

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 Ki Teitzei 5781

451

Siyatta D'Shemaya for Teshuvah in Elul

We're almost halfway through Elul. Soon it will be Rosh Hashanah, which is Yom HaDin, and then *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*, a special time for repentance, will follow. Chazal say (*Rosh Hashanah* 18a), "Seek Him out when He is found, call out to Him when He is close" — These are the ten days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. "Seek Him out" because that's when "He's found" — it's a time when teshuvah is accepted and there is *kirvas Elokim*, closeness to Hashem: "call out to Him when He is close." This is a Heavenly *chesed*; even though we already were judged on Rosh Hashanah, and the verdict was issued, we still have *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah* and we can repent. At the end of these 10 days, we can attain atonement on Yom Kippur.

The month of Elul is called "*Yemei HaRachamim*," days of mercy. There are 40 days between Rosh Chodesh Elul till Yom Kippur; during those 40 days, Moshe Rabbeinu was up in Shamayim pleading Klal Yisrael's case after the *Luchos* were broken, and Hashem forgave them for the *Cheit HaEigel*. Every year, during those days the *hashpa'ah* of *middas harachamim* returns.

The concept of *middas harachamim* is that when a person has a sin, he needs *rachamim* — after all, a person is judged in Heaven for his sins. While a person can always repent, the power of repentance is so much more reachable in Elul; it's a time of *siyatta d'Shemaya* for teshuvah. During *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*, it's even easier, but Elul is still a time of special *siyatta d'Shemaya* for teshuvah.

That's why we blow the shofar during Elul. The shofar wakes us up to teshuvah, as the *pasuk* states (*Amos* 3:6), "If a shofar is blown in the city, will the nation not tremble?" It's natural that a shofar blast is terrifying — even when it comes to physical matters. But here, when it comes to spiritual matters, the shofar arouses us to do teshuvah. That's the reason for the custom of blowing shofar before Rosh Hashanah. For the same reason, we also say "*L'Dovid Hashem Ori*," which is a *tefillah* all about teshuvah. This psalm also contains requests for *ruchniyus*: "*Achas sha'alti mei'eis Hashem, osah avakesh, shivti b'veis Hashem kol yemei chayai* — I ask one thing from Hashem; that's what I request: I want to dwell in Hashem's house all the days of my life." And: "*Horeini Hashem darkecha* — Show me Hashem, Your path."

Prayer and Hishtadlus for Ruchniyus

The *pasuk* mentions two ideas: "*achas sha'alti*," and "*osah avakesh*." "*Sha'alti*" denotes a request, we are asking for

rachamim and *siyatta d'Shemaya* to live in Hashem's house, and for Hashem to teach us His ways. Then we add: "*osah avakesh*." Here, the term "*avakesh*" implies doing *hishtadlus*, as we see in various places in Tanach. For example, "And the matter was investigated (*vayivukash*)" (*Esther* 2:23), and "He sought out (*bikeish*) the donkeys" (*Shmuel I* 9:3), which means he looked for them. When a person loses something, he seeks it out and looks for it; *bakashah* means doing *hishtadlus*.

If so, "*achas sha'alti*" is prayer, and "*osah avakesh*" is *hishtadlus*. A person needs *tefillah* for *siyatta d'Shemaya* for doing teshuvah, and he also needs *hishtadlus*. There are ways to wake up and do teshuvah and one must put in effort.

Rav Yisrael Salanter's statement is well known: he said that it is tried-and-true that davening for *ruchniyus* is helpful. If a person davens for his *ruchniyus* — such as success in Torah and an increase in his *yiras Shamayim*, like we do in Ahavah Rabbah when we say "*v'yacheid l'vaveinu l'ahavah u'l'yirah*," and we ask for *siyatta d'Shemaya* for *yiras Shamayim* — it is tried-and-true that he will be *zocheh* to *siyatta d'Shemaya*.

