

דע את עמך  
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# Getting to Know Your People

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דע את עמך  
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## *Contents*

<b>1   <i>Steps Toward Ahavas Yisrael</i></b>	<b>3</b>
Three Kinds of Love	3
Two Steps to Ahavas Yisroel –“Remove Yourself From Evil” and “Do good”	3
“What is Hated to You, Do Not Do Unto Others”	4
Remove Your Ego	5
To Love Others Like Yourself	5
Our Avodah: To Reveal the Selfless Love for Others	6
Our Goal: Unity	6
In Summary	7
 <b>2   <i>Revealing Unconditional Love</i></b>	 <b>8</b>
Four Kinds of Relationships	8
Hating Evil	8
Neutral Relationships	9
Conditional Love	9
Two Examples of Conditional Love	9
Seeing Others’ Qualities	10
Unconditional Love	11
 <b>3   <i>The Necessity To Hate Evil</i></b>	 <b>13</b>
Hatred Tells Us A Lot About Love	13
Hating a Sinner	13
Hating the evil is part of Ahavas Yisrael	14
The Dangers of Kiruv	14
 <b>4   <i>Loving A Convert: Achieving Universal Love</i></b>	 <b>16</b>
The Mitzvah To Love A Convert	16
“Ahavas Yisrael” Isn’t Everything	16
Ahavas Yisrael/Love of Jews and Achdus/Universal Unity	17

<b>A Long History of Disparity In Creation</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>The Head and the Rest of the Body</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>The Connection Between Converts and Moshiach</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Exile – Disparity Between Jews and Gentiles</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>The Connecting Point</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>The Convert: The Paradoxical Existence of Jew and Gentile At Once</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Loving A Convert: The Key To Achieving Unity With The World</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>The Future – A New Perspective</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Loving A Convert: Remember Your Own Beginnings</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>The Connection of Gentiles To Torah</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>The Inner Perspective Towards A Convert</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Why The Beis HaMikdash Is On Har HaMoriah and not Har Sinai</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>The Third Beis HaMikash Is For Everyone</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>In Conclusion</b>	<b>25</b>
<b><i>5   How To Hate Evil &amp; Aspire For Unity</i></b>	<b><i>27</i></b>
<b>When Hatred Is Permissible</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Hating A Sinner Is Not Allowed When It Becomes Personal</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Defining Love and Hate</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Baseless Hatred Cannot Allow For The Beis HaMikdash</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>“Kamoicha” – To Love Another Jew “Like Yourself”</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Hatred Does Not Exist In Our Inner Dimension</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Hating The Evil, Not the Person</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>The Depth of Ahavas Yisrael</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Returning To The Perfected State of Mankind</b>	<b>33</b>

## 1 | *Steps Toward Ahavas Yisrael*

### *Three Kinds of Love*

The holy *Zohar* states that there are “three crowns” which are all intertwined with each other: love for Hashem, love for the Jewish people, and love for the Torah. Each of these are interconnected, so a person cannot have one of these loves if he is missing the others.

Simply put, in order to love Hashem, we must also love the Jewish people as well as to love the Torah. In order to love the Jewish people, we must also love Hashem and love the Torah. And in order to love the Torah, we must love Hashem as well as love the Jewish people.

That is true, but the deeper explanation, however, is that these are all *paths* to get to the other. The *path* to love Hashem is through loving the Jewish people together with loving the Torah. The *path* to get to love of the Jewish people is through loving Hashem together with loving the Torah. And the *path* to loving the Torah is through loving Hashem together with loving the Jewish people.

There is a discussion amongst our Sages (in the *Talmud Yerushalmi*) about which love has to come first, but everyone agrees that the purpose of all these three kinds of love is to love Hashem. Thus, love of the Torah and love for the Jewish people are but the “garments” of the true love – love of Hashem. Our love for Hashem is thus “clothed” in our love for Torah and in our love for the Jewish people.

Our *avodah* (inner work) in *ahavas Yisrael* (loving the Jewish people) is to understand how all these three kinds of love are essentially one and the same: how they lead to love for Hashem.

### *Two Steps to Ahavas Yisrael – “Remove Yourself From Evil” and “Do good”*

In *Tehillim* it is written, “Remove yourself from evil, and do good.” There are always two steps in any *avodah* that we have – first we must remove ourselves from any evil or obstacles, and only then may we attempt to “do good”. Thus, before we learn how to “do good” in our *avodah*, we must first remove the evil, if we are to get to any good.

Therefore, we have two steps in *ahavas Yisrael* (loving the Jewish people). The first step in *ahavas Yisrael* is to first “remove yourself from evil”, and the second step in *ahavas Yisrael* is to “do good”.

The *Mishnah* in *Avos* states: “What is hated to you, do not to do your friend.” This is our first step in *ahavas Yisrael*: loving other Jews. We must stay away from committing evil acts towards other Jews, such as being inconsiderate to another Jew. Only after we succeed in fulfilling this first step can we proceed to the actual *mitzvah* of *ahavas Yisrael* of “And you shall love your friend like yourself.”

The first step we will need to do is not do wrong things to others, but this is not yet the actual level that is *ahavas Yisrael*. It is but a prerequisite. In order to achieve *ahavas Yisrael*, in order to “do good” for others, first we should not do inconsiderate things to other people. Only by being considerate to others in the first place can a person come to “do good” for others out of love.

On a deeper note, to “do good” doesn’t necessarily have to mean doing physical acts of kindness for another person. A person can “do good” with one’s very heart. This we can see by the following phenomenon. Let’s say two people who never met each other in their life are suddenly informed that they are long-lost brothers. Suddenly, these two strangers will be filled with an enormous love for each other. What can we learn from this? It shows us that the love present in the Jewish people is a real, existing force within us that can always be accessed – if we choose to, that is.

Although we are ultimately speaking here about increasing our *achdus* (unity) to each other, our *avodah* with this not simply to try to “become one” with each other; rather, all of us already are one. Every Jewish soul, all of us, has the same root; we are all essentially one unit. So what it is that we have to do? All we need to do is *remove* the obstacles holding us back from our natural love toward each other, and that will *reveal outward* the love for others Jews that we have deep down in our souls.

### ***“What is Hated to You, Do Not Do Unto Others”***

The *Gemara* states, “Rabbi Akiva said, “What is hated to you, do not do unto others, for it is written, “And you shall love your fellow like yourself.” What is Rabbi Akiva saying? That a person shouldn’t kill or steal? That we shouldn’t cause others pain? Although it is definitely true that we shouldn’t cause others pain, this cannot be what Rabbi Akiva was coming to say. A person shouldn’t cause pain to others regardless, even if he doesn’t mind if someone else would do it to him.

What doesn’t bother one person may still bother another person, and one may not do something to another that is bothersome even if he himself isn’t bothered by it. So what does it mean that you shouldn’t do to others what you yourself do not want done to you? What does it have to do with you? Simple human decency requires that we shouldn’t cause pain to others; that is not new to us!

Rabbi Akiva is coming to tell us an entirely new idea. What Rabbi Akiva came to tell us is that a person shouldn’t only be concerned about himself; he should be concerned about others. “What is hated to you, do not do unto others” - a person wouldn’t want that another person should only care about himself and not to care about him. Therefore, don’t do that others. Just like you don’t like it when another person only cares about himself and he doesn’t care or worry about you, so should you be the same and not only worry about yourself.

### *Remove Your Ego*

Elsewhere in the Talmud, Rabbi Akiva says, “*And you shall love your fellow like yourself*” – this is the entire Torah. The rest is commentary.” Loving other Jews is the entire Torah! Why? How can this be the entire Torah?!

Loving the Jewish people doesn’t mean that we simply shouldn’t act cruel to another Jew; we don’t need our Sages to tell us that. Loving the Jewish people means to remove the barriers between ourselves and other Jews. And what is that barrier? It is the self-serving ego, the “I” in a person, which allows a person to only care for himself. Our *avodah*, then, is to nullify that ego, and then we will naturally come to love others. Thus, Rabbi Akiva is saying that our *avodah* of nullifying your ego is the underlying essence of all of the Torah.

### *To Love Others Like Yourself*

There is a discussion in the *Rishonim*<sup>1</sup> if the commandment of the Torah to love others “like yourself” is literal or not. The view of the Ramban<sup>2</sup> says that it is impossible to love others as much as you love yourself. Instead, he interprets that to love others “like” yourself means that a person should treat others the same way he would want to be treated. Other *Rishonim* seem to disagree with this view, and they interpret the Torah’s commandment in the more literal sense – that you must love another Jew just as much as you love yourself.

