

חובות הלבבות • שער יחוד המעשה • פרק חמישי (1-)

(15)

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

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In this chapter, the Chovos HaLevavos introduces us to the ultimate battle of our lives: the war against the yetzer hara. The author warns us that this archenemy is not an outside force, but is deeply interwoven within our very neshama, spirit, and physical senses, constantly plotting our downfall while pretending to be a trusted friend. He explains that the yetzer hara's primary weapon is to sow doubt in our emunah and confuse our minds with false arguments.

We are urged to recognize that this internal struggle is the 'great war,' far more critical than any physical battle. The author shares a famous mashal of a pious man who reminded returning soldiers that conquering a physical enemy is only the 'small war,' whereas conquering the yetzer hara is the true, lifelong struggle that requires constant vigilance.

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

וְרָאִיתִי לְבָאֵר לָךְ מִן הָעֲנָנִים הַזֵּה דְמִיּוֹנִים, יִירוּ עַל מָה שֶׁלֹּא זָכַרְתִּי מֵהֶם, כְּדִי שִׁיזְהָרוּ מֵהֶם בְּנֵי אָדָם וְיִהְיֶה לְבָבָם שָׁלֵם לֹא לְהֹרִים; כְּמוֹ שֶׁאָמַר הַחֶכֶם (מְשָׁלִי א'): "שִׁמְעֵ חֶכֶם וְיוֹסֵף לֵקַח" וְגו'.

I have seen fit to clarify for you regarding this subject some examples which will teach you about the things I have not explicitly mentioned, so that people will be on guard against them and their hearts will be complete with Hashem, as the wise man said: "Let the wise man hear and increase understanding."

וְהוּא שֹׁאמֵר: בֶּן אָדָם, רְאֵי לָךְ לְדַעַת כִּי הַשּׁוֹנֵא הַגָּדוֹל שֶׁיֵּשׁ לָךְ בְּעוֹלָם הוּא יִצְרָה, הַנִּמְסָהּ בְּכַחוֹת נַפְשָׁהּ, וְהַמַּעֲרֵב בְּמִזְג רִיחָהּ, וְהַמְשַׁתְּתֵף עִמָּהּ בְּהִנְהִיגַת חוֹשֵׁיהָ הַגּוֹפְנִיִּים וְהַרוּחָנִיִּים, הַמוֹשֵׁל בְּסוּדוֹת (ס"א בַּמְדּוֹת) נַפְשָׁהּ וּצְפוֹן חֲבֶהּ, בַּעַל עֲצָתָהּ בְּכָל תְּנוּעוֹתֶיהָ הַנִּרְאוֹת וְהַנְסִתָּרוֹת שֶׁתִּהְיֶינָה בְּרִצּוֹנָהּ, הָאוֹרֵב לְפִתּוֹת פְּסִיעוֹתֶיהָ (ס"א לַעֲיִתוֹת פְּשִׁיעֶתָךְ); וְאַתָּה יָשֵׁן לוֹ וְהוּא עֹר לָךְ, וְאַתָּה מְתַעֵלִם מִמֶּנּוּ וְהוּא אֵינוֹ מְתַעֵלִם מִמְּךָ.

And this is what I say: O son of man, you must know that the greatest enemy you have in this world is your own yetzer hara, which is interwoven into the very powers of your soul, mixed into the makeup of your spirit, and partners with you in directing your physical and spiritual senses; he rules over the secrets of your soul and the hidden chambers of your chest, acting as your advisor in all your movements, both visible and hidden, that you wish to make, lying in wait to trip up your steps; and you are asleep to him while he is awake to you, and you ignore him while he never ignores you.

NOTE The author is describing how the yetzer hara is not an external enemy, but rather operates from within our own thoughts, feelings, and physical drives, making him incredibly dangerous.

