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[Home](#) > Bilvavi Part 1 - Section 6 Love of Hashem

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161

Ahavas Hashem is a positive commandment in the Torah, as it says, "And you shall love Hashem, your G-d, with all your heart and all your soul and all your resources" (Devarim 6:5). We see that everyone is obligated to love Hashem. The passuk mentions three levels of love: heart, soul, and resources. The mishna in maseches Avos (5:19) explains that there are two kinds of ahavah: love dependent on something, and love not dependent on anything. Love dependent on something means that one's love is a result of receiving something, but when this ceases, the love ceases.

On the other hand, love not dependent on anything is an intrinsic bond. Ahavah has the numerical value of echad. This ahavah stems from an inner unity between the lover and the beloved. Conditional love of Hashem can be found amongst the gentiles, because they are capable of having love and gratitude toward those who give them things. Unconditional love, of the sort we are discussing, is only present in the Jewish people. This love is unity with the Beloved, and only the Jewish people have unity with Hashem ("Yisrael and Hashem are one"). Therefore, they can have this inner love.

The gentiles, on the other hand, who are separate from Hashem, can only have conditional love. The gemara (Pesachim 8a) says that if a Jewish person gives a coin to a poor person so that his own son will live, his action is valuable, because even if his son will not live, he will still be glad that he gave the charity. This is because deep down, he really wants to give without receiving anything in return. This is unconditional love. But in the case of a gentile, if his son dies and there is no specific justification for his giving, the love ceases, and he has no interest in giving.

It is clear that when attaining the attribute of ahavah, one must first attain ahavah that is dependent on something, and afterwards, ahavah that is not dependent. The soul of a Jew contains both of these qualities, conditional and unconditional love, and a person must work to bring this latent love into action. First, he must uncover in his soul the conditional love, and then he can reveal the unconditional love. (There are individuals born with unconditional love that is already exposed. They can skip the first stage since the unconditional love is already exposed, and they are able to involve themselves with it immediately.)

162

For one to possess even the conditional kind of ahavah, he must recognize from who is receiving. If he thinks the item is anyway his, the gift will not inspire him to ahavah. If Reuven gives a gift to

Shimon, and Shimon thinks that Reuven is just returning something he had borrowed, this will not cause Shimon to love Reuven.

The same is true with love toward the Creator. First of all, one must clearly recognize the benefits Hashem has bestowed upon him, and then he will be able to love His Creator with conditional love. If a person lives without thinking, he will not sense the Creator's kindnesses, and it will be difficult and nearly impossible for him to truly love the Creator, even conditionally. Therefore, a person must first contemplate and recognize the areas of life and the ways in which Hashem bestows kindness upon him.

163

A person's avodah is to understand and to perceive that he has gotten nothing on his own. Every single thing he possesses comes from Hashem. It is not enough to have the awareness that Hashem has given him a lot of gifts and is very kind to him. He must recognize that every single thing is from Hashem, and that each thing he has is only an expression of Hashem's kindness.

We will provide an example: A person buys a house, and after a number of years, the house goes up in value, and he profits significantly. A person might think simply that Hashem was kind to him by giving him this profit; but that is not enough. A person must consider that the very idea to buy that house was a gift from Hashem. In other words, not only his material acquisitions and pleasures, but every thought and feeling, and every aspect of his body and soul is a gift from Hashem. Every good idea that comes to one's mind is from Hashem, and so it is with even the smallest details. At first, a person should look at the "bigger" things, like money and children. After that, he should see that his entire being, including all his thoughts, feelings, and movements, without exception, are gifts and expressions of kindness from the Creator, blessed be His Name.

164

There are two parts to this: 1) Negating the notion that one thinks and achieves things by oneself; (2) the perception that everything is from Hashem. This is a person's avodah. By nature, a person rushes through life and doesn't think at all, so his human nature gives him the sense that he is smart, insightful, knowledgeable, and so on. One must therefore consider each detail: "Where did I get this from? Through my own ability, or from Hashem?"

A person generally thinks he has "help from Hashem" - in other words, he does most of the work, but Hashem helps out. The truth is not like that at all. Even a person's own efforts come only from Hashem's power. The good thoughts and the energy to work and acquire things are all gifts from Hashem. The effort known as hishtadlus (necessary personal effort) derives its energy and its associated wisdom and plans from Hashem. Everything, then, is a gift from Him.

165

We will now illustrate how a person might acquire the awareness that everything is from Hashem. A person should sit in a quiet place, and think to himself, "Who gave me my wife? How did I find her? Did I do this with my own strength and wisdom? Certainly not! Only Hashem gave her to me. All of my wisdom and other capabilities are only from Hashem." In this manner, he should consider one detail after another. If he lives in a house and is pleased with his acquisition, he should consider: "Who gave me this house? Did I find it with my own wisdom, or was it from Hashem?" He should train himself to review all his possessions and consider one detail after another, for a long period of time, day after day. He should first consider this in his thoughts, and then express it with his mouth. First, he will say it in the third person - "Hashem gave me." Then, he should speak in the second person -

"You gave me." Earlier, we described the methods of speech in the second and third person. He should continue with this process until he understands and feels that things do not come to him through his own power. Even if he employed wisdom and intelligence, those, too, are gifts from Hashem, Who placed wisdom and intelligence in the person. A person must have no sense of ego here. He is merely like the guardian of an item, who has nothing of his own. All he has - his body, his money, his thoughts, his speech, his feelings, and more, are from Hashem.

