

חובות הלבבות • שער יחוד המעשה • פרק חמישי (-106) (122)

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

ON THIS PAGE

In this chapter, the Chashuve author of the Chovos HaLevavos exposes the cunning tactics of the yetzer hara as he tries to derail a Yid from his avodas Hashem. When a person faces hardships, the yetzer hara tries to make him look at the success of the wicked, whispering that his suffering is only because he clings to Hashem and His mitzvos. He tries to scare the person away from doing good by exaggerating the difficulty of mitzvos—claiming that fasting will make him sick, that learning at night will ruin his health, or that giving tzedakah will lead to poverty—while making sins look incredibly sweet and pleasurable.

If the yetzer hara cannot stop the mitzvah, he tries to ruin it afterward by bringing sadness and regret over the good deeds, or by making the person feel joy after doing an aveirah. He also tries to weaken the person's Torah study, telling him to settle for basic knowledge or to focus on secular wisdom like grammar and poetry instead of deep halachic analysis. If the person still perseveres in his learning, the yetzer hara tries to trip him up with the spiritual traps of jealousy toward other talmidei chachamim or haughtiness and arrogance over his own superior understanding.

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

ובצר לה, יעביר על לבך טובת הרשעים והצלחת הכופרים, כמ"ש (איוב יב): "ישליו אהלים לשדדים
ובטחות למרגיזי אל".

And in your times of distress, the yetzer hara will bring to your mind the prosperity of the wicked and the success of the deniers, as it is written: "The tents of robbers are at peace, and those who provoke G-d are secure."

ויאמר לה: "לא נכנס עליך ההפסד הזה אלא מפני שדבקת בעבודת האלהים ובמצותיו, ואין ביכולתך
לעמד בזה מפני כבד משאו ודחק (נ"א ורוחק) תכליתו; ואם היית מסיר הענין הזה מלבך ותנוח לו
ממנו, היית שמח בעניינה כמו שאתה רואה עליו הרשעים."

He will say to you: "This loss and suffering has only come upon you because you clung to the service of Hashem and His mitzvos, and you do not have the strength to endure this because of its heavy burden and the distance of its ultimate reward; if you would only remove this matter from your heart and rest from it, you would be happy in your situation, just as you see the wicked are."

NOTE The yetzer hara tries to convince the person that their life's difficulties are a direct result of their religious devotion, suggesting that abandoning their avodah would bring them immediate peace and happiness.

הלא תראה מ"ש הכתוב (ויקרא י'): "בְּקִרְבִּי אֶקְדָּשׁ", ואמר (עמוס ג): "רַק אֶתְכֶם יִדְעָתִי וְגו' עַל כֵּן אֶפְקֹד וְגו'", והדומה לזה.

He will say: "Do you not see what the verse says: 'Through those near to Me I will be sanctified,' and it says: 'Only you have I known... therefore I will visit upon you all your iniquities,' and other similar verses?"

NOTE The yetzer hara even uses holy verses out of context to discourage the person, arguing that Hashem is extra strict with those close to Him, so being close only brings suffering.

ובשהוא רואה שאתה מסכים לעשות מאומה ממעשה העבודה, יגדיל עליה ענינו ויפחידה ממנו.

And when he sees that you resolve to perform any act of Hashem's service, he will exaggerate its difficulty in your eyes and try to frighten you away from it.

ואם יהיה מענין הצום, יאמר לה: "הזהר, כי יחליש אותך ויחליאך וימנעה מעניני עולמך ואחריתך".

If it is a matter of fasting, he will say to you: "Be careful, for this will weaken you and make you sick, and it will prevent you from attending to both your worldly affairs and your spiritual future."

ואם יהיה מענין תוספת תפלה בלילה, יעלה על לבו כי השנה טובה לה מן המזון, ושומרת בריאותה ומחזקת גופה יותר מן המאכל והמשקה.

And if it is a matter of adding extra prayers at night, he will bring to your mind the thought that sleep is better for you than food, and that it preserves your health and strengthens your body even more than eating and drinking.

ואם יהיה מעניני הצדקות, ידמה בעיניו אבדת ממנו, וישים הריש לנגד עיניו, ויזכיר דלות המסכנות והחסרון.

