

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

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

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The Yevanim's Decrees — the Miracles and the Merits

Chanukah was a time of miracles for Am Yisrael, as we say in the Al HaNissim *tefillah*. There were decrees to **“make them forget Your Torah”** — to cause us to stop being *osek baTorah*, and **“to cause them to transgress the statutes of Your will”** — and also to prevent us from observing the *chukim*, those mitzvos we don't know the reason for, such as *shaatnez* and *kilayim*. But thanks to the miracles, just the opposite took place — the decrees were nullified and Am Yisrael was able to be *osek baTorah* and observe the *chukim*.

What were the miracles? We mention them in Al HaNissim as well: **“You handed strong ones in the hands of weak ones.”** This is a miracle *l'maalah min hateva*, that weak men should overpower strong warriors. Another miracle was: **“many in the hands of few”** — a few people were victorious over many; and this is also *l'maalah min hateva*.

But then we mention even more miracles: **“the impure into the hands of the pure, and the wicked into the hands of the righteous, and the wanton sinners (זדים) into the hands of those who are osek in Your Torah.”** These three matters are not miracles, but they are the *zechuyos* that effected the miracles. The Chashmonaim were pure and righteous and were *osek baTorah*, and in that merit, they were *zocheh* to have the impure, wicked, wanton sinners given over into their hands. Let's take a look at these three matters.

Tehorim, Tzaddikim, Oskei Torasecha

“Impure in the hands of the pure” is understood. Impurity is *avodah zarah* and purity is *emunah*, which is the opposite of *avodah zarah*. The impure Yevanim were handed over to the pure Chashmonaim. **“Wicked in the hands of the righteous”** — people with bad *middos* are called *reshaim*, wicked, and *tzaddikim* are people with

good *middos*. Tzaddik comes from the word *tzedek*, “righteousness,” as the *pasuk* states (*Devarim* 16:20): *“Tzedek tzedek tirdof, Chase after righteousness.”*

These two matters are *zechuyos*: the Chashmonaim were pure *baalei emunah* and they were *tzaddikim* with good *middos*. In this *zechus*, they merited to overpower the impure, wicked Yevanim. Let us try to understand what the third matter is: **“Wanton sinners into the hands of those who are osek in Your Torah.”** What does “wanton sinners” mean? And why is *oskei Torasecha* the opposite of wanton sinners?

We can explain that זדים, “wanton sinners” are people who have evil thoughts, as the *pasuk* states (*Shemos* 18:11), *“כי בדבר אשר זדו עליהם”*. Targum there explains: *“With the thing that they thought...”* As such, the Yevanim were זדים, for they thought evil thoughts, plotting how they could ruin Am Yisrael and prevent them from being *osek baTorah*. They knew that Torah gives Am Yisrael all their *maalos* and good *middos*. Our inborn characteristics of being *“bayshanim, rachmanim and gomlei chasadim”* are the result of the *kedushas HaTorah* that we received at Har Sinai. The Yevanim do not have these *maalos*, and as such, they feel inferior to Klal Yisrael. That's why they wanted to ruin Am Yisrael and prevent them from being *osek baTorah*.

This is the matter of זדים. They contrived wicked thoughts and intended on influencing Klal Yisrael via the *bittul Torah* they'd force upon them — they knew that *esek haTorah* effects the worthy behavior of *oskei Torasecha*, and they wanted to “cause them to forget Your Torah”!

But their evil thoughts did not come to fruition, and the זדים were given over into the hands of the *oskei Torah*, because Heaven sends special *hashgachah* and those who pursue others (with evil intent) become pursued themselves, as the *pasuk* states

(*Koheles* 3:15), “And Hashem seeks the pursued.” Since the Yevanim were the one pursuing *oskei Torah*, in the end, they became pursued themselves and were handed over to the *oskei Torah*.