From a superficial perspective, it would seem that these two opinions contradict each other. One is saying that it is impossible to love others with the same love you have for yourself, and the other seems to be saying that it is indeed possible. However, from a deeper, inner perspective, there is no contradiction; both opinions can be possible. How can they both be reconciled? It is based upon the understanding we have explained above, that if you only love yourself, you cannot love others, but if you nullify your ego, you can then be able to love others - no less than how love yourself.

To love only “yourself” will mean that you will not be able to love others. But if you remove the ego, then you can now love others. Thus, the *Ramban* said that you can’t love others as much as you love for yourself, that is, if you haven’t yet nullified your ego. When you haven’t yet nullified the ego, then you will only love yourself, and you will not be able to love others as much as you love yourself. But the other *Rishonim*, who said that it is possible to love others as much as you love yourself, are describing the higher level, where a person has removed his ego. Such a person can love others just as much as he loves himself.

From this deeper perspective, there is no disagreement between the *Ramban* and the other *Rishonim* if it’s possible or not to love others just as much as you love yourself – for as we have explained, it will depend on if the person has nullified the ego or not.

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<sup>1</sup> Early commentators, spanning the 10<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries

<sup>2</sup> Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman (known as “Nachmanodies”)

### *Our Avodah: To Reveal the Selfless Love for Others*

Thus, our *avodah* is to reveal from within ourselves that hidden, selfless love for other Jews. We are not “looking” to “find” anything new over here – we already have it within us! We are searching for our long-lost power to love others. We are looking for our true self, which is to be selfless and love others.

Loving the Jewish people (*ahavas Yisrael*) is thus a deep, inner matter. It is not the superficial kind of “love” that we may think it is. The problem is that our ego, the selfish “I” in us, is holding us back from loving anyone other than ourselves. We need to remove that “I”, and the more we nullify our “I”, the more love we will uncover toward others.

Until now, we only addressed the first step, which is to “*remove yourself from evil.*” We have explained that we stay away from evil from not doing evil to others, and this can only be achieved by nullifying our ego. This paves the way for the second step, to “*do good*” – which is the actual *ahavas Yisrael* that we are trying to reach.

We will now speak of this second step. The second step, to do “do good”, contains two levels, in addition to a third level, which comes after the first two levels, as we will explain.

### *Our Goal: Unity*

How do we come to reveal our love for other people? The *Sefer HaChinuch*<sup>3</sup> writes that that “the heart is pulled after the actions.” Doing mere acts for other people can awaken the love in our hearts.

On a superficial level, this means that we should be kind to others even though we don’t feel any love to them, and by doing acts of kindness for others, that will cause us to love others. That is true, but there is more depth to this matter. There is an inner mission here. It’s not enough that a person should feel that he loves the other. What we are trying to achieve is *achdus* (unity): a sense of “oneness” with the other, when I feel that I and another Jew are really “one” – when I see another Jew as a part of me.

Our intention should therefore be to “do” good things for other people *because* we want to achieve that sense of *achdus*/unity with the other. That is the goal of doing kind acts for others, and that is what it means to have *ahavas Yisrael*: being kind to other Jews because I want to arrive at unity with another Jew.

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<sup>3</sup> *Sefer HaChinuch* 15; see also *Mesillas Yeshtarim* chapter III

### *In Summary*

To summarize, there are three steps towards *Ahavas Yisrael*:

**Step 1** is, “*Remove yourself from evil.*” This includes basic consideration to other Jews; not to be inconsiderate to another Jew. (This is the lowest level of *ahavas Yisrael*, and it is the level that is treated generally in all of the works of *mussar*).

**Step 2** is, “*Do good.*” This part means that one should not only be concerned for his own needs, and to be concerned about others. (This is the middle level of *ahavas Yisrael*, and it is the level generally described in most works of *Chassidus*).

**Step 3** – *Achdus/Unity*. The goal of *ahavas Yisrael* is not just to feel loving towards the Jewish people, but to arrive at a sense of unity with another - to realize that another Jew and I are essentially one; to feel that another Jew is a part of me. (This is the highest level, and it is the level treated in the works of *Chabad Chassidus* such as in sefer *Tanya*.)



## 2 | *Revealing Unconditional Love*

### *Four Kinds of Relationships*

There are four different kinds of relationships that we experience: hatred, neutral, conditional love, and unconditional love.

1) **Hatred.** As a rule, “Esav hates Yaakov”. The gentile nations contain in themselves a deep hatred for Jews, an absolute hatred, which they inherited from Esav, ever since Yaakov *Avinu* received the blessings from Yitzchok, whereupon Esav resented his brother for taking the blessings. The relationship we have with gentiles is a relationship of hostility and enmity.

2) **Neutral.** When people walk by us on the street and we don’t feel anything towards them, we do not hate them, nor do we feel a love for them. How do we feel towards them? Neutral.

3) **Conditional love.** When we love someone based on a reason, this is called conditional love.

4) **Unconditional love.** When we love someone and it is not dependent on any reason, this is called unconditional love.

Our discussion here will mainly focus on the last two kinds of love mentioned, conditional love and unconditional love. First we will speak a little about our *avodah* when it comes to understanding hatred and neutral relationships, and then we will focus the discussion on conditional and unconditional love.

### *Hating Evil*

What is hatred? Hatred is whatever love isn’t. Why does hatred exist? What is its purpose in Creation?

From a superficial understanding, hatred is evil, and love is holy. Hatred was created to counter the holiness of love. For everything holy in Creation, something else was created in equal power which is evil. This is in order to allow free will in the world. Since love is a holy creation, hatred had to be created in order to counteract its holiness. On a simple level, hatred is evil.

But when we analyze it from a deeper level, we can see that even hatred can be good. How? When we hate evil – when we hate something that should not be loved.

The *Gemara* says, “It is permitted to hate the wicked”.<sup>4</sup> What does that mean? It does not mean to hate the sinner himself, but to hate the evil within him.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Pesachim 113b*

What is the difference if I hate the sinner or the just the sin itself? Why is it permitted to hate the sins that he does, but not the sinner himself?

If I hate the person himself, then we are in essence apart from each other, and that is the entire idea of hatred – to feel that him and I are apart. Such a hatred is evil, and it is not permitted. But if I only hate the evil that he does, not the person himself, then the entire hatred is between me and the evil - not between me and the other. [In the later chapters we will speak more about this].

### *Neutral Relationships*

If one feels neutral to another person, the problem is that he is living life superficially, and he will need to work on becoming a more internal kind of a person. He sees other Jews walking on the street and doesn't feel anything toward them, not love and not hatred. So he is living his life in a superficial, external manner. By becoming a more internal kind of person, he will be able to view the other person as someone who should be loved, as opposed to just seeing him as some 'neutral' person in his life.

### *Conditional Love*

A third kind of relationship with others is when we feel a love to others, but only conditionally. What is missing from this kind of love?

If I love a person only because of a certain reason, I don't really love him for who he is. I love something about him that makes him loveable, but I do not actually love *him*, as a person.

This is a kind of love that is *shelo lishmah* (to have ulterior motives). But as we know, "it is permitted to have ulterior motives, in order to arrive at pure motives".<sup>6</sup> This is the purpose of conditional love – to utilize it with the intention of arriving at unconditional, pure love for the other person, not dependent on any reason. If I love a person for a reason *because* I am ultimately trying to achieve a pure love for him that will have no reason, then there is a purpose to conditional love.

### *Two Examples of Conditional Love*

There are many examples of conditional love.

We explained that conditional level is to love someone for any reason. The love for the other person will be based on a certain condition, thus it not a true love for the "person" himself, rather

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<sup>5</sup> As explained in *sefer Tanya*

<sup>6</sup> *Pesachim 50b*

for the aspects about him that make him loveable. As soon as that reason goes away, the love goes away, because it was only conditional.

For example, if I love someone because he gives to me, it is conditional. I only love him as long as I receive from him. As soon as he stops giving to me, I won't love him anymore. This is a clear example of conditional love.

Let's say I love someone because I like his personality; I find him to be very entertaining. This is also conditional love, because I am still basing my love for him from something I get from him - I am receiving a certain pleasure being around him, and this is also a kind of receiving. I don't really love him *for who he is* - I love him *because I receive a good feeling from him*. If he were to change his personality, I would lose interest in him - and then I no longer love him.

### *Seeing Others' Qualities*

Our holy *sefarim* explain that the way to achieve *ahavas Yisrael* is through being "*dan l'chaf zechus*" - judging another favorably. This is because when a person sees faults in another person, it is hard to love him, because he is disgusted at what he sees in the other. But if a person focuses on the other's qualities, he will love him, because he will naturally be drawn to other person's good qualities, and he will become bound with the good in that person.