And if it is a matter of giving tzedakah, he will make you imagine the loss of your wealth, placing poverty right before your eyes and reminding you of the misery of destitution and lack.

וכן בכל מין ממיני המצות והחסדים, ישתדל להפחידה ולהגדיל הענין בלבו כדי שתתרחק ממנו.

And so it is with every kind of mitzvah and act of chesed; he will strive to frighten you and exaggerate the difficulty in your heart so that you will slacken your hand from it.

וכאשר תחשב לעשות עברה, יחבב לה הנאתה, וישכיחך ענשה, ויזרז אותך לעשותה ולנטות אליה.

But when you think of committing a sin, he will make its pleasure beloved to you, make you forget its punishment, and urge you to do it and incline toward it.

ואם תרגיש לזה ולדומה לו ממנו, השב עליו כי כל צער שעבר עליה במה שקדם מימיה לא נשאר ממנו בך אות, אך חלף מהרה ועבר, ושכרו עומד לה לעולם לא יתם ולא יכלה.

If you sense this or anything similar from him, answer him back: 'Of all the pain that has passed over me in my earlier days, not a single trace remains in me; it quickly passed and vanished, but its reward stands ready for me forever, never to end or perish.'

והמתענה, כשיצום ביום ויאכל בלילה, כאלו לא התענה, וישוב אליו כחו, וישאר לו שכרו שמור.

And regarding one who fasts: when he fasts by day and eats at night, it is as if he did not suffer from the fast at all, for his strength returns to him, while his reward remains safely stored away for him.

וכן הנעור בקצת הלילה, כאשר ישן ישוב לקלות גופו וכאילו לא נעור, וישאר לו גמול עמדו ושכר תפלתו לעולם.

And similarly, one who stays awake for part of the night: once he sleeps, his body returns to its light, refreshed state as if he had never stayed up, while the recompense for his standing and the reward for his prayer remain for him forever.

אבל ענין הצדקה, כבר בארתי בשער הבטחון באר היטב.

As for the matter of tzedakah, I have already explained it very well in the Gate of Trust in Hashem.

NOTE In Shaar HaBitachon, the author explains that giving tzedakah never decreases a person's decreed sustenance, so the fear of poverty is entirely an illusion of the yetzer hara.

אך ענין העברות, צריך שתשיב אל לבך ותעביר על מחשבתך חליפות הנאותיה מהרה, המתה והאסור שבהם, ותשא חרפת המגנה מהם עליך וענשה בעולם הזה ובעוה"ב.

But regarding sins, you must bring to your heart and pass through your thoughts how quickly your pleasures pass away—both the permitted and the forbidden ones—leaving you only with the disgrace of the shameful act and its punishment in this world and the World to Come.

אז יהיה היצר נגף לפניך, ותחרץ למעשה הטוב, ותרפה מכל מעשה מגנה.

Then the yetzer hara will be defeated before you, and you will be eager for good deeds and slacken from any shameful act.

וכאשר יאבד סברו ממך בפנים האלה, ועשית מה שהסכמת עליו ממעשי העבודה, שתתדל להכניס הדאגות בלבך ולהתמיד עליה היגונים, כדי שתתחרט על מה שקדם לך מן המעשה הטוב, וימנעך מן הגמול עליו ושיקבלוהו הבורא ממך.

And when his hope of enticing you in these ways is lost, and you go ahead and perform the service you resolved to do, he will then try to bring worries into your heart and make your sadness linger, so that you will regret the good deeds you did in the past, which would prevent you from receiving reward for them and prevent the Creator from accepting them from you.

NOTE Regretting a mitzvah can retroactively destroy its spiritual value, which is why the yetzer hara tries to make a person feel depressed or regretful after doing a good deed.

ואם תעשה דבר עברה, משתדל להכניס השמחה בלבך והששון במה שקדם לך, כדי שתתחזק בדבר ותחרץ עליו.

But if you commit a sin, he will strive to bring joy and gladness into your heart over what you have done, so that you will become entrenched in it and eager to repeat it.

