

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

From the *Sichos* of Maran Rosh HaYeshivah Rav Gershon Edelstein ztvl”l • *Vayeira* 5786

637

## The Obligation to Try to Reach the Deeds of Our Avos

<sup>1</sup>Chazal say (*Tanna d’Bei Eliyahu Rabbah*, chap. 25), “A person is obligated to say ‘When will my deeds reach the deeds of my forefathers, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov.’” A person is obligated — every single person, is obligated to say, which means he must invest effort to reach this level — to make sure that his deeds will be like the deeds of the *Avos*, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. On a simple level, this is very incomprehensible. How can we attain the *madreigos* of the *Avos HaKedoshim*?

But the matter is as follows: the truth is, all of Avraham’s *nisyonos* — and Chazal tell us (*Avos* 5:3) that Avraham was tested with ten *nisyonos* and he withstood them all — Klal Yisrael, too, throughout all the generations have the same *kochos* of *mesirus nefesh* to withstand all these *nisyonos*. This is written in a number of *sefarim*, and the *Ruach Chaim* on *Pirkei Avos* writes the same idea.

It’s well known that this is the reality — throughout the generations, Klal Yisrael withstood *nisyonos* of decrees of *kiddush haShem*. They gave up their lives and the lives of their children *al kiddush haShem*, and they did it with joy! Because the *kochos* of our *Avos HaKedoshim* are present in Klal Yisrael. Any action our *Avos* did with *mesirus nefesh* in order to overcome all their hardships and to withstand their *nisyonos*, gave *kochos* to Klal Yisrael throughout the generations to withstand these *nisyonos*.

Now, this applies to Klal Yisrael on a national level, but each individual’s success is his own responsibility and depends on his own *bechirah*. This is why Chazal say, “A person is obligated to say, ‘When will my deeds reach the deeds of my forefathers, Avraham,

Yitzchak, and Yaakov,’” because our forefathers’ deeds belong to the entire Klal Yisrael throughout all the generations. And while it is not possible to attain the *madreigah* of *kedushah* and the *hasagos* of our *Avos*, it is possible that the actual “deeds” can be like our *Avos*’ deeds. Every member of Klal Yisrael has the *kochos* to perform deeds similar to the *Avos*’ deeds.

## Love and Mercy — To Perform Hashem’s Commandments

There are number of concepts inherent in the deeds of our *Avos*. One of them was the *nisayon* of the Akeidah. My father, ztvl”l, in the name of the *Nachlas Dovid*, told me the following explanation of the *pesukim* describing the Akeidah: The *pasuk* says (*Bereishis* 22:7), “And Yitzchak said to Avraham his father, and he said, ‘אבי, My father,’ and he said, ‘הנני בני, I am here, my son.’” The wordiness of this exchange requires explanation. Why did Yitzchak say “My father,” and why did Avraham answer “I am here, my son”? *Lichorah*, these words are extraneous — this manner of calling a person before speaking to him does not appear anywhere else.

He explains that Yitzchak was asking Avraham the following: According to nature, slaughtering a son is a great act of cruelty, and it negates the natural mercy a father has for his son, as it states in *Tehillim* (103:13), “As a father has mercy on his son.” If you have this *rachamim*, how is possible to commit such an act of cruelty? However, in this case, there was a special commandment from Hashem and Avraham Avinu was obligated to carry it out. Yitzchak was asking Avraham, “My father,” meaning, “Are you doing this mitzvah with all the compassion that a person has for his son, or is this a mitzvah of cruelty?”

<sup>1</sup> Excerpted from a *sichah* in Yeshivas Ponevez, Kislev 5762 (end 2001).

Avraham responded, “I am here, my son.” He was saying: the feeling of compassion and a father’s love for his son is completely present. *Adaraba*, I am doing this with my natural father’s love for his son; since this is Hashem’s command and it’s a mitzvah — if so, it for my son’s benefit. My *rachamim* and love obligates me to do this; this act is not cruelty, it is love!

