

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 Nitzavim 5782

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Ahavas HaBriyos: A Basis for the Entire Torah

We are on the threshold of Yom HaDin and we need *zechuyos* to emerge victorious in Judgment. The merit of *ahavas habriyos*, which is a basic, fundamental matter, is a great *zechus*, as Chazal say (*Yerushalmi Nedarim* 9:4): “*V’ahavta l’reiacha kamocho*, love your fellow Jew as yourself — this is a great principle in the Torah.”

We can explain the words “a great principle in the Torah” to mean that we need *ahavas habriyos* in order to fulfill *b’shleimus* all our Torah obligations. And if we act with “*v’ahavta l’reiacha kamocho*,” as the *Mesillas Yesharim* writes in chap. 11: “Exactly like yourself,” it is a *segulah* for success and it generates *shleimus* in all Torah-related matters. However, if a person’s *ahavas habriyos* is deficient, this causes a lack in *shleimus* in the entire Torah and all the mitzvos he fulfills.

Rav Chaim Vital writes in *Shaarei Kedushah* that the Torah does not enumerate many mitzvos regarding *middos*. While the Torah says that a king may not be a *baal gaavah* (*Devarim* 17:20): “So that his heart will not be haughty over his brothers,” the Torah does not specifically mention anger or many other *middos*, such as humility, *anavah*. It just says that Moshe Rabbeinu was the humblest of men, but there is no mitzvah to be humble, per se. The reason for this, says Rav Chaim Vital, is because *middos* are the basis and introduction to the entire Torah; they are the foundation of one’s soul and of man’s essence.

Don’t Publicize Your Good Deeds

Another thing that’s important to be aware of is to be careful not to publicize your good deeds, as it states (*Mishlei* 11:2), “And with the modest is wisdom.” The Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 14a) states: “הוי קבל וקיים,” that is, a person should stay out of the limelight, he should hide himself that people should not be familiar with him or know about his good deeds — and as a result of this, he will exist. That’s why one should hide his good deeds.

Rabbeinu Yonah writes similarly in *Shaarei Teshuvah* (1:24) regarding the attribute of humility: “He shall be submissive and serve Hashem with humility; he shall not desire honor for his honorable deeds, and he shall not request glory for his glorious actions; he shall conceal them from others’ knowledge as much as possible.” That is, it is necessary to hide his good deeds as much as he can, and this is a very great merit.

A Person B’Shleimus Influences Others

Every single person is an influencer and can be influenced: he is influenced by society, yet through his behavior, he also has an influence on society. The more *shleimus* a person has achieved, the greater his influence on others. How does a person attain *shleimus*? By learning *mussar sefarim*! Such as *Chovos HaLevavos*, which delineates the duties of the heart, how one’s heart should be.

Judge Every Man Favorably

Let’s mention one of the duties of the heart: judging favorably, *dan l’kaf zechus*. The Gemara (*Shabbos* 127) tells the story of a person who worked as a hired laborer for three years. When the time came for him to return to his home, he asked his master to give him his wages, so he’d be able to provide for his wife and children. His master responded that he had no money and could not pay him. The laborer asked him to pay him via other means, such as fruit, property, or livestock, but the master said he had none of those either.

Now, the laborer sees that the master has all of these things, and yet, he judges him favorably, believing that there’s a reason why he cannot give him his wages. Even though the master behaved improperly and actually did him a grave injustice, he still judged him favorably for every single thing — believing that there must be a reason, far-fetched as it may be, as to why he couldn’t pay him with that currency.

The Gemara relates that in the end, it became clear that the laborer's speculations were actually true, and when the master found out that his worker had judged him favorably, he told him: "And as for you, since you judged me favorably, may Hashem judge you favorably!"

The Gemara relates this story because this is actually Heavenly behavior: if someone judges his fellow

favorably, even in his heart — just in his heart! — Heaven will judge him favorably, *middah k'neged middah*. And this is one of the "*chovos halevavos*, duties of the heart," which is also a great merit for Yom HaDin.



