

Darkei HaChizuk

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

From the *Sichos of Maran Rosh HaYeshivah Rav Gershon Edelstein ztvk"l* • *Netzavim-Vayeilech 5786*

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The *yahrtzeit* of Maran Gaon Yisrael the Ponevezer Rav ztvk"l was this week, on 20 Elul. Every year, there is an *Atzeres Zikaron* in yeshivah in honor of his *yahrtzeit* and in preparation for the Yamim Noraim. What follows are Rabbeinu's remarks from the *atzeres* in 5762 (2002).

The Influence of Torah Learned with Ahavas Torah

Every year, we speak *divrei hisorerus* on the Rav *zichrono livrachah*'s *yahrtzeit*, in order wake ourselves up and learn from him and his good, lofty ways, and to follow in his footsteps. The *yahrtzeit* falls out in Elul, which is a month when *chizuk* is required. It's the most appropriate time for *chizuk*, as in Elul, there is *siyatta d'Shemaya* for *chizuk*.

Let's take a look at the Rav's special qualities. We will not discuss his personality, his *gadlus*, his *gaonus*, and his *tzidkus* — instead, we will primarily focus on his actions and deeds, because we have to learn from his actions. We are not capable of reaching the levels of *hasagos* that the previous generations attained, but we can perform the "*maasim*" that they did — as Chazal say (*Tanna d'Bei Eliyahu Rabbah* 25), "A person is obligated to say, 'When will my deeds reach the level of the deeds of my fathers, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov.'"

The Rav's *maasim* were *chizuk* in Torah, in founding the yeshivah and building it up, and in strengthening Torah across the world, among all of Klal Yisrael. That is what he was involved in and what he worked on. With his great *zechuyos*, he was *zocheh* to *siyatta d'Shemaya* for tremendous success.

Anyone who didn't live in the Rav's generation cannot fathom the *chizuk* there was regarding the *sedarim* in yeshivah. Everyone came on time to *seder*, not one person was late. And if there was a late-comer, he would be embarrassed to come inside! And everyone came to davening in yeshivah. There were just a few who did not come, literally just a few. The same was true for *mussar seder*; everyone learned *mussar*, and they would come on time. They would not come late, because the *chashivus* of Torah, *tefillah*, *yiras Shamayim*, and *mussar* was so profound. This was a *kiddush HaShem*.

בניינא דיומא

Yemei HaRachamim — For Ruchniyus!

During Elul, it's easier to wake up to teshuvah, as it's the "Days of Rachamim and Selichos." What does *rachamim* mean? That there is *siyatta d'Shemaya* for *ruchniyus*! Because what does a person need *rachamim* for? What should he be pitied for more, for a lack in *gashmiyus* or *ruchniyus*? Definitely for *ruchniyus*, because without *ruchniyus* he is more of a *nebach*. We find (*Bava Metzia* 33a) that one's *rebbe* who taught him Torah takes precedence to his father, since his father brought him into this world, and his *rebbe* brings him to Olam HaBa. That is, *ruchniyus* is more important than *gashmiyus*.

(Elul 5770/2010)

The Obligation to Utilize the Yemei HaRachamim

Since there is great *siyatta d'Shemaya* in Elul, it is more serious if one does not utilize it properly. Rav Yisrael Salanter is known for quoting the rule from the Gemara (*Menachos* 43b), "The punishment for white is greater than the punishment for sky-blue." That is, there are white strings and blue strings in *tzitzis*. It is graver not to attach white strings to one's garment than not attaching blue strings. *Techeiles* is expensive and hard to acquire, but the white strings are not so costly and can be obtained easily. As such, it is more serious when one fails to fulfill this mitzvah, because the gravity of a sin is commensurate with the difficulty involved in performing the mitzvah.

