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בס"ד

Darkei HaChizuk

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

From the *Sichos* of Maran Rosh HaYeshivah Rav Gershon Edelstein *ztvk"l* • *Vayeira 5787*

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A Sichah Delivered in Teves 5771 (2011)

about the pleasure and enjoyment in avodas Hashem, which is greater than all pleasures

The Desire to Enjoy Life Is Human Nature

There's something that's very simple, but we must speak about it again. It is human nature to want to enjoy life and feel good, and not to suffer hardship. Not only doesn't man want hardship, he also wants to enjoy himself, he wants to have a pleasant, nice life. And what pleasures does the world have to offer? There are physical pleasures, such as eating, drinking, and rest. There is also the desire for honor and wealth, and anything else that makes a person happy. The yearning for this stems from our physical nature and the yetzer hara that entices us, and when one gets used to this, it is very hard to wean himself off and stop.

The Rambam writes in *Hilchos Teshuvah* (7:3) that there's an obligation to do teshuvah for bad *middos*. And one of them is chasing after culinary desires. He does not say not to eat, he says not to "chase after" food. And what causes this chasing? The desire that is part of human nature.

In some things, it's even possible to become addicted, such as alcohol. When a person gets used to drinking, he is drawn to it and it's hard to stop. The Midrash (*Tanchuma Shemini*) relates a story about a drunkard who would drink to inebriation and roll in the streets. His sons were very embarrassed of him, because when he was drunk, he looked like an animal, not a person, and they wanted him to stop getting drunk. Once, they saw another drunkard rolling in the streets, like him. They called their father over to see what it looked like, but he just went over to the drunkard and asked him: Where did you find such good wine? It's a human characteristic that a person does not care and is willing to suffer shame in order to satiate his desires.

There's also a smoking addiction, it's a very enticing desire. I heard in the name of the Gerrer Rebbe, the Imrei Emes, that smoking starts from arrogance. A little kid sees the grown ups smoking and wants to feel big… And adults smoke in order to calm their nerves. I remember as a child that when things were stressful, people would smoke a lot. But then, people found out that it's poison. One of the *gedolim* was a heavy smoker, until he fainted once as a result of smoking. After that, he stopped. However, since he was used to smoking when he prepared his *shiur*, he started sucking candies in order to keep his mind clear and not fall asleep. After a while, you get used to it and you don't need it anymore. However, generally, a person who is used to

B'Inyanei D'Yoma

Rabbeinu delivered a *sichah* in his home every Tuesday evening. Elections (*bechirot*) are always on Tuesdays, and during those *tekufos*, Rabbeinu would speak about the timely issue at hand. Sometimes, he would also discuss the *maalah* of *bechirah*, "*u'bacharta ba'chaim*, and choose life," in fulfilling the entire Torah and all the *mitzvos*; he'd also speak about "*Atah bichartanu mi'kol ha'amim*, You have chosen us from all the nations." He characteristically would also remind his listeners not to waste their time on curiosity about the election results.

What follows are excerpts from his *sichah* on the night of the previous elections, in Cheshvan 5783 (2022).

We just had elections, and soon the results will be clear. It is natural to be curious, to wonder about the results of the elections. And even though it's not *l'maaseh*, it's interesting. Curiosity is part of human nature, part of wanting to know what happened and what's going on. But it's a waste of time! And you can use that same time for good things. While it's natural to be curious, people waste a lot of time on their curiosity.

Some people need it because they have nothing else to do, and being bored is harmful to one's health. So, for health reasons, they have to be busy with interesting things… Such people do exist. But we are *bnei Torah* and we have what to do, we were *zocheh* that Shamayim gave us *siyatta d'Shemaya* and we have something interesting to be occupied with — *esek haTorah*, which is interesting. Each person on his own level — Chumash with Rashi, *mussar sefarim*, there are many interesting *divrei Torah*; each person according to his level, according to his abilities.

And *esek haTorah* makes the most happy, fortunate life, as Chazal say (*Avos* 6:4), "*Ashrecha baOlam haZeh*, You are fortunate and content in this world"! There is no happier life than a life of Torah.

