

Darkei HaChizuk

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

A Sichah from Maran HaGaon Rav Gershon Edelstein *shlita*, Rosh Yeshivas Ponevez • Parashas Mattos-Mas'ei 5781

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Minimizing Physical Pleasure Makes You Fortunate

The *Mesillas Yesharim* writes (chap. 1) that a person was created to “take pleasure with Hashem.” He quotes a few statements from Chazal to this end — that man was created to take pleasure with Hashem, and the real, true pleasure is only in Olam HaBa, about which the *navi* said (*Yeshayahu* 64:3), “No eye has seen it, aside from You, Hashem.” Chazal say (*Berachos* 34b) that even the prophets had no idea or concept of the pleasures of Olam HaBa — they are eternal pleasures, and they continue on endlessly.

However, aside from the pleasures of Olam HaBa, pleasure exists in this world too. Chazal say (*Avos* 6:4): “This is the way of Torah... if you do so, you will be fortunate in this World.” This means good fortune and pleasure exist in this world too. So how do we attain it? By minimizing physical pleasures! This is one of the 48 acquisitions of Torah and it is the condition upon which a person merits Torah and “*ashrecha b'Olam HaZeh*, you will be fortunate in this World” — **minimizing pleasures is what creates “*ashrecha b'Olam HaZeh*.”** *Pirkei Avos* actually says as much: “This is the way of Torah; eat bread with salt” — specifically bread with salt.

Of course, this is individual, each person according to his ability; only if he has the stamina to behave this way. Minimizing pleasure, according to one’s ability, is the way to attain being fortunate in this World. There were *gedolim*, *tzaddikim* who would swallow their food, without chewing it, so as not to derive pleasure from it. That’s how they fulfilled “minimizing pleasure” on their level, and then they were “fortunate in this World”!

Pleasure and Geshmak in Learning Torah

And how is the “*ashrecha*” manifested? In Torah! The Torah gives a person pleasure in this World. We’ve see that Torah is compared to all sorts of delicacies and pleasures, such as: “There is no water aside from Torah” (*Bava Kama* 17a); “All those who are thirsty go to the water source” (*Yeshayah* 55:1). Just as water is the best thing for a thirsty person — he doesn’t want any sweet drinks when he’s really thirsty; water is more refreshing for him than any other drink — so too, Torah learning revives a person’s soul.

The *navi* continues: “And go purchase wine and milk without money, without a price.” This is a *meshal* to the other flavors found in Torah. Once a person has already quenched his thirst with water, then he can enjoy wine and milk, i.e., flavored drinks. The *pasuk* in *Tehillim* says about *divrei Torah* (19:11): “They are sweeter than honey” — even more than honey. And so on and so forth, Torah is compared to all sorts of tastes and worldly pleasures. As we said, the way to attain all this is by limiting one’s pleasures, as the Tanna said: Eat bread with salt and drink measured water. Of course, each person does what

he’s able to do. But this is the condition to acquiring Torah and being fortunate in this World. Minimizing pleasures is one of the 48 ways to acquire Torah. It defies logic, but this is the reality. This is the only way one can attain happiness in this World. **Minimizing pleasure is the condition to merit “*ashrecha*” with all the varied tastes and pleasures inherent in Torah.** Indeed, Torah is compared to water for a thirsty person, and to honey, wine, and milk.

The World Stands on Torah Learning

Chazal said (*Avos* 1:2): The world stands on three things: on Torah, on *avodah*, and on *gemillus chassadim*. The first is Torah.

The Bartenura explains: “On Torah — if Klal Yisrael had not received the Torah, the Heavens and Earth would not have been created, as the *pasuk* states (*Yirmeyah* 33:25): “If not for My Covenant [Torah, which is learned] day and night, I would not have set down the laws of heaven and earth.” That is, Chazal’s statement that the world stands on Torah is referring to Kabbalas HaTorah. The merit of Bnei Yisrael’s acceptance of the Torah caused the world to exist. But Tosfos Yom Tov writes that “Torah” is not only referring to Kabbalas HaTorah; it also refers to *esek haTorah*. Someone who is involved in and learns Torah revives the world’s existence.

