

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

From the *Sichos* of Maran Rosh HaYeshivah Rav Gershon Edelstein ztvl • *Rosh Hashanah 5786*

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Wake Up Sleepy Ones — Acknowledge the Truth

The Rambam writes (*Hilchos Teshuvah* chap. 3), “Even though blowing the shofar on Rosh Hashanah is a *gezeiras hakasuv*, it carries a hidden message: “Sleepy ones, wake up, wake up from your sleep, and arise, you who slumber, and search out your deeds, and do teshuvah, and remember your Creator.”

That is, the mitzvah of *tekias shofar* is a *gezeiras hakasuv*, a Biblical decree, and we don’t know the real reason for it; it is one of the secrets of the Torah. The Torah was created before the Creation of the World, and we cannot fathom its hidden secrets. However, there is a hint, a hidden message that we can take from this mitzvah: the shofar is a wake-up call — “Sleepy ones, wake up from your sleep.” People are sleeping, they don’t feel anything, they don’t acknowledge the facts, and they don’t wake up — but we must wake up! “Arise, you who slumber, and search out your deeds, and do teshuvah, and remember your Creator.”

A few *madreigos* are mentioned here. First, there is “search out your deeds,” as the *pasuk* states (*Eichah* 3:40), Let us search and examine our ways.” The way to do this is by learning *mussar*, “and do teshuvah,” as the *pasuk* continues, “and let us return to Hashem.” There is also “remember your Creator,” because in order for one’s teshuvah to be complete, he must remember this.

The Rambam continues, “These are the ones who forget the truth because of their involvement in meaningless pursuits, and they waste their years in vanity and emptiness, which will not be beneficial and will not save them. Look at your souls and correct your ways and deeds; each one of you should leave his evil path and the thoughts that are not good.” Being involved in meaningless pursuits makes one forget the truth, and forgetting the truth leads to all sorts of terrible things. Therefore, we must recognize and remember the truth.

And truth is, as the Rambam writes: “Each one should leave his evil path.” It’s well known that when the word *derech*, “path,” is used, it is referring to *middos* — to bad *hashkafos* and bad *middos*. It is imperative to leave his evil “path,” and know that truth that they are “meaningless pursuits,” that this world is not of primary importance. We must remember that there is Olam HaBa,

and that all of Olam HaZeh is only secondary, and is merely a means to merit attaining our fundamental goal, which is Olam HaBa.

Zachreinu l’Chaim — To a Life of Olam HaBa

The *mefarshim* explain that in the prayers of the Yamim Noraim, we first ask for “life,” without any adjectives: *zachreinu l’chaim*, remember us for life,” “*zocheir yetzurav l’chaim*, Who remembers His creations for life,” and then, at the end of the tefillah, we ask for *chaim tovim*, a good life: “*u’chsov l’chaim tovim*, and remember for good life.” Additionally, in the *Sim Shalom brachah* in Shemoneh Esrei we add “*B’sefar chaim... l’chaim tovim u’leshalom*, Inscribe us in the book of life... for a good life, and for peace.” What is a “life,” and what is a “good life”? And what is the difference between life and a good life?

Both the Vilna Gaon and the Ramchal (in *Maamar HaChochmah*) explain that “life” refers to the real life, eternal life in Olam HaBa. We ask for this first in the *Zachreinu l’Chaim* section — we ask to be *zocheh* to Olam HaBa. And how can we merit this? By doing *maasim tovim*! And we daven: *Zachreinu l’chaim*, remember us for life, let us merit fulfilling the Torah and mitzvos, and in that way, we will merit Olam HaBa, which is called “life.” Now, it is possible that our Olam HaZeh won’t be good, and we will have difficulties and *nisyonos*, because everyone has his *nisyonos* and *cheshbonos*, but Olam HaBa is the *ikkar*, the primary goal in life.

