

חובות הלבבות • שער הכניעה • פרק ששי

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

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In this chapter, the Chovos HaLevavos outlines the practical path of the submitted person, detailing the specific manners of conduct he must adopt to live with true humility. We learn how a person must cultivate a deep recognition of Hashem's infinite greatness and study both Torah and reason to understand the true boundaries of lowliness.

We are also introduced to the essential midos of patience and forbearance. The author guides us on how to bear difficult situations for the sake of Hashem, how to judge others favorably, and how to train our tongues to speak only goodness, ensuring our inner submission matches our outer behavior.

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

אבל המנהגים שראוי לנהוג בהם בעל הכניעה, הם עשרה.

Now, the ways of conduct that are proper for a person of submission to adopt are ten.

הראשון: דעת אלהים ומדותיו הטובות, והיתרון אשר נתן לאדם על שאר בעלי החיים, כמ"ש (תהלים ח): "תמשי'להו במעשי ידך".

The first is: knowledge of Elokim and His good attributes, and the superiority that He granted to man over the rest of the living creatures, as it is written, "You give him dominion over the works of Your hands."

כאשר יכיר גדל עצמת הבורא, ורוממות גבורתו וחקמתו העליונה, יכנע לו וישפל לפניו, וילמד ממה שצוה החכם (משלי כה): "אל תתהדר לפני מלך", כ"ש לפני ממ"ה ואדוני האדונים, יתעלה מדמות ומחשול, כמו שאמרה חנה (שמואל א ב:ב'): "אין קדוש כה' כי אין בלתי".

When a person recognizes the greatness of the Creator's power, His exalted might, and His supreme wisdom, he will submit to Him and humble himself before Him; he will learn from what the wise king commanded, "Do not glorify yourself before a king," and apply an a fortiori argument to standing before the King of kings and Master of masters, Who is exalted beyond any likeness or comparison, as Channah said, "There is none holy like Hashem, for there is none besides You."

והשני: לדעת חיובי התורה והשכל, ולקרא בספר תורת האלהים, ולעמדם על החכמה המשפלת והמקבלת, ללמוד ממנה תנאי הכניעה ומקומות הנתינתה.

The second is: to know the obligations of the Torah and of intellect, to read the Book of the Torah of Elokim, and to comprehend both rational wisdom and the received tradition, in order to learn from them the conditions of submission and the areas where it should be practiced.

והשלישי: רחב הלב וסבלות מה שישנא מן הדברים ומן המעשים מן הבורא ית', כמו שאמר (תהלים ו):
"אם גמלתי שולמי רע" וגו', ואמר (משלי כד): "אל תאמר באשר עשה לי כן אעשה לו".

The third is: broadness of heart and patient endurance of things and deeds that one dislikes, accepting them for the sake of the Creator, may He be blessed, as David HaMelech said, "If I have requited my ally with evil..." and as Shlomo HaMelech said, "Do not say, 'As he did to me, so will I do to him.'"

ואמרו רז"ל: "הנעלבים ואינם עוזבים, שומעים חרפתם ואינם משיבים, עושים מאהבה ושמים ביסורים, עליהם הכתוב אומר (שופטים ה): ואהבו כצאת השמש בגברתו", והוא הנקרא אצלם "מעביר על מדותיו".

And Chazal said: "Those who are insulted but do not insult, who hear their shame and do not reply, who act out of love and rejoice in suffering—of them the verse says, 'And those who love Him shall be like the sun going forth in its might'; and this quality is what Chazal call "one who passes over his measures" of retaliation.

והרביעי: עשות הטוב לבני אדם, ודבר טוב להם, ולדונם לזכות, ושלל יספר בגנותם, ושימחל להם מה שידיברו בו ויספרו בגנותו, ואם אינם ראויים לכך, כמו שאמר (קהלת י"ב): "גם במדעה מלך אל תקלל", ואמר (תהלים נ): "פיה שלחת ברעה... תשב באחיה תדבר, בכן אמה תתן דפי".

