

Darkei HaChizuk

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

A Sichah from Maran Rosh HaYeshivah Rav Gershon Edelstein *shlita* • Parashas Pinchas 5782

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How To Withstand Nisyonos

Chazal say (*Sanhedrin* 7a), “A *dayan* should always imagine that a sword is positioned between his feet and that Gehinnom is open beneath him.” A *dayan* must *pasken* the halachah; he makes the decisions when he *paskens* whether a person is innocent or guilty. Sometimes there is pressure and *dayan* must withstand the *nisayon* of rendering true, just judgment. That’s why Chazal gave this *eitzah* — that a *dayan* should be aware that he is like a person with a sword between his feet and that Gehinnom is open beneath him.

A sword and Gehinnom symbolize two things: “A sword” is a *mashal* for *yissurim* of this world, and “Gehinnom” refers to spiritual *yissurim* in Olam HaBa. We must remember that humans can experience both physical *yissurim* and spiritual *yissurim*. And this is the advice to a *dayan*: Use this fear to withstand your *nisayon*. Envision yourself — meaning, it should be as clear to you as if you actually see it — that if you bend the judgment *chas v’shalom*, even slightly, even a hairsbreadth, then there will be a sword in this world, there will be terrible suffering. And there will be spiritual *yissurim* in Olam HaBa.

Spiritual *yissurim* are worse than physical suffering, because there is a limit to how much suffering a person can humanly bear — there are some terrible *yissurim* that the body cannot withstand. However, the *nefesh* continues to exist and can bear even the most difficult suffering. We cannot even fathom what terrible *yissurim* there may be. The *nefesh* is spiritual, and it endures even while the suffering continues. The Gemara (*Gittin* 57a) tells us about Bilaam, Titus, and Oso HaIsh who were all sentenced to Gehinnom for generations upon generations, and they continue to suffer *yissurim*.

Middos after Death

The Gemara there tells us that before Onkelos converted, he wanted to know if it was worthwhile for him to become a Jew. He used sorcery to bring up Bilaam, Titus, and Oso HaIsh from their graves. Bilaam and Titus told him that if he wants to be happy, he should cause *tzaros* to the Jews, because it says, “Whoever causes trouble to the Jewish nation becomes a leader.” Meaning, he will receive honor and become important. Onkelos asked them how they were faring in the next world — did they receive Gehinnom or Gan Eden? They answered that they were suffering terribly in Gehinnom; profound, unfathomable suffering. And despite that, they still told him to cause trouble to the Jewish nation.

My rebbi Rav Dessler *zt”l* said that we learn from this how a person’s bad *middos* remain with his soul even after death, because *middos* are part of the *nefesh*’s nature. Even when a person’s body is no longer, his bad *middos* are still there — just as we see with Bilaam and Titus.

The Gemara relates that afterwards, Onkelos brought up Oso HaIsh, who a Jew who “converted” who was killed, as the Gemara relates (*Sanhedrin* 43a), “He was brought out to be stoned because performed sorcery, and incited and enticed (*meisis u’meidiach*) the Jewish nation.” He performed sorcery, tried to sway both individuals (*meisis*) and the community (*meidiach*) from Torah, and he was given the death sentence, as is befitting for such a sinner.

He too told Onkelos that he suffers terribly in Gehinnom, and Onkelos asked him what he should do. Oso HaIsh answered: “Try to benefit them, do not seek to harm them.” Only do good to the Jews; make sure not to cause them trouble.

The Difference Between Bnei Yisrael and Other Nations

The Gemara there says, “See the difference between sinners of the Jewish nation and prophets of other nations.” I heard from my rebbi Rav Dessler *zt”l* that even though Bilaam was a prophet, he was a non-Jew, and his *nefesh* retained the bad *middos* of a non-Jew. So he told Onkelos to cause trouble to Klal Yisrael. Even after death, his bad *middos* were ingrained in his soul. Oso HaIsh had a Jewish *neshamah*, so even though he had been a *rasha*, his *nefesh* naturally had Jewish *middos*, and that’s why he told Onkelos to make sure to benefit Klal Yisrael.

