

חובות הלבבות • שער יחוד המעשה • פרק חמישי (31-)

(45)

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

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In this chapter, we learn how the yetzer hara works to ensnare a person, starting with the physical desires of this world. If we listen to him regarding our basic physical needs, he quickly entices us to pursue superfluous luxuries, urging us to exert all our strength to serve this world and seek honor from others. He even tries to divert our intellectual pursuits toward superficial wisdoms, like grammar and music, solely to gain prestige in the eyes of the public.

However, if we shut the door to these desires from the very beginning and remain satisfied with our basic necessities, the power of the yetzer hara is broken. But for those who are wise, the yetzer hara uses a different tactic, attempting to confuse their understanding through spurious arguments and intellectual fallacies. If a person relies solely on their own intellect without proper guidance, the yetzer hara will gradually lead them from truth to complete falsehood.

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

וכאשר נשמע אליו במזון, אשר לא יתכן לעמד בלתו, ייפה לנו המותרים שהם טפלה למזונות; ויחבב לנו השמחה והתענוג, ולקנא בשרים ובאנשי עבודתם, להדמות אליהם, ולנהג מנהגם, וללכת בחקיהם בבקשת התענוגים.

And when we listen to him regarding food—which is something we cannot exist without—he will make the luxuries, which are merely secondary to basic sustenance, appear beautiful to us, and he will make indulgence and pleasure seem so desirable that we will envy noblemen and their servants, striving to be like them, to adopt their customs, and to follow their ways in the pursuit of physical pleasures.

וכאשר יראה חפצנו ורצוננו בזה, יאמר: "שגס מתניך, חשף זרועך, האיש הנפתה, והשתדל בכחך, הגבר המוסת, ועבד העולם ועבד אנשיו, אולי תגיע לקצת מחפצך בו."

When the yetzer hara sees our desire and willingness for this, he will say: "Gird your loins, bare your arm, O enticed man, and exert all your strength, O seduced man, to serve this world and to serve its people, so that perhaps you may attain some of your desires in it."

"ואל תתעסק במעשה מעשי העולם אלא מה שיהיה לך בו עזר על העולם הזה, ותהיה מרצה בו לאנשיו ומנהיגו, מן המושלים אל שאר העם."

"Do not occupy yourself with any worldly endeavors except those that will help you get ahead in this world, and through which you will find favor in the eyes of its people and its leaders, from the rulers to the rest of the populace."

"ואל תטריד לבך בדבר מן החכמות אלא מה שתתכבד בו אצל אנשי דורך, ותתרצה בו אל גדולי בני
דמך משר ושוטר וקצין ובעל מעלה: בחכמת הלשון, ותכן המשקל, ושרשי הדקדוק, והשיר, והחידות
החמודות, והמשלים המפלאים, והמליצות הנכריות."

"And do not trouble your mind with any area of wisdom except that which will bring you honor among the people of your generation, and make you favored by the prominent figures of your time—such as ministers, officers, rulers, and men of high standing. This includes the art of language, poetic meter, the principles of grammar, poetry, charming riddles, wondrous parables, and exotic rhetoric."

NOTE The yetzer hara is trying to divert the person from studying the deep, inner wisdom of the Torah and the duties of the heart, steering him instead toward superficial, prestigious intellectual pursuits that win social acclaim.

"ותתמיד לשבת עם אנשי הצחות, ולמד לדבר עם כל כת מכתות בני אדם, ואל תשתק שלא תחשב אויל
וכסיל; והנח שאר החכמות, כי יגיעתם רבה ותועלתם מעוטה."

"Make sure to constantly sit with eloquent speakers, and learn to converse with every class of people so that you do not remain silent and be deemed a fool or simpleton; and abandon all other wisdoms, for the effort they require is great while their practical benefit in this world is small."

ואם לא נפתח פתח לתאוות בפתח לה למלא משאלותם, להתנהג במותרם ולרדף אחריהם, ונשיבהו: כי
המותרם אין צורך אליהם, ובמה שאנו מעינים בו מעניני מזונותינו מטרדת נפשיותנו בהם די.

But if, from the very beginning, we do not open a door for our desires by fulfilling their demands, nor accustom ourselves to indulge in luxuries and chase after them, and instead we answer the yetzer: 'We have no need for luxuries, and the mental strain we already endure in securing our basic sustenance is quite enough for us.'

ואם יתן לנו האלהים המותרים מבלי טרדת לבנו בהם ויגיעת מחשבותינו עליהם, נוציאם במה שראוי
להוציא ובמה שהדין נותן; ואם לא, נסתפק במזון ולא נצטרך אל זולתו, אז ישבר היצר וינגף.

