

חובות הלבבות • שער הכניעה • פרק שביעי

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

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In this chapter, the Chovos HaLevavos provides us with the practical touchstones of true submission, showing us how a person can know if his humility is genuine and comes from the depths of his neshama. The author outlines five distinct areas of life where a person's inner avodah is put to the test, revealing whether he has truly surrendered his ego to Hashem.

We learn how a truly humble person responds to personal affronts, financial loss, and the praise or criticism of his fellow men. Through these everyday nisyonos, the author guides us to look honestly at our reactions, showing how a Yid can transform even the most challenging moments into opportunities for deep yiras Shamayim and closeness to Hashem.

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

אבל הסימנים שבהם תתברר הכניעה מן הנכנע, כשיראו בו, הם חמשה.

Now, the signs by which true submission is verified in a humble person, when they are seen in him, are five.

אחד מהם: בעת חזק כעסו על מי שמבזה אותו, בין במאמר בין במעשה, שאם ימשל ברוחו וימחל אחר היכלת להנצח, מעננה וספלות, יורה על ברור כניעתו.

The first of them is at the moment of his intense anger toward someone who insults him, whether in word or in deed; if he rules over his spirit and forgives, despite having the ability to take revenge, doing so out of humility and lowliness, this points to the genuineness of his submission.

והשני: כשיפגעו פגע בממונו, או יקרהו מקרה בקרוביו, אם יגביר הסכל על החרדה, וירצה בגזרת הבורא ויצדיק את דינו, יורה על כניעתו הטובה וספלותו לאלהים, כמו שאמר הכתוב על אהרן במה שארעו במות נדב ואביהוא: "וידם אהרן"; ואמר דוד: "דום לה' והתחולל לו"; ונאמר: "לכן המשכיל בעת ההיא ידם".

The second is when he is struck with a loss in his wealth, or some calamity occurs to his relatives; if his patience and fortitude overcome his panic, and he willingly accepts the Creator's decree and justifies His judgment, this points to his proper submission and lowliness before Elokim, just as the verse says of Aharon regarding what befell him at the death of Nadav and Avihu, "And Aharon was silent," and David said, "Be silent to Hashem and wait patiently for Him," and it is said, "Therefore, he who is prudent shall keep silent at that time."

והשלישי: כשיתפרסם ענינו אצל בני אדם בטובה או ברעה.

The third is when his affairs become known among people, whether for good or for bad.

שְׁאֵם יִשְׁבְּחוּהוּ עַל טוֹבָה שְׁעָשָׂה, יָבוּ לְמִשְׁבַּחוֹ עָלֶיהָ, וְתִהְיֶה נִקְלָה בְּנַפְשׁוֹ וּקְטָנָה בְּעֵינָיו מִהֵיכָל מִקְבְּלֵת וּרְצוּיָה אֶצֶל הַבּוֹרָא, לְקִטְנוּתָהּ נֶגֶד מָה שֶׁהוּא חַיֵּב בּוֹ מִכְפָּלֵי הַטּוֹבָה הַהִיא.

For if they praise him for a good deed he performed, he will look down on the one praising him for it, and the deed will seem insignificant in his own soul and small in his eyes to be accepted and pleasing to the Creator, because of its smallness compared to the many times more service he actually owes Hashem for all the goodness He has bestowed upon him.

וַיֹּאמֶר לְמִשְׁבָּחוֹ: "רַב לָּהּ, אָחִי, כִּי אֵינָהּ נֶגֶד עֲוֹנֹתַי אֲלֵא כְּנִיצוּץ מִן הָאֵשׁ בַּיָּם; וּאִפִּי אִם תִּהְיֶה נִחְשָׁבֶת לְמֵאוּמָה, אֵיךְ אֲדַע אִם הִיא נִצְלָת מִפְּגָעֵי הַהֶפְסֵד הַמְּשִׁיגִים אוֹתָהּ, עַד שֶׁיִּקְבְּלָנָה הַבּוֹרָא מִמֶּנִּי וְלֹא יִשְׁיבָנָה עָלַי וְיִשְׁלִיכָנָה בְּפָנַי, כְּמוֹ שֶׁכָּתוּב: 'כִּי תִבְאוּ לְרָאוֹת פָּנַי מִי בִקֵּשׁ זֹאת וְגוֹ', וְאָמַר: 'לֹא תוֹסִיפוּ הִבִּיא מִנַּחַת שְׂוֵא וְגוֹ'?"