Rabbeinu Chaim Volozhiner discussed this at length in *Nefesh HaChaim* (*Shaar* 1, chap. 16): “The existence and vitality of all the worlds comes about only through the Torah HaKedoshah that the Jewish people study. Their Torah is the light of all the worlds and the soul and vitality of them all. If there would be one moment that Torah was not being studied in the entire world — from one end of the universe to the other — all the worlds would return to their [original] state of *Tohu*, utter confusion. Indeed, Chazal say [the world was created] for the sake of Torah, which is called ‘*Reishis*.’” Theoretically speaking, if there would be just one moment without Torah worldwide, the world would be destroyed immediately, *Rachmana litzlan*. He wrote a similar idea in *Shaar* 4, chap. 11.

Fulfilling a Mitzvah by Taking Care of Physical Needs

It’s well known that the Chazon Ish *zt”l* said that “*esek haTorah*” does not refer just to when one is actually learning Torah. Rather, when a person goes to sleep in order to refresh himself and regain his strength to learn more, this is also considered “*esek haTorah*.” When a person has these intentions, his sleep is *l’shem Shamayim*, and the Rambam (*Hilchos Deios* 3:3) writes that his sleep is “*avodah laMakom*,” service of Hashem. Along the same lines, if someone uses his sleep as a preparation for the mitzvah of Torah learning, his very sleep is part of *esek haTorah*. Indeed, while he sleeps, it’s considered as if he is presently involved in the mitzvah of *talmud Torah*.

The same is true regarding eating. The Rambam writes about sleeping — that is, **even** sleeping, which is passive, a *shev v'al taaseh* — so *kal vachomer*, if a person performs active physical needs (*kum v'aseh*), such as eating, *l'shem Shamayim*, it is considered that he is involved in a mitzvah. Even while he fulfills these physical needs, it's viewed as if he's learning Torah, since it's all *hechsher Torah*, preparation for fulfillment of learning Torah.

We've already discussed the wonderful thought about the many mitzvos a person performs when he sits down to eat a meal. First, he washes to eat, and fulfills the mitzvah of *netillas yadayim*. Then he makes a *berachah asher kiddeshanu... al netillas yadayim* — this is another mitzvah. He's blessing Hashem and thanking Him for the opportunity to do a mitzvah, for the sanctity we receive as a result of the mitzvah. And then he makes a *berachah* of *hamotzi* — another *berachah*, another mitzvah. Based on what we just said, even his eating is a mitzvah, so long as he has the right intention, in order to promote his *avodas Hashem*. In this matter, all his actions will be mitzvos, which add more *kedushah* and sanctify the person. It all hinges just on his intent: what is his intent as he eats, and why is he eating.

As we mentioned, the world stands on three things and the first is Torah. It's referring to *esek haTorah*, which includes learning, but also includes anything connected to and necessary for Torah learning.

My father *zt"l* told me that Rav Chaim Volozhiner *zt"l* says as follows: When will Mashiach come? When Torah spreads out throughout the world; when there will be Torah in all corners of the world. Today, we have Torah in Eretz Yisrael and in many other places in the world; Torah has even spread as far as Hong Kong. I heard there is a Yid there, teaching Torah to the local Jews. **The more the world becomes sanctified with the *kedushah* of Torah, the faster Mashiach will come. When Torah spreads out across the world, in North America, in South America, and in every single place in the world, then the world will become holy and the *geulah* will arrive!**

The world stands on three things. On Torah — we just discussed. On *avodah* — the service of *korbanos*. Nowadays, since we don't have *korbanos*, we have *tefillah*, which is *avodah she'balev*, “service of the heart,” and it's similar to *korbanos*. That's *avodah*. *Gemillus chassadim* is simple: acting with good *middos* and performing good deeds *bein adam lachaveiro*.

They said *haolam*, “the world,” stands. This refers not only to the entire universe, but it also is a reference to man himself. A person, too, is a world; he is called *olam katan*, “a miniature world” (see *Tanchuma Pekudei* 3). *Haolam omeid*, “the world stands,” means that man's *sheleimus* is dependent on these three matters. When a person is *osek* in these three matters *b'sheleimus*, according to his individual abilities, and uses all his strengths, this is his *sheleimus*.

Making a Living Can Be a Mitzvah

And the truth is, when someone needs to work for a living, he's doing a mitzvah. Without *parnasah* how would he survive, and how would he fulfill the mitzvos? He needs to provide for his physical needs and his family's too, and even

though it's natural to want to make a living, if he keeps in mind that he's doing it *l'shem Shamayim*, then he is *osek b'mitzvah*.

