

חובות הלבבות • שער הפרישות • פרק ראשון

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

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In Shaar HaPerishus, Chapter One, Rabbeinu Bachya begins by laying the groundwork for understanding what *perishus* — abstinence — truly means. He explains that it's a concept with many layers, often misunderstood, and he's going to reveal its deeper purpose. The chapter will differentiate between two main categories of abstinence: a general form that applies to all people for their physical and worldly well-being, and a more specific form that applies to *Bnei Torah* for the benefit of their *neshamos* in *Olam Haba*.

Rabbeinu Bachya then delves into the fundamental need for this general abstinence. He connects it back to the purpose of creation, explaining that Hashem placed the soul in a physical body to test it and refine it, so it can reach the level of the holy angels. He'll show us how Hashem implanted desires within us for food, drink, and procreation, which are necessary for our existence, but these very desires, if unchecked, can lead to our detriment. Therefore, a measure of *perishus* is essential to maintain balance and order in our lives.

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

אבל מהות הפרישות הכוללת וצורך אנשי העוה"ז אליה, אומר בתשובת השאלה הזאת כי הפרישות שם תחתיו ענינים.

Regarding the essence of general abstinence and why people in this world need it, I will answer this question by explaining that the term "perishus" (abstinence) encompasses many different concepts.

והשם כנוי מגלה והענין סוד מסתור, וכאשר יסירו אדירתו (ס"א אדמתו) ויתירו חותמו, יראה מסתור ענינו ותגלה מגמתו.

The name itself is a revealed designation, but the true concept is a hidden secret; when its covering is removed and its seal is broken, its hidden meaning will become apparent, and its purpose will be revealed.

וגדר הפרישות בלשון סתם: חסימת תאות הנפש והמנע מן הדבר הנפרש ממנו עם היכלת עליו והזדמנותו, לעלה המחיצת זה; ונאמר: הפורש מי שיכול והניח.

The general definition of perishus in common language is the curbing of the soul's desires and refraining from something one has the ability and opportunity to do, for a reason that necessitates it; we say, "a poreish (abstainer) is one who could have done it, but held back."

והעלה המחיצת חסימת תאות הנפש מתחלת לשני חלקים.

The reason that necessitates curbing the soul's desires is divided into two categories.

אחד מהם כולל האדם והרבה מבעלי חיים.

One of them includes mankind and many other living creatures.

והשני מיוחד באנשי התורה מן המדברים.

And the second is specific to the Torah-observant among mankind.

והפרישות הכוללת הוא הנהוג בה לתקנת גופינו והסדרת עניננו, כמו הנהגת המלכים בדת המדינות, והנהגת הרופאים לבריאם ולחולים, והנהגת כל איש שכל את נפשו בחסימת תאוותו מן המאכל והמשתה והמשגל והמלבוש והדבור ושאר תנועותיו ואפני תענוגיו.

General perishus is that which is practiced for the welfare of our bodies and the proper ordering of our worldly affairs, such as the conduct of kings in establishing state laws, the regimen prescribed by doctors for the healthy and the sick, and the conduct of every intelligent person in curbing his desires for food, drink, marital relations, clothing, speech, and his other activities and pleasures.

והפרישות המיוחדת היא שהורתה עליה התורה והשכל לתקנת נפשותינו לעולם הבא, כאשר אבאר במה שאני עתיד לדבר בעזרת האל יתברך.

The specific perishus is that which the Torah and intellect teach for the betterment of our souls in the World to Come, as I will explain in what I am yet to discuss, with Hashem's help.

אך אפני הצרך אל הפרישות הכוללת הוא בעבור מה שהקדמנו בשער השלישי מן הספר הזה: כי חפץ הבורא יתעלה בבריאית מין האדם היה ליסר הנפש ולנסותה בעוה"ז בעבור שתזדכך ותהיה בתכונת המלאכים הקדושים, כמ"ש (זכריה ג) אם בדרכי תלך וגו' ונתתי לך מהלכים בין העמדים האלה.

However, the need for general perishus stems from what we already introduced in the third gate of this book: that the desire of the Creator, may He be exalted, in creating mankind was to refine the soul and test it in this world, so that it would become purified and attain the state of the holy angels, as it is written (Zechariah 3:7), "If you walk in My ways, etc., and I will give you a place to walk among these who stand."

וחיבה החכמה נסות הנפש בגופות עפריות מקבלות הגדול והתוספת במצוה המזונות הראויים להם, והרכיב הבורא יתברך בנפשות האנושיות כח תאוה תכספנה בו למזון המוכן להם בעוה"ז להעמידו ולתקנו כל ימי חבורו.