Therefore, in Elul as well, which is a time when it's easier to get close to *ruchniyus*, if a person does not properly involve himself in *ruchniyus*, it is more serious than if he does not do so during the rest of the year. That's why there are customs that are performed during Elul, *minhagei Yisrael*, such as blowing the shofar every day in order to wake up and gain *chizuk*. We also say a lot of Selichos, and "*L'Dovid Hashem Ori*" — which includes many *tefillos* for *ruchniyus*. We do all of this in order to reach the level of "*Ani l'Dodi*, I am to my Beloved." There is an old custom in the *yeshivos* to add another fifteen minutes to the *mussar seder* in Elul. In order to attain the "*Ani l'Dodi*" one must strengthen himself spiritually, and the *chizuk* is to add another fifteen minutes of learning *mussar*.

(Elul 5761/2001)

This *hanhagah* was manifested in all aspects of their learning. For example, when it was time for *chazarah*, everyone reviewed the *shiur*, and that's how they came out *gedolim*. The *bachurim* who were not so engrossed in their learning weren't part of the *chevrah*, they didn't have friends. That was the situation in the yeshivah's early years, in the *zechus* of the Rav and his *hashpaah*. He had a *hashpaah* on the entire world and increased awareness of *chashivus haTorah*.

What gave him the drive to do so much and to have such an influence? I remember that during that *tekufah*, they said in the name of one of the *gedolei hador* that it came from the power of the Rav's *ahavas haTorah*. The Rav had tremendous, extraordinary *ahavas Torah*.

The reason is, when one has such tremendous *ahavas Torah*, whatever he does to strengthen the Torah is the result of *ahavas Torah* and *l'shem Shamayim*; it is a very tremendous level of *lishmah*. And as a result, one receives *siyatta d'Shemaya*; and that's how he is successful. That is the rule.

Ahavas HaBriyos at the Root of Influencing to Torah

However, aside from *ahavas Torah*, the element of *ahavas habriyos* is also involved. Because in order to have an influence on another person, one must have *ahavas habriyos*, as Chazal say (*Avos* 1:12), "Be of the students of Aharon, love peace and chase after peace; love people and bring them close to Torah."

The *mishnah* mentions four concepts, in ascending order. First, love peace and chase after peace, which are two concepts: "Chase after peace" means to be active and be *mashpia* peace, but in order to do so, one first must "love peace." One who loves peace has the abilities to influence others to be peaceful as well. If he is deficient in the *middah* of loving peace, he won't be able to "chase after peace," because the *mashpia's penimiyus* must first be complete.

Then, two more concepts are mentioned: "Love people," and "bring them close to Torah." The *mefarshim* explain that this is the order: if one wants to be a *mashpia* and bring others closer to Torah, he first must love people. Bringing others closer to Torah is only possible if you have *ahavas habriyos*.

The truth is, a person's *middah* of *ahavas habriyos* actually causes him to want to bring others closer to Torah. After all, why would he want to get involved in *kiruv*, why isn't it enough that he personally is close to Torah? It's because he has *ahavas habriyos*! Because Torah is the best thing that exists, the best thing that can be, with the greatest success, and someone who loves people wants to give them benefit. As such, he brings them close to Torah so they'll be happy and fortunate. A person who has these aspirations and feelings will succeed in bringing others close to Torah.

That is, the *hashpaah* of Torah will only hold if it comes along with *chesed*. If the desire to bring others close to Torah comes from *chesed* and *ahavas chesed*, it will be possible to influence them to Torah. This was the Rav *ztvk"l's* specialty;

he was *mashpia* with his profound *ahavas habriyos*, and his tremendous levels of *ahavas Torah*. When these two qualities are combined, then "bringing them close to Torah" will have great success, as it did in his case.

Merits for Elul: Chesed and a Forgoing Nature

It's Elul now, and we need *zechuyos* for the Yom HaDin. Everyone tries to think about what he can do to gain *zechuyos*. There are many, many things to work on, but there are also general matters, main things that everyone can strengthen themselves in. Even if it might not be *b'sheleimus* in the beginning, since the person is progressing and is in the right direction, he will be judged based on his end result, because he has the right aspirations. And he gains his future *zechuyos* already.

