

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 Devarim 5782

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The Churban and Its Cause

What was the sin that brought about the Churban? Chazal say (*Yoma* 9b) that during the first Beis HaMikdash, it was three specific sins: *avodah zarah*, *gilui arayos*, and *shefichus damim* — idol worship, immorality, and murder — the three cardinal sins, which one must not transgress even if he is threatened with death. And yet, seventy years later — after the seventy years in Galus Bavel — the Beis HaMikdash was rebuilt.

The Gemara tells us the reason for this: “The first ones, whose sin was revealed, their end was revealed.” That is, during the first Beis HaMikdash, the sin was clear, it was revealed to them; they knew they had transgressed those three grave sins. So that’s why the end of their *galus* was revealed. Since they knew what their sin was, they did teshuvah and rectified the sins. If the sin is rectified, the Beis HaMikdash can be rebuilt again.

[But during the second Beis HaMikdash, which was destroyed due to *sinas chinam*, baseless hatred, their sin was not revealed, it was not clear to the Jewish nation what their sin was, because *sinas chinam* is a sin in one’s heart, and everyone is sure his hatred is completely justified — he doesn’t feel that he’s sinning with *sinas chinam*. Since it’s not a revealed sin, no one rectifies it, and that’s why the Churban is continuing to this very day. Ed. note: This section has been taken from another one of Rabbeinu’s *sichos*.]

When referring to the sin, the Gemara uses the term “*nisgaleh avonam*, their [intentional] sin was revealed.” The term “*avon*” refers to intentional sins, while the word “*cheit*” applies to unintentional sins. When Bnei Yisrael transgressed the three cardinal sins during the first Beis HaMikdash, they were doing so intentionally because the yetzer hara was so powerful. Even though they knew it was an *aveirah*, it hard for them to stand up against the yetzer hara. That’s the meaning of “their *avon*, intentional sin, was revealed.” They were intentional sinners.

For example, we cannot fathom how strong the yetzer hara of *avodah zarah* is, but during the generation of the Churban it was extremely powerful. The Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 102b) tells us that Menashe, king of Yisrael,

told Rav Ashi, “If you had lived during my times, you wouldn’t have been able to withstand the yetzer hara of *avodah zarah*, because it was terribly powerful.” (Menashe did teshuvah at the end of his life.)

When we rectify our sins and iniquities, we will be *zocheh* once again to the Beis HaMikdash. What is the Beis HaMikdash? It is a place of a *hashpaah* of *kedushah* — **the Beis HaMikdash would shower *kedushah* on all of Klal Yisrael, no matter where they were. And this *hashpaah* of *kedushah* counteracted the yetzer hara.**

Esek HaTorah Is Like the Beis HaMikdash

Now we don’t have a Beis HaMikdash, and Chazal tell us (*Brachos* 8a), “From the day the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed, HaKadosh Baruch Hu has no place in His world, except for the four *amos* of halachah.” *Esek haTorah* is also *mashpia kedushah*, just like the Beis HaMikdash did.

I once heard the Ponovezer Rav talking about this concept. He said that even when the Beis HaMikdash stood, there was a *hashpaah* of *kedushah* from the *dalet amos* of *halachah*. In those days, however, there was *both* the Beis HaMikdash *as well as* the *dalet amos* of halachah. ***Esek haTorah* is *mashpia kedushah* just as the Beis HaMikdash does. A person who is *osek baTorah* becomes sanctified and imparts *kedushah* to others.** During the time of the Beis HaMikdash, there was both the Beis HaMikdash and *esek haTorah*, but if they wouldn’t have been *osek baTorah*, that would have been a sin. The Beis HaMikdash cannot exist without Torah, because *bittul Torah* is a *cheit*! And then where would the *kedushah* be?!

As long as the Beis HaMikdash was standing, and we had both the Beis HaMikdash and *oskei Torah*, there were two factors that brought an influence of *kedushah* against the yetzer hara: the Beis HaMikdash and *esek haTorah*. Both were necessary — just the Beis HaMikdash without Torah was not enough. But nowadays, we don’t have the Beis HaMikdash, so Torah on its own has an influence of *kedushah* just like the Beis HaMikdash. Torah is like the Beis HaMikdash and it has the same level of *hashpaah*.

