

חובות הלבבות • שער הפניעה • פרק עשירי

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

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In this chapter, the Chovos HaLevavos brings us to the beautiful, practical fruits of our avodah in acquiring kniyah (submission and humility). The author, zechuso yagen aleinu, lays out six profound benefits that a person gains when he truly humbles himself before Hashem and his fellow Yid. These benefits are split evenly: three of them sweeten a person's life in this world, and three of them prepare his neshama for the next world.

We will learn how a humble Yid finds true peace of mind, accepts Hashem's decrees with love, and finds favor in the eyes of all who meet him. The chapter also brings down beautiful, practical guidance from our Sages and a wise man on how to look at every single person we encounter—whether they are older, younger, wealthier, or poorer—and find a way to see them as greater than ourselves, helping us to live with genuine yiras Shamayim.

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

אבל תועלת הפניעה בעניני העולם הזה והעולם הבא הם ששה דברים: ג' מהם בעניני העוה"ז, ושלושה מהם בעניני העולם הבא.

Now, the benefits of submission in the matters of this world and the World to Come consist of six things: three of them pertain to the affairs of this world, and three of them pertain to the affairs of the World to Come.

ואשר בעניני העוה"ז:

As for those that pertain to the affairs of this world:

אחד מהם, שישמח בחלקו; כי מי שנכנסה בו הגאווה והגדלה, אין העולם וכל אשר בו מספיק לו לכלולתו, לגבה לבו ובזותו מה שהגיע לחלקו ממנו.

The first of them is that he will rejoice in his portion; for one who has been entered by pride and self-importance, the entire world and everything in it is not enough to sustain him, because of his haughty heart and his looking down with contempt on whatever has come to be his allotted portion.

וכאשר יהיה נכנע, אין לנפשו אצלו שום מעלה, ומה שמזדמן לו מן העולם הוא מסתפק בו למזונותיו ולספקו; וזה יביאהו למנוחת נפשו ומעוט פחדו.

But when a person is submissive, he does not attribute any special merit to himself, and whatever happens to come his way from this world, he is satisfied with it for his food and sustenance; and this brings him peace of mind and minimizes his worry.

יאכל מה שיזדמן לו, וילבש מה שימצא, וישן באשר ימצא, והמעט מן העולם מספיק לו עם פניעתו.

He will eat whatever is available, wear whatever he can find, and sleep wherever he can find a place, and even a tiny bit of this world is enough for him when coupled with his submission.

והכת האחרת הפך זה: ואם יגיעו למה שיגיעו, אין מספיק להם; והגאה כלו לא ימלא מחסורו עם גבה לבו וגאותו, כמו שאמר החכם: "צדיק אכל לשבע נפשו, ובטן רשעים תחסר".

But the other group is the exact opposite of this: even if they attain whatever they attain, it is never enough for them; and the proud man, even with the whole world, cannot satisfy his lack because of his haughty heart and arrogance, as the wise king said: "The righteous man eats to satisfy his soul, but the stomach of the wicked always feels want."

והשני, כי הנכנע סובל בעת ביאת הפגעים אליו והתהפכות הענינים עליו, בעבור שפלותו ונמיכות רוחו.

The second benefit is that the submissive person patiently bears it when troubles befall him and when his circumstances turn upside down, because of his lowliness and humble spirit.

והגאה, פחדו גדול וסבלו מעט בעת ביאת הפגעים עליו, מפני גבה נפשו ורום לבו ומעוט רצונו בעניניו, כמו שנאמר במי שהיה על הדרך הזה: "איך נפלת משמים הילל בן שחר" וגו'.

But for the proud man, his fear is immense and his endurance is minimal when troubles strike him, because of his inflated soul, his haughty heart, and his lack of acceptance of his situation, as was said regarding one who went on this path: "How have you fallen from heaven, morning star..."

והשלישי, כי הנכנע יהיה מוצא חן יותר בעיני בני אדם, ואהוב להם, וקרוב לדעתם ולהתנהג במנהגם.

The third benefit is that the submissive person finds much more favor in the eyes of other people; he is beloved by them, and he easily gets along with them and accommodates himself to their ways.

וכבר נאמר על אחד המלכים שהיה ממהר בהליכתו כשהיה הולך, ושאלו אותו על עלת הדבר, ואמר: "לפי שהוא יותר רחוק מדרך הגאווה, ויותר ממהר להשלמת החפץ".

It was already told of a certain king who used to walk with very quick steps; when they asked him the reason for this, he replied: "Because it keeps me furthest from the path of pride, and it gets me more quickly to fulfilling my purpose."

