

## Darkei HaChizuk

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

A *Sichah* from Maran HaGaon Rav Gershon Edelstein *shlita*, Rosh Yeshivas Ponevez • Parashas Pinchas 5781

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### Tragedies — Due to the Generation's Sins

There have been tragedies lately, *Rachmana litzlan*. Lag b'Omer in Meron and now in America. What a tragedy. We must take heed and think about what Hashem is doing to us.

Chazal say (*Shabbos* 33b): “*Tzaddikim nitfasim b'avon ha-dor* — Tzaddikim are taken for the generation's sin.” That is, the generation has a sin. The Gemara uses the word “*avon*” — which refers to an intentional sin, not merely a mistake. Tzaddikim are taken for this, to cover for their generation. We've already discussed this, saying that this begs an explanation: why is the tzaddik to blame? Why must he suffer for the generation's sins?

The answer is as follows: Chazal tell us (*Zevachim* 115b), and Rashi (on *Vayikra* 10:3) says too that when Hashem brings *din*, strict judgment on the tzaddikim, Hashem is “*mis'yarei, mis'aleh, u'miskaleis*, feared, raised high and praised” through it. The *din* makes a profound influence on the generation, and Hashem is thus “*mis'yarei, mis'aleh, u'miskaleis*.” “*Mis'yarei*,” from the root *yirah*, fear, doesn't just refer to the fear of punishment (which the Rambam writes is a low *madreigah* [*Hilchos Teshuvah* 10:1]). It must refer to *yiras ha-romemus*, which is a high level of *yiras Shamayim*. *Mis'aleh* and *miskaleis* are very special, high spiritual *madreigos* — which the *tzibbur* receives through the death of tzaddikim.

If so, when we asked why is the tzaddik to blame, and why must he suffer — well, the truth is that this is not a loss, nor does he suffer. Just the opposite — it's a great *zechus* for the tzaddik! He is *mezakeh es harabbim*. By serving as a medium for the *din*, he gives the *tzibbur zechuyos*, as Hashem is “*mis'yarei, mis'aleh, u'miskaleis*, feared, raised high and praised” and he is the one who caused this, through his death. Even though he caused this upliftment inadvertently, he still receives *zechuyos* and reward for it.

### When a Person Causes Hisorerus through His Death

There are a number of Gemaras and Midrashim that say that even if a person causes something unintentionally, he still receives *sechar* for the results. Take, for example, the mitzvah of *shi'kechah*. The *pasuk* says (*Devarim* 24:19): “And if you forget a sheaf in the

field.” And the *pasuk* concludes: “So that Hashem shall bless you in all that you do.” Even though he left that sheaf behind by mistake, he didn't want to forget it, since the poor man found it and was sustained by it, he is blessed.

And what's the blessing? It's probably not merely a physical blessing in the World, but a blessing in Olam HaBa, a true *berachah*, a spiritual *berachah*. Maybe since his forgotten sheaf provided the poor man with sustenance, it's considered that he sustains him and he has the *zechus* of *tzedakah*.

Rashi there quotes *Sifrei* (Rashi quotes this same *Sifrei* at the end of *Parshas Vayikra*): “So that He shall bless you: Even though he received it unintentionally. *Kal v'chomer* if one does so intentionally. From now on we can say: if a person drops a coin and a poor man finds it and is sustained, the first man is blessed as a result.” Even though it was a mistake, it's considered a *zechus* for him and he merits the *brachah* of *tzedakah*. Even when something happens to a person against his will, if something good occurs, it is a *zechus* for him.

We've mention the Gemara in *Moed Katan* (21b) many times — two of Rabbi Akiva's sons died in his lifetime, and when they died, all of Klal Yisrael came to their *levayah* to honor Rabbi Akiva. When Rabbi Akiva saw that the entire *tzibbur* had come, he stood on a high bench so they'd all hear him, and said: “My brothers, Bnei Yisrael, why have you come? If you came for Akiva, well, there are many Akivas in the marketplace.” That is, there are many other people named Akiva; what's special about me? “However, you said, ‘The Torah of Hashem is in his heart’ (*Tehillim* 37:31); since Rabbi Akiva's heart is full of Torah, you came in honor of the Torah. Since you are giving honor to Torah, I am comforted!”

