

## 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 Shemos 5781

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### Hashem Decides on A Person's Finances

Human nature is that a person wants two things: 1) Money: human beings want as much money as possible, as Chazal said (*Koheles Rabbah* 1:13): "If he has one hundred, he wants two hundred; if he has two hundred, he wants four hundred." 2) Honor: humans by nature want to be honored and respected, and they enjoy honor.

This is all a mistake. First of all, desiring money is wrong, because finances depend only on *hashgachas Hashem*. Every year, on Rosh Hashanah, it is decided who will be poor and who will be wealthy. It is not dependent on the person and his desires; it depends on one thing only: whatever is decided in *Shamayim*.

The *pasuk* in *Koheles* states (5:12): "There is wealth that is kept for its owner to harm him." Sometimes wealth is to man's detriment. Another *pasuk* there states (5:11), "And the satiety of a wealthy man does not let him sleep." The rich man is worried; he must guard his possessions. Indeed, Chazal say (*Avos* 2:7): "More possessions, more worry."

Every penny a man is supposed to earn was already set in *Shamayim*. The Gemara tells us (*Beitzah* 16:1): "Man's earnings are set from Rosh Hashanah." **Since everything is set, if a person tries to make more money, it will not give him an easier life. Because everything was already predetermined in any case.** *Shamayim* already set the amount of money he'd bring in over the year, based on his financial needs in this world.

The Gemara there states that this does not include Shabbos and Yom Tov expenses, and tuition for his children's Torah learning. For those expenses, if a person spends less, he will earn less, and if he spends more, he will earn more. The *sefarim* provide a hint to remember this: **הרץ מ"ש"ר** — the acronym "Tishrei" stands for: תלמוד תורה, Torah study; שבת, Shabbos; ראש חודש, Rosh Chodesh; יום טוב, Yom Tov. (The Gemara does not mention Rosh Chodesh; it is brought down in *Midrash Vayikra Rabbah* 30:1.) There is no set amount of money for the aforementioned expenses; *Shamayim* provides a person with money based on what he spends.

Therefore, even though money is a necessary resource, it must be seen for what it is: a means, not a goal.

### The Nature of Desiring Money and Honor

However, human nature is different. Humans naturally desire money. Sometimes, it happens that a person can

suffer a financial loss due to his desire for money. Take for example, someone with a steady income. He hears about a business opportunity that promises greater financial security, so he sells whatever he has and invests in this business opportunity. And then he loses everything. This scenario is not uncommon, many have suffered losses due to their desire for money.

The *Mesillas Yesharim* explains (end of chap. 11) the concept of desire for money, and then it states: "The desire for honor is even greater. For it is possible that a person would conquer his yetzer hara for money and other worldly pleasures, but the desire for honor goads him on; for he cannot [bear to] see himself on a lower level than his friend." The nature of desiring honor is stronger than the desire for money.

I have seen, however, people who have the opposite nature. They aren't interested in honor; they know that *kavod* is *narishkeit*, foolishness, but they need money — because it is useful. They are more impressed with money, and don't care about honor at all.

But most people desire honor; the nature of loving honor goads them on and controls them — and to such an extent that they embarrass themselves just to receive honor.

### Honor Is Fitting Only for Torah

The truth is, Chazal said (*Avos* 6:3), "Honor is fitting only for Torah." The explanation of this is that honor is a spiritual pleasure, not a physical pleasure. "Honor is only fitting for Torah" means that *ahavas haTorah* and the pleasure of learning Torah is a much greater spiritual pleasure than the pleasure derived from honor! A person who is *osek baTorah* doesn't need the imaginary pleasure of honor, because there is much greater pleasure inherent in Torah, the concept of *ashrecha baOlam ha-zeh*, "you are fortunate in this World," is stronger, more potent.

Chazal go on to say there (6:4): "This is the way of Torah: Eat bread with salt, and drink measured water, and sleep on the ground, and live a life of suffering, but nonetheless, toil in Torah. If you do so, you are fortunate in this world, and it will be good for you in the World to Come." Simply speaking, the *chiddush* here is that **even** if a person only has bread with salt, and a small amount of water, and he lives a life of suffering and hardship, yet he still toils in Torah, then he will be fortunate in this world. *Ashrecha*, you are fortunate, means that this is the greatest level of good

fortune; there is nothing greater. This lifestyle gives a person the most fortunate, happy life in this world!

### A Plethora of Pleasures — Contradiction to Torah

Rabbeinu Yonah explains that this *mishnah* does not mean “even” if a person only has bread and salt. Rather, it means he must specifically choose a diet of bread and salt, meaning, he should *l’chatchilah* limit his worldly pleasures. Chazal say (*Avos* 2:12): “Apply yourself to learn Torah, as it is not an inheritance for you.” A person has to prepare himself and apply himself so that he will be qualified and ready for Torah. What does this preparation entail? “To minimize pleasures so that he can learn a lot of Torah, as we have learned: ‘This is the way of Torah, bread with water etc.’ Because wisdom will not be able to reside within a person who indulges in pleasures.”