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At the massive *atzeres* this week, Maran Gaon Yisrael HaGaon Rav Dov Landau *shlit"a* quoted Rabbeinu *ztvk"l*:

… And to the *bnei hayeshivos* we say: Engross yourselves in *limud haTorah*. Maran Rosh HaYeshivah Rav Gershon *zt"l* would speak encouragingly to everyone about learning on the evening of elections. Invest efforts in this, overcome your curiosity, after you fulfill your duty and vote, go back to the *beis midrash* immediately. Don't focus your attention on anything else.

smoking needs to be weaned off, and there are experts to help with this.

There's also an addiction to honor, which is very terrible. The Gemara (*Menachos* 109b) relates that Rabbi Yehoshua ben Perachyah said, "At first, anyone who told me, 'Ascend to a position of greatness,' I would bind him up and place him in front of a lion. Now, if anyone tells me to step down from my position, I would throw a kettle of boiling water at him." He didn't mean this literally; he was just giving an example about how extreme human nature is. This person had distanced himself so much from honor and was so angry at anyone who wanted him to accept a position of honor, but once he actually rose to greatness, it would have been even worse if someone told him to leave his position. Because it is very hard to bear the lack of honor that he had become accustomed to.

We find that the *ben sorer u'moreh* seeks what he has become accustomed to and does not find it. The Gemara says (*Sanhedrin* 72a), "And just because he ate a *tartimer* of meat and drank a half a *lug* of Italian wine does the Torah say he must be taken out to *beis din* and stoned? However, the Torah knew what would be in the end: he would eventually squander his father's money and seek what he was accustomed to and not find it. So then he'd go out to the crossroads and rob people [killing them, thereby incurring the death penalty]. The Torah says, 'Let him die innocent, rather than have him die guilty." Since he became used to stealing to fill his desires, and since he does not take anyone else's needs into consideration because he craves meat and wine, without being weaned from this lust, he will continue and get more and more absorbed in his desires, and he'll become addicted to them, until it leads him to rob and murder people.

And as we know, when a person goes bankrupt and goes into debt, he takes loans and co-signers, and he even borrows from his father and his family members, even though he knows he won't be able to pay such astronomical sums. He doesn't care and he doesn't think about the end. Because that's human nature — when someone is drowning and is under a lot of pressure, he doesn't think about others. Similarly, there are desires that are part of human nature that are hard to resist. And when he wants to satiate his desire, he does not think about anyone else, to the extent that he may steal like the *ben sorer u'moreh*.

People Invest So Much Effort for Temporal Pleasures

This is all the result of the natural human characteristic of a person wanting to enjoy himself, but these are physical enjoyments. This is not the Torah's way; there is an alternative: a life of Torah, which is more enjoyable than all other pleasures.

There are two *cheshbonos*. The natural way of the world is that if someone wants a good, happy life, he thinks he must earn money. If he has money, he thinks he'll have a good life. As such, he has to invest in learning a profession, because nowadays, there are hardly shoemakers or tailors anymore. Instead, there are factories with special machinery which one must learn how to operate. As time passes, new professions evolve that require learning new techniques, and in order to receive a diploma, one must spend years studying. And in certain fields, without a diploma, he won't land any jobs, such as teaching, accounting, or a tax consultant, and the like.

Take a doctor, for example. Someone who wanted to become a doctor told me that there are years and years of studies, of learning all sorts of facts and reviewing them, and working in a medical laboratory doing all sorts of unpleasant experiments, and the people on top of him scream at him and embarrass him, because he's just a student… And they send him here and there, and he suffers and endures so much hardship for years, because he knows that he will soon be a doctor and earn money.

[If even if he becomes a doctor, is a doctor always healthy? In fact, there's a certain doctor who treated patients and taught them how to prevent diseases by following certain medical protocol. He's a young man, and he suddenly got sick; he had blocked arteries and had to go to rehab. He is so broken — he healed others, and now he needs a different doctor to heal him. They had pull strings to persuade other doctors to treat him and be kind to him. **A person has absolutely no guarantees regarding his life in this world**.]

