

חובות הלבבות • שער הכניעה • פרק שלישי

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

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In this chapter, the Chovos HaLevavos takes us through the practical realities of life that break a person's pride and bring him to a state of true submission. The author outlines ten specific circumstances—ranging from physical weakness and poverty to the sobering realization of our own mortality—that naturally force a person to lower his head and recognize his dependence on others and, ultimately, on Hashem.

By learning these ten pathways, we gain a deeper understanding of how Hashem uses the trials of this world to refine our neshamos. Whether through the pain of illness, the burden of debt, or the quiet voice of our own conscience during a personal accounting, each situation is a wake-up call designed to strip away our arrogance and bring us closer to genuine yiras Shamayim.

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

אבל הסבות אשר תהיה הכניעה והשפלות בעבורם מן האדם, אחר גאותו, עשר.

However, the circumstances that bring a person to submission and a lowly spirit after he has been proud are ten.

אחת: כשיחלש כחו מתנועתו הטבעית מפני קלאים, או מזג רע, או חלישות הרפכות, ויכנע בעבור זה, ויתחנן אל האלהים ולבני אדם, כמו שאמר: "ויכנע בעמל לבם" וגו'.

The first is when his physical strength and natural movement wane due to illness, a poor physical constitution, or a weakening of his bodily makeup, and he becomes submissive because of this, pleading to Hashem and to other people, as the pasuk says, "He humbled their heart with labor."

NOTE The author refers to physical vulnerability as a natural catalyst that breaks a person's ego and forces them to realize their dependence on Hashem and others.

והשנית: כשימצאנו פגע או ריש, ויצטרך לבני אדם אחר שלא היה צריך להם, ויכנע להם, ותשבר רוחו מהתגאות בענינו, כמו שאמר: "והיה כל הנותר בביתך יבוא להשתחות לו" וגו'.

The second is when misfortune or poverty strikes him, and he suddenly needs help from other people after having been completely independent of them, causing him to submit to them and breaking his prideful spirit regarding his status, as the pasuk says, "And it shall come to pass, that everyone who is left in your house shall come and bow down to him."

והשלישית: כשתהיה עליו לזולתו טובה עודפת, ויראה חסדו עליו, יכנע לו, כמו שאמר: "רבים יחלו פני נדיב" וגו'.

The third is when someone else bestows an abundant favor upon him, and that person's kindness toward him becomes evident, causing him to submit to his benefactor, as the pasuk says, "Many will entreat the favor of a generous man."

וְהָרְבִיעִית: מִי שֶׁנִּתְחַיֵּב לְחֵבְרוֹ דָּבָר וְאִינוֹ יָכוֹל לְפָרְעוֹ, וְיִכְנַע לוֹ, כְּמוֹ שֶׁאָמַר: "אִם אֵין לְךָ לְשָׁלֵם" וְגו'.

The fourth is one who owes his fellow a debt and is unable to repay it, causing him to humble himself before him, as the pasuk says, "If you have nothing with which to pay..."

וְהַחֲמִישִׁית: מִי שֶׁהוּא בְּמַאֲסָר אוֹיְבוֹ, וְיִכְנַע לוֹ וְתִשׁוּחַ נַפְשׁוֹ, כַּמּוּ"ש: "עָנוּ בַּכָּבֵל רַגְלָו" וְגו', וְאָמַר: "וְאִם אֲסוּרִים בְּזֻקִּים".

The fifth is one who is imprisoned by his enemy, causing him to submit to him as his spirit sinks low, as the pasuk says, "They hurt his feet with fetters," and as it says, "And if they be bound in fetters."

וְהַשִּׁשִּׁית: הָעֶבֶד שֶׁאִינוֹ יָכוֹל לְפָדוֹת עַצְמוֹ מִיַּד אֲדוֹנָיו, וְיִכְנַע לוֹ, כַּמּוּ"ש: "הִנֵּה כְּעֵינֵי עֲבָדִים" וְגו'.

The sixth is a slave who cannot afford to redeem himself from his master's possession, causing him to submit to him, as the pasuk says, "Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their masters."

וְהַשְּׁבִיעִית: כְּשֶׁתִּמְצָאנָה אֶת הָאָדָם צָרוֹת וּפְגָעִים מַעֲצִיבִים, תִּשְׁבֵּר רוּחוֹ וְיִכְנַע לִבּוֹ, כְּכַתוּב: "אוֹ אֲזַי יִכְנַע לִבָּבָם הָעָרֶל".

The seventh is when distressing troubles and painful misfortunes strike a person, breaking his spirit and humbling his heart, as it is written, "If then their uncircumcised heart be humbled."