So Rabbeinu Yonah holds that one specifically must eat bread and salt — meaning, he should limit his worldly pleasures, as we learned in the 48 ways to acquire the Torah listed in *Pirkei Avos*, chap. 6. One them is “*mi’ut taanug*” — the Torah is acquired by limiting worldly pleasures. Increasing worldly pleasures is a contradiction to the Torah! Eating bread and salt is the preferred way of living, and so is drinking measured water. The *mishnah* is exhorting us to eat and drink just the right amount to sustain our bodies. So too, “sleep on the ground” means only to sleep as much as necessary.

Of course, this is all subjective, each person according to his needs and abilities. If a person can sleep on the ground and wake up rested, why should he look for the physical pleasures in a more comfortable sleep? What does he need it for? But of course, each person must do what he is capable of doing. We merit success in Torah by minimizing pleasures. And the contrary is true as well: the more pleasure one allows himself negates success in Torah.

The same is true regarding honor. One of the matters Torah is acquired with is “distancing oneself from honor.” If a person wants honor and doesn’t distance himself from it, even if he doesn’t run after the honor, he is already losing out on success in Torah. A person must distance himself from honor, he must specifically stay far away!

There are some people who not only don’t distance themselves from *kavod*, but they seek it out. They complain that people didn’t honor them as much as they honored others. This happens often, people make these mistakes.

### Bnei HaYeshivos Are Mevakshi Hashem

There is a *madreigah* called “*mevakeish Hashem*,” a person who seeks out Hashem. The Gemara in the end of *Berachos* (63b) relates that it says in *Parashas Ki Sisa* that after the sin of the Golden Calf, Moshe Rabbeinu went out of the *machaneh*. He had a tent there, and he called it “*Ohel Moed*.” “And it was that every *mevakeish Hashem* went to the *Ohel Moed* which was outside the *machaneh*” (*Shemos*

33:7). That is, anyone who wanted to learn Torah would go out to the *Moshe Rabbeinu*’s tent outside the camp. And as a result, he was called “*mevakeish Hashem*.”

The Gemara there learns a *kal v’chomer* from this. If the Torah calls anyone who went out to the *aron Hashem*, which was only a distance of 12 *mil* from the camp, a *mevakeish Hashem*, *kal vachomer*, *talmidei chachamim* who travel from city to city and from country to country to learn Torah, are called *mevakshei Hashem*.”

That is, if a person who walked a distance of 3 *parso’as* outside the *machaneh* to learn Torah from *Moshe Rabbeinu* was already called a *mevakeish Hashem*, which is a special title for someone who puts in effort and takes pains for Torah, *kal vachomer*, someone who troubles himself even more — *talmidei chachamim* who travel from city to city, who travel to *yeshivah* to learn Torah — are surely called *mevakshei Hashem*. This is a very high *madreigah*.

I’ve already told the story of *Maran HaGaon Rav Baruch Ber zt”l*, which I heard from someone who was his *talmid* in *Kamenitz* and was present at the time of the story: Once two *bachurim* from a different city came to *Rav Baruch Ber*. *Rav Baruch Ber* said to them, “*Shalom Aleichem, vus machst ihr mevakshei Hashem* — how are you, *mevakshei Hashem*.” *Rav Baruch Ber* viewed every single occurrence through the perspective of Torah. When two *bachurim* came from another city, he immediately recalled the title the Gemara coined for them: *mevakshei Hashem*! What a special title!

### The Inner Joy of Mevakshei Hashem

In *davening* we say, *Yismach lev mevakshei Hashem*, “may the heart of those who seek Hashem rejoice.” I saw the following about this *pasuk*: Ostensibly, *mevakeish* means *mechapeis*, one who seeks out, as the *pasuk* in *Mishlei* says (2:4): “If you search it out like money.” That is, a person who seeks out and searches is still lacking; he doesn’t have what he needs and wants. He cannot be happy as long as he doesn’t receive what he’s looking for. He’ll only be happy when he acquires it, but meanwhile, he doesn’t have anything to be happy about, because he is lacking his heart’s desire! So what does the term “*mevakshei Hashem*” mean?

