

חובות הלבבות • שער יחוד המעשה • פרק חמישי (-46)

(60)

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

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In this chapter, we learn how to stand strong against the subtle tricks of the yetzer hara, who tries to lead us astray under the guise of piety. The yetzer hara may tempt a person to take on extra stringencies or make changes to established paths, but we are warned to stick to the ancient boundaries set by our holy forefathers. We must first ensure we are fully keeping our basic obligations before trying to go above and beyond the letter of the law.

We also begin to explore the second type of temptation, where the yetzer hara tries to make us worry about what other people think. He will flatter us about our high spiritual level and then whisper that we must now strive to find favor in the eyes of our fellow men. The chapter teaches us how to recognize these damaging thoughts and how to answer the yetzer hara with emunah and clear thinking.

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

וְאִפְשָׁר שֶׁקִּדְּמָה לְדַעְתָּהּ אִפֹּן יֵשֶׁר הַמַּחֲשָׁבָה הִיא בְּתַחֲלָתָהּ, וְנִעְלָם מִמֶּנּוּ אִפֹּן הַהֶפְסֵד אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה מִמֶּנָּה בְּאַחֲרִיתָהּ; וְאַתָּה בְּמַעוֹט יְשׁוּבָה תִּרְאֶה יְשָׁרָה, וְלֹא תִרְאֶה טְעוּתָהּ וְאַפְנֵי הַפְּסָדָהּ.

And it is possible that the seemingly proper nature of that plan appeared to your mind at its beginning, while the way of ruin that will result from it in the end was hidden from you; and you, in your lack of deliberation, see its uprightness but do not see its error and the ways of its ruin.

וְאָמַר הַחֶכֶם (משלי כב): "אַל תִּסַּג גְּבוּל עוֹלָם"; וְאָמַר (שם יא): "שִׁמְעֵ בְנֵי מוֹסֵר אָבִיךָ"; וְאָמַר בְּמִי שְׂמָאשִׁים אֲבוֹתָיו (שם ל): "דּוֹר טָהוֹר בְּעֵינָיו וּמִצָּאָתוֹ לֹא רַחֵץ, דּוֹר אָבִיו יִקְלָל"; וְאָמַר (שם): "עֵין תִּלְעַג לְאָב".

And the wise king Shlomo said, "Do not remove an ancient boundary stone," and he said, "Hear, my son, the instruction of your father," and he said regarding one who condemns his fathers, "There is a generation that is pure in its own eyes, yet is not washed from its filth; a generation that curses its father," and he said, "The eye that mocks a father."

אֲךָ אִם תִּרְאֶה לְקַבֵּל עַל עֲצָמְךָ מִתּוֹסֶפֶת הָרְשׁוּת בְּמִצְוֹת מֶה שֶׁתּוּכַל עָלָיו, אַחֵר שֶׁתִּמְלֹא חוּבוֹתֶיךָ מִן הַמִּצְוֹת, לֹא תִהְיֶה חֶסֶד, אַחֵר שֶׁיִּהְיֶה מִסְפִּים בָּם שְׂכָלְךָ וְרַחוּק מִתְאַוֶּתָּהּ — יִהְיֶה טוֹב.

However, if you see fit to take upon yourself optional additions to the mitzvot as much as you are capable of, after you have fully discharged your obligatory duties of the mitzvot, out of a love for piety, and after your intellect agrees to them and they are far removed from your personal desires — then it is good.

וְאַתָּה מְקַבֵּל עָלָיו שָׂכָר, וְאֵינְךָ יוֹצֵא בּוֹ מִדַּעַת הָרַאשׁוֹנִים; כִּי כָבֵד אָמְרוּ: "וַעֲשׂוּ סִיָּג לַתּוֹרָה".

And you will receive reward for this, and you are not deviating in this from the path of the early sages; for they have already said, "And make a fence for the Torah."

ואמרו: "מפני מה חרבה ירושלים? מפני שהעמידו דבריהם על דין תורה, ולא עשו לפנים משורת הדין".

And they said, "Why was Yerushalayim destroyed? Because they established their rulings strictly on the law of the Torah, and did not act beyond the letter of the law."

