

Darkei HaChizuk

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

A Sichah from Maran HaGaon Rav Gershon Edelstein shlita, Rosh Yeshivas Ponevez - Hoshana Rabah 5773 #28

Hoshana Rabah is the time for the final verdict for the upcoming year. We already had the *ksiva v'chasima* - writing and sealing - of our verdict, on *Rosh Hashana* and *Yom Kippur*, yet there is another *chasima* on *Hoshana Rabah*. We ask Hashem at the end of *hoshanos* "והתמנו בספר היים טובים" - may You seal us (our verdict) in the book of good life. How is it possible to have another verdict after *Yom Kippur*? Furthermore, the *Midrash* tells us (*Tanchuma Emor* 20) that through taking the four species on *Succos* and praising Hashem with them, we merit atonement from our transgressions. We see that even after *Yom Kippur*, there are still *aveiros* that were not atoned for, and hence the need for another day of atonement, on *Succos*. This is the reason there is also another verdict. One can merit a better *chasima* than he received before. We need to explain though, how the *daled minim* grant atonement from transgressions.

The *Gemara* in *Yoma* (86b) tells us that if one does *teshuvah* out of love of Hashem - תשובה מאהבה - his transgressions, even those committed with intent, become merits. The *Mesilas Yesharim* (Ch. 4) explains that this works similarly to the process of nullifying a vow. Just as the *Chocham* can annul a vow that already was taken, thereby making it *halachically* as if it never took place, so too, complete *teshuvah* and remorse, make it as if one never committed the *aveira*. If one does *teshuvah* out of fear of Hashem - תשובה מיראה - the *aveiros* committed with intent, become as if they were committed without intent. The verdict one received on *Yom Kippur* was based on his level at that time and if he later does *teshuvah*, the *aveiros* are considered as if they were not there to begin with; so much so that they can even become merits! We still need to resolve how taking the four species accomplishes this.

Teshuvah out of love of Hashem is a very lofty level that has many levels within it. The *Chovos Halevavos* tells us that the higher levels of אהבת השם - are not possible to achieve through natural means yet there are some levels that one could reach through natural means. In chapter 19 the *Mesilas Yesharim* writes that the *simcha* one gets from performing a *mitzvah* is an offshoot of *ahavas Hashem*. The *simcha* one gets is from the recognition of the importance of that *mitzvah*. When a person has something important and valuable, he is naturally happy. The root of this is from the internal, built in love we have for Hashem. We are told in *Vayikra* (23:40): "וישמחתם לפני השם אלוקיכם שבעת ימים" - And you shall rejoice before Hashem your G-d seven days.

Succos is called זמן שמחתינו - the time of our joy. This is an auspicious time for שמחה של מצוה - *simcha* from the *mitzvos*. Through this level of *simcha*, one can merit the level of *ahavas Hashem*. This level was not necessarily achieved on *Yom Kippur* and one can merit a better verdict, whereby his *aveiros* actually turn into merits. We can add to this what we know from *Rabbeinu Yona* in *Shaarei Teshuva* (1:1) that Hashem helps penitents (*baalei teshuva*) to achieve the levels of *ahavas Hashem*, more so than their natural abilities allow for. It is Hashem who will circumcise their hearts in order to achieve His love. After *Yom Kippur*, which is a time for *teshuvah*, there is a special Divine assistance given to those penitents to achieve *ahavas Hashem*. This, combined with the *mitzvos* of *Succos* performed with *simcha* - joy, can achieve this level of love of Hashem and have *aveiros* turn into merits. One can merit a better verdict on *Hoshana Rabah* than he did on *Yom Kippur*.

Teshuvah is not an easy endeavor, as the natural drives of a person pull him towards *Olam Hazei* and not to *Olam Habah*. The *Chovos Halevavos* (*Cheshbon Hanefesh* ch. 3) tells us that the love of this world and the next are diametrically opposed. One cannot love this world and simultaneously love the next. *Teshuvah* is the changing of a person's innate drives so that his ambitions are towards *Olam Habah* and not towards *Olam Hazei* and its physical pursuits. Such a drastic internal change cannot be achieved in one day. The *Gemara* in *Avodah Zarah* (10b, 17a, 18a) tells us of all those who acquired *Olam Habah* in a single moment, through a single event. I heard from my Rebbi, Rav Dessler zt"l an explanation why all these people mentioned in the *Gemara*, died immediately after this moment of epiphany. This is because they surely would have fallen back down from their high status. One simply cannot acquire a new internal persona in a single moment and maintain that level.

