

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 Shelach* 5781

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Shevet Levi Withstood Nisyonos

Shevet Levi merited serving in the Beis HaMikdash, as the *pasuk* states (*Bamidbar* 8:18): “And I shall take the Levi'im in place of all firstborn sons of Bnei Yisrael.” Chazal said (*Zevachim* 112b), “The service was performed by the firstborn sons until the Mishkan was established.” At first, the firstborn sons were responsible for the *avodah* of bringing *korbanos*. In fact, in the end of Parashas Mishpatim, the *pesukim* tell us that the firstborn sons brought up *korbanos* before Matan Torah (*Shemos* 24:5): “And he sent the lads of Bnei Yisrael and they offered *korbanos*.” Both Rashi and Onkelos explain that “the lads of Bnei Yisrael” were the firstborn sons. Hashem instructed that they should perform the *avodah* until the Mishkan would be established. (See *Yerushalmi Megillah* 1:11).

But then Klal Yisrael sinned with the Golden Calf, the Eigel HaZahav. The firstborn sons also sinned, but Shevet Levi did not. Therefore, they merited performing all the *avodos* in the Mishkan and Beis HaMikdash, as the *pasuk* states (*Devarim* 10:8), “And it was at that time Hashem separated Shevet Levi.” Rashi explains: At that time: during the first year after they left Mitzrayim, and you erred with the Eigel, but Shevet Levi did not err. Hashem separated them from you.” Shevet Levi merited filling the role of Kohanim and Levi'im — performing all the priestly work in the Beis HaMikdash, and filling the Levi'im's role of singers, musicians and gatekeepers. During the period of the Mishkan, they also carried the Mishkan and all its *keilim*, holy vessels: “They carried them on their shoulders” (*Bamidbar* 7:9.) The Levi'im were the singers, musicians and gatekeepers for many generations and will continue to do so for all future generations.

They merited this by withstanding a *nisayon*, because *cheit ha-eigel* was a *nisayon*. The entire Klal Yisrael sinned with the Eigel, and Shevet Levi withstood the test and refrained from following the sinners. By withstanding this challenge, they merited the acquiring the spiritual virtues of *avodas hakorbanos* and *avodas ha-levi'im*.

Matnos Kehunah — Materialism to Service Spirituality

They also merited materialistic gifts; the 24 priestly gifts, as well as *ma'aser rishon*, which is given to the Levi. **Now, why did they need materialism? Just to service spirituality!** This was instead of a plot of land in Eretz Yisrael, because Levi'im did not receive a portion of land, nor were they allowed to partake of war spoils. Instead, they received the *matnos kehunah* and *ma'aser rishon*, so

they should have some materialism in order to fulfill their spiritual service.

At the end of *Hilchos Shemittah v'Yovel*, the Rambam explains why Levi'im did not receive a plot of land or partake in the spoils: “Because the Levi is separated to serve Hashem and teach His straight ways and just laws to the masses... Therefore, they were removed from the natural way of the world. They do not wage war like the rest of the Jewish people, they do not inherit land or acquire it through physical force. They are Hashem's army, as it says (*Devarim* 33:11): ‘May Hashem bless His army,’ and the Blessed One merits them, as it states (*Bamidbar* 18:20): ‘I am your portion and inheritance.’” That is, something taken by force is not fit for Shevet Levi! Shevet Levi is not connected to such things! They receive straight from Hashem whatever they need to live — materialism to use for spirituality.

Every Person Can Resemble Shevet Levi

The Rambam writes there: “This does not apply to Shevet Levi alone. Every single person from all peoples of the world whose heart moves him and intellect enlightens him to separate himself to stand before Hashem and serve Him, to know Hashem and walk in the straight path that Hashem set, one who unburdens himself from the yoke of ‘*cheshbonos rabbim*,’ the varied calculations that man creates, he is set aside for utter sanctity and Hashem will be his portion and inheritance forever and ever. He will merit receiving his necessities in this world just as the Kohanim and Levi'im merited.”

Every single person can be like Shevet Levi, as the Rambam states: “From all peoples of the world” — even non-Jews. It is possible that *chassidei umos ha-olam*, righteous gentiles, can merit this. Indeed, the Gemara writes (*Bava Kama* 38a) that even a non-Jew who is *osek baTorah* is like a Kohen Gadol. Anyone who acts this way, one who understands that he should be an *oved Hashem*, is promised that Heaven will provide him with his livelihood, and he will not have to exert effort into making a living.

There are many details in this Rambam — regarding the merits of a person like this. And I've found that the Rambam bases all his comments on *ma'amarei Chazal*. Rav Chaim Kaneivsky *shlita* cites additional sources.

While these are the *zechuyos* of Shevet Levi, every single person can merit them. **Every single person! If he serves Hashem and serving Hashem is his sole aspiration and purpose in life, he will not have any financial**

difficulties. Hashem will provide him will all his needs, with the minimum necessary to live.