However, there is a point that must be understood about this. A lot of people confuse "love" (*ahavah*) with esteem or admiration for others (*harachah*). If I admire and respect someone, if I value him for his qualities, it is not yet love. It is certainly the *way* toward love, but it is not yet love. Love - *ahavah* - has the same numerical value as the word "*echad*", which is "one"; meaning, love is only achieved when I become unified with the other. Only when I am bound up with the good in the other's soul am I "one" with him, which is love. But if I merely respect him because I value his qualities, it is not yet love.

We are also not on the level today to reach *ahavas Yisrael* just by seeing the qualities of others. Why not? It is because everyone has their different tastes; if I like a certain kind of person because I consider a certain quality to be worthy of having, then that automatically makes me dislike others who don't have that quality. Thus, even I love everyone in the world who has a certain quality that I really admire, it will not help me love everyone else who do not have those qualities.

Although there is not one Jew in the world who does not possess a worthy trait, none of us are on the level to find qualities in every Jew. The only person who will be able to do that is Moshiach, who will find the qualities of every Jewish soul. Thus, we need to find a different solution if we are to love every Jew, which is *ahavas Yisrael*. Finding the good qualities in a person will only help us overlook his faults, but it will not help us in achieving *ahavas Yisrael* to all Jews.

The truth is that all *ahavas Yisrael* is really conditional. We only love our fellow Jews because of a reason - they are all Jews, and not non-Jews, so ultimately all of our *ahavas Yisrael* is somewhat conditional. If all our love of the Jewish people is conditional, how then can we come to have true

love for other Jews? We will have to uncover from within ourselves a deeper kind of love than conditional level: the power to have *unconditional love* towards others.

### *Unconditional Love*

Where can we find in ourselves an unconditional love for others? How do we reveal it?

Every Jew has good in his soul; thus, it seems that if I just love every Jew because they are intrinsically good in their essence, and not for any other reason, such love is unconditional; for there is no reason not to love any Jew – every Jew has good within him. However, this is still loving him only conditionally, because I only love a Jew because he is a Jew and that he is not a non-Jew. So we are back to our question: if true love can only be unconditional love, and our love for Jews is only conditional because we only love Jews for being Jews, then how are we able to have genuine *ahavas Yisrael* to the Jewish people?

The answer to this is that there is an aspect of unconditional love within us which we can uncover, and use that power of unconditional love as well toward all other Jews. This is known as *achdus* (unity). With unity, I don't love a person for any reason other than that I simply love him, *because* I love him.

How can I love someone without any reason? It is as follows. If a person loves only himself, it's clearly a very negative trait – he is being selfish and egotistical. What should a person do if he realizes he is selfish, and he wants to stop being selfish? A superficial response would be that he should learn how to uproot his egoism. But this isn't true. There is a purpose to why we love ourselves, and it is just that we have to utilize it for what Hashem meant it for. A person can use his self-love for others! How? Just like you love yourself for no reason, you can understand that you are able to love others for no reason.

Where do we find this kind of love for another person? Is it possible to love someone else with the same kind of love you have for yourself?

A Rebbi loves his student, and vice versa. This is a very great love, but it is still a love that depends on something. They only love each other if they are receiving from each other, thus it is not unconditional love. But a father loves his son for no reason. Although it is true that a father loves his son because he raised him, thus he feels good from this and receives from his son – we find many cases in which a person was informed after many years that he has a son. Even without ever fathering the child, the father is instantly filled with a love toward him, although he hasn't received at all from the son. Thus, the father loves his child unconditionally – he loves him simply because he loves him. There is no reason.

There is an ability in a Jew's soul to love others unconditionally. That very same love can be used to love others – just like I love myself or my child for no reason, I can also love others for no reason.

The holy *sefarim* write that *ahavas Yisrael* is one of the most difficult areas in our *Avodas Hashem*. Why? Because true *ahavas Yisrael* is only reached through unconditional love, which is very hard to reach. We all have this power within us to love unconditionally, but we have to dig very deep into our souls to reach it, and it is not easy.

This natural love for others comes from the deepest part in one's soul, and in order to reach it, one has to reveal his soul – the true “I” in oneself. Upon revealing one's true self, one can love himself for no reason, and from that very same love one can extend himself to others and love them with the true love of *ahavas Yisrael*.

We all have it within ourselves to love others unconditionally, not for any reason. We are using it every day, but we are usually not using it properly – we are usually only using it to love ourselves. Our *avodah* is to use that natural love that we have toward ourselves and extend it to others. The same way we love ourselves for no reason, so can we can love others for no reason...

### 3 | *The Necessity To Hate Evil*

#### *Hatred Tells Us A Lot About Love*

The Torah writes, “Do not hate your brother in your heart, and you must love your fellow like yourself.” Love can be used either positively or negatively, and so can hatred be used positively or negatively.

The holy *sefarim* write that all opposites share the same root. Thus, love and hatred have the same root. In order to understand what loving another is, we also need to understand what hatred is.

#### *Hating a Sinner*

The *Gemara*<sup>7</sup> says that it is permitted to hate a wicked person, depending on certain conditions. The question is: How can it be that we may hate another Jew?

Even more so, we know that the general purpose of Creation is to come to have complete *achdus* (unity) with everyone. If we are allowed hate sinners, how can we ever have complete *achdus*!?

Furthermore, *ahavas Yisrael* is the “great rule of the Torah”, as Rabbi Akiva says, and it means to love everyone, with no exceptions. If we hate the wicked, then we don’t love everyone in *Klal Yisrael*!. So how are we allowed to hate the wicked??

The sefer *Tanya* says that even when we hate the wicked, we are not allowed to hate the sinner himself. We must still love the sinner himself; we must rather hate the *evil* within him that he is committing. This approach helps us a bit, but it is still hard to understand how hating the wicked will not negatively affect our *Ahavas Yisrael*.

In order to understand this, we first need to know why it is permitted to hate evil. Normally, when a person hates another person, it is because the other person is bothering him or antagonizing him. There are many reasons why a person hates someone, but they are all the same: the other person is being a nuisance and he is being bothersome.

That is true about the average situation of hatred. Such hatred comes from our *nefesh habehamis*, the animalistic layer in the soul, which is only the external part of the soul. Such hatred is petty, unjustified hatred. But when one hates the evil that a sinner does, this is a different kind of hatred. It is a hatred that doesn’t come from pettiness, but from the *Nefesh Elokis* in us, the G-dly soul in a person. The only reason why one hates evil is because there is a part in his soul that hates evil, and this is his G-dly soul. When hatred comes from this pure place in the soul, it is not evil.

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<sup>7</sup> *Pesachim 113b*

How does a person get rid of his petty hatred for someone else? Through *emunah*. A person realizes that no one else can harm him unless Hashem willed him to do so – “A person cannot lift his finger below unless it was announced above.” Through *emunah*, one realizes that it is not really the other person who is bothering him, because everything comes from Hashem.

The solution for petty hatred towards others is the same reason why the deeper kind of hatred is permitted. When a person hates evil, he isn't hating the other person for bothering him or hurting him personally. He hates the evil because he fears Hashem, and it is not a personal matter at all. It is about Hashem.

We will give an example to explain this. If someone has a dirty house and it bothers him, he doesn't hate his house – he hates the dirt in his house. The same is true for hating the evil acts of a sinner. I don't hate him; I hate the thing he does which is evil.

### *Hating the evil is part of Ahavas Yisrael*

There is another reason why hating evil doesn't contradict *Ahavas Yisrael*. The holy *Ohr Hachaim* says that by hating the evil in a sinner, one can uplift the sinner to a higher level in spirituality. Since one still loves the sinner himself and only hates his evil, he helps the sinner become connected to *Klal Yisrael*.

It is thus clear that hating evil not only doesn't contradict *Ahavas Yisrael*, but it is actually a branch of *ahavas Yisrael*. The way we have *ahavas Yisrael* to the wicked is by hating the evils that they commit yet still loving them as people.

### *The Dangers of Kiruv*

There is a terrible mistake that many people who are involved in *kiruv*<sup>8</sup> make, though. A person who does *kiruv*, out of his great love for another Jew, might come to love the sinner without any boundaries – loving him entirely, even the evil he commits.

This is misguided love. True *ahavas Yisrael* is to love even sinners, but this does not mean to totally embrace them and love every aspect in them. One must hate the evil that another person does, and he must not feel “accepting” towards how the sinner acts. A person must love every Jew, even sinners - but to love even what he *does* is the downfall of those who go too far in their *ahavas Yisrael*.

