



GROWING IN LOVE AS A PATH TO PERSONAL AND NATIONAL REDEMPTION

The Gemara, Yoma 9b, gives us the cause for the destruction of the first and second Beit Hamikdash:

מקדש ראשון מפני מה חרב מפני ג' דברים שהיו בו ע"ז וגלוי עריות ושפיכות דמים ... אבל מקדש שני ... מפני מה חרב מפני שהיתה בו שנאת חנם ללמדך ששקולה שנאת חנם כנגד שלש עבירות ע"ז גלוי עריות ושפיכות דמים.

The first Holy Temple, why was it destroyed? Because of three different aspects that had become part of its very nature: idol worship, illicit relations and murder ... The second Holy Temple ... why was it destroyed? Because of baseless hatred (sinat chinam). This comes to

teach us that baseless hatred is equivalent to the three cardinal prohibitions of idol worship, illicit relations, and murder.

How are we expected to combat the “baseless hatred” we may be feeling in our hearts toward our fellow Jew? Is it enough to simply not hate, or are we expected to do more?

Rav Kook determines that if hatred destroyed the Temple, then the opposite will rebuild it:

ואם נחרבנו, ונחרב העולם עמנו על ידי שנאת חנם, נשוב להבנות, והעולם עמנו יבנה, על ידי אהבת חנם.

If we were destroyed, and the world with us, due to baseless hatred, then we shall

rebuild ourselves, and the world with us, with baseless love — ahavat chinam.

Orot HaKodesh vol. III, p. 324

The Torah, Vayikra 19:18, commands us to love others in the following way:

לֹא תִקֶּם וְלֹא תִטּוֹר אֶת בְּנֵי עַמֶּךָ וְאֶהְרַת לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךָ אֲנִי ה'.

Do not take revenge and do not bear a grudge against the members of your people, and you shall love your fellow as you love yourself; I am God.

The Torah does not inform us what the nature of this “love” is. Is it enough to simply feel love for others in our hearts? Should we be going around telling people that we love them

irrespective of our relationship to them? The commentators tell us that real love involves much more than lip service or internal feelings.

Ahavat Yisrael as a Prohibition Against Hurting Others

The Rambam in the *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilchot Deot* 6:3 defines the mitzvah to love others by caring for them as you would yourself:

מצוה על כל אדם לאהוב את כל אחד ואחד מישראל כגופו שנאמר ואהבת לרעך כמוך לפיכך צריך לספר בשבחו ולחוס על ממונו כאשר הוא חס על ממונו עצמו ורוצה בכבוד עצמו והמתכבד בקלון חבירו אין לו חלק לעולם הבא.

It is a mitzvah incumbent upon every person to love each member of the Jewish people as much as he loves himself, as the verse states, "And you shall love your fellow as you love yourself." Therefore, one must speak praise of another person and be cautious with another's property in the same way that he desires to be honored and is cautious with his own property. However, one who glorifies himself through the denigration of his fellow has no share in the World to Come.

The *Sefer HaChinuch*, Mitzvah 243, defines loving your neighbor as yourself as not hurting others:

ואמרו זכרונם לברכה [שבת ל"א ע"א] דעלך סני לחברך לא תעביד. ואמרו בספרי, אמר רבי עקיבא זה כלל גדול בתורה, כלומר שהרבה מצוות שבתורה תלויין בכך, שהאהבה חבירו כנפשו לא יגנוב ממונו ולא ינאף את אשתו ולא יונהו בממונו ולא בדברים ולא יסיג גבולו ולא יזיק לו בשום צד. וכן כמה מצוות אחרות תלויות בזה.

The Sages have said, "Whatever is hateful to you, do not do to your friend." In the Sifri, it is stated that Rabbi Akiva said, "This is a fundamental principle

in the Torah," meaning that many commandments are related to this one, in the respect that one who loves his fellow will not steal his belongings, nor be unfaithful with his wife, nor will he defraud or insult him, nor trespass upon his property, nor cause him damage in any way. Thus, the fulfillment of many other commandments is dependent upon the fulfillment of this one.