And he will say to the one praising him: "Enough, my brother! For compared to my sins, this deed is like a single spark of fire in the sea. And even if it were to be considered of some value, how do I know if it was saved from the spiritual defects that ruin a mitzvah, so that the Creator will accept it from me and not return it to me and throw it back in my face, as it is written, 'When you come to appear before Me, who requested this of you, to trample My courts?' and it says, 'Bring no more vain meal-offerings...'"

NOTE The "spiritual defects" refer to insincerity, pride, or seeking honor, which the author discussed in Gate 5 (Shaar Yichud HaMaaseh).

כָּל שָׂכֵן אִם יִשְׁבְּחוּנוּ בְּשֶׁקֶר, שֶׁצָּרִיךְ לְהִרְחִיק הַדְּבָר הַהוּא מֵעֲצָמוֹ, וַיֹּאמֶר לְמַסְפֵּר: "דִּי לִי (ס"א: לָּהּ) אָחִי בִקְצוּרֵי בְּמָה שֶׁאֲנִי חַיֵּב בּוֹ לַבּוֹרָא, אֵל תִּקְבֹּץ עָלַי עוֹן קְצוּרֵי וְעוֹן הַשִּׁבְחָה בְּמָה שֶׁלֹּא עָשִׂיתִי, כִּי אֲנִי יוֹדֵעַ עֲוֹנֹתַי וּפְשָׁעַי יוֹתֵר מִמָּה, כְּמוֹ שֶׁאָמַר דָּוִד ע"ה: 'כִּי פֶשַׁעִי אֲנִי אֲדַע'."

How much more so if someone praises him falsely, where he must reject that praise from himself and say to the speaker: "It is bad enough, my brother, that I fall short in my obligations to the Creator; do not add to my account the sin of my shortcomings together with the sin of accepting praise for what I did not do! For I know my sins and my transgressions better than you do, as David, peace be upon him, said: 'For I know my transgressions.'"

וְאִם יִזְכֹּר בְּרָעָה שְׁעָשָׂה, יוֹדֵה עַל נַפְשׁוֹ בִּקְצוּרוֹ, וְאֵל יִחְזֹר אַחֵר אֲמַתְּלָאוֹת לְהִנָּקוֹת מִמֶּנָּה וּלְזַכּוֹת עֲצָמוֹ, כַּמ"שׁ יְהוּדָה: "צִדְקָה מִמֶּנִּי"; וְאֵל יִשְׁתַּדֵּל לְהַכְלִים (ס"א: לְהַכְחִישׁ) הַמַּסְפֵּר, וְאֵל יִאֲשִׁימֵנו עַל אֲשֶׁר גָּלָה אוֹתוֹ.

And if someone mentions a bad deed that he actually did, he should admit his shortcoming and not search for excuses to clear himself of it and justify himself, just as Yehudah said, "She is more righteous than I"; and he should not try to embarrass or deny the speaker, nor blame him for exposing him.

אָבֵל יֹאמַר לוֹ: "אָחִי, מָה שֶׁעוֹר מָה שֶׁהִשְׁקַפְתָּ עָלַי מִרַע מַעֲשֵׂי אֶצֶל מָה שֶׁלֹּא יָדַעְתָּ מִמֶּנִּי, אֲשֶׁר הָאֲרִיךְ לִי הַבּוֹרָא סָתְרוּ בָּהֶם? וְאֵלּוֹ הִיא נִגְלָה לָּהּ רַע מַעֲשֵׂי וְעֲוֹנֹתַי, הֵייתָ בּוֹרַח מִמֶּנִּי וּמִפֶּחַד מַעֲנֵשׁ הַבּוֹרָא עֲלֵיהֶם, כַּמ"שׁ אַחָד מִן הַמְּשׁוֹרְרִים: 'חֲטָאִי לוֹ יִרְחוּן בָּם שְׂכָנַי, אֲזִי בָּרַח וְרַחֲקוּ מִן גְּבוּלִי', וְאָמַר אִיּוֹב: 'אִם כִּסִּיתִי כְּאֵדָם פֶּשַׁעִי'."