Shem Gadol V’Kadosh B’Olamecha

Continuing on in Al HaNissim, we say, “**And for Yourself, You made a great and holy name in Your world.**” We must understand what a “great and holy name” means. What’s “great”? And what’s “holy”?

The explanation is similar to the meaning of a *pasuk* in *Parshas VaEschanan* (*Devarim* 3:24), “You began to show Your servant Your greatness and Your strong hand.” Rashi there explains: “Your greatness” — this is Your attribute of goodness. That is, Hashem’s *middah* of beneficence is great. Now we understand that “and for Yourself, You made a ‘great’ name” means that this revealed Hashem’s *middah* of goodness, of beneficence. It showed us how He showers good upon Am Yisrael.

“**And holy**” means that it is beyond our ability to understand, as we say in davening, “V’Atah Kadosh, And You are holy” — meaning, we have no concept of Who Hashem is, as the Zohar states (*Tikkunei Zohar* 17:1), “Our thoughts cannot fathom Him at all.” Similarly, we say in “Ani Maamim”: “...The Borei Yisbarach Shemo is not physical and physical levels of understanding cannot comprehend Him.” This is the meaning of “a great and holy name.” “Great” refers to Hashem’s attribute of beneficence toward Klal Yisrael and “holy” refers to the fact that we have no idea Who HaKadosh Baruch Hu is, and it’s impossible to fathom Who He is.

L’Hodos u’LeHallel for Torah and Mitzvos

The result of this was “**and they established these eight days of Chanukah to give thanks and praise to Your great name.**” Beis Din HaGadol in those days established two things, two *takanos*: they established the days of Chanukah “*l’hodos u’lehallel*, to give thanks and praise.” *Hoda’ah* is saying Al HaNissim in davening and Birkas HaMazon, and *Hallel* is reciting the full Hallel — we say the full Hallel on all eight days of Chanukah.

The concept of “Your great name” is mentioned here again — “to give thanks and praise **to Your great name.**” We explained that “Your great name” refers

to Hashem’s *middah* of goodness, and we thank and praise Hashem for the good, for the *middah* of good that Am Yisrael receives from HaKadosh Baruch Hu.

And what is this goodness? The Torah and mitzvos! The Yevanim wanted to “cause us to forget Your Torah and cause us to transgress the statutes of Your will,” and HaKadosh Baruch Hu treated us with beneficence — their evil plot did not come to fruition and we still have the Torah and mitzvos. We are *osek baTorah* and we observe the *chukim* — and that’s what we are expressing our thanks for. We are grateful for the good, we are happy and feel fortunate to have Torah and mitzvos, and we express our thanks for this. *Hoda’ah*, expressions of thanks, is given for something a person is happy about, for something good that he receives. We are profoundly happy to be able to be *osek baTorah* and to observe the *chukim*.

Esek HaTorah on Chanukah

Based on this, we see that **since Chanukah is a time for *hoda’ah* for Torah, if a person isn’t *osek baTorah* on Chanukah, it’s a contradiction — he’s expressing thanks for Torah and not learning Torah.** We are thanking Hashem for nullifying the decree of “to make them forget Your Torah” — we are happy and feel so fortunate that we are able to be *osek baTorah*, and if we do not do so, it is a paradox.

Therefore, it surely not *shayach* to have *bittul Torah* on Chanukah. We must be *osek baTorah* without wasting time all eight days of Chanukah, and even on Shabbos Chanukah. For many years already, in our yeshivah Shabbos Chanukah is not an off-Shabbos. The *bachurim* go home either the Shabbos before or the Shabbos after, but on Shabbos Chanukah, they stay in yeshivah. Shabbos Chanukah is a Shabbos of Torah!

The Ruchniyus Hashpa’ah Returns Every Year

The *sefarim* tell us (Ramchal’s *Derech Hashem* 4:7, among others), that any *ruchniyus hashpa’ah* Klal Yisrael have ever experienced will return at that same time every single year. For example, Shavuot is the *Zman Matan Toraseinu*. Matan Torah happened once at Maamad Har Sinai, but it’s called “*Zman Matan Toraseinu*, the time of the giving of the Torah” nowadays too, every single year, because

the *hashpa'ah* returns every single year. Since Matan Torah took place on Shavuot, it is a time of a *hashpa'ah* of Torah, and one can merit *hatzlachah* in Torah on Shavuot every year.