It turns out that the *hashpaah* of *kedushah* and the “Beis HaMikdash” in our times is the “*dalet amos* of halachah,” because learning Torah brings down the same level of *kedushah* like the Beis HaMikdash did! Those who can learn but do not — because of the yetzer hara — are lacking this *kedushah*. Of course, this is individual — each person must learn as much as he can based on his personal situation and abilities, but if a person does not learn as much as he can, that’s the yetzer hara and he doesn’t have a “Beis HaMikdash.” **It’s like a Churban Beis HaMikdash!**

Torah Is the Only Remedy Against the Yetzer Hara

This is the *metzius* — *esek haTorah* brings a flow of *kedushah* against the yetzer hara. If someone can learn, and he has time, but he doesn’t use all his available time for Torah study, there will be a decline in *ruchniyus*! As we said, it depends on each person’s *metzius*, each person’s abilities and situation. It could be that someone doesn’t have much time, but he must make sure to utilize his time wisely so there won’t be *bittul Torah*. If there’s *bittul Torah*, the yetzer hara gains control. Torah is the only solution against the yetzer hara.

Chazal said (*Kiddushin* 30b), “I created the yetzer hara; and I created the Torah as a *tavlin* (spice/antidote) against it.” Another Gemara (*Bava Basra* 16a) relates the following: Iyov claimed it’s not fair — man has a yetzer hara, so how can he be expected to overpower it? He was told: Hashem created the yetzer hara and He created the Torah as an antidote against it. Torah is the cure against the yetzer hara.

The *Mesillas Yesharim* writes (chap. 5): “It’s simple. If the Creator only created this cure for this blow, it is unequivocally impossible for a person to become cured of this malady without this cure. Anyone who thinks he can be saved without it, is simply mistaken. He will eventually realize his mistake when he dies due to his sin.”

He goes on to say, “And what can this be compared to? To a sick man who sought out doctors, received a diagnosis, and was told to take a certain medicine. Now this man, who has no prior medical training, decides to put the suggested medicine aside and chooses a different medication that suits his fancy. The man will surely die. The same is true in this case. The only one who is familiar with the malady called the yetzer hara and the power it wields is the One Who created it. He warned us that Torah is the only thing that can cure us of the yetzer hara. If so, can someone put it aside and take whatever he fancies and still live?!”

That is, if HaKadosh Baruch Hu, **Who created man and also created the yetzer hara, said that the Torah is the antidote, then it is surely the only antidote.** There is no

other *eitza* or way to stand up against the yetzer hara. Only *esek haTorah*.

Siyatta D’Shemaya When All Kochos Are Used

The Gemara in *Kiddushin* cites the *pasuk* “The wicked one watches the tzaddik and wants to kill him, but Hashem does not let him fall into his hands.” Chazal said, “A person’s yetzer hara overpowers him every day and seeks to kill him, as it states ‘The wicked one watches the tzaddik and wants to kill him,’ and if Hashem wouldn’t help him, he would not be able to overcome him, as it states, ‘Hashem does not let him fall into his hands.’ That is, the “wicked one” is the yetzer hara who wants to make a person sin and kill him — a spiritual death, killing his *neshamah*. But “Hashem does not let him fall into his hands” — we need *siyatta d’Shemaya*, because the yetzer hara is very strong, and without Hashem’s help, we would never be able to overcome it. That’s why we need HaKadosh Baruch Hu’s help.

But when does Hashem help? Only when the person himself does whatever is in his power to conquer his yetzer hara, as it states in *Mesillas Yesharim* (end of chap. 2), “If a person keeps himself in check, Hashem will help him and save him from the yetzer hara, but if he does not guard himself, Hashem will surely not guard him. Because if he does not pity himself, who will pity him?” It’s similar to what they said (*Berachos* 33a), “It is forbidden to have mercy on one who does not have wisdom.” And this is the meaning of the mishnah (*Avos* 1:14), “If I am not for myself, who will be for me?”

It’s brought down in the name of the Gra (*Kol Eliyahu, Sukkah*), “When does Hashem help? When the person does everything he can to overcome his yetzer hara, and he has reached the point where if HaKadosh Baruch Hu won’t help him, he won’t be able to do any more. He’s already reached his limits and it’s impossible for him to do anything else. At that point, Hashem will send him help, He will not abandon him! However, as long as he is able to do more than he’s already done, but he doesn’t do it, Hashem will not help him either.”