The *Sefer HaMitzvot HaGadol*, *Mitzvat Asei* 9, gives us a broader understanding of the mitzvah, since he views hurting others as if you are actually harming yourself:

מי שיושב ומחתך בשר והכה ידו בסכין וכי תחזור ידו ותכה ידו להנמק.

Imagine a person sitting and cutting a piece of meat, who accidentally cuts his own hand with the knife. Would it be logical for him to hit the hand that is holding the knife in revenge?

The *Sefer HaChinuch*, Mitzvah 243, goes even further in describing the mitzvah to love each Jew. He tells us to show compassion to a person and his assets. Treat a person the way we would want to be treated ourselves, and to love each member of Israel with a "soul love," i.e. to have compassion for a Jew and his property just as we have compassion for ourselves and our own property:

שכלל הכל הוא שיתנהג האדם עם חבירו כמו שיתנהג עם עצמו, לשמור ממונו ולהרחיק ממנו כל נזק, ואם יספר עליו דברים יספרם לשבח ויחוס על כבודו ולא יתכבד בקלונו, וכמו שאמרו זכרונם לברכה [ירושלמי חגיגה פ"ב ה"א] המתכבד בקלון חבירו אין לו חלק לעולם הבא. והמתנהג עם חבירו דרך אהבה ושלוש ורעות ומבקש תועלתם ושמה בטובם, עליו הכתוב אומר [ישעיהו מ"ט, ג'] ישראל אשר בך אתפאר.

The elements included in this mitzvah follow the general principle that one should treat another person in the way he would treat himself, e.g. protecting

his property, preventing him from being harmed, speaking only well of him, respecting him, and certainly not glorifying oneself at his expense. The Sages have said regarding this last point, "One who glorifies himself at the expense of his fellow has no share in the World to Come." Whereas, one who behaves with others in a loving and peaceful manner fulfills the verse, "Israel, by whom I am glorified."

Rav Kook, when describing the mitzvah to love others, speaks from his heart and his soul. From his description we can see that the love we should feel for others should be deep and very real. It should stem from the desire to connect with the light of Hashem that flickers in every Jew:

שמעו אלי עמי. מתוך נשמתני אני מדבר עמכם, מתוך נשמתני, מתוך קשר החיים שאני קשור בכולכם, ואתם כולכם קשורים בי, מתוך אותה ההרגשה שאני חש אותה עמוק יותר מכל הרגשות החיים שלי, שאתם רק אתם, רק אתם, רק כולכם, כללכם, כל נשמותיכם, כל דורותיכם, רק אתם הנכם תוכן חיי, בכם אני חיי, בכם, בחטיבה הכוללת של כולכם, יש לחיי אותה התוכן, שהוא קרוי חיים, מבלעדיכם אין לי כלום. כל התוכן, כל השאיפות, כל הערך של שיווי החיים, הכל אני מוצא בקרבי רק עמכם ואני זקוק להתקשר עם נשמותיכם כולכם. אני מוכרח לאהבה אתכם אהבה אין קץ. אי אפשר לי להרגיש שום הרגשה אחרת. כל האהבות הקטנות עם הגדולות שבכל תהלוכות חיי הכל אצורות הן באהבתכם באהבת כללותכם, הכלל שכל הפרטים שלכם בו היום וחיים כל אחד מכם כל נשמה בודדת שמכלל כולכם היא ניצוץ גדול וחשוב מאבוקת אור עולמיים, המאירה לי את אור החיים אתם נותנים אתם לי תוכן לחיים לעבודה, לתורה, לתפילה, לשירה לתקוה. דרך הצינור של הוייתכם אני חש את הכל אני אוהב את הכל.