The *Arizal* said that *ahavas Yisrael* can bring the person to the greatest spiritual heights, but it can also be the source of a person's entire spiritual downfall. Pursuing *ahavas Yisrael* thus contains a danger. Those who are regularly involved with people who sin as they are trying to draw them closer

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<sup>8</sup> *drawing close our fellow Jews to religious Torah Jewry*

must be careful to treat them with love, but the evil that they do must be despised. Only this kind of *ahavas Yisrael* can be effective *kiruv*.

If a person loves a sinner so much to the point that he is entirely accepting of him, accepting even the sins that the other person commits, he is guilty of drawing in a wicked person into *Klal Yisrael*. It is like bringing a man with dirty clothing into the King's palace. Only when we hate the evil that the sinner does do we remove the "dirt" that is on him, and then we can bring him into the palace of the King.

Why can't we love a sinner totally? It is because *ahavas Yisrael* isn't a purpose unto itself. If it would be a purpose unto itself, we would be allowed to love everything about a sinner, even the things he does. But *ahavas Yisrael* has a deeper root: it is branch of our love for Hashem and our love for the Torah, which contains His will. If we have *ahavas Yisrael* but we are missing love for Hashem and love for the Torah (when we become accepting of evil acts and lifestyles of other people), then we are missing true *ahavas Yisrael*.

Some raise a point that if the whole purpose of *ahavas Yisrael* is all to achieve *achdus* (unity) to be at "one" with other Jews, then we must have complete *achdus* even with the wicked, and that we should be more accepting of their evil acts. This is wrong! Although the purpose of *ahavas Yisrael* is to reach *achdus*, we must understand that *ahavas Yisrael* is a way that leads towards serving Hashem. The goal of *ahavas Yisrael* is not *ahavas Yisrael* for its own purpose – the goal is to reach a greater love for Hashem.

*Ahavas Yisrael* must have a solid, firm plan, and it must be built properly, according to the guidelines of our Torah. Only with loving Hashem and loving His Torah's *mitzvos*, can our love for other Jews be considered to be true *ahavas Yisrael*.



## 4 | *Loving A Convert: Achieving Universal Love*

### *The Mitzvah To Love A Convert*

The Rambam<sup>9</sup> writes that there is a *mitzvah* to love a *ger* (a convert), and that this is included in the *mitzvah* of *Ahavas Yisrael*.

Loving a *ger* is a novel concept to *Ahavas Yisrael*. A *ger* doesn't come from Avraham, Yitzchok and Yaakov, yet there is still a *mitzvah* to love him. It expands our *mitzvah* of *ahavas Yisrael*. We would assume that *ahavas Yisrael* is only to those who descended from the Avos, yet the *mitzvah* applies to even those who annex themselves onto the Jewish people, those who are not originally descendant from the Avos.

In certain aspects, a *ger* retains his status as a gentile. He has no *yichus* (lineage to his past).<sup>10</sup> In spite of this, we are still commanded to love him. This concept, then, needs to be understood well.

### *“Ahavas Yisrael” Isn’t Everything*

The *Sefer Toldos* writes that everything that exists in Creation can either purify the impure, or it can contaminate that which was previously pure; this is personified by the law of *parah adumah* (the red heifer; its blood and ashes is sprinkled onto a person contaminated from a corpse, in order for him to become purified). The *parah adumah* purifies the impure that it is sprinkled upon, but it contaminates the Kohen who sprinkles it, who had been previously pure. It is a *chok* (law) of the Torah that cannot be understood logically.

Taking this further: when someone is “above” a certain matter because he is on a higher spiritual plane, if he descends from his level, it is impurity, on his level. And if someone is “below” a certain spiritual level, if he connects himself to the level above, that is what purifies him.

Any spiritual descent is a degree of spiritual impurity. Thus, the *parah adumah* purifies those who are impure, because they are “below” a certain spiritual level due to their contamination; while those who use the *parah adumah* to purify others are contaminated through it, for they were previously “above” it, and they lowered their spiritual level in involving themselves with it.

The above concept has applications to all areas of *Avodas Hashem* as well, according to *sefer Toldos*. So it can also apply to *ahavas Yisrael*.

*Ahavas Yisrael* can purify the impure, and this is what we discussed until now, that someone who previously did not love can achieve love, through gaining *Ahavas Yisrael*. When there is an absence of

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<sup>9</sup> *Mishneh Torah: Mada: Hilchos De'os 6:3*

<sup>10</sup> *Tractate Kiddushin: Chapter 4*

love for other Jews (or even worse, when there is actual hatred for another Jew), this is like a spiritual impurity, for it is disparity. *Ahavas Yisrael* creates unity, which takes the impure out of their situation of disparity, and purifies them.

That is all one side of the coin: *ahavas Yisrael* “purifies the impure”. But there is also another side of the coin, as the *Toldos* writes: that it can also “contaminate the pure”. *ahavas Yisrael* is not just about “purifying the impure” – it is not just about revealing love to other Jews in situations that there was previously no love. If a person thinks that this is all there is to *ahavas Yisrael*, his *ahavas Yisrael* will be detrimental in the long run. He will become misguided in all his *ahavas Yisrael* and he will act inappropriately with it.

On a deep note, one needs to learn how to be a little “above” the level of *Ahavas Yisrael* – if not, he will always be “below” the point of *Ahavas Yisrael*, and then his *Ahavas Yisrael* will have too much of a hold on him and cause him to act improperly. And because this person can’t go “above” *Ahavas Yisrael*, he will always remain “below” it - and he will never really acquire it at all.

So a person has to see how *ahavas Yisrael* can “purify” him as well as how it can “contaminate” him. Practically speaking, one has to reveal more *ahavas Yisrael* to others [as was discussed in the previous chapters], but on the other side of the coin, a person has to understand that if his *ahavas Yisrael* is misguided, it will “contaminate” him [in other words, one’s *ahavas Yisrael* can be detrimental to him if he does not see the two sides of the coin to *ahavas Yisrael*].

This is the outline of the concept, and now will try to make this concept more practical.

### *Ahavas Yisrael/Love of Jews and Achdus/Universal Unity*

*Ahavas Yisrael* can be detrimental if the focus is just on love of Jews alone and there is no aspiration to love the other nations. This prevents the all-inclusive *achdus*, the unity of Creation, which is the ultimate purpose and goal of Hashem’s Creation.

If there would only be Jews in the world, there would be nothing wrong with only having *Ahavas Yisrael*, and in fact, it would be wonderful, if that was the situation. But the fact is that there are gentiles in the world as well. In the future, the entire world – all of Creation - will declare Hashem’s Name as one, thus, there will be a universal unity. Thus, the goal of *ahavas Yisrael* does not end with *ahavas Yisrael*. The ultimate purpose of *ahavas Yisrael* is to reach *achdus* (unity), and *ahavas Yisrael* should be viewed as the “tool” to get there.

So if a person remains with just *ahavas Yisrael*, he has actually created more disparity, because he never reached the goal of it all, which is to unify with the world. There is an even deeper goal of the *avodah*, which is to unify with all of Creation – even plants and rocks. And finally, the deepest level of the *avodah* is to unify with the Creator, after all of this has been achieved.

In our current 6000 year era, our focus has always been on *Ahavas Yisrael*, and this is actually what caused *sinas chinam* (baseless hatred), which destroyed the *Beis HaMikdash*.<sup>11</sup> But in the future, there will be unity with the world. The third *Beis HaMikdash* will be on a higher level than the first two temples, which will be all-inclusive, where all of the nations in the world can come serve Hashem. And on a more subtle note, we see that even in the first and second *Beis HaMikdash*, gentiles were allowed to donate *korbonos*, so we see that there is already a concept of universal unity even within the current 6000 year era. In the future, all gentiles will be allowed to ascend the Temple Mount, because they will have a connection with the *Beis HaMikdash*.

### *A Long History of Disparity In Creation*

When Hashem gave us the Torah at Har Sinai, the Sages said that it was at that moment that the gentiles began to hate us, for “*sinai*” is from the word “*sinah*” (hatred), which hints to the hatred of gentile towards Jew, which descended onto the world at that time. When Hashem gave us the Torah, it is written, “*I am Hashem your G-d, Who took you out of Egypt.*” The giving of the Torah made the Jewish people unique, and that caused the gentiles to hate us.

There was unity in the Jewish people when we stood at Sinai, but at the same time, there was disparity between the Jewish people and the nation. There was *ahavas Yisrael*, for each Jew stood at Har Sinai “with one heart”, unified with each other, but there was not yet *achdus* in Creation, for now there was a separation between Jews and gentiles.

The disparity between Jews and the other nations really started way before this; it merely became intensified at Har Sinai when we received the Torah and were officially deemed apart from the other nations.

