

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

A Sichah from Maran Rosh HaYeshivah Rav Gershon Edelstein *shlita* . **Vayeishev 5783**

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V'Halachta B'drachav — Regulating Ourselves in Middos Tovos

We learn in *Pirkei Avos* (2:8) that Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai had five students: Rabbi Eliezer ben Hurkenos, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chanina, Rabbi Yosi HaKohen, Rabbi Shimon ben Nesanel, and Rabbi Elazar ben Arach.

The next *mishnah* tells us that Rabbi Yochanan told them: "Go out and see what is the good path man should adhere to." We can explain that "good path" means "good *middah*." "Man should adhere to" means that he should constantly and consistently act with this good *middah* and cling to it at all times. A number of good *middos* are mentioned there, as we will now explain.

Now, if these good *middos* were already present in this person's *teva*, then it's already part of him, and he doesn't have to "stick" to them especially. But the *mishnah's* wording shows us that even if these *middos* are not part of his nature, he must still adhere to them and regulate himself in these *middos*, until his habits become second nature. And he should get used to acting with *sheleimus* via these good *middos*.

The truth is, we should go back to the source of this idea as to why a person should try to have good *middos*, or endeavor to mold his behavior through good *middos*.

Apparently, the source for this is the *pasuk* (*Devarim* 28:9): "*V'halachta b'drachav*, And you shall follow in His ways." Chazal said (see *Shabbos* 133; *Sotah* 14), "Just as He is merciful, you shall be merciful; just as He is gracious, you shall be gracious." There is a mitzvah to follow in Hashem's ways, to behave with good *middos* like HaKadosh Baruch Hu behaves. And acting with good *middos* is called "*in His ways*."

What Is the Good Path?

This is what Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai meant when he told his *talmidim* to go out and see what is the good "path" to adhere to, to cling to, to constantly shape his

behavior based on these *middos tovos*. This is how to fulfill the mitzvah of "*v'halachta b'drachav*."

Pirkei Avos tells us that each of Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai's five *talmidim* gave a different answer to his question; each one mentioned a different *middah tovah* to cling to. Rabbi Eliezer's answer is quoted first: "**Ayin tovah**," a good eye, meaning it's a good *middah* to *fargin* the other person, to be happy with his successes and good things, to be happy that the other person is feeling good.

Rabbi Yehoshua said, "**Chaver tov**," a good friend, which is also a good *middah*. Being a good friend, connecting to him, helping him, giving him a good feeling. Rabbi Yosi said, "**Shochein tov**," a good neighbor, meaning you should also be a good neighbor, act nicely, respectfully, and make sure that even your neighbors feel good around you. [This is how Rabbeinu Yonah explains it: "Rabbi Yehoshua said "*chaver tov*" — to be a good friend to a person other than someone you would naturally be attracted to, and to regulate yourself to acting in a way that will cause other people to be comfortable around you. Rabbi Yosi said, "*shochein tov*" — that he personally should be a good neighbor to all his neighbors.]

Anticipating Consequences vs. Borrowing and Failing to Repay

Rabbi Shimon said, "**Ha'roeh es ha-nolad**, One who foresees the consequences of his actions." Let's understand what is so special about this, and what good *middah* this includes.

Later in the same *mishnah*, Rabbi Yochanan tells his students to "go out and see what is the bad path from which man should distance himself. Each person stated the opposite of the good *middah* he had mentioned previously. Rabbi Eliezer said, A bad eye. Rabbi Yehoshua said, A bad friend. Rabbi Yosi said, A bad neighbor. Rabbi Shimon said, Borrowing and failing to pay back.

The opposite of one who can envision the outcome of his deeds, is one who borrows and doesn't pay back his

loans. That is, even though he doesn't have the means to pay back his loan, he still borrows. This is a bad habit and one should stay away from it. Why does he borrow if he knows he won't be able to pay back? It's because he doesn't consider what will happen afterward, so he borrows and then cannot pay back.

