

Darkei HaChizuk

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

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The Zechus of Torah Protects Us

Bein HaZemanim is over, the new *zman* has already begun. There's usually less Torah learned during *bein hazemanim*, but now that the *zman* began, there's a lot of Torah. While some people learn during *bein hazemanim* as much as they do during the *zman*, there are still many others for whom *bein hazemanim* is a time of *rifyon*, slackening. Among the majority of the *tzibbur*, there is a deficiency in Torah during *bein hazemanim*. Once the *zman* starts, there is Torah again.

It's no secret that many tragedies have occurred during *bein hazemanim*, but during the *zman*, *baruch Hashem*, everything's fine. The *zechus* of Torah is diminished during *bein hazemanim*.

I've already told you about the episode with the *tzaddik* from Netivot, Rabbi Yisrael Abuchatzzeira *zt"l*. Once, the Israeli army was preparing for a dangerous military operation and they wanted a *berachah* from him. So they drove down to Netivot and asked him to bless them that there would not be any tragedies. He asked them, "What time is the operation set for?" They told him: 2:00 p.m. He told them not to do it then, because *yeshivos* and *kollelim* have their afternoon break then, and everyone is eating and resting; the merit of Torah is missing. He told them it would be best to schedule the operation for 4:00 p.m. — when *seider* begins in *yeshivos* and *kollelim*; then they'd have the *zechus* of Torah. The Torah's *zechus* isn't only for the people who actually learn Torah; it protects and saves even those who don't learn.

However, one who learns Torah earns special merit — the *malach ha-ma'ves* has no control over him! The Gemara relates (*Shabbos* 30b) that Dovid HaMelech knew he would be *niftar* on Shabbos, so he diligently learned Torah throughout the entire Shabbos. The *malach ha-ma'ves* could not control him. When the *malach ha-ma'ves* figured out what was happening, it made a terrible noise between the trees to disrupt Dovid HaMelech's learning. Dovid rose to see what the noise was from, and the step he stood on broke. This distracted him and he stopped learning for a moment. At that very moment, the *malach ha-ma'ves* was able to overpower him. *Esek haTorah* is so powerful; it can save a person from the *malach ha-ma'ves*.

We've already said that *esek haTorah* is greater than all mitzvos, as Chazal say (*Avos* 3:6): "If ten sit and learn Torah together, the Shechinah rests among them... and even one..." It doesn't say anywhere that when people perform mitzvos, the Shechinah rests among them. This *madreigah* and *maalah* is exclusive to Torah.

Using Torah to Show Off: the Elixir of Death

Chazal say (*Avos* chap. 6) that the Torah is acquired in 48 ways. Many of these relate to good *middos*, such as modesty and loving one's fellows, because good *middos* are a cause for success in Torah.

The Gemara (*Kiddushin* 30b) expounds on the word *v'samtem*, "*sam tam*." The Torah is compared to an elixir of life. Chazal say (*Taanis* 7a): "Whoever learns Torah for the sake of it (*lishmah*), his Torah becomes an elixir of life. Yet whoever learns Torah *she'lo lishmah*, not for its own sake, it becomes the elixir of death." They explain that the "*shelo lishmah*" mentioned here means that he learns Torah to provoke others and become haughty, to win over and control others. This is *bad middos*, and it's considered that he's doing an *aveirah*! He's learning in order to use *bad middos* and to perform bad deeds, so his Torah becomes an elixir of death for him, since it's causing him to sin.

Even if he while he's learning, he doesn't have *bad middos* yet — meaning before he acts with arrogance or before he turns confrontational — if he's learning in order to provoke others, it's already considered that he's involved in an *aveirah*! Just as one who's on his way to perform a mitzvah is considered as if he's actually involved in a mitzvah already, because the goal of his trip is the mitzvah, the reverse is true as well. If his goal is to sin, and he's learning Torah to be able to act with negative *middos*, the actual learning is a sin — and it's called "the elixir of death," *sam ha-ma'ves*. Such Torah study is a grave sin and the elixir of death for him. *Baruch Hashem* we have no connection to such things.

Controlling One's Natural Inclination

There are people who are born with good *middos* and have a good, compliant nature. But there are others who are born with a nature of *bad middos*. Such a thing does exist. And yet, practically speaking he acts properly: he acts with good *middos*, does *chessed* and helps others,

makes sure not to hurt others, is not arrogant or confrontational — he goes against his nature.

A person like this is on a higher level than someone who's born with good *middos*! The latter is simply following his nature; this is no great *madreigah*, because that's just his nature. However, if someone is born with bad *middos* and he behaves otherwise, he goes against his nature and exhibits good *middos*, his behavior stems from *yiras Shamayim* or from acknowledging the truth and hoping to change. Well, this is a *madreigah* and someone like this is an *adam gadol*, a great person.

