

חובות הלבבות • שער חשבון הנפש • פרק ראשון

Sentence by Sentence • Punctuated Hebrew with Translation and Notes • Navy & Gold Edition

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This first Perek of Shaar Cheshbon HaNefesh introduces us to the fundamental concept of spiritual account-taking. We'll explore what this means: a deep, internal deliberation between our emotional self and our intellect, to truly understand our spiritual standing. The Chovos HaLevavos will bring us pesukim from Tanach that emphasize the importance of this self-reflection and introspection.

We'll see how the Torah and Nevi'im exhort us to engage in this process, to 'know' and 'taste' Hashem's goodness, and to serve Him with understanding. The Perek will also highlight the pitfalls of neglecting this vital spiritual work, showing us what happens when one fails to examine their deeds and account for their spiritual obligations.

All introductions, summaries, and contextual notes are the editor's commentary and are not part of the original text.

אבל החשבון עם הנפש הוא השתדלות האדם בעניני תורתו ועולמו בינו ובין שכלו, כדי שיידע בזה מה שיש לו ומה שיש עליו מן החובות.

However, the accounting with one's soul is a person's diligent effort regarding his Torah and worldly matters, between himself and his intellect, so that through this he may know what he possesses and what obligations rest upon him.

NOTE The 'accounting with one's soul' (cheshbon hanefesh) is a fundamental concept in mussar, referring to a regular, honest self-assessment of one's spiritual and ethical standing.

וּכְבֹּר הַזְהִירָנוּ עַל זֶה הַנְּבִיא ע"ה בְּאִמְרוֹ (דברים ד): "וַיֵּדַעְתָּ הַיּוֹם וְהַשַּׁבָּת אֲלֵ לִבְּךָ כִּי ה' הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים וְגו'".

And the prophet, may he rest in peace, already warned us about this, by saying (Devarim 4): "Know therefore this day, and take it to your heart, that Hashem, He is the only G-d, etc."

וְאָמַר דָּוִד ע"ה (תהלים לד): "טעמו וראו כי טוב הי".

And Dovid, may he rest in peace, said (Tehillim 34): "Taste and see that Hashem is good."

וְאָמַר (ד"ה א כח): "ידע את אלהי אביך ועבדהו".

And it says (Divrei HaYamim I 28): "Know the G-d of your father and serve Him."

וְאָמַר (תהלים לב): "אל תהיו כסוס כפרד אין הבין".

And it says (Tehillim 32): "Do not be like a horse or a mule, which have no understanding."

וְאָמַר בְּמִי שֶׁלֹא הִסְתַּכֵּל בְּעִנְיָנוּ וְלֹא חָשַׁב עִם נַפְשׁוֹ עָלֵיהֶם (ישעיהו מ"ד:י"ט): "וְלֹא יָשִׁיב אֶל לְבוֹ וְלֹא דַעַת וְלֹא תְבוּנָה".

And it says about one who did not examine his matters and did not account with his soul concerning them (Yeshayahu 44:19): "He does not take it to heart, nor is there knowledge or understanding."

וְאָמַר (תהלים עח): "לֹא זָכְרוּ אֶת יָדוֹ".

And it says (Tehillim 78): "They did not remember His hand."

וְאָמַר (דברים לב): "זָכֹר יָמֹת עוֹלָם".

And it says (Devarim 32): "Remember the days of old."

וְאָמַר (תהלים קמג): "זָכַרְתִּי יָמִים מִקֶּדֶם".

And it says (Tehillim 143): "I remember the days of old."

וְאָמַר (איוב לו): "אֶשָּׂא דַעַי לְמִרְחֹק".

And it says (Iyov 36): "I will bring my knowledge from afar."

WHAT TO TAKE FROM IT

Shaar Cheshbon HaNefesh Perek Aleph defines spiritual account-taking as a man's deliberation between his nefesh and intellect regarding his Torah and worldly affairs, to know his spiritual assets and liabilities. The Chovos HaLevavos brings pesukim from Moshe Rabbeinu and Dovid HaMelech, such as "Know therefore this day, and establish it in your heart that Hashem He is Elokim," and "O taste and see that Hashem is good," to emphasize the mitzvah of knowing Hashem and serving Him with understanding. The Perek concludes by citing pesukim that warn against neglecting this introspection, contrasting it with the importance of remembering Hashem's deeds and seeking knowledge from afar.

The Chovos HaLevavos opens with a fundamental chiddush: the idea of "cheshbon hanefesh" – taking a spiritual accounting. Lichoira, we might think this is just about checking if we did our mitzvos, like a checklist. But the Chovos HaLevavos is coming to be mechadesh something deeper. It's not just about *what* we did, but about the *deliberation* between our nefesh and our seichel, our emotional side and our intellect. It's about truly *knowing* what we have and what we still owe, not just intellectually, but in a way that penetrates our heart and actions.

Moshe Rabbeinu tells us "V'yadeta hayom v'hasheivota el levavecha" – *know* this day, and *return it to your heart*. Dovid HaMelech says "Ta'amu u'reu ki tov Hashem" – *taste* and *see* that Hashem is good. This isn't just about learning facts; it's about internalizing, experiencing, and making it real for ourselves. The Gemara is bothered by someone who doesn't do this, saying "Lo yashiv el libo" – they don't return it to their heart. It's not enough to just hear the words; we need to bring them into our inner world, to truly process them.

This means we can't just go through life on autopilot, like a horse or a mule that "ein havin" – has no understanding. We need to pause, to reflect, to ask ourselves: What is my purpose? What are my obligations? Am I truly living up to them? Am I connecting to Hashem in a real way, or just going through the motions? This isn't a one-time thing; it's a constant process of self-examination and growth, remembering the "yemos olam" – the days of old, the lessons of our past, and carrying them forward.

So, the practical takeaway for today is: Take five minutes before bed tonight to reflect on one specific interaction or action from your day. Ask yourself: Did I act with full awareness and intention, or was I just reacting? What did I learn from it, and how can I bring that lesson into my heart for tomorrow?