We said that this episode is written in greater detail in *Masechas Semachos* (chap. 8; and it's also brought in *Yalkut Parshas Yisro*). Rabbi Akiva was comforted because he realized that there was a great *zechus* here. Through their deaths, his sons had been the cause of *kavod haTorah*. Even though they did not intend to do so, it still evolved through them and it's a *zechus* for them. They attained the merits of *zikkui harabbim* for *kavod haTorah* — all of Klal Yisrael came out to honor

Rabbi Akiva's Torah, and the enormity of the *zechus* of *kavod haTorah* is unfathomable. Indeed, the Gemara says (*Shevuos* 30b): "*Asei d'kavod haTorah adif* — the *mitzvas asei* of *kavod haTorah* is greater [than a different *mitzvas asei*]." As a result, Rabbi Akiva said: I am comforted — he derived comfort from the fact that his sons merited such enormous *zechuyos*.

The rule is that for every *zechus* a person gains, he needed prior *zechuyos* in order to gain it. The same is true regarding *zikkui harabbim* — one needs prior *zechuyos*. And this is what Chazal said about Moshe Rabbeinu (*Avos* 5:18): "Moshe merited and brought merit to the masses; the *zechus* of the masses depended on him." That is, Moshe Rabbeinu first "merited" and performed *maasim tovim* himself, and that's why he was able to "bring merit to the masses." We've already explained what Moshe Rabbeinu's prior "merit" was, for which he was *zocheh* to bring merit to the *rabbim* by giving Klal Yisrael the Torah. Indeed, we received the entire *Torah shebichsav* and *Torah sh'be'al Peh* from Moshe Rabbeinu, and the inestimable *zikkui harabbim* that already occurred, and that will continue on and on, was the result of Moshe's prior *zechus*. It's not written explicitly what this *zechus* was, but there are Midrashim about it. (See *Shemos Rabbah* 2:2.)

This is what Rabbi Akiva said: One needs prior *zechuyos* to merit *zikkui harabbim*, and "*megalgilim zechus al yidei zakkai* — A meritorious act is brought about through a meritorious person." When he saw that his sons' death brought about such a tremendous *zikkui harabbim*, it showed him that they had other, unknown, *zechuyos*.

### Tragedies Arouse Us to Accept Mussar

If so, the tragedies in Meron and now in America, such great tragedies, where tzaddikim passed away, these tzaddikim were *mezakei harabbim*. Through their deaths, they caused "*misyarei, mis'aleh, u'miskaleis* — Hashem is feared, raised high and praised." They are bringing merit to the *tzibbur* through their deaths, and this shows that they had prior *zechuyos*, which gave them the merit to be *mezakeh es harabbim*.

The death of tzaddikim and the strict judgment afflicted on them is due to the generation's sins. Tzaddikim bring atonement through their deaths, and are *mezakeh es harabbim*, and at the same time, they reap even more *zechuyos* — many, many *zechuyos* and inestimable levels in Olam HaBa! Therefore, anyone whose death brings about *hisorerus* is a *mezakeh es harabbim*. Whether their death causes people to do teshuvah, *maasim tovim*, or whether it wakes them up to take upon themselves a new level of *ruchniyus*, it is attributed to the *niftarim*, and we cannot fathom what tremendous

*zechuyos* this gives them. Furthermore, it shows that they had many prior *zechuyos*. This is the reality.

But of course, it all depends on the *tzibbur's madreigah*, whether the *tzibbur* understands this and wakes up, or *chas v'shalom*, if they don't take heed and wake up. The *navi* says (*Yirmeyah* 2:30) "I hit your sons in vain; they did not take *mussar*." That is, it really can happen — "I hit your sons in vain" *Rachmana litzlan*, because tragic incidents had no effect on them and they didn't take *mussar*. This could be the result, but *aruch Hashem*, our *tzibbur* has *yiras Shamayim*, the *tzibbur* takes things to heart, they think about what happened, they wake up, and they are *mischazeik*. It is truly a situation of "*misyarei, mis'aleh, u'miskaleis*."

### Everything Is in Hashem's Hands and Is for the Good

It's important to keep a vital rule in mind: Everything is in *Shamayim's* hands. The Gemara says two things: 1) Everything is in Heaven's hands (*Berachos* 33b) 2) Whatever the Merciful One does is for the good (*ibid.* 60b). These two rules are *emunah peshutah*. If a person lives with this *emunah*, he will be happy! And he will never have a reason to be resentful or begrudge someone else.

