

חובות הלבבות • שער יחוד המעשה • פרק חמישי (16-)

(30)

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

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In this section, the Chovos HaLevavos exposes the relentless tactics of the yetzer hara as it tries to undermine a Yid's emunah. When the yetzer hara fails to stop a person from serving Hashem with pure intentions, it shifts its focus to casting doubts on the very foundations of our faith, starting with the existence of Hashem and the creation of the world from nothing.

As the struggle continues, the yetzer hara tries to confuse the neshama with false beliefs, questions about the purpose of our avodah, and doubts regarding prophecy and the authenticity of the Torah. It even attempts to weaken our commitment to the Oral Law, divine justice, and the reality of reward and punishment in the World to Come. The author guides us on how to use our intellect and the holy teachings of our Sages to defeat each of these challenges.

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

וכאשר יתיאש מספק אותך בזה, ישתדל לספק אותך בבורא יתברך; ויאמר לך: כי העולם הזה אינו חדש ולא נברא, ולא סר פאשר הוא עתה ולא יסור כן, ואין דבר ממנו יותר ראוי להיות בורא מנברא, ואין דבר ממנו חייב מעבודת זולתו, שהכל ישן קדמון.

And when the yetzer hara despairs of casting doubts in your mind on this, he will try to make you doubt the Creator, may He be blessed, and will say to you: 'This world is not newly made and was not created; it has never been different than it is now, nor will it ever change, and nothing in it is more fitting to be a creator than a created thing, and nothing in it is obligated to serve anything else, since everything is ancient and eternal.'

NOTE The yetzer hara tries to push a person toward heresy (atheism) by claiming the universe is eternal and has no Creator, meaning there is no higher power to whom we owe our service.

וכאשר יקרה בזה, שוב לשכלך, ויראה אותך הפסד הדעת הזה ממאמר היחוד מן הספר הזה, במה שימצאך [כי] לעולם הזה בורא בראו מלא דבר.

And when he confronts you with this, return to your intellect, and it will show you the falsehood of this view based on what we explained in the Gate of Unity in this book, which will prove to you that this world has a Creator Who created it from absolute nothingness.

NOTE The author refers back to Shaar HaYichud (the first gate of Chovos HaLevavos), where he logically proved that the universe had a beginning and must have been created ex nihilo (yesh mei'ayin) by Hashem.

וְכַאֲשֶׁר יִתְיַאֵשׁ מִסִּפֵּק הָעֵינַן הַזֶּה עָלֶיהָ, יִפְלֶה בְּמִינֵי הַשְׁתּוּתָה, כְּמוֹ דַּעַת מְנִיחֵי הָרַבּוּי, וְדַעַת אֲנָשֵׁי הַתּוֹלְדוֹת, וְדַעַת הַפְּתָאִים מִחוּץ הַכּוֹכָבִים, כְּפִי הַתַּחֲלָקוֹת דַּעוֹתָם.

And when he despairs of casting doubt on this matter, he will try to make you fall into various forms of partnership (shittuf), such as the belief of those who posit a plurality of gods, the belief of the naturalists, or the belief of the foolish astrologers, according to their various opinions.

NOTE Shittuf refers to associating partners with Hashem. The yetzer hara tries to introduce dualism, trinity, pantheism, or belief in the independent power of the stars (astrology) to dilute pure monotheism.

וְכַאֲשֶׁר יִתְבָּרַר לָהּ כִּי הַבּוֹרֵא ית' אֶחָד קְדָמוֹן, בְּמָה שֶׁקֹּדֶם לָנוּ מִן הַדְּבָרִים בְּתַחֲלֵל הַסֵּפֶר, בְּזֶה יָסוּרוּ כָּל אֵלּוּ הַסִּפְקוֹת מִמֶּנּוּ.

But when it becomes clear to you that the Creator, may He be blessed, is One and Eternal, based on what we have already established at the beginning of this book, then all of these doubts will leave you.

