

How to Be Saved from Chevlei Mashiach

From a Sichah Delivered in Kollel Ponevezh "Ohel Kodshim"

Learning Torah during Trying Times

There is something very important that not everyone is aware of: one who learns Torah during trying times is on a very high *madreigah*. Chazal discussed the great advantage of this in various Gemaras and Midrashim (See *Sotah* 49a, for example). It's a *l'chatchilah* that *esek haTorah* should be learned during trying times. One who does so reaps tremendous *zechuyos*.

Maran the Chazon Ish *zt"l* once told me, "**Torah mitoch hadachak, der Eibershter hut doss lieb,**" Hashem loves Torah that is learned during trying times. Someone who learns Torah during trying times or under financial stress is beloved by Hashem, beloved Up Above!

This is a reality — there are so many *avreichim* who are *osek baTorah mitoch hadachak*, and they should know that it's *l'chatchilah*, and that they receive tremendous *zechuyos*. It's also a great *zechus* for success in Torah; a person who learns under such conditions sees more *hatzlachah*.

Be Busy with Torah and Gemillus Chassadim

We are currently living through turbulent times — "*eis tzarah hi l'Yaakov*" (*Yirmeyahu* 30:7). The security situation is tenuous, there have been tragedies in the past few days. Why is this so? It's from Shamayim! Chazal have already told us (*Sanhedrin* 88b): "What shall a person do to be saved from *chevlei Mashiach*?" The Gemara tells us that Rabbi Yochanan said: "Let him come, but not during my generation" — because I cannot live during a generation with the *chevlei Mashiach*, with such difficulties and tragedies. I cannot bear to see all that.

So what's the *aitzah*? How can a person be saved? The Gemara answers: "Be busy and involved with Torah and *gemillus chassadim*! If there are profound difficulties, *chevlei Mashiach*, be *osek baTorah* and in that merit, you will be saved. *Gemillus chassadim* as well will help; make sure there is *ahavas habriyos*, *v'ahavta l'reiacha kamocha*. Fulfill this actively — do acts of *gemillus chassadim*.

Ahavas HaBriyos Is Necessary for Success in Torah

The truth is, *ahavas habriyos* is a *mitzvas asei* (*Vayikra* 19:18): "*V'ahavta l'reiacha kamocha,*" and this includes the obligation to perform *gemillus chassadim* as well. Aside from falling into the category of this mitzvah, it is also part of the mitzvah of Talmud Torah. The obligation to amass Torah knowledge includes the obligation of *ahavas habriyos*. Chazal (*Pirkei Avos*) tell us that Torah is acquired through 48 ways, one of which is "*ohev es habriyos*, love others." A person's success in Torah is deficient without this.

If so, while *ahavas habriyos* is its own *mitzvas asei*, as the *pasuk* states: "*V'ahavta l'reiacha kamocha,*" it is also an obligation as part of the *chiyuv* of learning Torah. The *halachos* of Talmud Torah obligate us to have *ahavas habriyos*, which will generate success in Torah! Likewise, the fulfillment of all 48 acquisitions to Torah (which lead to success in Torah) are also requirements in order to succeed in Torah. There are 48 such obligations; and none of them are simple.

For example, one of the acquisitions mentioned is "*ohev es haMakom*, love Hashem." This is a high *madreigah*, and the Rambam (*Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah*, chap. 2), Rashi (*Devarim* 6:6), *Chovos HaLevavos* (*Shaar Ahavas Hashem*) explain what love is and how one attains it. This is a specific

mitzvas ase as well as a *chiyuv* to be fulfilled in order to achieve success in Torah. After all, we have an obligation to acquire *yedias haTorah*, Torah knowledge, and in order to do so, one must cultivate all 48 acquisitions.

Humility Is Preparation for Torah

The same is true regarding all 48 acquisitions. Many of them are mitzvos in and of themselves, and at the same time, they are also a preparation for acquiring Torah. Take “*anavah*, humility” for example. The *pasuk* (*Mishlei* 16:5) states, “Any arrogance of heart is an abomination to Hashem.” Even a tiny amount of arrogance — *kol*, any — any drop of importance a person attaches to himself is considered an abomination.

That’s why Chazal say in *Pirkei Avos* (4:4), “Be very, very humble.” The Rambam explains (in his commentary on the Mishnah, and in *Hilchos Deios* chap. 2) that a person shouldn’t even have a “*shminis she’b’shminis*,” an eighth of an eighth of arrogance (see *Sotah* 5a). A person shouldn’t feel important, because if he feels important he’ll be deficient both in his *madreigah* of *anavah* and in his *kinyanei haTorah*. This is one of the first of the 48 acquisitions: “*b’talmud Torah... b’eimah, b’yirah, b’anavah*.”