Whatever the Merciful One does is for the good. We don't know why it's good, but it is! These tragedies are for the good — for whose good? For every single person's good. There's not even one person who was pained from this tragedy and it wasn't for his good, because "*haTzur, tamim pe'alo* — the deeds of the Rock are perfect" (*Devarim* 32:4). We don't know how it is for his good, but we can try to think about it, and by contemplation, one might be able to understand why, and for what reason, he had to suffer this anguish.

In any case, all pain is from *Shamayim*. Even if a human being caused the pain, that's not the real reason it happened to him; it's really Heaven sent. There's a real reason why *Shamayim* is giving him this pain, and it's for his benefit.

So what's the benefit? A person must contemplate the situation. There is the concept of *middah k'neged middah*, and a person has to think and try to find the *middah k'neged middah*. If he can't find it, he should attribute it to *bittul Torah*, as Chazal say (*Berachos* 5a): "If a person sees *yissurim* befalling him, he should scrutinize his deeds. If he did so, and couldn't find [the reason], he should attribute it to *bittul Torah*." (See too the *Nefesh HaChaim* Gate 4, chap. 29.) **There is a reason for every single difficulty in life.**

## A Life of Torah and Mitzvos Brings Happiness

The more we are involved in Torah, the happier our lives will be. Chazal say (*Avos* 6:4), “*Ashrecha baOlam HaZeh* — You will be fortunate in this World,” when you go in the path of Torah, and toil in Torah. Each person according to his ability. Someone who has to support his family can still be *osek baTorah* in his spare time and learn as much as he can.

We’ve already mentioned that when a person takes care of his family’s needs, he is doing a mitzvah, he’s doing *chesed* and is “indebted” to his family. And it’s a mitzvah to pay back one’s debts, so it turns out that while he is working, he is involved in a mitzvah. He is doing a *chesed* and paying back his debts, and he is continuously earning *zechuyos*. The same is true in all aspects of life — if he thinks about it and has the intention that he’s acting *l’shem mitzvah*, then whatever he does are acts of mitzvah.

When a person goes to eat and washes his hands before eating bread, he is doing mitzvos: washing to eat, making a *berachah al netillas yadayim*, and then another *berachah: hamotzi*. Even when he eats, if he is eating because he needs to be healthy to perform the 613 mitzvos and to serve Hashem, then his eating is a mitzvah. And he is constantly being involved in that mitzvah, and then he concludes his meal with another mitzvah: *birkas haMazon*.

Again, even when a person must go to work to support his family, he is doing a *chesed* and is repaying his debt to his family. (He is obligated to support them.) This too is considered a mitzvah.

### Rectifying the Sin of the Churban

It’s now the period of *Bein HaMetzarim*, which is the time of the Churban. The fasts of Shivah Asar b’Tammuz and Tishah b’Av are to remind us of the Churban. The Rambam explains (*Hilchos Taaniyos* 5:1) that the reason and benefit of fasting is so that it will wake us up to do teshuvah. What should we do teshuvah for? For the never-ending sin that brought about the Churban!

Chazal say (*Yoma* 9b), “The earlier ones, whose sin was revealed, the end [of their *galus*] was revealed as well; but the later ones, whose sin was not revealed, the end of their *galus* was not revealed.” During the first Beis HaMikdash, their “sin was revealed,” their sins were clear — they transgressed the three cardinal sins, and that’s why the Churban and *galus* came about. But then they repented, and seventy years later the second Beis HaMikdash was built. It was clear what their sins were, so they repented for them.

But during the Second Beis HaMikdash, their sins were not revealed, because the sin was *sinas chinam*, which is not a revealed sin because everyone is positive that he is right and doesn’t even notice his sin. Of course, there are tzaddikim; the Tannaim lived during the generation of the Churban. Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai and others were surely tzaddikim; they didn’t have *sinas chinam*. However, the main *tzibbur* constitutes the “generation,” and the *tzibbur* was infected with *sinas chinam*, a *cheit* in their *middos*.

Since this sin caused the Churban, rectification of the sin will rectify the Churban. Indeed, Chazal say (*Yerushalmi Yoma* 1:1), “Every generation that does not merit the rebuilding of the Beis HaMikdash in their times, it is considered as if they destroyed it.” That is, if the Churban is still continuing, it’s a sign that the sin is still present. And the reason the sin is continuing is because we don’t feel the sin. We think: “Is this considered *sinas chinam*, wanton hatred? It’s hatred for a good reason...” Every person is sure he’s right and he doesn’t realize that his hatred is “*chinam*.” So the sin continues and continues and causes the Churban to continue.

