

חובות הלבבות • שער חשבון הנפש • פרק רביעי

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

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In Shaar Cheshbon HaNefesh, Chapter Four, Rabbeinu Bachya is going to open up for us the incredible benefits that come from truly internalizing the spiritual accountings we've been learning. It's not just about knowing them, but really grasping their truth and letting our souls yearn to fulfill them. When we do this, a profound transformation happens within us, purifying our souls and dispelling doubts, leading us to acquire all good character traits and reach the most treasured spiritual heights.

The chapter emphasizes that just as in mathematics, medicine, or engineering, the quality of the outcome depends on the strength and correctness of the foundational principles. Similarly, to achieve true spiritual clarity and connection to Hashem, we must diligently apply these spiritual accountings with a faithful heart. This will illuminate our minds, protect us from the yetzer hara, and awaken a new, sublime sense within us, allowing us to perceive deep secrets and experience constant joy in both worlds.

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

אך תועלת החשבון הנזכר היא: התולדה שמילדת הנפש בעמדה על ברור מה שקדם לנו בשלשים אפני החשבון הנזכרים, והבנת עניניהם, וצורת מציאתם, ואמתת חיובם, והמשך הנפש לקבלם עליה כפי הכרתה בהם והשבתם ברעיוניה.

The benefit of the aforementioned spiritual accounting is the result that the soul brings forth after it clearly grasps the thirty methods of accounting we've already discussed, understands their concepts, the form of their existence, the truth of their obligation, and when the soul is drawn to accept them upon itself according to its recognition of them and establishes them in its thoughts.

ואז, אחי, תתילד בנפשו תולדה מעלה ורמה; תלמד ממנה כל המדות הטובות, ותגיע בה אל כל החמודות, והיא זכות עצם הנפש מקדירות הסכלות, המסירה חשכת הספק אשר בלבבה.

And then, my brother, a sublime and lofty result will be born in your soul; from it you will learn all good character traits, and through it you will attain all precious things, which is the purification of the soul's essence from the obscurity of foolishness, removing the darkness of doubt that is in your heart.

וכבר ידעת כי כפי ברור ההקדמות ורב מספרן וישר סדורן תהיה התולדה הנולדת מהן בברורה וחשיבות מעלתה.

You already know that the clarity and importance of the outcome derived from fundamental principles depends on how clear, numerous, and properly ordered those principles are.

וכן הרפכת המרקחת במלאכת הרפואות, כי תועלת המרקחת וכח מעשיה יהיה כפי כח הסממנים אשר הרפכה מהם המרקחת.

Similarly, in the art of medicine, the benefit of a compound and the potency of its effects will correspond to the strength of the ingredients from which it is composed.

וכן בחכמת השעורים, הנקראת בערבית אלהנדס"א, כפי רב ההקדמות המקדמות בענין הנדרש תהיה חשיבותו ותועלת ידיעתו.

Likewise, in the science of measurements, called "Al-Handasa" in Arabic, the importance and usefulness of the knowledge gained will depend on the number of foundational principles established in the desired field.

וכמו כן בהרבה מן המעשים, כי הפלס לא יתכן למחברו עד שיידע קדם חכמת השעור וטבעי המנינים והשקלים.

And so it is with many endeavors, for a balance scale cannot be constructed unless one first understands the science of measurement, the nature of numbers, and weights.

וכן חוג החושים, הנקרא אצטרוֹל"ב בערבית, לא יתכן למחברו אלא אחר עמדו על חכמת השעור ועל המובדיטאות (המכרסאות) ותנועת הגלגלים ופשיטות הכדור.

Similarly, the astrolabe, called "Itztrolab" in Arabic, cannot be constructed unless one first understands the science of measurement, geometry, the movements of the celestial spheres, and the flatness of the earth.

NOTE The term "פשיטות הכדור" (flatness of the earth) here refers to the geometric concept of a plane or a flat surface in calculations, not a literal belief that the earth is flat. It's about understanding how to project spherical coordinates onto a flat surface for astronomical measurements.

וכן הענין הזה הנדרש מן הנפש לא יתכן לה, אחי, אלא אחר שתסבל קבלת מה שהעירותיך עליו מן החשבון עם נפשך במה שזכרתי לה בשער הזה ובזולתו מן השערים והתמדת המעשה בהם.

So too, this matter that is demanded of the soul, my brother, will not be possible for you unless you first bear the acceptance of what I have awakened you to regarding the accounting with your soul, as I have mentioned to you in this gate and in other gates, and you are diligent in acting upon them.

כי כאשר תעשה זה בלב נאמן ובנפש ברה, יאזר שכלך ותראה הדרך אל כל המעלות הרמות, ולא יהיה ליצר דרך להגיע אליה ולהשיאה, ותהיה בתכונת סגלת האלהים, ויתחדש לה כח העליוני נכרי לא ידעתו בכל אשר הרגלת בו מכחותיה, כמו שאמר החכם (קהלת ח): "חכמת אדם תאיר פניו" וגו'.

