

חובות הלבבות • שער יחוד המעשה • פרק חמישי (-76)

(90)

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

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In this chapter, the Chovos HaLevavos exposes the deep, subtle traps of the yetzer hara that target a talmid chacham who has already overcome basic temptations. The yetzer hara first tries to distract him during his avodah by filling his mind with complex Torah questions and intellectual difficulties, leaving his heart far from Hashem. When the person wakes up to this and tries to serve Hashem with true sincerity, the yetzer hara pivots to a new, cunning tactic: urging him to completely hide all his mitzvos and learning under the guise of avoiding flattery and pride.

We learn how the yetzer hara tries to convince a Yid to act lazy, join in lightheadedness, and abandon public mitzvos like davening with a minyan or teaching others, all to "protect" his sincerity. The author provides us with the essential tools and arguments to defeat these tricks, showing us how to balance the need for hidden avodah with our public obligations to Hashem.

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

ואם ימלט מכל מה שזכרנו, ויהיה מאנשי החכמה והבינה, יעביר על לבו ענין קשה מעניני החכמה, ויטריד אותו בשאלה ותשובה, ובקשאי ובפרוק, ומה שנתעלם ממנו בעיון מה שהיה צריך לעין בו, ומה שנסאר לו ללמוד מן החכמה; ויחשב עם נפשו לעסק בו, ויטרידהו בזה בכל מעשי העבודה, ויפסיד עליו כפלים מה שמתקן עליו.

And if a person escapes all the traps we have mentioned, and he is indeed one of the people of wisdom and understanding, the yetzer hara will bring to his mind a difficult matter of Torah study, distracting him with questions and answers, difficulties and resolutions, pointing out what he missed in his analysis, what he should have investigated further, and what still remains for him to learn of this wisdom; and he will resolve in his soul to occupy himself with it, and the yetzer will distract him with this during all his acts of divine service, causing him twice as much loss as he gains.

NOTE The yetzer hara uses the person's own passion for Torah study and intellectual depth as a distraction to ruin his focus during other essential acts of avodah, like tefillah.

ואפשר שיכנס במעשה העבודה ויצא ממנו, ויהיה תמיד בטרודת לבו בזולתו מעניני העולם.

And it is possible that he will enter into an act of divine service and emerge from it while his heart is constantly preoccupied with other worldly matters.

ואפשר שיבקש כפרת המקום בלשונו, והוא רץ במחשבתו ובמצפונו להמרותו.

And it is even possible that he will seek forgiveness from Hashem with his tongue, while in his thoughts and innermost mind he is rushing to rebel against Him.

ומתחנן אליו באבריו, ופונה מעליו בלבו ובחבו, דומה למה שאמר הכתוב: "בפיו ובשפתיו כבדוני, ולבו רחוק ממני"; ואמר: "ניפתוהו בפיהם, ובלשונם יכזבו לו, ולבם לא נכון עמו".

He supplicates to Him with his physical limbs but turns away from Him in his heart and innermost thoughts, similar to what the verse says: 'With its mouth and with its lips it honors Me, but its heart is far from Me,' and as it says: 'They enticed Him with their mouth, and lied to Him with their tongue, but their heart was not sincere with Him.'

ואם ייקץ בעת ההיא, ויחשב עם נפשו, ויאמר לה: איך אתנהג עם הבורא במה שאינו נכון לי להתנהג בו עם הברואים, בעת שאני צריך אליהם, או בעת שהם צריכים לי?

But if he wakes up at that moment, makes an accounting with his soul, and says to it: 'How can I behave toward the Creator in a way that would be improper for me to behave toward created beings, either when I need them or when they need me?'

כי מי שאלה אליו לבקש ממנו חפץ, ואשאל אותו ממנו בלשוני, ולבי פונה ממנו, אלו היה מכיר זה ממני, היה מואס וגועל אותי, כל שכן שימנע ממני חפצי.

For if I were to go to someone to request a favor, asking him with my tongue while my heart is turned away from him, if he were to recognize this in me, he would despise and loathe me, and he would certainly withhold my request.

קל וחמר אם היה יודע כי שאני מטריד לבי במה שאינו מפיק רצונו, אך במה שמקציפו עלי, שתהיה שנאתו אותי יותר גדולה, ומניעתו ממני יותר ראויה.

How much more so if he knew that I was occupying my mind with things that do not please him, or even with things that anger him, surely his hatred toward me would be even greater, and his refusal to help me would be completely justified.

וכן מבלי ספק הייתי עושה למי שהיה שואל ממני שום חפץ, והייתי יודע מלבו מה שידע בוראי מלבי.

And without a doubt, I would act the exact same way toward anyone who asked a favor of me, if I could know his inner thoughts just as my Creator knows what is in my heart.