Listen to me, my people! I speak to you from my soul, from within my innermost soul. I call out to you from the living

connection by which I am bound to all of you, and by which all of you are bound to me. I feel this more deeply than any other feeling: that only you — all of you, all of your souls, throughout all of your generations — you alone are the meaning of my life. In you I live. In the aggregation of all of you, my life has that content that is called “life.” Without you, I have nothing. All hopes, all aspirations, all purpose in life, all that I find inside myself — these are only when I am with you. I need to connect with all of your souls. I must love you with a boundless love.

Each one of you, each individual soul from the aggregation of all of you, is a great spark from the torch of infinite light, which enlightens my existence. You give meaning to life and work, to Torah and prayer, to song and hope. It is through the conduit of your being that I sense everything and love everything.
Shemonah Kevatzim, vol. I, sec. 163

According to Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Tanya* 32, by recognizing the incredible G-dliness in man who is made in G-d’s image, love of all man will be the inevitable consequence:

והנה ע"י קיום הדברי' הנ"ל להיות גופו נבזה ונמאס בעיניו רק שמחתו תהיה שמחת הנפש לבדה הרי זו דרך ישרה וקלה לבא לידי קיום מצות ואהבת לרעך כמוך לכל נפש מישראל למגדול ועד קטן. כי מאחר שגופו נמאס ומתועב אצלו והנפש והרוח מי יודע גדולתן ומעלתן בשרשן ומקורן באלקי' חיים. בשגם שכולן מתאימות ואב א' לכולנה ולכן נקראו כל ישראל אחים ממש מצד שורש נפשם בה' אחד רק שהגופים מחולקי'. ולכן העושי' גופם עיקר ונפשם טפלה אי אפשר להיות אהבה ואחווה אמיתית ביניהם אלא התלויה בדבר לבדה. וז"ש הלל הזקן על קיום מצוה זו זהו כל התורה כולה ואידך פירושא הוא כו'. כי יסוד ושורש כל התורה הוא להגביה ולהעלות הנפש על הגוף מעלה מעלה עד עיקרא ושרשא דכל עלמין וגם להמשיך אור א"ס ב"ה בכנסת ישראל כמ"ש לקמן דהיינו במקור נשמות כל

ישראל למהוי אחד באחד דוקא ולא כשיש פירוה.

A person who recognizes the loftiness of the soul, as contrasted to the lowliness of the body, can easily fulfill the mitzvah of loving one’s fellow. All Jews are interconnected and all are children of One Father. Therefore we are called brothers, since each person’s soul has its root within God, and one is only divided from the other in the physical sense. On the other hand, one who gives precedence to the physical will not be able to truly fulfill this mitzvah in an unconditional way, as required. That is why Hillel described this mitzvah as the most fundamental commandment in the Torah, while the rest is commentary. For the foundation of the service of God is to elevate one’s soul to its root and thereby draw down spiritual sustenance for the Jewish people, which is not possible to do if we are divided.

By recognizing the incredible G-dliness in man who is made in G-d’s image, love of all man will be the inevitable consequence.



Giving Creates Love Not the Other Way Round

In his essay on loving kindness, the mussar giant Rav Eliyahu E. Dessler defines love as the result of giving.

כאשר ברא אלקים את האדם, עשהו לנותן ונוטל. כח הנתינה הוא כח עליון ממדות יוצר הכל ברוך הוא, שהוא מרחם ומטיב ונותן, מבלי קבל דבר בתמורה, הן לא יחסר לו כלום ... רק שאנו מביעים לו את תודתנו, אשר זה שורש עבודתנו לו. וככה עשה את האדם ... כי יוכל לרחם ולהטיב וליתן.

When the Almighty created human beings He made them capable of both giving and taking. The faculty of giving is a sublime power. It is one of the attributes of G-d Himself. He is the Giver par excellence. His bounty and His goodness extend to all His creatures. His giving is pure giving for He takes nothing in return. He can take nothing for He lacks nothing. Man has been granted this sublime power of giving enabling him too to be merciful to bestow happiness to give of himself.