But with *emunah*, we know that our entire life is conducted by *hashgachah*, be it in medical matters or in any other matters, everything is with *hashgachah* for man's benefit — for the true good of eternal life. If a person works hard for temporal life, because in the end, he'll have some benefit, isn't eternal life more important? What's more important, eternal life or temporal life? Of course eternal life is more important! But it depends on one's *emunah*, and if a person has clear *emunah*, he understands that it's worth investing for eternal life. However, human nature does not work this way, because temporal life is so clearly evident to us, and we don't have such clarity in our *emunah*. Even if someone is already a *baal emunah*, if he has *hesich hadaas* and does not work on strengthening his *emunah* right away, his *emunah* will diminish. That's why we constantly need *chizuk* in *emunah*.

A Life of Torah Is the Greatest Pleasure

There's another *cheshbon*, too. If a person lives his life with *emunah*, life in this world is better too! Indeed, Chazal say (*Avos* 6:4), "You will be fortunate and content in this world." And we see that it's the reality — who's happier, the *bnei Torah* or those who don't learn? Are wealthy people happier? *Adaraba*, it happens often that wealthy people lose their money and end up bankrupt. They're always worried and tense, as Chazal say (*Avos* 2:7), "More possessions, more worry." I know a wealthy man who had a lot of children. At first, some of them worked in the business, earning money and losing money. In the end, he decided that from then on, his children would only be *osek* in Torah. He'd take care of providing for them so they'd be able to sit and learn — because he saw that the ones who were attached to Torah were the happiest and most content and their lives were better.

It turns out that, truly, even in this world one who follows the Torah's ways lives a better, happier life. One just needs *emunah* for this, because there are *nisyonos* too. Sometimes

we see secular Jews and wicked people having success, living a good life, and it seems that there's no *hashgachah*. But this is not so. The *sefarim* have already discussed this at length, and there are also *pesukim* in the Torah regarding why the wicked prosper or why a *tzaddik* has a difficult life. See *Chovos HaLevavos* (*Shaar HaBitachon* chap. 3) and *Michtav Me'Eliyahu* (vol. 1, p. 15ff), and many other *sefarim*.

One of the *cheshbonos* is that if all the tzaddikim would live a good life without *yissurim* in this world, then everyone would be a tzaddik. There would be no *nisayon* and the yetzer hara wouldn't have anything to entice them with. And it's necessary for the yetzer hara to have something to tempt them with so there will be a *nisayon*, as the reward is for overcoming the *yetzer hara* and for our choices. Without a *nisayon*, there is no *sechar*.

Therefore, the Avos HaKedoshim endured *yissurim* and *nisyonos* in order to increase their *madreigah*. Avraham, the first, had his *Asarah Nisyonos*, and then Yitzchak increased his *madreigah* and was called *Olah Temimah* (a Perfect Sacrifice) (*Bereishis Rabbah* 64:3), and Yaakov was the *Bechir HaAvos* (Chosen of the Avos) (ibid. 76:1). Each one received the *maalah* of his father, and then added more effort and *avodah* to become closer and closer in *avodas Hashem*.

The Pleasure in Torah, Chesed, and Tefillah

The truth is, *avodas Hashem* is a pleasure. And when a person does any of the *mitzvos* with *emunah*, he has pleasure, because he knows that it's worthwhile. And then it's tempting and enticing. However, when he's only doing a mitzvah out of fear of Hashem, it's very hard, and he feels like he's being forced, but when he does a mitzvah out of love, it comes along with a flavor and special enjoyment.

This is so much more applicable when it comes to *limud haTorah*, which is the greatest pleasure possible. Torah is the greatest thing; it gives us *sheleimus*, and it is an antidote for the *yetzer hara*. And there is special sweetness in Torah, as the *pasuk* states (*Tehillim* 19:11), "And they are sweeter than honey and the drippings of honeycombs," and the Torah is compared to wine, meat, and milk, and many other flavors and examples of worldly pleasures, which are merely a "*mashal*" for the tremendous pleasure of Torah. It's known that *retzifus haTorah*, learning Torah uninterrupted, is very enticing, so much so that it's hard to stop learning.

