

ארבעה צריכים חיוזוק (ברכות לב:) – שיתחזקו אדם בהם תמיד בכל כחו (רש”י)

From the *Sichos* of Maran Rosh HaYeshivah Rav Gershon Edelstein ztvk”l • *Ki Seitzei* 5785

631

Feeling Elul in Previous Generations

We are in Elul now.¹ There usually is *hisorerus* in Elul, because it’s Elul now! In the past, this was felt very acutely.

An elderly man told me what Elul was like in his days, more than 100 years ago. In those days, they traveled in wagons with wagon drivers. That’s how they transported loads, and that’s also how people traveled from city to city. The wagon drivers would wait around in the marketplace for people to come and hire them. Sometimes, they’d fight with each other — they were very simple people. Their level of knowledge amounted to knowing how to harness the horse to the wagon and hit it with their whips. But in Elul, if a fight would break out among them, one would say to the other, “**It’s Elul today; how can you speak like that?!**” That’s how he would frighten him. The simplest wagon driver, who was a complete *am ha’aretz*, was frightened of Elul. That was the reality.

Why Shouldn’t I Consider Myself a Tzaddik?

Nowadays, we don’t feel it as much. A rav from Tel Aviv told me that he delivers shiurim in a shul there for *baalei batim*. Some of them are “*chashuve*” *baalei batim*. He said that once in Elul he was walking the most *chashuv* member of the shul, who was a serious person and who always attended his *shiurim*. He must have been walking with him after the shiur. And the rav told him, “It’s Elul now, we have to improve ourselves...” And the man replied, “What do I have to improve in? For me, the entire year is like Elul. I have no need for *chizuk* or improvement; my whole day is planned out, with *tefillos* and whatever else I need to do. I have nothing to improve in.” He considered himself a tzaddik.

The truth is, when I was a child, I also thought I was a tzaddik. I heard that there were *mussar sefarim*, but I was afraid to open them and read them, because who knows what would be written there in *Mesillas Yesharim* and *Reishis Chochamah* about Gehinnom. (There’s a section called *Maseches Gehinnom* in *Shaar HaYirah*, chap. 13.) I was afraid of *mussar sefarim*, until once, it apparently

was *min haShamayim*, I happened to open a *Chayei Adam* to *Hilchos Rosh Hashanah v’Yom Kippur*. There, it gives *chizuk* about what to do teshuvah for. The *Chayei Adam* explains which sins a person might mistakenly do — this sin, and that one; all sorts of sins.

And I realized that I’m not a tzaddik at all. I also do some of those things. It’s true that I daven, but did I have proper *kavanah* in my *tefillos*? And in *Birkas Avos*? And what about *bittul Torah*? And *lashon hara*? And many other such things; I don’t remember all the details now, but I saw many things that I needed to correct. **And I wasn’t upset about it; I was happy! Because now I know what to fix up and now I know what problems I have. That’s how I started enjoying mussar**, because *mussar sefarim* tell you what needs to be corrected, and you have to know about it.

Pay Detailed Attention to What Has to Be Fixed

I saw that the Mashgiach writes in *Ohr Yechezkel (Elul)* that the problem is that people don’t think and their brains are not active. After all, every single person is certain that he has what to correct. We aren’t talking about people who consider themselves perfect, like that *baalebus* we mentioned... But everyone knows he has something to fix up and no one thinks he’s a perfect tzaddik. And if you ask him, “In what area are you a *rasha* and why aren’t you a tzaddik,” he’ll be amazed by your question and will say: “Am I a tzaddik? Of course I’m not a tzaddik.” But if you ask him why not, and ask him to tell you what his specific sin is, he’ll say, “Of course I have many sins, it’s not necessary to list them in detail. After all, I don’t learn *mussar*, so I definitely have sins.” But if you try asking him again, “Still, tell me what sins you have,” he will not be able to answer you! And since he is not aware of what his sins are, how will he do teshuvah for them?!