לְבַשׁ לָהּ בְּגָדֵי הַיְדִידוּת, וְעָדָה עֲדֵי הָאֱהָבָה לָהּ, וְנִכְנַס בְּכָלֵל נְאֻמָּיָהּ וְאִנְשֵׁי עֲצָתָהּ וּסְגֻלַּת אֱהָבָיָהּ; רֵץ אֶל רְצוֹנָהּ בְּנֶרְאָה מְרִמִּיזוּתָיו וּקְרִיצוּתָיו, וְהוּא מוֹרָה אוֹתָהּ בְּחֻצּוֹ הַמְּמִיתִים לְשֶׁרֶשֶׁף מֵאֲרֵץ חַיִּים, כַּמ־שׁ הַפְּתוּב בְּמִי שֶׁעֲנִינוּ כֹּה (שם כו): "כְּמַתְּלֵהֶלֶה הֵיכָּה זָקִים חֲצִים וּמוֹת, כֵּן אִישׁ רָמָה אֶת רָעָהּ וְאָמַר הֲלֹא מִשְׁחָק אָנִי".

He has clothed himself in the garments of friendship for you, adorned himself with the jewelry of love for you, and entered the inner circle of your trusted ones, your advisors, and your dearest friends; outwardly, from his hints and gestures, he seems to run to do your will, yet he is actually shooting you with his deadly arrows to uproot you from the land of the living, as the verse says of one whose way is like this: "Like a madman who shoots firebrands, arrows, and death, so is a man who deceives his friend and says, 'Am I not only joking?'"

וּמִן הַחֹזֶק שֶׁבְּשִׁלּוּחָיו אֲשֶׁר יוֹרָה אוֹתָהּ וַיִּלְחֶם אוֹתָהּ בָּהֶם בְּמִצְפוֹן עֲנִינָהּ, שִׁשְׁתֵּדֵּל לְסַפֵּק עֲלֶיהָ אֲמִתּוּתָהּ, וּלְשַׁבֵּשׁ מָה שֶׁנִּתְבָּרַר לָהּ, וּלְעַרְבֵב אֶת נִפְשָׁהּ בְּמַחְשְׁבוֹת כְּזָבִים וְטַעֲנוֹת שְׁקָרִים; יִטְרִיד אוֹתָהּ בָּהֶם מִתּוֹעֲלוּתֶיהָ, וַיִּסַּפֵּק עֲלֶיהָ מָה שֶׁנִּתְבָּרַר לָהּ מֵאֲמוּנָתָהּ וְדַתָּהּ.

And among the strongest of his weapons that he shoots at you and fights you with in the privacy of your inner self, is that he strives to cast doubt on your truths, to distort what is clear to you, and to confuse your soul with false thoughts and deceptive arguments; with these, he distracts you from what is for your benefit, and makes you doubt what has been made clear to you of your emunah and your Torah.

וְאִם תִּהְיֶה נֹזֶהר מִמֶּנּוּ, וְתִזְמִין לוֹ שִׁלּוּחֵי שְׂכָלָהּ לְהִלָּחֵם אוֹתוֹ בָּהֶם, וְתִסָּלֵק חֻצּוֹ מֵעֲלֶיהָ, תִּנָּצֵל וְתִמָּלֵט מִמֶּנּוּ בַּעֲזַת ה'.

But if you are on guard against him, and you prepare the weapons of your intellect to fight him with, and deflect his arrows away from you, you will be saved and escape from him with the help of Hashem.

וְאִם תִּשְׁלִיחַ עֲנִינָיָהּ אֵלָיו וְתִמְשָׁךְ אַחֵר רְצוֹנוֹ, לֹא יִרְף מִמָּה עַד שִׁיאֲבֹדָהּ בְּשָׁנֵי הָעוֹלָמִים, וַיִּשְׁרֹשֶׁף מִשְׁנֵי הַמְּעוֹנִים, כַּמ־שׁ בְּסַעֲיָהּ מִסַּעֲיָיו וְאִישׁ אֶחָד מִחִיָּלָיו (שם ז): "כִּי רַבִּים חָלָלִים הִפִּילָה וְעַצְמִים כָּל הָרָקִיעַ, דִּרְכֵּי שְׂאוֹל בֵּיתָהּ" וְגו'.