וְהַשְּׁמִינִית: כְּשִׁיחֹשֵׁב עִם נַפְשׁוֹ בְּהִמְרוֹתוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים בְּטוֹבָתוֹ, וּבְעָטוֹ בְּהַמְקוֹם הַשָּׂכַח עָלֶיהָ, וְיִכְנַע וַיִּבּוֹשׁ וַיִּכְלֵם מִן הָאֱלֹהִים, כַּמּוּ"ש: "אֱלֹהֵי, בִּשְׂתִי וְנִכְלַמְתִּי".

The eighth is when a person makes a personal accounting and reflects on how he rebelled against Hashem despite all the goodness bestowed upon him, kicking against the bounty instead of offering praise for it, which leads him to feel humbled, ashamed, and embarrassed before Hashem, as the pasuk says, "O my G-d, I am ashamed and blush."

NOTE This is a higher level of submission, driven by spiritual self-reflection and hakaras hatov (gratitude) rather than external physical suffering.

וְהַתְּשִׁיעִית: כְּאֲשֶׁר יוֹכִיחֵנוּ הַבּוֹרָא וַיְכַלִּימֵנוּ עַל הִמְרוֹתָיו אוֹתוֹ, יִכְנַע וַיִּפְחַד, כְּמוֹ שֶׁאָמַר עַל אַחָאָב: "הֲרֵאִיתָ כִּי נִכְנַע אַחָאָב מִלְּפָנַי".

The ninth is when the Creator rebukes him and puts him to shame for his rebellion against Him, causing him to submit and tremble with fear, as was said regarding Achav, "Have you seen how Achav has humbled himself before Me?"

וְהָעֲשִׂירִית: כְּשִׁירְגִישׁ בְּקִרְבַּת הַמָּוֶת וּבּוֹא יוֹמוֹ, וַיִּחְשַׁב בְּאֵימַת הַמָּוֶת וּמַעֲמַד הַדִּין וְהִתְשַׁבּוּן, וְיִכְנַע וַיִּשָּׁח וַתִּקַּל נַפְשׁוֹ בְּעֵינָיו, וַיִּתְחַרֵּט עַל חֲלִיפַת יָמָיו וְכִלּוֹת חַיָּיו מִבְּלִי צָדָה מִמַּעֲשִׂים טוֹבִים יִקְדָּמָם לְפָנָיו לַעֲתָ נִסְעוֹ, כַּמּוּ"ש: "פָּחַדוּ בְּצִיּוֹן חַטָּאִים".

The tenth is when he senses the approach of death and the arrival of his final day, contemplating the dread of death and the standing before the Heavenly Court for judgment and accounting; he then becomes humbled and bowed down, viewing himself as insignificant, and deeply regrets the passing of his days and the end of his life without having prepared a provision of good deeds to precede him for his journey to the World to Come, as the pasuk says, "The sinners in Zion are afraid."

NOTE The ultimate realization of mortality strips away all worldly illusions of grandeur, leaving a person focused solely on the spiritual provisions (tziedah) of Torah and mitzvos.

WHAT TO TAKE FROM IT

The chapter details the ten circumstances that bring about submission: physical illness and weakness, falling into poverty and needing others, receiving kindness from a benefactor, being unable to pay back a debt, being imprisoned by an enemy, being a slave bound to a master, suffering sudden disasters, making a personal accounting of one's rebellion against Hashem's goodness, receiving direct rebuke from the Creator, and finally, sensing the approach of death and the upcoming judgment. Through these ten situations, a person's spirit is broken, his pride is shattered, and he is brought to a state of humility and teshuvah before the Al-mighty.

למעשה WHAT TO TAKE HOME

My dear talmid, the holy Chovos HaLevavos is opening our eyes to a profound truth about the human heart. We all want to acquire the beautiful middah of kniyah, true humility and submission before Hashem. But the Ibn Paquda teaches us that there are two ways a person can arrive at this place. Often, we are forced into submission by life's painful circumstances: a sudden illness, financial strain, needing to ask others for favors, or the stark realization of our own mortality. When our strength is broken, our pride naturally crumbles.

But there is a much higher, sweeter way to build this connection. Instead of waiting for Hashem to send us trials that force us to bend, we can choose to awaken this humility ourselves through honest reflection. When you sit down and make a quiet accounting of your life, looking at the endless, undeserved goodness Hashem showers upon you every single day, and you realize how often we fall short in our gratitude, that realization should melt our hearts. This is a kniyah born not of pain, but of love and shame before Hashem's infinite kindness.

Why wait for the challenges of life to break our pride when we can willingly soften our hearts right now? By proactively recognizing our absolute dependence on the Creator, we transform our entire relationship with Him from one of fear and reaction to one of deep, loving closeness.

Today, take three minutes to sit quietly and list five specific kindnesses Hashem did for you this week. Let the sheer weight of His goodness naturally soften your heart and bring you to a place of genuine, loving humility before Him.