וְכַאֲשֶׁר יִתְיַאֵשׁ מִמֶּנּוּ בַּפָּנִים הָאֵלֶּה, יִשְׁתַּדֵּל לְפַתּוֹתָהּ מִצַּד חַיּוּב עֲבוֹדַת הַבּוֹרֵא, וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ: כִּי הָעֲבוֹדָה מִן הָעוֹבֵד לְנֶעֱבֵד תִּהְיֶה בְּעֵת צָרְכּוֹ אֵלָיו, וְהַבּוֹרֵא יִתְבָּרַךְ אֵינָנו צָרִיךְ לְבְרִיּוּתוֹ וְלֹא חָסֵר לְשׁוֹם עֲבוֹדָה, וְעֲבוֹדָתָהּ לוֹ אֵין לָהּ טַעַם וְלֹא פְּנִים.

And when he despairs of misleading you in these ways, he will try to entice you regarding the obligation to serve the Creator, saying to you: 'Service from a servant to a master is only appropriate when the master needs him; but the Creator, may He be blessed, has no need for His creations and lacks nothing that your service could provide, so your service to Him has no reason or purpose.'

וְכַאֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁקִיף בְּשִׂכְלָה עַל מָה שֶׁקֹּדֶם לָנוּ בְּשַׁעַר הַבְּחִינָה לְטוֹבַת הָאֱלֹהִים עָלֵינוּ, וּבְשַׁעַר חַיּוּב קִבְּלַת הָעֲבוֹדָה לָאֱלֹהִים בַּעֲבוּרָהּ, יָסוּר הַסִּפֵּק הַזֶּה, וְתַחֲבִיב אֶת נַפְשְׁךָ בַּעֲבוֹדַת הָאֱלֹהִים.

But when you contemplate with your intellect what we have already explained in the Gate of Reflection regarding Hashem's goodness toward us, and in the Gate of the Obligation to Accept the Service of G-d because of that goodness, this doubt will disappear, and you will obligate yourself in the service of Hashem.

NOTE The author refers to Shaar HaBechinah (Gate of Reflection) and Shaar Kabalas HaAvodah (Gate of Accepting Service), which explain that our avodah is not to fulfill a need of Hashem, but is our duty of gratitude for His endless chessed toward us.

וְכַאֲשֶׁר יִתְיַאֵשׁ מִפַּתּוֹתָהּ בַּפָּנִים הָאֵלֶּה, יִשְׁתַּדֵּל לְסַפֵּק עָלֶיהָ בַּעֲנֵינָן הַנְּבוּאָה וְהַנְּבִיאִים, וּבַתּוֹרָה וּבְאִפְּנֵי אֲמִתּוּתָהּ וַחֲיוּבָהּ.

And when he despairs of enticing you in these ways, he will try to cast doubt in your mind regarding the concept of prophecy and the prophets, and regarding the Torah, its truth, and its binding nature.

וְאִם תִּעַמַּד כִּנְגְּדוֹ בְּשִׂכְלָה, וְתִלָּחֶם בּוֹ בַּטְּעֵנוֹת הַקּוּדְמוֹת בַּסֵּפֶר הַזֶּה בְּשַׁעַר הַשְּׁלִישִׁי מִמֶּנּוּ, יָסוּרוּ כָּל הַסִּפְקוֹת הָאֵלֶּה מִלְּבָבְךָ, וְיִתְאַמֵּת אַצְלָהּ עֵינֶיךָ הַנְּבוּאָה, וְצָרְךָ חַיּוּב הַתּוֹרָה, וְשְׁלִיחוֹת הַנְּבִיאִים בָּהּ, וְאִפְּנֵי הַהֶעֱרָה עָלֶיהָ.

But if you stand up against him with your intellect and fight him with the arguments previously mentioned in the third gate of this book, all of these doubts will leave your heart, and the reality of prophecy, the necessity of the Torah, the mission of the prophet who brought it, and the ways we are awakened to it will be verified as true in your mind.