ושאלו אחד מן החכמים: "במה היית אדון לכל בני דורך?"

And they asked one of the Sages: "How did you merit to become the leader over all the people of your generation?"

אמר: "מפני שלא פגעת אחד מהם שלא ראיתי לו מעלה יתרה עלי.

He replied: "Because I never encountered a single one of them in whom I did not see some quality that made him greater than me.

כי אם היה יותר חכם ממני, הייתי אומר: הוא ירא אלהים יותר ממני ליתרון חכמתו על חכמתי.

For if he was wiser than me, I would say: 'He must have more fear of Elokim than I do, because of the superiority of his wisdom over my wisdom.'

ואם קטן ממני בחכמה, אומר: כי חשבונו יהיה קל מחשבוני ביום הדין, מפני שאני עובר במזיד והוא עובר בשוגג.

And if he was lesser than me in wisdom, I would say: 'His accounting on the Day of Judgment will be lighter than my accounting, because my transgressions are committed knowingly, whereas his are committed in error.'

ואם יהיה גדול ממני בימים, אומר: כי זכויותיו רבות מזכויותי, מפני שקדמני לעולם.

And if he was older than me in years, I would say: 'His merits must be more numerous than my merits, because he preceded me into the world.'

ואם יהיה קטן ממני, אומר: כי עונותיו מעטים מעונותי.

And if he was younger than me, I would say: 'His sins are fewer than my sins.'

ואם יהיה כמוני בימים ובחכמה, אומר: אולי לבו לאלהים טוב מלבי, לפי שאני יודע במה שקדם לי מן העונות ואינני יודע מה שהיה ממנו.

And if he was equal to me in years and in wisdom, I would say: 'Perhaps his heart is better directed toward Elokim than my heart, for I know the sins I have committed in the past, but I do not know what sins he has committed.'

ואם יהיה יותר עשיר ממני, אומר: כי מצאה ידו בעשרו לעבד הבורא ולעשות צדקות והעניק לעניים יותר ממני.

And if he was wealthier than me, I would say: 'With his wealth, he has the means to serve the Creator, give tzedakah, and support the poor far more than I can.'

ואם יהיה דל יותר ממני, אומר: כי הוא דכא ושפל רוח יותר ממני בעבור דלותו, והוא טוב ממני; ולא זיתי לכבדם כלם ולהכנע להם."

And if he was poorer than me, I would say: 'He is surely more broken and humble in spirit than I am because of his poverty, and so he is better than me.' Thus, I never ceased to honor all of them and humble myself before them."

וכן אמרו רז"ל: "והוי דן את כל האדם לכהן זכות", "והוי מקביל את כל האדם בספר פנים יפות".

And so our Sages of blessed memory said: "Judge every person favorably," and "Receive every person with a cheerful countenance."

ואמרו: "מאד מאד הוי שפל רוח".

And they said: "Be exceedingly, exceedingly humble of spirit."

ואמרו: "יהי אדם רך כקנה ואל יהי קשה כארו; לפיכך זכה קנה לחתך ממנו קלמוס לכתב בו ס"ת, תפלין ומזוזות".

And they said: "A person should always be soft like a reed and not stiff like a cedar; therefore, the reed merited that a quill is cut from it to write Sifrei Torah, Tefillin, and Mezuzos."

והרביעי, שהוא בעניני העוה"ב: כי הנכנע קרוב להשיג החכמה, בהמשכו אחרי החכמים והכנעו להם והליכתו אליהם, כמו שנאמר: "הולך את חכמים יחכם".

The fourth benefit, which is in the matters of the World to Come, is that the submissive person is close to acquiring wisdom, because he draws close to the Sages, humbles himself before them, and goes to learn from them, as it is written: "He who walks with the wise will become wise."

ואמרו רז"ל: "יהי ביתך בית ועד לחכמים, והוי מתאבק בעפר רגליהם. והוי שותה את דברייהם".

And our Sages of blessed memory said: "Let your house be a meeting place for the Sages, sit in the dust of their feet, and drink in their words thirstily."

וְהָאֱלֹהִים יַעֲזֹר לוֹ עַל הַחֲכָמָה, כְּמוֹ שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "יְדַרְךָ עֲנוּיִם בְּמִשְׁפָּט, וְיִלְמַד עֲנוּיִם דְּרָכֹו".

And Elokim will help him to attain wisdom, as it is written: "He guides the humble in justice, and He teaches the humble His way."

