

## Darkei HaChizuk

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

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### אם אדם רואה שייסורים באים עליו יפשפש במעשיו

#### Jewish Decrees against Jews

Currently in Eretz Yisrael there are *gezeiros*, and the goal of these decrees is to make it hard to learn Torah, to cause *bittul Torah*. That's the objective of these *gezeiros*.

Furthermore, there are *gezeiros* against the general population, as the government is run by an anti-halachah leadership. Very grave prohibitions are involved, *Rachmana litzlan*. These are matters that the general population usually does observe; they don't usually violate these *issurim*. But now the government wants to cause the public to stumble and commit these sins and become *baalei aveirah*, *Rachmana litzlan*.

It's hard to understand how Jews can enact decrees on other Jews. It's against a Jewish person's nature; indeed, Chazal tell us (*Yevamos* 79a), "There are three signs in this nation: *bayshanim*, *rachmanim*, *v'gomlei chasadim* — they are merciful, bashful, and perform acts of lovingkindness."

Every single Jew has these traits, whether or not he is Torah-observant. Every single Jew that has a Jewish *neshamah* is naturally different from people of other nations — this is well known. I've heard from people who travel often that they see a clear difference between a Jew and non-Jew. Jews have a different personality; non-Jews don't share this personality.

During the time of the First Beis HaMikdash, there were kings who caused the nation to sin. And what sin was that? *Avodah zarah*, idol worship. There was an extremely powerful yetzer hara for *avodah zarah* in those days. Indeed, Chazal say that we cannot fathom how strong the yetzer hara for worshiping idols was. Eventually, the Anshei Knesses HaGedolah begged for mercy and the yetzer hara for *avodah zarah* was nullified. (See *Yoma* 69b.) But before this yetzer hara was eradicated, it was tremendously strong — we cannot imagine how strong it was. That's why there were kings, both from the kingdoms of Yehudah and Yisrael, who caused the nation to sin in idol worship. That was the nature of the yetzer hara for *avodah zarah* in those days.

But during the Second Beis HaMikdash, this yetzer hara no longer existed, and the Jewish kings no longer issued royal decrees to serve idols — but there were decrees from the Greek kingdom to uproot religion. Many Jews gave up their lives to uphold the Torah and mitzvos (see *Vayikra Rabbah* 32:1), but the Greeks continued with their decrees. They had an influence on some Jews, who became *misyavnim*, Hellenists. In any case, it was the non-Jews who passed the decrees. But that **Jews should enact decrees against other Jews? It is incomprehensible that our Jewish brothers should act this way.**

#### Heavenly Decrees Due to Lack of Zechuyos

However, the truth is, everything is in Heaven's hands, any difficulty a person has is *b'yedei Shamayim*. It was *min haShamayim* that these decrees were passed! Of course, the people who actually enact these decrees have free choice, they are *baalei bechirah*, but we, who are experiencing these difficulties, must remember that all our difficulties are Heavenly decrees.

It's incumbent upon us to figure out what Hashem wants from us. "*Mah zos asah Elokim lanu*, What has Hashem done to us?" — What has Hashem done? To us? Why did we personally receive these challenges, all sorts of challenges and difficulties? It's a sign that we are lacking *zechuyos*, because everything depends on one's *zechuyos*. Since everything is *b'yedei Shamayim*, it follows that everything depends on a person's *zechuyos*. If there are difficulties, it's a sign that there's a lack of *zechuyos*. And if there aren't enough *zechuyos*, there will be decrees and there will not be *siyatta d'Shemaya*.

Now, the people who pass these decrees have their own yetzer hara, and their yetzer hara controls them, but why are we subject to these decrees? It must be that *Shamayim* issued these decrees on us! And it's because we need *zechuyos*; we are lacking *zechuyos*, as Chazal say (*Berachos* 5a): "If a person sees pain and tribulations coming upon him, he should examine (יפשפש) his deeds."

In *Eiruvin* daf 13, it says "he shall feel (ימשמש) his deeds." The *Mesillas Yesharim* (chap. 3) explains the

difference between the two terms. “פּשַׁע” refers to clear-cut matters of good and bad. He should simply check: is there something bad I need to rectify, or is there something good that I should be doing. However, מַשְׂמַח means to “feel out” his good deeds — Is he completing them *b’sheleimus*? Sometimes, we perform good deeds, but they’re incomplete, something’s missing in *sheleimus*; so we need to check if our *maasim tovim* are being performed *b’sheleimus*.

