

חובות הלבבות • שער הכניעה • פרק תשיעי

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

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In this chapter, the Chovos HaLevavos addresses a fundamental question in our avodah: can submission and pride co-exist in the heart of a believer? The author breaks down the concept of pride into two distinct categories—pride in physical, bodily matters and pride in spiritual achievements—to show how each affects a person's yiras Shamayim and humility.

We will learn how physical pride completely drives away submission, while spiritual pride is split into two paths. One path is highly reprehensible and ruins a person's spiritual standing, while the other is actually praiseworthy and helps a Yid grow even deeper in his submission to Hashem.

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

אבל אם יתכן להתקבץ בלב המאמין הכניעה והגאווה אם לא?

But is it possible for submission and pride to coexist in the heart of the believer, or not?

אומר בתשובת זה: כי הגאווה מתחלקת לשני חלקים.

I will say in response to this: pride is divided into two categories.

אחד מהם: גאות האדם בגופו, ובעניני גופו, ותקוניו הגופיים.

One of them is a person's pride in his physical body, his physical affairs, and his bodily well-being.

והחלק השני: גאותו במעלותיו הרוחניות, בחכמה והמעשה הטוב בעבור עבודת הבורא.

And the second category is his pride in his spiritual qualities—namely, in wisdom and good deeds performed for the sake of the service of the Creator.

וכל גאווה שתהיה מחמת הגופיים, היא מרחקת הכניעה מן הלב, ומן הנמנע התקבצם בלב אחד, בעבור הרחקת כל אחד מהם את חברו.

Now, any pride that stems from physical matters distances submission from the heart, and it is impossible for both of them to dwell in one heart, because each one of them completely repels the other.

כי כאשר יתגאה האדם בדבר מדברי העולם, אין מביאו לזה אלא: בזות את בעל הטובה, ומעוטה אצלו, ומעוט ידיעתו במהירות הסרתה ממנו ונסיעתה מאצלו.

For when a person takes pride in any worldly matter, nothing brings him to this except his belittling of the Benefactor (Hashem), his viewing the benefit as insignificant, and his lack of awareness of how quickly it can be removed from him and depart from his possession.

וַיַּחֲשֹׁב כִּי הוּא הִמְטִיב בָּהּ לְעַצְמוֹ, וְהִקְוָה אוֹתָהּ בְּכַחוֹ וּבְחֻמָּתוֹ, כַּמֶּשֶׁשׁ סִנְחָרִיב (ישעיהו י"ג:ג): "בְּכַח יְדֵי עַשִׂיתִי"; וְאָמַר נְבוּכַדְנֶצַּר (דניאל ד':כ"ז): "הֲלֹא דָא הִיא בְּבָל רַבְתָּא"; וְאָמַר פֶּרְעֶה (יחזקאל כ"ט:ג'): "לִי יְאוּרִי" וְגוֹי.

Instead, he thinks that he himself brought about this good for himself, and that he acquired it through his own strength and wisdom, just as Sanheriv said, "By the strength of my hand I have done it," and Nebuchadnezzar said, "Is this not the great Babylon [which I built]?" and Pharaoh said, "My river is my own..."

וּבְכָבֶד יָדַעְתָּ מָה שֶׁהָיָה תְּכַף לְמֵאמְרָם, מִהֲרִיסַת מְלָכוּתָם וְהַשְׁחָתַת מַמְשָׁלָתָם.

And you already know what immediately followed their boastful words—the destruction of their kingdoms and the ruin of their dominion.

אֲךָ הַגָּאֹנָה שֶׁבַּמַּעֲלֹת הָרוּחָנִיּוֹת מִתְחַלֶּקֶת לְשְׁנֵי חֲלָקִים: אֶחָד מֵהֶם מְגַנָּה, וְהַשְׁנִי מְשַׁבַּח.

However, pride regarding spiritual qualities is divided into two categories: one of them is reprehensible, and the second is praiseworthy.

הַמְגַנָּה: שִׁיתִּיגָאָה הָאָדָם בְּחֻמָּתוֹ וְהַצְדִּיק בְּמַעֲשָׁהוּ, וְגוֹרֵם זֶה שִׁירְבָה בְּעֵינָיו, וַיִּסְפִּיק אֲצִלּוֹ מָה שֶׁקָּדַם לוֹ מֵהֶם, וְלַחֲשֹׁב שֶׁדִּי לוֹ בָּמָה שִׁיָּצָא לוֹ מִן הַשֵּׁם הַטּוֹב וְהַשְׁבַּח אֲצֵל בְּנֵי אָדָם, וְלִבְזוֹת בְּנֵי אָדָם, וְלִגְעַל אוֹתָם, וְלִסְפֹּר בְּגִנוּתָם, וְלִהְיוֹת חֲכָמִי דוֹרוֹ וְגִדּוּלֵיהֶם פְּחוּתִים בְּעֵינָיו, וְלִהְתַּפָּאֵר בְּקַצּוֹר חֲבָרָיו וְסִכְלוֹתָם.

The reprehensible kind is when a person prides himself on his wisdom or a righteous person on his good deeds, which causes his achievements to seem grand in his own eyes, so that he is satisfied with what he has already accomplished, thinking it is enough for him to have acquired a good reputation and praise among people; this leads him to look down on others, despise them, speak of their shortcomings, view the Torah scholars and leaders of his generation as inferior, and glorify himself through the shortcomings and foolishness of his peers.

וְזֶה הוּא הַנִּקְרָא אֲצֵל רז"ל: "מִתְכַּבֵּד בְּקִלּוֹן חֲבֵרוֹ"; וּבָזָה לֹא יִהְיֶה נִכְנָע וְלֹא עָנִיו.

