

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 Vayechi* 5781

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Fast Days — To Arouse Us to Teshuvah

Last Friday was Asarah b'Teves. On that day, the siege around Yerushalayim began, so 10 Teves is the beginning of the Churban. Asarah b'Teves is one of the four fasts Chazal established to commemorate the Churban: 10 Teves, 17 Tammuz, 9 Av, and Tzom Gedaliah.

The Rambam (*Hilchos Taaniyos* 5:1) explains why we fast; what is the reason for all these fasts? The fasts are meant to arouse to teshuvah. These fasts remind us of the Churban and the suffering and misfortune of that time — which is still continuing. After all, the Churban is still present and the reasons for the Churban — the sins that caused the Churban — are also still occurring. If we would have repented, there wouldn't be any sins, and the Beis HaMikdash would have been rebuilt already. When we remember this, we are aroused to repent and rectify our sins. This is the reason for instituting fast days — so that we'll do *teshuvah*.

The fast days are already mentioned in the Navi (*Zechariah* 8:19), "So said Hashem Tzevakos, the fast of the fourth [month], the fast of the fifth [month], the fast of the seventh [month], and the fast of the tenth [month]..." This was a *takanah* yet from the period of the prophets. The concept of fasting to arouse a person to repentance was instituted in the times of Zechariah HaNavi — it was probably a prophecy.

Why Do Tzaddikim Fast?

Who fasts? Everyone fasts, even tzaddikim fast, and even the prophets fasted. Even Zechariah HaNavi fasted. Ostensibly, why should he have to fast? For what does he have to repent? Did he have any sins? Perhaps the reason is because the *rabbanim* did not differentiate between people — it was a general rule that the entire *tzibbur* should fast. And since there was a *takanah* to fast, tzaddikim also had to fast, even though they don't have sins.

Perhaps even tzaddikim can rise in *madreigah*; after all, there are many *madreigos*, as Rabbeinu Yonah explains in *Shaarei Teshuvah* (3:17) that there are a number of lofty *maalos* which are also *mitzvos aseh*, such as *yiras Shamayim* and *ahavas Hashem*, and these are comprised of an unlimited number of levels. *Talmud Torah*, *deveikus baTorah*, and *u'Bo tidbak* are also *mitzvos* with unlimited *madreigos*.

For example, Yonason ben Uziel reached a tremendously high level in *limud haTorah*. When he was *osek baTorah*, birds that flew over his head would be burnt (*Sukkah* 28a). So too, when Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua participated in Elisha ben Avuyah's *bris* and discussed *divrei Torah*, a fire came down from Heaven and encircled them (*Yerushalmi*,

cited in *Tosfos*, *Chagigah* 15). These are the *madreigos* one can reach in Torah.

If this is the level one can reach, it's always possible to increase *madreigos* — that's why tzaddikim fast, to arouse them to rise to higher *madreigos*. It's certainly possible.

The Necessity of Selichos

We add Selichos before Shacharis on fast days. Selichos include a prayer for teshuvah, with *vidui*, supplications that there should not be any *tzaros*, and many other requests as well. Selichos were not composed during the times of the Tannaim and Amoraim, nor during the times of the Nevi'im — there were no Selichos then. Selichos only started during the Gaonim's times, or even later. There are a number of Selichos that the Gaonim composed, or the Rishonim, but during the times of the Tannaim or Amoraim there were no Selichos. This begs our attention: If so, why do we recite Selichos nowadays, and why is it more necessary in our days?

The reason seems to be that Selichos are meant to arouse us to teshuvah. We need these Selichos to wake us up. During the times of the Amoraim, there was no need for Selichos. Instead, they would fast, and they would know that they had to do teshuvah. They were aroused to teshuvah even without Selichos!

But when there was *yeridas hadoros* in later generations, the *tzibbur* needed other stimuli — Selichos — to arouse them. In the earlier generations, this was not necessary; the fast day itself aroused them to teshuvah.

The truth is, whatever we say in Selichos is included in our regular daily prayers. For example: *Hashiveinu, Selach Lanu, Re'eh na b'onyeinu* — whatever's in the Selichos is actually included in the blessings of Shemoneh Esrei. And even so, Chazal instituted the recitation of Selichos.

It seems that the reason for this is because we are used to saying Shemoneh Esrei every day, so it doesn't shake us up properly. But if we make the same requests in a different *nusach*, along with *vidui* (*Ashamnu* etc.) — which we don't say every day — it will arouse us to do teshuvah. That's why we recite Selichos.

Repentance for Mistakes; Awareness of One's Sins

How does one do teshuvah? And what should one do teshuvah for? A person first must be aware of his sins; after all, are we rebels who sin purposely? Do we know that something's a sin and do it nonetheless? That doesn't make sense! However, there are sins we commit unintentionally —

we don't know that they're sins. Now, if we don't know that they're sins, how can we repent?

