

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 Ki Seitzei 5782

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Three Pillars: Zechuyos for Yom HaDin

We are presently in the month of Elul; it will soon be Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, the days of judgment. Now is the time to increase *maasim tovim* in order to be meritorious in judgment. Elul is also the month of Rachamim — “Hashem created this one parallel to that one” (*Koheles* 7:14). On the one hand, these are days of judgment, and on the other hand, it’s Chodesh haRachamim, the month of mercy, with inherent *siyatta d’Shemaya* to perform *maasim tovim*. Shamayim has mercy on us and gives us *siyatta d’Shemaya* to perform *maasim tovim* and thus emerge meritorious in judgment.

What are these *zechuyos*? Which *maasim tovim* will make us victorious in judgment? There are three primary *zechuyos*, as Chazal say (*Avos* 1:2), “The world stands on three matters: Torah, *avodah* and *gemillus chasadim*.” The world actually stands on these three things, and if *chas v’shalom*, one of them is missing, the world will be destroyed.

The *Bartenura* cites applicable *pesukim* and *maamarei Chazal* supporting this statement, that the world exists and stands in the merit of these three matters. Torah, as Chazal say (*Shabbos* 88a), “Had Yisrael not accepted the Torah, Heaven and Earth would not have been created, as it states: ‘If not for My covenant [that is studied] day and night, I would not have established the laws of Heaven and Earth.’” *Avodah*, as Chazal say (*Taanis* 27b), “If not for the *maamados* — i.e., *korbanos* — Heaven and Earth would not exist.” And *gemillus chasadim*, as it states (*Tehillim* 89:3), “The world is built on *chesed*.”

The navi tells us the following about Torah: “If not for My covenant [that is studied] day and night...” — because Torah must be learned both by day and night, as it states (*Yehoshua* 1:8), “And you shall toil in day and night.” The *Nefesh HaChaim* discusses this at length (4:11, and more). He says that if *chas v’shalom* there would be even one moment when there would be no Torah study at all, the world would be destroyed and it would revert to a state of “*tohu va’vohu*, utter emptiness.” The entire reason for the world’s existence is because Torah is always being learned.

While people do sleep, they are sleeping in order to be able to learn Torah, so their sleep is also considered *esek*

haTorah. Indeed, the Rambam writes (*Hilchos Dei’os* 3:3) that if a person sleeps so that he’ll have energy to serve Hashem, even his sleep is considered *avodah*, and he’s serving Hashem as he sleeps. If we look around and see that the world is standing, it’s proof that *esek haTorah* is occurring. This in itself is *hashgachas Hashem*; He makes sure that there is ongoing, constant *esek haTorah* so that the *zechus* of Torah will uphold the world. The same is true regarding *avodah* and *gemillus chasadim*, which also uphold the world.

The World Exists for Kevod Shamayim

What was Hashem’s intention when He created the entire world? Why did He create the world? The answer is written explicitly at the end of *Pirkei Avos*: “Everything that HaKadosh Baruch Hu created in His world, He created only for His glory, as it states, ‘Whatever is called by My Name and for My glory, I created, formed and even made it.’” That is, the entire Creation, all the worlds, and all the angels, — *seraphim*, *ofanim*, and *chayos hakodesh* — were created for one purpose: for *kevod Shamayim*. Of course, HaKadosh Baruch Hu is the Melech HaKavod, and He doesn’t need the honor. However, the purpose of this is to bring merit to His creations, for when Hashem’s creations generate *kevod Shamayim*, that is their right to existence. Furthermore, in this manner they will merit Olam HaBa, which is the genuine, real good.

Kevod Shamayim is generated via these three things. Indeed, the *pasuk* states (*Bereishis* 6:13), “And the land was filled with *chamas*, theft.” Thievery is the opposite of *gemillus chesed*, and while that generation also committed other sins, Rashi tells us (citing Chazal, *Sanhedrin* 108a), that it was robbery that sealed their decree. Robbery caused the destruction of the world, and only the tzaddik Noach and his family were saved.

Feeling Like a Poor Man

Now, in the month of Elul, we need *zechuyos* for Yom HaDin. Let’s take a look at the *zechuyos* that every single person can acquire.

In *Maseches Rosh Hashanah* (16b), Chazal tell us about one way to earn *zechuyos*: “Every year that is ‘poor’ at the beginning becomes ‘richer’ at its end, as it states,

'*Me'reishis shanah* (lit., from the beginning of the year, but it's spelled רשית without an *aleph*, meaning 'poor') *v'ad acharis* (until the end). In the end, the year will have a [good] ending." This is teaching us that when a person feels like he's poor in *zechuyos* — when he feels that he doesn't have *zechuyos* and he needs *middas harachamim* — in this merit he "become wealthy at the end" and is *zocheh* to *siyatta d'Shemaya* and a *ksivah v'chasimah tovah* on the Yom HaDin.

