

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 Chukas* 5781

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Fulfilling Positive Mitzvos in a Passive Way

There is a positive mitzvah of “*Tishbos*,” refraining from creative work on Shabbos. This mitzvah is fulfilled passively, by a *shev v'al taaseh* — by doing nothing. *Lichorah*, a person is fulfilling a *mitzvas aseh* during every single moment of Shabbos, since he is refraining from work.

If so, how would this apply to someone who is *mechallel Shabbos*, *Rachmana litzlan*, but still sometimes doesn't do anything on Shabbos. Would it be considered that he is fulfilling the mitzvah of *Tishbos* when he isn't actively being *mechallel Shabbos*? It doesn't make sense. When Chazal said (*Sanhedrin* 37a) that even “the empty ones among you” are full of mitzvos like a pomegranate, “mitzvos” refers to good deeds. If someone usually does *melachah* on Shabbos, only sometimes doesn't, merely because he doesn't have anything to do then, it doesn't make sense that he is fulfilling a mitzvah.

Tosefos (*Bava Kama* 56b) writes that if a person has a mezuzah on his doorpost, it's considered that he is involved in a mitzvah, even though he isn't actively doing anything. Tosefos explains that the reason he isn't absolved of performing other mitzvos, as is someone who is “*osek b'mitzvah*,” is because he can do both at once. But in any case, he is considered as an “*osek b'mitzvah*,” and he fulfills the mitzvah of mezuzah passively, with a *shev v'al taaseh*.

The Ran (*Sukkah* 11a, in the Rif) disagrees with this Tosafos and holds that one who is *osek b'mitzvah* is *patur min hamitzvah*, absolved from other mitzvos — even when he can perform both at once. He offers a different reason as to why a person who has a mezuzah on his doorpost is not absolved from all other mitzvos. He says that this person is only “*mekayeim*,” fulfilling, the mitzvah; he is not “*osek*,” involved in it — since it's passive, a *shev v'al taaseh*. Only someone who is actively involved, *osek*, is absolved from other mitzvos.

This reveals that the Ran too opines that merely having a mezuzah on your doorpost is fulfillment of the mitzvah, even without doing anything. However, he holds that it is not called “*osek b'mitzvah*” and therefore cannot absolve the homeowner from fulfilling all other mitzvos. This is similar to what we said regarding the mitzvah of *Tishbos* on Shabbos — someone who doesn't do *melachah* is fulfilling a *mitzvas aseh* at every given moment just by passively refraining from work.

However, the *mitzvos aseh* of mezuzah and *Tishbos* don't seem to be on similar ground. Putting up a mezuzah is an obligation — the very fact that a person has a house obligates him to put up a mezuzah, so when the mezuzah is up, the mitzvah is being fulfilled; it's not merely a *shev v'al taaseh*. On Shabbos, however, when he doesn't do anything simply because there's nothing to do, it doesn't make sense that he'd be fulfilling the *mitzvas aseh* of *Tishbos*.

Fulfilling the Mitzvah by Withstanding a Nisayon

The rule seems to be like Chazal say (*Kiddushin* 39b): If a person doesn't transgress a prohibition, he receives the same reward as one who does a mitzvah — for example, if the opportunity to transgress comes his way, and he is saved from transgression. Rabbeinu Yonah writes in *Shaarei Teshuvah* (3:9) that we learn this from the *pasuk* “To those who fear Hashem and contemplate His name,” which refers to someone who is faced with a chance to transgress but refrains.

Rabbeinu Yonah explains that this is only true when a person is facing a *nisayon*, a challenge, as in “the opportunity to transgress comes his way.” That is, he wants to commit a certain sin, but he conquers his yetzer hara because he has *yiras Shamayim* — and for that reason, he's given reward as if he fulfilled a mitzvah. Not only does he have the “*shev v'al taaseh*” of refraining from committing the sin, he also has the positive “*kum v'aseh*” of *yiras Shamayim* — after all, he was faced with the *nisayon* of sinning, and instead he strengthens his *yiras Shamayim*. The awakening of *yiras Shamayim* in his *kum v'aseh* has prevented him from committing the sin.

If so, the reward is not for the *shev v'al taaseh*, for refraining from sin — it's for the positive act of *yiras Shamayim* specifically when he's faced with a *nisayon* and overcomes it. He is fulfilling the mitzvah of *yiras Shamayim*. However, if there's no *nisayon*, and he's just sitting around doing nothing, he is not fulfilling any mitzvah.

