say Hallel and recite Al HaNissim, but why? Why are we required to express thanks; how is the miracle from generations yore connected to us? Why was Chanukah established as a time for thanking and praising for all generations to come until the arrival of Mashiach? After all, the miracle did not happen to us.

The answer is simple. If the miracle would not have taken place, and *chas v’shalom* the Yevanim would have been successful in carrying out their evil plans “to make them forget Your Torah,” then we wouldn’t have Torah either, because Torah is handed down from generation to generation and at that time, all Torah was in Eretz Yisrael, and almost all Jews lived in Eretz Yisrael. If the decree would’ve been actualized and the Jews then wouldn’t have learned Torah, then from where would we have Torah? The same is true regarding mitzvos: whatever mitzvos we observe today is a continuation of the Torah observance in those times. Therefore, we too are required to thank and praise, because the miracle was for us too. In the merit of that miracle, we have Torah and mitzvos today!

Impure Ones – Wicked Ones – Zeidim

The prayer continues: “You gave over mighty ones in the hands of weak one,” and “many in the hands of few” — this is the miracle, that the weak overpowered the mighty and the few overpowered the many. But then the prayers says: “And impure ones in the hands of pure ones, wicked ones in the hands of righteous ones, and *zeidim* in the hands of those who are involved in Torah.” This is not the miracle; this is the *zechus*! They merited the miracle in the *zechus* of these three matters: because they were pure, righteous, and involved in Torah!

Three aspects of the Yevanim’s wickedness are mentioned here: they were impure, wicked, and *zeidim*. “Impure” means they were atheists, they denied *emunah* — all their decrees were targeted against *emunah*, as is written in the Midrash (*Bereishis Rabbah* 2:4), The answer is that the Yevanim wanted to uproot *emunah*, as Chazal said (*Bereishis Rabbah* 2:4): As they would say to them: “Inscribe on the horn of an ox that you have no portion in the G-d of Israel.” The Yevanim were not idol worshipers, they valued the hedonistic culture, beauty and physicality. They had no need for idol worship; they valued physical strength. This is represented by “the horn of an ox” because an ox is the strongest animal, as is written (*Mishlei* 14:4): “an abundance comes by the strength of an ox,” and it is used for labor.

The Yevanim wanted us to deny *emunah* and value their hedonistic values — which is like *avodah zarah*, the person himself becomes the *avodah zarah*. This is similar to what the *Chovos HaLevavos* writes (*Shaar HaPrishus* chap. 2): “They make their stomachs their gods,” they value themselves.

This is the meaning of “impure ones” in the hands of the pure ones — as they deny *emunah*, and “wicked ones,” those with bad *middos*, in the hands of righteous ones, those with good *middos*.

The third matter is “and *zeidim* in the hands of those involved in Your Torah.” *Zeidim* can be explained based on the following *pesukim* (*Shemos* 18:11): “For with the thing that they plotted (*zadu*), he came upon them.” This refers to improper thoughts, as it states (*Shemos* 21:14): “But if a man plots deliberately against his friend to kill him with cunning.” ***Zeidim* means they would think bad thoughts, and parallel to that, we have “oskei Torasecha,” which is the opposite — it means a person’s mind is busy with Torah! With holy thoughts.**

In the merit of these three matters, we were *zocheh* to a miracle. Due to the fact that Mattisyahu and his sons were pure *baalei emunah*, tzaddikim with good *middos*, and were involved in Torah, their minds were busy with Torah, they counteracted the Yevanim who had the opposite characteristics: impure, wicked, and *zeidim*.

Esek HaTorah During Chanukah

Chanukah was established to express thanks and praise for the miracle — but it doesn’t say anywhere that Chanukah

is a time for learning Torah, because it is simple that there's no reason to mention that. Learning Torah is an absolute obligation and is self-understood. There is no *heter* for *bittul Torah* during Chanukah! It's clear that we must be *osek baTorah*; there is no need to establish special *takanos* to this end.

Adaraba, on Chanukah the obligation to be *osek baTorah* should be even greater, since there was a decree not to learn Torah, and the salvation occurred on Chanukah when the decree was nullified. If so, Chanukah was a time of *siyatta d'Shemaya* and a *hashpa'ah*, influence, of Torah. It's well known, and it's already been written in *sefarim* (Ramchal's *Derech Hashem* 4:7) that whenever there was a *hashpa'ah* of *kedushah* in Klal Yisrael, at that same time every single year, that Divine flow returns. **Since there was a *hashpa'ah* from *Shamayim* during Chanukah that the Jews were able to be *osek baTorah*, this *hashpa'ah* returns every year during Chanukah, and there is more *hatzlachah* in Torah learning than there is during any other time of year, since this is the time of a *hashpa'ah* of Torah.** So it seems.

