

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

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

514

## “כי היא חכמתכם ובינתכם לעיני העמים”

### The Yevanim Wanted to Lower Am Yisrael's Madreigah

The wicked Greek kingdom, Malchus Yavan, issued decrees against Am Yisrael “to make them forget Your Torah, and cause them to transgress the statutes of Your will.” Let’s take a look at the reason for this: Why, and for what purpose did they want to make them forget Torah? Why should Malchus Yavan be bothered by the fact that there’s Torah and there are people being *osek baTorah*? Why didn’t they want people to be *osek baTorah*?

The reason might have to do with Am Yisrael’s special, good *middos*. Am Yisrael naturally has good *middos*, they have a completely different personality than the other nations, as Chazal said (*Yevamos* 79a), “There are three signs in this nation: they are merciful (*rachmanim*), bashful (*bayshanim*), and perform acts of loving-kindness (*gomlei chasadim*). *Rachmanim* means they have mercy on others, *bayshanim* means they have the attribute of bashfulness, and *gomlei chasadim* means doing acts of kindness to others even without the element of mercy — doing *chesed* because of *ahavas chesed*, loving to do kindness.

It’s well known that this is Am Yisrael’s nature. If one Jew is here, and another Jew is suffering in another place, thousands of miles away, the first Jew is pained over his pain and wants to help him. And he even sends help from far away, because this is a Jew’s nature — *rachamanim* and *gomlei chasadim*. This nature does not exist in other nations — it could be that they’ll do some “acts of charity,” but it does not stem from *ahavas chesed*, because it’s a different personality.

As a result, the non-Jews have an inferiority complex, because the Jews have such a good personality and they don’t. They feel very uncomfortable about this.

That’s why they wanted to “make them forget Your Torah and cause them to transgress the statutes of Your will” — they wanted to take Klal Yisrael away from

Torah and mitzvos, because without Torah and mitzvos, they wouldn’t have the special personality exclusive to Am Yisrael. Torah and mitzvos are what makes Am Yisrael a nation with a special personality, and they wanted to change that. They couldn’t bear it that we have a special personality, and it caused them to feel inferior. Instead of becoming better themselves — that’s not possible, because they would have to become Yidden in order to do so — they wanted to ruin Am Yisrael and make them “forget Your Torah and cause them to transgress the statutes of Your will.” It seems to be that this is the reason.

### Hatred Since Matan Torah

The truth is, there is a *maamar Chazal* (*Shabbos* 89a): “Why was ‘Har Sinai’ called Har Sinai? Because hatred (*sinah*) came down from it to the other nations.” That is, the hatred that the other nations harbor toward Klal Yisrael comes from Har Sinai. At Maamad Har Sinai, Klal Yisrael received the Torah, and they also received the madreigah and special attributes of Am Yisrael. They received the “Am Yisrael personality,” and this caused hatred. That’s why the non-Jews hate us, and that’s why they want to “make them forget Your Torah.” They want Am Yisrael to be like them, without the special *chashivus*.

### Hashgachah that Klal Yisrael Remain on Its Madreigah

The Midrash tells us (*Yalkut, Bamidbar remez* 684), “When they came to Shittim and the nation began to commit adultery, the nations rejoiced: ‘That crown that had been in their hands is already taken away from them; the praise that they are praised for is nullified; they are equal to us.’” When Bnei Yisrael sinned with the Daughters of Moav, the nations were happy that Am Yisrael was now just like them; they lacked the *madreigah* and *chashivus* of Am Yisrael, and they said, “That crown that had been in their hands is already taken away from them.” Am Yisrael’s crown and *chashivus* were now gone because of the adultery they committed with Bnos Moav; the other nations were happy that Am

Yisrael would now be just like them, and they wouldn't be inferior to Am Yisrael.