Strive For Truth page 119
(Translated by Rav Aryeh Carmell, Feldheim Publishers)

The word for “love” in Hebrew, “*ahava*,” has the root “*hav*,” which means to give. The more a person gives to others the more the giver will love the recipient. Will the recipient feel love toward the giver? Not necessarily. This is because the act of giving in and of itself creates the *ahava*. Taking, says Rav Dessler, may be a necessity for all of us, but it doesn’t create a “love” relationship in and of itself. The following true story from World War II illustrates this point. Rav Dessler tells the story (*Michtav M’Eliyahu*, Volume 1, Page 36) of a case that he personally observed. (From a personal conversation I had with a member of Rav Dessler’s family, this story was

actually biographical, and it involved Rav Dessler himself, his wife and child):

I knew a young couple whose little son was the delight of their lives. War overtook their town and they were forced to flee. It so happened that the young mother was away from home on that day; the father fled with his little boy in one direction while the mother was forced to take the opposite route, and so the family was separated. At last the battlefronts grew quiet, peace returned, and they were reunited — and what a happy family union that was. But a remarkable thing came to light. The love between the father and his son was deeper than that of the mother for the son. The cruel fact was that the potential “giving” of all those years was lost beyond recall. It was the father who had reared the child and had lavished on him the thousand-and-one acts of tender care which normally fall to the mother. The love which springs from all that giving had passed completely to the father.

Loving Others Like Yourself Begins at Home

The idea of loving others as oneself was observed very clearly in the life and actions of Rav Aryeh Levin in his love of every Jew. This story involving his relationship to his wife beautifully illustrates this idea:

Rabbi Aryeh Levin was one of the most beloved rabbis of the previous generation. He lived in Israel and had a wonderful reputation among all Jews, no matter

their background or religious level. On any given week, Rabbi Levin could be seen visiting inmates in the local prison, relating to soldiers defending the land of Israel, or taking care of the needy. He was also married for many years right up to his old age. In her later years his wife started experiencing foot problems. One day the pain became unbearable and Rabbi Levin decided to visit the doctor with her. Upon their arrival the doctor brought them both into his examination room. The doctor looked at Rebbetzin Levin and asked, “How can I help?” Before his wife could say anything, Rabbi Levin answered, “My wife’s foot hurts us.” It wasn’t her foot; it was their foot. If she was experiencing pain, so was he, and that’s how they experienced life together.

The Life of Rabbi Aryeh Levin: A Tzaddik in our time. By Simcha Raz. Page 150 (Feldheim)

Mashiach Will Come When True Love Reigns Supreme

The Chafetz Chaim, (*Shmirat HaLashon, Chelek Sheini*, Ch. 7), tells us that Mashiach will come when we maintain peace in our communities by eradicating both baseless hatred and speaking in derogatory ways about others. Baseless hatred is actualized primarily through lashon hara:

והנה כתבו הספרים בשם הזוהר “ק דבי כנישתא חדא אם היו שומרים מדת השלום כדבעי יכולים לזכות לביאת המשיח א”כ ביאת המשיח תלוי בידוע וידוע דמדת השלום אין אנו יכולים לזכות בו רק אם נהיה זהירים ממתלה מעון שנאת חנם ולשה”ר וכל אחד

שיתחזק לתקן החטא הזה יהיה לו חלק בהבית הבנוי לעתיד דבלתם היה הבית חרב לעולם ח”ו.

It is written in the name of the Holy Zohar that even one congregation that maintains peace properly can merit bringing the Mashiach. Therefore, the coming of the Mashiach is dependent upon us. And it is known that preserving peace can only be accomplished if we are careful in avoiding both baseless hatred and speaking derogatorily of one another. Each individual who endeavors to rectify these shortcomings will have a share in rebuilding the future Temple; without this, the Temple could remain destroyed forever, God forbid.

May we be zoche to build a true and lasting love connection between every Jew, and as a result, merit the final geulah, the coming of Mashiach and the rebuilding of the third and final Beit Hamikdash.



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