It’s only when a person does whatever he can and puts in intense effort, and learns Torah, and learns *mussar*, then HaKadosh Baruch Hu will help him. But if he doesn’t do what he can, why should he get any help? You put in your work, and then you’ll get help! Why should they help you if you’re not doing anything?! Only if he’s reached the point where “if HaKadosh Baruch Hu doesn’t help him, he will not be able to overcome it” — meaning, he’s already done whatever he can, with his *kochos*, and he cannot do anymore. Then Hashem will help him. But if he’s just lazy and wants to rest — not because he really needs that rest, but because he loves wasting time and taking it easy — then he will not have *siyatta d’Shemaya*!

Baruch Hashem, this is something we can do. We can learn Torah, and we can learn *mussar*. But it also depends on us truly making the most of all our possibilities — each person according to his situation — and be *osek baTorah*, which is the antidote against the yetzer hara. And if so, we have the promise that HaKadosh Baruch Hu will help us.

Mussar Sefarim Are Necessary

Of course, the yetzer hara disturbs us, and as we know, the yetzer hara constantly tries its hardest against Torah, because Torah is the antidote to it. That's why we have to take action that will strike directly against the yetzer hara. The known *eitzah* is to learn *mussar sefarim*. The *Mishnah Berurah* writes (*siman aleph*) that “*Torah tavlin*” refers to the *mussar sefarim*; we are to learn *mussar sefarim*, which impart *yiras Shamayim*.

Yiras Shamayim is not innate to human nature. While we know that we must believe, and that we need *emunah*, it's not something natural that just happens. Only Avraham Avinu was on that level; he recognized his Creator. But it's not like this when it comes to regular people; we have to learn *mussar sefarim* on a steady, daily basis in order to increase *yiras Shamayim*.

The Gemara (*Brachos daf 32*) says that four matters require *chizuk*, strengthening. Rashi explains what *chizuk* means: “Constantly and with all his strength.” In order to attain *chizuk*, two parameters must be met: 1) it should be done constantly, using one's time wisely, with no *batalah* and no *stam* resting 2) with all his strength, each person must do whatever he can based on his inner *kochos*. He may not over push himself, but he must do as much as he can, utilizing all his *kochos*. Then he will have *siyatta d'Shemaya*.

But if a person doesn't do what he is capable of doing, why should others help him? If he doesn't have mercy on himself, why should others have mercy on him?

We must know that this is the reality and we are so lucky that we have this opportunity to learn *mussar sefarim*. We've already discussed many times that if someone has a steady *sefer* for a few minutes a day in *mussar*, he becomes a different person. He is fortunate and his family is happy and fortunate too. I know many stories about this. It's the reality. If you learn a *mussar sefer* for a few minutes a day, it impacts your life and grants you a happy, fortunate life. **Mussar is not frightening! Just the opposite — it provides you with a happy, fortunate life.** It grants you a *taam*, a good flavor, in life, for a good, happy life.

Baruch Hashem we have this opportunity and the understanding, and we come to hear *mussar*. Why do we come to hear *mussar*? We coming to be purified! And “one who comes to be purified is helped” (*Yoma 38b*). Someone

who wants to hear and comes to be purified has *siyatta d'Shemaya*. What's called “coming to be purified”? Whenever a person does anything to become a bigger *baal madreigah* in *ruchniyus* and Torah. Then he will have *siyatta d'Shemaya*!

The Value of a Wordless Tefillah

Davening also helps a person merit *siyatta d'Shemaya*. It's not necessary to use the set, standard *tefillos* — even a personal *tefillah* expressed in one's heart is effective. [However, in order to fill one's obligations of *tefillah*, one must daven the three set *tefillos* daily, and they must be recited verbally. In this case, thought is not equivalent to speech. But in addition to the three daily *tefillos*, thinking a non-verbal *tefillah* can also make a person worthy of *siyatta d'Shemaya*.]

We've already told the story of the irreligious American Jew who came to Eretz Yisrael for a visit. He was not a believer and he did not know anything about *emunah*, but he went to the Kosel, because that's what's done. When he arrived at the Kosel, he began to think about Yiddishkeit. He thought that if all *inyanei emunah* are really true, he wants to see a sign from Heaven. Right after entertaining this thought, a *kiruv* activist came over and asked him if he wanted to learn about Judaism! Since he had thought about it seriously, it's considered a *tefillah* in his heart, and he was *zocheh* to *siyatta d'Shemaya*.