This was the *madreigah* of Avraham Avinu, with *sheleimus* of *emunah*, with this *hergesht*. Indeed, the *pasuk* testifies about him (*Nechemia* 9:8), “And You found his heart faithful (*ne’eman*, from the same root as *emunah*) before You.” He had complete *emunah*, along with the sense that this is pure truth, feeling and living this truth. All of Klal Yisrael potentially has this *madreigah*, inherited from Avraham Avinu, but in actuality, it depends on each individual’s *bechirah*, and each person must say, “When will my deeds reach my *Avos*’ deeds.” That is, **one must invest effort to perform his deeds with the same *hergesht*, with the *hergeishim* of *sheleimus* of *emunah* like the *Avos*.**

### The Difference between Yisrael and the Nations of the World

In certain nations, they sacrifice their sons to *avodah zarah*, as the *pasuk* states (*Devarim* 12:31), “For also their sons and daughters they would burn in fire to their gods.” Rashi quotes the *Sifri*: Rabbi Akiva said, I saw a heathen tying up his father in front of his dog and it devoured him. (*Sifsei Chachamim* explains: “His dog” means *avodah zarah*; “it devoured him” means he burned his father in a fire.)

*L’havdil*, this is, so to speak, similar to the *nisayon* of the Akeidah. But the truth is, it is not similar at all. When non-Jews sacrifice their sons, it is the result of cruelty, as they have no mitzvah obligating them to do so. It is only in the hopes of receiving some benefit from the *avodah zarah* that they are cruel even to their own children. When it comes to Klal Yisrael, however, when they perform *mitzvos* — even those that may seem to be cruel — everything is done out of mercy and compassion, not out of cruelty.

Regarding the *Ir HaNidachas*, the *pasuk* states (*Devarim* 13:16 -18), “You shall surely strike the inhabitants of that city... and burn the city in fire... and He will grant you mercy and be merciful to you.” The *Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh* explains: “This statement means that since He commanded you

## The Yahrtzeit of Maran HaGaon Rav Elazar M.M. Shach ztvk”l

This Friday 16 Cheshvan is the *yahrtzeit* of Maran HaRav Shach ztvk”l. What follows is an excerpt from the *hesped* Rabbeinu delivered in Yeshivas Beis Mattisyahu on Rav Shach’s *shloshim*, Kislev 5762.

When we speak about the *gadol hador*, HaRav Shach, *zichrono livrachah*, what did we see by him? **That he did not have *hesich hadaas* from Torah all day long!** He was always sitting at the table with a Gemara and learning. Even when people came to him for public matters and private matters, the Gemara remained opened and he continued learning with *deveikus*, non-stop, without taking his mind off his *deveikus baTorah*.

His approach to *tefillah* was similar too. **Davening and asking Hashem for *rachamim* was a constant.** Before every *shiur*, he would go over to someone and ask for a *brachah* that his *shiur* should come out good. Even though he had already prepared the *shiur* and everything was ready, he still needed *siyatta d’Shemaya* that the *shiur* should be good and be *l’amitah shel Torah*. He did not rely on “*kochi v’otzem yadi*” in *ruchniyus* — relying on one’s own mental prowess is a natural *middah* that people might have. However, we must know that one does not attain *ruchniyus* through *kochi v’otzem yadi* — it happens only with *siyatta d’Shemaya* and *zechuyos*, and one needs to daven and ask for *rachamim* for it. And he would go over to young people and ask them for a *brachah*, people many years younger than him; before the *shiur* he would go over to people who could have been his grandchildren and them for a *brachah*. This is *tefillah*!

And another thing: *limud hamussar* is part of the yeshivah’s *sedarim*, but not everyone knows how important it is. The *poskim* write that learning *mussar* is a total obligation, because a person who does not learn *mussar*, naturally cannot be *b’sheleimus*. He cannot be *b’sheleimus* and fulfill all his obligations if he does not wake himself up through constant *chizuk*. Even recently, over the last *tekufah*, **HaRav Shach would go up to the *mussar seder* in yeshivah.** It took him a long time, about a half hour, to walk from his home to yeshivah, and he would take one step, and then another, to come and sit and learn during *mussar seder*. In his *tzava’ah* as well, he asked for “one thought of *mussar*.”

regarding the Ir HaNidachas (a city where all the inhabitants profess to be idolators) to kill out the entire city by sword, including their animals, this action will engender a nature of cruelty in man's heart. The Yishmaelim have informed us that the royal executioners say when they are carrying out their duties and murdering someone, they experience a strong desire to kill; they have lost their trait of mercy and have become cruel and barbarous. This trait would have become rooted within those who killed out the Ir Nidachas, and that's why they were given the promise that Hashem would grant them mercy. Even if nature would engender the trait of cruelty in them, the Source of mercy will send them the power of mercy once again to nullify the power of cruelty that the act engendered in them."