The path to changing one's internal drives and ambitions is only through establishing a constant *cheshbon hanefesh* - an internal spiritual assessment. A person is affected by what he sees, hears and thinks. Man is capable of being influenced by external factors and people. As well, one's actions will affect who he is. One who is constantly thinking and analyzing his behaviors through a *cheshbon hanefesh*, must change. Even if one does not feel any change, after some time he will surely be a different person, whose whole persona has changed. *Olam Hazei* no longer will pull him. We can accomplish this through *mussar*. One needs to make time, every day, for learning *mussar*. All the

mussar works contain important principles for growth in Torah. As long as one learns *mussar* daily, from a sefer that interests him, (as something not captivating does not have an effect), regardless of how little time he spends, he will be affected. If one accepts upon himself to learn *mussar* daily, as the *poskim* tell us that this is a requirement from the Torah, he will surely become a different person. His ambitions will be towards *Olam Habah*. The decision to do a *mitzvah* will already assist him in carrying it out. As we have said before in the name of R'Chaim Voloziner zt"l, the decision to perform a *mitzvah* gives a person more *kedusha* which enables and assists him in bringing that thought to fruition. Rabbeinu Yona (*Shaarei Teshuva* 2:10) empowers us when he writes that when one decides to do *teshuva* and to listen to all that the Rabbis instruct him to do, he immediately has stepped out of darkness and into the light. In a single moment he has changed himself and has merited the reward for all those *mitzvos* that he has yet to do! When one accepts upon himself this path of *cheshbon hanefesh* through learning *mussar*, his *teshuva* is out of love of Hashem and he is considered a complete *ba'al teshuva*.

The area which requires the most work, and that has seen a major regression over the generations, is that of *middos* - character traits. Having good *middos* is the ultimate perfection of man. The *Gemara* in *Berachos* (17a) says: The goal of Torah is *teshuva* and good deeds. *Teshuva* is for the past, i.e. through Torah one realizes where he erred, and good deeds are concerning the future. We have found people who bless others upon the birth of a child that he should grow up to Torah, *mitzvos*, *Chuppa* and good deeds. It is clear that *mitzvos* and good deeds are two distinct things. As well, in the blessings we recite in the morning we say: שתרגילנו בתורתך ודבקנו במצוותיך - may You make us consistent with Torah study and may You cleave us to Your *mitzvos*; and yet we immediately follow that by asking: ודבקנו ביצר הטוב ובמעשים טובים - may You cleave us to the *Yetzer Hatov* and to good deeds. What is the distinction between *mitzvos* and good deeds?

The simple explanation is that "good deeds" are *mitzvos* performed solely out of love of the *mitzvos*, for the sake of Heaven; without any personal agendas or biases, such as the rewards one will receive or even *Olam Habah*. He feels the responsibility to perform the commandments and is happy to do so without any expectations in return. The goal of Torah is to lead a person to such a level. When one is attached to Torah, the *kedusha* of Torah permeates him and affects him to perform *mitzvos* in this complete way. The *passuk* in *Micha* (6:8) tells us that G-d demands of us to do loving-kindness; not just kindness but rather *chesed* that comes out of love in the heart for this *mitzvah*. Rabbeinu Yona (3:13) writes that one must seek and trouble himself to do good for his friend. This is regardless of his friend's status, rich or poor. As well, this trait is from the main responsibilities of man in this world. Even though Rabbeinu Yona says one must trouble himself with this, to those that love kindness, this is no trouble at all; they actually enjoy helping others. Loving-kindness is actually ingrained in all *Yidden*, for it is not possible to command us to love something we intrinsically do not love. *Koheles* tells us that we are the ones that ruin this natural trait of loving-kindness through our biases and ulterior motives. *Koheles* (7:29) says: "G-d made man straight and yet they (man) had many calculations". Rav Chaim Vital zt"l

explains that when one has personal agendas and biases of bad *middos*, all the *mitzvos* he performs are not complete. Negative *middos* are a defect in the *nefesh* - soul - and the only way to achieve good *middos* is through Torah. It is the Torah that sanctifies and purifies the *nefesh*. That is the way to loving others. Those people that have *middos tovos* - good traits - live a happy life. They do not experience jealousy nor competition. They enjoy benefitting others. Just as Avraham Avinu sat outside his tent, looking for guests, on the third and most painful day after his *bris*; not being able to help others was hurting him and he had to find an opportunity to help others, even while being so physically ill. There are those who would like to perform acts of *chesed* but are embarrassed to do so. This causes them suffering, as they really do want to help those in need. They must know that the embarrassment is worthwhile in order to get used to good *middos*. In the long run they will enjoy performing acts of *chesed*.

On the other hand, man is also pulled by negative traits despite having this trait of loving-kindness instilled in him. There are constant trials that bring people to bad *middos* and many obstacles that can hinder a person's achievement of correct *middos*. Arrogance is one such negative trait. The *Gemara* in *Eiruvim* (54a) expounds on the *passuk* that tells of the travels of *Bnei-Yisroel*. וממדבר מתנה וממתנה נחליאל ומנחליאל במות - If a man makes himself humble as a desert (מדבר) Torah will be given to him as a gift (מתנה) and then his inheritance is Hashem, i.e. Torah (נחלה קל). He then ascends to greatness (במות - stage) and if he becomes haughty, Hashem lowers him (הגיא - valley). If he returns to the right path, Hashem raises him again as it says: כל גיא יינשא - all valleys shall be risen. The explanation is as follows. When one learns Torah, he initially merits success proportionally to his input - יגעת ומצאת - "If you toiled, and you found (achieved), believe it" (know that the success is real). When he then makes himself like a desert, a place owned by no one and available to everyone, i.e. he teaches Torah for free, (Rashi *Nedarim* 55a) he merits a level of Torah above his natural abilities. If he stays attached to Torah he merits having Torah his inheritance and through this achieves a high position of respect and authority whereby he can now influence even more people in the ways of Torah and *yiras* Hashem. If, while there, he becomes haughty, Hashem lowers and humbles him.

