

Darkei HaChizuk

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

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

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Atah Bechartanu — The Chosen Nation

A Sichah in Telzstone — Sukkos 5780

Our Yom Tov *tefillos* include the “*Atah bechartanu*” section, where we thank Hashem for choosing us from all other nations to be His chosen people. The *tefillah* continues with many more expressions of gratitude: “You loved us, and you wanted us, and you exalted us from every tongue, and you sanctified us with Your mitzvos, and You brought us close, our King, to service of You... and You gave us... appointed festivals for gladness, Festivals and times for joy” — these too are all expressions of gratitude; we are thanking Hashem for these matters. “You have chosen us” is also gratitude to Hashem for choosing us from all other nations.

We need to understand what we are thanking Hashem for, and the nature of this thanks. After all, HaKadosh Baruch Hu chose us because we actually are the choicest of all nations. When someone picks something from a variety of things, he chooses the best. That’s what Hashem did, so why must we thank Him?

Actually, the explanation of “*Atah bechartanu*, You have chosen us” is really “You made us chosen, You transformed us into *baalei madreigah*, people on a high level.” Indeed, Klal Yisrael is on a special *madreigah*, the Jewish people have a distinct personality, different from all other nations. Jewish people have a better essence than non-Jews, and this is all from HaKadosh Baruch Hu, Who chose us and made us into *baalei madreigah*.

If so, it is a great joy for us to Jewish, to be *baalei madreigah* — this includes first and foremost having good *middos*. Jewish people have *middos* that do not exist in non-Jews. Jews are also more talented, but the *ikkar* is our *middos* and the Torah we have. And that’s what we are thanking Hashem for: “*Atah bechartanu mikol ha-amim*” — for choosing us from all other nations; for loving us, and wanting us, for giving us Yamim Tovim for rejoicing. We thank Hashem for giving us Yom Tov and for the entire Torah.

This is similar to what we say daily in Birkas HaTorah: “Who has chosen us from all the nations and has given us His Torah.” Hashem first turned us into chosen people, and only then did He give us His Torah. In the merit of the exalted attributes Hashem gave us over other nations, we became fitting, and worthy of accepting the Torah.

Chazal say (*Peah* 1:1) that learning Torah is equal to all mitzvos, and when a person is *osek baTorah*, any Torah, be it Chumash with Rashi, or even learning aleph-beis, he is connected to Hashem! The *Zohar* says “*Kudsha Brich Hu*,

v’Oraisa, v’Yisrael chad Hu — Hashem, and the Torah, and Klal Yisrael are one.” By learning Torah, a person becomes holy, and he is sanctified with *Hashem Yisbarach’s kedushah*. As soon as he learns Torah he is sanctified, and as long as a person is learning Torah, he is holy and connected to HaKadosh Baruch Hu.

What tremendous happiness and joy we have for meriting such lofty *zechuyos*! This is what gives us great joy: *Ashreinu, mah tov chelkeinu*. This gives us happiness.

The truth is, we cannot fathom how fortunate we are. We are Jews, we have a Jewish *neshamah*, and we are *zocheh* to daven to Hashem, to make *berachos*, to speak with Him, and He wants to hear us, as it states (*Tehillim* 81:11): “Open your mouth wide and I will fill your requests.” This is really profound and it is a tremendous joy. We don’t even know how ecstatic we should be for what we have, for every single *tefillah*, every single *berachah*.

Of course, when a person makes a *berachah*, he can’t just mumble it quickly; he must recite it with *kavanah* — he has to feel what he’s saying. But in any case, it’s a tremendous joy to know that Hashem wants to hear us and that we are actually speaking to Him.

If so, *ashreinu, mah tov chelkeinu*! And especially now, on Yom Tov, when we have a mitzvah of *simchas Yom Tov*, being happy on Yom Tov, and even more on Sukkos, which is *Zman Simchaseinu*, the time of our rejoicing. We must rejoice with all the *ruchniyus* we have — there is what to be happy about, and we must be happy! *B’ezras Hashem*, may we all merit being happy with the joy of Yom Tov and merit whatever we need.

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B’Tzeila d’M’heiminusa — In the Shadow of Emunah

A Sichah in Givat Ze’ev HaChadashah Sukkos 5776

There’s a *pasuk* in *Devarim* (10:12): “What does Hashem Elokecha ask of you?” What does Hashem want from us and what are our obligations? “Just to fear Hashem your G-d” — *yiras Shamayim* and *emunah*, those are our obligations. What does Hashem ask of you? Only to have *yiras Shamayim*, which is *emunah*.

The *Shulchan Aruch*, in the first section, quotes the Rema, who quotes the Rambam’s words from *Moreh Nevuchim*: “*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.” This is a great principle in the Torah: a person must always remember and never forget the truth that HaKadosh Baruch Hu sees and knows all his actions, as Chazal say (*Avos* 2:1): “Know what is above you: an eye that sees, an ear that hears, and all your deeds are inscribed in the book.”