It turns out that there could be two people acting exactly the same. For one, it's natural and is not considered a *madreigah*, while the other person is overcoming his nature — this is a *madreigah* and he is considered a great person!

Influencing Others to Withstand Nisyonos

If a person has a *hashpa'ah*, is a good influence on others to have *middos tovos*, then even if he already has good *middos*, he receives *siyatta d'Shemaya* to have even better *middos*, *middah k'neged middah*. Even when good *middos* is part of a person's nature, sometimes, he does have a small inclination to act otherwise, and this is a *nisayon* which is difficult to withstand. But if he's a good example of *middos tovos* for others and influences them to act properly, he merits *siyatta d'Shemaya* for good *middos* and to overcome his *nisyonos*. Having a *hashpaah* of good *middos* means that he speaks about it with others and explains what it means to have good *middos*. Of course, a personal example is also a *hashpaah*. When people see how he acts, it has an influence on them!

So too, if a person acts with *yiras Shamayim*, he influences others to more *yiras Shamayim*. The stories abound. Someone told me that he serves in an influential, public position. He's responsible for many matters and in his powerful position, he can do things that may help some people or cause damage to others. Sometimes, he rightfully must make certain decisions, and others pressure him to act improperly. It's no secret that when people are under pressure, they can act inappropriately, but he told me that he withstands this *nisayon*. Why? Because he saw *yiras Shamayim*! He learned in yeshivah as a young man, and he saw the Ponovezer Rav and the Mashgiach Rav Yechezkel zt"l, and he saw their *yiras Shamayim*. Since he was exposed to *yiras Shamayim*, he has it too, and his *yirah* controls him despite the pressure. Normally, people succumb to natural pressures, but he does what is right; he acts as his *yirah* obligates him. This is the *koach* of *yirah* and this is the *hashpa'ah* of someone who sees *yiras Shamayim*.

However, acquiring *yiras Shamayim* is not simple. He saw *yiras Shamayim* so he attained it, because seeing

yiras Shamayim has a *hashpa'ah*. But what happens when someone doesn't see a living example of *yiras Shamayim*? How will he attain *yiras Shamayim*? The answer is only by learning *mussar*! An intelligent person learns *mussar sefarim*: *Shaarei Teshuvah*, *Mesillas Yesharim*, *Chovos HaLevavos*, *Orchos Tzaddikim* — all the *mussar sefarim*. Then he sees what a sin really is, and he attains *yiras Shamayim*.

The Gravity of One Unintentional Sin

I once heard *baalei mussar* speaking about the gravity of a sin. They said: What is a *shogeig*, an unintentional sin? On Rosh Hashanah, there is an obligation to hear the shofar. Even if Rosh Hashanah falls on Shabbos, *mi'd'Oraisa*, the *chiyuv* still stands, but the Rabbanan decreed not to blow shofar, just in case someone might decide to learn the laws of *tekias shofar*, walk to another person's house carrying his shofar, and transgress carrying on Shabbos. Rabbanan did not mean that this person would carry intentionally; they thought he may not be aware of the prohibition of carrying, think it was permissible to carry, and thus unintentionally be *mechallel Shabbos*. For unintentional *chillul Shabbos*, one must bring a *korban chatas*, and so they decreed not to blow the shofar on Shabbos.

If we take a deeper look, it's clear that there's no concern that the entire *tzibbur* will make this mistake — Chazal were worried about one person, or maybe just a few people throughout the generations. And yet, for this single person who might make a mistake, all of Klal Yisrael, throughout all generations, do not blow shofar when Rosh Hashanah falls out on Shabbos!

Rosh Hashanah is called *Yom Teruah*, *Zichron Teruah*. Shofar blowing is compared to the Kohen Gadol's *avodah* in the *Kodesh Kodashim* (*Rosh Hashanah* 26a), and the shofar arouses us to do teshuvah. And yet, the chachamim ruled that all Klal Yisrael should not blow shofar due to the concern that one person might sin unintentionally! This demonstrates how grave sin is, and just how powerful is the sin of a single person.

Even after we know this, it's not easy to understand — and that's why we need *yirah*. *Yiras Shamayim* is a *mitzvas aseih*, as it states (*Devarim* 10:20): Fear Hashem your G-d." Rabbeinu Yonah writes in *Shaarei Teshuvah* (*Shaar* 1:17, 20; *Shaar* 3:15,17) that the *chiyuv* is to increase *yiras Shamayim*! To increase more and more *yiras Shamayim*, since there are many levels of *yirah*. A person is obligated to constantly be involved in increasing his *yirah*, to add more and more!