The first thing is *chesed*. In *Shaarei Teshuvah* (1:28), Rabbeinu Yonah quotes the Gra (*Rosh Hashanah* 17:1), "Anyone who has a forgiving nature, he is forgiven for all his sins." Having a forgiving nature is also *chesed* — acting with good *middos* and *ahavas habriyos*. Due to this, he merits that they forgive all his "*pesha'im*" — this term includes even the grave sins, *pesha* and *meizid*, rebellious and intentional sins, and all the more so, unintentional sins. *Shamayim* overlooks his sins and forgives him! This is *middah k'neged middah*; since he did *chesed* with someone else, acting with *ahavas habriyos* and having a forgiving nature, *Shamayim* overlooks his sins and forgives him even for the *peshaim* he committed.

Rabbeinu Yonah writes that this is one "very respectable opening for hope" to merit atonement, and it is a profound *zechus*, along with the hope it offers. It's not so hard to be *maavir al middosav*. If so, this is something to start with — being *maavir al middosav*, having a forgiving nature. It's a *shev v'al taaseh*, a passive act of *ahavas habriyos*; it simply must be in one's heart, inside the *penimiyus halev*.

Now, if one is also actively involved in *chesed*, especially *chesed* in Torah, as Chazal said, "Love people and bring them close to Torah," which is called "*Toras chesed*" (see *Sukkah* 49b), he is definitely *zocheh* to *siyatta d'Shemaya* and great *zechuyos* for the Yom HaDin.

The concept of *middah k'neged middah* in both *ruchniyus* and *gashmiyus* is well known. Chazal discuss *middah k'neged middah* regarding *gashmiyus* matters in many places. For example (*Yerushalmi*, beginning of *Peah*), the generation of Achav would be successful in battle because there were no *baalei lashon hara* among them. They had *ahavas habriyos* and good *middos*, and even though were idol worshipers, *Rachmana litzlan*. The *yetzer hara* for *avodah zarah* was very strong in those days, and while they were definitely punished for it in Gehinnom and in Olam HaBa, they lived well in Olam HaZeh thanks to their good *middos*. If, in Olam HaZeh, one acts toward others with good *middos* and does *chesed* in material matters with others, they are *zocheh*, *middah k'neged middah*, to material *chesed* from *Shamayim*. The same is true regarding *ruchniyus* matters. If one does *chesed* in

ruchniyus matters with others, they are *zocheh* to success in *ruchniyus*, *middah k'neged middah*.

Ahavas HaBriyos Is in Klal Yisrael's Nature

But *chesed* must be performed with *sheleimus*, with *ahavas chesed*, as the *pasuk* states (*Michah* 6:8), "And what does Hashem demand of you, only to perform justice and *ahavas chesed*, lovingkindness." That is, it should not simply be "acts" of *chesed*, there should be love involved. This is what is man's obligation and what is demanded of him: to perform *chesed* out of love!

This actually was Avraham Avinu's *middah*. On the third day after his *bris milah*, he searched for guests, in order to perform *chesed*. And he felt bad that there were no guests. *Lichorah*, why did he feel bad? Why did the lack of guests cause him pain? Even though he missed out on the *mitzvah*, if there are no guests, there is no obligation. There are other *mitzvos* he can do — he can be *osek* in Torah and *avodah*, why did he specifically want to do *chesed*? The explanation is that since *ahavas chesed* is part of his nature, he was naturally pained when he couldn't do *chesed*!

And Klal Yisrael inherited the nature of *ahavas chesed* from Avraham Avinu; it's just that some people ruin their nature through free choice and bad habits. However, every Jewish person's innate nature is to have *ahavas chesed* in *gashmiyus* and *ruchniyus*.