The fourth is: doing good to people, speaking well of them, judging them favorably, not speaking disparagingly of them, and forgiving them for whatever they say or speak in his disparagement, even if they are not worthy of such forgiveness, as it says, "Even in your thoughts, do not curse a king," and it says, "You let loose your mouth for evil... you sit and speak against your brother, you slander your own mother's son."

וממחילת הדבור הרע והגנאי, מה שאמר הכתוב (במדבר י"ב:א'): "ותדבר מרים ואהרן במשה", ואמר (שם): "והאיש משה ענו מאד", מפני שמחל להם.

An example of forgiving evil speech and disparagement is what the verse says, "And Miriam and Aharon spoke against Moshe," and then it says, "And the man Moshe was exceedingly humble," which was because he forgave them.

ומזה מה שאמר החכם (קהלת ז' כ"א): "גם לכל הדברים אשר ידברו אל תתן לבך", ואמר (שם): "כי גם פעמים רבות ידע לבך" וגו'.

And regarding this, the wise king said, "Also, do not pay attention to all the words that people speak," and he said, "For your own heart knows that many times you too have cursed others."

ואמרו חכמינו ז"ל: מעשה ברבי אליעזר שירד לפני התבה ואמר עשרים וארבע רננות ולא נענה, ירד ר' עקיבא ואמר "אבינו מלכנו" ונענה; יצתה ב"ק ואמרה: "לא שנה גדול מזה, אלא שנה מעביר על מדותיו וזה אינו מעביר על מדותיו".

And our Sages, of blessed memory, said: It happened that Rabbi Eliezer went down before the Ark and recited twenty-four prayers of supplication but was not answered; Rabbi Akiva then went down and said, "Our Father, our King!" and was answered. A Heavenly Voice went forth and proclaimed, "It is not because this one is greater than that one, but because this one passes over his feelings of resentment, and that one does not pass over his feelings of resentment."

וְנֹאמַר עַל אֶחָד מִן הַחֲסִידִים שֶׁעָבַר עַל נְבִלַת כָּלֵב מִסֵּרַחַת מְאֹד, וְאָמְרוּ לוֹ תַלְמִידָיו: "כִּמָּה מִסֵּרַחַת נְבִלָה זֹאת!" אָמַר לָהֶם: "כִּמָּה לְבָנוֹת שֵׁנִיָּה!" וְנִתְחַרְטוּ עַל מָה שֶׁסָּפְרוּ בְּגִנוּתָהּ.

And it is told of one of the pious men who passed by the carcass of a dog that was smelling very foul. His disciples said to him, "How foul-smelling this carcass is!" He said to them, "How white are its teeth!" and they regretted having spoken of its disparagement.

וְכֵיוֹן שֶׁהוּא גִּנְאִי לְסִפֵּר בְּגִנוּת כָּלֵב מֵת, כָּל שָׂכָן בְּאָדָם חַי; וְכֵיוֹן שֶׁהוּא טוֹב לְשַׁבַּח נְבִלַת כָּלֵב בְּלִבּוֹ שֵׁנִיָּה, כָּל שָׂכָן שֶׁהוּא חוֹבָה לְפִי זֶה לְשַׁבַּח אָדָם מְשֻׁכָּל וּמִבִּין.

Now, if it is disgraceful to speak disparagingly of a dead dog, how much more so of a living human being; and if it is good to praise even a dog's carcass for the whiteness of its teeth, how much more is it an obligation, according to this, to praise a human being who possesses intellect and understanding.

וְהִיָּתָה כּוֹנֶנְתּוֹ לְהוֹכִיחָם שֶׁלֹּא יִלְמְדוּ לְשׁוֹנֵם לְדַבֵּר רָע וַיָּשׁוּב לָהֶם טָבַע.