166

When a person has the privilege to sense these ideas, he reaches the level [expressed by Moshe and Aharon] of "and what are we?" (Shemos 16:7) He feels that he does not have anything of his own, and everything he has is only from his Creator. This is more than a mere desire to be humble; it is a perception of the truth of existence. Everything belongs to Hashem, and a person is merely the guardian of the wisdom, the money, the children, and whatever else he has.

One must accustom himself to this way of thought time and again, realizing that in all areas of life, he is a guardian over things that really belong to Hashem. The children are not his, but a deposit from Hashem. The wisdom is not his, but a deposit. This money is not his, but a deposit. He must not entertain the thought that something is "mine." Everything belongs to Hashem, and all is from Him. If something is mine, it just means that Hashem gave it to me as a deposit in order to serve Him with it, but nothing more than that.

167

When a person feels that everything he has is a gift from the Creator, he should ponder, "Why did Hashem give me these things?" He should answer, "Because he loves me, so all these gifts are expressions of His love toward me." In this way, he should stop and think, and then say, "Master of the World! Who gave me this object? You did! Why did You give it to me? Because You love me." He should discuss each detail, and mention Hashem's love each time, until the idea that Hashem loves him is fixed in his heart. One must repeat this patiently thousands and tens of thousands of times, with simplicity, focus, and inner quiet.

168

After a person has acquired conditional ahavah in his heart, his avodah is now to acquire the kind of ahavah that is not dependent on anything. We have mentioned that this attribute is already deep within us, because "Yisrael and Hashem are one." Of course, this is something that can only be perceived by the soul, not by the body. Therefore, the whole essence of this ahavah is a revelation of the inner essence of the Jewish soul. For a person to attain this level of unconditional love in a solid way, and not merely pick up small fragments of it, his whole life must revolve around Hashem. All of his thoughts must be focused on Hashem (except when he is learning Torah, as mentioned above). He should be totally devoted to thoughts about Hashem's existence and the fact that he is with Him, and he should be involved in conversation with Hashem, so that He will be the center of his life at all times. In this way, he will experience a revelation of the concept that "Hashem and Yisrael are one."

But all this can only occur after a person has successfully followed the path we have discussed until this point. His heart will then be pure and clean, and Hashem will rest in it. Then, his entire being will be attached to Hashem from the depth of his heart. Because he has nullified the thoughts of the vanities of the world, and is totally immersed in thoughts about Hashem, there will be no barrier preventing Hashem from being revealed in his heart.

This is a very broad topic, and what we have touched upon is only a drop in the ocean. We have,

however, tried to at least bring a person to a measure of understanding and the ability to seek the path so that he will always live with Hashem. At all times, he will have the privilege to converse with Hashem with simplicity, and with a feeling that Hashem is with him and resting inside him. When a person has the privilege to reach this level, he will be able to remember almost each moment that he is in the presence of Hashem. Even if he forgets momentarily, he will remind himself immediately. Fortunate is the one who is always closely attached to Hashem, and whose whole way of life is like this.

169

The inner path toward unconditional love requires contemplation and speech. One must contemplate well the nature of unconditional love, consider examples in this world, and consider our spiritual underlying essence, until the ideas are fixed well in his mind, and he possesses complete faith that unconditional love exists between Hashem and the Jewish people.

After that, comes the avodah through speech. This is a very precious and wondrous avodah, in which one selects pesukim that mention Hashem's love toward the Jewish people and their love toward Him. Alternatively, he might select his own words, according to his ability, and repeat a phrase many times, for half an hour, or an hour, or more, each person according to the affinity of his soul. These words must emanate from the heart, not just from the mind, and one must persist with them for a very long time. In this way, his soul will be greatly fired with the love of his Creator.

170

This must be done with inner quiet and calm, as well as inner strength. There must be an inner passion, not an outer passion. Outer passion is only excitement, and excitement does not really penetrate the barrier that covers the soul. Only "flashes of fire [from the flame of G-d]" (Shir Hashirim 8:6) can burst through the barrier of the heart of stone that prevents the feelings of the soul from being revealed. When this is done with inner quiet and passion, and one persists for a long time without fail, Hashem will surely accept his efforts and remove any foreign barrier that prevents him from actually sensing the unconditional love that is there.

This method is well-known to ovdei Hashem, and is not a new idea. It is also discussed, in part, in the work Yesod VeShoresh Ha'Avodah. It has been tested and proven many, many times. But success requires a person to be very solid in his avodas Hashem and not prone to fool himself at all.

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