Olam HaZeh Just for Olam HaBa

Afterwards, we insert, “*u’chsov l’chaim tovim*, and inscribe for good life.” We are asking that even life in this world should be good. We ask to be able to fulfill all the *mitzvos* not from a place of pain and harsh *nisyonos*, but with a good life, without *nisyonos*.

But we certainly are not asking for a good life in Olam HaZeh for the purpose of Olam HaZeh, because then it will be instead of Olam HaBa. It’s not worth it to receive Olam HaBa in this world — the Shelah actually has a special *tefillah* about “not eating up his world in his lifetime.”

We find in the Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 101a) that when Rabbi Eliezer was sick, his *talmidim* came to visit him. They began crying and Rabbi Akiva laughed. They said to him, Why are you laughing? He told them, I'm laughing because as long as I saw that Rabbi's wine did not turn sour, and his flax was not damaged... I said, Perhaps, *chas v'shalom*, Rabbi received his Olam HaBa. But now that I see Rabbi in pain, I am happy." That is, as long as someone enjoys a good life without suffering, there's a reason to suspect that he may have received his Olam Haba in this world.

We see this in reference to Yaakov Avinu, who said (*Bereishis* 32:11), "I have become small from all of the kindnesses," and Rashi explains, My *zechuyos* have become diminished due to the kindnesses.

Therefore, when we ask for "a good life" in Olam HaZeh, the intention is not for the sake of Olam HaZeh, but for the sake of Olam HaBa. By being blessed with a good life in this world, we will be able to perform more mitzvos and *maasim tovim*, and through that, we will merit Olam HaBa. The primary goal is Olam HaBa, which is the true, eternal life.

However, a request of this nature can only come from a person who already recognizes the truth clearly and knows what is primary and what is secondary. He must know that Olam HaBa is primary, and Olam HaZeh is secondary and is only a means to acquire Olam HaBa. If a person who has this awareness, he can truly ask for this and think about it.

Tefillah: Each Person According to His Madreigah

The truth is, there is a long *derashah* from Rav Chaim Volozhiner about Rosh Hashanah. He quotes the *Zohar* who says that the main gist of our *tefillos* on Rosh Hashanah must be about *kevod Shamayim*. We daven about *Malchus Shamayim*, the Heavenly Kingdom; we say "And may You Hashem rule alone over all Your creations." We should be feeling pain and be concerned about this; this is what we should be davening for — for *kevod Shamayim*, not for ourselves.

Indeed, it's well known that Rav Yisrael Salanter said (cited in *Siddur haGra* in the introduction to Rosh Hashanah davening) that this is a very high *madreigah*, and that regular people are not on this *madreigah*. For regular people, *kevod Shamayim* is not the only thing that they care about; they want to live, they want Olam HaZeh — that's human nature and that's the reality. So if a regular person would only be asking and davening for *kevod Shamayim* and *kiddush Hashem*, and fail to ask Hashem for worldly matters, he is simply lying. He is lying and being deceitful in his davening. In *Shamayim*, they know the truth, and HaKadosh Baruch Hu knows our

thoughts, as we say in the *piyyut*, "To the One Who knows thoughts on the Day of Judgment."

I once heard about someone who arrived in a shul when they were davening *Avinu Malkeinu*. When they said, "Inscribe us in the Book of sustenance and livelihood," they did not get very emotional. But when they said, "Return us to You in complete repentance," they were extremely emotional. This man was impressed by their *madreigah* — they were more concerned about teshuvah than about their *parnasah*. But then someone who knew these people explained to him that they just were not worried about *parnasah*, they already were making respectable salaries and they felt secure about that. But they were not confident about their teshuvah, so they invested more when they davened for teshuvah.

In any case, that's human nature and that's the reality. And each person must daven according to his *madreigah*. Of course, we must always aspire to greater, loftier *madreigos*, but *l'maseh*, each person has to conduct himself as befits his *madreigah*. A person cannot deceive himself.