The Days of Selichos / From Rabbeinu Shlita's Sichos

The Purpose of Selichos and Piyutim

We started saying Selichos in Elul, before Rosh Hashanah, and the Sefardim start from Rosh Chodesh Elul already. On Rosh Chodesh Elul, we start blowing the shofar in Elul and saying *L'Dovid Hashem Ori*.

All of these *minhagim* did not exist in the times of the Gemara; they only started later. For example the *piyyutim* of *Selichos* are only from the Rishonim's times; some are even from the Geonim's times, such as "*Malachei Rachamim*," and "*Yisrael Nosha*" — which are from Rabbeinu Shefatia. However, in the Gemara's times, no one said Selichos.

The reason is that during the Gemara's times, the people were strengthened even without *Selichos*. It was only later, when we experienced *yeridas hadoros* in *emunah* and in feeling *eimas hadin*, the trepidation of Judgment, that it was necessary to add all these *minhagim* in order to arouse us to *chizuk* and teshuvah.

We see this in the Yamim Noraim prayers as well. On Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur we recite many *piyyutim*; we're in shul all day long davening. During the times of the Gemara, it was not like this either. They just davened Shemoneh Esrei, without any additional *piyyutim*. Most of the *piyyutim* in our *machzor* is from the Rishonim's times; some are from the Geonim's times.

The Gemara tells us (*Yoma 77b*) that people would visit their *rebbe* on Yom Kippur, and they'd have time to learn. They weren't busy davening all day long, because they were on a *madreigah* where they felt Yom Kippur without needing all those *piyyutim*, and without any *chazzanim* to arouse the *tzibbur*. They felt Yom Kippur, because Yom Kippur is Yom Kippur!

Furthermore, the Gemara at the end of *Taanis* tells us that they would even make *shidduchim* on Yom Kippur. There's no paradox here of Yom Kippur with *eimas hadin* and *shidduchim*! Because they were much closer to the truth, closer to Har Sinai, and they were on such a level of *kirvas Elokim* that they were able to make *shidduchim*

on Yom Kippur without taking away from the gravity of the day. *Adaraba*, amidst their uplifted status and the general atmosphere of Yom Kippur — when the *Satan* has no control and everyone's thoughts are steeped in *kedushah* — the *shidduchim* came out even better.

That's how it was previously, but then there was *yeridas hadoros*, and they had to add some more *minhagim* since the people were slipping farther away. They had to arouse feelings, *hergeishim*, but real, true *hergeishim*, not illusory *hergeishim*, but *hergeishim* of clarity! Clarity of knowing the truth, being aware that the truth is as clear as daylight. And this effects the proper feelings in one's heart. Since there was *yeridas hadoros* in *emunah*, the innate *hergeishim* have been weakened and we need *Selichos* and all the *piyyutim* to wake us up and remind us.

Selichos Should Influence Our Behavior!

Commenting on the *pasuk* (*Devarim 30:6*), "And Hashem will circumcise your heart and the heart of your children to love..." the *Baal HaTurim* writes: "The *roshei teivos*, acrostic, of *את לבבך ואת לבב* spell *אלול*, and that's why it is customary to arise early for *Selichos* beginning from Rosh Chodesh Elul." Since Elul is an auspicious time to merit *ahavas Hashem* and *milas haleiv*, circumcision of the heart — which is a great merit — we say *Selichos*, as through *Selichos* and *tefillah* one merits the virtue of circumcision of a hardened heart. The opportune time for this is in Elul.

The *Baal HaTurim* writes further: "A similar hint is found in the words "לולא האמנתי לראות בטוב השם", If only I had believed to see Hashem's goodness" (*Tehillim 27:13*) — *לולא* is *אלול* backward, since from Elul and onward, I am terrified in front of Hashem." That is, on the one hand, Elul is a time of tremendous *zechuyos*, when one can merit circumcision of the heart, and this is a reason for great joy, but on the other hand, it is a time of fear and trepidation.

However, it is not so simple to merit circumcision of the heart via *Selichos*, because after all, we all say *Selichos*.

And do we all automatically merit *milas haleiv* right afterward? It doesn't look like it. We say *Selichos* and we don't see any change; we don't feel any change, we don't feel that we've received any additional virtues after reciting *Selichos*.

