

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 • Parashas Naso 5782

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Torah Is Acquired through Humility and Happiness

We all want *hatzlachah* in Torah, and there are 48 ways to acquire Torah. The Gra writes in his commentary to *Mishlei* that *Eishes Chayil* is the Torah. The *gematria* of "חיל" is 48, corresponding to the 48 *kinyanei Torah*. And that's why we say, "*Eishes chayil mi yimtza*, Who can find the *Eishes chayil*?", meaning, it's difficult to find someone who has all 48 acquisitions. In any case, every acquisition on its own is a *zechus* for success in Torah. The *hatzlachah* is concomitant with the acquisitions; the more *kinyanim* a person has acquired, the more success he'll see in Torah. The contrary is also true; the less *kinyanim*, the less success.

For example, one of the *kinyanim* is *b'anavah*, with humility. I've noticed that not everybody knows what humility is. Some people think *anavah* means seeing only his faults and not his *maalos*, as if he must think that he's worthless, that he's a nothing, and he has no good attributes. But this is really not *anavah*! And it's not right either, because every single person has many *maalos*; thinking that he is worthless is not being humble.

The Torah is acquired *b'simchah*, with happiness, both with happiness and humility. If *anavah* means thinking that you are worthless, how can you be happy? The two are contradictory! That type of "humility" is a contradiction to happiness! And included in the 48 acquisitions to Torah are both "happiness" and "being happy with one's lot" — they are two different concepts. One is being happy while a person is learning, and the other is being happy even when he isn't learning. But if *anavah* means thinking "I'm worthless," how can a person be happy?

Humility — Like a Poor Man Who Receives Charity

The answer is, that is certainly not *anavah*. The *Mesillas Yesharim* speaks about *anavah* at length in Chap. 22. He explains that of course every person has many good attributes, talents, good *middos* and *yiras Shamayim*, and a person should be aware of his good qualities. And yet, it is still possible to be humble. There could be someone, a *gadol baTorah*, a great *talmid chacham* who comes up with *chiddushei Torah*, a *baki*, a *baal havanah* who has reached a high level in Torah, someone who experiences success in Torah and *ruchniyus*, someone who is aware of this and happy with his lot — and yet, he is still humble.

Why? Because all the *maalos* a person has are not things he's done on his own; they are gifts from *Shamayim*;

everything is in Heaven's hands. The fact that he understands his learning is from Heaven. Good *middos* are from *Shamayim* — he was gifted with a good nature with *middos tovos*, and his nature is from *Shamayim*. The same is true when it comes to talents, a good memory, ability to explain well, and all other *maalos* a person may have. They are all Heavenly gifts, all *chesed Hashem*.

If a person has *emunah* and he believes this, he knows that everything is *chesed v'rachamim* from Hashem. **What can this be compared to? To a poor man who doesn't have anything and other people have mercy on him and give him things, so he subsequently has food to eat. If not for other people's mercy, he wouldn't have food. So can it be that the poor man will consider himself special because he has food to eat?** After all, whatever he does have is only because other people took pity on him and gave it to him. So too, any person who has *maalos*, all the *ruchniyus* and *gashmiyus* a person has, it is all in Heaven's hands. Why does he have it? *B'chesed u'v'rachamim*! Due to Hashem's kindness and great mercy! Why would a person feel important about this? Feelings of superiority are surely out of place, because everything is from *Shamayim*.

Therefore, there is no reason why a person should consider himself important; he should just be happy with what he has, like the poor man is happy that he has something to eat, that he's full and is not hungry. So too, a person should be happy what whatever he has, with all his *maalos* — both in *gashmiyus* and *ruchniyus* — and he should rejoice that he has these attributes, but it doesn't make sense that he should feel important because of them, since it is all *chesed v'rachamim* from *Shamayim*. Why would feeling important about this make sense?

Rabbeinu Yonah writes in *Shaarei Teshuvah* (1:12) about the attribute of submissiveness (*hachnaah*). A person who sinned and repents must do so with submissiveness. He must think about how "he did not remember his Creator Who created him something from nothing, and performed kindness with him, and His hand guided him at all times, and He protected his soul at every moment. And how could his heart have turned to anger Him?" A person should think: How could I have forgotten that there is a Creator Who created me *yeish me'ayin*. And performed kindness with him — He did *chesed* for me! And His hand guided him at all times — HaKadosh Baruch Hu is constantly leading and guiding man. And He protected his soul at every moment — Every moment that a person is alive is Heavenly mercy. And

how could his heart have turned to anger Him — how is it possible to sin, how did he dare to go against Hashem's will, to anger his Benefactor.