But if you surrender your affairs to him and are drawn after his will, he will not let go of you until he destroys you in both worlds, and uproots you from both dwellings, as is written concerning one of his branches and a soldier of his legions: "For many are the victims she has cast down, and numerous are all her slain; her house is the way to the grave..."

עַל כֵּן, אֵל תִּטְרִידָהּ מִלְחָמַת זִוְלָתוֹ מִמְּלַחְמָתוֹ, וְקָרַב בְּלִתי קָרְבוֹ, וְהִתְרַב עִם מִי שֶׁהוּא רְחוֹק מִמָּה מִן הַתְּרַב עִם מִי שֶׁלֹּא יִפְרָד מִמָּה, וְדַחוּת מִי שֶׁלֹּא יִגִּיעַ אֵלָיָהּ כִּי אִם בְּרִשּׁוֹת מִדְּחוּת מִי שֶׁאֵינוֹ שׂוֹאֵל רִשּׁוֹת בְּהִמָּצְאוֹ עִמָּהּ.

Therefore, let no other war distract you from his war, nor any other battle from his battle; do not let the sword against a distant enemy distract you from the sword against the enemy who never leaves your side, and do not let repelling an enemy who can only reach you with Hashem's permission prevent you from repelling the enemy who needs no permission to enter, since he is already inside you.

וְאָמְרוּ עַל חֲסִיד שֶׁפָּגַע אֲנָשִׁים שָׁבִים מִמְּלַחְמַת אוֹיְבִים וְשָׁלְלוּ שָׁלַל אַחֵר מִלְחָמָה חֲזָקָה, אָמַר לָהֶם: "שִׁבְתֶּם מִן הַמְּלַחְמָה הַקְּטַנָּה שׂוֹלָלִים שָׁלַל, הִתְעַתְּדוּ לַמְּלַחְמָה הַגְּדוֹלָה!".

And they tell of a certain chasid who met people returning from a war against physical enemies, carrying spoils after a fierce battle, and he said to them: "You have returned from the minor war carrying spoils; now prepare yourselves for the major war!"

אָמְרוּ לוֹ: "וּמָה הִיא הַמִּלְחָמָה הַגְּדוֹלָה?" אָמַר לָהֶם: "מִלְחַמַּת הַיֵּצֶר וְחֵילָיו".

They asked him: "And what is the major war?" He answered them: "The war against the yetzer hara and his legions."

וּמִן הַתְּמָחָה, אַחֲדִי, כִּי כָּל אוֹיֵב שֵׁשׁ לָהּ, כְּשֶׁתִּנָּצַח אוֹתוֹ פַּעַם וּשְׁתֵּיתִים, יִרְף מִמֶּה וְלֹא יַעֲלֶה עַל לְבוֹ לְהִלָּחֵם בָּהּ, לְדַעְתּוֹ יִתְרוֹן כֹּחַ עַל כָּחוֹ, וְהוּא מִתְיָאֵשׁ מִנִּצּוּחַ אוֹתָהּ וּמִגִּבּוּר עָלֶיהָ.

And it is a wonder, my brother, that with any other enemy you have, once you defeat him once or twice, he will back off from you and it will not enter his mind to wage war against you again, because he recognizes that your strength is greater than his, and he despairs of ever defeating you or overpowering you.