Chazal told us (*Yevamos* 79a), “There are three signs in this nation: they are merciful, bashful, and perform acts of lovingkindness.” That’s the difference between Klal Yisrael and the other nations. Why? Because Hashem “chose” us from all the nations, and He made us special and chosen, with good attributes and special *middos tovos*. A non-Jew who converts also receives this nature.

The Gemara relates (*Shabbos* 31a) the story of a convert who wanted to convert if someone would teach him the entire Torah on one foot. We can explain this to mean that he wanted to know what he would gain if he’d convert; after all, he could be a respectable gentile, observe the Seven Mitzvos Bnei Noach and fulfill all his obligations. He wanted to hear “on one foot,” meaning, in short, why it was worthwhile for him to convert.

Hillel told him, “What is hateful to you, do not do unto others.” That is, by converting, you will receive a Jewish nature with good *middos*. You won’t do anything to others that you wouldn’t want others to do to you. The truth is, this is the meaning of the *pasuk*, “*V’ahavta l’reiacha kamocho*, Love your fellow as yourself.” Hillel only said it in the passive form, *shev v’al taaseh* (see the Maharsha), because he meant to tell the potential convert that he’d receive a Jewish *neshamah* if he’d convert. And then, his nature would change and he’d receive good *middos* as part of his soul’s nature. That’s what he stood to gain.

The Only Remedy Against the Yetzer Hara

Rav Yisrael Salanter wrote in *Iggeres HaMussar* that this Gemara about a *dayan* imagining he has a sword between his feet and Gehinnom opened beneath him applies to every single person, because every person is his own *dayan*. Every person has to make decisions about his behavior and actions — should he or shouldn’t he do this? On the one hand, he has a very powerful yetzer hara which is constantly persuading him to sin, so much so that he doesn’t even feel that it’s the yetzer hara. He thinks it’s his own desires — but it’s not him, it’s the yetzer hara seducing him! A person has to be like his own “*dayan*,” he has to decide how to behave. The *eitzah* for this is to strengthen one’s *yiras Shamayim*, to remember that he has a “sword” — *yissurim* of Olam HaZeh, and “Gehinnom” — *yissurim* of the *nefesh*. The only way to overpower the yetzer hara is by activating this fear, which is *yiras Shamayim*.

And what’s the *eitzah*? How does one do this *l’maaseh*? I’ll tell you a true story. Someone told me that he serves in a public position and he wields a lot of power. He can do favors for people, and he can also prevent people from receiving favors — legally and illegally. Many public matters depend on him, and he is under fierce pressure from all sides, but he withstands this *nisayon* and only does things legally. What gives him the inner strength to do so? Because he “saw *yiras Shamayim*” when he learned in yeshivah as a young man. He saw *gedolim* who had *yiras Shamayim*, and when he saw them, he saw fear, he saw what “*yiras Shamayim*” really is. This is how he acquired *yiras Shamayim* — and the impact it made on him lasted a lifetime.

Two Types of Torah Are a Tavlin

But if someone never saw a person with *yiras Shamayim*, and he doesn’t have anyone to go see, what can he do? It’s about situations like this that Chazal said, “I created the yetzer hara, and I created the Torah as a *tavlin* (spice/antidote) against it.” The Gemara relates (*Bava Basra* 16a), that if, on the day of judgement, a person claims that he had a yetzer hara and excuses himself by saying, “What could I have done?”, HaKadosh Baruch Hu will reply: “I created an antidote against it!” While there is such a thing as a yetzer hara, I’m the One Who created it, and I also created the remedy for it. If we did not have a yetzer hara, there would not be a way to earn reward. Without a yetzer hara, we have no *nisyonos* and there would be no reason to do *aveiros*, so then for what would we receive reward? That’s why we have a yetzer hara and we must overcome it. But there is an *eitzah* — *Torah tavlin*.

Rav Yisrael Salanter wrote in *Iggeres HaMussar* that all *divrei Torah* are an antidote against the yetzer hara. If someone learns *Perek ‘Shor Shenagach es haParah’* it will help him and protect him from speaking lashon hara and the like; however, there is a better *tavlin*. There is something that is a direct antidote against the yetzer hara: learning the Torah applicable to the specific *aveirah* you are trying to stay away from. For example, in order to combat the yetzer hara of lust for money, there is a special *tavlin* for desire for money; there’s a special *tavlin* for the desire for honor — learn parts of *mussar* that are specific for those sins. This is the *tavlin*, the direct antidote against the yetzer hara.

