

# 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 Nitzavim 5781*

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## Being Careful about Coronavirus

Coronavirus has spread once again; it's a very dangerous virus. There is a real obligation to maintain all health precautions and take care not to contract the virus. This disease has spread and is still spreading, and we are obligated to take care of our health — *v'nishmartem me'od linafshoseichem* (*Devarim* 4:15). A person must be healthy, because if not, his *avodas Hashem* cannot be *b'sheleimus*. Therefore, we must be very careful to adhere to all known health precautions and protect ourselves from this virus.

## Utilize Every Moment for Zechuyos

Let's speak about *inyanei d'yoma*. We are at the end of Elul — the Yom HaDin is very near! We must increase *zechuyos*, as many as possible, for the Yom HaDin. We must utilize every moment for *zechuyos*; we must be involved in mitzvos and *maasim tovim* at every given moment.

Therefore, first of all, **we must refrain from doing anything that is not absolutely necessary**. Whatever isn't necessary, just don't do it. *Sheiv, v'al taaseh*. Don't be busy with things that aren't necessary; keep your time available for mitzvos and *maasim tovim*.

## Proper Intent Transforms Regular Actions to Mitzvos

A person can really be busy with mitzvos every single moment. We've already mentioned what the Rambam writes (*Hilchos Deios* 3:3) about what Chazal said (*Avos* 2:12) "May all your deeds be *l'shem Shamayim*": All physical, worldly actions that a person must do can be considered a mitzvah, as long as he does them *l'shem Shamayim*.

As an example, the Rambam discusses sleep. If a person goes to sleep because he must sleep so he can fulfill his role as an *eved Hashem*, and he knows he needs strength to fulfill all his obligations, then "it turns out that his sleep is service of Hashem." He serves Hashem as he sleeps, since he is sleeping for the purpose of *avodas Hashem*.

One's intent, *kavanah*, changes his actions. If a person would just go to sleep because that's how nature works: the body needs sleep, then his sleep does not constitute any special *maalah* or *avodas Hashem*. But if he keeps in mind the concept we just discussed — that he's going to sleep so he'll have energy to fulfill all the mitzvos — then he is serving Hashem as he sleeps.

It turns out that it also makes a difference regarding how much a person should sleep. If he's sleeping *l'shem Shamayim*, then he would only sleep as much as necessary, no more. If he doesn't take *l'shem Shamayim* into account, he will end up sleeping too much, even though it's

unnecessary. Of course, a person must sleep, but there's a limit to how much sleep is necessary.

A person's entire day can change based on his *kavanah*. Any physical needs a person must take care of can be transformed into something entirely different as long as he has *kavanah* that he's doing so because the Torah obligates him to, and it's *retzon Hashem*.

## Netillas Yadayim and Birchos HaShachar

Washing *negel vassar* in the morning is another example. In the morning, there is a *ruach ra'ah*, and it's a mitzvah to wash one's hands to remove it. The level of this mitzvah depends on a person's *kavanah*. Someone who intends on removing the *ruach ra'ah* just so that he'll feel good, he'll be able to eat and drink etc., is doing it for his own *gashmiyus*, and it's a physical *kavanah*. However, if a person is washing his hands so that he can fulfill his Torah and mitzvah obligations, then even though he also thinks about eating, he intends on doing so in order to serve Hashem better, and it turns out that his washing is a *hechsher mitzvah*, preparation for a mitzvah, for all his *avodas Hashem*. *Kavanah* increases the quality of a mitzvah.

There's a mitzvah to recite the morning blessings, *birchos hashachar*, and it's *avodas Hashem*. This too depends on a person's *kavanah*. The more *kavanah* one has while he recites these *berachos*, the greater level of *avodas Hashem* he reaches. This is how one can serve Hashem with *birchos hashachar*.

The same is true regarding wearing a tallis. It is a *maaseh mitzvah* and *avodas Hashem*. And then you add a *berachah*, which is also *avodas Hashem*. So too with tefillin. Just putting them on is a mitzvah, and the *berachah* — whether one or two — are also another mitzvah. A person can constantly be busy with mitzvah actions, which is *avodas Hashem*!