וּמִי שֶׁהוּא גִבּוֹה לֵב, לֹא תִתְקַיֵּם בְּיָדוֹ חֲכָמָה עַל אֲמַתָּתָהּ, וְלֹא יִגִּיעַ אֶל תְּכֵלֶת יְדִיעָה בְּרוּרָה, מִפְּנֵי שֶׁמִּתְנַשֵּׂא מַלְכֵת אֶל אֲנָשֵׁי הַחֲכָמָה וְהַתּוֹרָה, כְּמוֹ שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "רָשָׁע כְּגִבּוֹה אָפֹו בֵּל יִדְרֹשׁ" וְגו'.

But as for one who is haughty of heart, true wisdom will not endure in his hand, and he will never reach the goal of clear knowledge, because he is too proud to go to the people of wisdom and Torah, as it is written: "The wicked, in his haughtiness, does not seek..."

וְהַחֲמִישִׁי, כִּי הַנִּכְנָע מְמַהֵר לַמַּעֲשֵׂה הָעֲבוּדָה בַּחֲרִיצוֹת וּבְרִיזוֹת, אֵינָנו מִתְגַּאֲה בָהֶם, וְלֹא בּוֹזֵה שׁוּם דְּבָר מֵהֶם, כְּמוֹ שֶׁאֲמָרוּ רַז"ל: "הָיוּ זֹהִיר בְּמִצְוָה קְלָה כְּבַחֲמוּרָה".

The fifth benefit is that the submissive person hastens to perform the service of Hashem with diligence and alacrity; he does not become arrogant because of his deeds, nor does he look down on any of them, as our Sages of blessed memory said: "Be as careful with a light mitzvah as with a serious one."

וְהַמִּתְגַּאֲה בְּעֲצָמוֹ מִתְאַחֵר מַעֲשׂוֹת הָעֲבוּדָה לְרוּם לִבּוֹ וּלְגִסּוֹת רוּחוֹ, וְאֵינָנו מְרַגִּישׁ עַד אֲשֶׁר יִפֹּל וַיִּשְׁפָּל, כְּמוֹ שֶׁאֲמָר: "אָמַר לַמֶּלֶךְ וּלְגִבְיָהּ הַשְּׁפִילוּ שִׁבּוֹ".

But the one who is proud of himself delays in performing the service because of his haughty heart and arrogance, and he does not realize this until he falls and is brought low, as the prophet said: "Say to the king and to the queen mother: Sit in a lowly place."

וְאָמַר: "שֵׁשׁ הֵנָּה שִׁנְאָהּ", וְאָמַר: "עֵינַיִם רָמוֹת" וְגו'.

And it says: "These six things Hashem hates," and it lists: "Haughty eyes..."

וְהַשִּׁשִּׁי, כִּי מַעֲשֵׂה הַנִּכְנָע מְקַבֵּל אֶצֶל הָאֱלֹהִים, כְּמוֹ שֶׁאֲמָר: "זִבְחֵי אֱלֹהִים רוּחַ נִשְׁבָּרָה".

The sixth benefit is that the deeds of the submissive person are accepted by Elokim, as it is written: "The sacrifices of Elokim are a broken spirit."

וְעוֹנוֹ נִמְחָל מִהֶרָה כִּשְׁהוּא שָׁב מִמֶּנּוּ, כַּמִּשָּׁנָה: "וּמִוֹדָה וְעוֹזֵב יִרְחָם".

And his sin is quickly forgiven when he repents from it, as it is written: "He who confesses and abandons them will find mercy."

וְנֶאֱמַר: "כִּי הִשְׁפִּילוּ וַתֵּאֱמַר גְּנוּה, וְשָׁח עֵינַיִם יוֹשַׁע".

And it is written: "When they cast down, you will say, 'There is lifting up'; and He will save the humble person."

וְאַלֶּה עֲשֶׂרֶת שְׂרָשֵׁי הַכִּנְיָעָה, יִתְבָּאֵר לָךְ מֵהֶם, אַחֲרֵי שֶׁאֵר מַעֲלֹת הַמִּדָּה הַחֲשׂוּבָה הַזֹּאת הָעֲלִיּוֹנָה הָרָמָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִכְרַתִּין בְּשַׁעַר הַזֶּה.

From these ten roots of submission, my brother, the remaining qualities of this precious, lofty, and exalted trait—which I have not explicitly mentioned in this gate—will become clear to you.