אָבֵל הַיֵּצֶר, אֵין מִסְפִּיק לוֹ מִמֶּה נִצּוּחַ פַּעַם וּמָאָה פְּעָמִים, בֵּין שֶׁנִּצַּח אוֹתָהּ בֵּין שֶׁנִּצַּחְתּוּ; כִּי אִם יִנָּצַח אוֹתָהּ יְמִיתָהּ, וְאִם תִּנָּצַחְהוּ פַּעַם אַחַת יֵאָרֵב לָהּ כָּל יְמֵי לִנְצַח אוֹתָהּ, כְּמוֹ שֶׁאָרְזוּ"ל: "אַל תִּאֱמֵן בְּעֲצָמָה עַד יוֹם מוֹתָהּ".

But the yetzer hara is not satisfied with you defeating him once or even a hundred times, whether he defeated you or you defeated him; for if he defeats you, he will destroy you, and if you defeat him once, he will lie in wait for you all your days to defeat you, just as our Sages, of blessed memory, said: "Do not believe in yourself until the day of your death."

וְאֵינוּ מַקְל בְּקִטְנָה שֶׁבְּקִטְנוֹת עֲנִינָהּ לִנְצַח אוֹתָהּ בָּהּ, כְּדִי שֶׁתִּהְיֶה לוֹ מִדְּרָגָה לִנְצַח אוֹתָהּ בְּמָה שֶׁלְּמַעְלָה מִמֶּנָּה.

And he does not consider even the smallest of your minor affairs too insignificant to defeat you in, so that it may serve as a stepping stone for him to defeat you in something greater.

וְעַל כֵּן, רָאוּי לָהּ שֶׁתִּהְיֶה נֹזֶהר מִמֶּנּוּ, וְאֵל תִּמְלֹא מִמַּשְׁאֲלוֹתָיו בָּהּ מְאוּמָּה; רַק יִגְדֵּל בְּעֵינָיָהּ הַמַּעַט שֶׁבְּמַעַט מִנִּצּוּחוֹ וְהַמַּצָּעַר מִהַתְּגַבְּרוּתוֹ, כְּדִי שֶׁתִּהְיֶה לָהּ מִדְּרָגָה אֶל מָה שֶׁלְּמַעְלָה מִמֶּנּוּ.

Therefore, it is proper for you to be on guard against him, and do not fulfill any of his requests at all; rather, let even the smallest victory over him, or the slightest increase of your power over him, be great in your eyes, so that it may serve as a stepping stone for you to rise to what is even higher.

כִּי בְּמַהֲרָה תִּהְיֶה תְּשׁוּקָתוֹ אֵלָיָהּ, וְלֹא יַעֲמֵד לְפָנֶיהָ בְּעֲמֻדָּה כְּנֻגָּדוֹ, כַּמ"ש (בראשית ד':ז'): "וְאֵלָיָהּ תְּשׁוּקָתוֹ וְאַתָּה תִּמְשָׁל בּוֹ".

For his desire will quickly turn toward you, but he will not be able to stand before you when you stand firm against him, as it is written: "And to you is his desire, but you shall rule over him."

עַל כֵּן, אֵל יִבְהִילָהּ דְּבָרוֹ וְאִם עֲצָמוֹ חֵילָיו, וְאֵל יִפְחִידָהּ עֲנִינָהּ וְאִם רַבּוֹ עוֹזְרָיו; כִּי עֶקֶר כּוֹנֵנָתוֹ לְאַמֵּת הִש"ק, וּמִגִּמַּת חֶפְצוֹ לְהַעֲמִיד הַכֹּזֵב, וְכַמָּה הִיא קְרוֹבָה מִפִּלְתּוֹ וְאִבּוּדוֹ מִהֵר אִם תִּרְגִּישׁ לְחַלְשָׁתוֹ.

Therefore, do not let his words panic you even if his legions are mighty, and do not let his presence frighten you even if his helpers are many; for his main intention is only to make falsehood appear true, and his goal is to establish lies, and how close is his downfall and how swift is his destruction if you only realize his weakness.