The disparity really began as soon as Avraham *Avinu* asked Hashem for a sign that his descendants will be protected by Hashem. The Ramban says that because he questioned Hashem, he was punished for lacking total *emunah* in Hashem, and now, history would become altered. Now his descendants would have to endure a 400 year exile in Egypt before they would go out of it. This already created a separation between Jews and gentiles, because after Avraham’s request for a sign, Hashem told him that now that he had said this, only Yitzchok is the real offspring of Avraham, while Yishmael was disregarded. This was the first disparity that started among Avraham’s descendants, in which Yitzchok and Yishmael were given different status.

Just as a person loves himself, so did all souls love each other, when we are contained in Adam’s soul at the start of Creation. In our original state, there was a love between all soul, and this was not just *ahavas Yisrael*, but a more complete level, which is the universal *achdus*. It was the state in which all souls, Jew and gentile alike, were unified into one unit. The concept of *ahavas Yisrael* did not yet exist. *Ahavas Yisrael* only started with Avraham *Avinu*, of whom Hashem chose his descendants to become His chosen people to receive the Torah. This disparity between the Jews and the gentile

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<sup>11</sup> *Yoma 9b*

nations was even more magnified with Yaakov *Avinu*, whose descendants are entirely the Jewish people, apart from the descendants of Esav and Yishmael.

### *The Head and the Rest of the Body*

The Jewish people are called “*raishis*”, the beginning. Hashem created the world knowing that they would become the chosen people; they were His “first thoughts.” They were always considered the most prominent. They are like the head on a body, which is the most prominent part of the body. But in a body, there are also feet and hands. The other nations are the like feet and hands of the body, while the Jewish people are like the head.

Imagine a body with a head, but with feet and hands that are severed from each other. While we can definitely say that the main part of the body is here, still, it’s incomplete. The body can survive with just the head and with the other parts of the body being severed from each other, but, it’s not complete. The ideal kind of body is a body in which all the parts of the body are connected together.

The lesson is: *ahavas Yisrael* alone is not a complete unity in the world. Only when there is complete unity between all parts is there a complete unity. Of course, the head is the head; it is the most prominent. But it’s just not the same when the body is missing the other parts.

Thus, for one to desire *ahavas Yisrael* alone, without knowing the greater goal of it, is a superficial perspective. The *Leshem* writes that the inner perspective towards Creation is not *ahavas Yisrael*/love of Jews, but “*echad*”, oneness – the universal unity that will be achieved in the future.

The Torah forbids intermarrying with the nations. In our current era, there is disparity and separation between Jew and gentile, and that is how it must be, for now. That is also the depth of exile. But in the future, all will be unified, and it will be revealed a love for the entire Creation – Jew and gentile will be unified. (In the future, it will be revealed that the entire “body” is connected with the “head”.)

### *The Connection Between Converts and Moshiach*

This is the secret behind converts.

In the future, *Moshiach* will rule the world. *Moshiach* descends from Dovid *HaMelech*, who was considered “lowly”; the lowly will then be considered uplifted and prominent. This is a deep fundamental to know about. Converts are therefore not just annexed onto the Jewish people – for we see that *Moshiach* will come from converts. *Moshiach* will come from Lot, who lived in the wicked city of Sodom, whom Avraham *Avinu* separated from. *Moshiach* has embarrassing roots; Lot’s daughters cohabited with their father and that is where his lineage descends from. Avraham *Avinu* separated from Lot, which formed a disparity between him and Lot; Lot was deemed lowly for choosing to go his own separate ways. That disparity continues until *Moshiach* comes. The

redemption will return the “relationship” between Avraham and Lot, because it will reveal that although Lot was lowly, greatness can still come from the lowliest beginnings.

### *Exile – Disparity Between Jews and Gentiles*

The common theme that runs throughout our exile is always disparity and separation. Sarah *Imeinu* had Yishmael expelled from Avraham Avinu’s home, and Hashem told Avraham to listen to her. This is because the disparity in Creation, which is the concept behind our whole exile, is ultimately the will of Hashem during the current 6,000 year era. The sons of Keturah received powers of impurity, which furthered the disparity. There was even more disparity with the separation that was made between Yaakov and Esav.

Esav wanted to wage war with Yaakov, but they met each other and left in peace. This shows us a deep, inner matter. On the outside, “Esav hates Yaakov”, but on the inside, they are “brothers”. In the future, we will enter the higher dimension of reality, the inner dimension, in which Yaakov and Esav will be “brothers” again. Esav kissed Yaakov “with all his heart”, and this hints to their inner unity. In the future, the inner perspective of unity between them will be revealed, and it will end the separation between Jew and gentile that began with Avraham and Yitzchok.

Ultimately, Jew and gentile must be returned to their “*raishis*”, to the beginning state of Creation in which they were unified together, even though they had gone their separate ways during the 6000 year era.

### *The Connecting Point*

How indeed can we all return to our *raishis*, to our universal beginning?

There is always a middle point that connects two opposite points. For example, a husband and wife are opposites, but they can be connected together through a middle point that bridges the gap, the *Shechinah*.

At our beginning, we were all in Adam’s soul. There was disparity created by Avraham’s question and with Yitzchok’s children, and the disparity was magnified by Har Sinai, when anti-semitism began. But eventually, we must all return to the unity, Jew and gentile alike. How? There must be a connecting point that can unify together the two opposite points. It is through the converts. The convert serves as the connecting point between the Jews and the gentiles.

At our root, we are all one, for all souls were once unified in Adam’s soul; every Jew and gentile were one unit. The *Beis HaMikdash* was destroyed by *sinas chinam*, but as we are nearing the end of the 6000 year era, we are currently in a time in which we can return to the original *achdus* that we used to have at the beginning of Creation.

We were exiled for this very reason: so that we can achieve *achdus* with the nations. Exile made us surrounded by the nations, and there is a purpose to this. It is because we are supposed to unify with the gentiles so that we can come to our ultimate goal of *achdus* with Creation.

Of course, this always presents a danger to us, because we can be influenced by them. In Egypt, the Jewish people didn't change their names or clothing or language, but in Persia, however, the Jews enjoyed the party of Achashveirosh and therefore felt very connected to him. They forgot their Jewish identity and the entire generation was deserving of destruction. This has always been our difficulty in exile, where we face the evil influences of the gentile nations that surround us.

In our actual behavior, we must separate from them and we must not imitate how they act. But on a more ultimate level, we also need to achieve unity with the gentiles, now that we live amongst them. But how do we unify them, if we must separate from their behaviors?

Chazal state the purpose of exile is to gain converts. In other words, it is the convert who is the bridge that can connect together the Jewish people with the other nations - and that is how we will achieve unity with them.

### *The Convert: The Paradoxical Existence of Jew and Gentile At Once*

There are essentially three groups of people in the world – the Jewish people, the nations, and the converts. The Jewish nation come from Avraham *Avinu*, and all of their souls stood at Har Sinai; (there is a discussion if it is possible for a Jew to cut himself off from the Jewish people, however). And there are the gentiles (who can convert into our people, all except for Amalek; according to the view of the Rambam and most *Rishonim*). And there is a third group of people, who serve to connect Jew and gentile together: the souls who are born into gentile families who choose on their accord to convert into the Jewish people.

The convert is the bridge that connects the Jew and gentile. He is born a gentile, and he chooses to come into the Jewish people, willing to accept all the *mitzvos*, even after he is told about how hard it will be. He undergoes much hardship to enter the Jewish people, and thus he makes great use of his free will in doing so.

But he is not totally part of the Jewish people when it comes to all aspects. Chazal say that for ten generations after he converts, he still retains his genes, so he is still connected with his past, and can easily fall back to into his old behaviors that he has inherited from his gentile ancestors. A convert is not just missing some Jewish holiness - he still has an aspect of totally gentile status in himself. For that reason, he retains some “gentile” aspect in himself, but he is also a Jew – and so only he can be the bridging aspect between the Jewish people and the gentile nations.

### *Loving A Convert: The Key To Achieving Unity With The World*

So our ultimate goal to strive for is achieve *achdus* with the world. How indeed can we reach it?

The first part of this that we need to go through is the avodah of *ahavas Yisrael*. First, we need to unify with other Jews, because if we don't unify within our own ranks, how will we connect to the rest of the world on the outside? The inside must first be secure, and then we can build upon that and connect outward to the rest of the world.

Until now [in the last three chapters], we addressed the first stage, *ahavas Yisrael*. The second step is to strive for universal *achdus*, to unify with the outside. How? It is only through the converts, for only the convert can be the connecting point, the bridge, between Jew and gentile.

The *Gemara*<sup>12</sup> says that Biblically, a gentile does not inherit his father, but the Rabbis enacted that he should inherit. The depth of this is that he is still connected with his past, therefore he can inherit his father, according to the Sages. Sometimes the Rabbis revealed aspects that the written Torah did not reveal, and this is one of them: the convert has lineage with his parents. There are additional ramifications of this concept that he is still connected to his past, but we won't get into this here.