ואיך לא אבוש מבוראי, שארצה לו מנפשי במה שלא הייתי רוצה לה מחלש כמוני, ולא היה רוצה בו ממני נברא נצרך וחלש כמוני, וכמו שאמר הכתוב: "גם בוש לא יבשו, והכלם לא ידעו"? אז ינגף היצר.

How then can I not feel ashamed before my Creator, offering Him from my soul that which I would never accept from a weakling like myself, and which no needy, weak creature like myself would accept from me, as the verse says: 'They were not at all ashamed, nor did they know how to blush'? With this realization, the yetzer hara will be defeated.

וכאשר יתיאש היצר מפתותה מן הפנים האלה, ישתדל לפתותה בהנחת החנף, ויאמר לה: לא יתכן שתהיה עבודתה לאל בלב שלם גמורה, עד שתרחיק החנף ממך, מעוטו ורבו.

When the yetzer hara despairs of enticing you through these means, he will try to entice you from the angle of abandoning flattery and insincerity, saying to you: 'It is impossible for your service of Hashem to be complete and with a perfect heart until you completely distance yourself from flattery, whether in small or large measure.'

NOTE The yetzer hara now tries to use the fear of 'chonef' (insincerity or showing off) to trick the person into stopping his good deeds altogether.

והרחקת החנף לבני אדם מעליה לא יתכן אלא בכסות כל מעשיה מהם, ובהראות הפך מה שיש בלבבך להם.

'And distancing yourself from flattery toward people is only possible by hiding all of your good deeds from them, and by showing them the opposite of what is truly in your heart.'

וְכַאֲשֶׁר תִּתְפַּלֵּל קְצֹר, וְאַל יֵרָאֶה מִמֶּךָ בְּהֵרָצוֹן וְלֹא הַשְׁתַּדְּלוּת.

'Therefore, when you pray, make it brief, and let no sign of desire or intense effort be visible from you.'

וְכַשְׁתִּרְצֶה לְלַמֵּד שׁוּם חֻקָּה הַתִּיחַד לְבִדָּה, וְאַל יֵדַע בָּזֶה זִוְלָתִי הַבּוֹרָא, וְאַל תִּרְאֶה בְּךָ שׁוּם מִדָּה טוֹבָה, וְהִרְאֶה הָעֶצְלָה וְהַכְּבִדּוּת בְּמַעֲשֵׂה הָעֲבוּדָה, כְּדִי שֶׁלֹּא יֵצֵא לְךָ בְּהֵ שֵׁם וְתִפְסִיד שְׂכָרְךָ.

'And when you want to study Torah, isolate yourself in private so that no one knows of it besides the Creator; let no good character trait be visible in you, and display laziness and heaviness in performing divine service so that you do not gain a reputation for it and lose your reward.'

וְלֹא תִצְוֶה עַל הַטּוֹב וְתִזְהִיר מִן הָרָע, וְאַל תּוֹדִיעַ חֻקְמָתְךָ וְאַל תִּלְמֶדָה לְזוּלָתְךָ, וְאַל יֵרָאֶה עָלֶיךָ סִימָן יִרְאֵת שָׁמַיִם וְלֹא אוֹת מֵאוֹתוֹת הָעֲבוּדָה, שֶׁלֹּא יִכְבְּדוּךָ בְּנֵי אָדָם בְּעֲבוּרָם.

'Do not command others to do good nor warn them against evil; do not make your wisdom known nor teach it to others, and let no sign of fear of Heaven or mark of divine service be seen on you, so that people will not honor you because of them.'

וּמִהַשְׁלֵמַת אָפְנֵי זְרִיזוֹתֶיךָ, שֶׁתִּתְרַע לְכָל כְּתוֹת בְּנֵי אָדָם, וְתִתְנַהֵג בְּמִנְהֲגֵיהֶם, וְתִלֵּךְ בְּדַרְכֵיהֶם וּבִנְתִיבוֹתָם בְּעִנְיַן דְּבָרֵי הָאֱמֶת וְהַשְׁחֹק.

'And to make your caution complete, you should socialize with all kinds of people, adopt their customs, and walk in their ways and paths regarding lightheartedness and joking instead of speaking words of truth.'

וְאַל תִּשְׁמַר כָּל כֶּךָ מִן הַכֹּזֵב וְהַשְׁבוּעָה, וְהַתְּחַבֵּר עִמָּהֶם בְּמֵאֲכָל וּבְמִשְׁתֶּה, וּבְחִידוֹת וּבְמוֹתְרֵי הַדְּבָרִים וְרֵב הַשְׁחֹק, וּלְדַבֵּר בָּהֶם לְזִכֹּר גְּנוּתָם, וְכָל אֲשֶׁר יִרְחִיק מִמֶּךָ שֵׁם הַפְּרִישׁוֹת בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה אֲצֵל אֲנָשָׁיו.