Humility, *anavah*, is not simple. A person may often think, “Why shouldn’t I feel important? After all, I have talents, I am coming up with *chiddushei Torah*, I am arriving at ‘*amitah shel Torah*,’ I say *shiurim*, I give *chaburos*, I write and publish such glorious *divrei Torah*.” If so, how can he be humble? Isn’t he important?

The *Mesillas Yesharim* devoted two chapters of his *sefer* to explain the trait of humility. The truth is, all of man’s abilities, his power of thought, and all his talents are Heavenly kindnesses, everything is from *Shamayim*, and is not self-made. A person is a creation and *Shamayim* is constantly providing him with his *kochos* and talents, as we say in davening: “Who in His goodness recreates *Maaseh Bereishis* every day, constantly.” The *Nefesh HaChaim* (*Shaar* 1) speaks at length about his at length: there is Heavenly *hashpaah* at every given moment.

This is the meaning of Hashem’s *achdus*, His Oneness, His singularity. *Hashem Echad*, Hashem is One. There is nothing else in the world that exists without Him willing it so. Whatever we see, such as this table, is here because it is Hashem’s will that

it should exist. If not for His will, everything would revert to *tohu va’vohu*, absolute nothingness. Hashem’s will brings life into the entire Creation. This is what *Hashem Echad* means — nothing else exists except for Him! *Ein od milvado*!

If so, why should a person feel important? After all, he is not the one doing anything, it is all from *Shamayim*. He is merely like a poor man who receives *tzedakah*. This is how one can acquire humility, which is a preparation for Torah and an obligation in and of itself. If one does not have humility, he must have some arrogance, which is an abomination to Hashem — “*kol g’vah leivav*,” any drop of arrogance is an abomination.

Our Gedolim’s Humility

The Gemara in *Sanhedrin* (7b) tells us about Rav, who had many *talmidim*. When he realized that a large crowd was accompanying him back home after giving a *shiur*, he would recite *pesukim* relating to humility so he shouldn’t feel important. Similarly, the Gemara tells us about Mar Zutra Chasida who would also recite *pesukim* about humility when his students would carry him on their shoulders and honor him.

Rashi explains that it was so he should not “*tazu’ach da’ato*,” that he shouldn’t move one iota away from his *middah* of humility. There was no concern that he’d become a *baal gaavah* because of all this honor, just that his mind should not “*tazu’ach*,” move a bit away, from the *sheleimus* of *anavah*. One must be very careful about this — careful not to feel even a drop of importance and then there will be a drop less humility. It’s frightening!

That’s why Rav and Mar Zutra Chasida recited these *pesukim* — so they shouldn’t move even an iota away from humility and they should remain in the *sheleimus* of the *madreigah* of *anavah*.

We’ve already said that while the Gemara only mentions Rav and Mar Zutra Chasida reciting *pesukim*, all the Tannaim and Amoraim probably also acted this way, just the people didn’t notice. All the *tzaddikim rishonim* and *achronim* and all *gedolei Yisrael* were extremely careful not to feel important.

Lich’orah, when everyone wanted to accompany them, they could have told them not to. They could have walked home alone, or if they needed an

escort, invited one person to come with them. So why did they allow such a large *tzibbur* to accompany them home?

The truth is, this was not an option. The *tzibbur* needs the merit of *kavod haTorah*, honoring Torah scholars, and this was *zikkui harabbim* in the mitzvah of *kavod haTorah*. *Kavod haTorah* is a profound mitzvah, as the Gemara says (*Shavuos* 30b): “He did so, because *kavod haTorah* is preferred.” The *tzibbur* that accompanied them gained the *zechus* of *kavod haTorah*, and it’s not right to take that away from them. The *tzibbur* wants those *zechuyos*! They didn’t have a choice; they had to accept the honor because the *tzibbur* needed that merit. And as for the fact that the *kavod* might harm their *middah* of humility, that is their problem, but there are solutions: to recite *pesukim*. This is how we should act.

Ahavas HaBriyos Every Step of the Way

In any case, the way to be saved from *chevlei Mashiach* is through being busy with Torah and *gemillus chassadim*. *Esek haTorah mitoch hadachak*, learning Torah in trying times, is *lichatchilah*! And it’s a great merit which can save a person from *chevlei Mashiach*, as can *gemillus chassadim, ahavas habriyos*.

When a person is around other people, he has opportunities for *ahavas habriyos* and doing *chessed* every step of the way just by smiling and being friendly. *Sever panim yafos* can actually give the other person a new lease on life! There are stories about times when just being friendly literally saved lives. The story of a *bachur* in our yeshivah comes to mind. He was unhappy in yeshivah. One Shabbos, he decided that he’d leave yeshivah for good right after Shabbos. But after davening on Friday night, when the *bachurim* lined up to wish the *roshei yeshivah* “good Shabbos,” another *bachur* clapped him on the shoulder and asked him how he’s doing. In a second, everything changed! In that *zechus*, he stayed in yeshivah because he saw that someone cared about him and respected him.