The *Mesillas Yesharim* writes (chapter 5) that if HaKadosh Baruch Hu, Who created man and also created the yetzer hara, and also created the Torah as an antidote to it, then this is certainly the only *eitzah* against the yetzer hara. There is no other *eitzah*. After all, this is the solution that HaKadosh Baruch Hu created: *Torah tavlin*. As we said, the entire Torah is the *tavlin*, the antidote, but there is a special Torah for every type of yetzer hara.

Eitzos for Correcting One’s Middos

For example, the desire for money is a yetzer hara. I know about people who wanted to earn money, and they sold and bought — because they were struck with money lust. In the end, they lost everything; all they gained was tremendous *bizyonos*.

It’s important to know that lust for money is a mistake, because it was already decreed on Rosh Hashanah, “who will be impoverished, and who will be wealthy.” Everything depends on one’s *zechuyos*; it has nothing to do with the natural scheme of things. Lust for money is a sin, because it is a deficiency in *emunah*! If a person needs *parnasah*, he should put in a normal amount of effort. But trying all sorts of “smart” schemes just to earn more and more? **Once a person has *parnasah* and is managing, if he tries to earn more, that’s the yetzer hara and it’s a sin.** And he’ll just end up being humiliated.

There’s an antidote (*tavlin*) against, and *eitzos* for, every yetzer hara. For example, the *middah* of anger. We’ve already spoken about the person who would get angry often on erev Shabbos. He was given an *eitzah* for how to rid himself of this *middah* — he was told to keep quiet, not to shout when he was angry. Over time, his habit became second nature, until he became completely cured of anger. There are special *eitzos* to counteract every single *middah*.

Rav Yisrael Salanter (*Ohr Yisrael* Letter 14) already wrote that if a person would only daven for a change in nature and would not try to correct his bad *middos*, it would be like davening to see even without eyes, which is impossible. One must implement appropriate *eitzos* that will help him correct each *middah*. Davening can only help to attain *siyatta d’Shemaya* to find the right *eitzah*, but it does not help to directly counteract one’s nature. One must learn *mussar* to become aware of the natural ways and *eitzos* to rectify every single *middah*. That is the *tavlin* against the yetzer hara.

We’ve already mentioned anger. The *middah* of arrogance, if a person holds himself in high esteem, is also a bad *middah* and a yetzer hara. It’s important to be aware of what it says in *Iggeres*

Learning Mussar — a Need and Necessity

HaRambam: “You should view every person as more important than you.” You must think that every person is greater than you, even if he is on a lower madreigah: imagine that “he is an unintentional sinner and you sin intentionally.” Perhaps he sins unknowingly because he never received a Torah education and he is unaware of his duties. But you are an intentional sinner because you know more than him; you are smarter, you are a *talmid chacham*, and if there’s a mitzvah you don’t keep, you are an intentional sinner. So if you consider yourself more important than him, this is a mistake, and it is *gaavah*, arrogance.

The *pasuk* says (*Mishlei* 16:5): “All those with arrogant hearts are an abomination to Hashem.” They are abominable to Hashem. If a person considers himself important, even slightly, he’s already abominable to Hashem. And if Hashem considers him abominable, is it *shayach* for him to have *siyatta d’Shemaya*? He’s an abomination, *Rachmana litzlan*. That’s why it’s important to be aware of the ways and *eitzos* to refrain from feeling self-important.

The *Mesillas Yeshtarim* speaks at length in two chapters (Chapters 11 and 22) about how a person can achieve the understanding that there’s no reason for him to consider himself important. Similarly, the *Chovos HaLevavos* writes (*Shaar HaKni’ah* chap. 9) that if a person notices a good attribute in himself, he must be happy with it, and thank Hashem for giving him this *maalah*, but he must not feel important! If he feels self-important, that’s already arrogance. **There’s a fine line between feeling “happy” with one’s *maalah* and feeling “self-important” with his *maalah*.** A person must be happy, but he cannot feel important, because whatever *maalos* he has is *chasdei Shamayim*; it’s not the result of his own power. It’s all Heavenly *chesed* and *rachamim*.

