

חובות הלבבות • שער חשבון הנפש • פרק חמישי

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

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In this fifth Perek of Shaar Cheshbon HaNefesh, Rabbeinu Bachya zt"l delves into the crucial question of how often a Yid needs to engage in spiritual accounting. Is it a constant avodah, or only at certain times? The Tanna is coming to be mechadesh a profound chiddush here, that this cheshbon hanefesh is not just a periodic exercise, but rather a continuous, moment-to-moment duty, commensurate with one's intellectual capacity and understanding.

Rabbeinu Bachya brings powerful raayos from Tanach to underscore this point, showing how Hashem Himself commands us to keep His Torah and mitzvos constantly in mind. He then offers practical guidance on how to internalize this constant accounting, emphasizing that no good deed is too small, and no sin too insignificant. He also cautions us against becoming complacent, reminding us that even our greatest acts of avodas Hashem are but a drop in the ocean compared to Hashem's boundless chessed.

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

אך אם החשבון הזה חובה על האדם תמיד, או בקצת הזמן מבלי קצתו – אומר בתשובת השאלה הזאת: כי החשבון חייב בו האדם כפי כח שכלו ומעלת הכרתו, תמיד עם כל הרף עין, ואם יוכל, עם כל נשימותיו; כדי שלא יפרד ממנו המורא והפחד והבטת מהאלהים ית', המשקיף עליו תמיד.

Regarding whether this accounting is a constant duty for a person, or only at certain times and not others, I will answer this question by saying that a person is obligated in this accounting according to the strength of his intellect and the level of his understanding, always, with every blink of an eye, and if he can, with every one of his breaths; so that awe, fear, and shame before Hashem Yisbarach, Who constantly observes him, should not depart from him.

וילמד ממה שצוה בו האל את המלך באמרו (דברים יז): וכתב לו את משנה התורה הזאת על ספר וגו', והיתה עמו וקרא בו כל ימי חייו וגו'.

And one should learn from what Hashem commanded the king, as it says (Devarim 17): "And he shall write for himself this repetition of the Torah on a scroll, etc., and it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, etc."

ואמר (יהושע א): לא ימוש ספר התורה הזה מפניך וגו'.

And it says (Yehoshua 1): "This book of the Torah shall not depart from your mouth, etc."

ואמר (דברים ו): והיו הדברים האלה אשר אנכי מצוה היום וגו'.

And it says (Devarim 6): "And these words, which I command you this day, etc."

ואמר: וקשרתם לאות על ידך וגו', וכתבתם על מזוזות ביתך.

And it says: "And you shall bind them for a sign upon your hand, etc., and you shall write them on the doorposts of your house."

וְחִזַּק הָעֲנָנִין בְּצִיצִית בְּאֶמְרוֹ (במדבר טו): וְהָיָה לָכֶם לְצִיצִית, וְאָמַר (שם): לִמְעַן תִּזְכְּרוּ.

And He reinforced the matter with Tzitzis, as it says (Bamidbar 15): "And it shall be for you Tzitzis," and it says (there): "So that you will remember."

וּמָה נִשְׁאָר מֵעֲנִינֵי הַזֵּרוּז עַל הַחֲשָׁבוֹן, אֲשֶׁר הוּא בְּעֲנִין זְכוֹן הַבוֹרָא, שֶׁלֹּא זָרְזָנוּ בּוֹ?

What is left among the matters of exhortation regarding the accounting, which is about remembering the Creator, that Hashem has not already exhorted us concerning?

וּכְפִי זֶה, אָחִי, רְאוּי לָהּ לְהִתְנַהֵּג בְּהִרְגֵּל הַחֲשָׁבוֹן עִם נַפְשְׁךָ בְּכָל שָׁעָה וּבְכָל רֵגַע לְאֵל יִתְבָּרָה.

And according to this, my brother, it is proper for you to accustom yourself to this accounting with your soul every hour and every moment before Hashem Yisbarach.

וְאַל תִּמְעַט בְּעֵינֶיךָ שׁוּם טוֹבָה שֶׁתַּעֲשֶׂה לְשִׁמּוֹ, אִפְּי בְּמִלָּה אוֹ בְּרֵאִיָּה; כִּי הַמְעַט מִמֶּךָ רַב אֶצְלוֹ, וְכֵן בְּעֵינֵי הַעֲבֵרוֹת.

And do not consider any good deed you do for His Name as small in your eyes, even a word or a glance; for a little from you is much to Him, and similarly regarding sins.

וְהַקְרֹוב שֶׁבְּדַמְיוֹנִים בָּזֶה: הָעֲתִמְתָּ הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ בְּאֶרֶץ שְׁעוֹר אָמָה תַּעֲתֵק בְּגִלְגַּל מִלִּין הָרִבָּה, וְכֵן הָעֲתִמְתָּ הַצֶּל בְּאַצְטְרוֹלָ"ב.