NOTE The third gate is Shaar Kabalas HaAvodah, which discusses how the Torah is necessary to guide human intellect and how prophecy is verified.

וכאשר יתיאש ממך בענין הזה, יספק אותך בקבלה; ויאמר לך: כי המשכל והכתוב שניהם אמת, אך מה שאמרו רז"ל אינו עקר, ולא קבולו חובה.

And when he despairs of overcoming you in this matter, he will try to make you doubt the Oral Tradition (the Kabbalah of the Sages); he will say to you: 'That which is logical and that which is written in the Torah are both true, but what the Sages of blessed memory said is not essential, and accepting it is not obligatory.'

NOTE The yetzer hara tries to make the person a Karaite—someone who accepts the Written Torah but rejects the Oral Law (Torah Sheb'al Peh) passed down by Chazal.

וכאשר תסתכל בשכלך, תראה כי המשכל והכתוב צריכין אל הקבלה צרך גדול, כי אין אחד מהם יכול להגמר מבליתי הקבלה;

But when you look with your intellect, you will see that both logical reasoning and the written text are in great need of the Oral Tradition, for neither of them can be fully realized without the Tradition.

כי המשכל, אם לא תגדר לנו הקבלה כמותו ואיכותו וזמנו ומקומו ושאר עניניו, לא יתכן לנו מצד שכלנו בלבד;

For as for logical duties, if the Oral Tradition did not define for us their quantity, quality, timing, location, and other details, we could never determine them through our intellect alone;

NOTE For example, while intellect dictates we must show gratitude to Hashem, it cannot determine the exact times, texts, or structures of the daily tefillos without the Sages' tradition.

וכן הכתוב, אם לא יפרש לנו אלא מן הספר בלבד, כמו שאמרו בו רז"ל: 'בשליש עשרה מדות התורה נדרשת', ואמרו: 'מסרת סג לתורה'.

and similarly, the Written Torah cannot be understood if we only have the text itself, as our Sages of blessed memory said: 'The Torah is expounded through thirteen hermeneutical rules,' and they said: 'The tradition is a fence for the Torah.'

ועוד, כי התורה השיבה אותנו בכל תולדותיה אל הקבלה, כמ"ש: (דברים יז) 'כי יפלא ממך דבר למשפט וגו', ואמר: (שם) 'ודרשת והגידו לך את דבר המשפט', ואמר: (שם) 'והאיש אשר יעשה כזון וגו'.

Furthermore, the Torah itself directs us in all of its detailed applications to the Oral Tradition, as it is written: 'If a matter of judgment is hidden from you...' and it says: 'And you shall inquire, and they will tell you the word of judgment,' and it says: 'And the man who acts intentionally [not listening to the priest or the judge]...'

NOTE The author quotes Devarim 17 to show that the Written Torah explicitly commands us to follow the rulings and traditions of the contemporary Beis Din and Sages.

וכאשר תעמד על כל זה, יסור הספק, ותתברר לך הידיעה המשכלת והכתובה והמקבלת.

And when you understand all of this, the doubt will depart, and the truth of logical knowledge, written scripture, and the received oral tradition will become clear to you.

וְכַאֲשֶׁר יִתְיַאֵשׁ לְפִתּוּתָהּ מִן הַפָּנִים הָאֵלֶּה, יִשְׁתַּדֵּל בְּזֶה מִצַּד הַגְּמוּלָה וְהַעֲנָשׁ, וְיֹאמַר: כִּי אֵינָם הוֹלְכִים בְּעוֹלָם עַל דֶּרֶךְ הַצֶּדֶק, וְאֵלּוּ הֵיוּ הוֹלְכִין עַל דֶּרֶךְ הַצֶּדֶק, לֹא הָיוּ מְטִיבִין לְרָשָׁע וּמְרִיעִין לַצַּדִּיק, כְּמוֹ שְׁאָמְרוּ מִי שֶׁהִקְדַּמְנוּ לְזַכְרוֹ בַּשַּׁעַר הָרְבִּיעִי מִן הַסֵּפֶר הַזֶּה.