It's really obvious. After all, Chazal say (*Yoma* 38b), "One who comes to be purified will be helped." One only needs to come be purified, to really want, to have a true *she'ifah*, yearning. Chazal say (*Berachos* 50a) referring to the *pasuk* in *Tehillim* (82:11), "Open your mouth wide and I shall fulfill it" — whatever you ask for, you will receive. That's the power of a *tefillah* for *ruchniyus*.

Since Elul is called Days of Mercy, *yeshivos* add another 15 minutes of learning *mussar*. In addition to the classic half-hour *mussar seder* before Maariv, there's another 15-minute *mussar seder* in Elul before Minchah, because one needs to do *hishtadlus* along with davening. And as we mentioned, "*achas sha'alti — osah avakesh*"; requests must come along with *hishtadlus*. Learning *mussar* is our *hishtadlus*, but if we don't do any *hishtadlus*, why should we deserve anything? What makes us worthy?

A Good Year Is Not Proof of Zechuyos

I once heard the following from Rav Elya Lopian *zt"l*. He said sometimes a person may think that since the year passed by without any considerable difficulties, it's a sign that he's a tzaddik. After all, Rosh Hashanah and the Day of Judgment went by, the year went by, and it was a good year. So he must be a tzaddik.

Rav Elya Lopian *zt"l* said this is not true. One cannot say that having a good year is proof that he was acquitted in

judgment. The Raavad, on his *Hasagos* on the Rambam (*Hilchos Teshuvah* 3:2) explained Chazal's statement that "the wicked are sealed for death immediately on Rosh Hashanah." He says that it does not mean that they would actually die that year; it means that they were immediately sentenced to die earlier than originally had been decreed.

If so, it could be that a person was supposed to live 120 years — the amount of time allocated him when he was created — but last Rosh Hashanah, it was decreed that his days would be shortened and that he'd live one year less. And he is not aware of this.

So even though this year passed peacefully, it's impossible to know what might happen, or what his true condition is. Maybe last year it was decreed that he'd only live to 119 instead of 120. And maybe this trend continues, and every year another year will be deducted from his original amount — and he is completely unaware. Therefore, it's not realistic to be calm just because a person had a good year, and everyone must try as hard as he can to do teshuvah before the *Yom HaDin*.

Scrutinizing One's Deeds and Bittul Torah

How does one do teshuvah? Chazal say one must find his bad deeds and investigate whether or not his good deeds were done *b'shleimus*: "*l'pashpeish u'l'mashmeish*" his deeds (*Eiruvin* 13b, and see *Mesillas Yesharim* chap. 3). But it's not easy to figure out what your sins are. A person doesn't even know that certain things are sins, so he doesn't even think about those.

Take the sin of *bittul Torah* for example. Chazal said (beginning of *Maseches Peah*) that Torah study is equal to all other mitzvos. Rabbeinu Yonah writes in *Shaarei Teshuvah* (3:16) that the punishment for a sin is commensurate with the gravity of the mitzvah. The greater the mitzvah, the more severe the punishment if he fails to upkeep it.

He cites the mitzvos of Korban Pesach and performing a *bris milah* as proof for this. Both are positive mitzvos, and anyone who fails to perform them is not actively doing something wrong. He's merely refraining from doing them, *shev v'al taaseh*. Even though a person does receive *kares* for this, there is not one incident in the entire Torah where someone received *kares* for a *shev v'al taaseh*. The reason there is *kares* for failing to eat Korban Pesach or for performing a *bris milah*, is because they are very important, great mitzvos; Shabbos is even desecrated to fulfill them. Therefore, failing to fulfill them is a very grave sin and is punished by *kares*.

These two mitzvos are prototypes for all other mitzvos. **The punishment for failing to fulfill the mitzvah is commensurate with the gravity and greatness of the mitzvah. Therefore since Talmud Torah, Torah study, is equal to all other mitzvos and garners tremendous reward, its converse, the sin of bittul Torah, is "equal to all other aveiros."** Indeed, Rabbeinu Yonah writes just this in *Shaarei Teshuvah*. This seems obvious — the

greater the mitzvah is, the greater the punishment for a person who fails to fulfill it.