That’s “*Shivisi Hashem l’negdi tamid.*” It is not easy; fulfilling this mitzvah *b’sheleimus* is a high *madreigah*, but it’s the first section of the *Shulchan Aruch*! And what does Hashem ask of you, if not to fear Him? Fear is only manifested if a person remembers that an “eye sees him and an ear hears, and all his deeds are inscribed in the book.” That’s what’s demanded of us.

Now it’s *Sukkos*, we are sitting in a *sukkah*, which is something that strengthens *emunah*. The whole concept of a *sukkah* is to remind us (*Vayikra* 23:43): “For I had Bnei Yisrael live in *sukkos*.” And Chazal say (*Sukkah* 11b): “This is referring to the *ananei hakavod*, clouds of glory, or to actual *sukkos*.” By sitting in a *sukkah*, we recall the *ananei hakavod* — a supernatural phenomenon, it was a miracle performed through *hashgachas Hashem*, and this strengthens our *emunah*.

Chazal tell us regarding sitting in the *sukkah* (*Sukkah* 2a) to leave our permanent abode for the entire week and live in a temporary dwelling place. This is to make us aware of the fact that we live our lives in a temporary home; we don’t have a permanent home in this world, as they say in *Berachos* (28b, and more) “We are here today, tomorrow...” This is how a person should feel in this world — we should feel that each day is the only one we have. This is a person’s obligation and the *sukkah* reminds us of it.

Even according to Rabbi Akiva, who opines that “for I had Bnei Yisrael live in *sukkos*” is referring to actual *sukkos*, in any case, this too was not a natural course of events. It all took place through *hashgachah pratis*, as it says “I had [them] live.”

This is man’s duty and this is how he attains *sheleimus*. A Yid must constantly be growing and advancing in *emunah*. Growing in *emunah* is not simple; believing and remembering that everything is in Heaven’s hands, and whatever a person sees is in Heaven’s hands. The very fact that I’m here now is in Heaven’s hands. It wasn’t natural, it happened through *hashgachah pratis*. Maybe this fact will bring down a *chizuk*. And that would be *hashgachah pratis*, thanks to the *tzibbur* who has the merit to gain *chizuk*.

Practically speaking, how can one continue remembering about “an eye that sees and an ear that hears” throughout the day? It’s against nature to constantly be thinking “*Shivisi Hashem l’negdi tamid.*” There’s only one solution: to learn *mussar*. If a person has a steady *mussar seder* every day, something that’s not too heavy or boring — it has to be a *sefer* that interests him — it most certainly has an effect! Even if a person doesn’t feel it, over time, the effect

becomes more pronounced and he becomes a different person. He doesn’t even realize that he’s changing, but there is a tremendous change, until he eventually notices that he’s different. He’s not the same as he was last year. His behavior is entirely different.

Aside from strengthening *emunah*, learning *mussar* also gives a person a happier life. Many people have told me that in the past, they did not learn *mussar* regularly, and once they started, their lives changed; they now have a happy life. In fact, their entire family is happier, their house is permeated with *simchas chaim*. This is the secret and power of Torah, *Toras hayirah*, which is *mussar sefarim*. This is what Hashem demands of you — have *yiras Shamayim*.

Yehi ratzon that we all merit to strengthen whatever needs strengthening. May we all truly fulfill the first section in *Shulchan Aruch*. And then, may we be *zocheh* to strengthen whatever needs strengthening, may we merit *yeshuos* and *nechamos*, and a joyous Yom Tov.



Ashreichem Talmidei Chachamim

A Sichah in Givat Ze’ev HaChadashah – Sukkos 5778

The Gemara in *Menachos* *daf* 18 brings that one of the Tannaim told someone “*Ashreichem talmidei chachamim, she’divrei Torah chavivin aleichem b’yoser* — How fortunate are you Torah scholars, for the words of Torah are extremely dear to you.” Nowadays, these words are a song: *ashreichem talmidei chachamim...* If *divrei Torah* are really dear to you — you are fortunate! The Mishnah in *Avos* (chap. 6) says: “You are fortunate in this world, and it is good for you in the world to come.” “*Ashrecha*” means that this is the greatest joy that exists. If words of Torah are so very precious to you, this is the greatest joy that can be. There is no worldly pleasure greater than this — we’ll only have greater pleasure in *Olam HaBa*. But in *Olam Haze*, this is the maximum joy one can experience.

The *tzibbur* here is sitting and learning Torah, and you all want to hear more *divrei Torah* and *chizuk* — *divrei Torah* are so precious to you. This is a tremendous *zechus* and a great *madreigah*. *B’ezras Hashem* may we all merit *siyatta d’Shemaya* for continued success in whatever is needed, both in *gashmiyus* and *ruchniyus*. May we have a happy Yom Tov for every one of us and all of Klal Yisrael.