'Do not be so careful to avoid falsehood and oaths, and join them in eating and drinking, in riddles, idle chatter, excessive laughter, and speaking about people to mention their faults—indeed, do anything that will distance you from a reputation of abstinence among the people of this world.'

וְאִם תִּשְׁמַע לוֹ בָּזֶה, יִשְׁלַל מִמֶּךָ אֱמוּנָתְךָ וְלֹא תִרְגֹּשׁ.

And if you listen to him in this, he will strip you of your faith without you even realizing it.

וְאִם תִּשָּׁיב עָלָיו וְתֹאמַר לוֹ: כִּכָּר עֲזַרְתָּ לְאוֹיְבֵי בְּהִלָּחֶמְךָ בִּי, וְהַתְּחַכְּמָה לִי לְהִרְסַם כַּחַי וּלְמַהֵר מִפְּלִתִי; וְאִיךָ אֶבְרַח מִן הָאֵשׁ הַקְּטָנָה אֶל הָאֵשׁ הַגְּדוֹלָה?

But you must answer him and say: 'You have already aided my enemies by waging war against me and using your cunning to destroy my strength and hasten my downfall; how can I flee from a small fire into a massive fire?'

וְאֲנִי לֹא בִּרְחִיתִי מֵאַהֲבַת הַשֵּׁם וְהַכְּבוֹד אֲלֵא שֶׁלֹּא לְהִזְדַּיֵּן לְבְנֵי אָדָם, וְאַתָּה מִצְוֶה אוֹתִי לְהִזְדַּיֵּן לָהֶם בְּהִנָּחַת עֲבוּדַת הָאֱלֹהִים!

'I only fled from the love of fame and honor so that I would not show off to people, yet you are commanding me to show off to them by abandoning the service of Hashem!'

אֲךָ מֶה שֶׁרְאוּי לְהִסְתִּירוֹ מִמַּעַשִׂי, הוּא כָּל מֶה שֶׁיִּשְׁשָׁלֵם וְיִגְמַר מִבְּלִי דַעַת בְּנֵי אָדָם בּוֹ.

'Rather, the deeds of mine that are proper to hide are those that can be fully completed and finished without any human being knowing about them.'

אָבֵל לְהִתְפַּלֵּל בְּצַבּוּר, וּלְצֻוֹת בְּטוֹב וּלְהִזְהִיר מִן הָרָע, וְלַמּוּד הַחֲכָמוֹת, וְעֲשׂוֹת חֶסֶד וְהַדּוּמָּה לָזֶה, אֵין מִן הַזְרִיזוֹת לְהִנִּיחַ אוֹתוֹ וּלְעֲזֹבוֹ בְּעַבּוּר עַל־תְּחִנָּה; אֲךָ אֲנִי חָיֵב לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ לְשֵׁם שָׁמַיִם.

'But praying with a minyan, commanding good and warning against evil, teaching Torah, performing acts of kindness, and the like—it is not proper caution to neglect and abandon them out of fear of flattery; rather, I am obligated to perform them solely for the sake of Heaven.'

וְאִם יִשְׁבַּחוּנִי בְּנֵי אָדָם עָלָיו אוֹ יְכַבְּדוּנִי בְּעַבּוּרוֹ, לֹא יִזְיק בְּשִׁכְרִי מְאוּמָּה, מִפְּנֵי שֶׁלֹּא הִיָּתָה כּוֹנֵנִתִּי לוֹ בַּעֲת הַמַּעֲשֶׂה.

'And if people praise me for it or honor me because of it, it will not diminish my reward in the slightest, because that was not my intention when I performed the deed.'

וְכִבָּר נֹאמָר: כִּשְׁתַּעֲשֶׂה מַעֲשֶׂה שְׂיֻדְעִים בּוֹ בְּנֵי אָדָם, וְתִרְצָה לַעֲמֹד עַל בְּרוּר כּוֹנֵנִתָּה, בְּחִן נִפְשָׁה בּוֹ בְּשָׁנֵי פָּנִים.

And it has already been said: When you perform a good deed that other people are aware of, and you want to verify the purity of your intention, test yourself in two ways.

אֶחָד מֵהֶם: שֶׁתִּדַּע מָה אַתָּה מְקַוֶּה בַּמַּעֲשֶׂה הַהוּא מִן הַגָּמוּל, וּמִמֵּי אַתָּה מְקַוֶּה אוֹתוֹ; אִם מִן הָאֱלֹהִים, הוּא שָׁלֵם, וְאִם מִזֻּלָּתוֹ, אֵינֶנּוּ שָׁלִים.

The first is: to clarify what reward you hope to receive from that deed, and from whom you expect it; if you hope for it from Hashem, your intention is perfect, but if from anyone else, it is not perfect.