The Midrash continues: "What did HaKadosh Baruch Hu do? When Klal Yisrael fell from their level, Hashem made them rise. He brought death to all those who sinned and brought Yisrael back to purity." 24,000 men from Klal Yisrael died in the plague, until Pinchas came and stopped the plague, as well as the spiritual decline. And this is how Hashem picked Am Yisrael up, bringing them back to their previous *madreigah*. **HaKadosh Baruch Hu does not let Yisrael decline from their *madreigah*; there is special *hashgachah* to make sure that Am Yisrael remains on their spiritual level, with the special *maalos* of Am Yisrael.**

The other nations feel inferior because of this, and that's why the Yevanim wanted to cause us to "forget Your Torah, and make them transgress the statutes of Your will." "Torah" is *esek haTorah* and "statutes of Your will" are those mitzvos we don't know the reason for, such as *shaatnez* and *kilayim*, both in the vineyard and in other plants. The Yevanim wanted to nullify these *chukim*, to cause them to transgress the statutes of Your will.

### The Importance of Observing Chukim

Why did the Yevanim specifically target the *chukim*, those mitzvos we don't know the reason for? We don't find that they issued decrees against *mishpatim*, because *mishpatim*, which are monetary laws, are things that the human mind can understand. *Adaraba*, the non-Jews understand "Jewish law," and people all over the world are interested in the Jews' monetary laws. Instead, the Yevanim wanted to do away with the *chukim*, "to cause them to transgress the statutes of Your will." What's the reason for this? Why did they care specifically about *chukim*?

The explanation is written in the Torah (*Devarim* 4:6): "For this is your wisdom and intelligence in the eyes of the nations, the fact that you heed all these *chukim*, and they said, 'Only a wise, intelligent nation is this great nation.'" That is, the *goyim* see that we are wise and intelligent — how? Because we heed and observe all these *chukim*! Our observance of the *chukim* shows the other nations that we are a "wise, intelligent nation."

It says explicitly that it's because of the *chukim*, even though *chukim* are not something we understand. When the non-Jews see us observing the *chukim*, they say, "Only a wise, intelligent nation is this great nation." This causes them to value and respect Am Yisrael, who is an important nation, a wise, intelligent nation, and as a result of the *chukim*, they begin to esteem Am Yisrael! That's

the reality. (See the *Sefer HaAkeidah's* explanation of this in the beginning of *Parshas Ki Savo*.)

That's why the Yevanim wanted to make them "transgress the statutes of Your will," because they wanted to diminish Klal Yisrael's importance and *madreigah*. They specifically issued decrees against the *chukim*, and not against the *mishpatim*, because the *chukim* are what give Klal Yisrael a special *madreigah* in the non-Jews' eyes. When the non-Jews see this, they see Am Yisrael's importance and it makes them feel inferior, and that's why they want to make them "transgress the statutes of Your will," that's why they want to stop Am Yisrael from fulfilling the *chukim*.

### Our Chachamim Maintain Am Yisrael's Madreigah

At the end of the *Tochachah*, it states (*Vayikra* 26:44), "But despite all this, while they are in the land of their enemies, I will not despise them nor will I reject them to annihilate them, thereby breaking My covenant that is with them, for I am Hashem their G-d." Chazal said (*Megillah* 11a), "I did not despise them — in the days of the Kasdim, when I sent them Daniel, Chananyah, Mishael, and Azaryah; I did not reject them — in the days of the Yevanim, when I sent them Shimon HaTzaddik and Chashmona'i and his sons, and Mattisyahu Kohen Gadol; to annihilate them — in the days of Haman, when I sent them Mordechai and Esther; breaking My covenant with them — in the days of the Persians, when I sent them Beis Rebbi and the sages of the generations."

That is, Klal Yisrael have special *hashgachah*. Throughout the generations, there have always been *gedolei Yisrael*, and they keep Klal Yisrael on their special *madreigah*. The other nations see this *hashgachah* and they feel inferior; it causes them pain and it's disturbing to them, so instead of becoming *geirim*, they hate Klal Yisrael and want to ruin them.