וְזָכֹר מָה שֶׁהֵעִירוּתִידָה עָלָיו מֵהֶם, וְשִׁמְנוּ נֶגֶד עֵינֶיךָ, וְחָשַׁב בּוֹ תָמִיד, וְהִשְׁתַּדֵּל לְקַנּוּתוֹ, וּפְקֻדָּהּ עִם נִפְשָׁךְ וּמִדּוּתֶיךָ תָּדִיר.

Remember what I have awakened you to regarding them, place it before your eyes, think about it constantly, strive to acquire it, and examine your soul and your character traits with it regularly.

וְהַעֲזֹר בְּאֱלֹהִים עָלָיו, וְשָׁאַל אוֹתוֹ מִמֶּנּוּ לְהִתְקַרֵּב אֵלָיו וּלְהִגִּיעַ לְרָצוֹנוֹ; אוֹלֵי יִישְׁרָךְ לוֹ וַיְכִין לְךָ הַדֶּרֶךְ אֵלָיו, כְּמוֹ שְׁמִתְפַּלְלִים הַחֲסִידִים אַחֵר תְּפִלָּתָם: "אֱלֹהֵי, נִצֵּר לְשׁוֹנֵי מֶרַע וְשִׁפְתֵי מְדַבֵּר מִרְמָה, וְלִמְקַלְלֵי נַפְשֵׁי תַדָּם, וְנַפְשִׁי כְּעָפָר לְכָל תְּהִיָּה".

Seek the help of Elokim to achieve it, and ask Him for it so that you may draw close to Him and attain His favor; perhaps He will guide you straight to it and prepare the path to Him for you, just as the pious pray at the conclusion of their prayers: "My G-d, guard my tongue from evil and my lips from speaking deceit, and let my soul be silent to those who curse me, and let my soul be like dust to all."

וְהִזְהַר מִהֲרָהוּר לִבְךָ וּפְתוּיֵי הַיֵּצֵר לְךָ, בְּמָה שְׁיִבִּיאָךְ אֵלָיו מִהַגְבָּהּ וְהַגָּאוֹה וְהַגָּאוֹן וּבִקְשַׁת הַשְׂרָרָה וְהַגָּדְלָה וְהַמְמָשָׁלָה.

And be on guard against the thoughts of your heart and the enticements of the yetzer hara, which would lead you to haughtiness, pride, arrogance, and the pursuit of authority, self-aggrandizement, and power.

וּכְבֹּר הַזֶּהִיר אֶפְנֵי הַדֶּרֶךְ הַשְּׁוֶה לְאָדָם בְּעוֹלָם בְּאֶמְרוֹ: "שְׁתִּים שְׁאֵלָתִי מֵאַתָּה" וְגו', "שָׂוֵא וּדְבַר כָּזָב הִרְחַק מִמֶּנִּי" וְגו'.

The wise king already cautioned us regarding the proper, balanced path for a person in this world when he said: "Two things I have asked of You... keep falsehood and lies far from me..."

וְאָמְרוֹ: "פֶּן אֶשְׁבַּע וְכַחֲשֵׁתִי" וְגו', "וּפֶן אֲוַרֵשׁ וְגִנְבֹתִי".

And his saying: "Lest I be full and deny You... or lest I be poor and steal."

הַקִּיצָה, אַחֵי, וְאַל תִּתְּעַלֵּם לְרַפָּא מְדוּהַ הַגָּאוֹה מִנִּפְשָׁךְ וּמִמִּדּוּתֶיךָ בְּרַפּוּאוֹת אֲשֶׁר הוֹרִיתִיךָ.

Awaken, my brother, and do not neglect to heal the disease of pride from your soul and your character traits with the remedies that I have shown you.

וְאַל יִמְנָעַךְ מִזֶּה מָה שֶׁתִּרְאֶה עָלָיו הַמוֹן בְּנֵי אָדָם מִהִתְעַלֵּם לְרַפָּא נַפְשׁוֹתָם מִן הַמְדוּהַ, וְתֹאמַר: "יִמְצָאֵנִי מָה שִׁימְצָאֵם".

Do not let yourself be held back from this by seeing the masses of people neglecting to heal their souls of this disease, causing you to say: "Whatever happens to them will happen to me."

כִּי הָעוֹר, כְּשִׁיזְדַּמְנוּ לוֹ הַכְּחָלִים הַמוֹעִילִים שְׂיוּכָל לְהִרְפָּא בָהֶם כְּשֶׁהוּא מִתְּעַסֵּק בָהֶם, אֵין מִן הַזְרִיזוֹת שִׁיתְאַחֵר מִזֶּה וְיֹאמַר: "יִמְצָאֵנִי מָה שִׁימְצָא חֲבֵרֵי הָעוֹרִים".