ואם תרגיש לתרמיותיו ותשים לבך למיני מצודותיו, תהיה נזהר בהם ותעזר באלהים להנצל מהם; ואם לא תרגיש להם, יפילה פתאום ויריק חציו בה בפתע, כמו שאמר (משלי ז): "עד יפלח חץ כבדו".

If you are sensitive to his deceptions and pay attention to his various traps, you will be on guard against them and be helped by G-d to be saved from them; but if you do not sense them, he will cast you down suddenly and shoot his arrows into you in an instant, as the verse says: "Until an arrow pierces his liver."

ואם תעמד כנגדו בכל זה ולא יוכל לפתותך במה שזכרנו, ישתדל לך מצד חכמתך.

And if you stand strong against him in all of this, and he cannot entice you through the ways we have mentioned, he will then try to attack you through the angle of your wisdom and Torah study.

ואם יראה ממך חריצות ללמוד החכמה, יאמר לך: "הלא יספיק לך מה שמספיק לגדולי דורך וזקניך לדעת תורתך הנאמנה?"

If he sees in you a diligence to study Torah wisdom, he will say to you: "Is it not enough for you to know your faithful Torah to the same extent that is sufficient for the leaders and elders of your generation?"

הלא ידעת כי החכמה אין לה קץ ולא תכלית; שים מגמתך אל עקר האמונה ושרש התורה, ואח"כ למד מה שתזדמן בו אצל בני אדם מעגלן השיר והמקצב וצפוני הדקדוק והחידות הנכריות והמשלים הנוהגים.

He will say: "Do you not know that wisdom has no end and no limit? Direct your goal only to the core of faith and the root of the Torah, and after that, study things that will make you look sophisticated and prestigious among people, such as poetry, meter, the secrets of grammar, exotic riddles, and popular proverbs."

NOTE The yetzer hara tries to divert the person from deep, authentic Torah study into superficial, intellectual pursuits that only serve to gain social prestige.

והנח לך דברי הדינים ומחלקת החכמים בהם, ואל תכניס עצמך בחכמת שרשי המופת ואיכות הדבור ומיני הקשיות ואפני הראיות ואיכות הלוג העלה עם המעולל והתחברות החכמה הנראית עם החכמה הנסתרת מפני עמקם ודקות ענינם.

"And leave aside the details of the laws and the disputes of the Sages in them, and do not enter into the study of the principles of logical proof, the nature of speech, types of analogies, methods of evidence, the relationship between cause and effect, and the connection between the revealed wisdom and the hidden wisdom, because of their depth and subtlety."

וסמך על אנשי הקבלה במה שתוכל לעמוד על ברורו, כאשר תסמך עליהם במה שהוא נמנע ממך.

"And simply rely on the transmitters of tradition even in matters where you could actually arrive at clarity through your own analysis, just as you rely on them for things that are beyond your reach."

ואם לא תשמע לו ותשתדל ותתחזק, יורה אותך בחצי הקנאה בחבירה; ואם גיעו לחכמה מבלעדיה, תטור אותם ותשתדל לתלות בהם מומים ולהפחיתם ולדבר בגנותם, כאלו הם שגלוג בינתך וגלוג חכמתך.

And if you do not listen to him, but instead strive and strengthen yourself in study, he will shoot you with the arrows of jealousy toward your peers; if they attain wisdom that you have not, you will bear a grudge against them, try to find faults in them, demean them, and speak disparagingly of them, as if they had stripped you of your understanding and stolen your wisdom.

ואם תחפם מבלעדיהם, יפחתו בעיניך ליתרון בינתך, ותשנאם לסכוליותם, ותראה זה לעמי הארץ, ותתנאה לנפשה ותתהלל בחכמתך עד שתטען שאתה יודע מה שאינה יודעו.

And if you become wiser than them, they will seem inferior in your eyes because of your superior understanding, and you will hate them for their ignorance, and display this attitude to the common people, becoming arrogant in your soul and boasting of your wisdom, until you even claim to know that which you do not know.

ויגבה רוחך מלמד, וירום לבבך את שתלמד, ותקץ את שיקשו עליך, ותרבה להחזיק עצמך כחכם, ותתכבד בסכל חבירה, ותזדין בהכלים בני גילה, ותהיה שולל ממוסרי החכמים באלהים ובתורתו.

