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### מכתב התחזקות (ח)

In this period that we now find ourselves in, all the yeshivos and moisdos of chinuch are closed. There are those who wonder to themselves, can this truly be the wish of Hashem, how are we supposed to prepare ourselves for Kabbolas HaTorah by closing all the moisdos?

The answer is be found in the words of the Medrash: (קהלת רבה פ"ג ס"טו) "Said Rabbi Yitzchok, Bnei Yisroel were worthy of receiving the Torah as soon as they left Mitzrayim, but Hashem said, the shine and the sparkle of my children has not yet returned, they have just emerged from slavery and harsh work and cannot yet receive the Torah.

This is comparable to a king whose son recovered from an illness, they said to the king, your son can now resume his studies in school. Said the king, his healthy colour and complexion has not yet come back and you want that he should already go to school! Let him first fully recuperate for two or three months with good food and drink and then he can go to school.

Similarly, Hashem said, the healthy complexion of my children has not yet returned, they have come from slavery and harsh work and I should now give them the Torah! Let them first recuperate for two or three months with Mon, the Be'er (well of water) and the Slov, and afterwards I will give them the Torah in the Chodesh Hashelishi".

Although the day of Kabbolas HaTorah was "the day the Creator had been waiting for, the day the Torah, the world, the higher and lower creations had all been anticipating, when will Klall Yisroel finally arrive at Har Sinai" (words of the Ohr HaChaim, Shmos 19, 2), still, Hashem preferred to delay Kabolos HaTorah as long as Klall Yisroel had not fully recuperated.



This is also our avodah in our present situation, to look after our physical and emotional wellbeing and this also forms part of our Avodas Hashem. This is stated very clearly by the Rambam (הלכות דעות פר' ג) who writes as follows: Someone who conducts himself according to the dictates of refuah, should take to heart to ensure that he has a healthy and strong body that his nefesh be upright to know Hashem, for it is impossible that he can understand and delve into chochmah, if he is hungry and sick or afflicted with pain.

Someone who lives in accordance with this derech, is serving Hashem constantly, because his mind is preoccupied that he stay healthy in order to serve Hashem. Even when he sleeps, if he sleeps in order to rest himself that he not become ill and be prevented from serving Hashem because of illness, such a person- even his sleep is an avodah to Hashem, and about this our Sages have commanded us 'All your actions should be performed leshem Shomayim' and this is what Shlomo HaMelech meant in his great wisdom 'Know Hashem in all your actions and He will straighten your ways'".

One of the Gedolai Yisroel once heard about a certain person who had fasted on Yom Kippur, although he was dangerously ill and forbidden to fast. This godol later remarked: This person was exempt from all the mitzvos of Yom Kippur due to his illness. The only mitzva that he was obligated to keep was to eat and fulfil the mitzva of ונשמרתם מאוד לנפשותכם and protect his life, and that one and only mitzvah that he had, he went and violated it!

At present, we are unable to fulfil the mitzvah of davening with a minyan, we are unable to learn properly in the normal way with a chaburah. Many other mitzvos we are also unable to keep properly. Every morning straight after ברכת התורה we declare:

אלו דברים שאדם אוכל פירותיהם בעוה"ז והקרן קיימת לו לעולם הבא ואלו הן: כבוד אב ואם וגמילות חסדים והשכמת בית המדרש שחרית וערבית והכנסת אורחים ובקור חולים והכנסת כלה ולוית המת ועיון תפלה והבאת שלום בין אדם לחבירו ותלמוד תורה כנגד כולם.

Almost all these mitzvos we are unable at present to keep in the normal and proper way. We are unable to visit our parents, we cannot visit people, we cannot enter the beis hamedrash, we cannot invite visitors, visit the sick, go to weddings or levayohs לרח"ל, and we cannot sit and learn in the regular fashion!





So we have to mechazeik ourselves with those mitzvos that we can fulfil properly. Charity starts at home and Chazal exhort us to be extra careful to speak pleasantly and calmly to one's spouse and not to display anger. The gemara (שבח לר:) explains that someone who speaks to his wife and family pleasantly בניהוּתָא will merit "וידעת כי שלום אהלך" there will be peace and harmony in their home.

The Vilna Gaon zt"l wrote in his famous letter (Igeres HaGra) to his wife: "Be careful to gladden the hearts of others with kind and positive words, for this is a great mitzvah which is incumbent on every person. A person will be asked after his petirah; 'Did you make others feel important, and good about themselves. Most of the Torah is to make people happy. If one wronged the other in any way, please forgive each other, and le'maan Hashem please live together in sholom". The Vilna Gaon said further: "The main labour of a person in this world is to focus and rectify all aspects of aveiros bein odom le'chaveiro".

This is doubly poignant to us now, we are at home all day, and we are also in the period of Sefiras HaOmer. The Chida writes "In the days of the Omer, a person has to be extra careful in the service of Hashem with Torah and mitzvos, and he has to be especially careful not to transgress the aveiroh of sinas chinon, because we know what happened to the talmidim of Rabbi Akiva in these days".