### Klal Yisrael's Madreigah Influenced Others to Convert

Granted, there are those who really did become *geirim* after seeing Am Yisrael's *madreigah*. I know about a *ger tzedek* who, as a non-Jew, found a *Pirkei Avos* with *mefarshim* translated into German. He read it and when he saw what was written there, he decided to become a *ger*! Because throughout *Pirkei Avos*, one sees what a Yid is, with such good *middos*, such exalted behavior, such refinement, such *madreigos*, levels that only a Yid can achieve; a non-Jew cannot attain these levels. That's why he decided to convert. This is a true story, and I was acquainted with this *ger*; he moved to Eretz Yisrael after he converted.

There's another story about a *talmid chacham* who went to America to lecture on "Jewish law." His lectures were based on *Shulchan Aruch Choshen Mishpat*, with the Ketzos, the Nesivos, and Rabbi Akiva Eiger, and all the Acharonim. Non-Jewish law students also attended his lectures; they enjoyed the lectures and were impressed by them. After one lecture, a non-Jewish student came over to him and told him that after hearing the lectures, she came to the conclusion that they must convert.

"כִּי הִיא חֲכַמְתֶּכֶם וּבִינְתֶכֶם לְעֵינֵי הָעַמִּים"

### Hashgachah For Klal Yisrael's Survival in Galus

This is the power of Torah, Toras Yisrael, with all the *chukim* and *mishpatim*. This is what we have; we received the Torah from Sinai, and that causes the other nations to hate Am Yisrael. We have suffered due to this throughout the generations and we continue to suffer, but Am Yisrael exists!

Am Yisrael is a nation that survives and exists without their own country; Am Yisrael has been *galus* for thousands of years already, and we are not assimilating totally with other nations. How can this be? Has anything like this every been heard of before? A nation without a country remains a nation and does not join the melting pot of other nations, carries on with their lives *b'kedushah u'b'taharah* — this is special *hashgachah pratis* for Am Yisrael. We continue to exist for thousands of years in *galus*, without a country, and we live good, happy lives.

We see the special *hashgachah* in Klal Yisrael's existence throughout the entire period of *galus*. Rav Yaakov Emden wrote about this at length in the introduction to his siddur *Beis Yaakov*: "Who shall contemplate the singularity of our affairs and status in the world — we are the exiled nation, the scattered sheep, after everything that transpired to us, from all the *tzaros* for thousands of years; there is no nation more persecuted than ours. How plentiful were our enemies, how powerful were those who reared their heads against us from our youth, to destroy us and uproot us due to their hatred, which is based in jealousy. No matter how many rose up against us, they were never able to totally destroy us and annihilate us.

"All the previous world powers have vanished, and we, who cling to Hashem, are all alive here today. Throughout our lengthy exile, not one letter or vowel mark has disappeared from our *Torah shebichsav*, and all our Sages' words exist... Time's hand has had no power over them, nor has it vanquished them. What will a sharp-witted philosopher answer? Is this the work of coincidence?! By my life! When I contemplated these

wonders, they appeared greater to me than all the miracles and wonders that Hashem Yisbarach did for our forefathers in Mitzrayim, and in the Midbar, and in Eretz Yisrael."

So too, the *Chovos HaLevavos* writes (*Shaar HaBechinah*, end of chap. 5), that if a person nowadays wants to see miracles similar to those performed in Yetzias Mitzrayim, he should "look with a truthful eye at our status between the nations, from the time of our exile, and see how our affairs were arranged among them, despite all the disagreements we have with them, both overtly and covertly, and they are aware of these disagreements. And he shall see, our financial situation is close to theirs, or maybe even better than theirs. He will see that an average person among them must work harder for his livelihood than an average or even below average among us."

We see that even in *galus*, we see special *hashgachah pratis*, that Am Yisrael leads a happy, good life, and sometimes the Jews' life is better than the non-Jews', and *goyim* come work for Yidden. In the past, Yidden were moneylenders, lending money with interest to non-Jews, and the non-Jews understood and accepted this. And so over thousands of years, Am Yisrael is surviving, living happy lives, even without a country; this is a clear sign of the special *hashgachah pratis* for Klal Yisrael. This is Klal Yisrael's *madreigah*.

### Shelo Asani Goy — Ashreinu!

Every day in *Birkas HaShachar*, we recite the *brachah*, "*shelo asani goy*"; we also say "*shelo asani oved*," and "*shelo asani ishah*," because a woman has less mitzvos. But the first thing we mention is "*shelo asani goy*," we recite a *brachah* over this.