And when he despairs of enticing you in these ways, he will try to attack from the angle of reward and punishment, saying: 'These do not operate in the world according to the way of justice; for if they did, the wicked would not prosper and the righteous would not suffer,' just as was said by the one we previously mentioned in the fourth gate of this book.

NOTE This refers to the classic question of Tzaddik V'ra Lo (why the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper), which the author addressed in Shaar HaBitachon (the Gate of Trust).

וְכַאֲשֶׁר יִגְלֶה לָהּ הַשֶּׁכֶּל אֶפְיֵי הַצֶּדֶק בַּשָּׁנִי הָעֲנִינִים, אֲשֶׁר קָדַם וְזָכְרָנוּ אוֹתָם בַּשַּׁעַר הַבְּטָחוֹן, יִסּוֹר הַסֵּפֶק הַזֶּה, וְיָנוּחַ לִבָּנוּ מִשְׁבוּשׁוֹ.

But when your intellect reveals to you the ways of justice in both of these situations, as we have already mentioned in the Gate of Trust, this doubt will disappear, and our hearts will find rest from his confusion.

וְכַאֲשֶׁר יִתְיַאֵשׁ הַיֵּצֵר מְגִבֵּר עָלֵינוּ מִן הַפָּנִים הָאֵלֶּה, יִסְפֹּק עָלֵינוּ גְמוּלָה הַעוֹהֵב וְעֹנָשׁוֹ, וְיִשְׁתַּדֵּל לְעֲרֹב וּלְשַׁבֵּשׁ עָלֵינוּ מִצַּד מַעוֹט מְצִיאֹתוֹ מִבְּאֵר בְּסֵפֶר תּוֹרָתֵנוּ, וּמַעוֹט הָרְאוּת עֲנִינֵנוּ בּוֹ.

And when the yetzer hara despairs of overcoming us in these ways, he will cast doubt on the reward and punishment of the World to Come (Olam Haba), and will try to confuse and disrupt our minds because it is rarely mentioned explicitly in our Torah, and its reality is not openly apparent there.

NOTE The Torah focuses heavily on physical rewards in this world (like rain and crops in the Shema), which the yetzer hara uses to make a person doubt the existence of the spiritual afterlife.

וְכַאֲשֶׁר נִסְתַּכַּל בְּמָה שֵׁישׁ בְּסִפְרֵי שְׂאֵר הַנְּבִיאִים מִן הָעֲנִינִין הַזֶּה, כְּמוֹ: (קהלת י"ב:ז') 'וְהָרוּחַ תָּשׁוּב אֶל הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר נָתַןָּהּ';

But when we look at what is written in the books of the other Prophets regarding this matter, such as: 'And the spirit returns to G-d Who gave it';

(זכריה ג) 'וְנָתַתִּי לָהּ מִהֶלְכִים בֵּין הָעֹמְדִים הָאֵלֶּה';

and: 'And I will give you free access among these who stand here';

NOTE This prophecy in Zechariah refers to the soul walking among the angels in the spiritual realms after death.

(תהלים לא) 'מָה רַב טוֹבָהּ אֲשֶׁר צִפַּנְתָּ לִירְאֶיךָ';

and: 'How abundant is Your goodness which You have hidden away for those who fear You';

(ישעיהו ס"ד:ג') 'עֵין לֹא רָאָתָה אֱלֹהִים וּלְתֹרָה';

and: 'No eye has seen, O G-d, besides You, [what You will do for him who waits for You]';

(שם נח) 'וְהִלָּה לְפָנֶיךָ צִדְקָה וְגוֹ';

and: 'And your righteousness shall go before you [the glory of Hashem shall gather you in]';