Based on this, we can understand the concept of *Tishbos*. When a person has the opportunity to be *mechallel Shabbos*, and he holds himself back due to the prohibition, he is actually fulfilling a *mitzvas aseh*. However, when he doesn't do *melachah* just because he doesn't have anything to do, he is not fulfilling the mitzvah of *Tishbos*. Additionally, regarding Shabbos the *pasuk* states (*Shemos* 20:10), “*Shabbos laShem*.” Rashi explains that this means “*l'shem Hashem*, for Hashem's sake.” If so, when he doesn't do *melachah* just because he has nothing to do,

he's not acting "for Hashem's sake." It would only be *l'shem Hashem*, and a mitzvah, if he has a specific reason and *nisayon* to perform *melachah*, yet he controls himself and refrains from the prohibition.

Other Passive Mitzvos

Similarly, on Yom Tov there is a mitzvah of "*Shabbaton*." When a person refrains from *melachah* on Yom Tov, he fulfills a *mitzvas aseh*. This holds true only when he's faced with a *nisayon* that he must do *melachah*, but due to his *yiras Shamayim*, he refrains. Someone who doesn't do *melachah* just because there's nothing to do is not fulfilling this mitzvah. (For a further discussion on this matter, see Rabbeinu's *sefer Asifas Shemu'os, Tishrei*, end of *siman beis*.)

Based on this, we can also consider the mitzvah of *inuy*, afflicting oneself, on Yom Kippur, which is also fulfilling a *mitzvas aseh* by refraining from doing something. Here, as well, refraining from eating would only be a mitzvah if a person feels he must eat, but does not solely because of the mitzvah. If he doesn't feel hungry, though, or doesn't feel the need for any of the five *inuyim*, it would seem that there's no fulfillment of a mitzvah here. After all, the Torah wrote "*v'inisem*, and afflict yourselves," which means that the mitzvah is dependent on pain and affliction. This requires further examination.

Mitzvah of Leaving Land Alone during Shemittah

Furthermore, the same is true regarding Shemittah. The Torah states (*Vayikra* 25:2), "And the land shall rest a Shabbos to Hashem." (This seems to be the simple *pshat* of the *gemara* in *Avodah Zarah* 15b — the *mitzvas aseh* of letting the land rest during Shemittah is like letting one's animal rest on Shabbos. Even if someone else works the field on Shemittah, the owner transgresses a prohibition.) *Lichorah*, the fulfillment of this mitzvah only takes place when the need to do *melachah* comes up — it's time to plant, plow etc., and if it wouldn't be Shemittah, he would have done it, but since it's assur, he does not take action. By refraining from doing *melachah*, he fulfills the *mitzvas aseh* of "and the land shall rest." But if he doesn't work his land just because he doesn't have to, *lichorah*, there is no fulfillment of the mitzvah here.

Based on this, let's examine the custom some have of buying a small section of land somewhere in Eretz Yisrael to fulfill the mitzvah of Shemittah. *Lichorah*, since he wouldn't have worked the land during the sixth year, and he has no need for it, he does not fulfill the mitzvah of "and the land shall rest." Only if he would need to work the land, but refrains because of the mitzvah, then he'd be fulfilling the mitzvah. But if he just buys a piece of land and doesn't take interest in it, nor does he need to work it — and he wouldn't even have it if not for Shemittah — why should he get a mitzvah because of it? It's important to clarify the source of this custom.

Actually, there has been discussion about buying land from farmers who work that land during the sixth year, and

when he buys their land, he causes them to let the land rest. Doing this *lichorah* causes him to fulfill the mitzvah of "and the land shall rest." While he wouldn't have been working the land himself, he's just preventing others from working the land, it seems that the halachic status of whether he'd be fulfilling the mitzvah or not depends on what defines "the land shall rest." If it takes the same status as making one's animal stop working, then the mitzvah includes even when he prevents others from working their field.

Taking the discussion even further, what if someone buys a fruit tree and declares it *hefker*, it would seem that he fulfills the mitzvah of Shemittah by making his tree *hefker*, but he doesn't fulfill the mitzvah of Shemittah by refraining from work. Because if it wouldn't have been Shemittah, he wouldn't have worked on the tree. He is only fulfilling the mitzvah by his act of making the tree *hefker*, as the *pasuk* states (*Shemos* 23:11), "You shall release it and abandon it."

Rabbeinu's Address at the Siyum on Maseches Keilim this Past Week

Learned *l'illui nishmas* his son Rav Shimon Yosef ז"ל

Making a *siyum* on a *masechta* — like is being done now, after learning *Maseches Keilim* with all the *mefarshim* — is a great thing. On the *pasuk* "There are sixty queens," Chazal said in the Midrash (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 18:21), "These are the sixty *masechtos*. It did not say "kings," but "queens," which means the *masechtos* are queens. Each *masechta* is a queen, and the person who learns it is a king. Someone who finishes all sixty *masechtos* is a king sixty times.