This is one effective way to be meritorious in judgment. But the person must understand it, it should be clear to him that he does not have *zechuyos*. It's not a mistake to think this way; it is the actual reality! After all, is there anyone who can claim that he doesn't have any sins — if every single person would just think about his life from the day he became accountable for his sins, from his bar mitzvah, is there anyone who can say that he is free of the sin of *bittul Torah*? Anyone? Maybe there are individuals, *yechidei segulah*, but most people cannot say this. So they feel indigent! They feel poverty-stricken in Torah! We mention this in the first Selichos: "Like poor men we knocked at Your doors." This is what we mean by a year that's "poor at the beginning."

Torah: Teshuvah for Bittul Torah

If so, if we want to be meritorious in judgment, we must search and investigate — "search out our ways and investigate them" — what is our status regarding these three matters: Torah, *avodah*, and *gemillus chasadim*. Torah is mentioned first. What's with Torah? Who doesn't have the sin of *bittul Torah*? Of course, it is possible to repent and do teshuvah, but teshuvah must be real and include true remorse, with real *viduy*, and accepting not to repeat the behavior in the future. We must accept upon ourselves to act properly, without any *bittul Torah*. When these factors are present — *azivas hacheit* and *viduy* — then (*Mishlei* 28:13), "one who confesses and leaves [the sin] will obtain mercy."

But if there is no *azivas hacheit*, it's like one "who dips himself in the mikveh while holding an impure creature." His *tevilah* is worthless and there's no purity at all. It's not that he's becoming pure and then immediately becoming impure again — he had never become pure in the first place! He was constantly connected to impurity. The same is true if there's no *azivas hacheit*. The person is still constantly involved in the sin, the sin of *bittul Torah*.

Avodah: Increasing Yiras Shamayim

Now let's discuss *avodah* and *yiras Shamayim*. *Avodah* refers to *avdus*, servitude, and *yiras Shamayim*, which is a *mitzvas asei*, as the *pasuk* states (*Devarim* 10:20), "Fear Hashem your G-d." There are many *madreigos* in *yiras Shamayim*, as Rabbeinu Yonah writes in *Shaarei Teshuvah* (see Gate 1:17, 20 and Gate 15:17) that there are many *madreigos* in *yirah* and one must achieve these *madreigos*, increasing his *yiras Shamayim* daily.

How does one do this? The reality is that if a person learns *mussar* every day and learns about *yiras Shamayim*, this will help him at least strengthen himself so that he won't decrease his levels of *yiras Shamayim*. However, increasing levels of *yiras Shamayim* is not easy. But this is the mitzvah, it's a *mitzvas asei* to increase *yiras Shamayim*!

That's why we also have *tefillos* about *yiras Shamayim*, such as the request we make in *Ahavah Rabbah*: "And unify our hearts to love and fear Your Name." We are asking for *siyatta d'Shemaya* for *yiras Shamayim*. Similarly, in *Tehillim* there are many *pesukim* and requests for *yiras Shamayim*, especially Perek 119, which includes many *pesukim* about Torah and *yiras Shamayim*.

Gemillus Chasadim: Acting with Good Middos

Gemillus chasadim involves following in Hashem's ways, as it states (*Devarim* 28:9), "And you shall go in His ways." Chazal say (*Shabbos* 133; *Sotah* 14), "Just as He is merciful, so shall you be..." Since this is practical behavior, following in Hashem's ways and actively behaving with *ahavas habriyos* and good *middos*, it is included in the mitzvah of *v'ahavta l'reiacha kamocha*. It's not simply inner love, the love is expressed in action by doing *maasim tovim* of *ahavas habriyos*. Just as Hashem is merciful and gracious, a person must be merciful and gracious, and actively perform *gemillus chasadim* both with his body and his money. This is the meaning of "following in His ways."

The Rambam writes (*Hilchos Aveil* 14:1), "It's a *mitzvas asei* to visit the sick, comfort the mourners, and attend levayahs... even though all these mitzvos are d'Rabbanan, they are also included in *v'ahavta l'reiacha kamocha*. Whatever you'd want others to do to you, do them for your brother who observes Torah and mitzvos." That is, there are many *mitzvos Bein Adam l'Chaveiro* that are d'Rabbanan — such as *bikkur cholim*, *nichum aveilim*, and *levayas hameis*, but they are also included in a single, more general *mitzvah d'Oraisa*, because they are included in *v'ahavta l'reiacha kamocha*. (Editor's note: See Rabbeinu's *shiurim* on *Kesuvos* 17.) The mitzvah of *v'halachta b'drachav* includes all acts of *chesed* between one's fellow man.