That's because it's not enough to merely recite *Selichos*. It depends on how the *Selichos* are recited, and what the person does after *Selichos*. How does the rest of his day look? In order to truly see a change due to *Selichos*, trepidation must be part of the equation — a person must have trepidation and awe of judgment due to his present situation. And then, through *Selichos* and davening — along with this trepidation and awe — one will merit “and Hashem will circumcise your heart.” If trepidation is present as well.

Righteousness Is Yours, Hashem — Shame Is Ours

In the *sefer Menuchah v'Kedushah*, the author (a *talmid* of Rav Chaim of Volozhin) writes: “Once when he arrived at shul for *Selichos*, the *tzibbur* had just begun reciting ‘*Lecha Hashem ha-tzedakah v'lanu boshes hapanim*, Hashem, righteousness is with You, and shame is with us.’ And he became so embarrassed that he wasn't able to lift up his face for a few minutes, and tears streamed from his eyes, similar to Ezra's statement: ‘I am ashamed and embarrassed to lift my face.’ And for the rest of his life, that *tzaddik* would daven to merit such holy moments once again.”

That is, he enjoyed being on that *madreigah* when he felt the shame and the truth with such clarity of *emunah* that he began to cry, for his *emunah* was tangible, but it only happened to him once, and he wanted to merit achieving this level again, but he was not successful.

The Gemara tells us (*Brachos* 28b) that before Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai's *petirah*, his students asked him to bless them. He told them, “*Yehi ratzon* that your fear of Heaven shall be as great as your fear of man.” His students were surprised, and asked, “Rabbeinu, is that all?” Rabbi Yochanan answered them, “*Halevai!* After all, when a person transgresses, he sins in private, saying, ‘No one sees me.’” *Lichorah*, this is hard to understand — did Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai's illustrious *talmidim* lack *yiras Shamayim* that he answered them “*halevai*,” as if to say that he didn't believe they'd achieve this *madreigah*?

We must explain that they surely had simple fear of punishment, *yiras ha'onesh*, but Rabbi Yochanan wanted to bless them that they'd achieve a higher *madreigah*, that they should also reach the *madreigah* of shame and *yiras ha-romemus* of HaKadosh Baruch Hu. This is clear from the second part of his response to them: “After all, when a person transgresses, he sins in private, saying, ‘No one sees me.’” When a person transgresses in private, he's not hiding because he's scared of the punishment; he's hiding out of shame. He wants to make a respectable impression on other people; he doesn't want to be ashamed, and he's embarrassed to do things that will make people think less of him. His innate sense of shame of people stops him from sinning.

This is what Rabbi Yochanan meant when he blessed them to have such a level of shame in front of Hashem as well — as this level of *emunah* is higher than *yiras ha-onesh*, fear of punishment.

The *Shaarei Teshuvah* (1:21) writes about the *madreigah* of shame: “The sinner will be extremely embarrassed to transgress sins in front of people, and he will be humiliated if they sense or notice that he's sinning. So how is that he is not ashamed in front of the *Borei Yisbarach*? It must be that since Hashem Yisbarach is distant from his inner self, he is ashamed in front of [Hashem's] creations, but is not ashamed in front of the Blessed Creator, the *Borei Yisbarach*.” That is, everyone should naturally be ashamed of his sins, but a person lives with his senses without understanding them and he does not feel that he should be ashamed.

The *Shaarei Teshuvah* continues: “And one attains the level of shame by contemplating Hashem's greatness and thinking about how evil is one who rebels against His word. And when he constantly remembers that Hashem sees his actions, discerns his inner feelings and beholds his thoughts.” Similarly, the *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 1 cites the Rambam in *Moreh Nevuchim*, which states that by “keeping Hashem before me constantly,” one will “arrive at fear and humility due to fear of Hashem Yisbarach and his constant **shame** of Him.”

While this is a very exalted *madreigah*, one does not acquire it with physical exertion; it is attained through *avodas ha-lev*, and there numerous levels one can reach in this matter.



