

חובות הלבבות • שער יחוד המעשה • פרק שלישי

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

ON THIS PAGE

In this chapter, the holy author of the Chovos HaLevavos, Rabbeinu Bachya, guides us in understanding which of our actions are vulnerable to the subtle traps of the yetzer hara and which are naturally protected. We will learn about the crucial distinction between the mitzvos we perform with our physical limbs and the quiet, internal avodah of the heart.

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

אבל המעשים אשר ישלמו ביחדם לאל בעת עשותם, הם מעשי העבודה שמקנים בהם רצון האלהים;

But the deeds that are only perfected when one dedicates them solely to Hashem at the time of their performance, are those acts of avodah (divine service) through which one hopes to find favor with Elokim.

NOTE The author is introducing the concept of 'Yichud HaMaaseh'—unifying one's actions—which means performing mitzvos purely for the sake of Hashem, without any ulterior motives.

והם כל המצוות הנראות על האברים, שאפשר שתהיה הכוונה בהם לזולת האל, ותהיה כוונת עושיהם להזדיין בהן אצל בני אדם ולקוות כבודם ושבתם על עשותם.

And these are all the visible mitzvos performed with the physical limbs, where it is possible for one's intention to be directed to someone other than Hashem, and where the performer's intent might be to adorn himself with them in the eyes of other people, hoping for their honor and praise for doing them.

NOTE Physical mitzvos, like giving tzedakah or putting on tefillin, are visible to others. This visibility creates a nisayon (test) of chonef (hypocrisy or showing off), as the yetzer hara can tempt a person to do them for social approval.

אבל חובות הלבבות, לא יתכן בהם חנף ולא כבוד ולא שבת למי שמקנים מהם דבר, מפני שאין ב"א יודעים את לבבו;

But regarding the duties of the heart, hypocrisy, seeking honor, or receiving praise are not possible for one who fulfills them, because other people cannot know what is in his heart.

NOTE Since the duties of the heart—such as loving Hashem, trusting Him, and fearing Him—take place entirely within a person's inner thoughts, there is no way for others to see them, which naturally removes the temptation to show off.

אך הוא מכון בהם לשם המשקף, והוא הבורא יתברך בלבד, כמו שאמר: 'אני ה' חקר לב פחן כליות', ואמר: 'הנסתרות לה' אלהינו וגו'.

Rather, one's intent in performing them is solely for the sake of the One Who watches, Who is the Creator, blessed be He, alone, as the pasuk says, 'I, Hashem, search the heart and examine the mind,' and as it says, 'The hidden things belong to Hashem, our Elokim.'

WHAT TO TAKE FROM IT

The chapter explains that visible mitzvos performed with our physical limbs are susceptible to insincerity, as a person might do them to gain honor, praise, or prestige in the eyes of others. In contrast, the duties of the heart are entirely hidden from

human sight, making hypocrisy impossible; therefore, our inner devotion is naturally directed solely to the blessed Creator, Who alone searches our hearts and knows our deepest thoughts.

למעשה WHAT TO TAKE HOME

The holy Chovos HaLevavos is opening our eyes to a beautiful, comforting truth about our inner life. When we do physical mitzvos, the yetzer hara has a foothold to creep in and whisper, "Look how beautifully you are davening, look how much tzedakah you are giving, what will people think of you?" We have to fight so hard to keep our physical actions pure and lishmah, solely for Hashem, because other people can see them.

But your heart? Your thoughts, your emunah, your bitachon, your inner love and fear of Hashem—that is a private sanctuary where no other human being can ever tread. Nobody else knows if you are quietly thanking Hashem in your mind, or if you are working to judge another Yid favorably in your thoughts. Because these "duties of the heart" are completely hidden from the eyes of flesh and blood, they are naturally protected from the poison of seeking honor or showing off. They belong purely and exclusively to you and the Creator.

This means that your inner world is your safest spiritual haven. When the noise of the world gets too loud, or when you feel your physical avodah is getting mixed with a bit of self-interest, you can always retreat into your mind. A quiet thought of emunah, a silent moment of surrender to Hashem's will, or a private feeling of gratitude is a perfect, unblemished offering that goes straight to the Kisei HaKavod, completely pure.

Today, take just two minutes to serve Hashem entirely in the privacy of your mind—think a quiet thought of gratitude to Hashem or make a silent, heartfelt tefillah that nobody else can hear or see, enjoying the pure sweetness of a mitzvah that is solely between you and Him.