## The Merit of Answering Amen with Kavanah

During davening, which Chazal call "*avodah she'balev*," and when a person answers "Amen" and "*Amen yehei Shemei Rabbah*") a person can transform his actions through *kavanah*. Chazal said (*Shabbos* 119b), "Anyone who answers *Amen yehei Shemei Rabbah* with all his strength..." Rashi explains: "With all his *kavanah*, intent." In any case, he is obligated to answer with *kavanah*, so the madreigah he can reach is unfathomable! What a great level of *avodas Hashem*!

Whenever a person answers Amen, to any *berachah*, he should have the proper intent. The Mishnah Berurah *siman* 124 and the Shelah (*Inyanei Tefillah, s.v. v'techilah nakdim*)

both explain what is the proper *kavanah* that a person should be thinking when he answers Amen. Some Amens are *hoda'ah*, acceptance and confirmation of the statement; and some are *bakashah*, requests. Chazal (*Shabbos* ibid.) say: Anyone who answers Amen with all his strength, the gates of Gan Eden are opened for him, as it states, “*Pischu she'arim v'yavo goy tzaddik shomer emunim* — Open the gates, and the righteous nations who guard the faith shall come. *Al tikrei 'shomer emunim' ella 'she'omrim Amen* — Don't read it 'those who guard the faith,' read it 'those who say Amen.’” The merit of this is unfathomable; there is such profound *avodas Hashem* inherent in reciting Amen.

The same is true regarding all *tefillos*, such as *Kedushah* and *Kaddish*. The *Mishnah Berurah* siman 56 cites *poskim* who say that one must have in mind to hear *Kaddish* from the *shaliach tzibbur*. Listening to *Kaddish* is unbelievable. This is true for every single part of davening. It is *avodas Hashem* and requires proper intent.

### Eating and Drinking Can Be a Mitzvah

And then when it's time to eat, you first wash to eat. The action of washing to eat is a mitzvah. And since a person needs to eat — he can't function and can't fulfill mitzvos if he doesn't eat — then his eating is also *avodas Hashem*. But it all depends on his *kavanah*. And there's also a limit to eating. If a person eats more than necessary, that's *taavah*; it's not *avodas Hashem*.

The same is true regarding all other physical needs. Take drinking, for example. Before a person drinks, he makes a *berachah*, and the actual drinking is a mitzvah too, because the body needs fluids to stay healthy. It's a need for *avodas Hashem*, but it all depends on one's intent. If one has the right *kavanah*, all his physical needs are transformed into mitzvos!

The *Sefer HaChinuch* (Mitzvah 488) writes that a person needs four things: food, sleep, rest, and happiness. Food and sleep are self-understood. The body cannot function without them. And aside from sleep, one also needs rest/relaxation. The body cannot be in constant activity for a prolonged period of time without stopping to rest. So rest is also a bodily need. And a person also needs happiness, upbeat spirits — without, a person is not a human being.

So while a person eats, sleeps, rests, or is happy, if he has in mind that these are all so that he will have a healthy body to serve Hashem, then he is actually serving Hashem. It all depends on the *kavanah*! **In this manner, a person can constantly be involved in mitzvos, which are zechuyos for the Yom HaDin.**

### How to Merit Zechuyos for the Future

Another *eitzah* to emerge meritorious on Yom HaDin is mentioned by Rabbeinu Yonah (*Shaarei Teshuvah* 2:10): “When he hears *mussar* from the *chachamim* and *mochichim*, the sages and the admonishers, he should listen and accept, and capitulate, and repent. He should accept in his heart all the rebukes and should not ignore even one word. Behold, in a short time, this man will leave behind deep darkness for a great light. For when he listens and heeds and his heart understands and repents, and he accepts

the admonishers' words on the very day he hears them, he falls into the category of “one who does whatever the *tofsei haTorah* instruct him to do” from this day onward, and he is careful about whatever the Torah leaders warn him — then his *teshuvah* is accepted and he is transformed into another person. And from the moment he decides to do so, he has acquired a merit for his soul and reward for all the mitzvos and *mussar*. He is fortunate for he has made his soul righteous in a short time.”