Therefore, "*ha'roeh es ha'nolad*, anticipating the outcome of his actions," means he should not borrow if he doesn't have a way to pay back the money. Even if he will encounter a little hardship as a result, he will have to manage with what he has and not borrow if he can't pay back.

And it's not so horrible to have a little hardship. In the Gemara (end of *Maseches Sotah*), Chazal expound about the virtues of one who learns Torah *mitoch ha-dachak*, during trying times. Maran the Chazon Ish *zt"l* once told me about learning *Torah mitoch ha-dachak*, "*Der Eibershter hut doss lieb*," Hashem loves Torah that is learned during trying times. That is, if someone has difficulties and learns despite those challenges, he is beloved by Hashem! HaKadosh Baruch Hu loves the person who is *osek baTorah mitoch ha-dachak* and learns during challenging times.

In any case, the good *middah* Rabbi Shimon chose, "one who anticipates the outcome of his actions," means not to borrow if he has no way of repaying his debt. If he has some difficulties, he will merit the *maalah* of learning Torah *mitoch hadachak*, but he should not borrow money.

Lev Tov — the Root of All Good Middos

Rabbi Elazar said, "**A good heart.**" That is, the good path to adhere is to make sure one's heart is good. Having a good eye and a good friend etc. is not enough. One needs a good heart! Here too, even if having a good heart is not this person's nature, he has to change his nature and make having a good heart his nature.

The same is true for all these qualities, such as a good eye. A person must reinforce the characteristic of having a good eye, he must *fargin* his fellow Jew and be happy with his friend's successes and good fortune. One must get used to being a good friend and a good neighbor, even if it's not his *teva*, and eventually his habit will become second nature, and his *teva* will change for the good. He should habituate himself in behaving this way until these good *middos* will become part of his very nature.

Rabbi Elazar said that the good *middah* to cling to is "a good heart." Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai told his

talmidim: "I prefer Elazar ben Arach's words to your words, for your words are included in his words!" That is, **the heart is the root, and if one has a good heart, and his heart wants others to have it good, and he enjoys it when other people have a good life, then he will automatically have the other good middos as well.** And that's the *ikkar*: having a good heart. And the converse is true too.

Instilling within Ourselves Good Middos

Rabbeinu Yonah writes in *Shaarei Teshuvah* (3:35): "You shall surely give him and your heart shall not be grieved when you give him" (*Devarim* 15:10). This is warning us to distance our soul from *tzarus ayin*, stinginess and mean-spiritedness, and to have a good eye, as it states (*Mishlei* 22:9), 'One who has a good eye, he will be blessed.' Giving handouts is not enough; we must instill in our souls the *middah* of generosity. Therefore, the Torah warned us and said, 'And your heart shall not be grieved,' after it states 'you shall surely give him.'"

This *pasuk* is referring to giving *tzedakah* — it's not enough to distribute *tzedakah*; one must instill within himself the *middah* of generosity, Yidden must have the *teva* of *ahavas chesed*, and we must be *tovei ayin*. The *pasuk* is telling us — "You shall surely give him, and your heart shall not be grieved" — your *middah* of *ahavas chesed* should be prominent when giving *tzedakah*.

Rabbeinu Yonah wrote further (3:36), "'Don't force your heart and don't clench your fists' (*Devarim* 15:7), this is warning us to remove from our hearts the *middah* of cruelty, and to plant within it pleasant shoots, which are faithful acts of mercy and kindness, as it states, 'And you shall go in His ways.'" That is, there is a *mitzvah* to implant in our souls good *middos*, which he calls "*nitei ne'amim*," pleasant shoots — good *middos* should be planted in our soul! And what are these good *middos*? *Rachamim* and *chesed*!