The closest analogy for this is how the sun's movement on earth by a measure of an amah translates to many miles of movement in the celestial sphere, and similarly the movement of a shadow on an astrolabe.

NOTE An astrolabe was an ancient astronomical instrument used to make calculations and observations, often involving the positions of celestial bodies and the movement of shadows.

וְאַל יִרְבוּ בְּעֵינֶיךָ מַעֲשֵׂיךָ, וְאִם יִהְיוּ לְשִׁמּוֹ.

And do not consider your deeds great in your eyes, even if they are for His Name.

כִּי בַּמְעַט שֶׁבְּטוֹבוֹת שֵׁישׁ לוֹ עָלֶיךָ, כִּפְּל מַעֲשֵׂה כָּל יוֹשְׁבֵי הָעוֹלָם עִם דְּקֻדּוּק הַחֲשָׁבוֹן.

For even for the smallest of the favors He has bestowed upon you, the combined deeds of all the inhabitants of the world, even with a precise accounting, would not be enough to repay Him.

עַל כֵּן, אַל תִּתְּעַלֵּם מַעֲשׂוֹת חֲשָׁבוֹנְךָ בֵּינְךָ וּבֵין בּוֹרְאֶךָ עַל גִּדְּל טוֹבוֹ עָלֶיךָ וְרַב חֲסָדָיו עִמָּךְ יוֹם יוֹם.

Therefore, do not neglect to make your accounting between yourself and your Creator regarding the greatness of His goodness towards you and His abundant kindnesses with you every single day.

וְאִם לֹא יִפְנֶה לְבָבְךָ בַּיּוֹם, יִהְיֶה בַּלַּיְלָה.

And if your heart does not turn to this during the day, let it be at night.

וְאִם חָלַף לָךְ יוֹם א', הִשָּׁג בְּשִׁנִּי, כְּמוֹ שֶׁאָמְרוּ רז"ל: שׁוּב יוֹם אֶחָד לִפְנֵי מִיתָתְךָ, וְאָמַר (קהלת ט): בְּכָל עֵת יִהְיוּ בְּגָדֶיךָ לְבָנִים.

And if one day has passed for you, catch up on the second, just as our Sages of blessed memory said: "Repent one day before your death," and it says (Koheles 9): "At all times let your garments be white."

WHAT TO TAKE FROM IT

This Perek establishes that cheshbon hanefesh is a constant, moment-to-moment obligation, not merely a periodic one. Rabbeinu Bachya supports this with pesukim from Tanach, highlighting Hashem's command for continuous remembrance of His Torah and mitzvos. He then advises us to view every good deed, no matter how small, as significant in Hashem's eyes, and similarly, to not dismiss any sin. Conversely, we should not consider our own good deeds as great, recognizing that they can never repay Hashem for even His smallest favors. The Perek concludes by stressing the importance of consistent accounting for Hashem's kindnesses, even if it means making up for missed opportunities on subsequent days, in line with the words of Chazal.

למעשה WHAT TO TAKE HOME

The Chovos HaLevavos is telling us a tremendous chiddush here: cheshbon hanefesh, this spiritual accounting, is not just a once-in-a-while thing. It's not only for Elul, or when we feel like we need a chizuk. No, the Tanna is telling us it needs to be *always*, with every blink, with every breath, to keep that yiras Shamayim alive. Just like a king needs to have the Torah with him constantly, just like we wear tefillin and tzitzis to remember Hashem's mitzvos always, so too this cheshbon, this awareness of Hashem's constant presence and His kindness, needs to be with us. It's not a burden; it's the very air our neshama breathes.

And what is this cheshbon? It's two things. First, don't minimize any good you do, even a small word or a glance, because to Hashem, it's huge. A tiny movement here on earth is a vast distance in the heavens. So too, our small efforts for Hashem are magnified. But on the other hand, don't get puffed up by your good deeds, because even the smallest kindness Hashem does for you outweighs all the good deeds of the entire world, doubled over! This isn't a contradiction; it's the balance of emes. Our avodah is precious, but Hashem's chesed is infinite.

So, what does this mean for us practically? It means we need to make this cheshbon a *habit*. Not just a thought, but a practice. If you miss it during the day, do it at night. If you miss a day, catch up the next. The Gemara says "Shuv yomechad lifnei misasecha" – repent one day before your death. Since we don't know when that day is, every day must be that day. This isn't about being perfect, but about being *present* with Hashem, always.

Your takeaway for today: Take just one minute, right now, to acknowledge one small kindness Hashem did for you today, and one small good deed you did for Him.