However, to merit *siyatta d’Shemaya*, one must strengthen himself. Chazal say (*Berachos* 32b), “Four matters require strengthening.” Rashi explains that “*chizuk*,” strengthening, means “constantly and with all his strength.” How does a person acquire the ability to practice *chizuk*? There are young people here and older people too, and *divrei Torah* are precious to them all, and everyone here wants to gain *chizuk*. How is it done?

The solution is that every single person should be aware of his *maasim tovim* and how important they are, as the *Mesillas Yesharim* (chap. 3) writes that person who wants to be in control of himself should create a mental image of all

his deeds, and take note of the bad parts of his deeds so he can distance himself from them. “And how good it would be to do this on a regular basis and strengthen himself in this manner.” When a person is aware of his good attributes and good deeds, it gives him *chizuk* and *kochos* to continue in this manner.

Baruch Hashem, there are both younger and older people in the *tzibbur* here, and all of you have *ahavas Torah*, and want to hear Torah, and know Torah, and become *gedolei Torah*. They also want their families to become *gedolei Torah*, and when there is such great *ahavas Torah*, it is a lofty *madreigah*. When there’s *ahavas Torah*, it gives a person *koach* to continue.

And it’s important for every single person, old or young — even the very young, *cheder* boys or boys in *mesivta* — to know that anyone who loves Torah and wants to learn, and learning is interesting for him, well, this is a very great *zechus*. And it’s a reason for tremendous joy, to rejoice in the fact that they love Torah and want to learn and become great in Torah. This is wonderful and it’s a very great *zechus*. Someone who has this aspiration should be happy; he should be happy about his aspirations!

Everyone here also has good *middos*, and having good *middos* is wonderful. It’s the foundation of the entire Torah, as Chazal say (*Yerushalmi Nedarim* 9:4), “‘Love your fellow as yourself’ is a great principle of the Torah.” Having *ahavas ha-briyos* and good *middos* is a great *madreigah* — it’s even greater than having *ahavas Hashem*. Indeed, the Tanna (in *Avos* chap. 6) first mentions “love Hashem,” and only then “love your fellow man,” because *ahavas ha-briyos* is a harder level to attain — and therefore, it’s a higher *madreigah*.

It’s important to know that every single one of us can become a *gadol baTorah*; age doesn’t matter. Even older people can become greater. If every person would be *osek baTorah* with all his strength and according to his abilities. But not more than he can — it won’t help, and the time wasted trying to do more than he can is really a shame. If a person learns as well as he can and as much as he can, he will be successful, and this is a reason for tremendous joy and great success.

May we all *b’ezras Hashem* strengthen ourselves; every single one of us, including me, always needs *chizuk*. The best way to attain *chizuk* is by learning *mussar*. Learning *mussar* is not “*middas chassidus*,” it’s not only for the extremely religious. It’s a real need for every single person. It’s important to learn a *sefer* that interests you, because if the learning is boring, it’s not effective. There are many interesting *mussar sefarim*, like *Chovos HaLevavos*, *Mesillas Yesharim*, *Shaarei Teshuvah*, and *Orchos Tzaddikim*. Every person can find sections that interest him and will have an effect on him.

Many people have told me that they set up a steady learning session in *mussar* — even for a short time, and it turned their life around. They now have a much happier life, because

mussar sefarim educate and regulate a person to live a life of *emunah*, and a *baal emunah* doesn’t have any pain in life.

Since having *emunah* guides a person to realize that everything is in Heaven’s hands, and even if someone else disturbs me or causes me pain, it’s all from *Shamayim*. He is not the one disturbing, Heaven is doing it and it would have happened even without the second person. If so, there’s no reason to be angry or bear a grudge. Instead, try to figure out why *Shamayim* brought this on you.

Think: Am I really such a *tzaddik* that *Shamayim* is giving me *yissurim shel ahavah*? It doesn’t make sense; it makes more sense that I need to correct something in my behavior.

And everything that the Merciful One does is for the good, so since everything is from Heaven, and it’s for the good, then even challenges and difficulties are for my good! It’s important to think about why this is for his good — it probably happened to make him correct his deeds. He should try to figure out if there’s a *middah k’neged middah* in his pain, because Heaven makes many things happen *middah k’neged middah*.

Whatever we just said is written in *mussar sefarim*, we haven’t mentioned anything new. Anyone who picks up a *mussar sefer* will find many ideas and suggestions how to live a happy life. Especially with *emunah*, with the realization that everything is in Heaven’s hands, and everything is for the good. All difficulties and challenges can be transformed into good things. It should make a person happy to know that *Shamayim* sent him a “message” via his hardship, to search through his actions.

