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בלבבי ח"ה - עמ' נב

1.

Everything we do should be to give pleasure to Hashem

The first thing to know about everything we are about to say is that all of it is to give a *nachas ruach* (pleasure) to our Creator. If, G-d forbid, these words are not a source of pleasure to Hashem, then it is our hope that these words shouldn't be here.

If these words are pleasing to Hashem, we also need to be careful not to mix in other things that are not desirable by Hashem. Therefore it is always incumbent upon us to only do His will, and nullify anything else that does not fit what He wants.

This is the secret to success in anything; if bad becomes mixed up good, it is difficult for the good to remain, and thus our intentions here must be pure. Only something totally pure can last.

Of course, every person has downfalls and times in which he becomes immersed in self-worry, and he is not doing his actions for the sake of Heaven. But still, we must strive to always want to do His will, and this is the basis for everything. If a person should experience any failure with these matters, he should try to return to the inner point of it all, which is to do actions that bring a *nachas ruach* to our Creator.

The first thing necessary for this is that a person should pray that if he is indeed bringing pleasure to Hashem, then what he is doing should last, and if he isn't, it should not last. Additionally, a person should pray that any feelings that he might have that are not for the sake of giving pleasure to Hashem should become erased from his thoughts, and that he should only have desires which are for

the sake of bringing pleasure to Hashem. Additionally, before any action a person does, he should think and feel this, and even say it with his mouth to Hashem: that all his actions should be for the sake of getting close to Hashem, and that if he should experience any deterrent to him getting close, it should be nullified, and his eyes should be awakened to the proper way.

We need to keep to these conditions before doing anything, at all times.

2.

Purifying our motives

We need to know: if people come to gather together, for what reason are they gathered? When a group comes together for something, it is normally impossible to say something to them that will be applicable to everyone, because everyone is on a different level; everyone needs individual guidance. If we want to say things that are wise, we need to guide everyone individually, rather than give a public address.

However, the group of people here are gathered to hear the truth. The reason for our gathering here is to gather together all the different hearts who want truth, to come together and draw out from all our hearts the true desire to come close to the Creator and give pleasure to Him. Everyone in this gathering has that truthful point in his heart, and everyone's desire for this, when added together, becomes a fire.

Therefore, in every gathering of people there has to be a common goal: to search for the truth; to search for Hashem. By this, everyone can receive the unified goal, and together we can all find the truth. The proper way to go about this is to prepare ourselves by doing it for the sake of Heaven: to search for the truth, for Hashem. If that is the motivation, then we can reach the goal with even more purity. The purer our desires are for it, the more we will merit to understand how we can come close to Hashem.

3.

We need to become a pure vessel to receive Hashem's assistance

To explain this: the soul is a Godly creation, and it wants to do the will of its Creator. There is an adage, "It is our will to do Your will, but the yeast in the dough is holding us back." The true will of a person is give pleasure to Hashem, but the yeast - the "I" in a person, the external factor of a person, wants its own desires. So we need to remove those external desires, and awaken the point of truth in us, the part in us that says that it is "our will to do Your will."

By everyone preparing themselves to hear these words for the sake of Heaven, all of the pure desires of this gathering are in unison, and we can then have assistance from Heaven to reach the truth. If our desires are a mixture of good and bad – ulterior motives mixed with Heavenly motives – there is no way to receive pure sustenance, for the sustenance (*ohr*) can only enter a vessel (*kli*), and if the vessel is impure, than the sustenance that goes into it will also be impure.

4.

Every Jew has a unique soul

Another important point to be made is that every Jew is unique in his soul. Reuven is unique in one area that Shimon isn't. If a person works alone, then everyone has his own ability, alone. But when two people join together, their abilities come together, and they can give to each other's abilities. In this way, everyone can receive another person's unique ability, and use it to serve Hashem.

But in order to join properly with another, it must be done for the sake of Heaven. If there are impure motives, then the bad part of the mix cannot sustain any connection, just as the connection of the wicked is not a connection. Only a truthful desire can unite people. A connection with some bad in it is not a true connection and will not last. It will not be strong, and it cannot produce anything.

It is not easy to find people that do everything together for the sake of Heaven, but we must look for them. It is not quantity that we need, but quality. At all times, one must remember that he should be doing the action for the sake of Heaven.