The *Shaarei Teshuvah* cites *Avos d'Rebbi Nassan* (chap. 22), “Anyone whose deeds are greater than his knowledge, his knowledge will be maintained, as it says, ‘*Naaseh v'nishma*.’” Rabbeinu Yonah explains: The explanation is that if a person accepts upon himself to uphold the Torah and laws that the *gedolim* teach... from that day on, he acquired the *schar* of all the mitzvos, both for those that he heard and understood, and for those that he still isn't aware of. He wore righteousness and acquired *zechus* for both those that are revealed to him and those are still hidden from his eyes. And afterwards, he will learn every single day with the admonishers... and it turns out that this man's actions are greater than his knowledge, as he doesn't know anything. It's similar to Bnei Yisrael's statement of ‘*Naaseh v'nishmah*’ at Har Sinai, where they preceded acceptance before hearing.”

That is, a person's deeds can be greater than his knowledge, as he is still unaware of what he must do. And yet, it's considered as he did every good deed in the book. How? When he accepts upon himself to heed the *mussar* of the *chachamim* and *mochichim*, sages and admonishers, and to do whatever they tell him from then on. We've already mentioned that there were *maggidim* and *mochichim*, such as the Dubner Maggid, who would admonish the *tzibbur*. And every town had a “*shtoht maggid*” (a town *maggid*) who would recite *tochachah*, but nowadays, there are *mashgiachs* in *yeshivos* who give *divrei chizuk*.

That's what Rabbeinu Yonah was referring to. Rabbeinu Yonah was talking about a person who decided to listen to the *mochichim* on a regular basis, and to do whatever they exhorted him to do. Since he had already accepted upon himself that he'd listen to the *mochichim*, he receives reward for all the good deeds he'd do in the future. Since he made a decision that will surely bring him to performing good deeds, so it's considered as if he carried them out already!

That's how his deeds are greater than his knowledge — because he still is unaware of what his obligations are, and it's considered as if he already fulfilled them. This is similar to Bnei Yisrael's declaration of *Naaseh v'nishma* at Har Sinai. They were ready to fulfill whatever they'd hear later on. This way, they already reaped the reward for all their future *maasim tovim*.

The way to reach this level, writes Rabbeinu Yonah, is by listening to words of rebuke. While we don't have *mochichim* like in the past, we do have *mussar sefarim*. *Yeshivos* have set times for learning *mussar* — a half hour every day before Maariv, and in Elul, another fifteen minutes are added before Minchah. It's well known that someone who learns *mussar* on a steady basis is influenced by the *mussar* and he becomes another person. Of course,

one must learn *mussar* that's interesting; each person should choose what fits his nature. Anything that's interesting will have an influence.

### Yiras Shamayim Provides a Happy Life

We see clearly that people who learn *mussar* are different; they change from learning *mussar*. Women have told their husbands: "You've become a different person suddenly." And we're not talking about yeshivah bachurim, we're talking about a grown man who began learning *mussar* daily, and he literally became a different person! The reality is that *mussar* changes the whole atmosphere in the house for the better.

This is what Chazal said in *Pirkei Avos* (6:4): "This is the Torah's way... and you toil in Torah. If you do so, you will be fortunate in this world." Toiling in Torah gives a person a fortunate life, *Ashrecha baOlam HaZeh!* And what does it mean to toil in Torah? It could mean simply learning Torah, but it can also mean learning *Toras hayirah, mussar sefarim*. Learning *divrei Torah* of *yiras Shamayim* is what brings a person happiness in this world.

We've already mentioned the *Mishnah Berurah simah aleph*, who cites the Kadmonim that "The antidote to the yetzer hara is the *tochachah*, rebuke, of Chazal's statements." Indeed, Chazal say (*Kiddushin* 30b): "I created the yetzer hara, I created the Torah as an antidote to it." While all *divrei Torah* are an antidote to the yetzer hara, specifically the Torah of *yirah* is effective. It's the strongest antidote, has the greatest influence on a person's entire demeanor, and leads him toward a happy life. Because life with *yiras Shamayim* is a happy life.