Habit Promotes Change

Yirah leads a person to act with good *middos*, as we said. Indeed, even someone who has a nature of bad *middos*, if he acts with *yiras Shamayim* and goes against his nature; if he performs good deeds and acts with good

middos, these blessed habits will eventually become second nature. His nature will change and he will begin to love doing good deeds. At first, it will be against his nature, but since he goes through the motions of doing these good deeds, and gets used to it, his good behavior actually changes his nature!

This too is a *madreigah*. When someone who is born with good *middos* acts properly, this is not considered a *madreigah*, because this is how he was born. But if his nature was not like this originally, and he changed by habituating himself to act differently, this is a *madreigah*!

Torah's Sweetness: An Even Greater Obligation

Esek HaTorah is enticing. We've spoken about this often: Torah has sweetness, as it states (*Tehillim* 19:11): "And they are sweeter than honey." And *divrei Torah* are also interesting, as Rashi writes on the following *pasuk* (*Devarim* 6:6): "Which I command you today" — Like a new proclamation that everyone runs to read. If so, it's not hard to learn Torah; it's sweet, enticing, and interesting. One just has to start.

The Gemara states (*Menachos* 43b, cited by Rav Yisrael Salanter in *Ohr Yisrael* 7-8): "The punishment for *lavan* (white) is greater than the punishment for *techeiles* (light blue)." That is, there are white *tzitzis* strings and there are the *techeiles*, light blue, strands. If a man didn't wear *techeiles* (in the time of the Beis HaMikdash when *techeiles* was available), it was a sin, and he lacks the mitzvah of *techeiles*. But if he didn't wear white *tzitzis* strings, his sin is much graver. *Techeiles* is expensive — it's made out of the blood of a certain animal (*chilazon*) and it's hard to obtain. On the other hand, white *tzitzis* strings are inexpensive. When someone doesn't wear *techeiles*, it's because it's hard for him and he did not overcome his *nisayon* of spending such large sums of money. His punishment is less severe. However, if someone doesn't wear white *tzitzis*, which are cheap and easily obtainable, his sin is graver and his punishment is greater, since he failed to uphold a relatively easy matter.

So it is with everything. The gravity of the matter is measured by the level of difficulty involved. Based on this reasoning, the sin of *bittul Torah* is very grave, because *esek haTorah* is not difficult, and *divrei Torah* are so sweet, enticing, and interesting. A person who is *mevatel Torah* learning is like someone who doesn't wear white *tzitzis*, and his sin is greater.

The Maalah of Learning Torah Amid Trying Times

On the other hand, the reward is commensurate with the punishment. Just as the reward for wearing *techeiles tzitzis* is greater than the reward for wearing white *tzitzis*, since *techeiles* is more expensive and it's more difficult to keep this mitzvah, the *schar* of learning

Torah depends on each person individually. If a person has difficulty learning and nonetheless learns or goes to listen to shiurim — each person according to his options and abilities — since he has challenges and overcomes them, it is like wearing *techeiles*, which comes along with great reward. Someone who doesn't face difficulties in learning will receive less reward.

The Gemara (*Sotah* 49a) greatly praises one who learns Torah during trying times, *mitoch hadachak*. The reward for this is tremendous. They said: "Every *talmid chacham* who is *osek baTorah mitoch hadachak*, his *tefillah* is heard... and he is satiated from the Shechinah's glory... and the *pargod* is not locked before him..." Learning Torah in trying times is an extremely high *madreigah*. The reason is because it involves challenges and difficulty, and when difficulty is present, the reward is very great, especially when it comes to *esek haTorah*.

What's considered "*mitoch hadachak*," trying times? Simply speaking, *dachak* means there's no *parnassah*, and he lives a life of pain and challenges, and yet he still learns Torah. However, *dachak* can also mean that his time is *dachuk*, pressured. For example, if someone must work to support his family, he doesn't have much time for himself, and yet, he puts in an effort to learn during the little time he does have, and he uses every free moment he has for learning Torah. This too is called "*Torah mitoch hadachak*," because it involves effort; he is exerting himself to learn Torah according to his ability.

It turns out that "*Torah mitoch hadachak*" does not pertain only to people who learn Torah full time. Everyone can reach this level, based on his personal situation, if he exerts himself to learn Torah to the best of his abilities. We've mentioned the Rosh's comments (*Bava Basra daf* 8) regarding the *madreigah* of "Rabbanan" who are exempt from paying a tax for city guards. The Rosh writes that the *madreigah* of Rabbanan is not dependent on how much a person learns; instead it depends on how much time he wastes. Even someone who spends much of his day involved in *parnassah*, if he spends "every free moment to review Torah and learn Torah," he is considered "Rabbanan." The same is true regarding "*Torah mitoch hadachak*" — it is individual. If someone who doesn't have much time makes an effort to learn as much Torah as he can, his Torah is also called "*Torah mitoch hadachak*," and the reward he reaps is immeasurable.