וּכְמוֹ שֶׁסִּפֵּר עָלָיו הַחֶכֶם בְּאַמְרוֹ (קהלת ט':י"ד-ט"ו): "עִיר קְטַנָּה וְאֲנָשִׁים בָּהּ מְעַט, וּבָא אֵלָיָהּ מֶלֶךְ גָּדוֹל וְסָבַב אֶתָּהּ וּבָנָה עָלֶיהָ מְצוּדִים גְּדֹלִים. וּמָצָא בָּהּ אִישׁ מְסִכֵּן חֶכֶם".

And as the wise man described him, saying: "There was a small city with few men in it, and a great king came against it, besieged it, and built great siege-works against it. And there was found in it a poor wise man."

ספר על האדם בעיר קטנה מפני שהוא העולם הקטן, וספר על כלי גופו ומדות נפשו באנשים מעט, ומעטו אצלו כנגדו גדל לב האדם וארץ מאויו בעולם הזה וחסרון כחו והשגתו אותם.

He referred to man as a "small city" because man is called a miniature world, and he referred to the limbs of his body and the traits of his soul as "few men," which are few in comparison to the vastness of man's heart and his endless desires in this world, and his lack of strength and ability to attain them.

וספר על היצר בשר הגדול לרוב חילותיו ואנשיו וצבאותיו, ואמר "וסבב אותה" מפני שהוא מקיף כל עיני האדם בנראהו ונסתרו.

And he referred to the yetzer hara as the "great king" because of his many legions, men, and armies, and he said "and besieged it" because he encompasses all of man's affairs, both open and hidden.

ואמר "ובנה עליה מצודים גדלים" לרב הרהוריו הרעים ומחשבותיו הרעות ומקריו המגנים שמשמידל להמית את האדם בהם, כמו שאנו עתידין לבאר בעז"ה בשער הזה.

And he said "and built great siege-works against it" to refer to his many evil promptings, bad thoughts, and disgraceful situations with which he strives to destroy the man, as we will explain later in this gate with the help of Hashem.

ומה שאמר "ומצא בה איש מסכן חכם" ר"ל על השכל.

And when he said "and there was found in it a poor wise man," he was referring to the intellect.

ומה שספר עליו במסכן מפני שאנשיו ועוזריו מעטים, כמו שאמר עליו "ואדם לא זכר" ואמר "וחכמת המסכן בזויה".

And he described him as "poor" because his supporters and helpers are few, as the verse says of him: "and no man remembered..." and "the wisdom of the poor man is despised."

ועם חלשתו, כבר ספר מהירת תשוקת היצר אליו בהלחמו בו, ושהזקתו מסתלקת מעל האדם בנקלה; כי המעט מן האמת ינצח הרבה מן השקר, כאשר המעט מן האור דוחה הרבה מן החשך.

Yet despite his weakness, the verse already tells of the yetzer's eager desire to wage war against him, and how easily his power to harm is removed from the man; for a little bit of truth will defeat a great deal of falsehood, just as a little bit of light dispels a great deal of darkness.

ויש בזה הערה על מלחמות התאוות, ולעמד כנגדו היצר בהשתדלות וחריצות; כי כבר נתבררה חלשתו מעמד לפני השכל, ומהירות הנגפו לפניו, כמו שאמר הכתוב (משלי יד): "שחו רעים לפני טובים".

And in this there is an awakening to wage war against physical desires, and to stand against the yetzer hara with diligence and zeal; for his weakness in standing before the intellect has already been made clear, as well as how quickly he is defeated before it, as the verse says: "The evil bow down before the good."

