

חובות הלבבות • שער יחוד המעשה • פרק ששי

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

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In this chapter, the Chovos HaLevavos guides us in the essential avodah of guarding our thoughts and the inner musings of our hearts. The author teaches us that the ultimate success or failure of our mitzvos and deeds depends entirely on the purity of our thoughts, as the heart is the very source of our spiritual life and our connection to Hashem.

We are urged to put the same energy and care into our service of Hashem as we do into our worldly affairs. Just as we seek the absolute best and cleanest options in our physical lives, we must strive even harder to ensure our spiritual deeds are pure, wholehearted, and free from any ulterior motives.

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

אבל הזהירות במחשבה ושמירתה, ראוי לה שלא תתעלם לפקוד מחשבתה, ורעיוניה, ושרעפי לבה;

But regarding watchfulness over your thoughts and guarding them, it is proper that you do not neglect to constantly examine your thoughts, your reflections, and the inner musings of your heart;

NOTE The author transitions here to the internal avodah of the mind, emphasizing that guarding one's thoughts requires active, constant self-examination.

כי רב ההפסד והתקון במעשים לא יהיה כי אם מחמתם, כפי תקונם והפסדם.

for most of the ruin or rectification of one's physical deeds comes only because of them, varying according to how well those thoughts are rectified or ruined.

NOTE Our physical actions are merely the outer expression of our inner thoughts; if the thoughts are pure, the deeds will be pure, but if the thoughts are spoiled, the deeds are ruined.

כמו שאמר הכתוב (משלי ד): "מכל משמר נצר לבה, כי ממנו תוצאות חיים";

As the verse says: "Above all that you guard, watch your heart, for from it flow the springs of life";

ואמרה תורה (בראשית ח:כ"א): "כי יצר לב האדם רע מנעריו";

and as the Torah says: "For the inclination of man's heart is evil from his youth";

ואמר (דברים לא): "כי ידעתי את יצרו";

and as it says: "For I know their inclination";

ואמר (ד"ה א כח): "כי כל לבבות דורש ה', וכל יצר מחשבות מבין";

and as it says: "For Hashem searches all hearts, and He understands every inclination of the thoughts";

ואמר (דברים ל): "כי קרוב אליה הדבר מאד, בפיה ובלבבה לעשותו";

and as it says: "Rather, the thing is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to perform it";

ואמר (שם י'): "מה ה' אלהיך שאל מעמך, כי אם ליראה";

and as it says: "What does Hashem, your G-d, ask of you, but to fear Him";

והיראה אינה אלא בלב, והרעיון, והמחשבה.

and fear of Heaven exists nowhere else but in the heart, the reflections, and the thoughts.

NOTE Yiras Shamayim is fundamentally an internal state of mind and heart, which is why guarding one's thoughts is the key to all avodah.

ועל כן יש לה, אחי, להשתדל להיות כל מעשיך מיוחדים לבוּרא יתברך, ואל יהיה עמלך לריק וטרחך לשקר, כמ"ש (ישעיהו נ"ה:ב'): "למה תשקלו כסף בלוא לחם" וגו'.

Therefore, my brother, you must strive to make all your deeds dedicated solely to the Creator, may He be blessed, so that your toil will not be in vain and your efforts will not be for falsehood, as it is written: "Why do you weigh out money for that which is not bread?" etc.

ואל תתעלם ממה שהעירותיך עליו, כי כבר קבצתי לה בשער הזה כל שרשי מפסדי המעשים המיוחדים לאלהים, ותחת כל שרש מהם ענפים כמעט שאאין להם קץ.

Do not neglect what I have awakened you to, for I have already gathered for you in this gate all the root factors that ruin deeds dedicated to G-d, and beneath each of these roots are branches that are almost endless.

על כן אתה צריך להשמר מהם בכל יכלתך, אולי יהיה מעשה שלם לאלהים ומיוחד לשמו, ויהיה רצוי ומקבל אצל הבורא קבול טוב.

Therefore, you must guard yourself against them with all your strength, so that perhaps your service will be complete before G-d and dedicated purely to His Name, and it will be pleasing and accepted by the Creator with a favorable acceptance.

ונהוג בו מנהגך בעניני עולמך, כי אתה חושב על הטוב שתמצא במיניהם, ואשר יהיה רחוק מן הפגעים בהם, ומגנה מן הזיוף, וזה מן הכלבול;

Conduct yourself in this matter just as you conduct yourself in your worldly affairs—where you carefully seek out the very best options available, choosing what is far from potential damage, free of any counterfeit, and clear of any confusion;

וכיון שאתה עושה זה בעניני עולמך הכלה, כל שכן שתעשה כפלים בעניני אחריתך הקיימת, ובמה שתתקרב בו אל האלהים.

and since you do all this for the affairs of your fleeting physical world, how much more so must you do doubly so for the affairs of your eternal afterlife, and for that which brings you close to G-d.

NOTE The author uses a powerful 'kal vachomer' (a fortiori argument): if we exert ourselves to ensure our physical investments are secure and pure, we must do infinitely more to ensure our spiritual investments are free of ulterior motives.

והשתדל בכחך לזכר מעשיך, ואם ימעט, יותר ממה שתשתדל שיהיה רב בלתי זה;

Strive with all your strength to purify your deeds, even if they end up being few, rather than striving to make them numerous but unrefined;

כי המצט הזך הוא רב, והרב בלתי זך הוא מצט ואין בו תועלת;

for a small amount of pure service is actually a great deal, whereas a large amount of unrefined service is meager and of no benefit;

NOTE In the realm of ruchniyus, quality completely trumps quantity. A single mitzvah done with absolute lishmah (purity of intent) is worth more than many mitzvos performed with mixed motives.