### Torah — Increasing Quality and Quantity

Chazal delineated which *zechuyos* we need (*Avos* 1:2): “The world stands on three matters: Torah, *avodah*, and *gemillus chassadim*.” Torah is *esek haTorah*, which is first and foremost; *avodah* is *emunah*, and *avodah she’balev* is *tefillah*; and *gemillus chassadim* is *mitzvos bein adam lachaveiro*.

Each of these three matters involve many levels. For example, there are many levels in Torah, and if something is missing, we haven’t arrived at *sheleimus*.

However, the obligation is individual, each person according to his abilities. A person is not obligated to do what he cannot; not only that, it’s prohibited to exert himself beyond his abilities. Doing so is a sin, because he is harming his health and he must be healthy in order to function and fulfill the 613 mitzvos. Indeed, the Rambam writes (*Hilchos Deios* chap. 3) that a person must sleep, but if he sleeps as needed *l’shem Shamayim*, he is actually serving Hashem as he sleeps.

It could be that everyone’s deficient in *sheleimus* in *esek haTorah*. Even someone who has to work to make a living and doesn’t have time to learn all day, it’s very possible that he has a half-hour, or even one minute, that he can learn, but does not. This is a sin — even that one minute! If he has a minute available for learning and he doesn’t learn, this is a sin and a deficiency in *sheleimus*.

Quality in learning is also important. Is one’s learning *l’shem Shamayim*? Is he learning because he has no other choice, because he “has to” learn, or is he happy when he learns because he’s fulfilling Hashem’s will and is serving Hashem as he learns? While most people usually learn with joy because *divrei Torah* are interesting and delightful, it is possible that he can increase his level of joy. If even a small amount of joy is lacking, his *zechuyos* will be deficient. This is regarding Torah.

### Avodah — Quality of Kavanah in Tefillah

*Avodah* is *tefillah*. There are many levels and *madreigah* in prayer, as well. The highest *madreigah* is

(*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 98:1) when a person attains *hispashtus hagashmiyus*, nullification of his physical senses, and arrives at a state very close to prophecy, as we’ve seen happening in our *gedolim*’s prayers. We’ve already mentioned the Chazon Ish and the Brisker Rav whose *tefillos* were “*hispashtus hagashmiyus*,” their physical senses did not work. When people spoke to them, they simply did not hear.

The Brisker Rav would daven Shemoneh Esrei out loud. While Shemoneh Esrei is supposed to be a silent prayer, if someone needs to daven out loud in order to increase his *kavanah*, it is permitted (as long as it doesn’t disturb others’ prayers). Once the Brisker Rav forgot “*yaaleh v’yavo*,” and people who heard him davening tried to remind him. They said “*Yaaleh v’yavo!*” But he didn’t hear them because his physical senses were nullified and he lost his hearing during davening. A similar story is related about the Chazon Ish — A matter of *pikuach nefesh* arose, and people tried to talking to him about it while he was davening Shemoneh Esrei, but he did not hear them.

This is the highest *madreigah*, but there are many other levels in *kavanah* beneath this: how much *kavanah* one should have, what type of *kavanos*, how to act “*omeid lifnei haMelech*, standing before the King,” and how much *yirah* one should have during davening. There are many levels to *avodah she’balev*, and each person must check if there’s anything he can add based on his own abilities. If he doesn’t add it, this is a sin; his *tefillah* is not considered *b’sheleimus*, and he is lacking *zechuyos*. *Avodah* is a mitzvah, as the *pasuk* states (*Shemos* 23:25), “And serve Hashem your G-d,” and (*Devarim* 11:13), “Serve Him with all your heart and all your soul.” One who fails to do so is lacking in the *sheleimus* of *avodah*.