Many times we forget to have this in mind, but any small reminder to do it for the sake of Heaven has a lot of value. Eventually, a person will train himself not to be upset from his failures, and remind himself and others to do things for the sake of Heaven; Hashem will have mercy and awaken him when he does so, since he has a great desire in spite of all his failures. When a person truly searches for Hashem, Hashem will not abandon him, and he will surely draw him close, and He will merit him to do it for the sake of Heaven, which is the heart's pure desire.

5.

Praying that everything should be done for the sake of Heaven

It is proper that each individual pray many times that he merit to doing everything for the sake of Heaven, and that everyone as a whole should act for the sake of Heaven. No prayer comes back unanswered, and if a person prays that he do things for the sake of Heaven, then surely his prayer

will not go unanswered.

However, we don't always actually see this. Therefore a person shouldn't be discouraged if he sees that his prayers aren't being answered right away. He should believe that they were surely accepted, but that it isn't openly recognizable. He should continue to pray for a long time and not give up. Eventually, he is guaranteed to actually see progress: his heart and desires will act for the sake of Heaven.

The truth is that such a prayer should constantly be on one's lips. Even if a person merits to do actions purely for the sake of Heaven, there is always a higher level to be reached, a level that is still purer than the current one. One has to always pray that his motives become even more pure, and he needs to constantly pray for this.

Most people find it difficult to serve Hashem on their own, and they find it necessary to join with another; "Each friend will help each other." However, one must be cautious that the union will be for the sake of Heaven, and not for personal reasons. Those involved with each other need to speak this over with each other, that their constant desire is to join together only for the sake of Heaven.

6.

Praying to find those to join with

To find a gathering of those who truly have fear of Hashem is not an easy thing at all, in our generation. However, one shouldn't despair from this, G-d forbid; rather, a person should believe in Hashem, who is running the world with His attribute of truth. Anyone who searches for the truth is helped by Hashem.

Therefore, a person needs to beseech Hashem that he will merit to join a group or have a friend that wants to find the truth.

A person shouldn't feel guaranteed that his prayers will be answered right away, but this shouldn't cause one to despair. He should continue to pray more and more until Hashem helps him. One shouldn't care if this takes years! This is the way of someone who serves Hashem: he doesn't despair of working hard in how he beseeches Hashem, even if it takes many years, even if he doesn't see any changes! He trusts in Hashem that He hears his prayers, and eventually his prayers will be heard, and he will become close to Hashem.

The truth is that there are many ways how Hashem can draw a person close to him. Therefore, the main point of one's prayers should be that Hashem draw him close.

The way how he will get there – through a teacher, a group, or a friend – can only be attained through prayer. But the main point is to pray that he will come close to Hashem!

7.

Anything we do is a means to get close to Hashem

We have to know what our priorities are, and what is only second to most important.

Therefore, we need to know that the foundation of everything – our greatest priority – is that we should become close to Hashem.

We need to remember this at all times, and this should be what we desire our whole life: to come closer and closer. We need to remember that anything else is only a way to reach our purpose, a way to get close to Hashem.

The main thing is always to pray that we truly get close to Hashem. We need to also pray for the details it entails, such as *how* to get close, but we must not get caught up in the details.

Anyone who truly searches for Hashem will not be left empty-handed....

8.

It's hard being alone...

The Talmud says (Bava Basra 16b), "Either a friend or death." A person's soul needs companionship, and he needs to include others in his life; it can be his friends, or even just having others in his life. The point is that the soul cannot stand remaining alone. This is the way a person is made; "*It is not good for man to be alone.*" (Beraishis 2: 19). A man needs a companion who will take part in his life.

However, this is not the only reason why one needs a friend. The main reason why one needs a friend is because "*A friend helps his friend, and says to his brother, "Be strong."*" (Yeshayahu 41:6)

A person finds it difficult to tackle life's problems by himself. Life is full of difficulties, whether in material things or in spiritual matters. A person needs a lot of strength to withstand life's tribulations. It is very hard for a person to shoulder everything alone, and only when he has a partner who strengthens him and doesn't let him get affected by his life, he can withstand the difficulties.

It is very difficult to withstand anything, though unless a person has a *true* friend.

9.