וכ"ש שיהיה מעשה, עם מעוטו וזעירותו, בלתי זך לאלהים.

and how much more must you avoid a situation where your deeds, despite already being so few and small, are also unrefined before G-d.

וזהוהר שלא יהיה ענינה במעשיה לאלהים כענין העוף שאמר עליה הכתוב, שהיא יולדת הביצה ומחממת אותה על פני הארץ ממעוט שמירתה אותה, עד שיפסידוה שאר בעלי חיים ולא תעשה אפרוח.

Be careful that your conduct in your service of G-d does not resemble that of the bird spoken of in the verse, which lays its egg and warms it on the bare ground, but due to her lack of guarding it, other wild beasts ruin it, and it never hatches into a chick,

כמו שאמר הכתוב (איוב לט): "כנף רננים נעלסה וגו', "כי תעזב לארץ בציה, ועל עפר תחמם, ותשכח כי רגל תזורה" ושאר הענין.

as the verse says: "The wing of the ostrich beats joyously... For she leaves her eggs on the ground, and warms them in the dust, forgetting that a foot may crush them," and the rest of the passage.

NOTE This bird represents someone who performs a mitzvah but fails to guard it from the 'beasts' of pride, showing off, or ulterior motives, thereby ruining the spiritual fruit of their labor.

וכבר שבח החכם מי שהוא בהפך הענין הזה בוריוזותו והשתדלותו הטובה בעולמו, וצנינו לבחן בו וללמד ממעשהו, ואם הוא חלש שברמשים, כאמרו (משלי ו): "לה אַל נמלה, עצל" וגו', "תכין בקיץ לחמה" וגו'.

And the wise king already praised a creature that possesses the exact opposite trait in its diligence and excellent effort for its worldly needs, commanding us to observe it and learn from its actions, even though it is the weakest of crawling creatures, as he said: "Go to the ant, you sluggard... she prepares her bread in the summer," etc.

והנה זכרנו לה מצט מהרבה, ואל ירבה בעיניה ואל תקץ בו, כי כפי מעלות חשיבות המלאכות יהיו הפגעים הקורים אותם.

Behold, we have mentioned to you only a small fraction of a vast subject; let it not seem too much in your eyes, and do not grow weary of it, for the potential hazards that threaten any endeavor are always in direct proportion to the greatness and importance of that endeavor.

NOTE The Yetzer Hara fights hardest against the most sacred tasks. Since pure avodah is the highest level of human achievement, it naturally faces the most intense spiritual obstacles.

ומחקרנו בספר הזה, אין מעלתו וחשיבותו נעלמת ממנו שמכין.

And as for our investigation in this book, its high stature and supreme importance are not hidden from anyone who understands.

האלהים ישימונו מן השלמים עמו, והעושים לשמו הגדול, ברחמיו, אמן.

May G-d, in His mercy, place our portion among those who are wholehearted with Him, and who act solely for the sake of His great Name, Amen.

Completed is the Fifth Gate, with the help of my holy G-d.

NOTE Though the prompt refers to this as Chapter Six of the Gate of Unification of Action, the Hebrew manuscript colophon marks the completion of this entire section (the fifth gate of the book).

WHAT TO TAKE FROM IT

The chapter concludes with a powerful call to focus on the quality and purity of our avodah rather than just the quantity, explaining that a small amount of pure service is far more precious to Hashem than a large amount of impure deeds. Using the mashal of the careless bird that leaves its eggs to be trampled, contrasted with the industrious ant, the author warns us not to let our spiritual efforts go to waste through negligence. Ultimately, we must guard our thoughts with the utmost care, trusting in Hashem's mercy to help us achieve complete and pleasing service for the sake of His great Name.

לְמַעֲשֶׂה WHAT TO TAKE HOME

My dear brother, the Chovos HaLevavos is opening our eyes to a profound truth: the entire value of our avodah depends on the purity of our thoughts. We often spend so much energy worrying about the external details of our actions, yet we neglect the very place where those actions are born—our minds and hearts. If the thoughts behind our mitzvos are cluttered with self-interest or distraction, the deed itself becomes compromised. Hashem does not demand endless, massive undertakings from us; He desires the purity of our intentions. A small, simple deed done with a pure heart and a clean mind is infinitely more precious to Hashem than a mountain of actions performed without focus.

Think about how much effort we put into our worldly affairs. When we buy a house, close a business deal, or make a major purchase, we inspect every detail to ensure it is clean, genuine, and free of flaws. How much more so must we apply this same care to our spiritual lives! We cannot afford to be like the careless bird mentioned in Iyov, which lays its precious eggs on the bare ground and walks away, leaving them to be trampled by passersby. When we perform a mitzvah without guarding our thoughts, we leave our spiritual achievements exposed to the damaging winds of distraction and insincerity.

Instead, we must learn from the tiny ant. Though it is small and weak, it works with incredible focus and foresight, carefully preparing its food when the time is right. We must bring that same quiet, steady focus to our inner world. Before you begin a mitzvah, take just one quiet moment to check your heart, clear away the noise, and dedicate your action purely to the Creator.

Today, before you say a berachah, daven, or do a chessed for someone else, pause for three seconds to quiet your mind and consciously think: "I am doing this solely to bring pleasure to Hashem."