The sefer Bnei Yissocher tells us that the 49 days of the Omer correspond to לב טוב which has the same gematria of 49. During the Omer we have to strive to attain a Lev Tov, about which Rabbon Yochanon Ben Zakai proclaimed (אבות ב י) that it is the most important of all the middos, for he who has a Lev Tov has the key to acquire all other middos tovos.

Through being careful with mitzvos bein odom lechaveiro, a person can ascend to the highest madreigos. The gemara (Taanis 22:) relates that Rabbi Beroika Chozoha once met Eliyohu HaNovi in the market place and asked him if there were any people there who were Bnei Olam Habo, to which Eliyohu Hanovi answered that there was nobody, except for two brothers. Rabbi Beroika went over to these two brothers and asked them who they are. They replied that they were badchonim, whenever they saw someone who was sad they would cheer him up. If they heard of two people who had an argument they would make peace between them.



A second amazing story of the power of mitzvos bein odom lechaveiro is related in a Medrash: “Rebbi Yehoshua ben Ilam was informed in a dream; ‘Rejoice that you and Naanas the Butcher will be next to each other, and have the same portion in Gan Eden’. When Rebbi Yehoshua woke up, he said to himself ‘Woe is to me! From the day I was born, I was constantly occupied with fear of Heaven, I did not toil in anything except for Torah. I never walked four amos without tzitzis and tefillin, and I taught eighty talmidim, and now all my actions and my Torah are only equal to that of a butcher?!’

He sent for his talmidim and he told them that he cannot come back to the beis hamedrash. He first has to meet this person, Nanaas the butcher, and discover what type of person he is, and what his actions are. Rebbi Yehoshua travelled from place to place, until he came to the town where Nanaas the butcher lived.

Rebbi Yehoshua went to see him and asked him; ‘What are your deeds and what is your job?’ ‘I have elderly parents, and they can no longer stand on their feet, Nanaas replied. Every day I help them get dressed and washed, and then I give them to eat’.

Straight away Rebbi Yehoshua stood up and kissed Nanaas on his head and said to him; ‘My son happy are you and fortunate is your portion, and happy am I, that I have merited to be next to you in Gan Eden!’”

From these stories, we see how great is the power of mitzvos bein odom lechaveiro. However, it isn’t always so easy for a person who is accustomed to a certain way of life and a certain derech, to suddenly alter and change his focus.

The Maharshag (Rav Shimon Greenfeld zt”l) who was one of the great poskim in Hungary a hundred years ago, addresses this dilemma in one of his seforim. “There are people who have a certain custom, for example they fast every Monday and Thursday, or they learn 18 chapters of mishnayos every day. Sometimes it can happen, that on a particular day a very important mitzva has come their way, such as hachnosas orchim or bikur cholim. If they are now going to perform this mitzvah, they will no longer be able to learn their daily quota or keep their regular custom of fasting.





The person will say to himself, how can I possibly break my minhag which I have never missed even once over many years? If a person can speak like this, it shows that his performance of the mitzvos is not to do the will of his Creator, but for himself, that he can be proud of his record. If this person was acting leshem shomayim, he should understand that the point of all his actions and the aim of all he is trying to achieve, is only to bring nachas to Hashem.

In the same way that the merchants used to go only to the great market in Leipzig, afterwards when the market started in Vienna, they stopped going to Leipzig and went to Vienna. Later on, they realised that the merchandise in Leipzig was superior, they then resumed going to Leipzig. (until here are the words of the Maharshag).

So it is with avodas Hashem, as I heard in the name of the Chozeh of Lublin that a person must not be inflexible in his avodas Hashem. One of his great talmidim once gave him a note on which he had recorded his daily seder. This talmid had written an exacting timetable for himself, detailing hour by hour what he would learn and do in that time. The talmid asked the Chozeh if he approved of the schedule. The schedule found favour in the Chozeh's eyes, but at the end of the note he wrote: "but sometimes you should do just the opposite..."

In the same vein the Bnei Yissocher writes (אגרא דכלה פר' ראה) "I have heard in the name of great tzaddikim, that there are people who have a strict schedule how much they learn and how many chapters of Tehillim they say etc. A wise person should realise that one day is not the same as the next, as Shlomo Hamelech writes in Sefer Koheles that there are 28 different periods. "עת לפזר ועת לכנס" 'There is a time to be spread out, and there is a time to come together'. There are times, when a particular mode of behaviour is befitting that situation, and there are days when one has to behave differently.

Sometimes a particular mode of action is considered a mitzvah, but on the following day that very same action will be deemed an aveiroh. One cannot always explain this, but a wise person will understand it by himself. Sometimes a particular minhag is very commendable on a certain day, and the next day it is just the opposite".



At the moment, our daily schedules and seder hachaim have been dramatically altered. We are all being asked to do a different form of avodah, and our mode of behaviour which we are normally accustomed to has been suspended. This year we have a different form of preparation for Kabbolas HaTorah than that of other years. May “the shine and the sparkle of Klall Yisroel return speedily.”

יהי רצון שנזכה לעשות רצונך בלב טוב ובלב שלם.  
ידידכם ישראל פרידמן