Bittul Torah To Do Chesed

The Gemara (*Rosh Hashanah* 18a) tells us about the House of Eli. It was decreed that they would not live long, as it states (*Shmuel I* 2:33), "And those raised in your house will die as young men." That is, they'll die by age 18. Nowadays, there are families that are known to be Eli's descendants, yet there are those who do live long because the *zechus* of *esek haTorah* and *gemillus chasadim* atone for their sin. The Gemara says, "Therefore, I have sworn to the House of Eli that their sin will not be atoned with a sacrifice or offering" — Rava says: With a sacrifice or offering it will not be atoned, but it will be atoned with Torah and *gemillus chasadim*.

The Gemara there relates that Rabbah and Abaye were both from Beis Eli, and they both lived past 18. Rabbah, who was *osek baTorah*, lived till 40; and Abaye, who was *osek baTorah* and *gemillus chesed*, lived till 60. Ostensibly, this is astounding. Why didn't Rabbah perform *gemillus chesed* as well? He could have done *chesed* just like Abaye and been *zocheh* to a longer life. So why did he only spend his days learning Torah and not perform *chesed* as well?

The answer is that the obligation to learn Torah is “*v'hagisah bo yomam v'laylah*, and speak in it day and night.” And there's a prohibition of *bittul Torah*. A person is only permitted to stop learning for doing *chesed* if there is no one else to perform that *chesed* instead of him. The halachah is (*Moed Katan* daf 9, and Rambam, *Hilchos Talmud Torah* chap. 3) that one may stop learning Torah to perform a mitzvah that cannot be done by anyone else. However, if someone else can do the mitzvah, such as the mitzvah of *gemillus chasadim*, learning Torah takes precedence! If there is no one else available to perform the *chesed*, then he is obligated to do it, but if there is someone else who can do it and he nonetheless does it himself instead of learning Torah, that is a sin.

If so, it must be that Abaye did *chesed* because there was no one else available to perform that *chesed* instead. Heaven sent him the opportunity to perform a *chesed* that no one else could do, and in that merit, he lived another 20 years. Rabbah, however, was involved solely with Torah learning because there were other people who performed the *chesed*. He did not come across *chasadim* that no one else could have performed, so it was prohibited for him to do *chesed* — as it involved *bittul Torah*. If he'd stop his learning to do *chesed*, he would be in a worse state, because he'd be accruing another sin with Gehinnom, and it would not give him the benefit of longevity either.

Having Mercy and Giving In

Hashem's *hanhagah* of *middah k'neged middah* offers another opportunity to emerge meritorious in judgment. If a person acts with others kindly and mercifully, Shamayim will treat him the same way *middah k'neged middah*. Chazal speak about this often: “Anyone who has mercy on others, Hashem will have mercy on him” (*Shabbos* 157b); “One who judges his friend favorably will be judged favorably” (*Shabbos* 127b); and “If one is *maavir al middosav*, forgiving and easy-going, they will pass over all his sins” (*Rosh Hashanah* 17a).

If a person acts with inflexibility and strict justice (*middas hadin*) with others, if he demands what the other person owes him and isn't *mevater*, doesn't give in — even though he sees that it's hard for the other person, he does not have mercy on him, it could be that he's right according to the letter of the law. If he comes to *beis din*, they may say that he's right, but this is called *middas hadin* and if he acts this way, Shamayim will judge him with *middas hadin* too, *middah k'neged middah*. He deserves to be treated exactly

as he treats others, and since he is not *mevater* to others, Shamayim will not be *mevater* to him either.

And the opposite is true too. If a person is *mevater* and gives in to others, Shamayim will be *mevater* to him too because he is acting with *middas harachamim*. Even though he really deserves something, he gives in and is forgiving; he pities the other person and doesn't want him to have hardships, so *middah k'neged middah*, he too merits to be treated with *middas harachamim*.

In a “normal,” “natural” situation, if one person suffers from someone else, he gets angry and wants to repay him in kind. However, we have to make a calculation: the hardships are from Shamayim. If a person is having difficulties, it's what he deserves to get, and it's from Shamayim; after all, “Everything is in Heaven's hands.” And what's the purpose of hardships? “Whatever Hashem the Merciful One does is for the good!” Whatever Shamayim does is for our own good; even difficulties are for our good. We do not and cannot know how things are for our good. It could be it is *kaparas avonos*, since he has sins and needs atonement. Perhaps he received the hardships in this world instead of Gehinnom in Olam HaBa, so that is for his good.