But first, one must withstand a challenge. As we mentioned, Shevet Levi withstood the challenge of Cheit HaEigel, and that's how they were *zocheh* to the attain the *maalos* and merits of Shevet Levi.

These merits give a person the *zechus* for *ruchniyus*, but also for *gashmiyus* — as it will be used for *ruchniyus*. His materialism is not for the sake of materialism! Since this person's entire life is dedicated to serving Hashem, whatever he needs is for *avodas Hashem*. It's not physical pleasures; it's a necessary aid for *avodas Hashem*!

Turning Eating and Drinking into a Mitzvah

The Rambam also discusses Chazal's statement (*Avos* 2:12): "And may all your deeds be *l'shem Shamayim*, for the sake of Heaven." He writes as following (*Hilchos Dei'os* chap. 3): "It turns out that a person who follows this path his entire life is constantly serving Hashem... because all his thoughts are to fill his needs to the point that his body will be complete to serve Hashem. Even when he sleeps, if he sleeps so that he can relax his mind and rest his body so that he will not take ill, for he will not be able to serve Hashem if he's ill, it turns out that his sleep is *avodas Hashem*. This was Chazal's intention when they said: 'And may all your deeds be *l'shem Shamayim*.'"

As we said, withstanding a *nisayon* gives a person *zechuyos*, both spiritual merits and physical ones for the sake of spirituality. *Shevet Levi* is an example of this — they merited spiritual positions of the *avodas hakehunah* and *avodas halevi'ah*. However, they also merited *gashmiyus*, the 24 *matnos kehunah* and *ma'aser rishon* for the Levi, and thus did not have to work for *parnasah*. Indeed, the Rambam writes that they are "Hashem's army," and the king's soldiers eat at the king's table. The *Sifri* (*Parshas Korach*) explains the verse "I am your portion and your inheritance" as follows: you eat at My table! And you receive a reward from the king's palace (see *Rashi Devarim* 10:9).

The Rambam writes that if someone sleeps *l'shem Shamayim*, his sleep is considered *avodas Hashem*, but his intention wasn't **only** about sleeping. He was saying that **even** sleep, which is passive, *shev v'al taaseh*, is considered *avodas Hashem* if done with the proper intentions, then all the more so if his eating and drinking — which is active, *kum v'aseh* — is done so that he'll have strength for *avodas Hashem*, it is considered *avodas Hashem* as well. After all, he is part of Hashem's army and a soldier must eat in order to be healthy to serve the king.

Based on this, it turns out that if someone washes his hands to eat bread, his washing is a mitzvah. When he recites the *berachah* of hamotzi, he receives another mitzvah, and when he eats it, he gains yet a third mitzvah! Since eating and drinking are *avodas Hashem*, he is constantly involved in a mitzvah and *avodas Hashem*, which is cause for great joy.

A Talmid Chacham's Drinks Are Like Nesachim

That's why the Gemara says (*Yoma* 71a) that if someone wants to pour wine on the *mizbeiach*, he should fill the throats of *talmidei chachim* with wine. That is, one who wants to fulfill the mitzvah of *nisuch hayayin* nowadays, when we don't have a *mizbeiach*, there's a solution: give wine to *talmidei chachamim*. Why do *talmidei chachamim* drink wine? So that they'll have strength to learn Torah; the wine gives them strength and invigorates them. (See *Yoma* 76a.)

The story is told (in the *Siddur HaGra – Ishei Yisrael*, new edition, beginning of *Kesser Rosh*) about the Gra who wanted to drink coffee so he'd be able to learn: "So I heard from the wonderful rabbi... that once when the Gra was in jail... they gave him a special room where he learned with his gabbai, and they gave him permission to bring *sefarim* there and learn, as he usually did, all night long.

Night fell, and his yetzer hara came upon him. He did not want to fall asleep — so he asked his gabbai to bring him a little coffee or a different hot drink. The gabbai told him that it was basically impossible — they're in a locked jail, surrounded by a high wall, and there's no way they can get out. Not only that, the gates are manned by armed soldiers at all hours of the day and night.

The Gra told him to do the following. He said: There's a drainpipe under the jail's main gate. Climb down through that drainpipe, go to my house, warm up a hot drink for me, and bring it back to me. The gabbai said, "Impossible! First of all, there's barely any space inside the drainpipe, and a person cannot fit through. Secondly, when the soldiers see me — someone trying to escape from jail — they'll behead me." The Gra told him, "Go and come back, and you will not be harmed." And that's what happened. He fit through that narrow passageway, went to the Gra's house, warmed up a drink, and came back the same way. He brought the hot drink to the Gra, and none of the soldiers saw him nor did he see any soldiers on the way. This was the miraculous story.