There was a *bachur* in yeshivah who learned a special *derech halimud* of *chazarah* from the *mashgiach* HaGaon Rav Eliezer Ginzburg [*ztvk"l*] — how to review in a way that the *chazarah* is enjoyable. He incorporated this into his learning and it drew him in so strongly that he couldn't stop. It was so sweet that he didn't even notice that he was getting weaker. In the end, he had to travel to Tzefas for a few weeks to rest because had pushed himself beyond his *kochos*. This is the power of Torah, which is enticing.

The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh also writes (*Devarim* 26:11) that if people would sense the sweetness and delight of the Torah's goodness, they would pursue it with insanity and infatuation. It also says (*Mishlei* 5:19), "You shall always be intoxicated with love of it [Torah]." The Gemara (*Eiruvin* 54b) attributed this *pasuk* to Rabbi Elazar ben Pedas, who would sit and learn Torah in the lower marketplace of Tzippori and would forget about his outer garment that he left in the upper marketplace. The sweetness of Torah is so enticing that you forget where you are — like when you read an enthralling book. Of course, this is just an example, because the sweetness of Torah is even more enthralling. It's a pleasure of "*ashrecha baOlam haZeh*" literally, the greatest delight that could possibly be. And that's why there's a flavor to learning.

There's also a flavor in *middos tovos* and pleasure in performing *chesed*. People who do *chesed* enjoy it and love doing *chesed*, **like Avraham Avinu who went out to look for guests in the heat of the day on the third day from his *milah***. *Lichorah*, what did he need it for? Was he obligated to host guests? Everyone was staying inside their homes because it was so hot; no one needed to be hosted. But Avraham went out to look for guests because he loved *chesed*! (See more about this in the sidebar on the next page.)

So too, *avodas hatefillah* is a pleasure, so much so that the *Shulchan Aruch* writes that while one is davening, it's possible to attain nullification of physicality, such that he does not feel that he's alive and he doesn't feel anything, as the *pasuk* says (*Tehillim* 71:23), "My lips will sing praises." My lips will sing on their own! And *rinah*, song, is *tefillah*. Davening is such a pleasure and joy that it is enticing and one wants to continue davening. I am not on this *madreigah*, but we have to know that there are tzaddikim who are such *baalei madreigah*. Anyone who saw the Chazon Ish davening knows how he davened, what a *tefillah*; and how he said a *brachah*, with such sweetness, using every ounce of his strength.

If so, the truth is, all of our obligations are a pleasure! And the greatest pleasure of all is Olam HaBa, but there are pleasures in this world that are *mei'ein Olam HaBa*, a "taste" of the World to Come. And as the *Mesillas Yesharim* writes, that's why man was created — to have pleasure of [closeness to] Hashem!

And this is what Hashem demands of man: "He has told you, man, what is good, and what Hashem demands of you." The demand is that you should have it good! Because sometimes a person doesn't know what's good for him, and he must know that this is what's good for him. Then he will be content and fortunate in Olam HaZeh as well.

Sometimes there are difficulties. However, just as a person works hard in order to earn money and honor in the future — like during elections, anyone who wants to be a Knesset Member has to spend lots of money, and he works hard and invests so much and doesn't sleep at night until he attains the honor he desires. Some people start preparing years in advance for this. This is an example of what people do in order to gain honor.

☙ B'Inyanei HaParshah ❧

The Midrash (*Avos d'Rebbi Nosson* chap. 7) tells us about the difference between Iyov and Avraham Avinu. Iyov, who suffered greatly, complained. He said – I am such a tzaddik and I've performed so much *chesed* and *maasim tovim*, so why do I deserve all this suffering? HaKadosh Baruch Hu told him, You still haven't reached half of Avraham Avinu's *chesed*. Because when a guest arrives, he doesn't ask him what he wants to eat, he immediately gives him the choicest foods. He *shechted* three cows so he could serve his guests tongue with mustard, which is the tastiest, finest cut of meat. Even though he did not know them at all, and he could have served them simpler food, he chose to give them the best.