And Rabbeinu Yonah concludes: "And the wise man whose eyes are opened will engrave these matters on his heart and bring them into his innermost chambers." That is, the most important thing is to take this to heart. A wise man will submissively take these words to heart and understand that he was ungrateful.

So this is what humility is about: know that you have *maalos*, but don't consider yourself important because of them. Just be happy with your *maalos*. It is not a contradiction to be happy with one's *maalos* and not consider himself important, because he knows that everything is in Heaven's hands, and everything is from *Shamayim*.

If a person does not have *emunah*, then it's possible that he'll feel self-important due to his *maalos*. But if a person lives with *emunah*, such feelings are completely irrelevant, because he knows that everything he has is due to Hashem's kindness and mercy; nothing is the result of *zechuyos*. After all, whenever he performs anything good, he is just filling his obligation — if he doesn't do what he's obligated to do, he's a sinner. So does he deserve a reward because he's not a sinner? He doesn't deserve anything, whatever he has is *chasdei Shamayim*. Of course, a person must be happy, but he should not feel self-important, he should merely be happy and feel grateful.

Being happy and humble is a *madreigah*, and there's no contradiction between the two.

Hatzlachah in Ruchniyus Depends on Hishtadlus

The same is true regarding all 48 acquisitions of Torah. For example, the first one mentioned is "*b'talmud*," which means "to learn"! This is actually quite understandable; if a person wouldn't learn it's simple that he will not have *hatzlachah* in Torah. He must learn. The only question is, how much should he learn. Of course, the more a person learns, the more success he'll see. By learning more, he'll know more and have a better understanding and grasp — it all depends on how much he learns.

This is true on two accounts: naturally and when it comes to *zechuyos*. One needs *siyatta d'Shemaya* for success, and if he doesn't try, why should he receive it? This is true in all areas — all *ruchniyusdik* success depends on how much a person tries, and how much he does. The more a person learns with *hasmadah*, the more he will be *zocheh* to *siyatta d'Shemaya* in Torah.

Tefillah is similar as well. One needs to daven for *siyatta d'Shemaya*, but one must actually do whatever he can; without that, davening will not help.

Tefillah is not included in the 48 acquisitions of Torah. This is because *tefillah* does belong among the ways to acquire Torah — it's self-understood that if someone doesn't ask,

why should they give him? After all, a person needs *siyatta d'Shemaya*! While there are methods for acquiring Torah, a person still needs *siyatta d'Shemaya*! And if a person doesn't daven, even if he puts in the right *hishtadlus*, but he doesn't daven — meaning, he thinks he can succeed without *siyatta d'Shemaya*, is such a thing possible? Is success without *siyatta d'Shemaya* possible? Everything is in Heaven's hands, both in *gashmiyus* and *ruchniyus*. So it's simple that a person needs *tefillah*; only then can he possibly attain *siyatta d'Shemaya*.

It's well known that Rav Yisrael Salanter said it's tried-and-true that *tefillah* for *ruchniyus* is effective. But this only holds true when the person himself has done whatever he can. If he davens, but does not actively do whatever he can, his prayers will not help.

Natural Hishtadlus for Middos Rectification

In *Ohr Yisrael* (Letter 14), he gives an example about prayers for good *middos*. If a person needs to correct his *middos* [some people feel a lack in their own *middos*, and this is a *madreigah*] — take, for example, a person who feels he possesses the *middah* of anger. He knows that it's a sin and a bad *middah* and that he needs *siyatta d'Shemaya* to be saved from it, but if he only davens and begs for Heavenly mercy to remove the *middah*, but he doesn't employ natural methods to correct it, it's as if he's asking to see without eyes! He too must try and be active, employing helpful methods to correct this *middah*.

For example, there's an *eitzah* and a method for correcting anger. I've already told you the story of a married man who would get angry often on *erev Shabbos*, due to the pressure of getting ready for Shabbos. He would become angry and scream at his family. He asked me what he should do. He didn't want to get angry, but anger seemed to be part of his nature. He wanted advice how to overcome his nature. I suggested that whenever he felt angry, he should just keep quiet. He should contain the anger in his heart and not let it emerge. That is the way to wean oneself off anger.

He started doing this. The first time was very difficult. He saw things in his house that were getting him really angry, but he kept quiet and didn't scream. He came to tell me how hard it was and how he did not think he'd be able to bear such suffering every *erev Shabbos*. I told him to keep trying. Sure enough, the next Friday, he became angry, but he kept quiet. This time was a little easier, though it still was very difficult. On the third week, he controlled himself again and didn't scream at his family, and that week was even easier. Over time, it became easier and easier, until he completely broke his *middah* of anger. He did the exercise, he got rid of his anger, and now he does not get angry any more.