Of course, there are tzaddikim nowadays as well who don’t have *sinas chinam*, but most of the *tzibbur* has this failing, and it’s a deficiency in *middos*. If the sin would be corrected, the Churban would be over, and the Beis HaMikdash would have been rebuilt already.

### Strengthening Emunah Leads to Rectifying Middos

If so, the obligation to rectify the *cheit* that caused the Churban requires us to rectify our *middos*. *Tikkun hamiddos* is not simple; it’s not easy. Not everyone can say that he has good *middos*, because everyone has a built-in yetzer hara.

For example, there is a yetzer hara of *k’peidah*, it’s human nature. Not having *k’peidah* on someone who wronged you is against human nature, but having a *k’peidah* is against *emunah*! In any case, human nature is to have a *k’peidah*, so it’s not simple. Never having a *k’peidah* against anyone is a very high *madreigah* which is very difficult to attain.

But this is *emunah*! Knowing that there’s no reason to have a *k’peidah* because everything is in Heaven’s hands, and it’s all for our good, *gam zu l’tovah*. If so, there are two reasons why one should not have a *k’peidah*. 1) Because everything is in Heaven’s hands, and the pain is not because of the person who pained me; it’s from *Shamayim* and I deserve it. 2) It’s for my benefit — why? I have to do some introspection and

figure out why it's for my benefit, but this is the reality. And so there's no reason to be *makpid*.

This is our obligation to rectify the sin of the Churban. We must rectify our *middos* and strengthen our *emunah* that everything is in Heaven's hands, and Whatever the Merciful One does is for the good. Now, this is not simple at all. The only way to attain this level is by learning *mussar sefarim*. By learning *mussar*, a person learns what *emunah* is, and what good *middos* are. Then he can do some introspection and compare what he read to his own present state. Do I really act this way?

### The Benefit of a Steady Mussar Seder

All the *mussar sefarim* do not merely discuss *middas chassidus*, they discuss *chiyuvim*, regular obligations incumbent on every Jew. Without these behaviors, a person's heart is not a kosher heart. For example, *Chovos HaLevavos* describes "the duties of the heart," as its title reveals. There are ten gates to this *sefer*, one is about humility, another about *middos*, and others about many other duties of the heart. These behaviors actually go against human nature, but it's a given that *emunah* can change this nature.

The *Iggeres HaRamban* writes "all your words should be spoken pleasantly," without getting excited, without anger, without having *k'peidos*. Then the Ramban explains what will happen if you act this way: someone who does everything *b'nachas*, pleasantly, with *yishuv ha'daas*, from the perspective of *emunah*, will become a completely different person!

But this can only happen if there is a set time for learning *mussar*, to know the information. There is lots of information about *emunah* and *middos tovos* in *mussar sefarim*; these things are connected to the *chochmas hanefesh*, how one's heart should be.

As mentioned, these matters are not *middas chassidus*, they are obligations — *chovos halevavos*, duties of the heart. The Torah obligates the heart to function as is written in *Chovos HaLevavos* — with *yiras Shamayim*, with "v'ahavta l'reiacha kamocho," and with many other things that are associated with the heart. And they are all obligations; a person must advance in these matters. However, he cannot do it on his own, he can only do so by learning *mussar sefarim*, on a daily, steady basis. Anyone who has a steady learning session will really change.

I know men with families who started learning a little *mussar* every day, and as a result, their whole house changed, there was a completely different atmosphere, a pleasant atmosphere in the house! Indeed, the *Chovos HaLevavos* writes (*Shaar HaPrishus* chap. 4) about the *porush*, ascetic, who radiates joy, it's pleasant to be around him. He has a good, happy life.

This is what we need, *l'maaseh*. We need *emunah*, and *chizuk* for good *middos* by setting a daily learning session in *sifrei mussar*, every individual according to his own abilities. Even if it's just for a few minutes it's a reminder of our duties, and the learning will still have a very strong influence. *B'ezras Hashem*, may we all strengthen ourselves in whatever needs strengthening!

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גיטה פייגה בת רבקה  
לרפואה שלימה ומהירה  
בתוך כל חולי ישראל

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