It says in *Mishlei* (10:27), "Fear of G-d will increase days." That is, ***yiras Shamayim* doesn't make a person weaker physically; to the contrary, it increases vitality and strengthens the body.** General fear is bad for the body (*Bava Basra* 10a), but *yiras Shamayim*, fear of Heaven, is just the opposite! Rav Yitzchak Blazer discussed at length how *yiras Shamayim* is not sadness — it's manifested in joy. Fear of Hashem gives a person strength and a good life.

### Daven for Klal Yisrael

Another *eitzah* for the Yom HaDin is to daven and beg for mercy not only for yourself, but for all Klal Yisrael. A story is told about a great woman, the daughter of a *gadol*, who was in America and she had a son in Eretz Yisrael. Before the Yamim Noraim, she sent him a letter. She told him that when he davens on the Yamim Noraim and asks for success in *gashmiyus* and *ruchniyus*, he should think about all of Klal Yisrael. He shouldn't only think about himself, he should think about Klal Yisrael!

Indeed, Chazal say (*Bava Kama* 92a): "Anyone who davens for his friend and he needs the same thing, he is answered first." A person needs *siyatta d'Shemaya* for *gashmiyus* matters and for *ruchniyus* matters, but *ruchniyus* is the most important. When someone asks for his friend, he is answered first. Therefore, **if one davens for Klal Yisrael, he will have *siyatta d'Shemaya*. Most of davening is in the plural form, so one only needs to think and remember that he is not only asking for himself, he is asking for all**

**of Klal Yisrael. And then he'll be "answered first,"** and will be *zocheh* to *siyatta d'Shemaya*.

### Davening for Ruchniyus

One's priority in davening should be for *ruchniyus*. We've already mentioned that in the Yamim Noraim davening we first ask "Remember us for life," and then we ask "and inscribe us for a good life." This needs an explanation: What is "life" and what is "a good life"?

Both the Gra and the Ramchal explain that "life" refers to eternal life. We want eternal life, because this world is a transient world and it is not important. That's why we first ask for eternal life. And how will we attain eternal life? It can happen in a variety of ways, with difficulties or without. We ask to merit eternal life regardless of how it will happen.

But then we ask for "a good life" as well. We want to have a good life in this world as well, so that we can perform good deeds without difficulties or challenges. The purpose of a good life is to attain eternal life, because when a person has it good in this world, he can perform more good deeds and thus merit eternal life.

If so, when a person davens for all Klal Yisrael — for both *gashmiyus* and *ruchniyus* — the purpose of all his requests is for eternal life, which is the *ikkar*. And then he is answered first.

### Asking for Yiras Shamayim, Personal and Communal

During the Yamim Noraim prayers, we ask "Place Your fear on all Your creations." Your creations, *ma'asecha*, refers to the *Olam HaAsiyah*. We are asking on behalf of everyone in this world, we ask that everyone receives *yiras Shamayim*. Now, what about the individual who is davening? Doesn't he need this too? Isn't he lacking *yiras Shamayim*?

Actually, when one says "on all Your creations," he is also referring to himself, he's asking that he personally should receive *yiras Shamayim*! Even if he has some *yiras Shamayim*, there are always higher *madreigos* to reach. We can't even count how many *madreigos* there are in *yiras Shamayim*.

Regarding Moshe Rabbeinu, Chazal said (*Berachos* 33b) that for him, *yiras Shamayim* is simple. He had *nevu'ah* in a clear vision, *aspaklaryah hameirah* (*Yevamos* 49b), and "he gazed at the form of Hashem" (*Bamidbar* 12:8), so for him, *yiras Shamayim* was something clear and concrete. But not for us! We need *siyatta d'Shemaya* to acquire it, and that's why we ask "Place Your fear on all Your creations." Each person is asking for *yiras Shamayim* for himself individually, and for Klal Yisrael generally — that everyone should have *yiras Shamayim*.