Therefore, **an intelligent person will already start thinking now about what he must rectify, or at the very least, he’ll think about one thing that needs rectification**, because if he will merely be positive that he’s a *rasha* and he won’t think about correcting anything, it will just make him and he’ll despair of himself. Despair is something that defies logic, because

¹ Excerpted from a *sichah* delivered on Rosh Chodesh Elul 5771 (2011).

after all, there is teshuvah; a person can do teshuvah. There are gates of teshuvah and there is a mitzvah of teshuvah, as the *pasuk* states (*Devarim* 30:11), “For this mitzvah that I command you today.” The Ramban explains that this is referring to the mitzvah of teshuvah, and that’s why the next part of the *pasuk* states, “it is not concealed from you, nor is it far away” — meaning, it’s not hard; it’s easy to do *teshuvah*, and that’s why you should not give up. Instead, start clarifying [what you need to do] and begin to do teshuvah!

Learn Shaarei Teshuvah in Elul

And the truth is, *Shaarei Teshuvah* is the *mussar sefer* that’s generally learned in Elul. The *sefer* has four *she’arim*, gates: the first one explains the twenty principles of teshuvah, the second one explains six things that arouse a person to teshuvah, the *sibos* that wake a person up to teshuvah; the third one explains the *madreigos* of all mitzvos — what is a *mitzvah d’Rabbanan*, a *mitzvas asei*, *lav hanitak l’asei*, *lav she’ein bo maaseh*, and *lav she’yeish bo maaseh*, *azharas ha’teluyos ba’lev*, *misah b’yedei Shamayim*, and *misas bein din*, all the way up to the Tenth *Madreigah*, which discusses those who do not have a portion in Olam HaBa, and there’s a very long list of those people.

I already mentioned once that there’s something mentioned in the Tenth *Madreigah* that I do not want to speak about. And that is that there’s a group called *sonai Hashem*, “haters of Hashem.” Seven things are mentioned there, which are neither speech nor actions; they are some sort of thought taking place in a person’s heart, *hirhurim ba’lev*. Rabbeinu Yonah writes that that a person can even be Torah and mitzvah observant, and he could do *chesed* and fulfill all 613 mitzvos, but he harbors a thought in his heart, which renders him a *sonai Hashem*, *Rachmana litzlan*. I don’t want to talk about it, and whoever wants can look it up himself (*os* 160). Maran the Mashgiach *ztkv”l* would talk about it; he would say that this Rabbeinu Yonah shows us that a person can lose his Olam HaBa as a result of one inner thought. Of course, a person can do teshuvah, if he has *charatah* and he does *teshuvah*. But he doesn’t do teshuvah, he loses his Olam HaBa, *Rachmana litzlan*.

I once heard, or saw written somewhere,² that if a person wants to begin to know what he has to correct, if he wants

בבנייני הפרשה

כי יהיה לאיש בן סורר ומורה (נא, יח)

In Elul 5761 (2001), when the yeshivah was learning “*Perek ben sorer u’moreh*,” Rabbeinu highlighted a lesson of *chizuk* from this *parshah*.

Let’s mention something very profound and very simple that always needs to be mentioned and reviewed: that is *zikkui harabbim* — which gives a person very great *zechuyos*, to such an extent that Chazal tell us (*Avos* 5:18), “Anyone who brings merit to the masses, does not sin (*cheit*).” That is, the merit of *zikkui harabbim* saves a person even from a *cheit*, an unintentional sin, and he is *zocheh* to unimaginable levels of *siyatta d’Shemaya*.

How does one perform *zikkui harabbim*? If a person acts in the proper way, even if he doesn’t actively do anything to influence others, he automatically has a *hashpaah* on his surroundings! The contrary is true too. If a person does not act properly, it also has an influence on others. When someone is part of a *tzibbur*, every person has an influence on others and is influenced by them too. He is a positive influence on others, and is influenced positively as well. And the opposite can happen as well.