### Gemillus Chassadim — Greeting People Cheerfully

The mitzvah of *gemillus chassadim, bein adam lachaveiro*, is also written in the Torah (*Devarim* 28:9), “And you shall go in His ways.” Chazal said (*Shabbos* 133; *Sotah* 14), “Just as He is merciful, you shall be merciful as well.” *Baruch Hashem*, that’s Klal Yisrael’s nature — we are merciful and perform good deeds. But sometimes, one can even do a little more — for example, *sever panim yafos*, greeting people cheerfully, with a smile. Chazal say (*Avos* 1:15), “Greet every person with a cheerful countenance.” If a person can do so, but is negligent in this area and fails to ask people how they’re doing, this is a deficiency in *sheleimus* and, subsequently, in *zechuyos*.

**Stories are told how by simply expressing interest in another and asking “How are you?” has saved a**

person's entire *ruchniyus*. Years ago, one of the *talmidim* in yeshivah wasn't happy in yeshivah. He decided he'd leave right after Shabbos, and he'd stop learning completely. But on Friday night, as everyone made their way to the *rabbanim* to wish them "Gut Shabbos," a friend of his turned to him and asked him, "How are you? What's doing?" When he realized that someone in yeshivah cared about him, he decided to stay. This decision changed his entire *ruchniyus* status. His friend saved him just by asking one simple question: "How are you?". This is a true story — see the far-reaching effects of simply greeting people cheerfully!

It's known that they were very careful about this in Kelm. When a guest would arrive at the Talmud Torah in Kelm, *bachurim* would immediately approach him and ask him how he's doing and offer their help. They were so friendly that the guest often thought they knew who he was, and he couldn't understand where they knew him from or why they were so interested in him and trying so hard to help him. This is the mitzvah of *sever panim yafos bein adam lachaveiro*, which is performing *chesed* with one's body, and it doesn't involve any *tirchah*! But if a person can add even a little more, his mitzvah is not *b'sheleimus* and his *zechuyos* are deficient.

### All Madreigos Depend on a Person's Sheleimus

Fulfilling one's obligations in all of the above is not simple. What does it depend on, what's the key to success in these areas? It all depends on the state of a person's heart. The *Mesillas Yesharim* (chap. 16) speaks at length about the levels of purity of heart. He cites the *pasuk* (*Mishlei* 23:26), "My son, give your heart to Me," stating that this is the *ikkar* — the status of one's heart, how much his heart is a "*lev tov*." Indeed, Chazal say (*Pirkei Avos* 2:9), "What is the good path a person should cling to? *Lev tov*, a good heart"! Where should a person invest effort, where should he improve? In a *lev tov*!

There are *madreigos* in "*lev tov*." Improvement is possible and there are ways to attain these levels so that one's heart can become better and better. But if a person fails to do whatever is possible, he is lacking in *sheleimus*.

### Everything Is in Heaven's Hands

Regarding the mitzvah of *emunah*, it states (*Shemos* 20:2), "I am Hashem your G-d Who took you out of Mitzrayim." This is a commandment to believe that everything is in Heaven's hands, just as we saw the Divine providence in Yetzias Mitzrayim. **After all, Hashem's kindnesses accompany each person at**

**every single moment, from the day he's born. He is alive and constantly developing in both *gashmiyus* and *ruchniyus*, and everything is in Heaven's hands! All his successes and whatever he has is in Heaven's hands.** But does everyone think about this? Thoughts of this manner are against human nature. A person naturally forgets about this.

When Rabbeinu Yonah discusses the attribute of submissiveness (*Shaarei Teshuvah* 1:12), he writes the following: "He does not remember his Creator Who created him *וְשׁ מֵאֵין*, something from nothing, and performs *chesed* with him, and His hand guides him at all times, and He guards his soul at every moment." This is *emunah*, believing that Hashem leads man and protects his soul at every given moment. We must live with this *emunah*, we must believe that every moment of life is a *chesed* from Hashem, from the day he's born till his old age, constantly. This is true both in the spiritual realm and the physical realm; everything is in Heaven's hands. This obligates us to make sure that we lead our lives with *emunah*.

*Emunah* is not something that comes naturally — we must make it our mindset. Chazal said about Avraham Avinu (*Bereishis Rabbah* 39:1) that on his own, he arrived at the belief that there is no palace without an owner. This is a *madreigah* of intelligent understanding, the *madreigah* of *emunah*.