Rather, he should say to him: "My brother, how small is the bad you have observed in my deeds compared to what you do not know about me, which the Creator in His patience has kept hidden? If the bad of my deeds and my sins were revealed to you, you would flee from me, fearing that the Creator's punishment for them would strike you too, as one of the poets said: 'If my neighbors could smell my sins, they would flee and keep far from my border,' and Iyov said: 'Did I cover my transgressions like Adam?'"

וְאִם מָה שֶׁסִּפְרוּ עָלָיו שָׁקֵר, יֹאמֶר לְמִסְפָּר: "אָחִי, אֵין מִן הַתַּמָּה מָה שֶׁהֲצִילָנִי הַבּוֹרָא מַעֲשׂוֹת מָה שֶׁתָּלִית בִּי אֶצֶל רַב הַטּוֹבוֹת אֲשֶׁר גָּמְלָנִי, אֲךֹּה הַתַּמָּה סִּתְרוּ עָלַי בְּמָה שֶׁהוּא יוֹתֵר מְגֻנָּה וְגָדוֹל מְאֹד מִמָּה שֶׁסִּפַּרְתָּ עָלַי; הֲרָא, אָחִי, וְחַמַּל עַל זְכוּיוֹתַיךָ שֶׁלֹּא תֹאבִדְנָה מִמֶּךָ וְלֹא תִרְגֹּשׁ."

And if what they said about him is false, he should say to the speaker: "My brother, it is not surprising that the Creator saved me from doing what you accuse me of, considering the abundance of goodness He has bestowed upon me. What is truly surprising is His keeping hidden far worse and greater faults of mine than what you have spoken about! Stop, my brother, and have pity on your own merits, lest you lose them without even realizing it."

כִּי כִּבְרָ נֹאמֶר עַל אֶחָד מִן הַחֲסִידִים שֶׁזָּכְרוּ אוֹתוֹ לְרָעָה, וְכִינוּ שֶׁהִגִּיעוּ הַדְּבָר, שֶׁלַח לְמַדְבַּר בּוֹ כָּלִי מָלֵא מִזְמֶרֶת אֲרִצוֹ, וְכָתַב אֵלָיו: "הִגִּיעָנִי שֶׁשָּׁלַחְתָּ לִּי מִנְחָה מִזְכוּיוֹתַיךָ, וְגִמְלָתְךָ בָּזָה."

For it was already told of one of the pious men that someone spoke badly of him, and when the matter reached him, he sent the speaker a vessel filled with the choicest fruits of his land, and wrote to him: "I have been informed that you sent me a gift of your spiritual merits, so I have rewarded you with this."

וְאָמַר אֶחָד מִן הַחֲסִידִים: "הֲרֵבָה בְּנִי אָדָם יְבוֹאוּ לְיוֹם הַחֲשׁוֹבוֹן, וְכִשְׁמֹרָאִים לָהֶם מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם, יִמָּצְאוּ בְּסִפָּר זְכוּיָתָם וְכִוּוֹת שֶׁלֹּא עָשׂוּ אוֹתָם, וְיֹאמְרוּ: 'לֹא עָשִׂינוּ אוֹתָם'; וְיֹאמֶר לָהֶם: 'עָשָׂה אוֹתָם אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּר בְּכֶם וְסִפֵּר בְּגִנוּתְכֶם'."

And another of the pious men said: "Many people will come to the Day of Reckoning, and when they are shown their deeds, they will find in the book of their merits good deeds that they did not perform. They will say, 'We did not do these!' and it will be said to them, 'The one who spoke against you and related your disparagement performed them.'"

NOTE This refers to the spiritual reality that speaking lashon hara transfers the speaker's merits to the victim.