"My Light" on Rosh Hashanah — Recognizing the Truth

Beginning on Rosh Chodesh Elul, we recite "*L'Dovid, Hashem ori v'yish'i*" every day after davening. Chazal say in a Midrash (*Vayikra Rabbah* 21:4), "*Ori*, my light, on Rosh Hashanah, and *yish'i*, my salvation, on Yom Kippur." The concept of Hashem being our "salvation" on Yom Kippur can be understood literally — we merit atonement on Yom Kippur, and the atonement is our salvation. But we need to understand what "*ori*, my light" has to do with Rosh Hashanah; what is the light that we have on Rosh Hashanah?

We can explain as follows: Rosh Hashanah is a time of Din, Judgment. In order to be victorious in judgment, one needs teshuvah and *maasim tovim*. In order to do teshuvah, one must be aware and feel that he needs to do teshuvah. This is called "*hakaras ha'emes*, being aware of the truth." We mentioned the Rambam's comments that some people forget the truth because they're involved in meaningless pursuits — teshuvah is the opposite of this; it is recognizing the truth and not living in a mistake. Indeed, the *Mesillas Yesharim* explains that the *yetzer hara* is blindness, it blinds the intellect; and recognizing the truth brings a person to teshuvah.

Now, when a person has a day of judgment, he certainly has *siyatta d'Shemaya* to be victorious in his judgment, and there's special *siyatta d'Shemaya* to do teshuvah. These are the *yemei haratzon* of Elul, and when you use them properly, you have *siyatta d'Shemaya* and there's "*ohr*, light." That is, the light of truth. This is similar to *Torah ohr*, Torah is light, through Torah one sees the

truth, because you cannot see in the dark, and when it's light, you see the truth. Rosh Hashanah is the time of special *siyatta d'Shemaya* to merit the light of truth, to do teshuvah, and thus, to be victorious in judgment.

Malchiyos — Accepting the Kingdom and Behaving with Submission

But we need to put in our *hishtadlus*; without *hishtadlus*, one will not be victorious. At the very least, invest *hishtadlus* in the section of the *tefillah* where we say *Malchiyos*, *Zichronos* and *Shofros*. Chazal say (*Rosh Hashanah* 16a), “Say before Me *Malchiyos* in order to make Me king over you.”

Let's take a look at what “in order to make Me king over you” means. Does Hashem really need us to make Him king? His kingdom exists already: “*Ki laHashem haMeluchah*, To Hashem is kingship.” The explanation is that we know there are two concepts: a king (*malchus*) and a ruler (*memshalah*), as it states in *Tehillim* (22:29), “For the kingship (*meluchah*) is Hashem's, and He rules (*mosheil*) over the nations.” The Gra explains this as follows: A ruler (*mosheil*) is someone who rules by force (a dictator). His subjects are forced to listen to him; they have no choice. The *mosheil* is stronger than them, he overpowers them, and rules them. A king (*melech*), however, is someone whom the nation has chosen as their king; they want him to rule over them, the nation accepts him as their king and they want kingship.

This is the matter of “say before Me *Malchiyos*,” accept My kingship willingly, and you will have the awareness that you are slaves and I am your king; recognize that there is a king and there are slaves.

At the very least, we must feel like slaves, as we say in davening, “If [we are] like sons, or if [we are] like slaves.” “Like sons” is the higher *madreigah*; accepting Hashem out of love (*ahavah*), like a son-father relationship. Now, while everyone has a little something of a connection to love — as the Mashgiach the Ohr Yechezkel *ztvk*’l once said that every person has the ability to attain a little something from every *madreigah*; it's possible to attain a part of even the loftiest *madreigos* — we must at least feel like slaves. I am a slave, and I have a master whose directives I am obligated to follow — this refers to serving out of fear (*yirah*).