In many *yeshivos*, Chanukah is a time of *hasmadah*, and there is more intense learning — even on Shabbos Chanukah. The *bachurim* don't go home for Shabbos; they stay in *yeshivah* to learn. Shabbos Chanukah is a Shabbos of Torah!

The Maalah of Learning Torah on Shabbos

It's important to be aware of the great *maalah* of learning Torah on Shabbos. The Kabbalah *sefarim* write (cited in *Ben Ish Chai*, *Shemos*, Year 2), “The effects of learning Torah on Shabbos are 1000 times greater than the effects of learning on a weekday.” The *zechus* of Torah on Shabbos, the way Torah sanctifies a person, is one-thousand fold!

When the *mashgiach* Rav Yechezkel Levenstein, author of *Ohr Yechezkel*, was young, he would sleep a little on Shabbos afternoon. When he came to Kelm, he heard them speak about the sanctity of Shabbos, what *shemiras Shabbos* is all about, and the value of Torah learning on Shabbos. From then on, he stopped sleeping on Shabbos afternoon. Although many people rest a little on Shabbos, *oneg Shabbos*, he would not sleep on Shabbos. He used every available moment for learning Torah.

In any case, Chanukah was established “to express thanks and praise” — for the nullification of the decrees against Torah. Nowadays, we can learn and be *osek baTorah*, **so can it be that during a period of *hoda'ah* about Torah we would stop learning Torah?** Therefore, Chanukah itself poses a greater obligation to learn Torah.

The truth is that throughout the year, Friday and Shabbos are times that need *chizuk*, time is generally wasted then. But if one sets a *seder*, he can learn a lot! Even on Friday and Shabbos. But we know that this is something that needs strengthening.

One must be aware of the *maalah* of *esek haTorah*, which sanctifies a person more than anything else. Chazal say (*Avos* 6:1) about one who is *osek baTorah lishmah*, someone who learns Torah without ulterior motives, that he merits many things... and it raises him up above all other deeds. The *Ruach Chaim* explains: “Torah is greater even than good deeds.” All the good deeds and every mitzvah a person does is less than learning Torah. *Esek haTorah* sanctifies a person more than all other mitzvos; when a person is involved in Torah he is sanctified with an unimaginable level of *kedushah*.

If so, **how can a person not be *osek baTorah*? Every minute lost is such a pity! Every minute that a person doesn't learn creates a lack of *kedushah* and interrupts the *kedushah*.** It's a *hefsek* of *kedushah*.

Physical Needs Can Be Mitzvos Too

However, if a person needs to rest in order to be able to learn, this is considered “*hechsher mitzvah*,” preparation for a mitzvah, and is considered part of *esek haTorah*. A person must rest and sleep; if not, he will not be able to learn.

The Rambam (*Hilchos Deios*, Chap. 3) comments on Chazal's statement in *Avos* (2:12), “And may all your deeds be for the sake of Heaven”: If a person directs all his physical needs *l'shem Shamayim*, they are considered mitzvos. Even when he sleeps, if he has in mind that he's sleeping in order to regain his strength for the next day, so he can fulfill mitzvos, learn Torah, and daven, and so that he won't be tired and will be calm, his sleep is *l'shem Shamayim*. This sleep is considered *avodas Hashem*; he is serving Hashem in his sleep.

And like a soldier in the king's army who is obligated to eat and sleep so that he'll be strong enough to fight battles, and by doing so, he is fulfilling his mission; we too are “Hashem's army” and we need to eat and sleep in order to have strength to fulfill our obligations. The Rambam mentions this in reference to sleeping, which is something passive, and yet is still considered *avodas Hashem*. All the more so, is eating, which is an active deed, considered *avodas Hashem* when performed *l'shem Shamayim*.

But it all depends on whether one's intent is *l'shem Shamayim*, for the purpose of fulfilling all his various obligations. If so, it is called *avodas Hashem*. Intent changes the value of a person's deeds! Whether or not sleep is considered *avodas Hashem* or just a regular physical action all depends on one's intent, whether or not he was doing it *l'shem Shamayim*.

Accordingly, it turns out that a person can be involved in mitzvos all day long. Even his physical needs like eating and sleeping will be considered mitzvos and *avodas Hashem* if he has the right intent *l'shem Shamayim*, because he needs his food and sleep to further his *avodas Hashem*.

