

Darkei HaChizuk

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

A *Sichah* from Maran HaGaon Rav Gershon Edelstein *shlita*, Rosh Yeshivas Ponevez • *Parashas Vayeilech* 5782

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Shivisi Hashem L'negdi Tamid

We must increase *zechuyos* now in this period between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Let us take a look at what we can we do.

The Rema wrote in the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim* 1): “*Shivisi Hashem l'negdi tamid hu klal gadol baTorah u'v'maalos hatzaddikim asher holchim lifnei HaElokim* — ‘I place Hashem before me always’ is a fundamental rule in the Torah and of the attributes of the righteous ones who walk before Hashem.” He explains: “For a person’s sitting, movements, and activities when he is alone are not the same as his sitting, movements, and activities when he is standing in front of a great king. Neither is his voluntary speech and expression when he is with his family and close ones the same as his speech in the king’s presence. All the more so, when a person takes to heart that the Great King, HaKadosh Baruch Hu, Whose glory fills the world, is standing over him and watching his actions.” That is, “*Shivisi Hashem l'negdi tamid*” has an influence on man’s external actions. His speech and actions change, because a person in the king’s presence acts differently.

The *Shulchan Aruch* mentions actions and speech, but there are also thoughts. HaKadosh Baruch Hu is aware of our thoughts, as we say in the *piyuttim* of the Yamim Noraim: “*L'bochein levavos*, to the One Who examines hearts”; and “*yodea machashavos*, One Who knows thoughts.” When a person fulfills “*shivisi Hashem l'negdi tamid*,” this automatically has an influence on his innermost thoughts, and they will be different.

For example, this manifests itself when one recites a *berachah*, *birchos hanehenin*. Let’s say a person makes a *berachah* on a drink — everything will change: how does he recite the *berachah*, what kind of *kavanah* he has, how aware he is of Who he is speaking to, and what he’s saying; what’s the purpose and *kavanah* in every *berachah*. All these aspects are influenced by “*shivisi*”; his *kavanah* is entirely different!

The same is true regarding *kavanah* for all mitzvos. *Netillas yadayim* is a mitzvah and we recite a *berachah* of “*v'tzivanu*, and You have commanded us.” With “*shivisi*,” the *berachah* is transformed from something we do because we “have to” — since I have to eat, I have to wash to eat first; if not I can’t eat — to an act *l'shem mitzvah*, for the sake of the mitzvah. Not only that, we are

happy to be fulfilling the mitzvah of *netillas yadayim*! Then when we make the next *berachah* on eating the bread, we are fulfilling another mitzvah, another reason to rejoice. We are so happy to be able to make *berachos*, we are happy we have the strength to make *berachos*.

Another thing that changes with “*shivisi*” is our approach to eating in general. Instead of eating to satiate our physical desires, we eat for *avodas Hashem*, to have energy to serve Hashem. The Vilna Gaon wrote (*Iggeres HaGra*) that all worldly pleasures turn to *marah* in the grave. That means that all pleasures of this world turn into Gehinnom, but if one has the proper intent, that he’s eating because he has to, it becomes a mitzvah. And if it’s a mitzvah, he’s happy — *simchah shel mitzvah*!

Rabbeinu Yonah writes in *Shaarei Teshuvah* (4:9): “The reward for performing mitzvos joyfully is profound.” He cites *pesukim* to prove that *simchah shel mitzvah* is a high *madreigah*, as this joy is the consequence of how much he esteems the mitzvos, how much importance he lends to mitzvos. The more a person esteems mitzvos, the more profound it is.

Torah, Avodah, and Gemillus Chasadim

Chazal say (*Avos* 1:2): “The world stands on three matters: Torah, *avodah*, and *gemillus chasadim*.” Torah is self-understood: to be *osek baTorah* properly without wasting time, each person according to his capabilities. In the past, we’ve mentioned the concept that there could be someone who learns a little because he is busy all day making a living, but he is still on a high *madreigah*, since he learns as much as he can and uses every spare minute for learning Torah. *Avodah* is *tefillah*, which is called “*avodah she'ba-lev*, service of the heart” (*Taanis* 2b).