There is a *pasuk* in *Tehillim* (38:19), "For I will relate my intentional sins (*avon*), I will be concerned about my unintentional sins (*cheit*)." This means: I know and understand that I have intentional sins and I'm doing teshuvah for them, but I am worried about my unintentional sins, because I don't know what they are! I am worried — I must do teshuvah for these sins, but since I don't know what they are, how can I?

If so, we must learn how to do teshuvah. After all, a person doesn't sin intentionally, and the unintentional sinner doesn't know that he sinned.

Therefore, every person must search through his deeds (*pashpeish* and *mashmeish*, see *Eiruvin* 13b). The *Mesillas Yesharim* (chap. 3) explains that *pashpeish* means to find one's bad deeds, and *mashmeish* means to investigate his good deeds as well — perhaps they were not performed *b'shleimus*.

But this is still not enough, because people may do things and not even know they are sinning. Therefore, it is imperative to learn the Third Gate in Rabbeinu Yonah's *Shaarei Teshuvah*. There he writes that the reason he composed the Third Gate is because there are very grave matters and people do not realize how serious they are; we think they are merely *middas chassidus*, "acting piously." Since people are unaware that these matters are really very serious sins, he delineated each one in the Third Gate.

How to Determine Shleimus in Our Deeds

Not only must a person search through his actions, he must also investigate his *good* deeds and make sure nothing is deficient.

How does one determine if his deeds are *b'shleimus*? The *Chovos HaLevavos* writes (*Shaar Yichud HaMaaseh* chap. 5), "When you perform an action that others are aware of and you want to investigate your intentions, test your soul in this matter: contemplate whether you would act the same way if you were alone." That is, **if a person wants to know if he is acting *l'shem Shamayim* or not, he must be honest with himself and determine whether or not there is a difference when he does a mitzvah in front of others or when others cannot see.** If he acts the same way even when others don't see him, this is called *l'shem Shamayim*.

It's human nature for a person to act more *b'shleimus* when others are watching, and to act less *b'shleimus* when he has no audience. This type of behavior, though, is not *l'shem Shamayim*.

L'shem Shamayim or for His Own Honor?

The *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim* 53:11) addresses this idea regarding a *chazzan*. "A *shaliach tzibbur* who prolongs his prayers so that others will hear his beautiful voice, if he does so because he is happy that he can express his thanks to

Hashem Yisbarach pleasantly, he will be blessed... but if he intends to show off his voice and is proud of his voice, this is disgusting." [See too the *Chovos HaLevavos*, *Shaar Yichud HaMaaseh*: "The same can be said about all those who intend to find favor in man's eyes when they pray in a *tzibbur* and trill with new lyrics." See there.]

I heard from Maran Rav Dovid Povarsky *zt"l* that in Kelm they would say that when someone is a *baal tefillah*, others hear him and can notice whether he davens with *kavanah* and is thinking about what he's saying, or if he's just parroting the words and thinking about other things simultaneously.

But when a person davens at home, no one knows what his *kavanos* are, so it's harder to have *kavanah*. However if he's a *baal tefillah* and everyone can hear how he's davening, it will be easier for him to have *kavanah*.

This is what the *Shulchan Aruch* writes that it all depends what a person's intention is, and why he wants to be a *baal tefillah*: if it's because he enjoys the *kavod* he receives, even though once he's davening he also has *kavanah*, it is still considered disgusting.

But someone else who really wants to have *kavanah* in his davening, and decides to serve as the *baal tefillah* because that will force him to daven with *kavanah*, this is a very good thing — if this is his intention and purpose. But if his intention is merely to receive honor — and he happens to have *kavanah* as well — this is not considered *shleimus*. (See *Mussar v'Daas* vol. 2, p. 102 and vol. 3, p. 200.)

There are other similar matters that are subtle sins or deeds not performed with *shleimus*, and this is why one must search through his deeds and his actions — what are his intentions when he serves as a *baal tefillah*, and all similar situations.

Mesillas Yesharim Paves a Path to All Madreigos

I've noticed that sometimes a person will open up a *mussar sefer* and see things that frighten him. For example, the *Shaar Cheshbon HaNefesh* of the *Chovos HaLevavos*, there are such lofty calculations! And he feels that acting this way is beyond his capabilities, so he stops learning *Chovos HaLevavos*. He thinks it's not for him. But the truth is if the *Chovos HaLevavos* makes such demands of him, is it possible that he can't carry it out? Is he certain that he can't? It may be hard, but there are solutions!