ואמרו: "אמר רב הונא: כל העוסק בתורה בלבד דומה כמי שאין לו אלה, שנאמר (ד"ה ב טו): 'וימים רבים לישראל ללא אלהי אמת' — אלא בתורה ובגמילות חסדים".

And they said, "Rav Huna said: Anyone who occupies himself with Torah study alone is like one who has no G-d, as it is said, 'For many days Israel was without the true G-d' — rather, one must occupy himself with both Torah and acts of lovingkindness."

ואמר אחד מן החסידים: "מי שאין לו תוספת אין לו חובה"; ואין התוספת מתקבלת עד שתפרע החובה.

And one of the pious men said, "He who has no extra additions has not fulfilled his basic obligation"; yet, the extra addition is not accepted until the basic obligation is first paid in full.

NOTE The pious man's statement means that true fulfillment of one's duty requires a spirit of generosity that goes beyond the bare minimum; however, one cannot use extra stringencies to bypass or neglect basic halachic obligations.

ובכבר התירו לנו וחיבו אותנו להתנהג בתוספת המצות, כמו שאמרו: "מוסיפין מחל על הקדש"; והתוספת בצום, ובתפלה, ובצדקה, ועזב הרבוי ממותר המזון המתרים לנו.

And our Sages have already permitted us, and even obligated us, to conduct ourselves with additions to the mitzvos, just as they said, "We add from the profane to the holy"; and so too with additions in fasting, prayer, tzedakah, and leaving overabundance of the extra foods that are otherwise permitted to us.

וזהירו על השבועה בשם אפלו על האמת, ומהרבות הדברים אפלו אם יהיו נמלטים מן הכזב, ומזכרון עניני בני אדם אפלו אם הם נמלטים מן הגנות, ומהפליג בשבח אדם ואם הוא ראוי לכה, ושלא יספר בגנות המקצרים ומאסם ואם הם ראויים לכה, והרבה מן הדומה לזה.

And they warned against swearing by Hashem's Name even regarding the truth, and against speaking excessively even if the words are free of falsehood, and against discussing the affairs of other people even if they are free of disparagement, and against praising a person excessively even if he is worthy of it, and that one should not speak of the shortcomings of those who fall short or despise them even if they deserve it, and many similar things.

וראוי שנבאר עתה מן החלק השני הזה דמיונים שילמדו מהם שאר הענינים, ויזהר האדם מהם בע"ה כשידע אותם; כי אין ענין מעניני הטובה אלא אם יש לו פגע שיפסיד אותו.

And it is proper that we now explain examples from this second category of temptations, from which one can learn to understand other matters, so that a person may guard himself against them with Hashem's help when he knows them; for there is no good matter that does not have a corresponding pitfall that can ruin it.

ומי שעמד על אפני הפגעים המפסידים את המעשים יוכל לדעת להזהר מהם; ומי שלא ידע כי אם הטוב לבדו, לא ימלט לו ממנו דבר לרב הפגעים המשיגים אותו.

And one who understands the nature of the pitfalls that ruin good deeds will know how to guard against them; but one who only knows the good deeds alone will end up with nothing of them remaining, due to the abundance of pitfalls that will overtake him.

וְהָיָה אֶחָד מִן הַחֲסִידִים מְצִוָּה לְתַלְמִידָיו: "לִמְדוּ הָרַע תְּחִלָּה לְהַבְדִּיל מִמֶּנּוּ, וְאַחֵר כִּי לִמְדוּ הַטּוֹב וַעֲשׂוּהוּ", כִּמוֹ שֶׁאָמְרוּ הַכֶּתוּב (ירמיה ד): "נִירוּ לָכֶם נִיר וְאַל תִּזְרְעוּ אֶל קוֹצִים".

And one of the pious men used to instruct his disciples: "Learn the bad first so that you can separate yourselves from it, and afterward learn the good and perform it," just as the verse says, "Plow for yourselves a furrow, and do not sow among thorns."

וְאָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן בֶּן זַכַּאי לְעֵנֶין הוֹנָאת הַמִּדּוֹת וְהַמְשַׁקְלִים: "אִי לִי אִם אֹמֵר, אִי לִי אִם לֹא אֹמֵר; אִם אֹמֵר — שָׁמָּה יִלְמְדוּ הַרְמָאִים, אִם לֹא אֹמֵר — שָׁמָּה יִלְמְדוּ הַרְמָאִים: אֵין תַּלְמִידֵי חֲכָמִים בְּקִיָּאִים בְּמַעֲשֵׂי יָדֵינוּ".

And Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai said regarding the cheating of weights and measures: "Woe to me if I speak of it, and woe to me if I do not speak of it; if I speak of it, perhaps the swindlers will learn new tricks from my words, and if I do not speak of it, perhaps the swindlers will say: 'The Torah scholars are not experts in our secret practices.'"

וְאָמְרוּ אַחֵר כִּי: "אֲמָרְנוּ אוֹ לֹא אֲמָרְנוּ?" וְאָמְרוּ: "אֲמָרְנוּ, וּמֵהָאִי קָרָא אֲמָרְנוּ (הושע יד): 'כִּי יִשְׁרִים דְּרָכֵי ה' וְצַדִּיקִים יֵלְכוּ בָּם וּפְשָׁעִים יִכָּשְׁלוּ בָּם'".

And the Gemara subsequently asked: "Did he speak of them or did he not speak of them?" And they concluded: "He did speak of them, and he spoke of them based on this verse: 'For the ways of Hashem are straight; the righteous shall walk in them, while the transgressors shall stumble in them.'"

וְאֹמֵר כִּי כָּל מַה שֶׁהִקְדַּמְנוּ זָכְרוּ בַּשַּׁעַר הַזֶּה מִמָּה שֶׁמִּסְפַּק אוֹתוֹ הַיֵּצֵר עַל הָאָדָם, אִם לֹא יוּכַל לְסַפֵּק אוֹתוֹ בָּהֶם, יִדְבֵּר עִמּוֹ עֲלֵיהֶם מִדֶּרֶךְ הַטַּעֲנָה וְהַמוֹפֵת לְבִטֹּל עָלָיו אֲמָתוֹתָיו.

And I say that regarding all that we have previously mentioned in this gate of the doubts that the yetzer hara tries to cast upon a person — if he cannot succeed in making him doubt through them, he will argue with him about them using claims and proofs to undermine his truths.

וּכְשֶׁתַּעֲמִיד עַל בְּטוּלוֹ וְחִלְשׁוֹת רְאִיּוֹתָיו, וְלֹא יוּכַל לַעֲמֹד כְּנֻגָּדָה וְלֹא לְבִטֹּל מִמָּה שֶׁיִּדְעֶתָ אֲמָתוֹתָיו וּבִרְרוֹ בְּמַה שֶׁקִּדַּם לָנוּ בַּשַּׁעַר הַזֶּה, יָשׁוּב לְפָתוּתָהּ וּלְהַטְעוֹתָהּ בְּנִפְשָׁהּ וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ:

And when you stand firm against his vanity and the weakness of his proofs, so that he cannot stand against you or undermine what you know to be clear and true from what we have already discussed in this gate, he will return to flatter you and mislead you regarding your own self, and he will say to you:

"כִּמָּה אֲנִי שֹׂמֵחַ בְּעֵינֶיךָ עַל אֲמוּנָתְךָ הַטּוֹבָה וְלִבְךָ הַשָּׁלֵם לֵאלֹהִים! וּכְבֹּר הַגִּיעַת מַמְעָלוֹת הַחֶסֶד מִמָּה שֶׁלֹּא הִגִּיעַ אֵלָיו זִוְלָתְךָ בְּדוֹרְךָ, וַיֵּשׁ בּוֹ יוֹתֵר מִדָּאִי מֵהוֹדָאתָ לְבוֹרָא עַל טוֹבָתוֹ וְחֶסְדּוֹ; וְרָאוּי לָךְ לְהִנָּהֵג עִצְמָךְ גַּם כֵּן לְפָרַע קֶצֶת חוֹבוֹת בְּנֵי אָדָם."