This is what we were talking about. If someone's every action is *l'shem Shamayim*, he is *zocheh* to *gashmiyus* to help him with his *ruchniyus*. Heaven helped him bring the Gra a drink of coffee so he'd be able to learn. When done in this manner, eating and drinking is considered *avodas Hashem*.

After a person wakes up, he washes his hands, recites *birkos hashachar*, and recites the *pesukim* of "Yevarechecha." Then he says "*Eilu devarim*," *berachos*, *pesukei d'zimrah*, and the rest of the *tefillah*. And these are all mitzvos; he is constantly busy with mitzvos!

Working, But Not for Wealth

We've already mentioned the Rosh (on *Bava Basra* chap. 1, *siman* 26) regarding someone who must be involved in *parnasah* to support his family and therefore cannot learn

full time. If he isn't looking for wealth, and he's not working because he loves money, but just because he needs to make ends meet and actually uses all his spare time for learning, he is also called "*rabbanan*." This is the practical halachah, as recorded in *Yoreh Dei'ah* 243.

This has halachic ramifications regarding paying the tax for a city guard, as Chazal said (*Bava Basra* 8a), "*Rabbanan* do not require guarding." And they are exempt from the city tax for paying a guard to protect the residents from burglars and bandits. They don't need it because their Torah protects them, and it also protects the city. The Rosh wrote that even someone who works, but only to earn enough to provide for his family's necessities, and he uses all his spare time for Torah, his *gashmiyus* is solely to promote his *ruchniyus*, so he is on the level of "*rabbanan*" and is exempt from paying the city tax.

So it turns out that his spiritual level gives him *gashmiyus* to help promote his *ruchniyus*.

The Obligation to Give a Fifth to Tzedakah

The truth is, wealthy people have hard lives. Someone who is wealthy, loves money, and rushes to earn more wealth has a very difficult life. He always worried that he has to earn more money and that he shouldn't lose any money, as it states (*Koheles* 5:11), "The satiety of the rich does not permit him to sleep," and "Riches kept by its owner for his harm" (*Ibid.* verse 12). There are a few other *pesukim* in *Koheles* about the dangers of wealth.

Now, there were a number of gedolim who were wealthy, like Rav Efraim Zalman Margolis. But what did they do? They learned Torah all day long and let others manage their business. **They did not worry about money, because they knew that money is from Heaven. If there is a loss, it's from Shamayim, and they didn't take it to heart. Whatever is from Heaven is for the good, and even the loss is good.**

Furthermore, if a person gives a fifth of his earnings to tzedakah, he gains from it greatly. The Gra writes in the *Iggeres HaGra* that it is a grave obligation to give a fifth of all one's earnings. He writes: "For the sake of Hashem, separate one-fifth as He commanded you and do not give less, for I have warned you. One who gives less is constantly transgressing a number of negative and positive mitzvos, and it is considered as if he denied the *Torah haKedoshah*, *chas v'shalom*."

It's well known that if someone gives a fifth of his earnings to tzedakah, he benefits greatly. I've heard firsthand accounts from people who did this, and they benefitted immensely. (*Kesser Rosh* 123 writes in the Gra's name: One who is vigilant about *maaser* is promised that no harm will befall him; one who gives a fifth is promised that he'll become wealthy.)

The Chafetz Chaim in *sefer Ahavas Chesed* (vol. 2, chap. 19, 20) wrote about the details of this mitzvah as it applies to someone who earns money. He delineates what should

be done with the profits and how to fulfill one's obligations toward tzedakah.

The Effects of Davening for Ruchniyus

It's well known that Rav Yisrael Salanter said that it's true and tried that *tefillah* for *ruchniyus* is effective. Regarding *gashmiyus*, one's *parnasah* is decreed on Rosh Hashanah (*Beitzah* 16a), but there is no limit to how much *ruchniyus* a person can acquire. And it's proven that *tefillah* helps!

I already told you about an irreligious Jew who came from America to Eretz Yisrael. He was at the Kosel, and he started thinking, "If belief in Judasim is really the true path, I want Heaven to help me figure this out." At that very moment, a kiruv activist approached him and asked him if he wanted to learn about Judaism.

His *tefillah*, which had only been a thought, was accepted! **A *tefillah* in thought, even if it's not articulated, is also a prayer.** While the obligatory three daily prayers must be verbalized, when it comes to non-obligatory prayer in the form of requests, *tefillah* in one's heart is considered prayer.

Rav Yisrael Salanter said that it's tried and true that *tefillah* for *ruchniyus* is effective. If so, one who truly wants to succeed in *ruchniyus*, and he begs and firmly believes that everything is in Heaven's hands, will receive *siyatta d'Shemaya*!