If so, we have an *eitzah* to merit *siyatta d'Shemaya*. Every person should think about and offer a wordless prayer for *siyatta d'Shemaya* in *ruchniyus* matters — in Torah and *yiras Shamayim*. One needs *siyatta d'Shemaya* for *yiras Shamayim* as well. Indeed, in Birkas HaTorah we ask: “And unify our hearts to love and fear Your name.” Similarly, there are many *pesukim* in *Tehillim* that are requests for *yiras Hashem*, such as (*Tehillim 86:11*), “Unify my heart to fear Your name.”

[Even though Chazal said (*Brachos 33b*), “Everything is in Heaven's hands aside from *yiras Shamayim*,” we still ask for *siyatta d'Shemaya* to remove anything that prevents us from attaining it, and we ask to give us the opportunities and means to arouse ourselves to *yiras Shamayim*. Ed. note: This section has been taken from another one of Rabbeinu's *sichos*.]

As we said, a *tefillah* in one's heart is also helpful. Even if a person only thinks and asks in his heart, *Shamayim* will give him *siyatta d'Shemaya* in *yiras Shamayim*. He will receive *siyatta d'Shemaya* for *yiras Shamayim*. *Ashreinu* that we have the opportunities to achieve unlimited success in *ruchniyus*! *Yehi ratzon* that *Shamayim* should have mercy on us and give us the *havanah* to busy ourselves with these matters and achieve a higher *madreigah* in *ruchniyus*.

Success Depends on Zechuyos — Learning Torah and Mussar

Excerpts from Rabbeinu shlita's Address to Degel HaTorah Delegates at a Gathering Last Week

It's now ten years since the *petirah* of Maran Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv *zecher tzaddik livrachah*, and in his honor, we must do something important in the realm of public activism. Therefore, Degel HaTorah delegates must know that no matter what they are busy with — be it with the authorities or wherever they are — it's unacceptable for each person to simply rely on his own smarts to decide what is the Torah way in matters that arise. They must clarify *daas Torah*, what the opinion of *gedolei haTorah* is, what their opinion is regarding the approach toward public matters.

It's also important to remember that one needs *zechuyos* to be successful! And one needs *siyatta d'Shemaya*, together with *zechuyos* for success in *maasim tovim*, for spiritual and material public needs. *Esek haTorah* is the primary *zechus*.

Therefore, it is imperative to have a daily, set *seder* of at least a half hour to learn Gemara, preferably with a *chavrusa*. This is a great *zechus* for success in *zikui harabbim* in spiritual matters. There also must be a daily *seder* of a few minutes, just a short time, to learn *mussar sefarim*. *Mussar sefarim* give a person the *zechuyos* and the insight to know how to conduct oneself in all realms of life. And these two matters, the merit of Torah, actual Gemara, and the merit of *mussar sefarim* are *zechuyos* for success.

And Chazal say "One who comes to be purified is helped." *Shamayim* sends *siyatta d'Shemaya* to anyone who "comes to be purified." What does "comes to be purified" mean? There is a yetzer hara, and the *eitzah* against it is *mussar sefarim*, as Chazal say, "I created the yetzer hara, and I created the Torah as an antidote against it." The Torah is a *tavlin* (spice/antidote) against the yetzer hara. And the *Mishnah Berurah* (*siman aleph*) writes that the *tavlin* is *Toras hayirah*; *sefarim* of *yiras Shamayim* are the antidote against the yetzer hara.

And *tavlin* means that it also has a good flavor! There's a good flavor and sweetness in *mussar sefarim*, and there's a good flavor and sweetness in *yiras Shamayim*. All the most essential commodities in the world are sweet. Just as in the physical realm, food has flavor, man's spiritual needs also have a flavor, and *divrei Torah* are sweeter than honey. And they are compared to wine and water, and to honey and milk. *Mussar sefarim* are also *divrei Torah*, and they are the spice that is directly effective against the yetzer hara. This is the meaning of "coming to be purified."

And *b'ezras Hashem* with these merits, Degel HaTorah delegates will have *hatzlachah* in *maasim tovim*.

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