This is what our Sages, of blessed memory, call "gaining honor through the disgrace of one's fellow," and with such an attitude, a person will never become submissive or humble.

וְהַמְשַׁבַּח: כְּשִׁמְתִּיגָאָה הַחֶכֶם בְּחֻמָּתוֹ וְהַצְדִּיק בְּמַעֲשָׁהוּ הוֹדָאָה לְגִדְל טוֹבַת הַבוֹרֵא עָלָיו בָּהֶם, וְשִׁמְחָה בְּעִבּוּרָם, וַיִּגְרֵם לוֹ לְהוֹסִיף וְלִהְיוֹת מְשִׁיבָה בָּהֶם, וְלִהְיוֹת לְקֹרְבָנוֹ, וְלִשְׂמֹחַ בְּחֲבָרָיו, וְלִחוּס עַל כְּבוֹדָם, וְלִכְסוֹת סִכְלוֹתָם, וְלִדְבֹר בְּשִׁבְחָם, וְלֵאמֹר אוֹתָם, וְלִהְיוֹת לִי פֶּעַדָם, וְלִהְיוֹת בְּכָבוֹדָם.

And the praiseworthy kind is when the wise man takes pride in his wisdom or the righteous man in his good deeds as an expression of gratitude for the greatness of the Creator's goodness toward him in granting them, and out of joy in performing them; this motivates him to increase and exert himself further in them, to be humble toward his associates, to rejoice in his colleagues, to protect their dignity, to cover up their shortcomings, to speak in their praise, to love them, to defend them, and to be careful of their honor.

NOTE This "praiseworthy pride" is not arrogance, but rather a deep, joyful appreciation of the spiritual gifts Hashem has bestowed upon him, which humbles him and drives him to do even more.

וַיִּמְעָטוּ בְּעֵינָיו כָּל מַעֲשָׂיו הַטּוֹבִים, תָּמִיד טוֹרַח לְהִרְבּוֹת מֵהֶם, נִכְנָע בְּעֶבֶר חֲלִישׁוֹתוֹ מִהֲשִׁיג מְאֹדָיו בָּהֶם, מִשְׁפִּיל עֲצָמוֹ לְמִי שֶׁמְקַנָּה תוֹסֶפֶת עַל יָדָיו, מוֹדָה לֵאלֹהִים עַל מָה שֶׁחֲנָנוּ מִן הַמַּעֲלּוֹת, וּמִשְׁבַּח אוֹתוֹ עַל אֲשֶׁר הִפִּיקוֹ לְקִנּוֹת הַחֲמוּדוֹת.

All of his good deeds will seem few in his eyes, he will constantly toil to increase them, he will feel humbled because of his shortcomings in reaching his spiritual aspirations, he will lower himself before anyone from whom he hopes to gain spiritual growth, he will thank G-d for the virtues He has graciously granted him, and he will praise Him for helping him acquire these precious qualities.

וְזֹאת הַגָּאוֹה אֵינָה מַזְקָת לְכִנְיָעָה וְלֹא מְרַחֶקֶת אוֹתָהּ, וּבִכְמוֹהָ אָמַר הַכָּתוּב (דה"ב יז): "וַיִּגְבָּה לְבוֹ בְּדַרְכֵי ה'".

This kind of pride does not damage submission, nor does it drive it away; it is regarding this that the verse states of King Yehoshafat, "And his heart was uplifted in the ways of Hashem."

אך היא מסייעת אותה ומוסיפה בה, כמ"ש (משלי כב): "עָקֹב עֲנָוָה יִרְאֵת ה'".

Rather, it actually aids submission and increases it, as the verse says, "On the heels of humility comes the fear of Hashem."

WHAT TO TAKE FROM IT

The chapter explains that pride in physical matters stems from a lack of emunah, where a person forgets Hashem and attributes success to his own strength, leading to swift downfall. When it comes to spiritual pride, the author warns against the reprehensible type where a person becomes self-satisfied with his wisdom or mitzvos, looks down on others, and seeks honor at their expense. Conversely, the praiseworthy form of spiritual pride is actually an expression of deep gratitude to Hashem for enabling one's good deeds; this uplifted heart, as seen by King Yehoshafat, does not contradict submission but rather drives a person to increase his avodah, remain humble before others, and constantly strive for greater closeness to the Creator.

לְמַעֲשֶׂה WHAT TO TAKE HOME

The Chovos HaLevavos teaches us a profound secret about the human heart: not all pride is the same. While physical pride completely drives out our connection to Hashem, there is a type of spiritual pride that is actually praiseworthy. This is not the ugly pride of looking down on others or feeling satisfied with our spiritual standing. Rather, it is the holy joy of realizing that Hashem has gifted us with the ability to do a mitzvah or learn His Torah. When we feel uplifted by our spiritual achievements, it must immediately transform into deep gratitude to Hashem, which naturally makes us more humble, more loving toward our fellow Jews, and hungrier to do even more for Heaven.

True spiritual elevation never makes a person feel superior to others; instead, it makes them feel incredibly indebted to Hashem. When you feel a sense of joy and accomplishment in your learning or your davenen, do not suppress it out of a false sense of humility. Use that uplifted heart to praise the Creator for choosing you to serve Him, and let that joy drive you to treat every other Yid with the utmost respect and love.

Today, when you do a mitzvah or learn something new, take a moment to feel the joy of 'and his heart was uplifted in the ways of Hashem.' Immediately turn that feeling into a whisper of thanks: 'Ribono shel Olam, thank You for giving me the zechus to serve You.'

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Text

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