Yeshivah: A Place to Do Chesed

A yeshivah is big place for doing *chesed*. It may seem like a yeshivah is only "Gemara," and all you do is sit and learn, so where is the *chesed*? But the truth is, it's a huge place for doing *chesed*! You can merit huge *madreigos* of *chesed* and *ahavas habriyos*, if you just pay attention to think about someone else and feel his needs.

Chesed is included in the *mitzvas asei* of *v'ahavta l'reiacha kamocha*, love your fellow as yourself (*Vayikra* 19:18), which everyone is obligated to fulfill. This is talking about the *penimiyus*, not just doing something, but by doing *chesed* with *ahavah*. This is Klal Yisrael's nature. The obligation involves making sure the *middah* of *chesed* is not merely hidden in one's nature, but that it is in the open.

This happens through Torah, because without Torah, we have a *yetzer hara*. Torah is the antidote to the *yetzer hara*. However, we also need to think about doing *chesed*, because bad *middos* are also part of a person's nature. If one does not keep *chesed* on his mind, that is a lack of *sheleimus*. And as we said, *chesed* is part of Klal Yisrael's nature, and one can attain *sheleimus* in it.

Aside from the great *zechuyos* of *chesed*, doing *chesed* also makes a person happy. When a person does *chesed* because he is aware of how important it is, and because he has *ahavas chesed*, it is not hard for him — it actually makes him happy. The Rav *ztvk"l* was always busy with the yeshivah's matters and with *harbatzas Torah*. He hardly even had time to sleep; he was so sleep-deprived that he would fall asleep while traveling. But since he had a *hashpaah* on others, he was always full of joy! Because *ahavas chesed* and *ahavas habriyos* with bringing others closer to Torah makes a person happy.

If someone knows that he is doing what he is supposed to be doing and is fulfilling his obligations, and he feels the gravity of his obligations, and if he has true aspirations to fulfill his obligations amid *ahavas chesed* and *ahavas habriyos*, when he merits fulfilling this *mitzvah*, it is a cause of great joy! He feels delighted and content, *ashrecha baOlam haZeh*! He is happy that he is fulfilling his obligations and is realizing his good aspirations, which are also big *zechuyos*.

Chesed through a Kind Word and Help in Learning

Chesed can be done with speech, when you talk to someone. Sometimes, you have to say something nice to someone else, as Chazal say (*Kesuvos* 17a), "A person should always be *me'urav im habriyos* (integrated in society)." Rashi explains: Treat each person according to his needs. That is, when you see that someone needs someone to talk to him and make him happy, it's a *chiyuv*! It's included in *v'ahavta l'reiacha kamocha* and *chesed*. And the *pasuk* "And what does Hashem demand of you... *ahavas chesed*, lovingkindness," is referring to this, to feel the other person and notice if he needs a kind word.

Similarly, if someone needs help in learning, you need to explain it to him patiently, until he understands. This should be done with *ahavas habriyos*. And acting this way garners great *zechuyos*. There are many Gemaras that teach that a *melamed* merits great success in Torah, and even if he is not teaching on a high level, even if it's not on the level that he "learns from his *talmidim* more than from others" (*Taanis* 7a), in any case, teaching always contributes something to the *melamed*. Even if he's explaining something to his weakest *talmid*, it adds to the *rebbe's havanah* and gives him additional *zechuyos* to attain greatness in Torah.

We know about performing *chesed*, both in *gashmiyus* and *ruchniyus*, with *ahavas habriyos*, from the Rav's ways, *zichrono livrachah*. By the *hisorerus* achieved through this *atzeres zikaron*, may we merit great *zechuyos* for the Yom HaDin, for success in *gashmiyus* and *ruchniyus*. And may we merit a *kesivah v'chasimah tovah*!