Enjoying Honor — Detracts from Olam HaBa

Another bad *middah* is lust for honor. In *Avos* (chap. 6), they wrote that one of the ways Torah is acquired is by “distancing oneself from honor.” The desire for honor is the yetzer hara. The *Mesillas Yeshtarim* (chap. 11) wrote about how detrimental the desire for honor is — it pressures the person even more than the desire for money. It’s human nature to want and lust for honor, because it’s a spiritual pleasure. However, honor in this world comes at the expense of one’s Olam HaBa.

All worldly pleasures detract from Olam HaBa, because a person is showing that he esteems and loves this world. The *Chovos HaLevavos* (*Shaar Cheshbon HaNefesh* 3:25) writes: “Just as water and fire cannot be joined in one vessel, so too, love of Olam HaZeh and love of Olam HaBa cannot reside jointly in the believer’s heart. They’ve said that Olam HaZeh and Olam HaBa are like two rivals: when you want one of them, the other will be vexed.” The two worlds are like a person who has two wives — each of the wives hate the other. So too, Olam HaZeh and Olam HaBa are contradictory.

Honor, which is a spiritual pleasure and not merely a physical pleasure, detracts even more from one’s Olam HaBa. It says in *Kesser Rosh* (os 137), “The reduction in Olam HaBa for material pleasures of delicacies cannot be compared to the reduction for honor, which is a spiritual pleasure.” All worldly pleasures detract from one’s Olam HaBa, as the Gra writes (*Iggeres HaGra*) that all pleasures will turn into “*marah*” in the grave.

The *eitzah* to counteract all these bad *middos* is to learn *mussar*, to acquire *yiras Shamayim*. With the power of *yiras Shamayim*, a person will be able to overcome the yetzer hara. Just as a *dayan* is told to imagine that he has a sword between his feet and Gehinnom opened beneath him, we must learn *mussar sefarim*, especially *Shaarei Teshuvah*, which speaks a lot about *yiras Shamayim* and explains it in great detail. This is the *eitzah*. *Baruch Hashem*, Heaven gave us *eitzos* how to observe all 613 mitzvos, and we have *Shaarei Teshuvah* and other *sefarim* about *yiras Shamayim* that infuse us with strength and *chizuk* to observe all the duties of our heart, and to fulfill our actions as well, *b’sheleimus*.

For example, when it comes to lust for honor, it is incumbent upon us to “distance ourselves from honor.” It’s a duty of our heart, *chovos halevavos*, and running away from honor is a great *zechus* for success in Torah and *sheleimus ha-adam*. I’ve seen people who have this nature; they cannot stand honor. This is a special *maalah* and *madreigah*.

We’ve already spoken in the past that *yiras Shamayim* is a mitzvah itself, and there are many levels in this mitzvah, as the *Shaarei Teshuvah* discusses (3:17). However, *yiras Shamayim* is also a means to all mitzvah observance, and it is **the *eitzah* that counteracts the yetzer hara every step of the way. Just *yirah*!** Increase your level of *yiras Shamayim*, and the way to do that is by learning *mussar*.

Yeshivos have a set *mussar seder* every day for a half hour before Maariv. Not everyone understands this, not everyone understands that *mussar* is not *middas chassidus* — it’s a real obligation and essential need for *yiras Shamayim*, for *hasmadah* in Torah, for all the 613 mitzvos. It’s an essential, vital need! Because without *yiras Shamayim*, a person will fall into sin, and anyone who thinks otherwise is mistaken.

People with families who cannot learn during the yeshivah’s *mussar seder*, try to make a daily set time to learn a little *mussar*, even for five minutes. Learn a *mussar sefer* that will lead to *yiras Shamayim*; it’s life changing. Something that is set and constant has a *hashpaah*! The *pasuk* in *Iyov* (14:19) states: “Water wore down the stones.” And the meaning of this *pasuk* is well known. We’ve even related some true-life stories here about how *mussar* can effectively change a person’s life.

We’re talking about natural consequences, but *siyatta d’Shemaya* is also a part of it. One who comes to be purified is helped (*Yoma* 38b), and since a person learns *mussar*, he has “come to be purified.” He is showing that he wants to be a *yarei Shamayim*, so Heaven sends him help. Aside from the natural benefit, he also will receive *siyatta d’Shemaya*, and if a person has *siyatta d’Shemaya* he’s in a different league — it’s above nature, *l’maalah min hateva*!