It is difficult to find a true friend

Here we come to a big problem. It is very hard to find a true friend, a friend who will cater to one's personal needs, and especially necessary is a friend who is loyal, in all times of one's life. If one doesn't have such a friend, the Sages say that it is death, G-d forbid. What is the solution for such a person? Can he live his life as if he's dead? It is impossible to live like this.

What is the solution? Firstly, one needs to pray a lot for assistance and not give up. Even if it seems that his prayers aren't being answered, they will surely be answered, and eventually a person will be able to actually see it.

But until a person's prayers get answered, what should a person do in the meantime?

10.

The only true friend is Hashem

The answer to this is a great secret to anyone who doesn't know it, and it is very simple to someone who knows it.

The great secret is that Hashem Himself is the true companion that a person can have!

This doesn't mean that a person doesn't need friends. But the true friend is Hashem! "*Your friend and the friend of your father, do not abandon*" (Shabbos 31a). Rashi explains that that the "friend of your father" is Hashem.

Why is this a big secret? It is a secret because we know that Hashem is the Great King, whom it is supposedly impossible to come close to, the King who is on High, whom no one seems to have a connection or friendship with. He is the King who dwells in the most exalted place, where no one can reach. So if He can't be reached, how can one become His friend? How can a person form a friendship with a friend that he will never see even once? Such thoughts come to anyone who begins to mature, unless one was told beforehand that such thoughts are a mistake. It is a mistake that causes one to lose his focus on his purpose on this world.

Our purpose is to be close to Hashem, to be very close; to be a friend with Hashem and feel His fatherliness toward us. Hashem is our friend in everything, and there is no friend like Him in the whole world. There is no friend that can be so close to a friend as the perfect friend - Hashem.

One who hasn't merited this friendship thinks that this an exaggeration - nice thoughts which aren't practical, and just feelings; he thinks that someone who thinks like this is deluded by his imagination and fooling himself that he feels Hashem in his life. He is positive that one cannot feel Hashem.

But the truth is that it is an awesome friendship, a friendship which is so deep that no brother or friend on this world can compare to it. A person who feels Hashem in his heart is so wrapped up in Hashem's love, and goes with Hashem wherever he goes, and in every place he is he can feel Hashem with him. (*"His Glory fills the entire world."*)

One must know that if he hasn't yet merited to feel this way, he is experiencing death on this world. Even if he has everything good, if he is missing this, he is missing the main thing -- a bond with Hashem, a true bond. He is only experiencing mere sparks of love, and he doesn't realize that he could be living in a world full of love, a life that is never lonely; one always has a partner with him, a true partner - Hashem!

One who decides to believe this and strive to live in this world of love has the whole world in his hands. We will now explain how to enter this state of total love with Hashem.

11.

Why Hashem is better than any other friend

Before a person begins to work on how to feel his love for Hashem and Hashem's love toward him, he must first look at the words of the Talmud, "What you don't want your friend to do to you, don't do to him - this is the whole Torah, and the rest is commentary." Rashi explains that "friend" here means Hashem! Hashem Himself, in all His honor, is your friend and your father's friend; it's awesome. The Talmud is telling us that Hashem is your friend, a true friend whom there is none like.

We usually think of Hashem as being the King of the universe, Creator of the universe, etc. We relate to Hashem as if He is so separated from us that we can't ever grasp Him.

It is indeed true that He is our King. But there is another way to relate to Hashem, another way to go about Him; He is your "friend", and we can have a relationship with Him.

This is a totally different approach than the first approach; it is the soul's connection with Hashem. Just like a person enjoys sitting with his friends and talking to them, so can a person enjoy Hashem's company. Hashem is always available to talk to. He is not like other friends who can't always be with us; He is with us at any time.

12.

The evil inclination convinces a person that one can't have a relationship with Hashem

A person has to turn over all his thoughts to think about Hashem. One shouldn't just relate to Hashem as if He is far away, sitting in Heaven, applying the verse, "*Who among us can ascend to Heaven?*" or "*Who can see me and live?*" He shouldn't think, "What do I have to do with Hashem?" This is a nonsense that the evil inclination puts in, that we can't be close to Hashem.

A Jew who is living a true lifestyle lives with Hashem in his heart at all times; Hashem is his friend. Anyone who tastes of this friendship can feel clearly that there is no friendship like it in the world. There is nothing more reliable than this friendship, and there is nothing more pleasant than sitting in Hashem's company. Hashem is the true companion to a person, the true beloved friend that we have.