Reward: In Olam HaZeh and Olam HaBa

Chazal already informed us of the reward for learning Torah (in the beginning of *Mishnayos Peah*): A person eats its fruits [dividends] in this world and the principle awaits him in the World to Come. The reward is not only in Olam HaBa; one receives reward in Olam HaZeh as well. And not only that, the dividends in this

world are not simply material reward; they are dividends of the principle. Just as the principle is Olam HaBa, the dividends in this world are of the same type that one will receive in Olam HaBa. *Shamayim* gives him a good life in this world that will enable him to merit more Olam HaBa. Since he has a good life, without difficulties, he will be able to invest more effort in learning a lot of Torah and performing many good deeds. Through that, he will merit more Olam HaBa. These are the dividends reaped in Olam HaZeh.

If so, the concept “the principle awaits him in the World to Come” is not simply referring to the principle he deserves for the Torah he already learned — it’s much more than that! Since his dividends in this world will enable him to learn more Torah, he’ll be *zocheh* to more and more Olam HaBa. It turns out that he is *zocheh* to the reward of Olam HaZeh and Olam HaBa together, as the Tanna says (*Avos* 6:4), *Ashreicha baOlam haZeh v’tov lach l’Olam HaBa*, “You are fortunate in in this world and it will be good for you in the world to come”!

Desire for Torah — Merit for Siyatta d’Shemaya

It is *Sefiras HaOmer*. The *Sefer HaChinuch* (Mitzvah 306) explains the matter of counting Sefiras HaOmer. While we don’t know the main reasons for mitzvos — they are hidden aspects of Torah — there are known reasons for each mitzvah. The *Sefer HaChinuch* explains that when Bnei Yisrael left Mitzrayim, they knew that the purpose of leaving Mitzrayim was to receive the Torah. HaKadosh Baruch Hu told Moshe Rabbeinu (*Shemos* 3:12), “When you take this nation out of Mitzrayim, they will serve Elokim on this mountain.” When Bnei Yisrael left Mitzrayim, and they were no longer exposed to the impurity of Mitzrayim, they knew they’d be *zocheh* to receive the Torah in another fifty days. All of Klal Yisrael fervently yearned for and waited for the great, longed-for day when they’d receive the Torah. Their anticipation and desire were so strong that they simply counted the days! They were delighted with every passing day — one day passed, and yet another, and now there are less days left till Kabbalas HaTorah. During Yetzias Mitzrayim, the desire for Torah was so profound, that they were happy with every day that passed, which brought them closer

to Kabbalas HaTorah. This is what Sefiras HaOmer is about.

This is why, nowadays, we count Sefiras HaOmer every single year — Shavuos is Zman Matan Toraseinu. We’ve already explained what the *sefarim* say about the *hashpa’ah* of Torah returning every year. Just as there was a *hashpa’ah* of Torah on 6 Sivan in the year of Yetzias Mitzrayim and all of Klal Yisrael received this *hashpa’ah*, every single year on Shavuos, the *hashpa’ah* returns, and a heavenly influence of *hatzlachah* in Torah is brought down to the world. That’s why we count the days every year — due to our profound desire and anticipation for the moment when we’ll merit that heavenly *hashpa’ah* of Torah, of success in Torah and *dveikus baTorah*.

Based on this, we can explain that the concept of Sefiras HaOmer is giving expression of our deep desire for Torah. When a person desires and aspires for Torah, he falls into the category of “*ba l’taheir*, one who comes to be purified,” because he wants Torah. And so, *Shamayim* “*misa’ayin oso*, Heaven helps him” (*Yoma* 38b), and he merits *siyatta d’Shemaya*!

This is also individual. The *Mesillas Yesharim* writes at the end of his *sefer* that every single person can be completely pious, even someone who performs lowly work — as long as desires and yearns for Torah and comes to be purified, in a variety of forms: either by learning Torah as well and as much as he can, by listening to *shiurim*, listening to *divrei chizuk*. When each person does whatever he can — according to the possibilities available to him — to come to be purified, Heaven helps him and he is *zocheh* to *siyatta d’Shemaya* to become purified and attain one *madreigah* after another.

Every single person has these abilities to fall into the category of “one who comes to be purified.” *Ashreinu, mah tov chelkeinu* that we have these possibilities, that we can come to be purified and merit *siyatta d’Shemaya*. *B’ezras Hashem*, may we be *zocheh* to *siyatta d’Shemaya* for Kabbalas HaTorah.

Please daven for
גיטה פייגה בת רבקה
לרפואה שלימה ומהירה
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The *sichos* are transcribed and translated from a weekly *va’ad* in Rav Gershon Edelstein’s home.