

## Darkei HaChizuk

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

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### The Trepidation of Elul in Previous Generations

For many generations, there's been a decline in the way we relate to the trepidation of Elul. Rav Yisrael Salanter wrote (Letter 14) that in the generation before his, "everyone was terrified and shaking from the fear of *Yom HaDin*, but in 'our' days, the fear of Elul has almost been entirely extinguished." During Rav Yisrael Salanter's times, about 150 years ago, there was still a miniscule level of *Eimas HaDin*, trepidation of judgment.

Someone told me that he lived in a periphery town a number of years ago. Simple Jews lived in that town, and he could feel the *Eimas HaDin*, the trepidation of judgment and the dread of Elul, but nowadays, he doesn't feel that terror even though he presently lives among *bnei Torah*. And this man is not elderly. This is not "almost been entirely extinguished" — this is "completely extinguished." There probably still is something left, but it's not visible.

What's the reason for this *yeridas hadoros*? It has nothing to do with *ge'onus*, brilliance, or *tzidkus*; it is related to *yiras Shamayim*. Rav Yisrael Salanter writes in his letter that the reason for *yeridas hadoros* is because "the great G-d-fearing Jews are no longer, those whose trepidation of *din* is on their faces. Their fear made an impression on all others."

In the previous generations, there were giants in *yiras Shamayim* whose fear of judgment was written on their faces, and it made an impression on the entire *tzibbur*, influencing them to feel the terror of Elul as well. Now, we don't have such influential figures. Now, in order to receive *yiras Shamayim*, we need to be influenced by seeing others who are giants in *yirah*. Since they are not around anymore, *yiras Shamayim* has decreased, and we don't feel the trepidation.

I personally saw very simple working men who felt the *eimas hadin*. I knew someone who worked as a teller in a bank. Although he was religious, he did not wear a yarmulke to work. But when this man received an *aliyah* on the *Yamim Noraim*, he was so moved, he would cry. In his youth, he had learned in Volozhin under the Netziv, and he remembered the *eimas hadin* he saw by the Netziv. Even though he forgot about it all year long, he remembered during the *Yamim Noraim* and was moved to tears.

### Ani L'Dodi — Via Torah!

During the month of Elul, Hashem is especially close to us. The first, primary way to connect to Hashem is through learning Torah. Talmud Torah is equal to all other mitzvos, as is written at the beginning of *Mishnayos Peah*. Learning Torah purifies a person more than all other mitzvos do. Chazal say (*Avos* 6:1): "It raises him up, uplifts him over all actions." The *Ruach Chaim* explains: Torah is greater than even good deeds. Torah raises a person more than all other mitzvos do.

Of course, we must fulfill all 613 mitzvos. The *Yerushalmi* says (*Berachos*, chap. 1): "One who learns and does not fulfill [what he learned] would be better off had he not been created." But the truth is that learning Torah sanctifies a man more than any other mitzvos.

### Torah and Mitzvos Are Constant

The *Chovos HaLevavos* writes (*Shaar Avodas HaElokim* chap. 4) that there is never a moment when a person is absolved of *maasim tovim*. Whatever he can do, he must do. And as for resting or taking a break, resting is a mitzvah too, as long as it is necessary. If a person rests longer than is really necessary, it becomes a sin. It follows that nothing is optional; one's actions are either a mitzvah or an aveirah. Each person must perform as many *maasim tovim* as he is able, according to what he can; if he does less, that is a sin.

Removing the yoke of Torah, *prikas ol Torah*, is referring to both *Torah she'bichsav* and *Torah she'baal peh*. Every halachah in Torah obligates us!

### Six Constant Mitzvos in Thought

For example, the *Biur Halachah* (*siman aleph*) cites the *Sefer HaChinuch* who writes that there are six *mitzvos temidiyos* that a person can constantly be fulfilling. They are mitzvos connected to the heart, and do not require any action. Just by merely thinking, a person can fulfill these mitzvos, such as belief in Hashem's reality, and in *hashgachah* (Divine supervision). He mentions a few matters that are all duties of the heart, which a person can fulfill at any given moment. If so, someone who has the ability to do them and does not, it is a sin. If someone does not

know about these mitzvos, he doesn't know — but a person must know!

Once again, nothing's "voluntary." Your actions are either mitzvos or sins. And of course, there are these six constant mitzvos that can always be performed — if one is able to do them and doesn't, it is a sin. The *Chayei Adam (Klal aleph)* describes these mitzvos at length.

### Physical Needs and Family Are Also Mitzvos

Every single person can be busy with mitzvos every second of his day. We've mentioned the Rambam's comments (*Hilchos Dei'os* 3:3), that if a person's actions are all *l'shem Shamayim*, then even when he sleeps, it is considered as if he's "*osek b'mitzvah*," involved in a mitzvah. He goes to sleep on time because he has a *tafkid*, a role, to fulfill the next day — his actions are all mitzvos, his Torah learning is a mitzvah, his davening is a mitzvah, and his *maasim tovim* are mitzvos. Someone who has a family is obligated to help his family — so it turns out that he's constantly doing mitzvos!