This is the difference between non-Jews and Klal Yisrael. The non-Jews have a natural tendency for cruelty, like those Yishmaelim who are royal executioners, whose trait of cruelty intensifies as they carry out their duties, and they experience a "strong desire" to kill; they enjoy murdering. But when the inhabitants of an Ir HaNidachas must be killed out, the Torah promises that it will not cause cruelty, as the *pasuk* continues, "when you listen to the voice of Hashem your G-d." That is, if you are doing so as a mitzvah, because this is what Hashem commanded you to do — "when you listen to the voice of Hashem" — it does not cause cruelty. To the contrary, it will strengthen your *middah* of mercy — "and He will grant you mercy and be compassionate with you"!

### **Middos Tovos — Changing One's Nature through Torah**

The Ohr HaChaim continues: "And by saying 'and He will be compassionate with you' they were saying that when a person acts with a cruel nature, Hashem will act the same way toward him, as Hashem is only compassionate to those who are compassionate." If a person is naturally cruel and does not have a compassionate nature, Hashem acts with him in the same manner. And even if he does not commit acts of cruelty, and it's possible that he even performs good deeds, if he has a cruel nature, Hashem will act with him in the same manner. He will not merit *middas harachamim*, as Hashem only has compassion on a compassionate person.

He explains that the obligation to have good *middos* includes changing one's nature. If someone is naturally cruel — and this is not specific to cruelty; it applies to all negative *middos* — if he does not uproot his bad *middos*, he will not merit *siyatta d'Shemaya* in matters that require *middas harachamim*.

We say this every day in the Sim Shalom *brachah* in Shemoneh Esrei: "For by the light of Your countenance You gave us *Toras Chaim* and *ahavas chesed*." That is, we need Torah and *ahavas chesed*, and not simply "acts" of *chesed*, but "loving" *chesed* — *chesed* should be in our nature! And by engaging in Torah and fulfilling the *mitzvos*, we merit changing our nature. This is the meaning of "A person is obligated to say 'When will my deeds reach the deeds of my forefathers'" — our goal should be that our deeds reach the *madreigah* of the Avos, with the same *hergeishim* the Avos had. And it is possible to attain this.

It is true that it is not so simple, because we will have to change our nature. Furthermore, it's known that changing one's nature can only happen through Torah, as we have a *yetzer hara* and the Torah is the antidote to it. But sometimes it's hard to learn; the *yetzer hara* does not let us learn; it persuades us to waste time, and wasting time is enjoyable. So what is the *eitzah*? How can we overcome the *yetzer hara* so that it won't be hard to learn? Of course, if we are aware of the *chashivus* of Torah, if we know how important *esek haTorah* is, and if we also are aware of the opposite, how terrible life is and what a lack there is without Torah, it automatically will give us *chizuk*. But we still have a *yetzer hara*.

The truth is, Hashem made contrasting entities and there is *mesikus haTorah*, sweetness in Torah. Just as we have a *yetzer hara* that pushes us away from Torah, we also have a "yetzer" of Torah, the sweetness of Torah. Indeed, we say in Birkas HaTorah, "And please make sweet the words of Torah in our mouths." There is sweetness in Torah, and when something is sweet, it's enticing and pleasant and it's not hard to learn. *Adaraba*, you do it happily. One just has to make sure to learn in the manner that fits his nature — then he will feel the sweetness and will learn with joy and pleasure. And by doing so, he will merit all the good attributes and good *middos*.

## קידוש השם אל מול חילול השם ~ Kiddush Hashem to Counteract Chillul Hashem

Last week, hundreds of thousands of Yidden attended the massive Atzeres Tefillah of Kiddush Hashem, with the *gedolei hador shlita* at the helm. What follows are excerpts from a *drashah* Rabbeinu delivered on *Shabbos Parshas Chukas* 5770 (2010), at the *kiddush* of a *talmid's aufruf*, after the Atzeres Tefillah for the Emanuel prisoners.

It is proper to discuss what we presently merited seeing, a great gathering of *kiddush Shem Shamayim*, in a protest gathering of hundred of thousands who proclaimed “*Hashem Hu HaElokim*.” However, it seems that not everyone understands why this was done, why *rabbanim* instructed us to make a public Atzeres.

The truth is, it is because one judge stood up and declared that the judges are not bound by the *dinei Torah*, they are the ones who make decisions, not the *rabbanim*. And since some people agreed with him, the result was a *chillul Hashem*. Especially since that judge was not arguing whether the *rabbanim* were right or not, he was declaring that he doesn't care what the reality is or what the *rabbanim* say; and that law overrides the *rabbanim*.