The *Siach Yitzchak* in the *Siddur HaGra* explains that “when it comes to any other matter, when someone searches for something and doesn’t find it, his effort is in vain. However, this is not true regarding *mevakshei Hashem*. The actual seeking out is an exalted goal, which is the *kirvah*, closeness, to *Hashem Yisbarach*.” When someone is *mevakeish Hashem*, when someone seeks out Torah, the actual searching gives him joy! The searching is a special *zechus*, and just by seeking, he attains the merit of a *mevakeish Hashem*. That’s why he is happy even before he attains his goal. This is the reality. The actual seeking is a *madreigah* — the fact that he is seeking out Hashem and going to learn Torah.

## Going to Learn Torah Is Considered a Mitzvah

Someone who is on his way to learn Torah is called *osek bamitzvah*, *u'patur min hamitzvah*, “he is involved in one mitzvah, so is absolved of other mitzvos” (*Sukkah* 25a, and Rashi ad loc.). Someone who is already learning is not considered “*osek bamitzvah*” that he can be absolved of sitting in a sukkah.

The reason for this is explained in *Kol Ben Levi* (mentioned in *Chiddushei Rabbi Akiva Eiger* on *Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Dei'ah* 246:18): When it comes to Torah learning, every minute that a person learns is a new mitzvah, as the Gra writes (*Shenos Eliyahu*, beginning of *Peah*) that every word of Torah learning is a mitzvah, so if so, every word a person learns is a new mitzvah. It's not one long mitzvah, but many mitzvos, so it's not considered that he's in the middle of a mitzvah, so he's not considered *osek bamitzvah* to be absolved from other mitzvos. Not matter how long he learns, every word is a new mitzvah, which he hasn't yet started fulfilling.

On the other hand, when he's on the way to learn, it's one long mitzvah of preparation for learning Torah, and he's in the middle of it. Therefore, he is absolved from fulfilling other mitzvos. (See further in *sefer Asifas Shemu'os* Tishrei, fn. 23.)

I saw something about *limud haTorah* that many people don't understand. Learning Gemara even with Rashi, and not with Tosfos, is very pleasant and interesting, and is full of sweetness. Tosfos discusses many calculations, but Rashi has less, and basically explains the *peshat* in Gemara. There is extraordinary sweetness in learning the simple meaning of Gemara with Rashi. Not everyone is aware of this, but this is the reality.

### Necessary Worldly Pleasures

Let us get back to the concept of worldly pleasures. There are pleasures related to the desire for money and honor, and none of them have any *maalos* — in fact, they are deficiencies themselves.

But there are worldly pleasures that are necessities, such as eating and drinking. A person cannot exist without them. Honor, however, is not a necessity, but eating and drinking are necessary worldly pleasures.

And yet, the *Mesillas Yesharim* (chap. 13, 26) writes that there are various *madreigos* to eating and drinking. If a person enjoys the food and wants to enjoy it, and to this end, he eats the most delectable dishes and tries to make them even more delicious and enjoyable, this does not contribute to his health at all, and it is not a necessity.

Even if a person eats practically and healthily, if he enjoys his food, this is a worldly, materialistic pleasure. Both the *Mesillas Yesharim* and the *Shaarei Teshuvah* write that this distances a person from attaining *sheleimus*.

Therefore, the solution is to eat with the intention of *l'shem Shamayim*, as Chazal say (*Avos* 2:12), “And all your actions should be *l'shem Shamayim*, for the sake of Heaven.” When a person eats *l'shem Shamayim*, it is a necessity — it is preparation for doing mitzvos. After all, he must eat in order to have strength to fulfill all the mitzvos and perform *maasim tovim*. He's not eating solely to live; food is a means to perform *maasim tovim*.

### A Steady Time for Learning Shas

Everyone wants to learn, and everyone has *ahavas haTorah*. Nowadays, many learn Daf Yomi, or Amud Yomi. Usually, if someone learns on a steady basis — and as we said, Gemara with Rashi is also good — he advances further and further, until he eventually finishes Shas!

Finishing Shas is very special, and finishing any *masechta* is special too. Someone who once learned in yeshivah told me that he never would finish a complete *masechta*. And once, he did finish a *masechta*. He felt so wonderful, because finishing a complete *masechta* is *sheleimus*.

### Finishing a Masechta Makes You a King

The Midrash states (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 18:21), regarding the *pasuk* in *Shir HaShirim* “Sixty is royalty”: “These are the sixty *masechtos*.” This means the *masechtos* are called royalty. Not kings, but royalty. Every *masechta* on its own is called a queen. So who is the king? The person who learns the *masechta* is a king! We know the Torah is compared to a wife, and here it says that each *masechta* is compared to a queen. We must explain now when Torah is a wife, and when Torah is a queen.

The explanation is simple. It depends if a person learned an entire *masechta* or just part of it. Whenever a person learns Torah, but doesn't complete a *masechta*, that Torah is called a woman, not a queen. The man learning is called “a man.” Just as a man attains *sheleimus* through his wife, and without a wife he is lacking *sheleimus*, as it states (*Yevamos* 62b), “One who is without a wife is without Torah,” so too, a person who learns merits the level of *sheleimus* through his Torah, and he achieves the importance of a “man,” by learning Torah.