“*Gemillus chasadim*” means doing favors for others. Rabbeinu Yonah writes in *Shaarei Teshuvah* (3:13): “A person is obligated to go out of his way to perform favors for his nation. He must diligently labor to assist his friend, whether he is poor or rich. This is one of the most serious, important matters demanded of man, as it states (*Michah* 6:8): “He has told you, man, what is good, and what Hashem demands of you, but to do justice, and perform loving-kindness.”

On the one hand, it is good, “what is good,” but it is also an obligation: “what Hashem demands of you.” It’s worthwhile for man to act this way, but he is also

obligated to do so! “Do justice and perform loving-kindness” — do *chesed* with love. *Chesed* without love is something else. Hashem demands that you do *chesed* with love; this is simply excellent and a very high *madreigah*, as it states (*Vayikra* 19:18): “Love your fellow as yourself.”

The truth is, this is Klal Yisrael’s nature. Chazal say (*Yevamos* 79a) that there are three signs of this nation: they are *rachmanim*, *bayshanim*, and *gomlei chasadim*. “*Gomlei chasadim*” means performing *chesed* with love, *ahavas chesed*. This is Klal Yisrael’s *teva*. And since it is our *teva*, our innate nature, it’s not hard.

However, in reality, things look different. It says in *Koheles* (7:29), “Hashem made man straight, and they sought out many calculations.” Man is naturally straight, with all the signs of Klal Yisrael: *rachmanim*, *bayshanim*, and *gomlei chasadim*, but the *yetzer hara* lures us with all sorts of calculations that it should not be this way, and this is the cause of all bad *middos*.

Rectification of Middos Will Bring the Geulah

Bad *middos* brought about the Churban Beis HaMikdash, and they are the reason for the Churban’s continuation till this very day. Chazal said (*Yoma* 9b) that the first Beis HaMikdash lay in ruins for seventy years, and then the second Beis HaMikdash was rebuilt, but the second Beis HaMikdash is in ruins till today. The Gemara explains why: “The first ones, whose sin was revealed, their end was revealed; the later ones, whose sin was not revealed, their end was not revealed.”

During the first Beis HaMikdash, the sins that brought about the Destruction were clear: they were transgressing the three cardinal sins: idol worship, immorality and murder. Since they knew what the sins were, they could repent, and after seventy years of *galus*, the second Beis HaMikdash was rebuilt. *Galus* is suffering, which arouses a person to *teshuvah*. Bnei Yisrael were aroused to *teshuvah*, and once they repented, they were *zocheh* to the rebuilding of the Beis HaMikdash, with all the relevant *nissim*. As Chazal say (*Avos* 5:5), “Ten miracles were performed for our forefathers in the Beis HaMikdash.” These *nissim* returned during the second Beis HaMikdash as well.

But after the second Beis HaMikdash, there was another Churban, and the Churban is still continuing. The reason for this is “the later ones, whose sin was not revealed, their end was not revealed.” The second Beis HaMikdash was destroyed due to *sinas chinam*, which is a sin that transpires in one’s heart; it’s not revealed or exposed. People don’t even realize that they are sinning; they think: Is this *sinas chinam*, baseless hatred?! After all, I have a good reason for hating him. They don’t realize that it is baseless! Take the story of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza, where all parties didn’t think they were sinning. They thought there was a good reason for their hatred — the

yetzer hara lures us into thinking that it’s not baseless — but it actually was *sinas chinam*! And since people aren’t aware of their sin, they do not repent and do not correct their failings. That’s why the Churban is still continuing.

That’s why the Chafetz Chaim wrote his *sefer Chafetz Chaim*, which has two parts: One is *Chafetz Chaim*, a compendium of the laws of *lashon hara* and *rechilus*, with all the relevant *dinim*; and the second is *Shemiras HaLashon*, which is full of *mussar*, enjoining us to adhere to the *halachos*. His purpose in writing these *sefarim* was to rectify the sin of the Churban. He wrote the following in his Introduction: “But toward the end of period of the second Beis HaMikdash, due to our many sins, *sinas chinam* and *lashon hara* become overpowering, and as a result the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed and we were exiled from our Land... If so, as long as we do not make it our business to rectify this sin, how can the Redemption occur? Since this sin was so harmful, as it caused us to be exiled from our Land, all the more so, it will prevent us from returning to our Land.” And so the Chafetz Chaim wrote *Chafetz Chaim* and *Shemiras HaLashon* to prevent *lashon hara*, which stems from *sinas chinam* — the sin that led to the Churban. Without *lashon hara*, people will have good *middos*, and the Churban will end.