His intention was to rebuke them so that they would not train their tongues to speak evil, lest it become a second nature to them.

וְכֵן כְּשִׁילְמְדוּ לְשׁוֹנֵם לְדַבֵּר טוֹב, יָשׁוּב לָהֶם טָבַע קְבוּעַ, כַּמִּשָּׁל (תהלים טו): "לֹא רָגַל עַל לְשׁוֹנוֹ".

Likewise, when they train their tongues to speak good, it will become an established nature for them, as it is written, "He does not slander with his tongue."

וְאָמַר בְּהִפּוֹךְ זֶה (שם נב): "הַיּוֹת תִּחְשַׁב לְשׁוֹנָהּ" וְגו', "אֲהַבֶּתָּ כָּל דְּבָרִי בְּלֶעַ", וְאָמַר (שם קכ): "מָה יִתֵּן לָהּ וּמָה יִסְיֶף לָהּ לְשׁוֹן רַמְיָהּ".

And it says regarding the opposite of this, "Your tongue devises destruction... You love all devouring words," and it says, "What will it give you, and what will it add to you, O deceitful tongue?"

וְהַחֲמִישִׁי: הַכְּנִיעָה בְּעִנְיַי עוֹלָמוֹ כָּלֵם, הַנִּרְאָה מֵהֶם וְהַנִּסְתָּר, בְּדַבּוּרוֹ וּבְמַעֲשָׂהוּ וּבְתַנוּעֵת אַבְרָיו וְנוֹחָם, וְלֹא יִהְיֶה תוֹכוֹ בְּכָל זֶה הִפּוֹךְ בְּרוֹ, וְלֹא מַצְפּוֹנוֹ כְּנֶגֶד נִרְאֵהוּ.

The fifth is: humility in all his worldly matters, both public and private, in his speech, his actions, the movement of his limbs, and his rest, so that in all of this his inside is not the opposite of his outside, nor his hidden thoughts contrary to his outward appearance.

וּתְנוּעוֹתָיו שְׁקוּלוֹת וְנִכּוֹנוֹת וְשׁוֹת וּמִתְדַמּוֹת, הוֹלְכוֹת עַל דֶּרֶךְ הַכְּנִיעָה וְהַשְׁפָּלוֹת לֵאלֹהִים יִתְבָּרַךְ וְלִבְנֵי אָדָם, כְּפִי הַתַּחֲלָקוֹת מַעֲלוֹתָם וְכְפִי הַטּוֹב לֹא מֵהֶם לְתוֹרָתוֹ וּלְעוֹלָמוֹ, כְּמוֹ שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (שם קיב): "טוֹב אִישׁ חוֹנֵן וּמִלֵּוֹה, יִכְלָל דְּבָרָיו בְּמִשְׁפָּט".

Rather, his movements should be measured, proper, consistent, and harmonious, proceeding in the path of submission and humility before Elokim, may He be blessed, and toward human beings according to their various levels of virtue and according to the benefit he receives from them for his spiritual and worldly needs, as it is written, "It is well with the man who is gracious and lends, who conducts his affairs with justice."

וְאָמְרוּ רז"ל: "הָיִי שֹׁפֵל רוּחַ בְּפָנֵי כָּל אָדָם", וְאָמְרוּ: "הָיִי קָל לְרֹאשׁ וְנוֹחַ לְתַשְׁחָרֵת".

And Chazal said, "Be humble of spirit before every person," and they said, "Be yielding to a leader and pleasant to the youth."

וְהַשְׁשִׁי: שִׁיְהִיָּה יָקָר רוּחַ וּגְבוּהַ נֶפֶשׁ בְּעֵינָיו הָעוֹה"ב, שֶׁלֹּא יִסְפִּיק לוֹ מֶהֱם מָה שִׁיֻּדְמָן, וְלֹא יֹאמַר "יְי בְּמָה שֶׁתִּמְצָא יָדוֹ מֵהֶם".