### Expressing Thanks for Hashem's Kindnesses

There's an obligation to show gratitude. Once a person has the *emunah* that everything is in Heaven's hands, and he knows a person's entire life is due to Hashem's kindness and great mercy, it follows that he's obligated to say thank You! While we do recite the Modim prayer in Shemoneh Esrei, and we say "We thank You... Rock of our lives, Shield of our salvation... for our lives that are given over in Your hands..." is it genuine thanks? Are we really saying this from the depths of our hearts? That all depends on the level of our *emunah*, it depends on how complete our *emunah* is. "I am Hashem Your G-d" is a *chiyuv* to believe with complete belief, with *emunah sheleimah*!

*Sheleimus* in *emunah* is not a simple *madreigah*. Here too, the obligation is individual, each person according to his abilities. If someone can increase his *emunah* even a little and he fails to do so, he already has a sin and a deficiency in *zechuyos*. Of course, each person has his own set of abilities, but he is judged according to what he can do. If there is something else he could do based on his abilities, even if it's just a tiny amount, one cannot fathom how many *zechuyos* he can attain by doing so. And the converse is true as well — if he

fails to improve even slightly, it is a sin and a deficiency in *zechuyos*.

### Increase Zechuyos by Learning Mussar

This is the reason for all our difficulties, those we are presently experiencing, and the imminent difficulties. **If there are *zechuyos*, there are no difficulties!** We need *zechuyos*; if we have *zechuyos*, hardships will not exist.

How can we generate *zechuyos*? How can we stand up against nature, against the yetzer hara? The only solution is: learn *mussar*. We need constant *chizuk*, as Rashi writes on the Gemara (*Berachos* 32b): “Four matters require *chizuk* constantly: Torah... and *emunah*.” *Emunah* requires constant *chizuk* because it’s against human nature. *Mussar sefarim* are what give us *chizuk*, and setting a daily *sefer* in *mussar* strengthens *emunah* and provides us with *zechuyos*.

Which *sefer* should someone learn? Each person should choose the *sefer* he feels will have an effect on him. If something is boring, it will not be effective. It’s an individual choice, based on each person’s nature, based on what interests him. Take, for example, *Chovos HaLevavos*. It’s a large *sefer* with 10 Gates. Each person should learn the chapters that interest him, and then it will have an influence on him. If he learns something he finds boring, it will not influence him. It’s important to learn an interesting *perek* from any of the *sefarim*.

There are four main *mussar sefarim* in *yeshivos*: *Mesillas Yesharim*, *Shaarei Teshuvah*, *Chovos HaLevavos*, and *Orchos Tzaddikim*. There are other *sefarim* that are effective and have an influence, such as *Pele Yoetz*, which also includes wonderful *divrei*

*chizuk* on a variety of matters and areas. The *sefer* provides many *eitzos* and much *chizuk*. There are many other *sefarim* like it too, and each person should find what speaks to him and helps him increase *emunah*, which gives him *zechuyos*.

This is the *eitzah* how to increase *zechuyos* now. Each person should do what he can to increase *zechuyos*, and in this way, he will influence others as well, **because when there are *baalei madreigos*, it has an influence on the general *tzibbur***. It’s known that *kedushah* is *mashpia*. Indeed, the Chazon Ish writes (*Kovetz Igros* 3:62) that a true *baal madreigah* has an influence on his surroundings, because *kedushah* is *mashpia*!

Every single one of us should increase *chizuk* on his own by learning a *mussar sefer* that interests him. Each person should choose a *perek* that interests him and learn it on a steady basis. Doing so will increase *zechuyos* for himself and will also have an influence on the entire *tzibbur*.

Additionally, doing so leads to a happy life. I’ve already mentioned often about the people who started learning *mussar* every day, and their house immediately became a happy house. One woman told her husband, “What happened to you? You changed, you’re a different person!” His transformation was the result of learning *mussar*.

This is the worthwhile *eitzah* for every single person which will give us the *zechuyos* to prevent decrees. After all, the decrees are the result of a deficiency in *zechuyos*. May Hashem help us all, every single one of us, including me, may all Klal Yisrael become strengthened in whatever needs strengthening. May we merit increasing *zechuyos*, and may we merit good, happy lives!

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.