There are ways and methods to rid oneself of all bad *middos*, but if a person only davens for help, and doesn't take the proper steps toward *tikkun hamiddos*, Rav Yisrael Salanter says it is as if he's davening to see without eyes — which is impossible *b'derech hateva*.

Learning with Sweetness Leads to Hasmadah

Learning with *hasmadah*, *b'talmud*, may be difficult and require effort. However, there is inherent enjoyment and sweetness in *esek haTorah*, as it says in *Tehillim* (19:11), "And they are sweeter than honey and the drippings of honeycombs." There are all sorts of flavors that the Torah is compared to, such as water, honey, and milk, as Chazal say (*Bava Kama* 17a), "There is no water but Torah, as it states, 'O, all you thirsty ones go to the water.' Just as a thirsty person drink water to quench his thirst, the Torah saturates the soul. The *pasuk* in *Shir HaShirim* (4:11) compares Torah to honey and milk: "Honey and milk under your tongue." Since our spiritual lives, our eternal lives, are dependent on Torah, when Hashem created man and the world, He made it that they have pleasure in *esek haTorah* so that man will be able to be *zocheh* to eternal life.

That's why there is sweetness and pleasure in learning. But the rebbi or learner must teach or learn in a way that fits each person's personality. The *sefer Chosen Yehoshua* (1:7) writes about this at length. One's learning must fit his nature; then he will be able to learn with *hasmadah*. But if he learns in a way that's against his nature, he won't be able to continue, because it's hard to exert such effort against one's nature. Each person has his own nature, each person needs to learn in the way that is right for him. Then he'll be able to achieve "*b'talmud*," with *hasmadah*. When he learns according to his nature, learning is interesting and enticing and it becomes hard to stop.

The Gemara (*Eiruv* 54b) relates the story of Rav Elazar ben Peda who would sit and learn Torah in the lower marketplace of Tzipori, and his outer clock was strewn somewhere in the upper market place. Due to his intense engrossment in Torah, he forgot that he left his garment elsewhere. They attributed the following *pasuk* to him: "You shall always be intoxicated (lit., inadvertent) in the love of it." Due to his great love of Torah, he became inadvertent in his other affairs, and forgot about himself. The Gemara (*Shabbos* 88a) tells us about Rava who pressed his finger so hard while he was learning, that it began to bleed profusely. He didn't even notice because he was so engrossed in his learning.

This is how far *ahavas Torah* and sweetness of Torah can go, because Torah is spiritual life: "Eternal life He has implanted within us." That's why Hashem created Torah with such a special flavor, that's why He made *esek haTorah* so enticing and enthralling that it's hard to stop learning. I know about a *bachur*, he was already older, and he received guidance how to learn in an enticing way. He started learning and it was so interesting and enticing that he could not stop! He learned for a very long time and didn't even pay attention to his *kochos*. He eventually became weak and had to rest, but after he rested, he got back to himself. This is the power of the sweetness in Torah. One just has to be careful not to exert himself more than his body can handle.

Yiras Shamayim Breeds Success in Torah

Another two acquisitions of Torah are "*b'eimah*, *b'yirah*, with awe and fear." These are two *madreigos* of *yiras Shamayim*. All the acquisitions of Torah are *zechuyos*, because a person needs merits to succeed in Torah. Awe and fear are also *zechuyos*. **The more *yiras Shamayim* a person has, the more success in Torah he will see.**

There are many levels of *yirah*, there's *yiras Shamayim* and *yiras cheit*. The *Mesillas Yesharim* (chap. 24) explains that *yiras Shamayim* is when a person is careful and thinks before any move he makes, whether this is a mitzvah or an *aveirah*. He is frightened to stumble and sin, because he'll suffer Gehinnom for his sins. This is the mitzvah of *yirah*: "Fear Hashem your G-d." Not everyone has this level of *yirah*, not everyone is frightened of Gehinnom, of the fact that there is Gehinnom! For every sin, there is Gehinnom, even for an inadvertent sin. The *Shaarei Teshuvah* writes (4:15) that the inadvertent sinner will be punished and he requires atonement.

The way to attain all these levels is by having a *mussar seder*, like they have in *yeshivos*. We've already discussed the *zechus* of having a *mussar seder*. There was once a young *bachur*, about 13-14 years old, who was pressured by his parents to go work. He couldn't learn in yeshivah, but he would come to Ponevez Yeshivah for the *mussar seder* before Maariv every day. I asked him why he specifically chose to come then, and not when we were learning Gemara. He told me that he felt that learning *mussar* gives him life and strengthens him. So that's what he did: he learned *mussar* for a half hour every day.