It turns out that if a person causes another person trouble, not only hasn't he done him a bad turn, he's actually doing something good and beneficial. Of course, he did not intend on doing something good, but the reality is that it benefits him. If so, why is he angry? He received a gift — the other man decreased his Gehinnom, it's for the best! Gehinnom is an example how challenges can be good. Or perhaps it's for some other good reason, because all challenges are from Shamayim and are for the best. Whoever created the challenges has done you a favor and you have to thank him for it — even though it was not with good intentions. He still did you favor, albeit without intending on it. So there's no reason to have a *hakpadah* against him. Anyone who acts with *middas harachamim* and does not have a *hakpadah* on others will be treated *middah k'neged middah* with *middas harachamim*.

It is well known that during the month of Elul, there was a note hanging up in Kelm, reminding the bachurim to strengthen themselves in *ahavas habriyos* — one way to accrue *zechuyos* for Yom HaDin — to act with *ahavas habriyos* and give every single person around you a good feeling. Everyone near you should feel good, and have *rachmanus* on them. “Follow in His ways,” and in this way, *middah k'neged middah*, one can emerge meritorious in judgment.

A Happy Life — Zechus for Yom HaDin

We've already spoken about the many *zechuyos* one can accrue to emerge meritorious in judgment: Torah, *yiras Shamayim*, and acting with *middos tovos* — following in His ways, and acting with *ahavas habriyos* and *chesed*. These are all ways to be victorious on Yom HaDin. Therefore, “*ashreinu*, we are fortunate, happy.” I wish that

all Klal Yisrael — those who are close and those who are far — carry out these *zechuyos* for Yom HaDin. Learn Torah, act with *yiras Shamayim*, perform *chesed*, *gemillus chasadim*, daven, and strengthen your *emunah* so that you will emerge victorious on Yom HaDin.

This is also the “*ashrecha baOlam haZeh*” mentioned in *Avos* (6:4): If you toil in Torah, *ashrecha baOlam haZeh* — *osek haTorah* provides us with a happy, fortunate life in this world. There is no greater happiness than this, even if he’s eating bread and salt, drinking measured water, sleeping on the ground, and living a life of privation. Despite all these difficulties, if you toil in Torah — this is not another difficulty — it will bring you happiness and good fortune in this world! That’s the reality.

We’re talking about bread and salt specifically, minimizing pleasures — which is one of the 48 acquisitions of Torah. Even though a person only has bread and salt, it still satiates him and he’s not hungry. So too regarding his water — even though it’s measured, he has enough to quench his thirst. And he sleeps on the ground, but he still gets to sleep enough and he’s no longer tired. Living a life of privation may be painful, but when a person is learning Torah, he forgets about all the pain and he’s just left with “*ashrecha baOlam haZeh*.”

This is the reality. *Ashreinu, mah tov chelkeinu* that we can live happy lives and be *zocheh* to this fortunate life before Yom HaDin. *B’ezras Hashem*, may we all merit a *kesivah v’chasimah tovah*.

Hanachas Even HaPinah for Yeshivas Beis Mattisyahu

There’s a Gemara (*Megillah* 27a): “What is considered a great house? A place where Torah and tefillah are made great.” Now, a building is going to be built here, a place for Torah and tefillah and that’s called a “great house.” A great house for a holy place, a place where Maran the Chazon Ish and Maran the Steipler were, a place that’s been sanctified for many years already. A holy house is built in a holy place, a holy house where people are involved in the holy Torah, and they’ll continue *b’ezras Hashem* to be *osek baTorah hakedoshah*, along with *tefillah* and *mussar*. All these spiritual matters will provide tremendous *zechuyos* for this *tzibbur*.

It’s Elul now, and it’s very important to have *zechuyos*, as many as possible. Yeshivos add another fifteen minutes of *mussar* study before Minchah. There are those who do this, because we need more *yiras Shamayim*, we must increase *yiras Shamayim*. The *Nefesh HaChaim* (1:3 in the notes) cites the *Zohar* that Torah without *yirah* does not rise up. Torah without *yirah* is not *b’sheleimus*; *yiras Shamayim* is necessary too. *Yiras Shamayim* literally means to remember that there is Gan Eden and Gehinnom, and that there’s reward and punishment in this world too. That is *yiras Shamayim*.

Now a great house is being built on a sacred place. The *kedushah* has been here for many years already; it’s a sacred house. We are perpetuating the *kedushah* by adding another building, a great house where Torah and *tefillah* is made great. *B’ezras Hashem* may every single person here have *siyatta d’Shemaya*, the *rabbanim*, *roshei yeshivah*, the *mashpiim* who inspire others to Torah, *yiras Shamayim*, and *middos tovos*. May there be *siyatta d’Shemaya* for success in all *ruchniyus* matters and in all *gashmiyus* matters needed to succeed in *ruchniyus*. *B’ezras Hashem*, may we be *zocheh* to *besuros tovos* very soon and to a *kesivah v’chasimah tovah*.

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