I promise that anyone who learns *mussar* will be happy! People who are already learning *mussar* are surely happy already. And if someone hasn’t started yet, once he starts learning some *mussar* every day, he’ll discover new happiness and will be content with his lot, and have a happy life. Not only will he have *simchas Yom Tov* — which is happiness unique to these days — his entire life will be a life of joy! *B’ezras Hashem*, may we all merit this and be *zocheh* to true *simchas hachaim*.



Continuing the Level of Simchas Torah All Year Long

How can we maintain the level we achieved on Simchas Torah to carry through the entire year? The simple solution is to learn *mussar* daily. Many *poskim* write that learning *mussar* is a Torah obligation. The *Mishnah Berurah* writes (1:12), “A person must set himself a time to learn *mussar* every day, whether a lot or a little, because each person has a different *yetzer hara*. The antidote to the *yetzer hara* is *tochachos maamarei Chazal*, our Sages’ rebukes.” *Mussar sefarim* remind a person of his obligations.

I know someone who made great strides lately in *mussar*. He started learning *Sefer HaIkkrim* every day and it had a real effect on him. *Orchos Tzaddikim* is another *sefer*, and

it's good for everyone. He quotes the *Chovos HaLevavos* and *Shaarei Teshuvah*, sometimes quoting verbatim and then adding his opinion. He is one of the Kadmonim — the Maharsha quotes him. Many chapters address matters that need strengthening.

Rav Chaim Kanievsky *shlita's* *Orchos Yosher* has many wonderful things in it that address our generation. This week (*Sukkos* 5772) I told Rav Chaim *shlita* that there are so many new *inyanim*, things that happen so often that we should be writing about, such as *chinuch*. There are some parents, *tzaddikim*, who put too much pressure on their children, and when they force their child to learn or daven, he simply can't. There are stories about children who went off the *derech* because their parents pressured them and forced them to act properly. *Chinuch* has to be by personal example, not by force.

Rav Chaim *shlita* immediately showed me that this is written explicitly in *Avos d'Rebbi Nassan*, end of chap. 26: "A person who has a son, and the son did not learn Torah from his father, but went to learn Torah from others, is seeking flattery." The *Rishon l'Tzion* explains: "This means the son wanted to be flattered [wanted to hear compliments], but not only didn't his father flatter him and give him a good feeling, he acted arrogantly [not in a calm, understanding manner], so his son did not learn from him. This is coming to teach you that a father should flatter his son and compliment him in order to influence him to learn Torah." If we see that a child does not do well learning with his father, but when he learns with others, he is successful, the reason is because the boy is looking for compliments and a caring relationship. Since the father is so concerned about his son's progress, he doesn't look the other way when the child misbehaves, and doesn't compliment him freely. Instead, he pressures him and forces him to learn. The rebbi, on the other hand, compliments the boy and treats him well. That's why he is successful with his rebbi, but not with his father.

Generally, this happens because the parents are *tzaddikim* and want their children to be *tzaddikim* just like them, and

they pressure their children to do more than they are able to. As a result, the children start drifting away and don't want to listen to their parents. Rav Chaim *shlita* added that this is also the result of a lack of *seichel yashar* — the parents don't realize that one cannot be *mechanech* in this manner. Forcing children to behave a certain way will yield exactly the opposite behavior. The child won't want to learn and won't want to daven.

The Chafetz Chaim's *sefarim* are also wonderful *sefarim*. Just this week, I heard a story about a *bachur* who went off the *derech* and desecrated Shabbos, *Rachmana litzlan*. Rebbetzin Kanievsky *a"h* suggested that he start learning two *halachos* of *sefer Chafetz Chaim* and *Shemiras HaLashon*. He listened to her advice and made a complete turnaround! He is currently a *marbitz Torah* in *chutz la'aretz*. Learning *Chafetz Chaim* is so effective!

Someone once complained to me that *mussar* has no effect on him, and he's worried that he's guilty of *bittul Torah* if he learns *mussar* and it's not helpful. I told him that learning *mussar* is also *divrei Torah*. All *mussar sefarim* quote many *pesukim* and sayings of Chazal, and even if he doesn't feel the effects right away, the *mussar* he learns will eventually have effect on him. Just as the *pasuk* implies: "Stones which the water eroded" (*Iyov* 14:19, see *Avos d'Rebbi Nassan* chap. 6) — over time, his *mussar* learning will break through his heart of stone and will have a great effect on him.

But one must be careful not to place stones on his heart — like the electronic devices we have nowadays — all sorts of *yetzer haras* that can be slipped into a pocket. If a person pours cement on his heart, how can learning *mussar* help him? Even if "water erodes stones," how effective can it be if you keep putting more and more stones there? One must stay far away from disturbing things and maintain a steady *mussar seder* — that's the only way a person can continuously have *chizuk* and keep growing in the *madreigah* of Simchas Torah all year long!

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.