If someone feels like no one cares about him or respects him, it’s only human to feel bad. While it behooves a person not to hold of himself due to the *middah* of humility, human nature is also something to consider. Simple, unadulterated human nature is that if a person feels unneeded or if he feels like a third wheel, he feels bad and he can’t

learn properly, because he needs to be noticed. Therefore, when a person is part of a *tzibbur*, **it’s important to give other people a good feeling**, and one can never imagine the level of *zechuyos* he’ll gain from it. The other person should feel cared about, and by asking someone how he feels, and asking how things are going — of course, with a smile — this is a *chesed*, and one effortlessly fulfills “*gemillus chesed*.” It’s not hard, and one gains tremendous *zechuyos*.

The Power of Having a Set Mussar Seder

But everything depends on one other thing: being involved in *mussar*. When a person is involved in learning *mussar sefarim*, they know a lot and realize what a person’s duty is in this world. If one doesn’t learn, he forgets! And a steady learning session is very important, something every single day. It doesn’t have to be for a long time, it can be just a few minutes as long as it’s steady, every day. A person changes as a result. Many people have told me, including busy people with families, that once they started a steady session in *mussar sefarim*, the whole atmosphere at home changed. Now there’s a pleasant atmosphere at home, and they are happy.

This is the *chizuk*. Indeed, Chazal say (*Berachos* 32b), “Four things require *chizuk* (strengthening).” Rashi explains that it means “*Tamid u’bechol kocho!*” Constantly, and with all his strength. “Constantly” means every single day, for it not, it is not constantly. “With all his strength” means each person according to his abilities. The *mussar sefarim* provide this *chizuk* and strength for all these things, which will lead to a happy life with tremendous *zechuyos*.

Actually, the *tzibbur* needs *chizuk* in so many areas, and we are not speaking specifically about *bnei Torah*. We are discussing the general *tzibbur*. There is a *chiyuv* of Talmud Torah, which is equal to all other mitzvos. and the reward is dividends in this world, and the principle in the world to come. If one learns Torah in trying times, well, of course the reward will be based on his difficulties, as Chazal say (*Avos* 5:23), “According to the pain is the reward.” And this is true. However, the *tzibbur* — even the Torah observant — does not understand how great the *chiyuv* of *osek baTorah*, nor do they understand what *bittul Torah* means.

The *Chovos HaLevavos* (*Avodas HaElokim* chap. 4) writes that nothing in this world is voluntary; it’s

either a mitzvah or prohibited. If something is not an obligation or a mitzvah, it is automatically prohibited; nothing's voluntary. We thus see that if a person fulfills his obligations, he is *zocheh* to tremendous merits at every given moment because he is doing what he is obligated to do! If he learns Torah, well, Talmud Torah is equal to everything else.

A person must learn Torah during his every free moment, each person based on his *madreigah*. A *talmid chacham* learns Gemara, a simpler Jew learns Mishnayos, and an even simpler Jew recites *Tehillim*, which is also a great mitzvah. This is how one can utilize every moment properly. Unfortunately, people don't do this. It's because most of the *tzibbur* is simply unaware of how many *zechuyos* they can accrue, what their obligations are, and what they lose from *bittul Torah*. It's true that they aren't doing so intentionally; they are *shogegim*, unintentional sinners, but even a *shogeg* is a sin that requires rectification.

Similarly, most people are lacking *emunah* that everything is in Heaven's hands, and the belief there's no reason to be *makpid*, to be upset about someone else's actions. This is the mitzvah of

emunah "I am Hashem Your G-d" — to believe in *hashgachah pratis*. These are the areas that require *chizuk*.

The *etzah* for all of this is to learn *mussar sefarim*. It's well known that *mussar sefarim* influence a person. If one has a steady *mussar seder* for a few minutes a day it can change the entire household; it can create a pleasant atmosphere at home. If a person acts according to the path set in *mussar sefarim*, he will lead a calculated life. He will make decisions based on halachah, and as a result, his entire household will be full of happiness and will lead happy lives.

If so, we have an *etzah* and a way to live a happy life according to the Torah's path. *Ashreicha b'Olam HaZeh, v'tov lach l'Olam HaBa* — You are fortunate in this world, and it will be good for you in the World to Come. *Ashreinu, mah tov chelkeinu* — How fortunate we are; how good is our lot that we know and are able and *baruch Hashem* are fulfilling our duties. We are *osek baTorah*, and in this way, are bringing merit to the entire *tzibbur*. *Yehi ratzon* that we all merit whatever we need.

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