The Rambam writes about how a person's sleep can be *l'shem Shamayim*. After all, he could go to sleep later, but he knows that if he does, he'll be tired the next day and he won't be functioning optimally. So he hurries to go to bed on time so that he'll have strength to observe the Torah and mitzvos — in such a case, his sleep is a mitzvah. As he sleeps, he is serving Hashem — as the Rambam writes; "It comes out that his sleep is *avodas Hashem*." He is serving Hashem by sleeping!

When a person lives with these *cheshbonos*, he will constantly be involved in mitzvos. He simply needs to plan it out and arrange his day in an organized manner, according to his abilities, of course. He must not push himself past his limits — that's dangerous — but he must do what he can, in a calm manner with *yishuv hadaas*. He can even be fulfilling a mitzvah as he sleeps.

And when he eats, that can also be a mitzvah. After all, he must eat; if not he won't have energy and won't be able to function. So it turns out that whatever he does is a mitzvah. Additionally, someone who has to work to support his family is obligated to do so — he has a family and he must help them. Anything a person does because he must is considered an obligation — and he's obligated to eat and sleep.

The *Sefer HaChinuch* (Mitzvah 488) writes that the body needs four things: food, sleep, rest, and happiness. A person needs to be in a good mood — if not, he can't function. A person needs a good mood to function, food is a necessity, and so is sleep. In addition to regular sleep, a person also needs to rest; it's also a

necessity — the body cannot constantly be active without taking a rest. Joy, too, promotes energy. It's important to make sure that all these matters are utilized as needed.

### Eating Involves Many Mitzvos

It turns out that a person is busy with mitzvos all day long. For example, when a person wants to eat, he washes to eat. The actual washing is a mitzvah, and that is followed with a *berachah*: *v'tzivanu al netillas yadayim*, which is another mitzvah.

There is a halachah that if a person washes to eat, makes a *berachah*, and wants to eat, but in the end, something happens and he cannot eat, his *berachah* is not a *berachah l'vatalah*. He was obligated to wash because he wanted to eat, so his washing was a mitzvah, as was his *berachah*. (The fact that he subsequently didn't eat doesn't nullify the mitzvah retroactively, because while he was washing and reciting the *berachah*, he was actually obligated to do so — and he fulfilled a mitzvah by doing so.)

*Netillas yadayim* over bread is one mitzvah, **reciting the *berachah* for washing** is another mitzvah, and **reciting the *berachah* over bread** is yet another mitzvah. And even **when he eats**, it's one more mitzvah, since he's eating in order to have energy to fulfill the 613 mitzvos.

So a person is involved in mitzvos in all his actions; he simply must be conscious of it and go about his daily actions with the mindset that he is doing so because he is obligated. Of course, this isn't so easy. A person naturally wants to eat because he enjoys food; he goes to sleep because he wants to sleep — it's not so *pashut* to have the intention of fulfilling a mitzvah. That is a high *madreigah*. Yet, if one does have the right *kavanah*, intention, it follows that all his actions are mitzvos.

### Remember That It's Elul

I once heard from the Rosh Yeshivah Maran HaGaon Rav Dovid Povarsky *zt"l* that if **a person remembers that it's Elul, that itself has an influence**. A person realizes that Elul is not just any old day; after all, we are about to face judgment. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are *yemei hadin*, and they are also *yemei harachamim*. We have forty days of *yemei harachamim*, from Rosh Chodesh Elul until Yom Kippur. Hashem's *Middas haRachamim* is present and one can accomplish a lot. These are days of both *din* and *rachamim*, and when you think about that, your entire demeanor and behavior will be different.

## Emunah Creates a Happy Life

A person who entertains such thoughts will constantly be involved in mitzvos and will also have a happy, fortunate life. We've already mentioned that if a person lives with *emunah*, he will always be happy. He knows that everything is from *Shamayim*; whatever happens is from *Shamayim*. If life is good, it's from *Shamayim*, and if it's not good — if someone is disturbing him and creating problems — it's also from *Shamayim*. Hashem is giving him these difficulties for his own benefit, as Chazal say (*Berachos* 60b): “*Kol mah d'avid Rachmana, l'tav avid* — Whatever the Merciful One does is for the good.” The person causing him pain is to be pitied because he has a bad *middah*. But as for himself, he must remember that Hashem is giving him the pain, and it's for his own benefit. He must think about what they want from him in *Shamayim*.

Generally, any difficulty a person encounters has a *middah k'neged middah* reason. Just recently, someone told me that he had a certain difficulty and he started to think. He realized there was a reason for it, *middah k'neged middah* and understood what he had to rectify. **When a person lives with this *emunah*, he has a happy, fortunate life. He is aware that everything is in Heaven's hands. Any pain or difficulty is from *Shamayim*; it's not from the person who caused him the pain. It's irrelevant to think about the person who caused him the pain; instead, one should think: “What do they want from me in *Shamayim*?”** Both material pain and spiritual pain are from *Shamayim*. Every single difficulty points to a spiritual cause that requires rectification.