13.

All the evil inclination wants is so that we shouldn't have a relationship with Hashem

Hashem created the evil inclination in order to test us. The evil inclination enters in our mind all kinds

of thoughts and mentalities that aren't good. He turns dark into light and light into dark. It tells us in our thoughts, what kind of talk is this – getting close to Hashem?! Being friends with Hashem?! Hashem is so awesome and cannot be reached; you are friends with Him?!

The *yetzer hora* has many such accusations. It just wants one thing: that a Jew shouldn't be close to Hashem or be a friend with Him. This is everything that the evil inclination stands for.

14.

Praying to merit this relationship

One who searches for the truth is not swayed by the evil inclination's arguments. He prays to Hashem that he be shown the truth, and cries to Hashem as well for it. He wonders if it is really possible to have a relationship with Hashem, or if he is just hearing parables and doesn't feel it in his heart. He cries to Hashem that he be shown the truth, and he even visits the leaders of the generation and asks them: Is it really possible to feel Hashem in my heart? Is it really possible to have a bond with Him? Is it real or is it just imagined? Is this the way a Jew lives, or is it just a new idea?

If one prays to Hashem to be shown the truth, and cries out to Him very much, Hashem will help him find someone who is true in his service to Hashem who will tell him that there is nothing simpler than it. All of the great people in all generations lived like this, and there is no fact simpler than this -- that a Jew must be close to Hashem and be a friend to Him.

15.

The various arguments of the evil inclination

Hashem put the evil inclination in us who tries to sway us from the truth. The evil inclination comes up with many arguments and doesn't stop. He finds excuses why one should remove himself from the truth. A Jew who keeps the Torah and does mitzvos, and does his utmost to serve Hashem, and looks for how he can serve Hashem and be close to Him and love Him, and how he can feel Hashem's love toward him – will be attacked by the evil inclination's arguments.

His first argument will be: "First attain true awe of Hashem, which should come first, as it says *"The beginning of wisdom is awe of Hashem."* He claims that one first needs to learn how to have true awe of Him before he embarks on loving Him, and that he should first truly fear punishment before anything else. The evil inclination tells this to someone his whole life, that he is not yet in awe of Hashem so he can't love Him yet. In this way a person unfortunately dies without ever having any love of Hashem.

We have seen Jews like this, who never loved Hashem their entire lives, because of the above argument.

Our generation is weak, and therefore the Steipler Gaon zt"l writes that a person needs to grab whatever he can – whether it is fear of Hashem, love of Hashem or any good trait. How pitiful is it when one leaves this world without ever even beginning to love Hashem in his heart. A person has to also work on awe of Hashem, as well as to also love Him; if not now, when? Who knows if he'll have tomorrow to do it...

16.

Loving Hashem is not only for Chassidim...

There are those who argue that “anything new is forbidden by the Torah”, and that what we have said here is not the way we have received from our blessed teachers. The claim is that our way is to only learn *mussar* and about awe of Hashem – meaning to only have fear of punishment, for we don't find any of our earlier teachers stressing the fact to love Hashem. This claim is simply nonsense, because there is an open verse in the Torah that we have to love Hashem with all our hearts.

If loving Hashem is just a product of “*Chassidus*” or a simply nice conduct, then there would be room to claim that it is not our accepted way, because our fathers never did it. But it is a mitzvah of the Torah, so how can there be any such claim? Our holy ancestors surely performed the mitzvah of loving Hashem, so no one can say that it is not our ancestors' way.

Who is greater than the Chofetz Chaim, the light of the exile, who brings the words of Sefer HaChinuch in the beginning of his sefer, Biur Halacha: “This mitzvah is that person should place his outlook and thoughts on loving Hashem, and he should understand in his heart that any other love in this world such as love of wealth, children or honor is nothing in comparison to love for Hashem.”

Although these are simple words to anyone who seeks Hashem, we must speak them out so that any doubt is removed. Don't let your evil inclination tell you that loving Hashem is a “Chassidic” thought. How can an open mitzvah in the Torah only be for someone who is Chassidic?