This concept is found in *perek “Ben Sorer”* that we are learning now in yeshivah (*Sanhedrin* 71b), where it says that a *ben sorer u’moreh* is not held liable until he eats in a group that is entirely *סריקין* (*srikin*). Rashi explains that *סריקין* means *ריקין* (*reikin*), empty people who will habituate him to acting this way. However, even if there is just one decent person in the group, he will not continue acting improperly and will not become a *ben sorer u’moreh*.

The Gemara explains that if one decent person was part of the group and was sitting and eating with them, then the *ben sorer u’moreh* will not be drawn after his lusts. This is because he sees a decent person eating in a respectable manner, and it definitely has an effect on him. Even though he is presently eating and drinking gluttonously, he won’t continue to do so, because the decent person influenced him. Even one decent person among an entire group of empty, reckless people has an effect on them!

And this is the *zikkui harabbim* that is in everyone’s reach. Now, during Elul, everyone has to increase *zechuyos*. Anyone who adheres to the yeshivah’s *sedarim* creates *zechuyos* for himself, brings merit to others, and is *mezakeh es harabbim*. All the *sedarim* in yeshivah are arranged in a way that is beneficial for the entire *tzibbur*, and this is a great *zechus* and preparation for the Yom HaDin.

² In Rav Yisrael Salanter’s *Ohr Yisrael* (Letter 7), it says, “Similarly, in Elul, when time is short, one should make sure to learn a short *sefer*, such as *Shaarei Teshuvah* by Rabbeinu Yonah, and others like it, which speaks about almost all the underlying roots [and principles] of mitzvos and *aveiros*.” In *Ohr Yechezkel*, Letters (297), it states, “It is very necessary for a person to learn Rabbeinu Yonah *z”l*’s

Shaarei Teshuvah during these days, especially the Third Gate. In *Ohr Yechezkel*, Elul (p. 21), he writes, “Most importantly, it seems to me that we are obligated to learn the Tenth Level in the Third Gate, where Rabbeinu Yonah explains which people do not have a portion in Olam HaBa. Anyone who does not learn it will not know what his status is in this world.” See further in *Ohr Yechezkel*, Elul pp. 30, 86.

to know where he's lacking *tikkun* and how to correct it, he has to learn the Third Gate in *Shaarei Teshuvah*.

The Second Gate also explains which things arouse a person to do teshuvah. It lists six things: 1) when a person has *tzaros* and *yissurim* 2) old age 3) when someone admonishes him and gives him *mussar* 4) when he personally sees and reads words of *mussar* 5) Aseres Yemei Teshuvah 6) thinking about the day of death, as Chazal say (*Shabbos* 153a), "Repent today, for perhaps he will die tomorrow." These things frighten a person and arouse him to teshuvah.

Remembering Hashgachas Hashem Wakes a Person Up

Now, in the beginning of the Second Gate, Rabbeinu Yonah writes that the best thing is when a person wakes up on his own, without needing these other factors. The best thing is to wake up by "remembering Hashem Yisbarach," and constantly living with the remembrance that there is Divine supervision and there is no such thing as a coincidence. Additionally, before doing anything, one must make an accounting if it is halachically permissible or not, or if it is a sin or not — this is applicable in action and speech, and in thought too: what should you be thinking about now? There are *machshavos beteilos* and there are thoughts of mitzvos — you can think about them. For example, everyone needs to make a *cheshbon hanefesh*, and if a person lives with a *cheshbon* because there is Heavenly *hashgachah*, as it states (Avos 2:1), "Know what is above you, an eye that sees and an ear that hears, and all your deeds are inscribed in a book," this is called "*Shivisi Hashem l'negdi tamid*, I place Hashem before me constantly," and it is remembering Hashem Yisbarach. And by doing so, he becomes a different person!