"How I rejoice in your situation, in your good faith and your wholehearted devotion to G-d! You have already reached levels of piety that no one else in your generation has reached, and you have more than sufficiently thanked the Creator for His goodness and kindness; now it is proper for you to also conduct yourself in a way that pays some of your debts of gratitude to other people."

"כִּי כָּבֵד יָדַעְתָּ כִּי הֵם סְבוֹת תּוֹעֲלֹתָ וְהִזְקֹתָ, וּכְבֹּד נִתְבָּרַר לָנוּ כִּי בְּרָצוֹתָם אוֹתָךְ תִּהְיֶה תִּפְאָרְתָּךְ, וּבִהְתְּקַצְפָּם עָלֶיךָ יִהְיֶה חֲסְרוֹנָךְ; עַל כֵּן הִשְׁתַּדַּל בָּמָה שְׂפִיכָה רָצוֹם וְתִמְצָא חַן בְּעֵינֵיהֶם, כְּמוֹ שֶׁאָמְרוּ חֲז"ל: 'כָּל שְׂרוֹחַ הַבְּרִיּוֹת נוֹחָה הֵימָנוּ — רוּחַ הַמָּקוֹם נוֹחָה הֵימָנוּ'."

"For you already know that they are the immediate causes of your benefit and harm, and it is clear to us that when they are pleased with you, it brings you honor, and when they are angry with you, it brings you loss; therefore, strive to do what pleases them and find favor in their eyes, just as our Sages of blessed memory said: 'Anyone with whom the spirit of his fellow men is pleased, the spirit of the Omnipresent is pleased with him.'"

הָשֵׁב עָלַי: "וְמָה יוֹעִיל לִי בְּהִתְרַצוֹת אֶל חָלֹשׁ כְּמוֹנִי, אֲשֶׁר אֵין בִּיכָלְתוֹ לְהוֹעִיל לִי וְלֹא לְהִזְקֹק? וְאָמַר הַכְּתוּב (ישעיה ב): 'חִדְּלוּ לָכֶם מִן הָאָדָם' וגו'; וְאֶפְלוּ אִם הָיָה חוֹבָה, אֵיךְ אוּכַל לְרַצּוֹת כָּל בְּנֵי דוֹרִי, וְאֵין בִּיכָלְתִּי לְרַצּוֹת בְּנֵי בֵּיתִי, כָּל שָׁכֵן וּלְתָם!"

Answer him: "And what benefit will I get from seeking favor with a weakling like myself, who has no power to help me or harm me? For the verse says, 'Cease from relying on man, whose breath is in his nostrils, for of what value is he?' And even if it were an obligation, how could I possibly please all the people of my generation, when I cannot even please the members of my own household, let alone anyone else!"

"וְמָה שֶׁזָּכַרְתָּ מִדְּבַר רַבּוֹתֵינוּ ז"ל בְּעֵנֶן הָזֶה, אֵינוֹ מְחַיֵּב לְהִשְׁתַּדַּל בְּמַשִּׁיכַת רָצוֹן כָּל הַבְּרִיּוֹת, כְּמוֹ שֶׁכְּתוּב (משלי טז): 'בְּרָצוֹת ה' יִדְרָכִי אִישׁ גַּם אוֹיְבָיו יִשְׁלָם אֹתוֹ'."

"And as for what you mentioned from the words of our Sages of blessed memory on this matter, it does not obligate one to actively strive to win the favor of all people, as it is written, 'When Hashem is pleased with a man's ways, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.'"

"וְכֵן מִי שֶׁכָּל הַבְּרִיּוֹת מְקַטְנִים גְּדוֹלָם מוֹדִים וּמִשְׁבַּחִים אוֹתוֹ וְרוֹצִים אֶת מַעֲשָׂיו, רָאִיָּה הֵיא כִּי הָאֵל יִתְבָּרַךְ זָרַע לוֹ אֶהְבָּה בְּלִבּוֹת בְּנֵי אָדָם וְשֵׁם לוֹ שֵׁם טוֹב עַל לְשׁוֹנָם, וְזֶה אֵין הַבוֹרֵא עוֹשֶׂה אוֹתוֹ לְשׁוֹנָאִיו, וְהוּא לְרָאִיָּה בְּרוּרָה וּגְדוּלָּה עַל רָצוֹת הַבוֹרֵא אוֹתוֹ."