Pesach is called “*Zman Cheiruseinu*,” and this *cheirus*, freedom, is referring to spiritual freedom. At Yetzias Mitzrayim, we were freed from the 49 Gates of Impurity in Mitzrayim. Every year on Pesach, this *hashpaah* of spiritual freedom returns.

Sukkos is called “*Zman Simchaseinu*,” and at this time every year, there is a *hashpaah* for *simchah shel mitzvah*, because there was such joy at this time over the Ananei HaKavod and everything else that took place on Sukkos. Every year, the *hashpaah* for *simchah shel mitzvah* returns. That’s why Simchas Torah takes place at the end of Sukkos, on Shemini Atzeres.

If so, the same is true regarding Chanukah — it is a time of a *hashpaah* of Torah and success in Torah. Therefore, it is not *shayach* to have *bittul Torah* on Chanukah. Anyone who strengthens himself in Torah on Chanukah is doing a wonderful thing and it is a great *zechus*.

Beg for Mercy for Klal Yisrael

B’ezeras Hashem, may we merit that all Klal Yisrael, those close and far, hold tight to the life of Torah, a happy, fortunate life, and merit “*Ashrecha baOlam HaZeh*” through Torah, mitzvos, and *maasim tovim*. We’ve already discussed the fact that every single Yid has *middos tovos* engrained in his personality: we are *rachmanim*, *bayshanim*, and *gomlei chasadim*, but to actually be happy and fortunate (*me’ushar*), one needs *siyatta d’Shemaya*.

And this is what we daven for in Shemoneh Esrei in “*Hashiveinu Avinu L’Torasecha*, Our Father, return us to Your Torah.” We make our request in the plural form: *Hashiveinu, v’karveinu, v’hachazireinu* — we are asking for all of Klal Yisrael to be *zocheh* to Torah, *avodah*, and complete teshuvah. **And our tefillos help!** Every *tefillah* helps somewhat; every *tefillah* with *kavanah* and every request has an effect and an influence. That’s why it’s so important to daven with *kavanah* and to beg for *rachamim* for Klal Yisrael’s *ruchniyus*.

May Heaven have mercy on us and may we all be *zocheh* to be *me’usharim*, happy and fortunate, with “*ashrecha baOlam HaZeh*,” as it says in *Pirkei Avos* (6:4): “This is the way of Torah... and you toil in Torah. And if you do so — *ashrecha!*”

Rabbeinu’s Address at Ponevez Yeshivah’s Chanukah Mesibah

The *bachurim* were just singing “אשרי העם שככה לו אשרי העם שהשם אלוהיו”. What does this mean? It means that the fact that Am Yisrael has *emunah* that Hashem is their Elokim — Hashem is Middas HaRachamim and Elokim is Middas HaDin — this is *emunah*. And “אשרי העם שככה לו”, Fortunate is the nation for whom this is so! A person, and a nation, who lives with the *emunah* that Hashem is his Elokim, that everything is in Heaven’s hands, and that there’s Someone Who cares for us and gives us whatever we need — Hashem is our Elokim — this knowledge is what makes us fortunate and happy. *Ashrei HaAm*. A nation — and person; *yachid* and *rabbim*; those who have this *emunah* are happy and fortunate. *Ashrecha baOlam HaZeh*.