וְהַשֵּׁנִי: שֶׁתִּדַּע מִנִּפְשָׁה שֶׁאִם הִיָּיתָ מְתִיחַד, הִקְיִיתָ עוֹשֶׂה הַמַּעֲשֶׂה הַהוּא עַל הָעֲנָנִין הַהוּא; וְאִם יִתְבָּרַר לָךְ זֶה, מַעֲשֶׂה שָׁלֵם לֵאלֹהִים, הִרְבֵּה מִמֶּנּוּ, וְאִם יִהְיֶה פְּחוּת מִזֶּה, הִנִּיחָהוּ עַד שְׂיֻדְכָּה לְבָךְ לְשָׁמַיִם; אֹז יִנָּגֶף הַיֵּצֵר.

The second is: to ask yourself honestly whether, if you were completely alone, you would still perform that deed in the exact same manner; if this is clear to you, then your deed is pure for Hashem, so do more of it, but if it would be less than that, stop doing it until your heart becomes purified for the sake of Heaven. With this, the yetzer hara will be defeated.

וְאִם לֹא יִמָּצֵא הַיֵּצֵר דֶּרֶךְ לְפַתּוֹתְךָ מִהַפָּנִים הָאֵלֶּה, יִתְחַכֵּם לָךְ בְּמָה שֶׁהוּא יוֹתֵר דֶּק מִזֶּה, וְהוּא דֶּרֶךְ הַגָּמוּל וְהַעֲנֵשׁ בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה וּבְעוֹלָם הַבָּא.

And if the yetzer hara cannot find a way to entice you through these methods, he will try to outsmart you with an even subtler approach, which is through the path of reward and punishment in this world and the World to Come.

וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ: הִנֵּה אַתָּה מִחֲסִידֵי הַבּוֹרָא וּמִסֻּגָּלָתוֹ, וְכַמוֹךָ הוּא רָאוּי לְגִמּוּל הָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה וְהַבָּא, וְצָרִיךְ שֶׁתִּשְׁתַּדֵּל כָּפִי יְכָלָתְךָ, אוֹלֵי תִתְחִיל לְהִגִּיעַ לָזֶה בְּמַעֲשֶׂיךָ וּבְהַמְשָׁכָה אַחֲרֵי עֲבוֹדַת הָאֱלֹהִים בְּלֵב טוֹב וּבְשִׂמְחָה רַבָּה, כְּמוֹ שֶׁאָמַר דָּוִד: "אוֹר זָרַע לְצַדִּיק, וּלְיֹשְׁרֵי לֵב שִׂמְחָה."

He will say to you: 'Behold, you are among the pious of the Creator and His treasured ones, and someone like you is truly worthy of reward in this world and the next; you must exert yourself to the utmost of your ability, so that perhaps you may attain this through your deeds and by dedicating yourself to the service of Hashem with a good heart and great joy, as David HaMelech said: "Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart."'

NOTE Here, the yetzer hara tries to inject self-righteousness and pride into the person's avodah by making him feel superior and focused on his own spiritual stature.

WHAT TO TAKE FROM IT

The chapter details how the yetzer hara disrupts our service of G-d, first by distracting the mind with intellectual pursuits during davening, leading to a hollow service where one's lips are close to Hashem but the heart is far. To counter this, a person must make a soul-accounting, realizing he would never treat a fellow human being with such insincerity. When the yetzer hara then tries to push him to the opposite extreme—abandoning public mitzvos, learning, and rebuke under the pretense of avoiding flattery—the person must answer that public mitzvos must still be performed for the sake of Heaven, and he must test his true motives by examining his inner feelings regarding the praise of others.

לְמַעַשָּׂה WHAT TO TAKE HOME

The yetzer hara is incredibly cunning. When he cannot stop you from serving Hashem, he will try to ruin your avodah from the inside. If you are learning, he will distract you during davening with a difficult kashya or a brilliant chiddush, making you feel like you are doing something holy while your heart is actually far from Hashem. If you overcome that, he will try to make you hide your yiras Shamayim completely under the guise of avoiding ga'avah and flattery, whispering that you should act lazy or join in lightheadedness just to remain hidden.

True avodah requires us to recognize these subtle traps. We must be honest with ourselves: if we would be embarrassed to ask a favor from a flesh-and-blood friend while our mind was completely distracted, how can we stand before the Ribbono shel Olam with our lips moving while our hearts are elsewhere? At the same time, we cannot let the fear of showing off stop us from davening with warmth in public, learning Torah openly, or helping another Yid.

Today, before you begin to daven or do a mitzvah, take ten seconds to quiet your mind. Ask yourself: 'If I were completely alone right now, would I still do this mitzvah with the same care?' Clear away all outside thoughts, even holy thoughts of Torah study, and focus solely on the fact that you are standing directly before the Creator of the world.