And this is the main preparation for Yom HaDin, to feel submissive, like a slave. Chazal tell us (*Rosh Hashanah* 16b), “Every year that is poor at the beginning, becomes wealthy in the end.” We are supposed to feel poor, we are supposed come with the submissiveness of being enslaved to the entire Torah and all the *mitzvos*. And even if this is only out of fear, it is still a very high *madreigah*, and will give us tremendous *zechuyos* for the Yom HaDin.

“Return Us in Complete Teshuvah Before You”

In the Avinu Malkeinu prayer, and as well as in Shemoneh Esrei every day, we ask “Return us in complete teshuvah before You,” and we use three different terms: *teshuvah* (repentance), *sheleimah* (complete), *lifanecha* (before You). Let us take a look at what these three terms mean.

We can understand that there is teshuvah (repentance), and then there is *teshuvah sheleimah* (complete repentance). We want to merit “complete repentance” with all the various *madreigos* involved — and with *siyatta d'Shemaya*, it is possible. That is what we are asking for when we say “Return us in complete teshuvah” — we are asking to merit the *siyatta d'Shemaya* necessary in order to do complete teshuvah, with all the *madreigos* of teshuvah. However, we still need to understand the intent of “before You.”

My rebbi Rav E.E. Dessler *ztvk*’l explained (*Michtav MeEliyahu* vol. 4, p. 315) that sometimes, it seems to a person that he has already done complete teshuvah, and he's already had *charatah* (remorse) for the past and accepted on himself to be better in the future. However, HaKadosh Baruch Hu knows him and recognizes that his teshuvah is not yet complete; his *charatah* for the past and *kabbalah* for the future are incomplete. So that's what we are asking: “Return us in complete teshuvah ‘before You’” — our teshuvah should not merely be on the level where we think it's complete; it should be complete “before You”! Even before Hashem, Who ‘searches the heart and tests the kidneys,’ it should be known and revealed that it is complete teshuvah. his teshuvah should be as the Rambam says (*Hilchos Teshuvah* 2:2), “the One Who knows hidden thoughts should testify for him that he will never return to this sin.”

The truth is, these are very high *madreigos*, but one can ask and daven to attain them.

It's told that once, during Selichos, when the author of *Menuchah u'Kedushah* recited, “*Lecha Hashem hatzedakah v'lanu boshes hapanim*, To You, Hashem, is righteousness, and to us is shamefacedness,” he felt the shame literally. He experienced such a tangible sense of shame that he began to cry. This only happened to him once; he could not attain this *madreigah* afterwards again. For the rest of his life, he yearned to merit reaching that *madreigah* of shame, as he had felt it then. Hashem, righteousness is with You, and shame is with us.’

The truth is, Rabbeinu Yonah writes in *Shaarei Teshuvah* (1:22, 23) that the *madreigah* of shame is a very high one. He writes, “And one attains the level of shame by contemplating Hashem's greatness and thinking about how evil is one who rebels against His word. And when

he constantly remembers that Hashem sees his actions, discerns his inner feelings and beholds his thoughts.” And there are many *madreigos* in this.

Similarly, there are many *madreigos* in all *ruchniyus* matters. One cannot fathom that importance of the slightest *madreigah* that a person advances, even slightly. And one cannot fathom the value of every small act, and every *hisorerus*. In Maran Rav Shach *ztvk*’l’s will, he asked that everyone learn “one thought of *mussar*” —

every thought has a *hashpaah*. When a person thinks about something, it has an influence on him. Whatever a person hears or thinks about has a *hashpaah*. Good things make a good impact, and bad things do the opposite.

The general rule is to try to engage in teshuvah along with *tefillah* — and through this, you will merit *siyatta d'Shemaya*. This present time before Rosh Hashanah is a time of *ohr* and *siyatta d'Shemaya* to recognize the truth. In this *zechus*, may we all merit a *kesivah v'chasimah tovah*.