Indeed, this is the halachah. *Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 38:8)* writes that a person who is busy making a living is considered *osek b'mitzvah*. There, it was discussing the case of *sofrim* and people who sell *tashmishei kedushah*. “Those who write tefillin and *mezuzos*, they and their apprentices, and their apprentices' assistants, and all those who are involved in heavenly work, are absolved from wearing tefillin all day, except for during *Krias Shema* and *Shemoneh Esrei*.” The Rema adds: “If they were required to be involved in their work during the time for *krias Shema*, they are *patur* from reciting *krias Shema* and wearing tefillin, as the rule is: One who is involved in one mitzvah is absolved from another mitzvah.” See there.

Even if they are earning a salary and gaining from it, they could have chosen another way of making a living, but they specifically chose this profession due to the mitzvah and *zikkui harabbim* it involves. They want to be *mezakeh es harabbim* with a mitzvah and with *kedushah*. Since this is their principal intention, it is considered that they are involved in a mitzvah! **It all depends on one's intention — it depends on his primary intention.** The *Mishnah Berurah (s"k 24)* writes in the name of the Magen Avraham: “This is specifically if their main intention is to provide these [articles] for those who need them, but if their main intention is just to make a living, it's not considered that they are involved in a mitzvah.”

Once Maran the Mashgiach Rav Yechezkel Levenstein *zt"l* was in Tel HaShomer hospital for a short time. The Mashgiach held the hand of a male nurse and told him: Remember that you are performing a *chesed* with me. You are busy all day doing the mitzvah of *chesed*, and if you think about it and remember it, you have many *zechuyos*. It's true that you make a living this way, but you are also doing *chesed* and the *tzibbur* needs you. You are benefitting the *tzibbur*, and if you think about it, you will gain many merits!

I once said something similar to a taxi driver. I told him that he does *chesed* and good deeds all day long, because people need him, and he's a public servant. While he has to charge a fee because he needs to make a living, he is still helping other people and doing *chesed* all day long. He understood what I meant, and he appreciated it. **A person can be constantly involved in good deeds; it all depends on his intention!**

Ahavas HaBriyos Rebuilds the Ruins of Yerushalayim

Chazal say (*Berachos 6b*): Whoever brings joy to a *chasan* and *kallah*, it is as if he rebuilt one of the ruins of Yerushalayim. This begs an explanation. What's the connection between a *chasan* and *kallah*'s joy and the ruins of Yerushalayim? Why is it considered as if he built something?

The simple explanation is that bringing joy to a *chasan* and *kallah* is a good deed that stems from *middos tovos* and *ahavas habriyos*. Indeed, the Rambam writes (*Hilchos Aveil 14:1*) that bringing joy to a *chasan* and *kallah* is included in the mitzvah of *v'ahavta l'reiacha kamocho*.

Sinas chinam and a lack of *ahavas habriyos* was the sin that led to the Churban, as Chazal say (*Yoma* 9:2): “Why was the second Beis HaMikdash destroyed? Because there was *sinas chinam*.” That is, the opposite of *v’ahavta l’reiacha kamocha*. The Gemara relates that the people of that generation did mitzvos and *maasim tovim*, but there was no *ahavas habriyos*. The classic example and *mashal* for this is the story of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza (*Gittin* 55b). This wasn’t a one-time event; it is an example of the *sinas chinam* and lack of good *middos* that was prevalent in that generation. And as a result, the Churban took place.

The Churban is continuing till this very day because the sin hasn’t been rectified yet. And the Yerushalmi says (*Yoma* 1:1), “Any generation which doesn’t see the rebuilding of the Beis HaMikdash in its day, it’s as if that generation destroyed it.” If the sin had been rectified, the Beis HaMikdash would have been rebuilt, but since the Churban is still continuing, it’s a sign that the sin that caused it is still continuing. We are deficient in *ahavas habriyos*.

Therefore, when someone makes a *chasan* or *kallah* happy, if he does it because he has *ahavas habriyos* and *ahavas chesed* because he wants to make them happy, he is fulfilling the mitzvah of *v’ahavta l’reiacha kamocha*. It all depends on his intention. Being able to do *chesed* should be his primary intention in fulfilling this mitzvah — thus, he’ll be rectifying the sin that caused the Churban and will be building Yerushalayim’s ruins.