Actually, this is a request for *k'vod Shamayim*. When everyone in the world has *yiras Shamayim*, Hashem's glory will increase. We need *k'vod Shamayim*, for that is the purpose of Creation. Indeed, Chazal say at the end of *Pirkei Avos*: "Whatever HaKadosh Baruch Hu created in His world, He only created it for His honor, as it states: 'All that is called on My name and for My glory, I have created, formed, and even made.'" That is why we ask that the entire world merit to increase *k'vod Shamayim*.

We are asking for every single member of Klal Yisrael! It doesn't matter who; every single Jew has a Jewish *neshamah*. We ask that each one should be *zocheh* to increase *k'vod Shamayim*. And if we ask, it's a sign that this *tefillah* can be effective. But only if it's a true, heartfelt prayer.

So it seems. Rav Yisrael Salanter said that it's tried and true that a *tefillah* for *ruchniyus* is effective. It just depends on the level of *kavanah*. If a person really davens with his whole heart, if he cares about those people who don't have *yiras Shamayim*, if he personally begs for *yiras Shamayim* for himself too as well as all of Klal Yisrael, then his *tefillah* can be effective. That's how it should be. But it's a *madreigah*; it's not simple.

### L'Dovid Hashem Ori — Requests for Ruchniyus

In Elul, we add to davening the *perek* from *Tehillim* "L'Dovid Hashem Ori v'Yishi." It's only right to take a deeper look at what this *perek* is talking about and how it's connected to Elul.

For example, we mention there: "*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." The terms "*sha'alti*" and "*avakesh*" are used. We must explain the difference between *she'eilah* and *bakashah*.

"*She'eilah*" is a request, we are asking for help. That's what "*achas sha'alti*" is: We are asking HaKadosh Baruch Hu to help us in our *ruchniyus*, to help us merit living in Hashem's house our whole life. Then we add: "*osah avakesh*." Here, the term "*avakesh*" implies doing *hishtadlus*, as we see in various places in Tanach. For example, "Your servant requested (*bakeish*)" (*Tehillim* 119:176), and "He sought out (*bikeish*) the donkeys" (*Shmuel I* 9:3), which means he looked for them, he put in *hishtadlus*. Aside from davening, a person also has to do *hishtadlus*. While ***tefillah* for *ruchniyus* is helpful, one still must put in *hishtadlus*!**

Chazal tell us (*Niddah* 70b) that they asked Rabbi Yehoshua, "What should a person do to become wise?" That is, how can a person achieve success in Torah? He answered them: "He should increase sitting (*yeshivah*) and beg mercy from the One to whom wisdom belongs." That is, two tactics are necessary: davening and asking for mercy, along with *hishtadlus* — sitting and learning in *yeshivah* with a *tzibbur*, learning Torah with a *tzibbur*.

The Gemara and Rashi there explain that one certainly needs *rachamim*, mercy. It's simple that without *rachamim* and *siyatta d'Shemaya*, it's impossible to succeed. However, a person might think that if he asks for *rachamim*, he will automatically have *hatzlachah* in Torah. But Rabbi Yehoshua taught that this is not so. One must increase *yeshivah*, sitting and learning, as well. Asking for mercy on its own is not enough — one must also take action! That's why we say: "I ask for one thing — but I will also seek it out." *Tefillah* must be accompanied by *hishtadlus*; that's the path to success.

And then we say, "Hashem, show me Your path." The explanation is that in order to merit following Hashem's path, the path of *avodah*, serving Hashem *b'shleimus*, one needs *siyatta d'Shemaya*. "Hashem, show me Your path"!

We conclude this *perek* with the phrase "Hope to Hashem, strengthen and encourage your heart, and hope to Hashem." This is not a *tefillah*; it's a behavior, a way of life. It's how a person should conduct himself; he should strengthen his *bitachon*. Actually, it says that a person needs *siyatta d'Shemaya* to attain the *madreigah* of *bitachon*, but one needs *hishtadlus* as well. The *Shaar HaBitachon* in *Chovos HaLevavos* teaches how to strengthen one's *bitachon*. Learning it and following the instructions is the necessary *hishtadlus*.

All these things we discussed require *siyatta d'Shemaya*. *B'ezras Hashem*, may we merit that Hashem help us all, all of Klal Yisrael, to merit eternal life on the Yom HaDin!

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.