Even if a person is busy with his family, it's a need, because his family needs him and he's doing *chesed* with them. Now, this is not only "*chesed*," it's actually a "*chiyuv*," an obligation that he is required to fulfill. It's a mitzvah that no one else can do, so he is obligated to do it and it's considered a mitzvah.

"If You Aren't Ascending, You Are Descending"

The *baalei hamussar* would often say, "If you aren't ascending, know that you are descending." Similarly, the Vilna Gaon explains the *pasuk* in *Mishlei* (15:24), "The path of life above is for the intelligent man, so that he stays away from the grave below," as follows: A person is called a "*holeich*" (someone who walks), as he must always be walking from one *madreigah* to another. If he doesn't go up, he will go all the way down, *chas v'shalom*. It's impossible to stand in one place. This is the meaning of the *pasuk*: he must choose an elevated lifestyle in order not to fall to the grave down below, and due to his elevated path of life, he will distance himself from the grave.

A person doesn't stay in the same place — only angels are called "*omdim*" (those who stand) (see *Zechariah* 3:7), as they do what they are obligated to do [whether or not an angel has *bechirah* requires further study], so they are always on the same *madreigah*. A person is not an "*omeid*," he is a "*holeich*" — he is always either going up or down. If he is not going up, he is going down.

Mussar Sefarim: A Tool for Growth

A person always must be an "*oleh*," one who is advancing, as Rabbeinu Yonah writes in *Shaarei Teshuvah* (3:17 and more) that there is an obligation to constantly increase one's *yiras Shamayim*, to add more and more and more! He writes that there are lofty *maalos* that were included in *mitzvos aseh*, and one of them is *yiras Shamayim*. A person must always advance and increase his *yiras Shamayim*, for there are many levels involved. For example, the *Mesillas Yesharim* explains the difference between *yiras Shamayim* and *yiras cheit*, and there are many more *madreigos* as well.

The *Mesillas Yesharim* is a good way to advance. It provides a path for advancement in all *madreigos*. For example, regarding *middas chassidus*, acting with piety, the *Mesillas Yesharim* explains which *kavanos* one should be thinking of in every action. The same is true regarding all *middos*; the *Mesillas Yesharim* provides a path and

shows how a person can naturally rise from one *madreigah* to the next.

It's well known that Rav Chaim Volozhiner told Rav Zundel of Salant: "All *mussar sefarim* are good, but *Mesillas Yesharim* should be your guide." That is, all *mussar sefarim* are good and give a person *chizuk*, but the *Mesillas Yesharim* shows the way and gives a path and system based on *chochmas hanefesh* how to advance and grow in every *maalah*.

I've seen that some people are frightened to learn *mussar*; they don't realize that it's for their own good, that learning *mussar* will help them grow. And there are others who think they are perfect and claim that they don't have anything to fix. Rabbeinu Yonah (*Shaarei Teshuvah* 2:8) wrote about these people: "There are many people who will be prevented from [accessing] the light of teshuvah, because they think they are pure and innocent. They will not consider fixing their ways for they think they are perfect. And these people are sinning greatly before Hashem." That is, the worst possible thing is for a person to think he is a *tzaddik* and thus never try to correct anything. He doesn't think thoughts of *chizuk* or prayer — prayer for *siyatta d'Shemaya* in *ruchniyus* is imperative. Rav Yisrael Salanter said that it's tried and true that every *tefillah* for *ruchniyus* helps.

L'maaseh, this is man's obligation in this world, to constantly advance and grow and to become more and more *b'shleimus*. This is only possible through a steady session in learning *mussar*. The *Mishnah Berurah* (*siman aleph*) writes that *mussar sefarim* are the antidote to the *yetzer hara*. Learning *mussar sefarim* gives a person more *shleimus* and more *shleimus*.

Of course, we need *esek haTorah*, every person must learn Torah according to his ability, each person with the opportunities available to him. If he has more opportunities and he does whatever he can, that is his *shleimus*. But if he can add more and he does not, this is a *chisaron*, deficiency. That's why we need *chizuk*, and the only *chizuk* is through learning *mussar*. It is tried and true that learning *mussar* helps.

We just need *siyatta d'Shemaya* for this. *B'ezras Hashem*, may we all merit *siyatta d'Shemaya* to strengthen ourselves and improve ourselves in whatever needs *chizuk*!

Please daven for
גיטה פייגה בת רבקה
לרפואה שלימה ומהירה בתוך כל חולי ישראל

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