What is the concept of a king? Is it merely a sign of honor to be called a king? The explanation is that the title "king" is referring to a spiritual level. The king is the leader, the educator, and the one who influences the nation. Indeed, the Rambam states (*Hilchos Melachim* 3:6), that the king is the heart of the nation and influences and leads the nation. The same is true regarding a person who completes a *masechta* — he becomes a king, and receives power to influence and lead. **Who does he influence? And whom does he lead? Himself! Every person has a very strong yetzer hara and must fight against it. Through the power of the Torah of a complete *masechta* he receives the kingly power to fight against his yetzer hara and lead all his actions according to the Torah.**

This is the *maalah* of a complete *masechta* — even if it's small, even if it isn't long, and especially *Maseches Keilim*, which has thirty *perakim*. The Mishnah (at the end of the *masechta*) states: "Fortunate are you, *Keilim*, that you entered [began] with impurity and left [finished] with purity." It's a great *madreigah* to complete the entire *masechta*.

Now they are starting a new *masechta*, and *b'ezras Hashem* just as they merited attaining the level of "king" with the kingly power to control and lead and conquer the yetzer hara, so too, *b'ezras Hashem* will they have

continued success, to begin new *masechtos* and finish them. And may they merit more levels of royalty to fight against the yetzer hara.

Additional Addresses at Previous Siyums L'illui Nishmas Rabbeinu's Son on His Yahrtzeit 30 Sivan

Chazal said (*Sanhedrin* 104a), “*B’ra mezakei abba*, A son brings merit to his father.” If a son does good deeds, it brings the father merit even if he’s already in the Olam HaEmes and he can’t do anything for himself. But if the son does something good, it’s as if the father did it, and the father merits Gan Eden and an increased portion in Olam Haba as a result of his son’s good deeds.

Now it doesn’t have to be the son specifically. Anyone who has an influence on others, then those who he influenced can bring him merit in the next world. If someone has a *talmid* whom he taught how to learn, and the *talmid* was empowered to learn due to this *rebbei*, then whatever the *talmid* learns is the due to the *rebbei*’s efforts and influence. Even if the *rebbei* is no longer alive, but the *talmid* is alive and is performing good deeds, the *rebbei* receives the merit of these good deeds, as they are the result of his influence.

Here are two stories about this: Someone passed away and left his estate over to be used to support Torah. A bookcase full of *sefarim* was purchased for Yeshivas Ponevezh from his estate. During that time, the yeshivah was learning *Maseches Gittin*. One of the *sefarim* purchased was a *sefer Chiddushei HaRashba* on *Gittin*. Some time later, the *niftar* appeared to Rav Ben Zion Bamberger *zt”l* — who had been very involved in securing this donation for the yeshivah — in a dream and repeated by heart the *Rashba* in *Gittin*. This *niftar* had never learned *Rashba* — and Rav Ben Zion didn’t either know the *nusach* by heart. Since the yeshivah had used a *sefer* bought from his money, the *niftar* was *zocheh* to know the *Rashba* in the Olam HaEmes, and he came in a dream to tell Rav Ben Zion about it.

This next story demonstrates how if someone influences others, he knows the Torah that he empowered others to learn. A man was killed in a car accident in America, and left behind his wife and two sons, I think. After her husband’s passing, the woman became stronger in her mitzvah observance and decided to move to Israel. Her sons joined a cheder and began learning Gemara. They had never learned Gemara before, and it was hard for them. Once, the boy told his mother: Tomorrow we have a test in Gemara and I’m not ready at all. He was upset when he went to sleep, but when he woke up the next morning, he said, “I’m ready for the test!” He told his mother that his father had appeared to him in a dream and had prepared for the test so that he should know the Gemara. This father actually had never learned Gemara, but since his son was learning Gemara, the father learned it too — in Gan Eden, because a son brings merit to his father. When he learns, his father learns in Gan Eden as well. Even if the son can’t understand the Gemara, the father could, and he came to explain it to his son.

In this case *Baruch Hashem*, there are wonderful descendants who received good *chinuch*, sons, sons-in-law, and grandsons. Whatever they do, whatever *maasim tovim* they do, is a *zechus* for their father! When they learn here, they are teaching him, and what they understand here with their level of understanding, he understands there with a Gan Eden level of understanding! Therefore, every single child must know that whatever he learns, he is teaching his father, his grandfather. And it’s not just the biological sons; anyone who was influenced from him can also bring him merit. This tremendous thing is in our hands; we can do *chessed* with the deceased, *chessed shel emes*.

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This is regarding bringing merit to the *niftar*, **but there is yet another matter that involves doing *chessed* with oneself, each person for himself. A person is born with a lifespan, a certain amount of years to live. What was he given talents for? To be involved in Torah! That’s the main goal in life, Torah and *maasim tovim*. A person can become a *baki* in Shas if he uses his time wisely and doesn’t waste it.** A person can learn Gemara and Rashi with just the simple *peshat* and become a *baki* in Shas. Each person should learn in the manner he likes learning. One doesn’t need special talents for this. But there are real talented people here, so all the more so, why not? Become a *baki* in Shas, learn Gemara with Rashi at least — especially the young people who have more time. Each one of you can become a *baki* in Shas, slowly, slowly. Use your time wisely and don’t waste it.

