

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 Tazria 5782

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Our Obligations in This Time

Maran Sar HaTorah ztvk"l's Petirah — Words of Hisorerus and Chizuk

The Mashpia of the Entire Generation Is Gone

Now we don't have Rav Chaim, who was a tremendously great person, and there's no need to talk about his *gadlus*; he was very great. The main thing is the *hashpaah* that there was, he was *mashpia*, he had an influence on the entire generation. An *adam gadol* and a *tzaddik* has an influence on the entire generation. It's known that there is a *hashpaah*.

The Chazon Ish writes as much in a letter (*Igros Chazon Ish*, 3:62): When there is a true *baal Torah* somewhere, he has a visible *hashpaah* on the entire area. It says a "true *baal Torah*" — it doesn't say "*gaon*," it says a "true *baal Torah*." This is someone who is *oisek baTorah* and conducts himself according to the Torah's laws. When someone like this is among us, he has a visible *hashpaah* on the entire area. Furthermore, there's a hidden *hashpaah* on more distant places — while one cannot see the *hashpaah* in those distant places, it is still present.

Here there was certainly a tremendous *hashpaah* on all of us. And now we are missing that *hashpaah*. The Chazon Ish spoke about every *baal Torah*; he said that every *baal Torah* has a visible *hashpaah* on his area and a hidden *hashpaah* on more distant places. But here, he was famous throughout the world; everyone used his *sefarim*.

And all the *sefarim* he composed are *zikkui harabbim*: there's *Orchos Yosher* and many other *sefarim*, which are *mamesh zikkui harabbim* — and they are *mashpia*. His influence reached all corners of the world, and now it's missing. His *berachos* and his *tefillos* are missing too; his influence is lacking throughout the world.

So what does this obligate us to do? We must fill in the missing *hashpaah*; we must be *mashpia* on ourselves. We must do things that will be *mashpia* on us. What areas should we focus on? Our main focus should be on the three matters that hold up the world, as they say in *Pirkei*

Avos (1:2): The world stands on three things: On Torah, *avodah*, and *gemillus chassadim*.

Esek HaTorah – a Zechus and an Obligation

Let's start with Torah, *esek haTorah*. There is a *chiyuv*, an obligation, to be *osek baTorah*, as it states in Krias Shema (*Devarim* 6:7): "And you shall speak in them, when you sit in your house, and when you walk on the way, and when you go to sleep, and when you wake up, and teach them to your children." Similarly, the *pasuk* in *Yehoshua* states (*Yehoshua* 1:8), "And you shall speak in it day and night." This is a prophecy that was given to Yehoshua, telling him that this is how it should be: Speak in it day and night. This is a *chiyuv* to learn Torah with *hasmadah*, diligence.

Aside from being a *chiyuv*, it is also a great *zechus*, and *esek haTorah* gives a person *zechuyos*, as Chazal said (*Avodah Zarah* 19b), "Whoever is *osek baTorah*, has success with his assets." Learning Torah gives a person success in his *parnasah*.

By the way, everyone should know that *parnasah* is a necessity, and it's better to earn *parnasah* from *esek haTorah*, by giving private lessons or by teaching in a cheder. Even teaching *aleph-beis* to young children in cheder is *divrei Torah* and it's *Toras emes*. One fulfills "and teach them to your children" in this manner. *Aleph-beis* is the beginning and the foundation for a child's all future Torah learning, but besides that, it is Torah itself. When someone teaches *aleph-beis* to young children, he is being *osek baTorah* and *mezakeh es harabbim* in Torah, and he is of the *matzdikei harabbim*, those who bring merit to the masses. Indeed, Chazal say (*Bava Basra* 8b) that *melamdei tinokos* (those who teach young children) are called *matzdikei harabbim*.

Esek haTorah is a tremendous *zechus*. On the other hand, *bittul Torah* is a grave sin, and Chazal say (*Sanhedrin*

99a) that if someone is able to learn Torah and he doesn't learn, the following *pasuk* is attributed to him: "For he has despised Hashem's word and nullified His commandments, and he will surely be cut off..." If he is able to learn Torah but does not, he is called "one who has despised Hashem's word," for, after all, why isn't he learning Torah? Because he is not *machshiv esek haTorah*, and if someone is not *machshiv* Torah, it's called "despising" Torah. He despises and degrades Torah learning.