It says “as if he built ‘one’ of the ruins of Yerushalayim” — Chazal were saying that a person shouldn’t think he built them all up; he only built up one. Why is this so? Although he rectified the sin of the Churban, and he has *ahavas habriyos*, there are still many, many others in the tzibbur of Klal Yisrael. Not everyone has *ahavas habriyos*, and *sinas chinam* still exists. So even though this person built “one of” the ruins of Yerushalayim and has corrected his part, there are still many more ruins, and other people are still destroying them. But in any case, he has rectified his portion and is not to blame for the continued Churban.

Learning Torah Lishmah

We learn in *Avos* at the beginning of chap. 6: “Whoever learns *Torah lishmah* will merit many things.” Now, besides for the things enumerated there, there are many other things a person can merit. “Not only that, but it was worthwhile to create the entire world just for him, and he is called a friend, beloved, lover of Hashem, lover of people.”

The fact that he’s called both “a friend” and “beloved,” requires explanation. Are these two separate titles: “a friend,” and “a beloved one,” or is it the same thing: “a beloved friend.” It seems that it’s one term, similar to the *berachah* in *sheva berachos*: *same’ach tisamach rei’im ha-ahuvim*, “Grant abundant joy to the beloved friends.”

Another mentioned in the *sheva berachos* is *ahavah*, *v’achvah*, *v’shalom*, *v’rei’us*, “love, brotherhood, peace, and friendship.” The Gemara (*Berachos* 12a) writes that when the *kohanim* switched their *mishmeros*, shifts, every week, the outgoing *mishmeres* would bless the incoming *mishmeres* as follows: “May the One Who rests His name in this House, make rest among you *ahavah*, *v’achvah*, *v’shalom*, *v’rei’us*.”

This is a four-fold blessing: *Ahavah* is a *madreigah*, it means one has *ahavas habriyos*. *Achvah* is even stronger love, like the love between brothers, *shalom* means to leave with one another peacefully without arguments and quarrelling.

Rei’us is something else — it means there is a relationship of friendship. It’s possible to have *ahavah*, *achvah*, and *shalom*, yet no *rei’us* — the two people simply don’t talk to each other. While he certainly loves his fellow, and he is as close to him as a brother, and they live peacefully together without fighting, there is still no friendship. We sometimes see this with neighbors, they say “Shalom, shalom” when they pass each other by, and they’re very polite and courteous, but there’s no friendship between them. This is the concept of *rei’us*, the type of love that’s *rei’us*.

Higher Madreigahs Are Attained through Tefillah

The *berachah* continues: Grant abundant joy to these beloved friends “as You made Your Creations joyful in Gan Eden of old.” That is, there should be the same level of joy as there was for Adam HaRishon — Hashem’s *yetzir kapav*, in Gan Eden — before the *cheit*!

At Adam HaRishon’s wedding, Hashem was the only guest; only He was around to make merry for Adam and Chava (*Eiruvim* 18b). At that point, the people did not have a *yetzer hara*, as Rashi explains on the *pasuk* “*v’lo yisboshashu*.” What a *madreigah*! One cannot fathom the level of *kedushah* and *simchah* at that wedding, where Hashem was the one making the *chasan* happy!

Chazal say (*Vayikra Rabbah* 20:2) that due to his great level of *kedushah*, his heel would darken the sun. “Heel” is Adam HaRishon’s lowest *madreigah* and is probably is a *mashal* to express clarity of *emunah*. That’s how high Adam HaRishon’s *madreigah* was.

When we ask Hashem to bring abundant joy just as He “brought joy to Your creations in Gan Eden,” it’s a blessing intertwined with a prayer: that the couple should merit the same level of joy that Adam HaRishon had in Gan Eden before his sin. This requires an explanation. How can this be? Is it possible to attain such a lofty level nowadays?

The truth is, there was a time when Klal Yisrael merited reaching this *madreigah* — during Matan Torah, as Chazal say (*Shabbos* 146a): “When Yisrael stood in front of Har Sinai their impurity stopped.” When they saw the thunder and lightning and the cloud on top of the mountain, and they heard Hashem’s voice speaking — they heard the first two *dibros* from Hashem — their impurity stopped, and they attained the same *madreigah* as Adam HaRishon before the sin.

If so, it is possible to attain this *madreigah*. However, Bnei Yisrael lost some of that *madreigah* after the Cheit HaEigel. Chazal say (*Avodah Zarah* 5a) on the *pasuk*, “For I said, ‘You are angelic creatures... Indeed, as man you will die’ — ‘You have destroyed your deeds — so, indeed, you will die like man. At that point, they went down in *madreigah*, but they had been on the lofty *madreigah* of Adam HaRishon before the sin.”