Curiosity can lead to wasting time. In the past, research was done and it was determined that a person wastes lots of time due to curiosity. For example, as he walks down the street, he sees an advertisement, so he stops to look at it, or he stops to read the paper. He should think: What do you care? What are you gaining from this? Does the news in America have anything to do with you? What will you gain from this? What does it have to do with you? If you have free time — go learn! And you’ll become a *baki* in Shas! Whoever doesn’t do this must do teshuvah. The main part of teshuvah is leaving the sin, and having deepfelt regret and pain over the sin is the next step. Leaving the sin is the main thing, though. *L’maaseh*, it’s worthwhile for every one of us here to make sure his time is utilized well from now on; stay away from curiosity and *devarim beteilim*. Curiosity is a time waster, and there’s no benefit or gain from it. Without curiosity, time would be used one hundred percent.

The best thing to do is to make a commitment. Many great men made themselves commitments. When Rav Yechezkel Abramsky *zt”l* was a rav, not a rosh yeshivah, he wanted to make a commitment. He took on learning the *Tosefta* and writing *chiddushim* on it. While he wasn’t able to write on everything, he wrote a lot, a very large commentary on *Tosefta*, with many *chiddushim*. This is *zikkui harabbim*. And this is how one can be engrossed in Torah.

Maran Harav Shach once told me that making commitment to *limud haTorah* is something extremely important and is a good of way to attain *shki'us baTorah*, immersion in Torah. One should “enslave” himself with commitments that are impossible to be released from. This way, he will not have *hesech hada'as* from the Torah.

(At a *siyum* at the *sheloshim*, Av 5778)

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We've already told about the person who passed away and came to his son in a dream to explain the Gemara to him. This is because “*b'ra mezakei abba*, a son brings merit to his father,” and whatever the son learned in this world, the father learned in the Heavenly *yeshivah*. So too, anyone who influenced others to learn will know the Torah that they learn. That Torah will enter his *neshamah*, but as long as he's alive, the body blocks it. Once the person passes away, the *neshamah* is unencumbered by the body, and we see that the *neshamah* knows all the Torah learned due to his influence. And it's on a level of *neshamah* without a body! And the man came in a dream to teach his son. This happened here in Eretz Yisrael, and I know the person it happened to.

Whatever a person does as a result of the *niftar's* influence, it belongs to the *niftar* and he gets merit for it. If people learn Torah due to his efforts, the Torah belongs to him and he knows that Torah in the *yeshivah shel maalah*. If they learned Shas because of him, he is a *baki* in Shas! Only we don't have the *zechus* that people should come to us in a dream — that was a highly unusual case. But the reality is that the entire Shas that was learned due to him, due to his *petirah*, belongs to him. Now in the Olam

HaEmes, he is a *baki* in Shas because others learned it in his *zechus*.

Therefore, it is a great *simchah* that we were *zocheh* to complete Shas. Besides for the great merit for those who learned it, they are also gifting the *niftar* with Shas — each one whatever he learned, but all together it's the entire Shas, which includes the entire Torah. This is a tremendous *zechus*, and they will surely be *zocheh middah k'neged middah*. Someone who bring another person merit in Torah, merits success in Torah, *middah k'neged middah*. All those who learned Shas and brought merit to the *niftar* will also be *zocheh* to success in learning Shas and the entire Torah, *middah k'neged middah*.

There's no limit to success in Torah, and it's not dependent on talent either. Rav Shlomo Lorencz *z"l* told me that he heard from Maran the Chazon Ish *zt"l* about a *bachur* who was not talented at all and did not understand even the simplest things. But over time, he became a great *lamdan* and became a *rav* in Chutz LaAretz during the Chazon Ish's times.

The Chazon Ish said, why was he *zocheh*? In the *zechus* of his grandmother's tears. At *licht bentching*, she cried and davened for her children to have success in Torah. In the merit of her heartfelt prayers, she was *zocheh*. The Chazon Ish did not want to say who this *rav* was. Years later, when he was asked again who the *rav* was, he said the *rav* has already passed away, so he surely cannot say. But this is the reality — through a parent's *tefillos*, a person can merit. Just as a son brings merit to his father, the opposite is true as well — the descendants are *zocheh* to spiritual success in the merit of their parents. All the more so if the person himself davens, a heartfelt prayer he can surely merit success. And there's no limit to success in Torah.

(From Rabbeinu's address at the *siyum haShas* on his son's first *yahrtzeit*, Sivan 5779)

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