Rabbeinu Yonah quotes the *pasuk* "and you shall follow in His ways," pointing out that this is the *mitzvah*, to regulate ourselves to have *rachmanus* and *ahavas chesed* in our souls. These *middos* are Hashem's "ways," as Chazal say, "Just as He is merciful and gracious, you too shall be merciful and gracious."

This is what Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai's *talmidim* were saying: good *middos* are the good path that man should cling to, and this is how to fulfill the *mitzvah* of "*V'halachta b'drachav*."

Regulating Ourselves to Ahavas Chesed

How can we do this *l'maaseh*? What are the necessary steps to achieve this? How can a person regulate himself to have *ahavas chesed* in his soul?

In his commentary on Mishnayos, on the *mishnah* “*Hakol l'fi rov hamaaseh*, Everything depends on the abundance of good deeds,” the Rambam writes (*Avos* 3:15): “He says that man will not attain these *maalos* based on the **greatness** of his deed, rather, it is based on the **abundance of times** he performs these deeds. The *marshal* is that if a person would give a worthy person 1000 gold coins at once, but would not give anything to the other person, this single great act would not cultivate his *middah* of generosity at the same level that giving one gold coin a thousand times would do. In the latter example, the person acted with generosity one thousand times, and he will have gained a strong acquisition of the *middah*, whereas in the first example, his soul only experienced a great *hisorerus* once to act properly, and then it dissipated.”

That is, if a person gives 1000 coins to tzedakah at once, it certainly has an effect on him and strengthens his *middah* of generosity because he did give tzedakah, and the action influences his *teva*, but it only has a small *hashpaah* on him. It does not affect him as much as the person who gave 1000 coins at 1000 different times, each time handing out one coin. The *hashpaah* in this case is completely different, because when a person gives tzedakah 1000 times, he has performed 1000 good deeds of generosity, and every *maaseh* joins together to change his nature, until his *teva* transforms completely, and he thus instills the *middah* of generosity in his soul.

This is what the Tanna in *Avos* meant when he said, “Everything depends on the abundance of good deeds.” It does not depend on the “size” of the deed, but on the “abundance” of deeds! An abundance of good deeds changes a person’s nature, and the more good deeds one performs, the better his nature becomes. This is how a person can change his *teva* — by acting in this manner, even if he’s lacking in *ahavas chesed*, he will attain *ahavas chesed*. And this is possible.

Torah Tavlin — The Remedy Against the Yetzer Hara

On the other hand, we have a yetzer hara, and the yetzer hara is the converse of nature, which opposes all our good deeds. We need an *eitzah* how to withstand the *yetzer hara*’s temptations.

The *eitzah* is as Chazal say (*Kiddushin* 30; *Bava Basra* 16), “I created the yetzer hara, I created Torah as an antidote to it.” The Torah is the *eitzah* against all the temptations of the yetzer hara, and it is the ammunition and stronghold against the yetzer hara. Now, the yetzer hara does not let us learn, and it creates opposition and disturbances, and it persuades us not to learn.

It seems that’s why they said “I created the Torah as a ‘*tavlin*’ (lit. spice) against it.” Just as a spice adds flavor to a food, Hashem created the Torah with a flavor and sweetness — *divrei Torah* are very interesting and they are sweet and pleasant, and *m’meilah*, Torah is enticing. This is the “spice” against the yetzer hara — the fact that *divrei Torah* are interesting and pleasant! And that they have a special flavor that gives the one who learns a very pleasant feeling.

Learning Mussar — the Strongest Tavlin

The *Mishnah Berurah* (1:10) writes, “A person must set a time to learn *mussar sefarim* every single day, be it a lot or a little, because ‘one who is greater than his fellow has a greater yetzer hara than him.’ The *tavlin* against the yetzer hara is *tochachas ma’amarei Chazal*, Chazal’s rebukes.” The strongest *divrei Torah* against the yetzer hara is *mussar*, and learning *mussar* is the antidote that works directly against the yetzer hara.