Nowadays, too, it is possible to daven for this! Chazal say (*Berachos* 50a) on the *pasuk*, “Expand your mouth and I will

fill it” — this is referring to *divrei Torah*. Hashem says to a person: Open your mouth; if you ask, you’ll get! We’ve already mentioned that Rav Yisrael says that it’s tried and true that davening for *ruchniyus* will help.

Pain Produces a True Tefillah

We daven three times a day for *ruchniyus*: *Hashiveinu Avinu l’Torasecha; p’sach libi b’Torasecha*. If so, why don’t we see that the *tefillah* helps, and why are we still in the same *madreigah* as before.

The answer is certainly that our *tefillah* is not a proper *tefillah*. It needs to be an *emesdik tefillah*, a *tefillah* and request generated by pain. When we feel that something’s lacking, and painful, the pain causes crying.

Stories are told about young people who davened and shed tears over their *madreigah* in Torah. The story is told about someone who was in shul and thought the shul was empty. He went behind the *paroches* of the *aron kodesh* and davened a heartfelt, tearful prayer begging for success in Torah. And he actually merited great *siyatta d’Shemaya* and had supernatural *hatzlachah* in Torah.

There’s a story about the first person’s son, who was a *baal madreigah*. He was once at the Kosel during wartime, and he met someone there. The other person was very sad, and told him that his father and the rest of his family were stuck in Chutz laAretz. He was worried about them. The first man calmed him down, and said, I’ll tell you, but you cannot tell anyone that I did so as long as I am still alive. Then he told him exactly where his father was and what he was doing. When the war was over, he found out that what the man had told him was true.

Such a *madreigah*! He was in Yerushalayim, and knew what was going on in distant lands. This didn’t happen so long ago, it happened right here in Eretz Yisrael. I heard this story from someone who heard it from the man himself. The *Chovos HaLevavos* discusses this *madreigah* (*Shaar Cheshbon HaNefesh* chap. 3): “He will be on the highest level of the *madreigos* of pious ones... and he will be able to see without an eye and hear without an ear and speak without a tongue and feel untouchable matters.” Even nowadays, people can see without eyes.

The way to attain this *madreigah* is through *tefillah*, but the prayer must be a real one, a prayer borne of pain. Such a prayer is truly helpful.

We see that the *gedolim* merited great things through *tefillah*. For example, we mentioned the Brisker Rav’s comments on the beginning of *Hilchos Nezirus*. He explains *peshat* in the Gemara. Now all other Achronim have difficulty with *peshat* in this *gemara*, but he was *mechavein* to the Rosh! In Tosafos HaRosh in *Gittin daf 77*, he explains the same exact words just as the Brisker Rav explained. The Brisker Rav didn’t see that Rosh, but he was *mechavein* to his words exactly.

How does one merit this? Through *tefillah*! And the Brisker Rav’s *tefillah* was on a very high level, *b’hispashtus hagashmiyus*, as is written in *Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim, 98:1)*. We’ve already related that while he was davening, he didn’t hear people talking to him because he was concentrating so intently on his davening. All his physical senses were disabled when he davened, as if he didn’t have a body. The same thing was told about the Chazon Ish. The Kuzari (Maamar 3, chap. 5) also discusses what a real *tefillah* is, and describes *hispashtus hagashmiyus*.

If we’d be davening like this, it would really help, but who davens like this nowadays? Are we really so pained over our level of Torah? Do we cry over it? That’s how *tefillah* should be; pain and true beseeching should accompany our *tefillos*.

This is what we must know: everything is dependent on *tefillos*. A person can merit “Open your mouth wide and I will fill it,” as Rav Yisrael Salanter said that it’s true and tried that *tefillah* for *ruchniyus* helps. But it must be a true *tefillah*. And one needs *siyatta d’Shemaya* and *zechuyos* for this — to merit a *madreigah* of true Torah, *avodah she’baleiv*, and perfect *ahavas habriyos* — that’s not simple either. Rabbi Akiva wrote: “Love your fellow as yourself” is a great principle in the Torah (*Yerushalmi Nedarim 9:4*). One needs *siyatta d’Shemaya* with *zechuyos* for this. *Yehi ratzon* that we all merit to attain these *madreigos*.

Please daven for
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.