The *Sefer HaChinuch* writes that it is a constant mitzvah for every person, and he writes clearly that one needs to place all his thoughts on loving Hashem. We don't need to elaborate on this topic for one who is searching for truth. But the evil inclination is very powerful, and he has succeeded into swaying many people into false notions; he'll tell a person anything just to get him far away from truth.

17.

Inspiring words of Rav Yisroel Salanter zt"l and Rav Dessler zt"l

If you're still in doubt and you think that loving Hashem is a "Chassidic" thing, (even though it's not true) then, for the sake of your future, I will quote you the words of the founder of the *Mussar* movement, Reb Yisrael Salanter, who is quoted in *Michtav M'Elياهو* (Vol. 1, p.38):

"In our times, we lack the true way of *mussar*. Gone are the truthful men who have it strong. We have reached the footsteps of Moshiach, which is known as an 'external' generation. When a person learns *mussar* today, he is focused more on the wisdom, philosophy and psychology of it. Even if he learns *mussar* with feeling, he doesn't bring it into his soul. Those of the Chassidic movement are also lacking in attachment to Hashem; they are left with just the outer shell of *Chassidus*, which seems like enthusiasm but isn't. Uplifting songs have remained, but the soul of the songs is gone. Enthusiasm in prayer has become a thing of old. Today the only thing we have is to take anything that helps us serve Hashem, by combining the wisdom of *Mussar* and *Chassidus* together. If only we can be illuminated and be opened up to recognize Hashem. If only today's *mussar* can uplift us to a little Chassidic enthusiasm. If only that enthusiasm would spur us on to make a deep self-accounting. If only through all of this we can grow spiritually and have a strong religious commitment. Hashem should help us reach this!"

These words of Rav Dessler zt"l are here to give us advice and help us serve Hashem.

18.

In our times, one must strengthen himself in whatever way he can

In order to feel these words properly, we have an explanation from Rav Hutner zt"l, who says a wonderful parable.:

A great philanthropist had two daughters. He wanted only to marry them off to the best scholars, true servants of Hashem. He was willing to support them forever so that they could have a clear mind to serve Hashem. Hashem granted him this kindness, and he married off his daughters to two outstanding people. He asked one of his sons in law which kinds of food they will need, so that they should never feel weak. The first son in law said that he needs to eat meat every day in order to have strength. The second son in law said he needs milk. Since one needed meat and the other needed milk, they could never eat together. (Although they technically could have dined together on separate tablecloths, they chose to be stringent).

One day, the wealthy father in law lost all his money one day, and he became poor. Yet he still found enough money to support his sons in law with their diets, but he couldn't give them everyday. Soon he became even more poor, and couldn't give meat or milk, only hard bread and water.

Now that the two son-in-laws are eating the same foods anyway, nothing should hold them back from eating together.

The same is with our subject. Once upon a time, *Chassidus* was real *Chassidus*, and *mussar* was real *mussar*. Each person chose his unique way to serve Hashem. But today, the *Chassidus* being practiced is not *Chassidus*, and neither is *mussar*. We are all partaking of the same "table" and reading the same *sefarim*, any *sefer* that strengthens us in serving Hashem.

Anyone who is searching for truth should nullify themselves to the words of Rav Dessler zt"l and Rav Hutner zt"l, and **strengthen themselves in whatever way they can**. Maybe through this, the words here can enter the heart.

19.

It's not enough to love the Torah without loving Hashem

The evil inclination is called an "old and foolish king." It has many ways to advise a person in straying from Hashem, and if it doesn't succeed one way, it'll look for another way. There are those who are swayed by him in thinking that since "Hashem, the Torah, and the nation of Yisrael are one", and it suffices for them to love only learning Torah, and that alone is like loving Hashem, for Hashem and the Torah are one. (We will explain why this does not suffice to love Hashem).

The truth is that there are three types of love: love for the Creator, love for the Torah, and love of the nation of Yisrael. If I love one of them, that doesn't mean for sure that I love the other two. So no one can rely on the fact that he loves Torah.

20.

What it means to truly love Hashem

There are people whom the evil inclination tests them by telling them that they already love Hashem. It will argue that you already love Hashem, and you only need to love Him more, and that you are

already loving Him more and more.