A complete *masechta*, however, has special importance and is called “queen.” When a person completes a *masechta*, he is called “king.”

### The Level of King: Control Over the Yetzer Hara

What does the word “king” mean? The Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 20b) relates that Shlomo HaMelech initially ruled over the entire world, and even over the *sheidim*, demons. Then, due to some sin, his kingship slowly diminished, and he only ruled over Bnei Yisrael. Then only over Yerushalayim, and then he says, “I was a king in Yerushalayim.” Meaning, I'm not even a king in Yerushalayim anymore. He ended up

being a king only over his own staff and bowl: the staff being his walking stick, and bowl being the bowl he ate from. This begs an explanation: what is a king over a staff and a bowl?

Based on what we mentioned earlier, that there are two primary desires — the desire for honor and arrogance, which is a spiritual pleasure, and other physical desires, like the desire for money.

When Chazal said that Shlomo ruled over his staff and his bowl, they were hinting that he ruled over these two primary *yetzer haras*. The staff is a sign of importance — respectable people walked with a staff — and Shlomo HaMelech ruled over “importance,” he was not arrogant. He ruled over the *yetzer hara* of arrogance; he had the *middah* of humility, he did not look for honor, nor did he hold himself in high esteem. The bowl, which is referring to the bowl he ate from, hints to the desire for food. Shlomo only ate *l’shem Shamayim*; he ruled over and controlled the *yetzer hara* of the desire for food.

This is a king: someone who rules over and controls all the *yetzer haras* in human nature; someone who rules over his “staff” and “bowl.” Someone who learns and completes a *masechta* merits the *madreigah* of “king” — he has control over his *yetzer hara*! And there are all sorts of *yetzer haras*, as Chazal said (*Kiddushin* 30b) that the *yetzer hara* is renewed and becomes stronger every day. “Becomes stronger” means the same *yetzer hara* becomes strong once again; while “renewed” means that new, never yet created, *yetzer haras* surface. We cannot even imagine how many *yetzer haras* exist.

Every *masechta* that a person learns gives him royalty and control over one *yetzer hara*. “Sixty is royalty” — the sixty *masechtos* in Shas correspond to the sixty *yetzer haras*. It seems that sixty is the maximum number of *yetzer haras*; the number sixty appears in many places in Chazal (see *Berachos* 57, and more). This is the *koach* of Torah.

All Torah learning, even if it isn’t a complete *masechta*, has an effect and brings a person up a *madreigah*. Completing a *masechta*, however, gives a person *sheleimus* and a

completely different *madreigah*. This is why the person we mentioned felt so wonderful when he completed a *masechta* — it’s because he achieved *sheleimus*. When a person is *shaleim*, he feels good; *sheleimus* gives him a pleasant, good feeling due to the sanctity of Torah which gives a person *koach* to fight the *yetzer hara*. The *yetzer hara* is *tumah*, impurity. Through the sixty *masechtos* a person becomes king with sixty various *kochos* and sixty powers to fight against all types of *yetzer haras*.

### The Path Is Via the Mesillas Yesharim

Each person must learn Torah according to his ability: one may learn more and another may learn less, but there is still a *yetzer hara*. In order to merit the *koach* of Torah, one must fight the *yetzer hara*. And the antidote to the *yetzer hara* is the *Mesillas Yesharim*. Indeed, the *Mishnah Berurah* (*siman aleph*) mentions in the name of the Kadmonim that the antidote to the *yetzer hara* is learning *mussar*. The *Mesillas Yesharim* gives a person *kochos* to know how to fight with the “sixty forms of royalty” against all the *yetzer haras*.

The path to achieve this is by moving up one *madreigah* at a time, as the *Mesillas Yesharim* explains. First caution, then alacrity, and then all the other good qualities. But the very first step is Torah, as Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair wrote in his *beraisa*, “Torah leads to caution.” And from that, one will attain all the *maalos*, by learning Torah to the best of his abilities, without extraordinary efforts. I think the Chafetz Chaim’s *sefer Toras HaBayis* gives suggestions how to learn and be *osek baTorah* and overcome all obstacles and disturbances.

And one who comes to be purified will be helped (*Yoma* 38b). If a person starts off with good intentions, he will have *siyatta d’Shemaya*. There is no limit to *siyatta d’Shemaya*. There are many facts and stories about people who merited *siyatta d’Shemaya* by learning *Mesillas Yesharim*. By learning *Mesillas Yesharim*, a person can attain unimaginable success. *B’ezeras Hashem* may we all be *zocheh* to *siyatta d’Shemaya* and success in whatever we need.

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