וְכֵן כְּשִׁיחֲסֵר מִסְפָּר זְכוּיָת הַמְּסַפְּרִים בְּגִנוּתָם, יִבְקְשׁוּ אוֹתוֹ בְּעֵת הַהִיא, וְיֹאמֶר לָהֶם: 'אֲבָדוּ מִכֶּם בְּעֵת שֶׁדִּבַּרְתֶּם בְּפִלּוֹנִי וּפְלּוֹנִי'."

And likewise, when the count of merits of those who spoke disparagingly is missing, they will search for them at that time, and it will be said to them, 'You lost them at the time you spoke against so-and-so.'

וְכֵן יִשׁ מֵהֶם גַּם כֵּן שִׁימָצְאוּ בְּסִפָּר חוֹבוֹתָם חוֹבוֹת שֶׁלֹּא עָשׂוּ, וְכִשְׁאוּמְרִים: 'לֹא עָשִׂינוּ', יֹאמֶר לָהֶם: 'נוֹסְפוּ עָלֵיכֶם בְּעִבּוֹר פְּלוֹנִי וּפְלּוֹנִי שֶׁדִּבַּרְתֶּם בָּם', כִּמוֹ שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: 'וְהָשִׁב לְשִׁכְנֵינוּ שִׁבְעָתַיִם אֶל חֵיקָם חֲרַפְתָּם אֲשֶׁר חֲרַפּוּהָ ה'."

And likewise, some of them will also find in the book of their liabilities sins that they did not commit, and when they say, 'We did not do these,' it will be said to them, 'They were added to you because of so-and-so whom you spoke against,' as it is said: 'And return to our neighbors sevenfold into their bosom their reproach with which they reproached You, Hashem.'

וְעַל זֶה הִזְהִירָנוּ הַפֶּתוּב בְּאִמְרוֹ: 'זָכוֹר אֵת אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְמִרְיָם בְּדֶרֶךְ'."

And regarding this, the verse warns us by saying: 'Remember what Hashem your Elokim did to Miriam on the way.'"

וְהִרְבִּיעִי: כְּשִׁיטִיב לוֹ הָאֵל בְּטוֹבָה גְּדוֹלָה, וּבְחֻכְמָה יִתְרָה וּתְבוּנָה רַבָּה, אוֹ עֹשֶׁר גְּדוֹל, אוֹ כְּבוֹד אֲצֵל הַמַּלְכוּת, וְהִדּוּמָה לָזֶה מִמָּה שֶׁנִּהְיָגוּ בְּנֵי אָדָם לְהִתְפָּאֵר בָּהֶם וּלְהִתְנַאֲוֹת בְּעִבּוּרָם, וַיִּשָּׂאֵר עַל עֲגִיז שְׁפָלוּתוֹ קֹדֶם לָכֵן, וְלֹא הוֹסִיף אֲלֵא עֲנֹה וְשְׁפָלוּת לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים וְכָבוֹד וְטוֹבָה לְבְנֵי אָדָם.

The fourth is when Hashem bestows upon him a great benefit, such as exceptional wisdom, great understanding, immense wealth, honor from the government, or similar things that people usually use to boast and become haughty, and yet he remains in his state of lowliness just as before, only increasing in humility and lowliness before Elokim, and showing honor and goodness to other people.

כְּמוֹ שֶׁאָמַר אַבְרָהָם עֵת שֶׁשִּׁפְחוּ הַבּוֹרָא וְאָמַר: 'הַמְכַסֶּה אֲנִי מֵאֲבָרָהֶם וְגו'' - 'וְאֲנֹכִי עֹפֵר וְאֹפֵר'; וְאָמַר מֹשֶׁה: 'וְנִחְנוּ מָה'; וְאָמַר דָּוִד ע"ה: 'וְאֲנֹכִי תוֹלַעַת וְלֹא אִישׁ'.

Just as Avraham said when the Creator praised him and said, 'Shall I hide from Avraham...', and he said, 'And I am but dust and ashes'; and Moshe said, 'And what are we?'; and David, peace be upon him, said, 'But I am a worm and not a man.'