On one hand, the reward for *esek haTorah* is vast, as they say, "Talmud Torah is equal to them all," and we merit the dividends in this world, while the principal waits for us in Olam HaBa. On the other hand, *esek haTorah* is an obligation, and it is a grave sin not to be involved in Torah study.

We find further in the Midrash (*Pesichta d'Eichah Rabbah* 2) that HaKadosh Baruch Hu was forgiving when it came to the sins of idol worship, immorality, and murder, but He did not overlook the iniquity of *ma'asah shel Torah*, degradation of Torah. The Midrash does not use the words "*bittul Torah*," it states "*ma'asah shel Torah*," because if a person is not involved in Torah learning, it's called "despising and degrading Torah." He does not lend the proper respect to *esek haTorah* — this is the meaning of "For he has despised Hashem's word."

I've mentioned already what I heard from my *rebbe* Rav E.E. Dessler *zt"l* in the name of Rav Chaim Brisker *zt"l*: The Gemara's words "if someone is able to learn Torah and he doesn't learn," is not only referring to quantity, in that he has time to learn and he does not — that is the simple *pshat*. After all, if someone could have learned during that time and he did not — well, why was he lazy, why didn't he learn? That's why it's called "he has despised Hashem's word." But Rav Chaim added another twist to this: Even when someone is constantly learning, if he could delve more deeply and have greater *havanah* by concentrating more, by concentrating and directing his thoughts only to Torah, but he does not do so, this too is called "he is able to learn Torah and he doesn't learn." Of course, this is individual, and each person is judged according to his abilities, but if he has the abilities to learn with greater concentration and is too lazy to make the effort, it's called "*ki dvar Hashem bazah*, he has despised the word of Hashem."

Chiddushei Torah Transform a Person

In addition to the importance of *esek haTorah*, creating *chiddushei Torah* is a very special *maalah*. In Devorah HaNevi'ah's *shirah*, it says (*Shoftim* 5:8): "*Yivchar Elokim chadashim*," which literally means "Hashem will choose the new ones." The Yalkut there says that this *pasuk* is talking about *chiddushei Torah* — Hashem chooses the new ones, the *chiddushei Torah*. So not only

should a person learn Torah, he should also come up with *chiddushim*, if he can, of course. So what's called *chiddushei Torah*? Anything that's new to a person, anything he didn't know before and now he knows — that's a *chiddush* for him, and it's called *chiddushei Torah*. (This will be discussed further soon.)

The *pasuk* says Hashem "*yivchar*, will choose," using the term "*yivchar*," because *chiddushei Torah* make a person *muvchar*, chosen. When someone comes up with *chiddushei Torah*, Hashem makes him chosen! He becomes a chosen person.

In our *tefillos* on Yom Tov, we say, "*Atah bichartanu mikol ha'amim*, You have chosen us from all the nations." "Chosen" here does not have the same meaning as someone who has two items to choose from and he picks out the one he likes best. "*Bichartanu*" means that HaKadosh Baruch Hu made us chosen, Am Yisrael is the most preferred nation of all nations, and we have a unique personality and special attributes that no other nation has. Indeed, Chazal say (*Yevamos* 79a): There are three signs in this nation: they are merciful, bashful, and perform acts of lovingkindness.

Am Yisrael Is the Chosen Nation

I once spoke with someone who is a world-traveler and has frequent meetings with both Jews and non-Jews about international matters. He said that you can clearly see the difference between a Jew and a non-Jew. Jews have a different personality; they don't have the same personality as non-Jews, because Jews are "merciful, bashful, and perform acts of lovingkindness." How did that happen? *Atah bichartanu!* HaKadosh Baruch Hu made us chosen, and gave us this special personality.

In *Birkas HaTorah* we say, "*Asher bachar banu mikol ha'amim*, Who has chosen us from all the nations." The explanation of this is that HaKadosh Baruch Hu made us more chosen than all the nations by giving us these three signs, which are exclusive to Klal Yisrael.