The end of the story is that he merited *siyatta d'Shemaya* through hidden miracles — but it was due to *zechuyos* — and he did not have to work anymore. He joined a yeshivah with other boys his age, and continued in yeshivah throughout the years. He merited a good *shidduch*, and still continued learning after his marriage. Today, he is a *mezakeh harabbim*, both in Torah and *yiras Shamayim*. And this is all in the merit of that half hour of learning *mussar*! Because "one who comes to be purified is helped" (*Yoma* 38b), and learning *mussar* is coming to be purified, so he was helped with *siyatta d'Shemaya*.

That's why the *mussar seder* in *yeshivos* is not merely *middas chassidus* for people on high *madreigos* — it's essential and necessary for every single person. Not everyone is aware of this. **It's a *seder* that gives a person life and spiritual *hatzlachah* eternally.** It's just important to learn a *sefer*, or chapter, that interests you, because if it's boring, it will not have any effect. All the *mussar sefarim* that are studied in *yeshivos* are interesting, so each *bachur* should find a chapter or *sefer* that interests him and will influence him. **This is a great *segulah* for success in Torah for one's entire life.**

B'eiras Hashem, may we all be *zocheh*, may every single person of Klal Yisrael be *zocheh*, to success in Torah,

middos tovos, yiras Shamayim, and all the spiritual *maalos*, with *siyatta d'Shemaya*. In Shemoneh Esrei, we ask “Return us, our Father, to Your Torah.” We speak in the plural form, davening for each and every Jewish person. “Forgive us,” and all other *ruchniyus* matters are also mentioned in the plural form, as we daven for every member of Klal Yisrael. *Yehi ratzon* that *Shamayim* has mercy on all Klal Yisrael, and may we be *zocheh* to become *baalei madreigos* in *ruchniyus*. And then we will experience “*ashrecha baOlam haZeh*.”

Indeed, Chazal say in *Pirkei Avos* (6:4), “This is the way of Torah: eat bread with salt and drink measured water... and toil in Torah. If you do so, you will be fortunate in this world.” It doesn’t matter if you only have bread with salt and a little water, you should still constantly toil in Torah.

By doing so, you will be fortunate. The happiest, more fortunate life is only through *esek haTorah!*

This is well known. Nowadays, we see this actually happening. Those who are *osek baTorah* live happy lives. And this is true even regarding people with families — those who are *osek baTorah* are the ones who live happy, content lives. I know many stories about people who led happy lives while they were *osek baTorah*, but when they decided to try to earn a little more money through other means, they were not successful! If a person is busy with other things that are not Torah, there’s no *hatzlachah* and one cannot attain “*ashrecha baOlam haZeh*.” Only Torah, or *parnasah* through Torah [i.e. teaching *talmidim*], can bring a person to “*ashrecha baOlam haZeh*.” *B’ezeras Hashem* may all Klal Yisrael attain *ashrecha baOlam haZeh* with the true happiness.

בס"ד, אייר תשפ"ב

לאחינו בית ישראל שיחי', שלו' ורב ברכה.

Chazal at the end of *Sotah* state that from the day of the Destruction of the Beis HaMikdash, every day is more cursed than the preceding one. Rabbeinu the Chafetz Chaim cites Chazal who say that the sin of *lashon hara* arouses the great Prosecutor against Klal Yisrael. Therefore, he composed the *sefer* “*Chafetz Chaim*” about the laws of *lashon hara* and the *sefer* “*Shemiras HaLashon*,” which contains much *divrei mussar* and *chizuk* for guarding our tongues. It’s well known that the Chafetz Chaim’s *sefarim* are “words that come from the heart” and due to their *kedushah* they have a great influence on those who learn them.

Therefore, we call upon all Yidden, wherever they may be, men, women and children. **Every single one of you should try to learn two halachos daily from the Chafetz Chaim zt”l’s sefarim, on a regular basis.** And it is surely a proper, important undertaking that our young children should become involved in from a young age. They should set upon their hearts and souls the *halachos* of *shemiras halashon* and strengthen their *emunah* from a young age.

Yehi ratzon that this act of strengthening *shemiras halashon* should be a great rectification for sins committed with our mouths, for which we were exiled from our Land, and due to which our Beis HaMikdash was destroyed. May we, and all Klal Yisrael, merit *chaim u’brachah l’mishmeres shalom*, and the *geulah sheleimah*, speedily in our days. Amen.

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The *sichos* are transcribed and translated from a weekly *va'ad* in Rav Gershon Edelstein’s home.