וּתְחִלַּת מָה שֵׁיִסְפֵּק אוֹתָךְ בּוֹ הַיֵּצֵר, וַיִּשְׁתַּדֵּל לְבָרֵר אוֹתוֹ אֶצְלָךְ, הוּא שֶׁנִּפְשְׁךָ אֵין לָהּ קִיּוֹם מִבְּלִתִּי הַגּוֹף, וְשֶׁהִיא נִפְסָדֶת בְּהִפָּסֵד גּוּפְךָ, וְשֶׁאֵין לָהּ מִצִּיאוֹת אַחֵר הַמָּוֶת, בְּדַמְיוֹנוֹת שְׂאִינָם מִתְקִימוֹת כְּשִׁיתְבוּנָן בָּהֶם הָאָדָם; כְּדִי שֶׁתִּהְיֶה סִבָּה לְבִקְשַׁת הַהֲנָאוֹת הַכָּלוֹת וְהַתְּאוֹוֹת הָאוֹבְדוֹת, וְשֶׁתֹּאמַר כְּמוֹ שֶׁאָמַר הַפֶּתוּב עַל אֲנָשֵׁי הַדַּעַת הַזֹּאת (ישעיהו כ"ב:י"ג): "אֲכֹל וְשֵׁתוּ כִּי מָחָר נָמוּת".

And the very first thing the yetzer hara will try to make you doubt, and will strive to prove to you, is that your soul has no existence without the body, that it perishes when your body perishes, and that it has no existence after death—using imaginary arguments that do not hold up when a person actually contemplates them; he does this so that it will lead you to pursue fleeting pleasures and lost desires, and so that you will say, as the verse says of those who hold this view: "Eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."

וְאִם תִּתְיַעֵץ עִם שִׁכְלְךָ בְּזֶה, יִרְחִיק מִמֶּךָ הַדַּעַת הַזֹּאת בְּרָאיוֹת [בְּרוּרוֹת] אֲשֶׁר זָכְרוּ אוֹתָן הַקְּדָמוֹנִים, וּבְדִבְרֵי הַנְּבִיאִים עֲלֵיהֶם הַשְּׁלוֹם.

But if you consult with your intellect on this, it will distance this view from you with clear proofs mentioned by the early sages, and with the words of the Nevi'im, peace be upon them.

WHAT TO TAKE FROM IT

The chapter outlines the relentless nature of the yetzer hara, who is never satisfied with a single victory and will lie in wait until a person's final day, as the Sages warned, 'do not believe in yourself until the day of your death.' To help us understand this constant threat, the author explains the passuk in Koheles of the 'small city' besieged by a 'great king,' where the city represents man, the king is the yetzer hara with his many deceptive tactics, and the 'poor wise man' who can defeat him is the intellect. We are exhorted never to give in to even the smallest request of the yetzer hara, but rather to stand firm with our intellect and trust that with Hashem's help, the enemy's downfall is swift once his weakness is exposed.

My dear brother, we often exhaust ourselves fighting external battles—worrying about what others think, managing our public image, or stressing over worldly matters. But the Chovos HaLevavos is teaching us a profound truth: the ultimate battlefield is not out there. It is inside your own heart. The yetzer hara is not a distant enemy; he is an intimate insider who knows your every weakness, masquerading as your best friend and advisor while quietly trying to plant doubts in your emunah and drag you down.

Do not be fooled when you win a single battle and think the war is over. The Sages warn us, "Do not believe in yourself until the day of your death." The yetzer hara never retires, and he is willing to start with the tiniest, seemingly insignificant compromise just to get a foot in the door. Yet, you must never despair. The wisest of men compared the intellect to a "poor wise man" who can defeat a great king. Just as a tiny amount of physical light automatically dispels a vast amount of darkness, a small, resolute stand for the truth of Hashem's Torah will completely shatter the falsehoods of the yetzer hara.

Today, when you feel the urge to make a "small" compromise in your avodah—whether it is delaying a tefillah by a few minutes, speaking a minor piece of lashon hara, or letting a tiny doubt linger in your mind—stop and recognize the enemy's hand. Treat that small spiritual skirmish as the ultimate battle for your neshamah, stand firm, and watch how quickly his power vanishes.

Identify one small, recurring excuse the yetzer hara gives you to slacken in your mitzvos today, and consciously reject it, remembering that even a tiny victory of truth completely dispels his darkness.