A Happy Life with Emunah

The same is true regarding *emunah*. If a person lives with *emunah*, he will always be calm and happy because he is aware of two things: 1) Everything is in Heaven’s hands 2) Whatever Hashem

does is for the best. Since everything is in Heaven's hands, no human being can cause him any difficulties. Even if someone causes him pain, he's not the one hurting him, it's from *Shamayim*. And since whatever Hashem does is for the best, this pain is for his best too.

It turns out that the person who caused him pain did him a favor. And now he has to figure out what the favor was — but it's clear that it was a favor, because “whatever Hashem does is for the best.” And whatever comes from Hashem is for man's good — even pain is for our good; it's to arouse us to do teshuvah. Pain is from Heaven; it wakes man up and makes him think, “Why do I deserve this? What do they want from me in *Shamayim*.” Then he understands that Heaven wants rectification, that he should correct his heart and thoughts, that he should live with greater *emunah* — “What does Hashem demand of you?” A person who lives with this *emunah* will never have a *hakpadah* on any person.

Everything that we mentioned: desire for honor, money and worldly pleasures, and anger, arrogance, and all sorts of yetzer haras, are related to *chovos halevavos*, duties of our heart. One can gain or lose from these behaviors, and the *eitzah* to overpower all these is to learn *mussar sefarim*. Hashem gave us *mussar sefarim* so our hearts will remain Jewish hearts. A *gadol* who saw someone learning a *mussar sefer* told him, “You should know that the *sefer* you're learning is the *Shulchan Aruch* of Yiddishkeit, the *Shulchan Aruch* of the heart. It reveals what a Yiddishe heart, a kosher heart, is. It teaches how to have a kosher heart with heart-related duties.”

Ashreinu, mah tov chelkeinu that Hashem has given us the opportunity to merit happy, fortunate eternal life. *Yehi ratzon* that we all merit, every single one of us and all Klal Yisrael, to happy, eternal life, both in this world and in the world to come.

Rabbeinu's Address for the Mirrer Yeshivah's Dinner

Baruch Hashem, there are many *bonei Torah* in the Mir Yeshivah in Yerushalayim. There are thousands of men learning Torah. Anyone who helps someone who is *osek baTorah*, all his *esek haTorah* and all his *zechuyos* belong to him! It's like Yissaschar and Zevulun. Yissaschar does not lose out, and Zevulun accrues *zechuyos* as if he himself had been learning Torah. All of Yissaschar's *esek haTorah* is considered as if he was being *osek baTorah* too, and he gains the *zechus* of *esek haTorah*.

Esek haTorah provides a person with “*ashrecha baOlam haZeh v'tov lach l'Olam HaBa*.” One who learns Torah is *zocheh* to a good life here in this world, *ashrecha baOlam haZeh*, in the *zechus* of Torah. Torah is the *zechus* for the happiest, best life. Those who support *lomdei Torah* receive the same *zechuyos* as one who is actively being *osek baTorah* — the *tomchei Torah* too are *zocheh* to happy, fortunate lives in this world, happier lives than money can give them! Real happy lives, with *simchas* and *nachas* from the family.

That's the tremendous profits that *tomchei Torah* merit, especially in Mir Yeshivah, which is an incredible *makom Torah* built on the roots of the founders, Rav Eliezer Yehudah Finkel, Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz, and all the *roshei yeshivah zichronam livrachah*. And with the present *roshei yeshivah*, Rav Finkel, and all the others who are involved in *mesirus nefesh* for *harbatzas Torah* to such a large *tzibbur* of thousands of *oskim baTorah*.

All these *zechuyos* belong to those who support Torah financially. They are *zocheh* to happy lives in this world, and certainly in Olam HaBa too. Even more in Olam HaBa — we cannot fathom what their Olam HaBa will be like. But in this world the *tomchei Torah* are *zocheh* to the happiest lives. They should be *zocheh* to donate now to Mir Yeshivah, *b'ezras Hashem*. May we hear *besuros tovos* and see *siyatta d'Shemaya* for whatever we need.

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להצלחת בניהם ובנותיהם
בתורה וביראת שמים

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