(ל:ב) — You will return to Hashem your God and listen to His voice
 (ל:ו) — And Hashem will remove [the layer over] your heart and
 your descendants' hearts so you will love Hashem

Ani L'Dodi, I Am to My Beloved — V'Dodi Li, And in That Merit, My Beloved Is to Me

Elul is a time that is *mesugal*, auspicious, for *teshuvah* and for success in *ruchniyus*. There are hints in the Torah to this. For example, the *roshei teivos* of the *pasuk* (*Shir HaShirim* 6:3), “אני לדודי ודודי לי, I am to my Beloved, and my Beloved is to me,” spells אלול, Elul.

The *Mishnah Berurah* writes (beginning of *siman* 581), “During these forty days, *teshuvah* is accepted, so his heart should be close to his Beloved in *teshuvah*, and then his Beloved is close to him to accept his *teshuvah* from love.” That is, there is an order: first, a person must turn to his Creator, as it states, “*Ani l'Dodi*,” and after he comes to be purified and opens an opening, even as narrow as the eye of a needle, Shamayim helps him and sends a great *hashpaah* of “*v'Dodi li*.”

Another hint quoted by the *Mishnah Berurah* is from the *pasuk*, “ומל השם אלוך את לבך ואת לבב זרעך לאהבה את”, And Hashem will remove [the layer over] your heart and your descendants' hearts to love Hashem your God.” The *roshei teivos* of את לבך ואת לבב also spell Elul. In Elul we receive special *siyatta d'Shemaya* to merit attaining the lofty attribute of *ahavas Hashem*.

This requires an explanation. The fact that it states “And Hashem will remove [the layer over] your hearts...” seems to imply that there is *siyatta d'Shemaya* even if the person himself doesn't put in effort first. Can the two *pesukim* be contradictory? And how can one merit *siyatta d'Shemaya* without first investing his own effort? After all, the first step must be “*Ani l'Dodi*!”

Siyatta d'Shemaya for One Who Does Teshuvah

The truth is, Rabbeinu Yonah wrote about this in the beginning of *Shaarei Teshuvah*. He says this *pasuk* is referring to *baalei teshuvah*. In the *pesukim* that precede it, it says, “And you shall return to Hashem your God and listen to His voice.” The continuation of this is “and Hashem will remove [the layer over] your heart...” That is, even the aforementioned *siyatta d'Shemaya* is in the *zechus* of the *teshuvah* the person began on his own.

Rabbeinu Yonah explains that a *baal teshuvah* has special *siyatta d'Shemaya*, more than a regular person receives. It says, “And the Torah explains that Hashem will help those who return in *teshuvah* when they can't attain it naturally. He will renew within them a pure spirit to attain the lofty attribute of His love, as it states, “And you shall return to Hashem your God and listen to His voice.... And it says “And Hashem will remove [the layer over] your heart and your descendants' hearts — to attain His love.” That is, a *baal teshuvah* merits tremendous *siyatta d'Shemaya* to “love” Hashem.

Someone who is not a *baal teshuvah*, on the other hand, even if he is a complete *tzaddik* who never sinned, will have a very hard time attaining this level. He will have to work very hard to reach the Tenth Gate in *Chovos HaLevavos* — The Gate of Love of Hashem. There are nine gates which precede this one that must be attained. The *baal teshuvah*, however, immediately has *siyatta d'Shemaya* to merit the lofty levels of *ahavas Hashem*, because he is on a higher *madreigah*. He had already been entrenched in sin and he overpowered it and changed his ways, and in that *zechus*, he merits *siyatta d'Shemaya* to “attain His love”! Shamayim gives him renewed strength and gives him additional *kedushah* to immediately merit a high *madreigah* of *ahavas Hashem*.

Elul is the time that is *mesugal* for this, as is hinted in the *pasuk*, “ומל השם אלוך את לבך ואת לבב זרעך, And Hashem your God shall remove [the layer over] your heart and your descendants' hearts.”

(Elul, 5771/2011 and 5778/2018)

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