Simply speaking, how can anyone say they are not guilty of *bittul Torah*? Even if he presently is careful and learns Torah to the best of his abilities, the obligation to learn began at his bar mitzvah. It would be extremely unusual for someone to be so careful. It's told that before the Vilna Gaon's *petirah*, he said, "I committed *bittul Torah* for a few moments." That means that throughout his entire life, he was only *mevatel Torah* for a few minutes. This is a very high *madreigah*!

Using Up the Reward for Mitzvos in This World

Regarding the idea we mentioned from Rav Elya Lopian that a person cannot be complacent even if he had a good year — this is true even regarding physicality. One can never know what was decreed; his life may have actually been shortened, but he is unaware.

There's something else to this as well. At the end of *Parashas Vaeschanan*, the *pasuk* states (7:10): "And He repays those who hate Him, to their face, to destroy them." Rashi and the Targum explain as follows: "They repay him in his lifetime in order to cause him to be lost from the World to Come." If wicked people do mitzvos and good deeds, they receive payment in this world, and they are punished for their *aveiros* in the World to Come. The opposite is true regarding tzaddikim — they are repaid for their mitzvos in the World to Come, but they receive punishment for *aveiros* in this world. The eternal life is what's important!

The reason for this is because *resha'im* want this world; they value it, but they don't value Olam HaBa. So Heaven gives them what they want. If they deserve reward for mitzvos, they get it in this world; they do not receive Olam HaBa. Tzaddikim want Olam HaBa, not Olam HaZeh. This world is just a means to reach Olam HaBa. Since they want Olam HaBa, that's what they are given. If they have sins, they are punished for them in this world so that they can arrive in Olam HaBa with a clean slate and they won't be punished there.

There's actually a prayer from the Shelah (*Maseches Tamid, Ner Mitzvah, os* 134) about not "eating up" one's reward for mitzvos in this world: "And I am very frightened for my soul. *Chas v'shalom*, wealth should not be detrimental and cause me to devour the small amount of *zechuyos* I have earned. If it is so, please take away this blessing, so I will not see my evil in the World to Come, the Eternal world. And if Your good will is to give and not to take, please place in my heart and in the hearts of all those connected to me [the will] not to use Your gifts for physical pleasures. May *bnei Torah*, upstanding, proper people, be supported with it, may we perform much charity and *gemillus chasadim* for those close to us as well as those far. May the word of Hashem be upheld." That is, if a person lives a good life in this world, he must be concerned that it is reward for his mitzvos and that they're giving him Olam HaZeh instead of Olam HaBa.

If so, who can know what his situation is, or what his *madreigah* is? No one can ever be sure. Even if he performs good deeds, is he really doing as much as he can? Probably not. A person must use his every bit of energy and strength to increase *k'vod Shamayim*; that's why he was given that energy and strength. Chazal say at the end of *Pirkei Avos*: "Whatever Hashem created in His world, He only created it for His own honor, as it states (*Yeshayah* 43:7): Whatever is called by My name and for My honor, I created it, formed it, and even made it." The purpose of the entire creation is to increase *k'vod Shamayim*. If a person doesn't do as much as he can to generate *k'vod Shamayim*, he cannot be considered a tzaddik anymore.

That's why a person cannot be sure of what *madreigah* he's on — even if he had a good year and is living a good life. That is not proof of his *madreigah*; it may just be the reward for his mitzvos in this world. A person should consider that he may be eating up his reward in this world and his good life might be coming on account of his Olam HaBa. It's impossible to know what anyone's *madreigah* really is.

Every single person must be concerned, because it's extremely rare for a person to be sinless from the day of his bar mitzvah. I don't know if such a thing exists. As such, no one can know what his *madreigah* is — he might just be eating up his reward in this world, as the Shelah writes.