For if a blind man is provided with effective eye-salves that can cure him if he applies them, it would not be wise for him to delay and say: "Whatever happens to my fellow blind men will happen to me."

וְאִלּוּ הָיָה אֶחָד מֵהֶם שׁוֹמֵעַ אוֹתוֹ אוֹמֵר הַמְּאָמֵר הַזֶּה, הָיָה לוֹעֵג לְמֹאמְרוֹ וּמַסְכִּיל עֲצָתוֹ.

If anyone were to hear him say such a thing, they would mock his words and consider his reasoning foolish.

וּכְפִי זֶה, עֵין לְנַפְשִׁי, וְהַשְׁתַּדֵּל לָהּ בְּכָל כֹּחַ, וְאַל תִּתְעַלֵּם מִמָּה שִׁיוַעֲלֶיךָ בַּעוֹה"ז וּבַעוֹה"ב, פֶּן תָּמוּת מִבְּלִי הַשְׂגַּת מְאוֹיֶיהָ מִן הַמַּעֲלוֹת הַחֲמוּדוֹת אֲשֶׁר בִּיכָלְתָּהּ לְהַשִּׁיג, כְּמוֹ שֶׁאָמַר הַחֶכֶם: "תֵּאוֹת עֲצִל תִּמְיֹתָנוּ".

Therefore, look out for your own soul, strive for it with all your strength, and do not neglect what will benefit you in this world and the World to Come, lest you die without attaining your desire for those precious spiritual heights which were well within your power to reach, as the wise king said: "The desire of the lazy man kills him."

וְאָמַר: "עַל שְׂדֵה אִישׁ עֲצִל עֲבַרְתִּי, וְעַל כָּרֶם אָדָם חֲסֵר לֵב" וְשָׁאָר הָעֲנִין.

And he said: "I passed by the field of a lazy man, and by the vineyard of a man lacking understanding..." and the rest of the passage.

וְהָאֱלֹהִים יוֹרְנוּ וְאוֹתָהּ דֶּרֶךְ עֲבוּדָתוֹ, בְּרַחֲמָיו וּבְחַסְדָּיו, אָמֵן.

May Elokim guide us and you on the path of His service, in His mercy and His kindness, Amen.

נִשְׁלֵם שַׁעַר הַשְּׁשִׁי. בַּה' תִּתְהַלֵּל נַפְשִׁי.

Completed is the Sixth Gate. In Hashem does my soul glory.

WHAT TO TAKE FROM IT

The chapter details the six benefits of submission, starting with three for this world: first, being happy with one's portion and avoiding the constant, painful lack felt by the arrogant; second, having the strength to bear life's trials with a quiet spirit; and third, finding favor and love in the eyes of others by judging everyone favorably and remaining flexible like a reed. For the next world, the author explains that the humble person is far closer to attaining true Torah wisdom because he eagerly sits at the feet of the Sages, he hastens to perform all mitzvos with zeal without looking down on any 'light' precept, and his avodah and teshuvah are deeply beloved and accepted by Hashem, who never despises a broken and crushed heart.

The Chovos HaLevavos reveals a beautiful secret about the middah of kniyah, true humility: it is the ultimate key to menuchas hanefesh, peace of mind in this world. When a person is filled with pride, nothing in the world is ever enough for him. He is constantly anxious, looking down at what he has, and always wanting more. But the humble Yid is happy with his portion. He doesn't feel he is owed anything, so whatever Hashem sends him is received with pure joy and gratitude. He eats what is available, wears what he finds, and sleeps peacefully, free from the heavy burden of keeping up appearances.

This humility also transforms how we look at every single person we meet. The author shares the golden advice of the wise man who became the leader of his generation simply by finding a way to see every other person as greater than himself. If someone was older, he assumed they had more mitzvos; if younger, fewer sins; if wealthier, more tzedakah; if poorer, a more refined and humble spirit. This is not just a nice thought; it is a practical avodah that softens our hearts, makes us beloved to others, and allows us to judge everyone favorably.

Today, catch yourself when you start to feel demanding or dissatisfied with your situation or with others. Stop and say to yourself: "I am in Hashem's hands, and whatever He gave me today is exactly what I need." When you speak to someone today, actively look for one specific way in which they are better or more meritorious than you, and treat them with the respect they deserve.