

Darkei HaChizuk

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

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Regulating Ourselves and Our Children to Ahavas Torah

There is a halachah of *chinuch* of young children, to educate them and regulate them in mitzvos. It is a *chiyuv d'Rabbanan*, but the question is: upon whom does this obligation fall? Is the young child himself obligated, or is the *chiyuv* his father's obligation? There are two *shittos*, two opinions on the matter. (See Rashi and Tosfos in *Berachos* 48).

A grown person, however, is obligated to educate and habituate himself. He is obligated *mi'd'Oraisa* in all 613 mitzvos, but the *yetzer hara* does its utmost to hinder his mitzvah observance.

For this reason, every morning, we recite a *tefillah* and ask Hashem "regulate us [*targileinu*] in Your Torah, and attach us [*dabikeinu*] to Your mitzvos." We use two different terms: *targileinu* and *dabikeinu*, for Torah and for mitzvos. This is because we need *hergel*, habituation; without doing something regularly and habituating ourselves to it, it is very difficult. We need the *hergel*, *she'targileinu b'Torasecha!* Once we do something regularly, it becomes second nature and it's not difficult any more. But without *hergel*, it's very hard because the *yetzer hara* disturbs us, and it's against human nature.

This is the meaning of the following *pasuk* about Torah (*Mishlei* 5:19): "You shall constantly become intoxicated in love of it [Torah]." This *pasuk* was recited about Rabbi Elazar ben Pedas, who was so engrossed in his learning that he forgot where he left his outer garment. How does one attain such *ahavas haTorah* and such immersion in Torah? By *hergel*, by doing something on a regular basis. *She'targileinu b'Torasecha*, until habit becomes second nature.

Torah is the most important thing for our eternal life, and also for "ashrecha baOlam haZeh, you shall be fortunate in this world." That's why Hashem created man in the way He did — that if he comes to be purified and is *osek baTorah*, Heaven assists him and makes Torah enticing. He enjoys his learning and develops a love for it: "You shall constantly become intoxicated in love of it [Torah]." But one needs *tefillah* for this as well, *she'targileinu b'Torasecha*, because it is against our materialistic

nature. And then our habit becomes second nature, and we attain a love for Torah.

Attachment to and Habituation in Middos Tovos

We continue to ask for help: "And attach us to Your mitzvos." We find in *Pirkei Avos* (2:9) that Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai asked his students: What is the good path [*derech*] that man should attach himself [*yidbak*] to? They told him: a good heart, a good eye, and many other concepts connected to good *middos*. The term *derech*, "path," points to *middos*, as the *pasuk* states: "And go in His ways [*derachav*]," and Chazal expound: "Just as He is merciful, you too shall be merciful..." Rabbi Yochanan was asking, What's the good "*derech*," meaning which good *middos* must a person attach himself to [*l'hidabeik*]. The term *deveikus*, *yidbak*, is used to teach us that it should become natural. One nature should be to have good *middos*. It's possible that a person is already a baal *middos tovos*, but his good *middos* can get stronger and stronger, his nature can include even more *middos tovos*. That's what we mean when we ask: "And attach us [*dabikeinu*] to Your mitzvos... and attach us to the *yetzer hatov* and good deeds."

The way to achieve this is through habituation, regulating oneself to act in a certain way. When a person becomes used to acting in a certain way, he becomes "attached" to that way until it becomes his reality. He becomes someone with a reality and nature of good *middos*.

Rav Yisrael Salanter already wrote (see Ohr Yisrael letter 14) that davening for *tikkun hamiddos* without practical *hishtadlus* in that field is a "tefillas shav," a worthless prayer. If someone does not have good *middos* and he davens to attain good *middos*, but doesn't do anything else, it's like someone without eyes davening to be able to see. There is a method and a way, based on one's *kochos hanefesh*, to rectify and strengthen one's *middos tovos* — and that is through *hergel*, regulating himself in that *middah* until it becomes second nature.

The Zechus and Kedushah of Children's Torah

The Gemara states (*Shabbos* 119b): "The world exists solely due to the breath of *tinokos shel beis rabban*, young school children." This means that despite the young age of *tinokos shel beis rabban*, and despite the

fact that they are not obligated in mitzvos, their breath — the Torah they learn — upholds the world! “Upholds the world” means that it sanctifies the world and brings down an influence of *kedushah* on the entire world, even though they are not obligated in *esek haTorah* (due to their youth they are exempt from the mitzvos). But even though they aren’t obligated, their Torah, the actual *kedushah* of Torah, has an influence and upholds the world. As we said, “upholds the world” means it brings *kedushah* to the entire world — it brings *kevod Shamayim* to the world. After all, the entire world was only created to bring glory to Hashem’s name, as the *pasuk* states (*Yeshayahu* 43:7): “I created it for My glory.” The *kevod Shamayim* we have in the world is the result of “the breath [the Torah uttered] of the mouths of young school children” since it is breath without sin. Even though they aren’t *bnei chiyuva*, they aren’t obligated in mitzvos, their Torah is *mashpia* and it upholds the world.