Unfortunately, the Churban is still continuing, and Chazal said (*Yerushalmi Yoma* 1:1): “Every generation that does not see the rebuilding of the Beis HaMikdash in its times, is considered to have caused its destruction.” The reason for this is because if the Beis HaMikdash was not rebuilt, it’s a sign that the sin is still continuing. That’s why it’s considered as if the Beis HaMikdash is being destroyed again.

Self-Criticism and Tefillah

The solution is to employ self-criticism, to search out one’s deeds and correct his *middos*. A person naturally doesn’t notice his deficiencies, and after he scrutinizes his deeds, he still doesn’t see anything wrong. I know of a case like this: A certain rav thought that one of his congregants was a serious person. Once when they were talking before Rosh Hashanah, the rav told this congregant: “We have to get ready for Rosh Hashanah.” And the man answered: “I’m ready for Rosh Hashanah all year long, I don’t have to do any further preparation.” A person can fool himself to such an extent that he doesn’t even notice his deficiencies.

If so, perhaps when a person learns *mussar*, he might think: “This does not apply to me; everything’s good and I don’t have to correct anything.” Therefore, aside from *mussar*, one also must daven for his *ruchniyus*; he has to daven to merit doing *teshuvah* and rectifying his deeds. Rav Yisrael Salanter said that it’s tried-and-true that *tefillah* for *ruchniyus* helps, as Chazal say (*Berachos* 50a): “Open your mouth wide and I will fill it” — this is referring to *divrei Torah*. There is no limit to *ruchniyus*; one merely has to ask, and his *tefillah* helps!

The Power of a Heartfelt Tefillah

Even so, it depends on what kind of *tefillah* it is, and how real one's *kavanah* is. The Rosh wrote in *Orchos Chaim* (os 36): "How good it is to ask forgiveness for reciting 'Selach lanu' (Forgive us) without *kavanah*." Sometimes a person is actually sinning when he says "Selach lanu," as he is voicing the words without meaning them, and he must ask forgiveness for davening "Selach lanu" without *kavanah*. These are very harsh words — it may be possible that a person davens, but is committing a sin with the very words of his *tefillah*.

But if one's *tefillos* are with sincere *kavanah* and he is davening with his whole heart for his *ruchniyus*, then his *tefillah* will help. There are known stories about young people who davened with their whole heart and asked for success in *ruchniyus*, and were actually *zocheh* to *siyatta d'Shemaya* and great success.

This story appears in the Introduction to the *sefer Hisragshus HaLeiv* about Rav Hirsch Michel Shapiro *zt"l*: Once the *shamash* of a shul in Chevron came into shul during the day to take care of some repairs. The shul was empty, but he heard the sound of weeping coming from behind the *paroches* of the *aron hakodesh*. This was not new to the *shamash*; many downtrodden, bitter people would come to pour out their hearts to Hashem. But to the *shamash's* great shock, Hershele, a little boy, emerged from behind the *paroches*, tears streaming down his cheeks. "What happened, my boy," he asked, concerned. "Is someone sick at home?" "Baruch Hashem, everyone is healthy," Hershele answered, and tried to make a hasty retreat. But the *shamash* didn't let up till he uncovered the reason for the boy's tears next to the *aron hakodesh*. "I asked HaKadosh Baruch Hu to open my heart to Torah!" he murmured; his eyes fixed on the ground. And this *tefillah*, which came from the depths of his heart, was answered. He rose in *kedushah* and *taharas halev* from day to day.

Many similar stories abound. I heard one from Rabbi Shlomo Lorincz *z"l*. The Chazon Ish told him about a *bachur* who was not a *baal kishron*, he wasn't especially talented; in fact, he had a weak mind and couldn't understand even very simple things. Despite this, he grew in Torah and became a *rav* in Chutz LaAretz. The Chazon Ish said, "How was he *zocheh*? In the merit of his grandmother's tears at candle-lighting, when she davened that her descendants should have success in Torah. It was this *zechus* that brought him *hatzlachah* despite his weak abilities."