Davening for Personal Needs and for Others

Sometimes, *tefillah* in one's heart is sometimes even more real and truthful than *tefillah* that's verbalized. The *tefillas* we say have a set *nusach* and it's not so easy to have *kavanah*, but when a person thinks about something in his heart, that is real; it's a real *tefillah*! Therefore, regarding *hatzlachah* in davening and the benefit one can gain from prayer, it will be more real and truthful if it comes from one's heart. (It must be clarified that we are not discussing the three obligatory daily prayers.) It is true and tried that one merits success in *ruchniyus* due to such *tefillas*.

If so, we have a way to succeed in *ruchniyus* — through davening.

Davening for the *ruchniyus* of other people is also effective. The Chazon Ish writes (*Igros Chazon Ish* vol. 1, 74) a *nusach* for a mother to recite in the blessing of *Shema Koleinu*. It's a prayer for her child — that he should learn well and have *hatzlachah* in his learning: "May it be Your will, Hashem Elokei v'Elokei avosai, that You have mercy on my son _____ and transform his heart to love and fear Your name, and to be diligent in Your holy Torah, and remove from before him all causes that prevent him from diligence in Your holy Torah, and set before him whatever would bring him close to Your holy Torah." This is the *tefillah* recited for the another person's *ruchniyus*.

There was a certain bachur who needed encouragement about learning Torah, and the Chazon Ish ז"ל told *yblcht*" a Rav Chaim *shlita*: "We will daven for him." They davened for him and it helped! (Editor's note: see the *Maharsha* on *Berachos* 10a, and the *Chazon Ish* on *Gilyonos haChumash* at the end of *Orach Chaim*.) This is the power of davening for others. **If you care about them and offer a real *tefillah*, like a mother davening for her son who she cares about, the *tefillah* helps!**

Here's another story about the Chazon Ish ז"ל. A young *bachur* who didn't enjoy learning and had no *cheishek*, desire, to learn came to him. The Chazon Ish sat and learned with him for a little while until he began to enjoy it. He suddenly saw that learning is interesting. The Chazon Ish himself gave up his time and sat and learned with a young boy to give him a good taste of learning.

Obligation of Tefillah to Bring Others to Teshuvah

If so, we have a wonderful tool in our hands to be *zocheh* to *ruchniyus* through *tefillah*, both for ourselves and for others — such as other family members. One can merit it by davening!

The Vilna Gaon wrote in *Iggeres HaGra* that if a parent doesn't daven for his children and they go off the *derech*, they will be punished severely. The question is, sometimes, parents try so hard and invest so much in their children's *chinuch*, and the child goes off the *derech* for other reasons, so what can they do? **The answer is: They must daven!** *Tefillah* for *ruchniyus*, for a loved one, is a *tefillah* from the heart, which is a real *tefillah*. And this *tefillah* will surely be beneficial! Therefore, if they do not daven, they are held to blame for their child's veering off the right path, *Rachmana litzlan*.

In *Yechezkel* (3:18 – 19) it states: "If I say to the *rasha*, 'You will die' and you do not warn him, and you didn't urge him to repent and leave his wicked way and save his life, he is guilty, and I shall request his blood from your hand. But you, if you do warn the *rasha*, and he does not

do *teshuvah* of his wicked ways and his evil path, he will die because of his sins, and you will have saved your soul." You did what could be done, you tried, and you were involved in trying to bring him back to repentance.

Based on this, there is advice on how to have an influence on others and cause them to do *teshuvah*: Daven! Of course, explaining and speaking is also good, but it doesn't help as much as *tefillah* does. If so, if a person can daven and does not, he is guilty of the *rasha's* corruption.

This is a high *madreigah*. It's not simple to daven for someone else to do *teshuvah*. During the Chazon Ish's time, many people had to do *teshuvah*, and the Chazon Ish surely davened for them, but it didn't help everyone. It seems that *tefillah* for someone else can have a small *hashpa'ah* but not a total effect. There's a limit to how much it can help.

The Chazon Ish and the Brisker Rav surely davened that others should do *teshuvah* — indeed, the *nusach* in *Shemoneh Esrei* is "*Hashiveinu b'Sorasecha*" — in the plural form. We are davening for all of Klal Yisrael. And they surely recited it with *kavanah* — we've already mentioned that their *tefillos* were recited with *hispashtus hagashmiyus*, all their physical senses became nullified, and their body was as if paralyzed while they davened. So their *tefillos* surely helped, but there's a limit to how much you can influence others. The person you're davening for also needs *zechuyos*. It depends on his *madreigah* and the sins he committed.

In any case, every single person needs to daven for himself and for his family — this is a true, heartfelt *tefillah*. Indeed, one can give others *zechuyos* through *tefillah*, as Rav Yisrael Salanter wrote: it's true and tried that *tefillah* helps! This is the *maalah* of *tefillah*. *Yehi ratzon* that we all are *zocheh* to daven with *kavanah* properly.

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