We mentioned before the concept of how two points are always connected together through a third point in the middle that serves as the bridge between them and connects them. The Vilna Gaon explains that this "bridging point" is always *above* the two points that it connects. For example, a man and woman are connected to the *Shechinah*, which is above them. So the connecting point is always above the two points it connects. The "bridging point" is therefore the *root* of the two points that are being connected.

Based on this concept, converts, who are the connecting point between Jew and gentile, are really the *root* point of both Jews and gentiles. Therefore, when we are connected with the rest of the world through connecting to a converts, we are not 'mixed' with them through the connecting point. That would be harmful to us and it would merely mix us up with them, causing us to receive all of their harmful influences to us. Rather, we are connected to that other side through a 'bridge', in a way that doesn't mix us up with the other side but still allows us to be considered unified and connected with them.

This is also the depth of why *Moshiach* comes from converts. He will connect the whole world together, because he will be above the rest of the world, for the connecting point is always above the two points that it is connecting together. *Moshiach* will return the world to its unity, the state of all souls when they were originally in Adam's soul, when there was no differentiation between Jew and gentile.

This is the secret of the concept that **Adam** stands for "Adam, Dovid, Moshiach" - it is because all were inside Adam. Dovid is the root of Moshiach, who connects everyone back to the original point of Adam, in which the entire world was one.

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<sup>12</sup> *Kiddushin 17a*



*Ahavas Yisrael* is thus only a step in a greater, more all-inclusive process, and that is how we should view it. The goal, after reaching *Ahavas Yisrael*, is to come to love the whole world. To love the whole world can only happen through the converts.

### *The Future – A New Perspective*

One of our 13 basic beliefs is, “The Torah will never be exchanged.” Chazal say that *mitzvos* will be “erased” in the future<sup>13</sup>, however, which seems to contradict this basic belief that Torah will never change. The *Rishonim* answer that the *mitzvos* will not simply get “erased”; rather, new depth will be revealed to the *mitzvos*, and in that sense, the original perception towards the *mitzvos* will disappear.

Thus, the Torah is *achdus* in its essence, and the garments on top of it are many, but in the future, the essence of the Torah will be revealed, which is *achdus*. This perspective of *achdus* in the Torah will give new depth to all of the *mitzvos* and “erase” the previous meaning of them.

At Har Sinai, hatred entered the nations for the Jewish people. That is on the external dimension. The inner dimension of Creation, is, that our root, we are all one, Jew and gentile. Therefore, we need to reveal an inner love for the entire Creation.

Chazal say that the souls of converts stood by Har Sinai. All converts today are really souls who stood at Har Sinai. The depth of this is that at Har Sinai, there was already *achdus* between Jew and gentile, even though there was hatred on the surface of things.

### *Loving A Convert: Remember Your Own Beginnings*

The Torah tells us to love converts “*because you were strangers in the land of Egypt.*” All Jews, originally, felt like strangers, in Egypt. Since we all knew what it felt like to be a stranger in a strange land, the Torah wants us to be sensitive to converts, who feel like strangers to the Jewish people when they come in.

The convert is born anew, but he feels like a stranger. The word “*ger*” means “convert”, and it also means “stranger”. Hashem tells us in the Torah that you should love the convert because you, too, were once a “stranger” in Egypt, thus, in a sense, we are all like converts. All of the four exiles we went through (we are currently in the “exile of Yishmael”) were all rooted in Egypt, and the purpose of exile is to gain converts, as the Sages said; and Egypt, the root of all exiles, is when we were like strangers/converts.

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13 *Niddah 60b*



### *The Connection of Gentiles To Torah*

The *Ramchal* writes that when a person asks about something, it shows that he has some connection to it, or else it wouldn't interest him.

When Hashem asked the nations if they want the Torah, they refused when they heard about what it entails, but Hashem still offered it to them. This shows that the gentiles do have some connection to the Torah, and the reason for this is because the Torah is the root of all nations. The Torah can be explained in 70 languages, because each of the 70 nations can connect to it. "Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world."

A gentile was created from the Torah as well. At Har Sinai, when Hashem gave the Torah to the Jewish people, He also offered it to all of the nations, because in essence, the nations have a connection with Torah.

This concept has the following ramification. If the unity in the world will only be achieved in the future, what do we have to do with this now? It is because the light of the future is already here – only that it is hidden.

### *The Inner Perspective Towards A Convert*

Thus, the convert is the way to unify with the other nations. We tend to think that converts are somewhat of lowly status, such as that we see that there are certain *halachos* of a gentile that apply to a convert, such as the fact that he doesn't inherit (Biblically). We have a superficial perspective towards converts, when we analyze it from a purely *halachic* perspective. But if we look at the depth into the matter, converts are the root of Moshiach, for *Moshiach* comes from converts.

There is an argument amongst Chazal if Yisro converted either before or after the giving of the Torah. The depth of this is that are two perspective towards converts. The view that he converted after the giving of the Torah shows us the inner perspective towards converts, which is that a convert stood at Har Sinai, because he serves to connect Jew and gentile together.

### *Why The Beis HaMikdash Is On Har HaMoriah and not Har Sinai*

The *Beis HaMikdash* was built on *Har HaMoriah*. There is a question why it wasn't built on Har Sinai instead. There are many answers to this question, but here will present the following deep answer.

*Har HaMoriah* is for all Creations, while Har Sinai is only for Jews. The future *Beis HaMikdash* will serve to unify all of Creations together, thus it has to be on *Har HaMoriah*. By contrast, Har Sinai is where hatred entered the nations for the Jews.

By the *akeidas Yitzchok* (the binding of Yitzchok on the altar), which was on Har HaMoriah, what was taking place? The *akeidah* represents a possibility to return Yitzchok back to his root state of universal unity, to end the unique status of the chosen people, which represents how all of Creation will return to Avraham. Yitzchok and Yishmael were divided from each other, but this is regarding the perspective of the current 6000 year era. In the future, when Creation will return to its root, there will be no more disparity between Yitzchok and Yishmael.

Thus, the *akeidah* represents the return of the entire Creation to its original unity. When Avraham was afraid of the *akeidah*, it was not simply because he had fatherly compassion on his son. The depth of his test was because it represented the return to a connection between Yitzchok and Yishmael, which he did not think was appropriate, for he had been told by Hashem that only Yitzchok is the chosen offspring, not Yishmael; and the *akeidah* represented a return of Yishmael being the only son, which would mean that Yitzchok and Yishmael are being returned to their root of being one.

Thus, Har Sinai does not represent *achdus* (although there was some *achdus* revealed there), while Har HaMoriah represents *achdus*, for it was there that the *achdus* between all of Creation was reignited. For this reason, Har HaMoriah is the site of the future *Beis HaMikdash*, where even gentiles will come to, because Creation will be unified again.

### *The Third Beis HaMikdash Is For Everyone*

The second *Beis HaMikdash* was destroyed because of *sinas chinam* (baseless hatred). Our *avodah* now is not to rebuild the second *Beis HaMikdash*, but rather the third *Beis HaMikdash*, which is different than the previous two temples we had.

Chazal say that the third *Beis HaMikdash* will not be built by human hands, and that it will descend from Heaven. Because it will come from Heaven, it will be for everyone.

### *In Conclusion*

Thus, *ahavas Yisrael* is only a path to get to a more inner goal, which is: to achieve unity with the entire Creation, which is otherwise known as the concept of “*achdus haberiah*” - the unified level of Creation.<sup>14</sup>

In actuality, it is unfeasible for us in our current situation to connect with gentiles without getting influenced by them, and in addition, their hatred for us doesn't allow it. The converts, however, are the connecting point between Jew and gentile, for he retains both aspects of Jew and gentile at once.

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<sup>14</sup> For more on this concept, refer to *Tefillah #0145 – Accessing The New Light of The Future*

Through loving a convert, we connect ourselves to the convert, to the bridge, which enables the connection between Jew and gentile without causing us to be spiritually harmed by their behavior. And from that point onward, we can then come to reach the deepest level of unity - to unify all of our souls with the Creator.

## 5 | *How To Hate Evil & Aspire For Unity*

### *When Hatred Is Permissible*

The *mitzvah* of *ahavas Yisrael* is only to love members of the Jewish people. It is written, “*And you shall love your friend like yourself.*” The *mitzvah* is to love – whom? “*Your friend.*” How much? “*Like yourself.*” The *posuk* says that *mitzvah* is to love “*your friend*”, and the *Gemara* says that this means that the *mitzvah* is only to love another Jew, who is called “*your friend*”; whereas the other nations are not called “*your friend*”, so there is no *mitzvah* to love them.<sup>15</sup>

There is also a prohibition “*you shall not hate your brother in your heart.*” What does hatred “in the heart” mean? The Rambam says that hatred is only when it’s in the heart, and not when it is outwardly shown through actions.