"Chaim" and "Chaim Tovim"

The Gra and the Ramchal both discuss the wording in the Yamim Noraim prayers, where we ask "*Zachreinu l'chaim...*, Remember us for life, O King Who desires life," and then we say "*U'chsov l'chaim tovim...*, And inscribe for good life." We also ask: "*B'sefer chaim... l'chaim tovim u'leshalom*, In the book of life... for good life and for peace." Sometimes we ask for "*chaim*," life, and sometimes, for "*chaim tovim*," good life. What's the difference?

The Gra and the Ramchal (*Maamar HaChochmah*) explain that "*chaim*" on its own is eternal life. That's why we ask "Remember us for life" — may we merit eternal life. Rosh Hashanah is also a Day of Judgment regarding eternal life, Olam HaBa. So that's what we ask first — we ask to merit Olam HaBa. How? It doesn't matter how. It might happen through *yissurim*, hardship and suffering, but that too is worthwhile. It's worth suffering and experiencing difficulties for Olam HaBa.

Then we ask for something else: for "*chaim tovim*," a good life. We are asking to have a good life in Olam HaZeh as well, but all for the purpose of Olam HaBa. We ask to have a good life without difficulty so that we can perform more and more good deeds and thus merit Olam HaBa. We are asking for *siyatta d'Shemaya* to be *zocheh* to Olam HaBa without having to experience difficulty. In any case, the goal is to merit Olam HaBa. But it's worth suffering and experiencing difficulty to attain Olam HaBa, but we are

asking for *siyatta d'Shemaya* for a good life in Olam HaZeh — for the purpose of Olam HaBa. Olam HaZeh is a means to attain Olam HaBa. This, according to the Gra and the Ramchal, is the explanation of *chaim tovim*.

Now, in the month of Elul, we must invest *hishtadlus* and involve ourselves in *teshuvah* and rectification of our deeds so that we merit "*chaim*" and "*chaim tovim*."

Thoughts Can Detract from Olam HaBa

As we said, it's not simple for a person to know what his sins are. He might have sins and not even know that they're sins — and they might even be extremely grave ones, too. The Third Gate in *Shaarei Teshuvah* discusses at length all sorts of sins. He divides them into ten levels. The tenth level is sins that cause a person to lose Olam HaBa. He writes that a person might be losing his Olam HaBa for a sin in his heart, for natural thoughts that come to mind. Even though these thoughts are natural, he can lose his Olam HaBa this way and land up in Gehinnom — for thoughts in his heart!

He wrote this about a group of people who hate Hashem. They have no portion in Olam HaBa (Gate Three 159-160). He writes: "The concept of 'Haters of Hashem' can be found sometimes in people who perform mitzvos and are very careful regarding all sins in action and speech. But if their heart is evil, and deep inside it's upsets them when their colleagues are *osek baTorah*, and it bothers them to see people serving Hashem and fearing Him, they are like a person who doesn't want others to honor the king and serve him —since he hates the king."

If a person sees someone serving Hashem — and automatically being honored for doing so, as this is usually the reality that someone who does good deeds is honored. Indeed Chazal say (*Avos* 4:1): "Who is honored? One who honors others." Since he does good deeds and honors others, he too is honored. Someone may see such a person and become jealous of the honor his colleague is receiving. He may be upset that the other person is doing all these good deeds, and he is not, and he'd rather the first man not perform those good deeds at all, and thus not be honorable. Someone who feels this way is called "a hater of Hashem."

The truth is, all good deeds are dependent on previous *zechuyos*. One who has *zechuyos* merits doing good deeds, especially *zikkui harabbim*, as Chazal say (*Avos* 5:18): "Moshe merited and brought merit to the masses." First he "merited," then he "brought merit to the masses." All good deeds are dependent on prior *zechuyos*. If a person who has *zechuyos* does *maasim tovim*, he is automatically honorable. His fellow Jew is jealous and it disturbs him that the other man is honored. His jealousy causes him to wish that the other man wouldn't be honored. This is called "Hater of Hashem"!