The same Gemara tells us that Rav Papa told Abaye: “*Didi v’didach, mai?*” That is, what about our Torah? How does our Torah rate? Abaye told him: “*Hevel* [breath, Torah study] that has sin cannot be compared to *hevel* that does not have sin.” That is, the ***hevel tinokos shel beis rabban* is *hevel* without sin, and it is considered greater than the Torah of Amoraim!** The Amoraim had the power to resurrect the dead, as it says (*Avodah Zarah* 10b), “*Zuti d’isa b’cho mechayeh meisim.*” There are many Gemaras that relate how Amoraim revived dead people. And yet, the Torah of young school children is greater than the Torah of the Amoraim! Because theirs is *hevel* without *cheit*. This is how far-reaching is the influence of the *kedushas haTorah* of young school children.

Secular Studies — Lack of Kedushah

For this reason, wherever children learn Torah sanctifies the world, and it brings down an influence of *kedushah* on the entire world. When it comes to secular studies, on the other hand, children should only be taught the bare necessities — simple arithmetic, addition, subtraction, multiplication and division — only whatever is necessary and nothing more! The rest of the time should be dedicated solely to Torah, because it sanctifies and upholds the world. Less Torah means less *kedushah*.

Children’s *limud haTorah* upholds the world. What does “the world” mean? The entire world! ***Tinokos shel beis rabban* that learn here [in Eretz Yisrael] bring down an influence of *kedushah* in Australia and North America and South America as well, till the farthest distance that exists. The Torah that is learned here has an influence of *kedushah*.** That’s the power of the Torah of *tinokos shel beis rabban*, and specifically young children, *ketanim*! While they are not *bnei chiyuva*, their

Torah is still so important, and if they learn less Torah, there is a lack of *kedushah* in the entire world.

That’s why anyone who is involved in teaching young children Torah has a tremendous *zechus*. Conversely, it is a severe sin to prevent *limud haTorah* of young children or to incorporate even a small amount of secular studies. Only absolutely necessary subjects are permitted, things that cannot be done without, but studies that aren’t necessary?!

Torah Gives Life in Both Worlds

The truth is that even when an adult learns Torah, he sanctifies himself and the entire world, and he is *mashpia kedushah* on the entire world because the Torah sanctifies. Every single moment of learning increases *kedushah*, and less Torah translates into a lack of *kedushah*. On one side is the *kedushah*, and on the other side, it’s *chas v’shalom* the opposite.

This is the story that’s brought in the Gemara (*Shabbos* 30b) about Dovid HaMelech, who asked HaKadosh Baruch Hu, “Hashem, inform me of my end” (*Tehillim* 39:5), he wanted to know when he’d pass away. HaKadosh Baruch Hu told him that he’d die on a Shabbos. He asked, Which one? Hashem did not tell him. So what did Dovid HaMelech do? Every single Shabbos, he sat and learned without stopping. The power of his Torah’s *kedushah* stopped the Malach HaMaves from touching him. When the Malach HaMaves realized what was happening, he created a thundering noise in the trees behind Dovid HaMelech’s palace. Dovid went out to investigate where the noise was coming from, but he continued learning all the while. However, as he was walking down the steps, the step beneath him broke, and he stopped learning for a moment. At that moment, the Malach HaMaves was able to reach him and take his soul.

This shows us how as long as a person is *osek baTorah*, the Malach HaMaves has no control over him due to the sanctity of Torah. Torah is called *Toras Chaim*, and not only *Chayei Netzach*, eternal life, but it is also *Toras Chaim* in this world, and serves to help us continue living in this world. Of course, we are talking about a Torah life. That’s the power of Torah.

The *Nefesh HaChaim* (4:33) expounds on the *pasuk* in *Mishlei* (3:18): “It is a Tree of Life to those who hold fast to it” — the Torah is compared to a tree of life. Just as when a man is shipwrecked and floundering in the ocean without his ship, when a piece of wood comes floating past him, he grabs onto it and holds it tightly so he won’t drown. As long as he holds onto the wood, the wood holds him so he won’t drown, but if he lets go of the wood for even one second, he will drown immediately. So too, the Torah is a Tree of Life for those who hold onto it. It

gives us eternal life and life in this world. Every single second of Torah!

We must be aware of this. We are unaware of the importance of just one moment of Torah learning — even people who are already *osek baTorah*. If they have one more available moment for learning, one cannot imagine the *zechuyos* and the importance of that one moment of Torah, nor can we imagine the tremendous level of *kedushah* he is sanctified with and he sanctifies the world with.