'And if Elokim sends us extra abundance without us having to trouble our hearts or exhaust our minds over it, we will spend it on what is proper and as the Torah law dictates; otherwise, we will suffice with basic sustenance and require nothing more'—then the power of the yetzer hara will be broken and defeated.

ואם נשמע אליו בהם, נצא ממדרגה אל מה שאחריה, עד שיביאנו לאבדון בעוה"ז ובעוה"ב.

But if we listen to him in these matters, we will descend from one level to the next, until he brings us to utter ruin in both this world and the World to Come.

וזה הדמיון בחלק הראשון, אשר יספק בו היצר את האדם כשיהיה חלש בחכמה ובדעת האלהים ותורתו.

This illustration represents the first category of enticements, which the yetzer hara uses to cast doubts upon a person who is weak in wisdom and in the knowledge of Hashem and His Torah.

אָבֵל אַם יְהִיָּה הָאָדָם חָכָם בְּדַעַת הָאֱלֹהִים וְתוֹרָתוֹ, יִשְׁתַּדֵּל הַיֵּצֵר לְהַכְנִיס הַהֶפְסֵד עָלָיו וְהַשְׁבוּשׁ בְּחֻמָּתוֹ
וּבְמַעֲשָׂהוּ מִדֶּרֶךְ הַטְּעָנָה וְהָרָאָה, מֵאִיזָה צַד שְׂיוּכָל, מִן הַמְשָׁכָל וְהַפְתּוּב וְהַמְקַבֵּל; וַיָּבִיא מוֹפֵת עַל מֶה
שִׁיּוּרָהוּ עָלָיו מִן הַמוֹפְתִים הַמְבְּהִילִים, אֲשֶׁר אֵין הַקְדָּמוֹתָם אֲמִתִּיּוֹת וְלֹא תוֹלְדוֹתֵיהֶם מְחִיבוֹת.

But if the person is indeed wise in the knowledge of Hashem and His Torah, the yetzer hara will instead strive to bring ruin and confusion upon his wisdom and his actions through intellectual arguments and proofs, attacking from whatever angle he can—whether from logic, Scripture, or tradition—bringing deceptive proofs whose premises are false and whose conclusions do not logically follow.

NOTE This is the second kind of temptation, where the yetzer hara uses the person's own intellectual nature against him, disguising spiritual downfall as sophisticated theological or philosophical inquiry.

וְאִם יְהִיָּה שְׂכָלָה זֶה וְחֻמָּתָהּ חֲזָקָה בְּדֶרֶךְ הַמוֹפֵת וְאֶפְנֵי הַהִזְהָרָה בּוֹ בַּעַת הַדְּבָרִים וְהַמְחִלְקָת, תִּרְאֶה אֶפְנֵי
טַעוֹת יִצְרָה בְּרָאִיתוֹ וּמוֹפְתוֹ, וַיִּתְּבַרֵר לָהּ הָאֲמִת, וְתִרְאֶה לָּהּ הַנְּכוּנָה, וְתִמְלֹט חֻמָּתָהּ מִן הַסִּפֵּק וּמַעֲשֵׂיהָ מִן
הָעֵרְבּוּב.

If your intellect is pure and your wisdom is strong in the methods of proof and the ways of being on guard during debate and dispute, you will see the fallacies in your yetzer's arguments and proofs; the truth will become clear to you, the correct path will be apparent, and your wisdom will be saved from doubt and your actions from confusion.

וְאִם תִּקְצֹר דַּעְתָּהּ מִזֶּה, יְהִיָּה פְתוּיוֹ לָהּ יוֹתֵר חֲזָק, וַיִּגְבְּרוּ עָלֶיהָ יוֹתֵר מִזֶּדְמָן, וּמִשְׁלֹ בָּהּ וְהַקִּיפּוֹ אוֹתָהּ בִּנְרָאָה
וּבִנְסִתָּהּ יוֹתֵר נְחוּץ, מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהוּא בָּא עִמָּה מִצַּד הַחֻמָּה וּמִנְהִיג אוֹתָהּ בְּדֶרֶךְ הַמוֹפֵת אֲשֶׁר תִּנוּחַ דַּעְתָּהּ
עָלָיו.

But if your understanding falls short in this, his enticement of you will grow stronger, his victory over you will be more easily achieved, and his dominion and siege over you—both in your outer and inner life—will become more pressing, because he approaches you under the guise of wisdom and leads you with intellectual arguments that your mind naturally finds comforting.