The Gemara (*Shabbos* 31a) tells the story of a potential convert, but before converting, he wanted to learn the entire Torah while standing on one foot. He approached both Hillel and Shammai, and Hillel told him, "Do not do to your friend what you would not want done to you." It must be that he wanted to know what he would gain if he'd become a Yid. After all, now he's a non-Jew and is only obligated to keep the Seven Mitzvos Bnei Noach — he observes them and thus already fulfills his obligations and is a righteous gentile. So why would it be worthwhile for him to convert and take upon himself Torah and mitzvos — what would he gain from this?

Hillel answered him: "Do not do to your friend what you would not want done to you." That is, by converting, he

will receive a Jewish personality of *middos tovos*; he won't be able to cause pain to another person and he won't do to others what he wouldn't want done to him. The Maharsha points out that Hillel didn't tell him "Love your fellow as yourself," because this is a *kum v'aseh*, an active mitzvah. He merely told him not to cause pain to others, which is a passive mitzvah. See the Maharsha there. *V'ahavta* as an active mitzvah is much harder, and Hillel told him about the easier mitzvah — not to cause pain to others. Just as he wouldn't want others to cause him pain, he shouldn't cause them pain.

This is the special personality unique only to Am Yisrael. They are merciful — a passive mitzvah, *shev v'al taaseh*; perform acts of lovingkindness — active mitzvos, *kum v'aseh*. Non-Jews do not have this personality and it's hard for them to behave in this manner. For Klal Yisrael, however, it is their innate personality and nature. That's what Hillel told the potential convert: when you convert, you will gain a *Yiddishe neshamah*, and your personality will change!

Every Additional Piece of Knowledge and Understanding Is a Chiddush

Let's go back to what we discussed about Torah, that there is a special *maalah* of *chiddushei Torah*. *Chiddushei Torah* are not just when someone comes up with a *chiddush* on his own; rather, every new *yediah* that a person adds to his learning is *chiddushei Torah* — because for him, it is something new, a *chiddush* that he did not know before. *Chazarah*, reviewing one's learning is also considered *chiddushei Torah*, because reviewing gives a person better clarity and his Torah becomes clearer.

The *sefer Keser Rosh* (*nun-vav*) writes in the name of Rav Chaim Volozhiner: "*Chiddushei Torah* are whatever a person learns more and clarifies thoroughly. As long as you are involved in it, you will find *taam*, flavor, in it, and the more you review, new *taamim* and explanations come up. That is called *chiddushei Torah*, whether he came up with the *divrei Torah* or whether someone else did — as long as the matter comes to light."

The main benefit of *chazarah* is when you review on another day. It is well known that it is not very beneficial to review Torah on the same day you learned it. However, when you review the next day, many matters that you didn't understand initially now become clear. It is known that this is the reality. It has happened that there are matters that a person did not understand the first time, and after reviewing it another day, he understands something else, and when he reviews it for a third time on a different day, he understands even more, and on the fourth day, everything is finally clear. When a person reviews *divrei Torah* four times over four days, every single review

clarifies the Torah more, and this additional clarity is called *chiddushei Torah*.

This is Torah and this is how one attains *hatzlachah* in Torah; this is also "*ashrecha baOlam haZeh*." *Esek haTorah* gives a person a happy life, *chaim me'usharim*. The greatest joy that exists in this world is only *esek haTorah*! When a person is busy learning Torah, he is happy and fortunate, **and there is no greater fortune or happiness than this.**

The Virtues of Avodah and Gemillus Chasadim

The second pillar that upholds the world is *avodah*, which is *tefillah*. *Tefillah* is also a *taanug*, pleasure, as is known. The *Shulchan Aruch* states (*Orach Chaim* 98:1) that there is a level of *tefillah* where one reaches nullification of the physical senses, and comes close to the level of prophecy. This means that one's physical senses don't work when he davens; it's as if he does not have a body. The Kuzari writes (3:5) that during Shemoneh Esrei "all one's senses shall be like they are panic-stricken, fearful to perform their leader's command. They will not feel pain, nor will they feel loss if it shall occur." That is, one's physical abilities don't work, and his body seems to be paralyzed, because his mind is wrapped up in *emunah* and the feeling that he is standing in front of the King.