Divine wisdom necessitated testing the soul within earthly bodies that can grow and increase through the consumption of suitable foods; and the Creator, blessed be He, implanted in human souls a power of desire, through which they long for the food prepared for them in this world, to sustain and maintain them throughout the days of their connection to the body.

והרכיב בהן עוד כח אחר תכספנה בו למשגל להיות מן האיש תמורתו בעולם, ונתן הבורא יתברך לאדם שחר עליהם התענוג בהם.

He also implanted in them another power, through which they long for marital relations, so that a person can have a replacement in the world; and the Creator, blessed be He, gave man a reward for these functions: the pleasure derived from them.

והפקיד עליו היצר להניע אותו אל המאכל והמשתה והמשגל ואל כל התענוגים והמנוחות אשר בהם תקנת גופו, כמו שאמר (קהלת ג:י"א) גם את העלם נתן בלבם וגו'.

And He appointed over him the yetzer hara to motivate him towards food, drink, marital relations, and all the pleasures and comforts that contribute to the welfare of his body, as it says (Koheles 3:11), "He has also set the world in their heart, etc."

וְכַאֲשֶׁר גָּבַר הַיֵּצֶר עַל הַשֶּׁכֶּל וְנִמְשְׁכָה הַנֶּפֶשׁ אַלָּיו, נִטְתָּה בְּאָדָם אֶל הָרַבּוּיִים הַמְבִיאים לְהַפְסֶדֶת עֲנִיָּנוּ וְהָרִיסֶת גּוּפוֹ.

But when the yetzer hara overpowers the intellect and the soul is drawn after it, a person inclines towards excesses that lead to the corruption of his affairs and the destruction of his body.

וְנִצְטָרָה בְּעֵבֹר זֶה לְמִדַּת הַפְּרִישׁוֹת מִן הַתַּעֲנוּגִים וְהַמְנוּחֹת, כְּדִי שִׁישְׁתּוּ עֲנִיָּנוּ וְיִהְיוּ דְבָרָיו עַל הַסֵּדֶר בְּעוֹה"ז בְּלִקְיַחַת הַמְּזוֹן, וְיִהְיֶה מְשַׁבַּח עָלָיו, כְּמוֹ שֶׁאָמַר (תהלים קיב) טוֹב אִישׁ חוֹנֵן וּמַלְוֶה יִכְלֹל דְּבָרָיו בְּמִשְׁפָּט.

Therefore, a measure of perishus from pleasures and comforts is necessary, so that his affairs may be balanced and his matters in this world, such as taking food, may be in proper order, and he will be praised for it, as it says (Tehillim 112:5), "A good man shows favor and lends; he will guide his affairs with judgment."

וּלְפִי שְׁנִצְטָרָה הַמִּין הָאָנוּשִׁי לְנֹהֵג בְּפְרִישׁוֹת אֲשֶׁר בּוֹ תִקְנָתוֹ בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה בְּקִחְתּוֹ הַצָּרָה מִמֶּנּוּ, הֵיזָה בְּדִין לְהִיּוֹת בְּעוֹלָם פְּרוּשִׁים גְּמוּרִים נִבְדָּלִים וְנִגְזָרִים מִעֲסָקֵי הָעוֹלָם, יִלְמַד מֵהֶם כָּל מִין מִמִּינֵי הָאָדָם כְּפִי צָרְכּוֹ (מִהַפְּרִישׁוֹת) וְכִרְאוֹ לְמִנְהֲגוֹ וּמִדּוּתּוֹ.

Since mankind needs to practice perishus, which brings about its welfare in this world by taking only what is necessary from it, it is fitting that there should be in the world complete ascetics, separated and cut off from worldly occupations, so that every type of person can learn from them regarding perishus, each according to his need and what is appropriate for his customs and traits.

וְאִין תִּקְנַת הָעוֹלָם שִׁיְהִיו כָּל אָנוּשֵׁי נֹהֲגִים בְּפְרִישׁוֹת כִּי זֶה מְבִיא לַעֲזִיבַת יְשׁוּבַת הָעוֹלָם וּלְהַפְסֵק הַיָּרֵעַ, וְכִבְּרָ אָמַר הַכְּתוּב (ישעיהו מ"ה:י"ח) לֹא תִהְיֶה בְּרָאָה לְשִׁבְתָּ יִצְרָה.

However, it is not for the welfare of the world that all its inhabitants should practice such perishus, because this would lead to the abandonment of civilization and the cessation of procreation, and the verse already states (Yeshayahu 45:18), "He did not create it to be a waste, but formed it to be inhabited."