The sixth is: that he should possess a noble spirit and high aspirations regarding matters of the World to Come, such that he is never satisfied with whatever happens to come his way, nor does he say, "What I have managed to achieve is enough."

אָבֵל יִמְעַט בְּעֵינָיו מַעֲשָׂהוּ וּיְכַלְתּוּ וְהִשְׁתַּדְּלוּתוֹ בְּעֵינָיו, וְתִגְבֶּה נֶפֶשׁוֹ אֶל מָה שֶׁלִּמְעַלָּה מִזֶּה תָּמִיד, כְּמוֹ שֶׁאָמַר הַכָּתוּב בִּיהוֹשָׁפָט (ד"ה ב יז): "וַיִּגְבֶּה לְבוֹ בְּדַרְכֵי ה'".

Instead, his deeds, his capability, and his efforts in his spiritual service should always seem small in his eyes, and his soul should constantly aspire to what is higher than his current level, just as the verse says of Yehoshafat, "And his heart was lifted up in the ways of Hashem."

וְהַשְׁבִּיעִי: שִׁיקְטֵן בְּעֵינָיו מַעֲשָׂהוּ, וְיִתְרַעַם עַל נֶפֶשׁוֹ עַל קִצּוֹרָה בְּעֵינָיו תּוֹרָתוֹ לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים וּלְפָנָיו בְּנִי אָדָם, וַיִּבְקֹשׁ מֵאֱלֹהִים עֶזֶר וְאִמְצָ [לְהוֹסִיף בְּעִבּוּדָה וּבְמַעֲשִׂים טוֹבִים, כְּמוֹ שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (תהלים קיט): אֲחֲלִי כִנּוֹ דַּרְכֵי לְשֹׁמֵר חֻקֶּיךָ].

The seventh is: that his deeds should seem small in his eyes, and he should complain to himself about his shortcomings in his Torah obligations before Elokim and before men, and he should pray to Elokim for help and strength to increase his service and good deeds, as it is written, "O that my ways were directed to keep Your statutes!"

וַיִּנִּיחַ הַגְּבוּהוֹת לְכָבוֹד הַבּוֹרָא, וַיַּעֲזֹב הַגָּדְלָה וְהִיקָר בַּעַת שֶׁהוּא עוֹשֶׂה לְאֱלֹהִים יִתְבַּרְךָ, בֵּין לְבִדּוֹ בֵּין בְּתוֹךְ מִקְהֵלוֹת בְּנֵי אָדָם, כְּמוֹ שֶׁאָמַר הַכָּתוּב עַל אַהֲרֹן עַל גְּדֻלַּת מַעֲלָתוֹ (ויקרא ו): "וְהִרִים אֶת הַדָּשָׁן" וְגו'.

And he should cast aside all pride for the honor of the Creator, abandoning personal prestige and dignity when performing service for Elokim, may He be blessed, whether he is alone or in the midst of public gatherings, just as the verse says of Aharon, despite his exalted status, "And he shall lift up the ashes..."

וְחִיבּוֹ הַבּוֹרָא לְהוֹצִיא אֶת הַדָּשָׁן בְּכָל יוֹם תָּמִיד, לְהַשְׁפִּיל וּלְהַסִּיר הַגְּבוּהוֹת מִלְּבוֹ.

The Creator obligated him to remove the ashes every single day, in order to humble himself and remove pride from his heart.

וְכְמוֹ זֶה אָמַר בְּדוֹד (שמואל ב ו): "וַתֵּרָא אֶת הַמֶּלֶךְ דָּוִד מִפְּנֵי וּמִכְרִכָּר לִפְנֵי ה'" וְשָׂאֵר הָעֲנָנִים, וְאָמַר (תהלים קיט): "וַאֲדַבְּרָה בְּעִדְתֶּיךָ נֶגֶד מְלָכִים וְלֹא אֲבוֹשׁ".