For when you do this with a faithful heart and a pure soul, your intellect will become illuminated, and you will see the path to all lofty qualities, and the yetzer hara will have no way to reach you and entice you. You will attain the status of one treasured by Hashem, and a new, strange, supernal power will awaken within you, unfamiliar to you from all the powers you are accustomed to knowing, as the wise man said (Koheles 8:1): "A man's wisdom makes his face to shine," and so on.

ואז תכיר הענינים הגדולים ותראה הסודות העמקות בזה נפשך ובר לבך וחזק אמונתך, ולא תפחד משמחה מתמדת בעולמה ובאחריתה לעצם מה שהשקפת עליו וגדל הסוד אשר נגלה לה עם העזר המגיע אליה מן האלהים יתברך.

Then you will recognize great matters and see deep secrets with the purity of your soul, the clarity of your heart, and the strength of your faith. You will not depart from a permanent joy in this world and in the World to Come, due to the magnitude of what you have observed and the greatness of the secret that was revealed to you, with the help that comes to you from Hashem, blessed be He.

וְרָאִיתִי לְמִשַּׁל לֵךְ מִשַּׁל קָרוֹב יִתְבָּאֵר לֵךְ מִמֶּנּוּ דְמִיּוֹן קֶצֶת מֵהַשְׁכָּרְתִּי לֵךְ, וְהוּא שֶׁתִּחְשַׁב כְּאִלוּ אֶתֶּה
בְּמָקוֹם וּמִמַּעַל לְמָקוֹם הַהוּא צוּרָה כְּנֶגֶד הַצַּד שֶׁהוּא נִכְחָד וְאֵין דֶּרֶךְ לֵךְ לִרְאוֹתָהּ בְּעֵינֶיהָ וּלְהִשְׁקִיף עָלֶיהָ
בְּחוּשׁ רְאוּתָהּ.

I found it proper to give you a close analogy, from which you will understand a bit of what I have mentioned to you: Imagine you are
in a place, and above that place, opposite the side facing you, there is a wondrous image, but you have no way to see it with your
eyes or to gaze upon it with your sense of sight.

וְהִגִּיד לֵךְ מִגִּיד כִּי כְּאֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂה טָס מִבְּרֹזֶל עֲשׂוֹת וּתְלַטְשֶׁהוּ עַד שֶׁתִּסָּר קְדָרוֹתוֹ וְתִמְשָׁחֵהוּ זְמַן אָרֶךְ
בְּמִשְׁיחוֹת רַבּוֹת וְאַחֵר כֶּה תַעֲמִידֵנּוּ נִכַח פָּנֶיהָ, אֲזִי יֵרָאֶה לֵךְ מִן הַצּוּרָה הָעֲלִיוֹנָה מִה שֶׁנֶּעְלָם מִמֶּךָ, וְתוּכַל
לִרְאוֹתָהּ וּלְהִשְׁתַּעֲשֵׂעַ בְּנִעִימוֹתֶיהָ וְזֶהר יִפְתָּהּ.

And someone tells you that when you make a sheet of crude iron and polish it until its dullness is removed, and you anoint it for a
long time with many ointments, and then you place it before your face, then you will see from that supernal image what was hidden
from you, and you will be able to gaze upon it and delight in its pleasantness and the radiance of its beauty.

וְהַצּוּרָה הָעֲלִיוֹנָה הַחֲשׂוּכָה אֲשֶׁר אֵין לֵךְ דֶּרֶךְ לִרְאוֹתָהּ בְּעֵינֶיהָ הִיא חֲכָמַת הַבוֹרָא יִתְעַלֶּה וְיִכְלָתוּ וְיִפִּי
הָעוֹלָם הָעֲלִיּוֹן אֲשֶׁר נֶעְלָם מִמֶּנּוּ צוּרָתוֹ וְתִכּוֹנָתוֹ.

The important supernal image that you have no way to see with your eyes is the wisdom of the Creator, may He be exalted, and His
power, and the beauty of the Upper World, whose form and nature are hidden from us.

וְהַטָּס הָעֲשׂוֹת הִיא הַנֶּפֶשׁ הָאֲנוּשִׁית, וְהַלְטִישָׁה הִיא הַנְּהַגְתָּהּ בְּחֻקֵּימוֹת וּבְמוֹסָרִים הַשְׁכָּלִיִּים הַתּוֹרִיִּים,
וְהַמִּשְׁיחוֹת הֵם אֲפָנֵי הַחֲשָׁבוֹן הַשְּׁלִשִׁים אֲשֶׁר זָכַרְתִּי לֵךְ.

The crude sheet of iron is the human soul, the polishing is its guidance through wisdoms and intellectual and Torah-based morals, and
the anointings are the thirty methods of accounting that I have mentioned to you.