"And so too, when all people, from the smallest to the greatest, acknowledge and praise someone and are pleased with his deeds, it is proof that G-d, may He be blessed, has planted love for him in the hearts of men and placed a good name for him on their tongues; and the Creator does not do this for those He dislikes, so this serves as a clear and powerful proof that the Creator is pleased with him."

"אֲבָל שְׂהִיָּה הָאָדָם הַחֲסִיד מִשְׁתַּדַּל וְטוֹרַח בָּמָה שֶׁיִּשְׁבַּחוּהוּ בְּנֵי אָדָם עַל עֲבוֹדָתוֹ לֵאלֹהִים — אֵין זֶה מִמְנַהֲגֵי הַחֲסִידִים; עַל כֵּן הִזְהַר מִזֶּה וְהִדּוּמָה לוֹ מִפְּתוּיֵי הַיֵּצֶר לָהּ, כִּי הוּא מִשְׁתַּדַּל לְהַדְרִיכָהּ בָּזֶה עַד שִׂפְיָלָהּ בְּמַצוֹדַת הַחֲנָף."

"But for a pious person to actively strive and exert himself so that people will praise him for his service of G-d — this is not the way of the pious; therefore, guard yourself against this and similar temptations of the yetzer hara, for he is trying to lead you down this path until he traps you in the snare of hypocrisy."

"וְהָשֵׁב עָלַי בְּשִׁבְחוֹ אוֹתָךְ: וְמָה הוּא שֶׁתֹּאשֶׁר אוֹתִי עָלַי מִדְּעֻתִי חוֹבוֹת הָאֱלֹהִים עָלַי, וְכִי הוּא כִּי אִם לְטַעֲנָה עָלַי לֵאלֹהִים מִפְּנֵי שְׂאִינִי סוֹבֵל לַעֲשׂוּהוּ כְּפִי דַעְתִּי?"

"And answer him when he praises you: 'Why do you praise me for knowing my duties to G-d? This knowledge only serves as a claim against me before G-d, because I do not exert myself to act fully in accordance with what I know!'"

The chapter outlines the proper way to take on extra stringencies, explaining that while going above and beyond is praiseworthy and aligned with the teachings of our Sages, it is only acceptable after one's obligatory duties are fully met. We are warned that knowing how to perform good deeds is not enough; we must also learn what damages them so we can guard our avodah from being spoiled. Finally, the text exposes the yetzer hara's tactic of using flattery to make us seek human approval, and provides the ultimate response: a person must realize that mortal men have no power to help or harm, and our only true focus must be finding favor with Hashem.

למעשה WHAT TO TAKE HOME

My dear friend, the yetzer hara is a master strategist. When he sees he cannot stop you from doing a mitzvah, he changes his tactics entirely. He stops fighting you and starts praising you! He whispers in your ear how holy you are, how much better you are than others, and then he gently nudges you to start worrying about what people think of your beautiful avodah. Before you know it, you are performing for an audience of flesh and blood, and the purity of your service to Hashem is completely ruined.

To protect ourselves, we must learn from the wise advice of the Chassid in our text: we must study the 'thorns'—the subtle spiritual dangers—before we can safely plant our good deeds. One of the greatest dangers is the urge to take on extra, beautiful stringencies (chumros) before we have even mastered our basic, daily obligations. If a person is not careful with the absolute basics of halacha, yet they are busy taking on extra fasts or special stringencies to look pious, it is a trap of the yetzer hara. True avodah means securing the foundation of your obligatory duties first, and only then adding extra layers out of pure, quiet love for Hashem, far away from the eyes of others.

When the yetzer hara tries to flatter you today or make you worry about your social standing in the eyes of others, answer him clearly: 'What good is the approval of a weak human being who can neither help nor harm my neshama?' Turn your heart back to the only One Who matters.

Today, choose one basic, obligatory halacha that you already do, and focus on performing it with absolute perfection and quiet sincerity, completely hidden from the eyes and praise of other people.