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## 48 Ways - 023 A Good Heart

### "Lev Tov" - A Good Heart

One of the 48 qualities to acquire the Torah is *lev tov*, to have a "good heart."

Our Sages reveal that the *gematria* (numerical value) of *lev* is 32 and *tov* equals 17, which together adds up to 48. This hints to us that until *Lag B'omer*, the 33<sup>rd</sup> day of the *Omer*, a person has a "*lev*" – he has the first "32" days of the *Omer*, but he doesn't necessarily have the *lev tov*, a good heart. After Day 33, for the rest of the 17 days until Shavuot, a person has the unique opportunity to turn his heart good – to gain a "*lev tov*".

What is a *lev tov* good heart? Is there such a thing as a "bad" heart?

A friend in Hebrew is called "*reia*". A similar word to "*reia*" (friend) is "*ra*" (evil). In other words, if a person has an 'evil heart' towards his friends, he cannot be a friend to them; he is only "*ra*" (evil) toward them. He will be selfish, and his motivations to have friendships are always about himself. But if his heart is 'good' towards others, he will be able to have friends.

The 24 students of Rabbi Akiva stopped dying by *Lag B'omer*, because after *Lag B'omer*, their hearts became good; they reached their '*lev tov*'. This shows us that from *Lag B'omer* onward, our *avodah* is to acquire for ourselves a '*lev tov*'.

### Having A "Lev Tov" In The Home

We have so far seen what an 'evil heart' is and what a 'good heart' is. Now we can understand the *avodah* before us now in these days – the *avodah* of acquiring a '*lev tov*', a good heart.

Let's say someone is the type to mistreat his friend; he does not have a '*lev tov*' toward others. When he gets married and he has kids, he will act the same way with his spouse and children. He will mistreat them also, because he never developed a '*lev tov*' toward others.

The children of such a person one day complain to him and say, "Daddy, you don't love us!" The father replies in bewilderment, "What do you mean I don't love you?! I do so much for you! I put so much money into you. I buy you so many things. Mommy and I both love you so much. Do you know how many times I got up for you in middle of the night and took care of you...?"

But the truth is that the father *doesn't* really love them! If the children claim that their father doesn't love them, it shows that he doesn't have a '*lev tov*' toward them all along!

It seems that the father loves his family, because he “does” so much for them and “gives” so much to them. But it can very well be that he doesn’t act with a *lev tov* toward his household, and therefore, the children will feel unloved, no matter how much he “does” for them.

Why? It is because when push comes to shove, he loves only himself, and he puts himself before his own household. When a very troubling day comes, he will be tested of how much he really loves his family – and he will fail the test, because he never really loved them to begin with. He had no ‘*lev tov*’ toward his children to begin with – he was selfish all along.

There are even people today who run away from their families, leaving their wife and children behind. Sometimes this is because a man falls in love with a woman who seems more attractive than his own wife. He fantasizes over her and wishes he could leave his own wife, because life looks a lot better with this new woman; he wants to go live life with his other woman and have his own private life with her.

How is it possible that a person can be so cruel to run away from his wife and five kids so that he can enjoy his own private life?! Even though he imagines that maybe life would be better if he goes to live with another woman he falls in love with, still, how can he do such a thing and leave his family behind?? How can he be so selfish to break apart his family??

The answer to this is because he was selfish all along! He had children, but he had them all for his own selfish needs. As soon as it becomes unpleasant for him to deal with his children, he throws them away (he wouldn’t even care to throw them into the ocean). He doesn’t care anymore about his family. He only had children because he thought it would be pleasant, but as soon as they become a bother him, he abandons them to go on and fulfill his selfish desires.

### ***The Meaning of a ‘Good Heart’***

We know that Moshe Rabbeinu was willing to put himself in danger when he saved a Jew from Dasan and Aviram. In this merit, he became the leader of the Jewish people. He had the special trait of truly caring for others.

But we aren’t talking about Moshe Rabbeinu, who was on the highest level possible. Is there any Jew living in this year, 2014, who is willing to truly sacrifice for another person??

The fact that a person has a lot of friends doesn’t mean that he loves his friends; often, it is the opposite – when a person is popular and he has tons of “friends”, often it can be that he really doesn’t love any one of them!

There is a concept that a person has to be willing to even commit a sin and lose his share in the World To Come so that he can save his friend, if need be it. Of course, some people don’t care to sin in the first place, because they have no *yiras Shomayim* (fear of Heaven). But in essence, a person has to be willing to sin for another person and forfeit his reward, if he must. The Chazon Ish said that a true friend is someone who is willing to go to *Gehinnom* for his friend if he has to. And if he sins for his friend, he will indeed go to *Gehinnom* – yet he still has to be willing to do something for his friend, even if he knows for sure that he will end up in *Gehinnom* for sinning.