Iyov, on the other hand, did not do this. He would ask every guest: What kind of food are you used to eating? Meat or fish, wine or whiskey? And he gave each person whatever he was used to, as this is the requirement in *hilchos tzedakah*: "give the poor man sufficient for his needs of what he is lacking" (*Kesubos* 67b). But Avraham did not just give him "sufficient," he wanted the guest to enjoy himself as much as possible, because he had such *ahavas chesed*, he loved doing *chesed*; without it, he was pained. Therefore, he went out to look for guests in the heat of the day, because without it, he was not happy!

Now, while he was always busy with Torah and *mitzvos*, he was drawn to *chesed* as well. This is not *bittul Torah*, because *chesed* is also a Torah obligation. And even though the obligation [of *tzedakah*] is "sufficient for his needs of what he is lacking," the Torah also obligates us to have *ahavas chesed*! Our natures should be drawn to *chesed* even more than to the halachah of "sufficient for his needs of what he is lacking"!

As it states (*Michah* 6:8), "He has told you, man, what is good, and what Hashem demands of you… to love *chesed*." Two parts of mentioned here: What is good, that is, it is good and worthwhile for man to love *chesed* and enjoy it. That way it will be good for him in this world and the world to come. But it is also a demand: what Hashem demands of you. Every person is obligated to do *chesed* according to his abilities and opportunities.

(Excerpted from the main sichah)

And so, if people invest so heavily for their temporal life, *kal v'chomer* we should invest for the true good in this world and the world to come, which is both good and worthwhile. This is our obligation, and if it's an obligation, it's a sign that it's good!

Hadrachah and Learning Mussar Are Necessities

Of course, the obligation applies to every single individual, according to his abilities. Nowadays, there are people who know how to give *hadrachah* (guidance) about how to attain *ahavas Torah* and *hasmadah*, and how to attain *ahavas chesed*, and *deveikus* in Torah and *tefillah*. And there are many *sefarim* on these topics as well. It's true that you can't trust everyone, but there are special people who know how to give advice on these matters.

The *Chovos HaLevavos* (*Shaar HaTeshuvah* chap. 6) writes that in every generation there is a *moreh derech*, someone to guide us, in *avodas Hashem*. You just need to look for him and find him. When the Chafetz Chaim was a young man, he searched for a *moreh derech* and found Rav Nachum'ke of Horodna. Rav Nachum'ke was a *shamash* in Grodna; he was a *baal moifes* and a tzaddik. The Chafetz Chaim traveled to him to learn a *derech* in *avodas Hashem*.

In conclusion, the primary thing is *deveikus baTorah* and *middos tovos*. These are things that every single person can attain — each person should learn in a manner that fits his nature, and do it in a way that is not difficult, because if it's hard, it will be impossible to carry on for a long time. And the learning must fit his *kochos*, with *yishuv hadaas* and without *hesich hadaas*. So too, his davening should be with *yishuv hadaas*. And he should perform *chesed* with *ahavas habriyos* — *chesed* actually develops one's *ahavas habriyos*.

The truth is, *middos tovos* and *ahavas chesed* are innate in every single person's nature, it's just that there are *negi'os*, biases, and other loves that lure him away — such as the love of relaxation, honor, and money, and other things that may occupy a person. And then as a result, he does not think about *ahavas habriyos*; but he does want publicity, he wants people to respect him etc., because that is human nature.

Therefore, one needs the *seichel* to learn *mussar sefarim* in order to know how to overcome all these difficulties. This is the best *eitzah*! Learn a little *mussar* every day, on a regular basis. Choice a *sefer* that is interesting and enticing, don't come with the mindset that "you have to" — get it into your heart that this is what should be done and that it's good. Make it interesting, learn with *hislahavus*, enthusiasm, or without — each person according to his nature. And as time passes, it will have an effect, and you will become a different person; you'll change into the person you should be. This is the reality, and of course, you need *siyatta d'Shemaya* for it.

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