Hatred is only prohibited towards “*your brother*”, a fellow Jew. As for a gentile, the *Gemara* says that it is permitted to hate a gentile, because he is not called “*your brother*”. It is considered a *middas chassidus* (a pious level, and not obligatory), though, not to hate him; but it is not prohibited according to the Torah to hate him.

Why indeed is the *mitzvah* only Jews, and why is there no prohibition to hate a gentile? This needs understanding. The simple understanding is because someone who has the status of a “brother” has precedence to those who aren’t your relatives, so you should place your priority on loving other Jews (your brethren) rather than on those who aren’t your “relatives” (the gentile nations). But there is a deeper reason to it.

### *Hating A Sinner Is Not Allowed When It Becomes Personal*

The above-quoted *Gemara* says that in some situations, we may hate even a Jew, if he is a Jew who sins intentionally, after being warned by witnesses not to commit the sin. Why are we allowed to hate this intentional sinner?

Elsewhere, the *Gemara* says that if one sees his friend unloading his donkey, and he also sees his enemy unloading his donkey, he must help his enemy first in order to overcome his evil inclination not to help the enemy. There are different opinions what type of “enemy” are we talking about: Some *Rishonim*<sup>16</sup> say that it is an enemy whom he is not permitted to hate, such as a person who mistreated him. Therefore, he must overcome his evil inclination of hatred towards him and help him unload.

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<sup>15</sup> *Pesachim 113a*

<sup>16</sup> *Tosafos in Bava Metzia 31a*

Others<sup>17</sup> however answer that it is referring to an enemy whom it is a *mitzvah* to hate, but now the hatred has become personal, because the person knows that the other one hates him, for “*Just as water reflects a face to a face, so does the heart of man reflect one to the other*”, and therefore he will reciprocate the hatred.

This is perplexing! What is the difference if he hates me or not? If we are speaking of a case in which there is no prohibition to hate him, because he is a sinner, then why must I overcome my evil inclination and help him?

Another fact we must clarify is, in a case where I am allowed to hate a sinner, what does it mean that I can hate him? Do I hate him for any personal reason? If it's a *mitzvah* to hate him, then even if I hate him for a personal reason, it's understandable that I need to overcome my evil inclination and help him unload.

But from the words of *Tosafos*, we see that hating a sinner is not about hating him on a personal level. When the *Gemara* says that it's a *mitzvah* to hate a sinner, it is because one who loves Hashem hates evil. This means that I have to hate the evil that is present here, but I am not allowed to hate any traces of good that are in this situation. Therefore, if I feel any personal hatred to him, I am hating him already beyond the evil that he does, and I am hating his essence. This is not permitted, and that is why I must overcome my evil inclination and help him unload, if I feel any personal hatred to him.

### *Defining Love and Hate*

Let us understand this further. Why indeed must one hate evil? And why is there a *mitzvah* to love only a Jew and not a non-Jew? In order to know this, we need to know what love is, and what hatred is.

Love is essentially to realize that another person exists, and to want his existence. Hatred is the absence of this feeling. It is when a person wishes that the other person wouldn't exist. Hatred means, I want to negate his existence. Hatred is not simply that “I hate him”. It means that I don't want him to exist.

How do we know this is true? Take a look at the opposite of hatred, which is love. When I love someone, I want him to exist. When husband and wife love each other, when parent and child love each other, they each want the other to exist. If one of them would die *chas v'shalom*, they would be bereft without the other.

So love is that I want the other person to exist. The more I want him to exist, the more I will love him. The more I hate a person, the less I want him to exist.

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<sup>17</sup> *Tosafos in Pesachim 113b*

Hatred is “*sinah*”, which is from the word “*shoneh*”, “different.” When someone is different than me – in other words, when I look at him as “different” – then I don’t want him to exist. If he stops existing, I’ll feel more at ease. So hatred is: “I don’t want him to exist”. Thus, hatred is not that I believe that the other person exists and I am simply bothered by what he does, that I feel an emotion of “hatred” towards him. A feeling of hatred towards another is rather a result of an even deeper negative feeling: that I do not want him to exist.

We see this apparent from the fact that when someone hates somebody, he doesn’t talk to him (for at least three days, as the *Gemara* says), because in his mind, the other person doesn’t exist. If he talks to him and tells him he hates him, the Rambam says that it’s not hatred, because hatred is only when it is kept in the heart and not revealed outward. Why? It is because verbalizing the hatred is at least acknowledging the other’s existence [Soon we will bring other opinions in the *Rishonim* who disagree with this]. Hatred is to ignore the person and act like the other doesn’t exist.

### *Baseless Hatred Cannot Allow For The Beis HaMikdash*

The *Midrash* recounts that when Moshe *Rabbeinu* met Dasan and Aviram fighting, he immediately realized why the nation wasn’t worthy of redemption: because he saw a “disagreement” between them. He realized that because there was disparity among the nation, the nation could not yet be redeemed; the depth of this is that when people disagree, they don’t want the other to exist. This is the whole idea behind *sinas chinam* (baseless hatred). Redemption can only happen to a nation in which each person wants the other to exist - or else there is no “nation” to redeem, for they are not unified.

The *Gemara*<sup>18</sup> says that *sinas chinam* destroyed the *Beis HaMikdash*, and “it still dances among us.” What is the connection between *sinas chinam* and the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash*? Why is it that the *Beis HaMikdash* cannot exist if there is *sinas chinam*? The *Beis HaMikdash* is called the *makom* (place) of this world where Hashem wants His *Shechinah* to dwell in. If one Jewish soul doesn’t want another Jew’s soul to exist, he doesn’t want the other person to have a “place” on this world. The *Beis HaMikdash* cannot either have a “place” on this world if that is the situation among us.

*Sinas chinam*, which destroyed the *Beis HaMikdash*, was therefore not a “punishment”. It created a reality in which people are apart from each other, and this cannot allow for a concept of a *Beis HaMikdash*.

### *“Kamoicha” – To Love Another Jew “Like Yourself”*

*Sinas chinam* means, I don’t recognize the other’s existence, and even if I am aware that the other exists, I don’t want him to exist.

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<sup>18</sup> *Yoma 9b*

Hillel told the convert that love for Jews is the entire Torah, to love another Jew *kamoicha*, “like your friend”. Love for others Jews has to be *kamoicha*, to love another Jew “like yourself”, and the depth of this it this to realize that the essence of Creation is the existence of the Jewish people, every Jewish soul.

Whenever we feel hatred, the emotion of hatred that we feel toward others isn’t the hatred itself! The hatred we feel is just a **resulting feeling** of some other deep evil force. The hatred **itself** is the fact that **we don’t want another to exist!** That is hatred. Everything else is its *result*, and that is what we know and recognize as “hatred”.

*Ahavas Yisrael*, then, which is the opposite of *sinas chinam*, is to realize that another Jew exists! When we contemplate the fact that another Jew exists, there will be love.

Thus, *ahavas Yisrael* is only a *mitzvah* towards “your friend”, a fellow Jew, because the Jewish people is necessary for Creation to exist, whereas the other nations are not needed for Creation to survive [from the perspective of the current 6000 year era, that is. Later, we will see that there is a higher perspective which will be revealed in the future]. It is to become aware of reality, the reality that the Jewish people are the essence of Creation – and to want that reality.

Therefore, we do not have an *avodah* to actually love the other nations [in our current era]. We had a *mitzvah* to destroy the seven nations who were dwelling in *Eretz Yisrael* in order to conquer it from them, and we have a *mitzvah* to wipe out Amalek. Only the Jewish people are necessary for the world to survive and uphold existence. There is only a *mitzvah* to love that which is necessary to hold up the universe, thus, the concept of love is only towards Jews.

What do we need to be aware of? We need to realize that the entire essence of Creation is the Jewish people. To love another Jew is essentially to realize **who** he is - that another Jew is the essence of creation. Our **awareness** to that is, essentially, the meaning of “*Ahavas Yisrael*”.

The emotion of “love” that we feel to others is thus only the external layer of love, and it is the only superficial layer of the love. The **essence** of the love, the inner dimension of the love itself, is **to realize another’s existence**. Just like I want myself to exist, so must I want the other to exist. That is love. “*Ahavah*” has the same numerical value of “*echad*”, “one” – love is about being at one with another.

So “*kamoicha*” is not just about how much to love another, but is rather the entire essence of the *mitzvah*. If I realize how necessary it is for another Jew to exist, by default there will be love to him. “*Kamoicha*” is to love another in the same way that you love yourself.