In the Third Gate (*os* 27), he writes the following about *zechiras Hashem Yisbarach*, remembering Hashem: "One of the *azharos hatehuyos ba'lev*, warnings involving one's heart, is 'Guard yourself, lest you forget Hashem your G-d.' This is a warning to us to remember Hashem Yisbarach at all times. A person must always try to acquire the obligatory behaviors that stem from 'remembering Hashem,' such as *yirah* (fear of Hashem), *tz'niyus* (modesty), *kishut hamachshavos* (refinement of thoughts), and *tachsis hamiddos* (purifying *middos*), because the sacred people will attain every beautiful behavior that crowns a person by remembering Hashem Yisbarach, as it states, 'Through Hashem, all descendants of Yisrael will become righteous, and boast [of His strength].'" Now, the Smag explained the *pasuk*, "Guard yourself, lest you forget" as follows: this is a warning against arrogance which leads to forgetting Hashem. However, Rabbeinu Yonah explains that it is a warning

to constantly remember Hashem Yisbarach, to live with remembering Hashem's *hashgachah* at every single moment!

Furthermore, this is the matter of "*Shivisi*" that's written in the *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim*, in the first *se'if*. The Mechaber writes, "He should become strong like a lion to rise in the morning to serve his Creator." This means he should act with alacrity to serve Hashem with a *kum v'asei*, in a physical, active manner. The Rema added, quoting the Rambam in *Moreh Nevuchim*, "*Shivisi Hashem l'negdi tamid*, 'I place Hashem before me constantly' is a great principle in the Torah and in the attributes of the righteous ones who walk before Hashem." This is an act of remembrance — to constantly remember *hashgachas Hashem*.

And Maran Rav Dovid Povarsky ztvk"l once said that the *eitzah* in Elul is "to remember that it's Elul today." And when you remember that it's Elul today, it will certainly have a great *hashpaah* on you and remind you to engage in teshuvah — each person as he sees fit, through thought and contemplation.

Teshuvah: Engage in Self-Criticism

I've already told you about an *avreich* who told me that every day, he thinks about "three *mussar* thoughts," three short thoughts that don't take a lot of time: 1) About his Torah learning — how is his learning, and whether he is learning as he should be 2) About his davening — how is his davening 3) About *bein adam lachaveiro* and *middos tovos* — how does he interact with people; does he, or does he not, insult others or cause them pain, and is there anyone who was hurt by him.

Someone told me that he once did a favor for someone. The recipient of his favor told him, "You're only doing me this favor '*l'shem mitzvah*,' because you want a mitzvah; that's why you're doing it. You're not doing me this favor because you have *ahavas habriyos* or *ahavas chesed*, and you're not doing it because you think about me, care about me, and love me. You're only doing it because you want a mitzvah, and you found a way to fulfill a mitzvah through me." And the truth is, he was right. The man was very disturbed by this; he was upset that he hadn't done the favor because of *ahavas habriyos*. He started thinking about this point, and he changed drastically.

This is called teshuvah — being engaged in self-criticism with these understandings and *hergeishim*. In *yeshivos*, there is a set *mussar seder* for a half-hour every day. Someone who never learned *mussar* at all told me that after he realized that it was worthwhile for him to learn *mussar*, he started learning *Sefer Halkkarim* on a regular

basis. This is an *emunah sefer*, and it constitutes remembering Hashem Yisbarach, “*Shivisi Hashem l’negdi tamid*.” He said that he enjoys it and he feels that it changed his entire life. He feels that his davening is different and all his thoughts are completely different.

This is what I was able to say now. *L’maaseh*, we have ways to be *mischazeik* and merit a *kesivah v’chasimah tovah*, a *shanah tovah u’mesukah*. And so, do not worry — and everyone can be *b’simchah*!