### Express Thanks for Heavenly Gifts

A person who has a happy, fortunate life must thank Hashem for it. After all, Heaven is treating him with *chesed* and *rachamim*. No one has “*zechuyos*” that make him deserving of good things — it's all *chesed* and *rachamim*. No matter what a person does, he is fulfilling his obligations. If he has the abilities to do it, he is obligated to do it; and if he doesn't do what he is supposed to do, he is a sinner. It doesn't make sense to consider someone a *tzaddik*, a righteous person, for fulfilling his duties; he is simply “not a sinner.” If so, what importance does he have, and why should he consider himself special? Any good he has is due to Hashem's *middah* of *rachamim*. Heaven had mercy on him and gave him all sorts of things — either *nisyonos* or *zechuyos*.

## One Who Comes to Be Purified

The rule is to believe and remember that everything is in Heaven's hands. When one lives with this *emunah*, he has *siyatta d'Shemaya*, because “one who comes to be purified is helped” (*Yoma* 38b). Anyone who comes to be purified and wants to perform *maasim tovim* receives Heavenly help, *siyatta d'Shemaya*.

I already told the story about someone from Chutz LaAretz who was not an observant Jew. He came to Eretz Yisrael for a visit and went to the Kosel, since that's what's done. While at the Kosel, he had stirrings of *emunah*. He began to think that he doesn't know what *emunah* is, or if it's the right path to take, but if it is true that there is *hashgachah pratit*, he would like to receive Heavenly help in learning about it. At that very moment, a *kiruv* activist approached him and asked him if he'd like to learn about Judaism. This is the reality: One who comes to be purified is helped. If a person wants *zechuyos*, he will have *siyatta d'Shemaya*.

### The Path of Torah Brings Joy

The simple solution is to set times for learning *mussar*, because *mussar sefarim* give a person *hisorerus* and wake him up. Without *mussar*, it's very unlikely that a person will wake himself up. *Mussar sefarim* wake a person up, have an influence on him, and give him a joyful life. I've already mentioned many times that I know people with families who started learning *mussar* every day. Not much, but a steady *mussar* session of a few minutes a day, and the whole atmosphere at home changed for the better. They now have a happy atmosphere at home.

That's the reality. When a person lives with a *ruchniyus* mindset and accounting, he has *siyatta d'Shemaya* for “*ashrecha b'Olam HaZeh*.” Chazal already said (*Avos* 6:4): “This is the way of Torah... if you do so, you will be fortunate in this world.” There they said “if you toil in Torah,” but this is not referring solely to learning Torah, it refers to the “path of Torah” — doing what the Torah obligates us to do. If one follows the path of Torah, he will have a joyful, fortunate life.

*Baruch Hashem*, we have *mussar sefarim* and we know the truth. We are *baalei emunah*, and we trust in Hashem and have faith in Him. “One who comes to be purified is helped” — may we all be *zocheh* to a *k'sivah v'chasimah tovah* and *siyatta d'Shemaya* for whatever we need.

## Now Is the Time to Increase Zechuyos

It was just *bein hazemanim* — from Tishah b'Av till Rosh Chodesh Elul. There were no special *takanos* to institute *bein hazemanim*, it just happened this way. The truth is, during *bein hazemanim*, there is no *hasmadah* in Torah learning; we are lacking the *zechus* of Torah and that's why it's such a dangerous time. We've had tragedies during this *bein hazemanim* too, *Rachmana litzlan*, because we don't have the *zechus* of Torah. It's true, people still learn, but it's not the same as during the *zman*, so we need special *zechuyos*. Anyone who learns during *bein hazemanim* is *mezakeh es harabbim* and his reward is unfathomable. It's a special *zechus* to learn Torah during *bein hazemanim*.

It's incumbent upon us to increase our *hasmadah*, *yiras Shamayim*, davening with greater *kavanah*! It's simply essential in such times! Be more careful about your *bein adam lachaveiro*, that is also a great, important matter — be careful that no one should be hurt, there shouldn't be any pain, certainly don't cause anyone pain. All the more so, be careful not to fall into *ona'as devarim*, which is much, much worse. In general, try to refrain from paining others; act with *rachamim* and have mercy on others. Chazal say (*Yevamos* 79a): "There are three signs in this nation: they are merciful, bashful, and they perform *chesed*." This is Klal Yisrael's inborn nature. A person must not only have mercy on his fellow's material needs, but also on his spiritual needs. He must be concerned about saving his friend from Gehinnom. Of course, there are people who sin unintentionally (*shogegim*), but this too is a sin, and he will be punished for it. Indeed, the *Shaarei Teshuvah* writes (4:15) that one who sins unintentionally will surely be punished. We bring *korbanos* for unintentional sins, for the element of *cheit*, sin, involved. Therefore, one must have mercy on others.

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