After all, when a person performs good deeds, he is serving Hashem, he's doing *avodas Hashem*. If the other man is bothered by his *avodas Hashem*, and he's jealous of other people who do good deeds and are thereby honored,

and he wishes that the other man wouldn't do his good deeds, he is a hater of Hashem. The king has a servant, and he doesn't want the king to have a servant. He's called a "hater of Hashem" because of his thoughts! And he loses Olam HaBa! That's what the *Shaarei Teshuvah* writes in the Tenth Level. This is something in one's heart, and it's not unusual for something like this to happen. After all, it's human nature.

Emunah Eliminates Kpeidos

Another matter related to the heart is something we've discussed often. The truth is, a person must always believe that everything is in Heaven's hands. Whatever happens to me, whatever happens to others — it's all in Heaven's hands. There's a reason for everything. All of Heaven's judgments are just and true. *Kol mah d'avid Rachmana, l'tav avid*, Whatever the Merciful One does is for the good. Everything is to benefit man. Even if a person has difficulties, it's for his good and Hashem wants only good for him. Most of the time, when a person is given difficulties, it's *middah k'neged middah*. Recently, someone told me that he was experiencing hardships. He realized that his hardships were *middah k'neged middah*, and everything was from *Shamayim* for his own good — to give him *zechuyos*. Difficulties give a person *zechuyos* and cause a person to do *teshuvah*. That's why there's no reason to be *makpid* on anyone because everything is in Heaven's hands.

The Mishnah (*Bava Metzia* 75b) says that when a person hires a professional, and they subsequently trick each other, they are allowed to be angry at each other. That is, it could be permissible for a person to be upset at someone else for acting improperly. I don't understand this explanation; after all, everything is in *Shamayim's* hands. What's the *heter* to be upset and angry? After all, all difficulties are in Heaven's hands, so what place does anger have here? I don't understand this explanation. (See more about this in the *sefer Ohr Yisrael, Kuntres Nesivos Ohr* p. 58, quoting Rav Yisrael Salanter *zt"l*.)

Nisyonos in Elul Bring Merit

In any case, we are now in Elul, the Days of *Rachamim*, when there is special *siyatta d'Shemaya* for *teshuvah*. On the other hand, it's well known that there are *nisyonos in Elul because the Satan, the yetzer hara, does not want us to do teshuvah. As far as I can remember, there were always nisyonos in Elul to detract us from doing teshuvah. We need special siyatta d'Shemaya that there shouldn't be any disturbances.* All difficulties are *nisyonos*, and the *zechuyos* depend on the level of the difficulties! *Shamayim* gives us difficulties so we can overcome the *nisayon*.

The *Mesillas Yesharim* writes (chap. 1) that everything in this world is a *nisayon*: poverty on one hand, and wealth on the other hand. As the *pasuk* states: "Lest I become satiated and I deny..." and, "Lest I become impoverished and I steal." Every situation is a *nisayon* and we must overcome them all.

The only solution is to learn *mussar*. In Elul, *yeshivos* add another 15 minutes of *mussar* before Minchah, aside from their regular half-hour *sefer* before Maariv. This is not considered *middas chassidus*, piety; it's something that's a real necessity for one's *ruchniyus*. We need to show that we are "one who comes to be purified is helped." But how does one "come to be purified"? If one is *osek* in purity and learns *mussar sefarim* — *Shaarei Teshuvah, Chovos HaLevavos, Mesillas Yesharim, Orchos Tzaddikim* — that's called "coming to be purified." *Mussar sefarim* are the antidote to the yetzer hara.

B'ezras Hashem, may we all become stronger spiritually and withstand our *nisyonos* in Chodesh Elul. May we be *zocheh* to doing complete *teshuvah* and to a *ksivah v'chasimah tovah*.

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.