Your spirit will become too haughty to learn from others, your heart will swell with pride when you teach, you will become annoyed when they ask you difficult questions, you will constantly hold yourself to be a great sage, you will seek honor through the ignorance of your peers, you will arm yourself by embarrassing your contemporaries, and you will end up completely stripped of the ethical teachings of the Sages regarding G-d and His Torah.

ואם לא יִשְׁלַם לוֹ מָה שְׂכֹן לְפִתּוּתָהּ בּוֹ בְּשֹׁעַר דַּעַת הָאֱלֹהִים וְתוֹרָתוֹ, יִשְׁתַּדֵּל לְפִתּוּתָהּ בְּשֹׁעַר מַעֲשֵׂי הָעֲבוּדָה.

And if he does not succeed in what he aimed to entice you with regarding the area of G-dly knowledge and His Torah, he will then try to entice you in the area of practical acts of service.

וּכְשֶׁתַּעֲשֶׂה לָאֱלֹהִים מַעֲשֶׂה, יִגְדִּילֵהוּ וַיִּנְשְׂאֵהוּ בְּעֵינָיו, וַיְשִׁימֶהּ לְהִתְגָּאוֹת בּוֹ, וַיִּקְלֶה אֲנָשֵׁי דוֹרָה אֶצְלָהּ, וַיִּקַּל עָלֶיהָ לְמַאֲסָם וּלְהַכְלִימָם וּלְבִישָׁם, וְאֶפְשָׁר שֶׁהֵם טוֹבִים מִמֶּה לִּפְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים.

When you perform a deed for G-d, he will magnify it and elevate it in your eyes, causing you to become proud of it, and he will make the people of your generation seem insignificant to you, making it easy for you to despise them, humiliate them, and shame them—when in truth, it is possible that they are better than you before G-d.

וְאִם יִהְיֶה בַּחֲבֵרֶיהָ מִי שֵׁשׁ לוֹ יִתְרוֹן עָלֶיהָ בְּעֲבוּדַת הָאֵל וּמַעֲשָׂהוּ טוֹב מִמַּעֲשֵׂיהָ וְהוּא מִשְׁתַּדֵּל לְהִתְקַרֵּב אֵלָיו יוֹתֵר מִמֶּה, יִסְתַּדֵּב הַיֵּצֵר בּוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ: "כָּל אֲשֶׁר יֵרָאֶה מִהִשְׁתַּדְּלוֹת וּזְלִתָּהּ בְּעֲבוּדָה הוּא חֶסְרוֹן נִרְאֶה מִמֶּה, וְלֹא הוּא הֵייתָ נִרְאֶה בְּעֵינֵי בְּנֵי אָדָם צָדִיק מְכַל בְּנֵי דוֹרָה; הֲשֵׂא עָלָיו וְקִנָּא בּוֹ וּשְׂטֵם אוֹתוֹ וַחֲקֹר עַל מוֹמָיו וּגְנוּתוֹ וְאַרְבַּ לְמַכְשׁוּלָיו, וְאִם תּוּכַל לְהוֹצִיא עָלָיו דְּבַת שֶׁקֶר כְּדִי לְהַפְחִית שְׁמוֹ אֶצְל בְּנֵי אָדָם—עֲשֵׂה!"

And if there is one among your peers who has an advantage over you in the service of G-d, whose deeds are better than yours, and who strives to draw closer to Him more than you do, the yetzer will incite you against him and say to you: "Any diligence in service shown by someone else only highlights your own deficiency, and were it not for him, you would appear to people as the most righteous person of your generation; so plot against him, be jealous of him, hate him, search out his flaws and disgrace, lie in wait for his stumbles, and if you can spread a false rumor about him to lower his reputation among people—do it!"

אִז תֵּשִׁיב עָלָיו: וְאִיךָ אֶמָּאֵס מִי שֶׁאֱהָבוּ הָאֱלֹהִים, וְאֵיכָנָה מִי שֶׁשָּׂבַח הַבּוֹרָא? וְלֹא דִי לִי עֲצָלוּתִי לְקִיָּם עֲבוּדָתוֹ כְּמוֹהוּ, עַד שֶׁאֲשַׁטֵּם מִי שֶׁיַּעֲבִדְהוּ?