### *Hatred Does Not Exist In Our Inner Dimension*

Hatred is only hatred when it is in one’s heart and not openly revealed or verbalized, or else it is not hatred, according to the Rambam. However, other *Rishonim* argue on the view of the Rambam and are of the opinion that a person is not allowed to hate another in his heart even if he takes no

action against the person. According to this opinion, why does the Torah say that you are not allowed another “in your heart”, if it is not dependent on the heart?

It is because really, it is not possible to hate another Jew. In reality, the entire Jewish people are all one, and there is only love. We are “one” nation; we all stood with “one” heart by Har Sinai. From the perspective of the *Yechidah* in our soul – our essence - we are all unified with other Jews.

How then are we able to hate someone? If it is not really possible in essence to hate another Jew, why then does the Torah forbid hatred towards another Jew? The answer is: hatred is only possible in the external layer of Creation. On the surface of things, which is the superficial layer on reality, we are able to hate another, but in our essence, in the inner dimension of reality, it is not possible for a Jew to hate another Jew.

Chazal say, “A Jew who sins, is still a Jew”, because a Jew is always inherently good. Thus, when I hate a sinner, I have to hate his sin, and not the person himself, because he is good in his essence.

When I hate someone, I don’t want him to exist. I am only allowed to hate the sin that a Jew commits, and not the Jew himself, because it is the *sin* which I shouldn’t want to exist. I must wish he wouldn’t sin; but I want him, as a person, to exist.<sup>19</sup> If I don’t want him to exist, then I can’t exist either, for we are all one at our root, and if I deny this oneness, I’m really negating my own existence.

Thus, hatred is only “in the heart”, even according to the opinion that the prohibition of hatred to another Jew extends beyond hatred in the heart. It is because hatred cannot reach deeper than the heart itself, for deep in our heart is our soul’s essence, where hatred cannot penetrate. The [external layer of the] heart can hate, but my actual soul [the inner point of the heart] cannot hate another Jew, *chas v’shalom*.

### *Hating The Evil, Not the Person*

Thus, the way to understand the *mitzvah* to hate evil is that by hating evil, I don’t want it to exist. The fact that I hate a sin means that I don’t want it to exist and that is how I nullify it. We are obligated to hate idol worship, meaning, we should wish that it wouldn’t exist. The more we hate evil, the more we nullify it and destroy it. But we have to be careful to wish that the evil acts a person does should be destroyed, and not wish to destroy another Jew’s existence, *chas v’shalom*.

The Maharal explains that sin in a Jew is *mikreh*, happenstance, and not *etzem* – not a part of his actual essence. The depth in implementing the Maharal’s words is, if I hate another Jew’s evil as being a part of him, then I consider his *etzem*/essence to be evil, and this is denying the intrinsically good essence of a Jew. Rather, you should hate the *mikreh* aspect of his sin, and instead reveal the *etzem* aspect of his sin, which is to remind yourself of his *etzem*, that his soul is always pure.

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<sup>19</sup> This is explained at length in *sefer Tanya*



There is another way how you can look at it. The permission to hate the wicked, and the *mitzvah* to hate them, is hatred, which is *sinah*, from the word *sheini*, “two”. You can only hate the evil he does, not the person himself, in other words, you need to reveal that the evil he does is *sheini*, a “second force” apart from his essence, and not the person himself. It is not part of his essence.

(There is another way to understand it as well. In the word *Beraishis*, we find the letter *beis*, which represents the number two, and the word *raishis*, which means beginning. Every Jewish soul, has a *raishis*/beginning, which is intrinsically pure. Look at his *raishis*, his beginning point, his essence, and not at the “*beis*” in his *Bereishis*....)

### *The Depth of Ahavas Yisrael*

Thus, the *mitzvah* to love another Jew “like yourself”, “*kamoicha*”, is to realize the reality, that every Jewish soul is necessary for existence. It is called the “*klal gadol*” (great rule) of the Torah, according to Rabbi Akiva. Why is it called the great rule of the Torah? There are many explanations, but the deep answer is as follows.

It is the “*klal gadol*” of the Torah, meaning, the world can’t survive without Torah, as the *Nefesh HaChaim* writes; and the world cannot survive without Yisrael. Both Torah and Yisrael are called *raishis*, because without the *raishis*, the universe cannot exist. Chazal state that Torah was created 2000 years before Yisrael, and this is a deep matter. If Torah was created before Yisrael, then how why is Yisrael called *raishis*? The answer is, that *raishis* doesn’t mean the “first” with regards to chronological order. *Raishis* really means something which, if it is taken away, nothing can exist.

As proof, the other nations were around before the inception of the Jewish nation, so there can be definitely be nations that existed before the Jewish people became a nation. So what does it mean that the Jewish people are the *raishis* of Creation?

Without Torah, there is no world. Without Yisrael, there is no world. That is why the Jewish people are called *raishis*. Without Yisrael, everything would cease, just as everything would cease if there would be no more Torah.

Thus, love of other Jews is called the *klal gadol* of the Torah. Superficially, to love another Jew like yourself is to simply “feel love” for another Jew. But the deeper meaning is: to realize that without another Jew’s existence, nothing can exist. Thus, it is the *klal gadol* of the Torah, because the Torah cannot exist without the Jewish people, without all 600,000 souls that accepted it.

Hashem is called “your friend”, whom you must not “abandon”.<sup>20</sup> Loving Hashem is not just to “love” the Creator in the way we think we understand, but rather to realize that if I don’t recognize the reality of Hashem, I can’t exist.

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<sup>20</sup> *Shabbos 31a*

The convert wanted Hillel to teach him the entire Torah on one foot, and Hillel told him, “Do not do unto your friend what you do not want done to yourself.” The depth of this was, the convert wanted that the entire Torah should be taught to him in one fact alone. Hillel was telling him, there is one thing you need. If you love other Jews like yourself, you recognize that reality depends on the existence of other Jews, and then you will have everything; and if you don’t have this fact straight, you have nothing.

So loving other Jews “*kamoicha*”, to love another like yourself, is not just simply “*ahavah*.” It is to realize that I need other Jews to exist, for the Jewish people is necessary for the survival of Creation.

### *Returning To The Perfected State of Mankind*

In the future, there will be unity between Jews and non-Jews. Why do we need the non-Jews, if the universe depends on Jews, and not on non-Jews?

The answer is, the goal of *Ahavas Yisrael* is to reach love for the Torah and for the Creator, whom we all depend on for our existence. We were all once part of Adam’s soul. Adam, originally, was the embodiment of the entire Creation, contained into one man. All of Creation was included in man in his initial state, which was called “*Adam Kadmon*” (original man), and *sefer Nefesh HaChaim* discusses this at length. In the ideal state of man, man is all-inclusive; all of Creation is part of him. This is the perfected state of man. Nothing was created for no purpose; because everything is necessary for man’s existence.

Thus, our goal in *ahavas Yisrael* is not simply to arrive at a “love” for all of Creation. It is to grasp that ultimately, we need all the details in Creation in order to exist, because that is the ideal state of mankind, *Adam Kadmon*.

In our current 6000 year era, we cannot reach the state of *Adam Kadmon*, but we can gather together some of our parts, by reaching *ahavas Yisrael*. Ultimately, we need to reach *Adam Kadmon*, which will be in the future. Therefore, we need to want others’ existence, although we cannot actually reach this perfected state right now. So we need to realize that we need other Jews in order to exist, and along with this, we should also wish that all of Creation should also exist. In recognizing that everything in Creation is necessary for us to exist – everything, including every non-Jew, even animals, plants, and rocks. It’s all necessary and it’s all a part of our existence.

In the current 6000 year era, we are after the sin of Adam, and we cannot reach true love with Creation. There are wars in the world all the time. All we can reach is a degree of perfection. *Ahavas Yisrael* alone is a part of the perfection process, thus, it is not complete perfection. But the will of Hashem is that all of the world will become unified. We need to at least yearn for such a thing. If we reveal this wish in our soul, then we can reach love for all of Creation, and then upon that, we can become closer to the Creator.

In the future, it will be revealed that all of Creation is part of man, for all of Creation was created in Hashem’s image. Man will then become a perfect container for the *Shechinah* to dwell upon. In

our current era, our love for other Jews is not complete, because our *ahavas Yisrael* cannot be true *ahavas Yisrael* when it lacks the unity with the rest of Creation. Therefore, we cannot reach complete love for Hashem.

But in the future, may it come speedily, it will be revealed the complete form of mankind, in which we all recognize that we need all of Creation in order to exist, and only then, can we become totally attached with the Creator.