וְכֹאֲשֶׁר יִפְתָּה שְׂכָלָהּ, יִטָּה מַעְלֶיהָ וַיַּעֲזֹר בּוֹ עָלֶיהָ, מִפְּנֵי שֶׁאֵתָהּ סוֹמֵךְ עָלָיו בְּמֶה שֶׁמְסַתֵּפֵק לָּהּ, וּבוֹטָח בּוֹ
בְּמֶה שֶׁלֹּא תִבִּין עֲנִינוֹ.

And once your intellect is seduced, it will turn against you and assist the yetzer hara in conquering you, because you rely on your intellect whenever you have doubts, and you trust it in matters you do not fully understand.

וְכֹאֲשֶׁר יִגְבֵּר עָלֶיהָ וַיִּמְשַׁל בָּהּ בַּעֲזֹר הַשְׂכָּל לוֹ וְסִיוְעוֹ אוֹתוֹ, בְּמֶה שֶׁמְטַעֶהוּ בּוֹ וּמְרַמְהוּ בְּעִינָיו מִן הַשֶּׁקֶר
בְּצוּרַת הַמוֹפֵת, יַעֲתִיק אוֹתָהּ מִן הַמוֹתֵר הַהוּא וּמִן הַמְדִּרְגָּה הַהִיא שֶׁהִיָּתָה קְרוּבָה אֶל הָאֲמִת וְנִסְתָּרִים בָּהּ
פְּנֵי הַשֶּׁקֶר, אֶל מֶה שֶׁאֲחִרָּיהָ, עַד שֶׁיִּבְיָאָה אֶל מִדְּרָגָה שֶׁנִּסְתָּרִים בָּהּ פְּנֵי הָאֲמִת וְהוּא הַשֶּׁקֶר הַגָּמוּר.

And when he overcomes you and rules over you with the help and support of your own intellect—by misleading it and presenting falsehood in the guise of logical proof—he will move you from that initial level, which was still close to the truth and where the falsehood was hidden, to the next level down, until he brings you to a level where the truth is completely hidden, which is absolute falsehood.

וְיִשְׁרֹשׁ אוֹתָהּ מִהָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה וְיִפִּילָהּ מִמַּדְרָגוֹת הַגְּמוּלָה בְּעוֹלָם הַבָּא, וְתִהְיֶה חֲכָמָתָה לְרָעָה לָּהּ וּשְׂכָלָהּ סִבָּה לְאַבְדָּהּ, כְּמוֹ שֶׁאָמַר הַכְּתוּב: "הוּא חֲכָמִים בְּעֵינֵיהֶם וְנִגְדַּ פְּנֵיהֶם נִבְנִים"; וְאָמַר: "הִנֵּה בְּדִבְרֵי ה' מֵאִסּוֹ וְחֲכָמַת מֶה לָּהֶם"; וְאָמַר: "כִּי יִשְׁרִים דְּרָכֵי ה' וְגו'".

He will uproot you from this world and cast you down from the levels of reward in the World to Come; thus, your wisdom will become a detriment to you, and your intellect the cause of your ruin, as the verse says: "Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and clever in their own sight!" and as it says: "Behold, they have rejected the word of Hashem; so what wisdom do they have?" and as it says: "For the ways of Hashem are straight, and the righteous walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them."

וְנֹאמַר כִּי הַחֲכָמָה, כְּשֶׁמְנַהֲיגִים אוֹתָהּ עַל דְּרָכָהּ, תִּהְיֶה רְפוּאָה לְכָל מַדּוּה; וְכִשְׁנוֹטִים בָּהּ מִנְּתִיבָתָהּ, תִּהְיֶה מַדּוּה כּוֹלֵל שָׂאִין לוֹ רְפוּאָה וְלֹא אַרוּכָה.

And it has been said that when wisdom is directed in its proper path, it is a cure for every illness; but when one deviates with it from its proper path, it becomes an all-encompassing disease for which there is no cure or healing.

וְעַל כֵּן נִמְשָׁלָה הַתּוֹרָה בָּאֵשׁ, כַּמִּשָּׁל: "הֲלֹא כֹה דִּבְרִי כָּאֵשׁ וְגו'", מִפְּנֵי שֶׁמֵּאִירָהּ הָעֵינַיִם בְּאוֹרָהּ, כְּמוֹ שֶׁאָמַר: "מִצּוֹת ה' בָּרָה מֵאִירַת עֵינַיִם", וְאָמַר: "נֵר לְרַגְלִי דְּבָרָה וְגו'".

Therefore, the Torah is compared to fire, as it is written: "Is not My word like fire," says Hashem?" because it illuminates the eyes with its light, as it says: "The commandment of Hashem is clear, enlightening the eyes," and as it says: "Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path."