Therefore, “*ashreinu, mah tov chelkeinu*, how fortunate we are, how great is our lot” that we have the Torah and we are *osek baTorah*, each person as much as he can with his individual abilities, and with the opportunities he has. We’ve already mentioned what the *Mesillas Yesharim* writes at the end of his *sefer*: there could be a simple man who works at menial jobs who is a *chassid* with the attributes and *madreigos* of piety; each person according to his situation.

It’s known that a shoemaker in Tel Aviv who fixed shoes for a living was a *baal madreigah* — because his mind was on matters of *kedushah*. Highly respectable people would go to him and ask for *berachos*. He would bless them and his *berachos* came true — such a thing is possible! Each person according to his abilities and his circumstances can be *davuk*, attached to, *kedushah*.

The *Mesillas Yesharim* tells us sets the path, and shows us how one can do this. The first thing is Torah. He cites a *beraisa* of Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair which says that Torah brings a person to *zehirus*, cautiousness, and all the other *maalos* that follow. *Tefillah* is also important, but as we said, *tefillah* alone is not effective for changing *middos*. However, we daven “regulate us in Your Torah and make us cling to Your mitzvos.” This is a prayer where we ask to receive the means that brings a person to change and rectify his *middos*. For this, *tefillah* can help. Therefore, *ashreinu, mah tov chelkeinu*.

One Who Comes to Be Purified

Another thing is tried-and-true, and that is that a heartfelt *tefillah* is also *mashpia*. I’ve already told the story of a secular Jew who arrived from Chutz LaAretz and went to Kosel HaMaaravi. While at the Kosel, something started stirring in him, and he thought: If belief in Hashem is true, I want to know about it. He was not a believer and he did not know what *emunah* was, but he wasn’t an *apikorus* or a denier. He just wasn’t sure about where the truth really lied. At the Kosel, he had some thoughts of teshuvah that he wanted to know the truth. And at that very same moment, a kiruv activist approached him and asked him if he wanted to learn about Judaism!

There’s another story about a young Jewish girl who was quite removed from *emunah* and did not the truth. She went to visit a priest in France to learn about Christianity, to find out about the “belief” of that religion. He told her: You are Jewish, first go learn about Judaism! She actually went to learn about Yiddishkeit and was *zocheh* to strengthen herself; she became a *baalas teshuvah* and built a Torah home.

Once when I related this story in public, one of the listeners came over to me and said: That young woman who the priest sent to do teshuvah and gave her back her Yiddishkeit is my mother.” Of course, this was all *hashgachah pratis* from *Shamayim*. Perhaps it happened because she went searching for the truth, and since she simply did not know where the truth was, she went to the priest. In the *zechus* of desiring to find the truth, she merited *siyatta d’Shemaya* and the priest told her to learn about Judaism.

The rule is like Chazal say (*Yoma* 38b), “One who comes to be purified is helped.” We all are coming to be purified, and the way to do so is by learning *mussar*, all the *mussar sefarim*. Of course, one must learn interesting *mussar sefarim*, because if the learning is boring it will not have a *hashpaah*. Any interesting *mussar sefer* has a *hashpaah*; this is “coming to be purified” and someone like this will be helped.

Aside from the *siyatta d’Shemaya* a person merits, it is also the natural consequence of learning *mussar*. Indeed, Rav Chaim Volozhiner told Rav Zundel of Salant, “It’s good to learn all *mussar sefarim*, but *Mesillas Yesharim* should be your guide.” *Mesillas Yesharim* provides a person with a natural path and method — based on his *kochos hanefesh* — how to advance in all the *maalos*, one level after another.

I once heard that it’s not necessary to start at the beginning of *Mesillas Yesharim*; you can start from the middle too, from *Neki’us* [cleanliness] or *Prishus* [abstinence] and the like, and there’s no need to go in order. However, it’s much easier to follow the *sefer*’s order. But the main thing is that each person should do what attracts him.

If so, *ashreinu, mah tov chelkeinu* that we are able to come and be purified, and that we come to hear *mussar* which is “coming to be purified.” In this merit, may we be *zocheh* to *siyatta d’Shemaya* and helped. May we all merit to be purified and to purify and have a *hashpaah* on others!

Rabbeinu shlita's Address at Dirshu's Siyum of Daf HaYomi B'Halachah

Let us address the *inyan* of learning halachah and *Mishnah Berurah*. The Chafetz Chaim wrote many *sefarim*, and the purpose of all these *sefarim* was *zikkui harabbim*. At first, he wrote his *sefer Chafetz Chaim on lashon hara* and then he wrote many more *sefarim*, all for *zikkui harabbim*.