וְהִרְבֵּה כְּאֵלֶּה, עִם מָה שִׁיּוּרוֹ עָלֵיו דְּבָרֵי חַז"ל, וּמָה שִׁישַׁג מִמֶּנּוּ בְּדֶרֶךְ הַשִּׁכּוּל, תְּנוּחַ נַפְשֵׁנוּ וְתַכְטִּחַ בְּבִירוֹר חַיִּיב הַגָּמוּל וְהַעֲנֵשׁ בַּעוֹה"ב.

and many other verses like these, along with what the teachings of Chazal point to, and what can be understood through logical reasoning, our souls will find rest and be confident in the absolute truth of reward and punishment in the World to Come.

וְכֹאשֶׁר יִתְיָאֵשׁ הַיֵּצֵר מְסַפֵּק אוֹתָנוּ בְּכָל מָה שֶׁקֹּדֶם זָכְרוּ, יִשְׁתַּדֵּל לְעַצֵּל אוֹתָנוּ בְּמַעֲשֵׂה הָעֵבוּדָה, וַיִּטְרִידֵנוּ בְּעִנְיֵי עוֹלָמָנוּ מִמַּאֲכָל וּמִשְׁתָּה וּמִלְבוּשׁ וּמִרֶכֶב, וְלִהְנוֹת בְּמִינֵי הַהֲנָאוֹת הַגּוֹפִיּוֹת.

And when the yetzer hara despairs of making us doubt all of these aforementioned matters, he will try to make us lazy in performing our service of Hashem, and will distract us with our worldly affairs—eating, drinking, clothing, transportation, and indulging in various physical pleasures.

NOTE When the yetzer hara fails to ruin a person's emunah (faith), he shifts tactics to practical distraction, trying to drown the person in materialism and physical comforts so they have no time or energy for spiritual growth.

WHAT TO TAKE FROM IT

The chapter details how the yetzer hara systematically attacks a person's emunah, beginning with doubts about the Creator and the creation of the world, which are refuted by the foundations of the first gate. It then addresses the yetzer's attempts to introduce false beliefs, argue that Hashem does not need our service, and cast doubt on prophecy and the Torah's authenticity. The author explains that the Oral Law is absolutely indispensable for understanding both rational and scriptural laws, citing the Torah's own command to follow the Sages. Finally, the chapter resolves doubts regarding divine justice in this world and the reality of reward and punishment in the afterlife, using proofs from the prophets and the teachings of Chazal to bring the heart to complete peace.

My dear friend, look at how the yetzer hara operates. The Chovos HaLevavos is pulling back the curtain to show us his entire playbook. The yetzer hara is relentless; the moment you defeat him on one front, he simply retreats, regroupes, and launches a different attack. If he cannot make you doubt Hashem's existence, he will try to make you doubt the purpose of your avodah. If that fails, he will attack the truth of the Torah, then the authority of the Sages and the Oral Law, then the fairness of reward and punishment, and finally, he will just try to make you lazy and distracted by physical comforts.

This is a profound lesson in spiritual vigilance. You must realize that when doubts, coldness, or a sudden feeling of 'what is the point of this mitzvah?' enter your mind, it is not a reflection of truth—it is simply the yetzer hara shifting his tactics because you defeated him yesterday. He wants to make you feel that your intellect and your tradition are at odds, or that the Oral Torah is somehow secondary.

To fight this, we must do exactly what the author prescribes: we must arm ourselves with clear, solid Torah knowledge and rely on the mesorah of our Sages. The Oral Law is what gives shape, time, and boundaries to the written word; without it, we are lost. When the yetzer hara tries to confuse you, do not engage in a shouting match with him. Instead, quiet your mind, return to the clear truths of the Torah and the Sages, and recognize his voice for what it is—just another desperate attempt to disrupt your connection to Hashem.

Today, when you perform a mitzvah or learn Torah, do it with the conscious intention of relying on the mesorah of our Sages, recognizing that their teachings are the essential key to fulfilling Hashem's will.