And similarly, it says of David, "And she saw King David leaping and dancing before Hashem," and the rest of the passage, and he said, "I will speak of Your testimonies before kings, and I will not be ashamed."

וְהַשְׁמִינִי: שִׁיִּסְפִּיק לוֹ מִסִּבּוֹת הַמְּזוֹן מָה שִׁיֻּדְמָן וּמָה שִׁיִּמְצָא, מֵאֲשֶׁר תִּהְיֶה נֶפֶשׁוֹ נִמְכָּזָה וְנִקְלָה בְּעֵינָיו, וְלִחְנֹךְ אוֹתָהּ לַעֲמֹד מִתְּאוֹתֶיהָ הַגּוֹפְנִיּוֹת, וְלְהַפְנוֹת לְפָרַע חוֹבוֹת הַבּוֹרָא עַל גְּדֻלַּת טוֹבוֹתָיו וְרַב חֲסִדּוֹ עָלָיו, כְּמוֹ שֶׁאָמַר דָּוִד (שם): "דָּרָה מִצּוֹתֶיךָ אֲרוּץ" וְגו'.

The eighth is: that he should be content with whatever means of livelihood present themselves and whatever he finds, because his soul is humble and small in his own eyes, and he trains it to restrain itself from physical desires, freeing himself to pay his debts of gratitude to the Creator for His immense goodness and abundant kindness, as David said, "I will run in the way of Your mitzvos..."

והתשיעי: שִׁינָקָם מִן הָרָשָׁעִים לְכָבוֹד הַבוֹרָא, וְאֵל תְּשִׂיאוֹהוּ מִחִילָתוֹ לְבְנֵי אָדָם בְּצַד עֲצָמוֹ לְמַחֵל בְּדַבְרֵי הָאֱלֹהִים, אוֹ לְמִי שִׁידְבֵּר בְּנִבְיָאִיו וְחֹסִידָיו וּסְגָלָתוֹ.

The ninth is: that he should take vengeance against the wicked for the honor of the Creator, and his personal habit of forgiving people should not mislead him into forgiving offenses against the word of Elokim, or those who speak against His prophets, His pious ones, and His treasured nation.

וְאֵל יִנְהַג בְּעֶשֶׂק בְּנֵי אָדָם אִישׁ אֶת רֵעֵהוּ כְּמִנְהַגוֹ בְּמִחִילָתוֹ לָהֶם בְּעֶשֶׂקָם אוֹתוֹ, אֲךָ יִצִּיל הָעֶשֶׂק וְיַעֲזֹר לְהוֹצִיא מִיַּד הָעוֹשֶׂק, כְּמוֹ שֶׁכָּתוּב (ירמיה כח): "דִּינוּ לַבֹּקֶר מִשְׁפָּט וְהַצִּילוּ גְזוֹל מִיַּד עוֹשֶׂק", וְאָמַר (איוב כט): "וְאַשְׁבְּרָה מִתְלַעוֹת עוֹלָם".

And he must not tolerate people oppressing one another in the same way he forgives them when they oppress him personally; rather, he must rescue the oppressed and help wrest them from the hand of the oppressor, as it is written, "Execute justice in the morning, and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor," and as Iyov said, "And I broke the jaws of the wicked."

וְיוֹרָה בְּנֵי אָדָם עֲבוֹדַת הָאֱלֹהִים, וְיוֹכִיחֵם וְיִכְלִימֵם, וְיִצְוֵם עַל הַטּוֹב וְיִזְהִירֵם מִן הָרָע בְּיָדוֹ וּבְלִשׁוֹנוֹ כְּפִי יִכְלָתוֹ, וְיִמְהַר לְקַחַת דִּינֵי הָאֱלֹהִים מִמִּי שֶׁחָיַב בָּהֶם, וְלֹא יִכְנַע וְלֹא יִשְׁפֹּל בָּזָה, כְּמ"ש בְּפִינָחָס (תהלים קו): "וַיַּעֲמֵד פִּינָחָס וַיַּפְלֵל וַתַּעֲצֹר הַמַּגֵּפָה, וַתִּחַשֵּׁב לוֹ לְצַדִּיקָה לְדֹר וָדֹר עַד עוֹלָם".