The Chazon Ish mentioned that it was in the *zechus* of her "tears." It wasn't a regular prayer; it was a *tefillah* with tears. A real, heartfelt *tefillah* comes with tears! When the *tefillah* is real, and one has davened with his whole heart, then even a grandmother's prayer for her grandson can help, and even a simple *bachur* who was not a *baal*

kishron can suddenly become a great *talmid chacham*. This is the power of *tefillah* with tears.

Without Torah a Person Is Pitiful

The Gemara states (*Niddah* 70b): "What should a person do to become wise? He should increase sitting... and beg for mercy from the One to Whom wisdom belongs." That is, one needs two things for success in Torah: increasing *yeshivah*, sitting, and asking for mercy. Sitting and learning is not enough, one must also daven for mercy, and then he will surely be successful in his Torah learning.

"Begging for mercy" means that **he should feel he needs "mercy," he should feel that without success in Torah he is a pitiful soul — and then his prayer will automatically be a tearful one. He'll beg Hashem: Have mercy on me! If someone needs mercy that means he has a very difficult challenge that he suffers from terribly and he's begging for mercy. When a person asks in this manner, his *tefillah* is accepted.** This type of prayer is called *tefillah* — begging for mercy.

One who comes to be purified is helped (*Yoma* 38b). If a person comes to be purified, that is, with his whole heart — like the grandmother who cried as she davened — then he is helped!

A Person Must Try His Hardest

Chazal said (*Kiddushin* 30b): "A person's *yetzer hara* overpowers him every day and tries to kill him, as it states "The wicked one looks out for the *tzaddik* and wants to kill him." The wicked one is the *yetzer hara*, who is very powerful, and he tries to kill a person, he tries to make him sin, thereby "killing" his *neshamah*, *Rachmana litzlan*. And "if Hashem wouldn't help him, he would never be able to overcome the *yetzer hara*, as it states: Hashem will not leave him in his hands." A person needs *siyatta d'Shemaya*, and Hashem helps him overcome his *yetzer hara*.

The Gra writes (*Kol Eliyahu on Sukkah*), "Our true Sages of blessed memory came to explain: When does Hashem help him? When a person has already done everything in his power in order to overcome the *yetzer hara*, and he's reached a point where if not for Hashem's help, he wouldn't be able to do anything else. He's already reached his limit, and there's nothing more he can do, so then Hashem sends His help and doesn't leave to the *yetzer hara's* clutches. However, if he can still do more but fails to do so, Hashem will not help him either."

The *Mesillas Yesharim* (end of chap. 2) writes; "If a person supervises and controls himself, then HaKadosh Baruch Hu will help him and save him from the *yetzer hara*. But if he doesn't supervise himself, HaKadosh Baruch Hu will surely not supervise him. Because if he

doesn't have mercy on himself, who will have mercy on him? As Chazal say (*Berachos* 33a): "It is prohibited to have mercy on someone who doesn't have knowledge." Indeed, Chazal say (*Avos* 1:14): "If I am not for myself, who will be for me?" That is, one will only merit *siyatta d'Shemaya* if he exerts himself as much as he can, and davens for mercy, and does whatever he can, up to the point that he simply cannot do anything else. Then Hashem will help him. But if he doesn't do whatever he can, then he won't receive *siyatta d'Shemaya*.

This is hard work. One must work hard so that his "coming to be purified" is done with all his power, and he must ask for mercy with total *kavanah*, he should feel really pitiful, like someone suffering greatly who davens and begs for mercy and cries because he's in pain! If his *tefillah* will be like this, Heaven will give him *siyatta d'Shemaya*, as Chazal say "One who comes to be purified is helped."

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These are really not simple matters. They are profound *madreigos*, and I don't know if I am allowed to speak about them, but that's what's written and one must be aware of it. One needs *siyatta d'Shemaya* for success in *ruchniyus*, and one needs *zechuyos* for *siyatta d'Shemaya*. And this is contingent on one's *tefillos*, how much *kavanah* does he have, how much does it pain him that he lacks success in *ruchniyus*. Like we said, it is not simple, and one needs to offer a true prayer for this too — he must daven for his davening, to merit such a *madreigah*.

It all depends on *siyatta d'Shemaya*, as Chazal said: One who comes to be purified is helped. We must hope that we all merit, *b'ezer Hashem*, to be among those who "come to be purified" *b'sheleimus*, properly. May we merit a *gmar chasimah tovah*, in *gashmiyus* and *ruchniyus*.

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