We must learn from here the power of *middos*. This is the person who was so humble; he is compared to a desert upon which everyone walks. He has achieved incredible levels of humility and success in Torah and yet when the test of honor is upon him, he starts to give himself the credit. This lofty level causes his decline. As the *Gemara* in *Succah* tells us (52a) כל הגדול מחברו יצרו גדול הימנו - the greater a person is, the greater his challenges (*Yetzer Harah*). Once his arrogance is involved, Hashem must lower him, as we know that Hashem humbles the haughty.

We are told in *Sanhedrin* (7b) about Rav and Mar Zutra Chasida that as they were being praised and honored would recite verses of humility and lowliness. Rashi explains that they acted in this manner so that their thoughts wouldn't lead them astray. They felt they were at the level of במות - and did not want to be

who thinks otherwise is mistaken.” The *kedusha* of Torah purifies the soul and refines the *middos*, therefore one must strengthen himself in Torah study. There are those who are naturally very talented and have refined *middos*. They are very adept at learning and do so without interruptions. They get depressed as they think they need to be perfect in their *middos* and yet are not there. This is very damaging. One must know that there are ways to get help for such thoughts. One must seek immediate guidance. There are many people trained to help these situations. These thought patterns are usually the byproduct of a mistaken premise and can be treated.

For Torah to permeate, one must learn without interruptions. Any mental break from Torah causes the effect to be dispersed. It says in the *Sifri* (*Devarim* 11:22) “If you shall leave me one day, I shall leave you two days.” This uninterrupted learning can only be achieved when one feels sweetness in his learning. We *daven* for this when we say: “והערב נא את דברי תורתך בפינו” - May you sweeten the words of Your Torah in our mouths”. When the Torah is sweet, it is captivating. If one doesn't feel the sweetness, then the learning is difficult and one anxiously awaits the learning to finish. This is not a Torah that can affect the person for it is not Torah being learned the way it should be. Of course, one must stop his learning in order to take care of his physical needs and to rest. One must be careful that the interruptions are indeed only to take care of that which his body needs in order to continue learning and not be an offloading of the yoke of Torah - פריקת עול - פריקת עול. When one stops in order to refresh his body, so that he can be strong and keep going, the actual break too is considered a part of his learning. The Rambam (*Hilchos Deios* 3:3) writes that when one sleeps to strengthen his body for learning, he is called a servant of Hashem even while he sleeps. This is his preparatory step to his *mitzvos* - הכשר מצוה - הכשר מצוה.

In our generation there are many distractions to feeling the sweetness of Torah. One must learn according to his natural abilities and his strengths, and that which interests him. If one learns from a drive for accomplishment, more than his strengths or not according to his abilities, he does not feel the sweetness of Torah. When this happens, the learning becomes boring and leads to *bitul* Torah. One has to learn according to his abilities and specifically, things that interest him; this is *Simchas haTorah*. This will produce

uninterrupted learning. Many people suffer from this and learn in ways not suited for their strengths. It begins in *chadarim* and continues throughout *yeshivos* and *kollels*. I know of cases that this caused very unfortunate results.

Another thing one must keep in mind regards *chinuch* – educating the young. There are many parents who are true *tzaddikim* that want to raise their children in the same way. They do not know that one must not push children too much. When one does so, it can create many difficulties. Specifically in homes of *tzaddikim*, these difficulties arise. The solution is to seek advice and guidance from those trained in *chinuch* in order to be able to teach the child through *simcha* and not a create a feeling of a burden.

One must remember that life has its challenges and that they all come as tests from Hashem. In *Tehillim* (11:5) it states: “Hashem shall test the *tzaddik*”. Without tests there can be no growth and accomplishments. All our merits come from passing our tests and difficulties. Everyone has their own set of tests and naturally people credit all sorts of natural causes to their hardships: his fault, the other's fault and so on. He doesn't understand that he must stand up to the tests and act with good *middos* despite the hardships. This is the path to success.

Chazal tell us (*Berachos* 5a) that Hashem gave *Yisroel* three gifts, all of which were given through hardships: Torah, *Eretz Yisroel* and *Olam Habah*. Only through *nisyonos* – tests - one can achieve success in these three areas. Those who understand, realize that all tests are for our ultimate good. The tests are there for us to beat them and merit Divine help; without hardships one cannot attain *Olam Habah*.

All that we addressed, *middos tovos*, Torah, *tefillah*, overcoming tests are all of primary importance and are not easily attained. Yet, everyone, with the correct desire to grow and to receive *דשמיא דשמיא* - has a tremendous *zechus* - merit - for a *Gmar Chasima Tova!*

(This *sicha* was given last year *Erev Succos* תשעב)



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