Now he himself has been incited by others, but his comments created a terrible *chillul Hashem*, and the rectification of *chillul Hashem* is to strengthen *kiddush Hashem*, as Rabbeinu Yonah writes in *Shaarei Teshuvah*.

Therefore, that is why we all went out to make a *kiddush Hashem*, declaring “*Hashem Hu HaElokim*” and “*Shema Yisrael*.” While some newspapers labeled it a “powerful demonstration,” this is a mistaken outlook of “*kochi v'otzem yadi*” which is nothing less than *avodah zarah*, and merely increases *chillul Hashem*. *Adaraba*, this is a time for us to strengthen our *emunah* that everything is in HaKadosh Baruch Hu's hands, and by increasing *kevod Shamayim*, we will rectify the *chillul Hashem* that occurred.

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During the daily shiur before the yeshivah left to the Atzeres, Rabbeinu added the following:

### **Rectification of Chillul Hashem — Kiddush Hashem**

We learn in *Pirkei Avos*, “Whatever HaKadosh Baruch Hu created in His world was only created for His glory, as it states, ‘Whatever is called by My name and for My glory, I created it, I formed it, I even made it.’” The purpose of all of Creation is *kevod Shamayim*, and without *kevod Shamayim*, there's no need for Creation. *Kevod Shamayim* means to publicize the belief that there is a Borei Olam and we are His servants, and that all the worlds: Atzilus, Bri'ah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah, were all created for that purpose: in order to increase *kevod Shamayim*. Even though Hashem is *Melech HaKavod* and He lacks no honor, in any case, this idea that we must increase *kevod Shamayim* is for our own benefit, for when we are involved in generating *kevod Shamayim*, we merit Olam HaBa, which is the true pleasure.

And if there's someone in the world who is degrading *kevod Shamayim*, that is simply terrible. Chazal say (*Yoma* 86a) that *chillul Hashem* is the most severe sin. *Teshuvah* does not atone for it, and *yissurim* don't cleanse this sin — only death, along with *teshuvah*, brings atonement.

Rabbeinu Yonah writes in *Shaarei Teshuvah* (1:47; 4:5) that there is an *eitzah* to rectify *chillul Hashem*, and that is “If Hashem *Yisbarach* helps him sanctify his Torah in front of other people and declare to others Hashem's strength and the honorable splendor of His kingdom.” That is, *kiddush Hashem* is the rectification of *chillul Hashem*.

### **The Obligation to Increase Kevod Shamayim When Torah Is Degraded**

Lately, those who are distant from us and distant from Yiddishkeit want to degrade and belittle those who learn Torah. They are intentionally directing various actions and incitement against *oskei Torah*. And it's not only against *oskei Torah*; it's also against *gedolei Torah*. They are inciting against *dinei Torah* and are publicly announcing that they are not obligated to adhere to *dinei Torah*.

This is a terrible *chillul Hashem*, that a Jew can stand up and declare, *Rachmana litzlan*, that there is a law that overrides the Torah's laws and that he does not take the Torah's laws into account.

During a time like this, when people are trying to incite the public against the Torah and to push them away from *emunah*, and when they want to degrade *kavod haTorah*, this is the tenth *madreigah* (listed in *Shaarei Teshuvah* Gate 3) of those who have no portion in Olam HaBa, *Rachmana litzlan*. And we must increase *kevod Shamayim* to counteract the terrible *chillul Hashem*, and we must show that we believe and are following in the Torah's way, and only the Torah's laws are our laws.

Maran HaRav Shach *ztvk"l* told me that he was once walking with the Brisker Rav *ztvk"l* in Yerushalayim, and someone came over to the Brisker Rav with a question. The man said that elections for the administration of the “Eidah HaChareidis” would be taking place in another few days. As a member of the Eidah HaChareidis, he had the right to vote, but he did not care who gets elected. He asked if there was any reason for him to go vote. Rav Shach asked the Brisker Rav if he could answer the question. He then told the man to go vote, because if there would be a lot of voters for the Eidah HaChareidis, it would be a *kiddush Hashem* — the world would see that there are a lot of *chareidim*, which would increase *kevod Shamayim*, and that is the point of Creation.

This is why the *gedolim* instructed us to take part in this public Atzeres, because when things reach a point where there is *chillul Hashem* and incitement against *emunah*, it is our obligation to strengthen *emunah* and to increase *kevod Shamayim*, which is the rectification of *chillul Hashem*. By participating in the protest, we show that we believe in Hashem and His Torah, and we are announcing loud and clear “*Hashem Hu HaElokim*”!

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