Rabbeinu would constantly — all year long, but especially before the Yemei HaDin — speak about the obligation to beg for mercy in our *tefillas* for all of Klal Yisrael, to ask that everyone should merit the delightful life of Torah and mitzvos. We’ve printed some of his comments about this a number of times already. What follows are excerpts from two *sichos*, when he spoke about this with great passion.

In a *sichah* in yeshivah on the night before Erev Rosh Hashanah 5782 (2021), he said:

In Shemoneh Esrei, we say “*Hashiveinu Avinu*, Return us, our Father, to Your Torah”; “*Chaneinu me’Itcha*, Grant us from Yourself knowledge, insight, and wisdom.” We express our requests in the plural form. We don’t say “Grant me,” we say “Grant us”! And who are we asking for? Who do we refer to when we use the plural form? Are we only referring to our family and close friends? No! We are asking on behalf of all of Klal Yisrael! We ask that they merit knowledge, understanding, and wisdom to learn Your Torah, to serve You, and to do proper teshuvah. If so, we are davening for the *ruchniyus* of others, and this type of prayer can help, just as Rav Yisrael Salanter said.

If only we would really be on this *madreigah*, which is a high *madreigah* indeed; it’s not simple. **We should care about and be pained over Klal Yisrael’s *ruchniyus*, we should care about *Yiddishe neshamos*; why shouldn’t they also merit Olam HaBa?** Although they are *shogegim*, unintentional sinners, a *shogeg* doesn’t merit Olam HaBa because he doesn’t have enough *zechuyos*. **If we really cared about them, and we were really pained over Klal Yisrael’s *ruchniyus* and eternal life, we would daven from the depths of our hearts. And it would certainly have an effect!**

But it’s not simple; it’s actually against our nature to be so pained and care so deeply about another person’s lack of Olam HaBa. It’s an extraordinary *madreigah* — **but that’s the way things should be!** “*V’ahavta l’reiacha kamocha*”! Is “Love your fellow as yourself” only referring to material needs? What about Olam HaBa? Could it be that we don’t care that he’ll have Gehinnom, or at the very least, he won’t have Olam HaBa? **It’s true, they’re *shogegim*, but they won’t receive Olam HaBa and they’ll be missing out on the pleasures of eternal life in Olam HaBa. Why don’t we care about this?!** It is a high *madreigah*, but at the same time, it is our obligation of *v’ahavta l’reiacha kamocha*.

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In the last *sichah* of his life, on Erev Shavuot 5783 (2023), he said:

Baruch Hashem, we are constantly engaged in Torah and *maasim tovim*, but we must think about what will be with all of Klal Yisrael, because there is a portion of Klal Yisrael who still don’t have this *sheleimus*, and they don’t have the “*ashreicha baOlam HaZeh*.” We daven and beg for *rachamim* for them, “Return us, Hashem, to Your Torah,” “Forgive us, Hashem, for we have sinned.” We daven in the plural form, for all of Klal Yisrael. It all depends on the *kavanah* of each and every person when he davens for all of Klal Yisrael — according to the level of *kavanah* we have, that’s how much *siyatta d'Shemaya* there will be!

We’ve already mentioned that Rav Yisrael Salanter said it is tried-and-true that davening for *ruchniyus* helps — both for himself and for others. When a person asks for *rachamim* in *ruchniyus* matters, he doesn’t necessarily have to use the *nusach* of the *tefillah*. Even a wordless *tefillah*, from his heart, is beneficial, because Hashem knows man’s thoughts (*Tehillim* 94:11). If a person offers a wordless prayer from his heart, and asks for *rachamim* from HaKadosh Baruch Hu, silently begging him to have mercy on this one or that one in *ruchniyus* matters, there will be *siyatta d'Shemaya* — even when davening for others. Now, generally a person has more *kavanah* when he davens for himself, but if he cares about the other person, he’ll have *kavanah* in his *tefillah* for them as well. For example, when someone cares about a member of his family’s *ruchniyus* level, he will daven for him from the bottom of his heart. And it is tried-and-true that this type of *tefillah* will help!

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