Then you must answer him: 'How can I despise someone whom G-d loves, and disparage someone whom the Creator praises? Is my own laziness in failing to fulfill His service like him not enough of a shortcoming, that I should now also hate the one who actually serves Him?'

וְאִין זֶה גְּמוּל מָה שֶׁאֲנִי חַיֵּב לַבּוֹרָא יִתְבָּרֵךְ, אֲבָל חַיֵּב אֲנִי לְאַהֲבָה אֶת אוֹהֲבָיו לְאַהֲבָתוֹ, וּלְכַבֵּד מְכַבְּדֵיו לְכַבֵּדוֹ, כְּמוֹ שֶׁכָּתוּב (תהלים טו): "וְאֵת יִרְאֵי ה' יְכַבֵּד".

'And this is surely not the proper return for what I owe the Creator, may He be blessed; rather, I am obligated to love those who love Him for the sake of His love, and to honor those who honor Him for the sake of His honor, as it is written: "And he honors those who fear Hashem."

וּכְבֹּר יָדַעְתָּ מָה שֶׁאַרַע אֶת מִרְיָם בְּעֵינֵי (במדבר יב): "וַתְּדַבֵּר מִרְיָם וְאַהֲרֹן בְּמֹשֶׁה", וּמָה שֶׁהָיָה מִעֲנִין קִרְחָ וְעִדְתּוֹ בְּקִנְיָאָם בְּמֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן בְּקִרְבָּתָם אֶל ה'.

'And you already know what happened to Miriam in the matter of "And Miriam and Aharon spoke against Moshe," and what happened to Korach and his assembly when they became jealous of Moshe and Aharon because of their closeness to Hashem.'

WHAT TO TAKE FROM IT

The chapter outlines a clear path to defeat these traps of the yetzer hara through deep contemplation and yiras Shamayim. To counter the fear of difficulty in mitzvos, a person must remind himself that the physical discomfort of a fast or late-night

learning quickly passes and leaves no trace, while the eternal reward remains forever. Conversely, the fleeting pleasure of an aveirah vanishes instantly, leaving only disgrace and punishment. To guard his Torah study and character, the learner must resist the yetzer hara's attempts to make him jealous of others or arrogant about his own wisdom, remaining vigilant against these spiritual arrows with the help of Hashem.

למעשה WHAT TO TAKE HOME

My dear friend, the Chovos HaLevavos is pulling back the curtain on the daily psychological warfare we all experience. Have you ever noticed how, the moment you decide to learn a bit more, daven with more kavanah, or give a generous amount of tzedakah, a sudden wave of exhaustion or financial worry washes over you? The yetzer hara is a master strategist. He will tell you that a fast will ruin your health, that waking up early to learn will make you too tired to function, or that giving charity will leave you destitute. He magnifies the temporary physical toll of a mitzvah while completely hiding the reality that physical fatigue passes quickly, but the eternal reward of your avodah remains forever.

Even when you overcome these hurdles and do the mitzvah, the battle isn't over. The yetzer hara will try to inject a cold feeling of regret or sadness into your heart, making you feel like your sacrifice wasn't worth it, just to spoil the purity of your act. Conversely, when a person stumbles into a sin, he tries to make them feel happy and accomplished, reinforcing the bad habit. We must learn to recognize these thoughts not as our own logical reasoning, but as the targeted arrows of the yetzer hara trying to weaken our resolve.

To defeat this, we must talk back to these thoughts with clear emunah. Remind yourself that any physical discomfort you feel from serving Hashem will vanish by tomorrow, but the spiritual light you created is eternal. When the voice of doubt tells you that you are sacrificing too much, look at the big picture and realize that the greatest investment a Yid can make is in his neshama.

Today, when you feel a sudden excuse or hesitation pop into your mind before doing a mitzvah or learning Torah, recognize it immediately as the yetzer hara's trick, say 'no' to the excuse, and do the good deed anyway.