This is also a false argument, because someone who thinks this doesn't know what love is. One should know that love for Hashem at least resembles the love of a husband and wife or the love of parents to children; just as when a father doesn't see his children he misses them, so must a person miss Hashem and long for Him, like the *Chovos HaLevovos* says, "The soul longs for G-d." Nowadays this is a problem, for even in our regular kinds of love we are lacking true love, and our feelings aren't so strong. This problem is one of the curses of the footsteps of Moshiach.

True love brings one to have a longing for the one whom he loves; he has a great desire to see him, to feel him, and to speak with him. These are not merely unstable feelings; they are feelings that fill the whole person and make him feel a tremendous warmth in his heart, and sometimes even in his whole body. It is hard to put this concept in writing, but the Rambam has already stated that all of the thoughts remain solid in a lover of Hashem. Someone who loves Hashem lives in a different world, a world of friendship with Hashem; he can talk to Him, feel Him, and is bound up with Him in his soul.

Upon loving Hashem, a person's heart stops being dead and comes to life; he is given a satisfaction and joy in life, and his whole life becomes different.

A person doesn't just think, "Okay, so I love Hashem." If he thinks this way, he doesn't know what love is, and certainly he doesn't know what loving Hashem is. One needs to understand that loving Hashem means to be moved to tears out of yearning for Him. A person cries out of warmth, love and happiness when he loves Hashem.

The evil inclination, though, tells a person that he already loves Hashem with just his small amount of feelings for Him.

It is hard to explain this any clearer to one who is searching for the truth, for he knows that loving Hashem is a deep, inner matter which needs a lot of hard work to acquire.

21.

***Besides for learning Torah, a person must also
develop a love for Hashem***

The evil inclination tells some people that they don't have to try to love Hashem, for they can rely on the words of the *Sefer HaChinuch*, who writes, "How does one acquire love of Hashem? Through

Torah..."

However – what should we say? The fact is that our eyes can see that many people are diligent in learning Torah, yet they don't love Hashem. We are puzzled: Why does Hashem let this occur?

But there is really no room for such a question. Why is this so? Because we know that all the benefits that come through Torah learning can only come when Torah is learned *lishmah*, for its own sake. Rav Chaim Vital wrote, "Who can say on himself that he learns Torah for its own sake?" So we don't learn Torah for its own sake, and therefore we don't get its benefits. It is therefore apparent that in order to attain love for Hashem it is not enough to learn Torah. We need more advice on how to get there.

The Rambam writes, "What is the way to love Him?..." He does not say that it is enough to just learn Torah. A person needs to seek ways how to love Hashem – besides for learning Torah, which is the basis for acquiring anything. What we need is to be healed, and we need the medicine to be healed.

The Vilna Gaon writes that when Torah learning is lacking in quality, we need medicine to heal us; we are referring to the advice found in our holy *sefarim*, which we will explain.

22.

People don't know what to work on first

Many good people have been tricked by the evil inclination and become so mixed up by him that they stop serving Hashem totally. They don't know where to begin, and where to end. People learn *mussar*, and they come across things that they would like to try to do; they know that they are sorely lacking in many areas that need improvement. But they don't know where to start and how to go about. They cannot come up with an order of what to do.

Additionally, people see others who are trying to help our communities – and every person speaks of one particular topic we need to improve on. One speaker will speak about on how we have to stop evil gossip, and another will lecture us on the sin of talking in shul. One gives a lecture on how we have to improve on answering Amen with concentration, and another tells us we have to improve on the laws of Shabbos. One lectures us on how we need to work on modesty, and another will lecture us on how we should really welcome in the Shabbos early. Each of them is trying to strengthen a particular area, but there is no order.

People are wandering around in the dark trying to figure out how they can work on all of these things at once. It is a problem that many people have, especially those who are searching for how to serve

Hashem best. We need to be able to know how to put order to all of these things, in order to serve Hashem properly. When we will understand how to serve Hashem properly, we can arrange all of these matters properly.

There are so many details involved in serving Hashem; it's endless. We need to understand the inner meaning in all of it, its inner contents, and the purpose of all of it together. When we know the purpose of how it all comes together, we can grasp the details with clarity, and we can know where each detail belongs and how it connects to the greater picture. Therefore, when a person begins to serve Hashem, one must know exactly what the purpose of his service is, to where his service is leading him to. After a person knows that purpose, he must now understand how each detail can bring him closer to it.

Source: <https://bilvavi.net/english/bilvavi-part-5-052-not-good-be-alone>