**"Shelo asani goy" — we just say it, but if we'd pay attention to what we are saying, we would realize that we must feel some *madreigah*, some sort of joy and happiness. We should be thinking "How lucky I am that I am not a goy!" We don't feel it, we don't feel it to such a degree. After all, who are we, and what *madreigah* are we on? But this is what we should be feeling! Every day in davening, we say: "אשרינו, מה טוב, ומה יפה ירושתנו! חלקינו, ומה נעים גורלנו, ומה יפה ירושתנו! We are fortunate, how good is our lot, and how pleasant is our fortune, and how beautiful is our inheritance! *Ashreinu!* That we say Shema Yisrael every day, and we have *emunah*, the Torah, and the mitzvos. *Ashreinu.***

*Baruch Hashem*, Am Yisrael is alive and existing with its special *madreigah*, and *b'ezras Hashem*, there will be *siyatta d'Shemaya* now only for the *shomrei Torah*

*u'mitzvos*, but also for our distant brothers. They should also be *zocheh* to reach this *madreigah*.

Our distant brothers do have this personality of *rachmanim*, *bayshanim*, and *gomlei chasadim*. [Because the entire Jewish nation received this *madreigah* at Har Sinai when they accepted the Torah and mitzvos, and one only loses the *madreigah* if he sins intentionally. The Chazon Ish already wrote that in our days, most of our

distant brothers are unintentional sinners and *tinokos she'nishbu*, that's why they still have the special personality of Am Yisrael.] However, while this is the reality, they are not happy and fortunate, they are not *me'ushar*! They don't have the happy, fortunate life of Torah and mitzvos. May Heaven have mercy and may they all become *me'ushar*, and we all be *zocheh* to *siyatta d'Shemaya*.

### **A Letter from Rabbeinu shlit" a and the other Members of Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah shlit" a**

בס"ד ה' וישלח תשפ"ג

To our brothers, Beis Yisrael, wherever they are, *shalom* and much blessing.

During these times, the Chashmonaim had special *siyatta d'Shemaya* that the *gezeiros* were nullified and in the merit of their *mesirus nefesh*, they merited being *osek baTorah* and observing the *mitzvos*. The Ramchal's words are well known: "Any rectification that was accomplished and any great light that shone at any time of the year, a counterpart of its original light should shine forth at that same time every year, and the results of its rectification will be renewed for those who accept it." If so, every year on Chanukah, the *hashpa'ah*, influence, of Torah and *mitzvos* returns, and it is the most *mesugal* time of the year for success in Torah and for fulfilling the *mitzvos b'sheleimus*. And since there was a great *yeshuah* on Chanukah and the decrees were nullified and the Yidden were able to be *osek baTorah*, it makes sense that there is also a greater obligation to be *osek baTorah*.

The Shelah HaKadosh wrote: "These holy days are more *mesugal* than other days for *hasmadah* in Torah. Therefore, one should listen and arouse himself to learn Torah and observe mitzvos with more power during these days." As such, one should strengthen himself not to slack off in Torah during these holy days. Every moment wasted from Torah learning during these days is a shame.

And it's simple that one should never *chalilah* waste his precious time at events that are not appropriate for *bnei Torah*, and especially not during these holy days it is only right for one to increase his involvement in *esek haTorah*. And we hope that the *mosdos Torah* will continue *esek haTorah* as is necessary. The Torah institutions and *batei medrash* should strengthen their *esek haTorah*, and add to the *kodesh* by instituting special learning *sedarim*.

The days of Chanukah are fitting and *mesugal* for *deveikus baTorah* — of course, each person according to his ability — with *yishuv hadaas* and joy. A wise, intelligent person will understand this, and will thus merit success in Torah all year long. *Yehi ratzon* that the merit of Torah protect us and all the Jewish people, and may we merit the *geulah sheleimah*, *bimheirah b'yameinu*, Amen.

*Dedicated by*  
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בתורה וביראת שמים

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