כִּי הַפְּרִישׁוֹת פְּנָה מִפְּנֵי הָעוֹלָם, וְצָרָה הַמְדַּבְּרִים אֵלֶיהָ כְּצָרְכָם אֶל שְׂאֵר הַחֲכָמוֹת וְהַמְּלָאכּוֹת אֲשֶׁר יִתְיַחַד בְּכָל אַחַת מֵהֶם עִם מְבִלְתִּי עִם אֲחֵר, כְּדִי שִׁיְהֲנוּ בְּנֵי אָדָם וְתִקַּח כָּל כֶּת כְּפִי צָרְכָהּ וְהִרְאוּ לָהּ מִהֵן.

For perishus is one of the cornerstones of the world, and mankind's need for it is like their need for other sciences and trades, in which some nations excel over others, so that people may benefit, and each group takes from them according to its needs and what is suitable for it.

וְאִין תִּקְנַת הָעוֹלָם שִׁיְתְּיַחֲדוּ כָּל אָנוּשֵׁי בְּחֻכְמָה אַחַת וְלֹא בְּמִלְאכָה אַחַת, כִּי הַשְּׁלֵמַת סֵדֶר הָעוֹלָם בְּכָלָו, כְּמוֹ שֶׁאָמַר הַחֲכָם (קהלת ג':י"א) אֵת הַכֹּל עָשָׂה יָפָה בְּעֵתוֹ וְאָמַר (שם) לְכָל זְמַן.

And it is not for the welfare of the world that all its people should specialize in only one wisdom or one trade, for the completion of the world's order is through all of them, as the wise man said (Koheles 3:11), "He has made everything beautiful in its time," and he also said (ibid.), "To everything there is a season."

וְכִבְּרָ הַתְּבָאָר בְּמָה שֶׁהִקְדַּמְנוּ עֲנִין הַפְּרִישׁוֹת הַכּוֹלְלָת וְצָרָה בְּנֵי אָדָם אֵלֶיהָ לְסִדֵּר עֲנִיָּיִהֶם בְּהָ בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה:

Thus, we have already explained in our introduction the concept of general perishus and mankind's need for it, so that they may order their affairs in this world through it.

WHAT TO TAKE FROM IT

Rabbeinu Bachya opens Shaar HaPerishus by defining abstinence as bridling inner lusts for a compelling reason. He categorizes this reason into two types: general abstinence for the welfare of the body and worldly affairs, applicable to all people (like kings' laws or doctors' regimens), and specific abstinence for *Bnei Torah* for the soul's benefit in *Olam Haba*. The need for general abstinence stems from Hashem's purpose in creating man: to test the soul within a physical body, refining it to angelic levels. Hashem implanted desires for food, drink, and procreation for sustenance and continuity. However, if these inclinations overpower understanding, they lead to detriment. Thus, a measure of abstinence is necessary to balance tendencies and order worldly affairs. While some must be complete ascetics to serve as examples, universal asceticism would abandon civilization, which is contrary to Hashem's will for the world to be inhabited. Abstinence is a cornerstone of the world, like other sciences and trades, with each person taking what is necessary for their role, contributing to the general welfare.

למעשה WHAT TO TAKE HOME

The Chovos HaLevavos is teaching us a fundamental chiddush here: there are two kinds of *perishus*, two kinds of abstinence. There's the *perishus klalis*, the general kind, which is just plain common sense. Every person, even a non-Jew, even an animal, needs to control their desires for food, drink, and pleasure, otherwise they'll destroy themselves. This is just basic self-preservation, to keep the body and the world in order. But then there's the *perishus meyuchades*, the special kind, which is unique to *bnei Torah*. This is the abstinence that the Torah and *seichel* teach us for the sake of our *neshamos*, for Olam Haba. This is the real *avodah*.

What does this mean for us? It means that when we feel a pull to overindulge, whether it's in food, or sleep, or even just too much idle talk, we have to ask ourselves: which *perishus* am I practicing right now? Am I just trying to keep my body healthy and my life in order, like anyone else? Or am I trying to elevate my *neshama*, to become closer to Hashem, to refine myself for Olam Haba? The first is good, it's necessary, but it's not the ultimate goal. The second, the *perishus meyuchades*, that's where the real growth happens.

Sometimes we might think we're being *frum* by just being disciplined, by not overdoing things. But the Chovos HaLevavos is telling us that true *perishus* for a *ben Torah* goes deeper. It's not just about avoiding harm; it's about actively pursuing holiness. It's about using our ability to refrain from pleasure, not just for our physical well-being, but as a tool to purify our souls and prepare them for the World to Come, to become like the holy angels.

So today, when you feel a desire for something, take a moment to consider: am I just practicing common sense *perishus klalis*, or am I using this opportunity for *perishus meyuchades*, to elevate my *neshama*?