The *Mesillas Yesharim* is a very calming *sefer*; the author covers a lot of topics. Generally speaking, all *mussar sefarim* are included in *Mesillas Yesharim*. He explains based on a person's *kochos hanefesh* how to advance and attain all *madreigos*. The *Mesillas Yesharim* explains how to attain all the same *madreigos* that the *Chovos HaLevavos* discusses in *Shaar Cheshbon HaNefesh*! If so, if someone feels frightened, overwhelmed, or confused, he should know that there is a way to do it — pick up a *Mesillas Yesharim*. So there is no reason to completely absolve yourself from learning *mussar*.

Indeed, it's well known that Rav Zundel of Salant asked Rav Chaim Volozhiner which *mussar sefer* to learn, and Rav

Chaim told him, “It’s good to learn all *mussar sefarim*, but the *Mesillas Yesharim* should be your guide.” All *mussar sefarim* are good and have an influence on people, but you must learn *Mesillas Yesharim*; it’s the best *sefer* for you. The *Mesillas Yesharim* should guide you, and in this way, you’ll find a path — based on your *kochos hanefesh* — how to slowly, but surely advance in all the *madreigos* until you reach humility and *kedushah*. It is possible, and there is a way to advance.

Be Careful Regarding Improper Thoughts

The *Shaarei Teshuvah* (Third Gate, *Ose* 160, tenth *madreigah*) writes about those who have no portion in Olam HaBa. He writes that *chas v’shalom* a person can lose his Olam HaBa by one wrong thought, which is really part of human nature. The Mashgiach Rav Yechezkel Levenstein *zt”l* once spoke about how it is possible to lose Olam HaBa with just one bad thought, *Rachmana litzlan*.

How is this so? Rabbeinu Yonah writes that there is a group of people called “haters of Hashem” who do not have a portion in Olam HaBa. He then went on to explain just who are “haters of Hashem”: “The concept of ‘haters of Hashem’ can sometimes be present in people who perform the mitzvos and are careful about not committing sins — by deed, or by speech — if they have a bad soul and deep in their heart it is difficult for them to see their friends being *osek baTorah*, or if it will aggravate them to see people serving Hashem and fearing Him. It is like you say about a person who doesn’t want people to honor the king and serve him, because he hates the king.” See the *Chovos HaLevavos* for further discussion.

For example, consider someone involved in a mitzvah, and the mitzvah gives him honor. Then there’s someone else who is doing the same mitzvah, but he isn’t as successful, and he wants the first man to be less successful as well, because it bothers him and pains him that the first man is more respected. He thinks: “If he was less respected than me, I would feel good, but it’s painful for me if he is more successful, and I want him to be less successful.” This is called “haters of Hashem”! After all, *ratzon Hashem* is that there should be as many *maasim tovim* as possible, and he wants less *maasim tovim*. This is going against Hashem’s will.

And even though this is human nature, if a person thinks thoughts like this, he is considered a “hater of Hashem,” *Rachmana litzlan*. We must be extremely careful about this.

Honoring Your Fellow Jew

I once heard the following from the Ponovezer Rav *zt”l*. There was once a *gadol baTorah* who was a rav and a rosh yeshivah in Chutz LaAretz. He wanted to appoint a second rosh yeshivah who was on a higher level than him, so the *talmidim* will benefit. In the end, it didn’t work out due to technical reasons, but he was willing to bring in a rosh yeshivah who was greater than him, and he would have been underneath him, the second rosh yeshivah would have received all the *kavod*!

Not only that, this man said he would be willing to give over his *rabbanus* to someone else who would be a better rav than him, and he mentioned the name of one of the *gedolim* then. That *gadol* refused his offer. But the original rav was willing to give up his position so that there would be a greater kiddush *Shem Shamayim*! Acting in this manner is against human nature.

The Gemara relates a similar story (*Pesachim* 66a). The sons of Beseira were *nesi'im*. Once, erev Pesach fell out on Shabbos and they forgot the halachah of whether *korban Pesach* pushes off the laws of Shabbos. They said, “There is one person here who came from Bavel. His name is Hillel the Bavli, and he learned Torah from Shemaya and Avtalyon. He surely knows the halachah. They summoned him and asked him their question. Sure enough, he answered on the spot and proved to them that it does push off the laws of Shabbos.

When the sons of Beseira saw this, they knew he was more knowledgeable than them, and they immediately appointed him *nasi* instead of them. (See *Bava Metzia* 84b: Three are humble... and the sons of Beseira... as he said, “They appointed him as *nasi* over them.”)

We see that this can happen, but it is against human nature. **How does one acquire this nature, to be like the sons of Beseira? By learning mussar! If a person learns mussar, he sees how wonderful it is to act like that, to give your fellow the opportunity to be great.** Even though it is against human nature, if someone learns *mussar*, he can act this way. The sons of Beseira learned *mussar*, and so did the rav in the Ponovezer Rav’s story. He was a *baal mussar*, so he was able to give others *kavod*.