The *Mishnah Berurah* is for *zikkui harabbim* in *halachah l'maaseh*. Chazal already said (*Niddah 73a*), "Whoever learns *halachos* every day is guaranteed that he is a "ben olam haba." The *Mishnah Berurah*, *chelek Orach Chaim* is *halachah l'maaseh*, practical halachah, for matters that occur in our daily life, from the beginning of the day until the day's end, including Shabbos, Yom Tov, and Rosh Chodesh. They are all *halachos* of daily matters, and it is a great *zikkui harabbim* for safeguarding halachah, on the entire section of *Orach Chaim*! The Chafetz Chaim had *siyatta d'Shemaya* for *zikkui harabbim*; whatever he started he had *siyatta d'Shemaya* and he completed it.

Therefore, learning *Mishnah Berurah* in *halachah l'maaseh* on a steady, daily basis is really something very important in order to know what to do and how to act — every *berachah*, every *tefillah*, what to think, what to have *kavanah* for, every single daily *hanhagah* of the entire year — it's all written in *Mishnah Berurah*. It is a great personal *zechus* for who learn *Mishnah Berurah*, as Chazal said, they are "guaranteed" to be a ben Olam HaBa. If one has a daily *k'vius* in halachah, he surely will merit Olam HaBa! Because he will fulfill all his obligations.

The truth is, it's not simple for a person to fulfill all his obligations, and that's why it's necessary — as the *Mishnah Berurah* writes as well — to learn *mussar sefarim* daily. Indeed, Chazal say "I created the yetzer hara, I created the Torah as an antidote to it." What is the *tavlin*? The entire Torah, but the main *tavlin* is *sifrei hayirah*, Torah that discusses *yiras Shamayim*. It is a necessity, because aside from *yiras Shamayim* being a mitzvah in and of itself, it is imperative to have *yiras Shamayim* in order to fulfill the 613 mitzvos, whether in deed, speech, or thought. A person must know halachah in all aspects of his life. The *Mishnah Berurah* also obligates us to learn *mussar* and to fulfill whatever the *mussar* teaches us, because *mussar* is the *ikkar*.

B'ezras Hashem, all those who learn *Mishnah Berurah* are considered "coming to be purified," because, after all, why are they learning *Mishnah Berurah*? In order to know and to fulfill, and one who comes to be purified is *zocheh* to *siyatta d'Shemaya*, that Heaven helps them. If a person is also intent on purifying others, he will surely have *siyatta d'Shemaya*. And all those who are *osek* in *zikkui harabbim* in *Mishnah Berurah*, are coming to be purified, and they are *zocheh* to *siyatta d'Shemaya* to purify and to be *mezakeh es harabbim*.

Hasmadah is also very important, in addition to all this. The *Mishnah Berurah* obligates us in this, in fulfilling halachah and taking care not to be *mevatel Torah*. *Hasmadah* in Torah is not considered *middas chassidus*, but *bittul Torah* is a sin! When a person is *osek baTorah*, he does not have a sin. How much time should he be learning? It's individual — each person as much as he can. The *Mesillas Yesharim* writes that even a menial laborer can be a pious man and a *tzaddik yesod olam*, as long as he is doing what he must do, and when he does what he can and he cannot do more, this is *sheleimus* and he becomes *haadam hashaleim*.

It's very important to know that *esek haTorah* and *hasmadah* are not acts of piety; they are a total *chiyuv*, an obligation! At the same time, it's also very pleasant to learn Torah because *divrei Torah* are "sweeter than honey" (*Tehillim 19:11*), and are "honey and milk under your tongue" (*Shir HaShirim 4:11*). The Torah is compared to water, wine, and all flavors, because the Torah is something essential. Physical things that are essential for the body are sweet, because if they wouldn't be sweet, man wouldn't eat them. But since he is hungry and enjoys the food and drink, he eats. Hashem created man in this manner so that he'd be able to survive. Animals also have a similar nature. The same is true when it comes to the *neshamah's* need for eternal life, eternity for man's *nefesh*, since eternal life in Olam HaBa is the best possible thing, as it says (*Yeshayahu 64:3*): "No eye has seen it, Hashem, aside from You." That's why there is special sweetness in *esek haTorah*, because the Torah is the most important thing for Olam HaBa! And HaKadosh Baruch Hu created the Torah with sweetness so that man will be *osek baTorah* to sustain his *nefesh* for eternal life.

As we said, the *Mishnah Berurah* obligates us in this, and by fulfilling the words of the *Mishnah Berurah*, we are *zocheh* to eternal life. One cannot imagine the *zechuyos* involved. All those who are *osek baTorah*, who learn Torah, and those who influence others to learn are garnering tremendous *zechuyos*. *B'ezras Hashem*, may all Klal Yisrael be *zocheh* to be among those who merit and bring merit to others, *kein yehi ratzon*!

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