Rabbeinu's Address at the Kinnus of Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah in His Home

We were *zocheh* to a wonderful thing, a great *simchah*, that there's *achdus*. Degel HaTorah and Agudas Yisrael are running together on a joint list, and that's terrific and a great *zechus* — *achdus*.

Our public representatives, the Knesset members and the municipality officials in the various cities are involved in *kiddush Shem Shamayim*, as it states (*Mishlei* 11:14): "With many counselors there is a victory." And this is very important for our representatives. They have many *zechuyos*, but they also need *zechuyos* to merit these *zechuyos*, deeds with *zechuyos*, they need to take counsel, with *yishuv ha-daas*, about every single matter.

There's another important matter, and that is to stay away from publicity. Don't publicize what they're doing, because publicity is harmful. Chazal have said (*Bava Metzia* 42a), "Blessing only rests on something that is concealed." And they also said (*Sanhedrin* 14a), "הוי קבל וקיים." It's well known that publicity is harmful. That's why it's very important that all public representatives, anyone involved in public matters, should not speak about or publicize anything. Modesty itself is a good attribute, as Rashi states (*Shemos* 34:3): "There is nothing more pleasant than modesty." And besides it is also a *segulah* for success.

We really were *zocheh* to *siyatta d'Shemaya* that we have representatives in the Knesset and in all the municipalities. They have *siyatta d'Shemaya* in their public activities, and *baruch Hashem* they merit this, due to their *zechuyos*.

Elections are coming up very soon. The nature of the new government depends on the elections. The last government's goal was to decree many decrees to do away with religion, *Rachmana litzlan*, both in *gashmiyus* and *ruchniyus*. And *baruch Hashem*, they were not successful, but that was their plan. It was a miracle and *hashgachah pratit* that their decrees were unsuccessful. We needed *zechuyos* for that too.

Therefore, it is very important that as many people as possible vote "*Gimel*" in the upcoming elections. Every person should go out and vote and try to persuade others to vote too. It's a very great *zechus* and it's *mamash kiddush Shem Shamayim*. Anyone who votes is declaring, "*Hashem Hu HaElokim*"! This is the declaration of anyone who votes. "Yahadut HaTorah V'HaShabbat" follows the Torah, the Torah's path, the way of Torah.

And it truly is something important. The *tzibbur* must be aware of this, that a person who goes in the Torah's way is "fortunate in this world." And there is no greater joy or fortune than this. And even if there's just bread and salt, and measured water, it doesn't deter him. And this way is actually the preferred way, *l'chatchilah*, with minimal pleasure. The main thing is to follow the Torah's path, and then you will be fortunate in this world.

Gimel's goal is that all Klal Yisrael should enjoy "you will be fortunate in this world," especially here in Eretz Yisrael. We are involved here in Eretz Yisrael so that every single person here will be "fortunate in this world." That's why it's a *kiddush Hashem* to vote, and anyone who abstains from voting for whatever reasons or calculations is actually abstaining from *kiddush Hashem*, and that's very grave indeed.

And there's one more very important matter too: Do not criticize other people. There is no *toeles*, benefit, to criticizing others. Additionally, criticism does not give you *zechuyos*; it's actually harmful! Do not speak critically about others because they are all *shogegim* and *anusim*. Our job is simply to state our goal, and our goal is that the entire *tzibbur* should "be fortunate in the world." We can explain it logically, but do not speak critically about others. One who criticizes others will not have *siyatta d'Shemaya*.

The general rule is that we need *zechuyos*, everything hinges on *zechuyos*. We need *zechuyos* for *siyatta d'Shemaya*, and the *zechuyos* are dependent on every single person's behavior. There are *zechuyos of middos tovos*, Torah and *yiras Shamayim*. And now that we are in Elul, there is *eimas ha-din*, fear of judgment, and there's Rabbeinu Yonah's entire *Shaarei Teshuvah* — those are the greatest *zechuyos*. *B'eiras Hashem* may we all merit *siyatta d'Shemaya* to be *mekadeish Shem Shamayim*. May there be a *kesivah v'chasimah tovah* for us and all of Am Yisrael!

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