He should teach people the service of Elokim, rebuke them, shame them for their wrongs, command them to do good, and warn them against evil with his hand and tongue to the best of his ability; he should hasten to execute the judgments of Elokim upon whoever is liable, and he must not show submission or humility in this, as it is written of Pinchas, "Then Pinchas stood up and executed judgment, and the plague was stayed; and that was counted to him for righteousness, unto all generations forever."

וְהַעֲשִׂירִי: שִׁיְהִיָּה בְּמַעַט דְּבָרִים, וְקוֹלוֹ נְמוּד, וּמַעַט שְׁחוֹק, וּמַעַט שְׁבוּעוֹת בְּשֵׁם עַל הָאֱמֶת, וְלֹא יַעֲבִיר עַל לִשׁוֹנוֹ כָּזָב, וְלֹא יֵשֵׁב בְּסוּד מְשַׁחֲקִים, וְלֹא יִשְׁמַח בְּמָה שֶׁשְּׂמַחִים עִמִּי הָאָרֶץ מִתַּעֲנוּגֵי הָעוֹלָם.

The tenth is: that he should be sparing in words, speak in a low voice, laugh little, swear rarely by Hashem's Name even on the truth, never let falsehood pass his tongue, not sit in the company of mockers, and not rejoice in the worldly pleasures that unlearned people rejoice in.

וְזֶה מִכְנִיעָה וְשִׁפְלוּת, לֹא מַצַּד גְּדֻלָּה וְהִתְנַשְּׂא, כְּמוֹ שֶׁאָמַר הַנָּבִיא (ירמיהו ט"ו:י"ז): "לֹא יִשְׁבְּתִי בְּסוּד מְשַׁחֲקִים וְאַעֲלֹז, מִפְּנֵי יָדְךָ בָּדָד יִשְׁבְּתִי כִּי יָעַם מְלֹאתָנִי".

And this behavior must stem from submission and humility, not from a feeling of superiority and self-exaltation, just as the prophet Yirmiyahu said, "I did not sit in the company of merry-makers, nor did I rejoice; because of Your hand I sat alone, for You filled me with indignation."

WHAT TO TAKE FROM IT

The chapter details the first seven of ten essential conducts for the humble person, beginning with a deep recognition of Hashem's greatness and the study of Torah and reason to understand humility. A person must cultivate forbearance, letting offenses pass as a 'Ma'avir Al Midosav', and actively do good to others by judging them favorably and speaking only of their merits—even learning from the story of a pious man who praised the white teeth of a dead dog to avoid speaking disparagingly. Finally, one must maintain consistent humility in all public and private affairs, while simultaneously harboring a great desire for the next world, always viewing his own service and good deeds as small and insufficient before the Creator.

The Chovos HaLevavos is teaching us a profound secret about the nature of our speech and middos: they are not static, but rather a product of habituation. When the Chassid pointed out the white teeth of a foul-smelling carcass, he was not just trying to be positive; he was training his tongue. The way we speak actually reshapes our inner nature. If we habituate our mouths to find the good, speaking kindly and judging favorably, that goodness eventually becomes our natural, instinctive way of being.

This is why being 'ma'avir al midosav', letting offenses pass and forgiving others, is so powerful that it opens the gates of Heaven when nothing else does, just as it did for Rebbi Akiva. True humility is not a feeling we wait to descend upon us; it is an active avodah of training our limbs, our minds, and especially our tongues to act with gentleness and restraint until it becomes who we are.

Today, make a conscious effort to train your tongue: when you are about to point out a flaw in a person, a situation, or even an object, stop yourself and find one positive point to speak aloud instead.