וְשׂוֹרֶפֶת בִּיקוּדָה מִי שְׁנוּטָה מִנְּתִיבָתָהּ, כְּמוֹ שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "כִּי בָאֵשׁ ה' נִשְׁפָּט", וְאָמַר: "יִמָּטֵר עַל רִשְׁעִים פְּחִים", וְאָמַר: "וְאִמְרַתִּי לֹא אֶזְכְּרֶנּוּ וְלֹא אֲדַבֵּר עוֹד בְּשִׁמּוֹ וְהָיָה בְּלִבִּי כָּאֵשׁ בֹּעֶרֶת וְגו'".

Yet, it burns with its flame anyone who deviates from its path, as it is said: "For by fire will Hashem contend in judgment," and as it says: "He will rain coals of fire upon the wicked," and as it says: "And if I say, 'I will not mention Him, nor speak any more in His Name,' then there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones."

עַל כֵּן הִזְהַר שְׁלֹא תִטֶּה אֲשׁוּרָה מִדְּרָגַת הָאֲבוֹת וְנִתִּיב הָרָאוּשׁוֹנִים אֶל הַבְּדִיאוֹת, וְתִסְמָךְ עַל שְׂכָלָהּ, וְתִתְיַחַד בְּעֲצָתָהּ, וְתִתְבּוֹד בְּסִבְרָתָהּ.

Therefore, be extremely careful that your steps do not stray from the path of the patriarchs and the road of the early sages toward newly invented ideas, and do not rely solely on your own intellect, isolate yourself in your own counsel, or withdraw into your own personal reasoning.

NOTE The author is warning against intellectual arrogance, where a person thinks he can bypass the received tradition (mesorah) of the Chachamim and rely solely on his own logical deductions.

וְאַל תַּחְשֹׁד אֲבוֹתֶיךָ בְּמָה שֶׁמָּסְרוּ לָּהּ מֵאוּפְנֵי טוֹבוּתָיָהּ, וְאַל תִּסְתַּר עֲצָתָם בְּמָה שֶׁהוֹרוּ אוֹתָהּ, כִּי אֵין עֲצָה שֶׁתַּעֲלֶה בְּדַעְתָּהּ שְׁלֹא קִדְמוּהָ לְדַעְתָּהּ וְעָמְדוּ עַל כָּל מָה שֶׁמְבִיאָה אֵלָיו מִטוֹב וְרָע.

Do not doubt your ancestors regarding what they handed down to you for your own good, and do not reject their counsel in what they taught you; for there is no idea that can arise in your mind that they did not already anticipate, having fully understood all the good and bad consequences to which it leads.

WHAT TO TAKE FROM IT

The chapter outlines the progression of the yetzer hara's influence, showing how he leads a person step-by-step to destruction in both this world and the next. For the simple person, he uses physical desires and the pursuit of honor, while for the wise

person, he uses intellectual arguments and false proofs to corrupt their wisdom. When wisdom is misused, it becomes a destructive disease rather than a cure, much like fire which can either illuminate or burn. Ultimately, the author warns us never to rely solely on our own intellect, but to remain steadfastly on the path of our forefathers.

למעשה WHAT TO TAKE HOME

My dear friend, the yetzer hara is a master strategist. He does not start by telling a person to throw away their Yiddishkeit. Instead, he begins with the small, seemingly innocent things—the "superfluous" comforts, the extra luxuries, and the desire to look prestigious in the eyes of the world. He whispers that you need to be sophisticated, to speak like the high society, and to chase after honor. If we let him in just a crack to pursue these extra physical pleasures, we open a door that is very hard to close, and he slowly drags us down, step by step, until we are far from where we started.

But what about the person who is already learning, who has yiras Shamayim and is striving for truth? To him, the yetzer hara comes disguised as a Rosh Yeshiva or a philosopher! He uses our own intellect against us, bringing sophisticated, intellectual arguments and doubts to confuse our minds. He makes falsehood look like deep Torah wisdom. If we rely solely on our own limited understanding and try to outsmart him alone, we can easily fall into his trap, using our own minds to justify things that are completely against the Torah.

The only way to survive this battle is to anchor ourselves to the mesorah—the path of our fathers and the holy sages who came before us. When we have doubts, we must not rely on our own cleverness or try to reinvent the wheel. We must humble ourselves to the timeless guidance of the Torah and the traditions passed down to us, knowing that our ancestors already foresaw these challenges and laid down the true path of life.

Today, when you feel the urge to buy a luxury you do not need, or when a sophisticated doubt enters your mind, stop and say: "I do not rely on my own cleverness. I am satisfied with what Hashem gave me, and I stand firmly on the path of my fathers."