וְכַאֲשֶׁר תַּעֲלֶם עַל לִבְךָ וּתְשִׁיבֵם עַל רַעֲיוֹנָהּ, תִּזְוֶה נִפְשָׁהּ וְיֵאוּר שְׂכָלָהּ, וְיִצְטָר לֵךְ כָּל עֲגִין נֶעְלָם בְּנִפְשָׁהּ,
וְתִרְאֶה צוּרוֹת הָאֲמִתּוֹת בְּעֵינֶיךָ פְּקוּחוֹת, וְיִפָּתַח לֵךְ שַׁעַר הַמַּעֲלוֹת, וְיִגַּל הַמָּסָד הַמְּבַדִּיל בֵּינָהּ וּבֵין חֲכָמַת
הַבוֹרָא מֵעַל עֵינֶיהָ.

And when you take them to heart and establish them in your thoughts, your soul will become pure, your intellect will be illuminated,
every hidden matter will be depicted in your soul, and you will see the forms of truths with open eyes. The gate of virtues will open
for you, and the separating veil over your eyes, which divides between you and the wisdom of the Creator, will be removed from you.

וְיִלְמְדֶךָ הָאֵל יִתְעַלֶּה חֲכָמָה רַמָּה וּמַעֲשֶׂה מוֹעִיל וְיִתֵּן לֵךְ כַּח אֱלֹהִי, כַּמִּי"ש (יִשְׁעִיהוּ י"א:ב'): "וְנִחָה עָלָיו
רוּחַ ה' רוּחַ חֲכָמָה וּבִינָה" וְגו', וְאָמַר (אִיּוֹב לֵא): "אֲכֵן רוּחַ הִיא בְּאֲנוּשׁ", וְאָמַר (מִשְׁלֵי ב':ד-ה'): "אִם
תִּבְקֶשְׁנָה כַּכֶּסֶף וְכַמְטָמוֹנִים תִּחְפְּשֶׁנָּה", וְאָמַר (שִׁם): "אֲזִי תִבִּין יִרְאֵת ה'" וְגו'.

And Hashem, may He be exalted, will teach you lofty wisdom and beneficial action, and will grant you Divine power, as it is written
(Yeshaya 11:2): "And the spirit of Hashem shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding," and so on. And it says (Iyov
32:8): "But it is a spirit in man," and it says (Mishlei 2:4-5): "If you seek her as silver and search for her as for hidden treasures," and it
says (there): "Then shall you understand the fear of Hashem," and so on.

This chapter explains that the true benefit of spiritual accounting comes from deeply understanding its principles, internalizing their obligation, and yearning to apply them. This process purifies the soul, dispels doubt, and leads to acquiring good character traits. Rabbeinu Bachya illustrates this with analogies from mathematics, medicine, and engineering, showing that a strong foundation is crucial for a successful outcome. He then presents a powerful mashal of polishing a hidden image in a mirror: the image is Hashem's wisdom, the mirror is the soul, and the polishing and anointing are the wisdoms, morals, and thirty spiritual accountings. By diligently engaging in these practices, the soul becomes clear, the intellect illuminates, and the veil separating us from Hashem's wisdom is removed, leading to profound spiritual perception and constant joy.

למעשה WHAT TO TAKE HOME

The Chovos HaLevavos is teaching us a profound chiddush here: the real benefit of all this cheshbon hanefesh, all this accounting we do with ourselves, isn't just to fix a middah or overcome a nisayon. No, the *main* thing, the *toladah me'ulah v'ramah* that comes from it, is a complete purification of the neshama itself. It's like polishing a dull piece of metal until it becomes a mirror. The metal doesn't just get cleaner; it gains a whole new *koach* to reflect what was hidden. Our neshama, when we do this avodah, becomes a vessel to perceive Hashem's wisdom and the deep secrets of the world in a way we couldn't before. It's not just about *doing* better; it's about *seeing* better, with a clarity that dispels all doubt.

Think about it: we often focus on the immediate results of our avodah. I learned mussar, so I'll be more patient. I davened with kavanah, so I'll feel closer to Hashem. And that's true, those are important. But the Chovos HaLevavos is telling us there's a deeper, more transformative process happening. Each time we engage in cheshbon hanefesh, each time we internalize these principles and make them part of our thoughts, we're not just adding another layer of good behavior. We're actually *refining* the very essence of our soul, making it more transparent, more receptive to spiritual truths. It's a fundamental change in our spiritual perception.

This is why the Chovos HaLevavos emphasizes the *process* so much. Just like a medicine's potency depends on the quality of its ingredients, or an engineering marvel depends on solid foundational principles, so too the clarity and loftiness of our spiritual perception depends on the thoroughness and sincerity of our cheshbon hanefesh. It's not a one-time fix; it's a continuous polishing, an ongoing anointing of the soul with the wisdom of Torah and mussar. When we do this with a *lev ne'eman* and a *nefesh barah*, our intellect becomes illuminated, and we gain a *koach eloki*, a divine power to see beyond the superficial.

So, for today, let's try to approach our avodah, especially our learning and our personal reflections, not just as tasks to complete, but as opportunities to polish our neshama, to make it a clearer mirror for Hashem's light.