אִז יִתְבַּרֵּר מִצְפוּנוֹ וְתִאֲמַן כְּנִיעָתוֹ; וְאָמַר הַחֹכֵם בְּעֲגִיז הַזֶּה: 'אִם רוּחַ הַמּוֹשֵׁל תַעֲלֶה עָלַי וְגו''.

At such a time, his inner thoughts are clarified and his submission is proven true; and the wise man said regarding this matter: 'If the spirit of the ruler rises up against you, do not leave your place...'

וְהַחֲמִישִׁי: כְּשֶׁהוּא מוֹכִיחַ אֶת נַפְשׁוֹ, וְנוֹתֵן דִּין הַבּוֹרָא מַעֲצָמוֹ, אַעפ"י שֶׁאֵין יְכָלֶת לְדִין עַל זֶה, תִּתְבַּרֵּר כְּנִיעָתוֹ לָאֱלֹהִים וְשְׁפָלוּתוֹ וְשִׁחוּתוֹ, כְּמוֹ שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: 'אֲנִיחָנוּ מֵעַלְנוּ בְּאֱלֹהֵינוּ וְגו'', וְנֶאֱמַר: 'וַיִּתְּנוּ יָדָם לְהוֹצִיא נַשִּׁיהֶם'.

The fifth is when he rebukes himself and accepts the Creator's justice upon himself of his own accord, even though there is no human authority with the power to enforce this judgment on him; this clarifies his submission to Elokim, his lowliness, and his humility, as it is written: 'We have trespassed against our Elokim...', and it says: 'And they gave their hand to send away their wives.'

NOTE This refers to taking responsibility and correcting one's spiritual wrongs voluntarily, even when there is no external pressure or court forcing one to do so.

וְעַם הַמְּאָרְעִים הָאֵלֶּה וְהַדּוּמִים לָהֶם, יִתְקַיְּמוּ סִמְנֵי הַכְּנִיעָה לְאֵל יִתְעַלֶּה וְהַשְׁפָּלוּת מִן הַנִּכְנָעִים, וְתִרְאָה אֱמוּנָת לְבָבָם בָּהֶם.

Through these situations and others similar to them, the signs of submission to Hashem, may He be exalted, and the lowliness of the humble will be established, and the sincerity of their hearts in these traits will be made manifest.

WHAT TO TAKE FROM IT

The chapter details the five signs of true submission: first, ruling over one's spirit and forgiving someone who causes insult or harm; second, accepting financial loss or the loss of loved ones with calm resignation and justifying Hashem's decree; third, handling praise or blame with absolute honesty, which includes deflecting false praise, admitting true faults, and remaining humble when falsely accused while recognizing that speaking lashon hara transfers merits from the speaker to the victim; fourth, remaining deeply humble and low when blessed with wealth, wisdom, or honor; and fifth, maintaining this submission consistently in all areas of one's life.

The Chovos HaLevavos teaches us that true kniyah, genuine submission and humility before Hashem, is not a theoretical feeling we feel when everything is quiet. It is tested and proven in the heat of the moment, especially when our ego is threatened. The ultimate test of this is how we react when others speak about us, whether they are praising us falsely or speaking badly of us.

When someone speaks poorly of you, the natural reaction of the yetzer hara is to fight back, make excuses, or attack their character. But the Chovos HaLevavos reveals a deep cosmic reality: when someone speaks badly of you, they are actually handing over their spiritual merits to you on a silver platter, while taking on your spiritual debts. A truly humble person does not get angry at their critic; they realize that Hashem is using this moment to clean their slate and enrich their spiritual bank account.

Instead of defending your honor or arguing, view the critic as a messenger helping you grow. If the criticism is true, use it as an opportunity to quietly admit your shortcomings to Hashem without making excuses. If it is false, remain silent and feel a quiet gratitude to Hashem for keeping your real faults hidden from the world, while accepting the spiritual gifts your critic has unwittingly sent your way.

Today, if someone criticizes you, insults you, or speaks poorly of you, do not argue back or defend yourself. Take a deep breath, remain silent for just one minute, and say quietly in your heart: 'Thank you, Hashem, for this kapparah and for the merits this person is giving me.'