בְּעֵינֵינוּ דְּיוֹמָא

Chizuk on Friday and Shabbos in Elul

Every year in Elul, Rabbeinu would give lengthy *divrei hadrachah* to the new *talmidim* who had joined the yeshivah. He would often speak about the *chizuk* that was needed on Friday and Shabbos. What follows is what he said at the end of the *shiur yomi* on Thursday 4 Elul 5768 (2008), *Parshas Shoftim*.

I want to point out something that’s very important to know now. It’s already Thursday, tomorrow is Friday, and then it’s Shabbos. And it’s known that Friday and Shabbos are a time that needs *chizuk*.

It’s true that some people are already strong in this area, even cheder-age children. I heard that there were children in a certain place who would learn a total of eighteen hours over Friday and Shabbos during their free time. These were cheder children, they weren’t even bar mitzvah yet, who learned eighteen hours over Friday and Shabbos! And they ate the Shabbos *seudahs*, and sang *zemiros*, and they slept as much as they needed, and they still managed to learn eighteen hours, nine hours each day. There are 48 hours over Friday and Shabbos, and that leaves a lot of extra time — there were another thirty hours aside from those eighteen that they learned. And even after sleeping properly and davening, there was still enough time for Shabbos *zemiros* and Shabbos *seudahs*.

And it’s very important to know this and to strengthen yourselves on Friday and Shabbos. It’s a special *zechus*, for two reasons. First of all, there is the *kedushah* of Shabbos — and erev Shabbos as well is a preparation for Shabbos, and it’s very close and connected to Shabbos. And the *kedushah* of Torah that’s learned on Shabbos is much greater than the *kedushah* of Torah learned during the week. The *sefarim* write, quoting the *mekubalim* (*Ben Ish Chai, Shemos shanah 2*), that the reward for mitzvos performed on Shabbos is 1000 times more than what one receives on a weekday, because the *kedushah* of Shabbos sanctifies the mitzvos. Erev Shabbos is close to Shabbos, and it has some of the *hashpaah* of the *kedushah* of Shabbos.

Now, there’s another matter involved too. Since there are so many people who slack off on Friday and Shabbos, anyone who strengthens himself at a time of *rifyon*, slacking off, receives the reward equal to everyone else. Chazal tell us (Yerushalmi, end of *Brachos*), “If you see a generation that is slackening from *divrei Torah*, stand up and strengthen it, and you will take the reward of them all. What’s the reason for this? ‘They have nullified Your Torah, it is a time to do for Hashem.’” This means that when there is a slacking off in Torah, as if “they have nullified Your Torah,” that’s the time to strengthen yourself and take action for Hashem’s honor. Anyone who strengthens himself at times like this will receive great reward, equal to everyone else.

This is similar to what Chazal told us about Avraham Avinu (*Avos* 5:2), “There were ten generations from Noach to Avraham... as all the generations angered Him increasingly, until Avraham came and received the reward of them all.” *Lichorah*, what does “the reward of them all” mean? The explanation is that he received the same reward that all ten generations would have received if they had been *tzaddikim*. Avraham received the reward of them all, as if they were all *tzaddikim*. There are reasons why this was so, but in any case, we must know that that’s how it is during times of *rifyon* — anyone who strengthens himself receives the reward of them all! And he also gets the reward who didn’t learn according to [what they would have received] if they had learned.

Therefore, it’s very important, especially in Elul, and it is certainly a great *zechus* to strengthen yourself on Friday and Shabbos and use those hours as much as possible, with *sedarim* and *chavrusas*. And if you decide what to learn in advance, and things are set and scheduled, you will be able to cover a lot of ground. Both in quantity and quality! And it will also give you a lot of mitzvos, and it’s a *zechus* for the Yamim Noraim.

For donations or dedications of the Hebrew and English flyers, or to receive the *sichos* to your email, please contact:

darkei.hachizuk@gmail.com

Donations can also be made at Kehillos or Nedarim Plus stations. Search for דרכי החיזוק (Code 710).

Dedicated by the Kroll Family, Los Angeles

להצלחת בניהם ובנותיהם
בתורה וביראת שמים