Mussar is like a “spice” — it’s interesting, and *mussar sefarim* have a very pleasant taste. Anyone who learns *mussar* is aware of this, he knows there’s a pleasant flavor to learning *mussar*. *Mussar sefarim* gives the learner a very pleasant feeling — of course, this is true if you learn an interesting *sefer*, or a part that’s interesting. Each person should follow his *teva* and learn whatever attracts him and interests him. One who does this will see that *mussar* gives the learner a very pleasant feeling.

Similarly, a person who listens to *mussar* — this is something I know — when a person listens to interesting *mussar*, it has an effect on him and gives him a very pleasant feeling! This is the Torah *tavlin*, like a spice that flavors the food.

That’s why *bachurim* have a steady *mussar seder* in *yeshivos*. They learn for a half-hour a day, and this *seder* is not *middas chassidus*, it’s something extremely important and it provides great *chizuk*, and a very pleasant feeling.

Mussar and Tefillah

I've already told you about the young *bachur* whose family prevented him from learning in yeshivah and he had to go out and work. But at the end of each day, he'd come to Yeshivas Ponevez and learn *mussar* for a half-hour before Maariv. I asked him why he specifically chose to learn *mussar*, and he said that he feels it gives him *chizuk*.

In the end, in the *zechus* of this *chizuk* and the "tavlin," he merited *siyatta d'Shemaya*, as Chazal said (*Yoma* 38b), "One who comes to be purified is helped." Learning *mussar* is "coming to be purified," and that person will have *siyatta d'Shemaya*.

This *bachur* was *zocheh* to *siyatta d'Shemaya* and his disturbances stopped, and he immediately joined a yeshivah. Now he is married already and he is *mezakeh es harabbim* in Torah and *yiras Shamayim*. And this is all in the merit of his steady *seder* in learning *mussar*! Since he "came to be purified," *Shamayim* helped him become a "purifier," a *mashpia* on others and a *mezakeh es harabbim*.

That's why *mussar seder* in *yeshivos* is something that adds so much, because this is how the *bachurim* "come to be purified," and this is how they are *zocheh* to *siyatta d'Shemaya* for success in *ruchniyus*.

Rav Yisrael Salanter said that it's tried-and-true that davening for *ruchniyus* is helpful, as they say in *Brachos* (50a) regarding the *pasuk* "Open your mouth wide and I will fill it" — this is referring to *divrei*

Torah. Open your mouth wide — just ask, because *tefillah* is effective!

It's only referring to *tefillah* that's verbally expressed, *tefillah* in one's heart is also effective. If a person offers a silent *tefillah* for help in *ruchniyus*, he will have *siyatta d'Shemaya*, because a silent *tefillah* in one's heart is also a prayer — Hashem knows our innermost thoughts, as it states (*Tehillim* 94:11), "Hashem knows the thoughts of man." We've already told true stories about how people were *zocheh* to *siyatta d'Shemaya* as the result of a non-verbal *tefillah*. Learning *mussar* is also considered "coming to be purified," and those who learn *mussar* are *zocheh* to *siyatta d'Shemaya* for success in *ruchniyus*.

This can teach us that anyone who learns *mussar*, and does so on a steady, daily, basis, is constantly rising from one *madreigah* to the next. And in any case, they surely aren't falling, and they might even be growing and rising.

This is the *maalah* of learning *mussar*, which is also a "spice" that gives the learner a pleasant feeling, as well as *chizuk*, and that's a tremendous advantage. When a person hears *mussar*, listens to a *mussar shmuess*, that also gives him a very pleasant feeling and much *chizuk*.

Yehi ratzon that *Shamayim* should give *siyatta d'Shemaya* to every single one of us, and every single one of Klal Yisrael, that we should become aware of the path to *chizuk* in *ruchniyus* which provides us with a pleasant feeling and a happy, fortunate life, as Chazal say (*Avos* 6:4): "Ashrecha baOlam HaZeh!"

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