We've already told stories about *gedolei Yisrael* who, when they were davening Shemoneh Esrei, didn't hear when people spoke to them. One of the *gedolim* was davening Shemoneh Esrei out loud, to increase his *kavanah* (the halachah is that if one will have more *kavanah* if he davens out loud, he should do so, as long as it will not disturb anyone else), and the people around him realized that he forgot "*yaaleh v'yavo*." They said: "*Yaaleh v'yavo, yaaleh v'yavo*," but he didn't hear them. Because when he davened, there were no senses and no physical body. This is a *madreigah*. There are many similar stories about *gedolei Yisrael*. This is the power of *tefillah* — which is *avodas Hashem* — when it is performed with such *deveikus* and such concentration until one reaches nullification of physicality and his senses don't work. This is *avodah*.

The third matter is *gemillus chasadim* with *ahavas chesed*. There are many levels of *ahavas chesed*, up until the *madreigah* of Avraham Avinu, who was the *amud hachesed*. He sat at the entrance to his tent, on the third day after his *bris milah*, in the heat of the day, to wait for guests. Despite the physical pain he was suffering, and even though he already almost one hundred years old, he felt bad that he didn't have anyone to do *chesed* for. He missed the *chesed*; it hurt him and he felt bad because of it. He felt so bad that Hashem had mercy on him and performed a miracle. Three angels in the guise of men were sent so that he could do *chesed* for them and satiate his desire and great love for *chesed*.

A person can reach such a lofty *madreigah* of *chesed*, a level where he loves *chesed* and enjoys doing *chesed* — and if he doesn't have anyone to do *chesed* for, he is pained because he doesn't have what he likes. A miracle was performed for Avraham Avinu, and angels who looked like people were sent so that Avraham could do *chesed* for them and enjoy his act of *chesed*. This is a *madreigah* of *ahavas chesed* — it hurts him if he cannot do as much *chesed* as he's used to doing.

These are the spiritual *madreigos* that Am Yisrael has — the non-Jews do not have these *madreigos*, only Am Yisrael does. And we are all Klal Yisrael, we are all chosen — “Who has chosen us from all the nations.” However, the yetzer hara sways us to make many calculations and that's what disturbs us from attaining these *madreigos*. We need *siyatta d'Shemaya* to overcome the yetzer hara so that we can conduct ourselves according to our true personalities, according to who we really are. We need *siyatta d'Shemaya* for this.

A Steady Daily Learning Session in Mussar

Therefore, the solution is to be *osek* in *mussar*, to learn *mussar sefarim* on a steady basis, because “water wears away stones.” When there is a steady learning session in *mussar* every day, if a person learns a *sefer* that interests him, it is *mashpia*. A person should learn *mussar* for a few minutes a day. The Maaseh Rav (*ois samech*) writes in the name of the Gra that one should learn *mussar* a few times a day, not just once a day. Actually, it is accepted in *yeshivos* to learn just once a day, a half hour before Maariv. The main thing is that it should be a daily, steady learning session.

The Chafetz Chaim writes about his times (*Beis Yisrael* 89) that “nowadays everyone sees that it's necessary,” that it's necessary to have a steady learning session in *mussar* every day. Of course, it must be an interesting *sefer*, because if it's boring, it will not have a *hashpaah*. Each person must choose a *perek* that interests him or an interesting *mussar sefer*.

This is what we can do to truly become “chosen,” to make ourselves “chosen” and to rise in *madreigah* — one *madreigah* after another. Adding another *madreigah* every day can only happen by learning some *mussar* every single day.

Maran HaRav Shteinman *zt"l* once said that if a person learns *mussar* for five minutes every day it will have an effect — as long as it's steady and constant. It will have more and more of a *hashpaah* every day. I've already told stories about families who realized that their father or husband suddenly became a totally different person, with a completely different mood, and the atmosphere at home became more pleasant. What happened? He started to learn *mussar*! And he learned a little *mussar* every single day.

This is what we can do and what we must do now, now that we are lacking Rav Chaim's *hashpaah* and we need to be *mashpia* on ourselves. The way to create this *hashpaah* is by having a steady learning session in *mussar*. *B'ezras Hashem* may we all be *zocheh* to make ourselves “chosen,” every single one of us should become *muvchar*, *muvchar*, and *muvchar* — chosen, and more chosen, and even more chosen. May we rise up many, many *madreigos b'siyatta d'Shemaya*!

Please daven for
גיטה פייגה בת רבקה
לרפואה שלימה ומהירה
בתוך כל חולי ישראל

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