This is part of “the duties of the heart,” how one’s heart should be. The *sefer Chovos HaLevavos* does not discuss matters that are *middas chassidus* — it discusses matters that are “duties,” how the heart must be, a heart according to the *Shulchan Aruch*. It’s not simple, because it’s against human nature, but it is possible. By learning *mussar*, by learning *Mesillas Yesharim* and other *mussar sefarim*, one can transform his heart to be like the heart of the sons of Beseira!

Believing That All Pain Is Heaven-sent

This is one small example, but there are many more, especially matters that are connected to *emunah*. For example, if a person is pained by another, it’s natural for him to be angry at the one who harmed him. However, *emunah* means believing that everything is from Heavens’ hands, and Heaven decided that he deserved this pain. Why? Maybe it’s an atonement for a sin, or maybe it’s to arouse him to teshuvah, as Chazal say (*Berachos* 5a): If a person sees that suffering befalls him, he should search out his deeds.” Or it could be that this suffering is *yissurim shel ahavah*, to increase his reward in Olam HaBa. However, if it bothers him, it’s probably not *yissurim shel ahavah*.

In any case, it is from Shamayim, and since it’s from Hashem, why should he get angry at the other person. He should be thinking about what Hashem wants from him, and not getting angry at the other person. The pain would have happened even

without him since it's from Shamayim. He should understand that the pain is for his benefit, and he should make an effort to think of ways this could be seen as good, for his benefit. Therefore, there is no reason to get angry.

While this perspective is against human nature, this is the way someone with *emunah* will act, and it's the *emes*. If a person lets his natural tendencies control him, he will get angry at a person who causes him harm.

Remaining Silent When Shamed

In Shemoneh Esrei we ask, "And to those who shame me, may my soul remain silent." The word used is *klalah*, curse, but it is really referring not to an actual curse, but to any type of shame. Whenever the word "*klalah*" is used in Tanach, it means shame. For example (*Melachim I 2:8*), *V'hu kilelani klalah nimretzes*, "And he cursed me clearly." We are asking that if others shame me, my heart should be silent — I shouldn't care, and I shouldn't be upset that others shame me. Even though this is against human nature, *tefillah* is effective.

However, if a person isn't interested in behaving this way, how can he ask for it? How can he lie? [A similar situation is discussed in *Chovos HaLevavos*, *Shaar Yichud HaMaaseh* chap. 5. See there.] However, this is a *tefillah*. We are asking and hoping that we reach this level, and even though it is not human nature to be silent when shamed, we are asking Hashem to change our nature. And it is possible to change nature! We daven for this: "And to those who shame me, may my soul remain silent." With *tefillah*, one can make a change.

We've already mentioned Rav Yisrael Salanter's comments (*Ohr Yisrael* Letter 14) that when it comes to changing a *middah*, *tefillah* alone is not effective. One must invest in natural ways of making a change — and one must learn *mussar* and become aware of the ways to do so. This must be actually what our *tefillah* is: that we should find the natural ways and solutions to change our nature, to reach the point where it won't bother us if others shame us.

Similarly, there are many other things that are against nature, yet it is possible to change one's nature.

Rectifying One's Natural Middos

The Rambam (*Hilchos Teshuvah 7:3*) writes that one must repent for bad *middos*. That is, even if a person is born with bad *middos*, or if they developed in him afterward, he must repent and change his *middos*.

Initially, you might think: why is it his fault that he has bad *middos*? After all, that's just his nature. He has a yetzer hara before bar mitzvah, and his yetzer tov only comes after his bar mitzvah (*Avos D'Rebbi Nosson 16:2*). Even though he's born with good *middos*, which is a Jew's natural disposition, once he starts understanding a bit, he already has a yetzer hara enticing him and persuading him with calculations of bad *middos*. Even a *kattan* has a yetzer hara, so if he has bad *middos* from his youth, it becomes his nature. What can be done about it?

Even so, the Rambam writes that there is an obligation to rectify one's *middos*! There is a mitzvah *v'halachta bidrachav*, follow in His ways, and every single person is obligated to change his nature and transform his *middos* to good *middos*. To this end, one must learn *mussar*, which provide solutions and natural ways to rectify one's *middos*.

Similarly, there are many things that depend on a person's nature, sin is part of human nature — but there are solutions and ways to defy nature. Therefore, it is so important to learn *mussar*. One also needs *siyatta d'Shemaya* for this. *Yehi ratzon* that we all merit to rectify whatever we need to, and may we add levels of duties of the heart. That will be the rectification of the sins of the Churban, as the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed due to *sinas chinam* and bad *middos*. By rectifying our *middos*, we will be rectifying the sin of the Churban. *B'ezras Hashem*, may we merit *hatzlachah* in all necessary areas.

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גיטה פייגה בת רבקה
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