We say the following *nusach* in our davening: “אשרינו מה טוב חלקינו ומה נעים גורלנו ומה יפה ירושתנו”, How fortunate we are; how pleasant is our lot, and how wonderful is our inheritance.” *Ashreinu*? In what way? Because we say “*Shema Yisrael*”! What is “*Shema Yisrael*”? The rest of the *pasuk*: “*Hashem Elokeinu, Hashem Echad*.” This is what makes us “*ashreinu*, happy and fortunate.” This is what makes the happiest life possible — the fact that we have a Merciful Father, and “Whatever the Merciful One does is for the best,” and everything is in Heaven’s hands — everything is for man’s benefit and good, for a Yid’s benefit, because Hashem is His Elokim. This is the message of “*Ashrei HaAm*.” And when a person lives with this *emunah*, he has a happy life. *Ashrecha baOlam HaZeh!*

This is only possible through Torah, as it says in *Avos* (chap. 6): “This is the way of Torah, eat bread with salt; drink measured water; sleep on the ground; live a life of privation — and still toil in Torah. If you do so,

ashrecha baOlam HaZeh, you will be happy and fortunate in Olam HaZeh.” There’s no *gashmiyus*, but you toil in Torah. *Lichorah*, *amal haTorah* is another effort and challenge, but no! It’s *ashrecha baOlam HaZeh!* This is the happiest life.

Bnei Torah who are *osek baTorah*, who enjoy a Gemara, a Rashi and a Tosfos, Rishonim, and Acharonim — *divrei Torah* are sweeter than honey — they live the happiest, most fulfilling life. *Ashrecha baOlam HaZeh*. That’s what you were singing before, which is a *pasuk* from *Tehillim*, “*Ashrei haAm she’Hashem Elokav*, Fortunate is the nation for whom Hashem is their Elokim!” *Baruch Hashem*, we merited to be *bnei Torah*, and all *bnei Torah* all over the world are the most fortunate, happiest people. *Ashreinu, mah tov chelkeinu*.

It’s a pity that all of Klal Yisrael is not so fortunate. There is such a large part of Am Yisrael that doesn’t experience this happy, fortunate life. May Heaven have mercy on them that they too, should have such a fortunate life.

We daven “Return us, our Father, to Your Torah” in the plural form. We are davening for all of Klal Yisrael, *השיבנו לתורתך, וקרבנו לעבודתך, והחזירנו בתשובה שלמה לפניך* — this is a *tefillah* for all of Klal Yisrael. A *tefillah* for Torah, for *avodah* and for complete teshuvah. And what is *tefillah*? It is a *bakashah*, a request. And why are we davening? Because we believe in the strength and power of *tefillah*. And as we know, Rav Yisrael Salanter says that it’s tried-and-true that davening for *ruchniyus* matters helps, because there’s no limit to *ruchniyus*, as the *pasuk* says “Open your mouth wide and I will fill it [your requests].” (See *Brachos daf 50*.)

Therefore, anyone who davens with *kavanah* “*Hasheveinu l’Torasecha*” and thinks about Klal Yisrael, it is *mashpia!* How many people does it have an effect on? Someone, one person, two people, and *baruch Hashem* our generation is the Generation of Teshuvah, there is teshuvah for Torah learning, but it depends on davening too, and it depends on how much we daven with *kavanah* for all of Klal Yisrael: “*Hasheveinu*, Return us to Your Torah, bring us close to service of You, and influence us to return in complete teshuvah before You.” Every person who davens is *mashpia*.

Of course, it is not simple to take it so personally, to truly be pained, and to truly beg for mercy from the depths of your hearts to influence Klal Yisrael to come back to Your Torah. It’s a *madreigah*, and it’s not easy and it’s not simple, but this is the *nusach* that Anshei Knesses HaGedolah instituted. *Tefillah* is all about asking — and why is this so? So there will be *siyatta d’Shemaya!* This was the Anshei Knesses HaGedolah’s purpose when they instituted *tefillah*, and that’s why we daven in this manner.

May Hashem have *rachamim* that there be a *hashpaah* of “*Hashem Elokav*” on all Klal Yisrael. May all Klal Yisrael have a happy, fortunate life of Torah and *emunah*: *Ashrei HaAm sheHashem Elokav*.

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