What’s a good friend, a true friend? Is it someone who has a nice smile to others? No, that doesn’t mean he’s a true friend. A true friend is someone who is willing to suffer on behalf of his friend. The *mitzvah* to love other Jews is to love them like yourself.

This is the true test of who a real friend is: someone who is willing to sacrifice for his friend.

The Mishnah in Avos says that the best quality to have is a “*lev tov*” – a ‘good heart’. The best way to succeed in *chinuch* (child education) as well is to have a “*lev tov*” towards our family.

### ***Analyzing The Motivations Behind Requests To Our Children***

Why do people have children? There are all kinds of self-serving motives that people have. Some people have children because they want a child to say *Kaddish* for them after they die. Others have a child so that they can be honored and served.

When a father asks his child to *bentch*, the child will listen only if he feels that his father has a *lev* toward him, that the request is coming for the well-being of his child. Otherwise, the child does it grudgingly – because he doesn’t feel a *lev tov* emanating in his father’s request.

When we make requests of our children, is it emanating from our desire that they do it for their own good – or are we asking them to do things for us for our own good...?

Once there was a child did something improper. He had a great father who said, “I can’t punish you now, because I’m angry at you. I don’t want the punishment to be coming out of anger. I want it to come for your own good.”

Parents often want their children to do what is good for “Me” [the parents]. A father often views his children as his slaves! Really, the father should train the child to do something because it’s good for the **child** to do. One should tell his child, “Do it for *yourself* – not for me.”

### ***“Expectations” From Our Children***

What do we want our children to be?

There are parents who want their child to attain prestigious positions in life: either to be a professor, or to become a lawyer, or to become a successful businessman in general. Others want their child to become a “Rosh Yeshiva”, so that he will be very honored in his life...

Is there any parent who wants their child to become who he really is? Let’s say the parents know for sure that the child is supposed to be a shoemaker, and this is what their child is meant to become in life. Would any parent let their child become a shoemaker...? Most parents would not come to terms with this. They don’t do what’s good for the child – they want from the child to do what’s good for *them*.

Even worse, there are many parents who want their child to continue their business that they started. Who says this is appropriate for the child to do? Just because the father started a certain business that means that the child has to continue it? Often, the child is dragged into the family business when it’s not good for him at all. Yet parents continue to put pressure on their children that they must continue the family business, and they tell them: “You have to. If you don’t, you will embarrass us in the community; it’s not good for your *shidduchim*, etc.”

In the same way that a person loves himself and he wants to be who he really is – and not what he is forced to be – so should a person love his child. Love him and **let him be who he really is, not what you want him to be**. And being who you are means to be who *you* really are; let the child be who he really is, not what you want him to be.

“*Chinuch*” – child education – means to let your child be who he really is, and not what you want him to be.

Sometimes I ask my child to do things in the house, like to clean up his room. I tell him, "Clean up the room because I want you to be organized." Or I tell him, "Clean your room because it's good for you to clean your room." Either of these requests is a good way to make a request, because then the child hears the message that it's for his own good that he has to do a certain chore.

When you make requests of your children, don't ask him to do something because it's good for **you** that he do it, but ask him to do it because you know that it's good for him to do. And make that clear in your request to your child.

### ***Raising Responsible Children***

We are describing here a whole different kind of life we can live.

Parents must let their children be who they are supposed to be; this does not mean of course to just let the child live with no reproof whatsoever and that we should let him act like a wild monkey. What we mean here is that the child has to sense that his parents really want the best for him.

We do not mean that the parents are never allowed to tell their child about the difficulties of life and instead tell them that life is a utopia. Rather, it's the opposite: let them know good and well that life contains difficulties – and for that reason, they need to become responsible, so that they will be able to deal with the difficulties that life will bring one day.

Train you child to be responsible. Train you child that life is about being responsible for others. But first, teach your child to be responsible for *himself*. That is what it means to let the child be "himself".

When someone works at a job that's not "himself", he can't be happy. A person is only happy when he does things that are himself, not when he forces himself into a role he has to play. Be the same with your children.

I hope that these words here have affected your soul. After understanding the words here, decide what kind of life you want to live – what kind of home you want to have. I hope that all of us here merit to have true and holy *nachas*.

### **QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS WITH THE RAV**

**Q: *Since the Rov says that we have to find "ourselves" first, how do we be our true self, in spite of society, which does not allow us to act like our true self?***

**A:** Good question. You can still be yourself to a certain degree, even if society doesn't allow you to.

**Q: *If a person doesn't know himself well and what's good for himself, how can he know what is good for his child??***

**A:** Very good question. It depends on if he is working on himself or not. If a person is in the process of searching to find his true self, he's in a lot better of a situation than someone who isn't searching to find himself. It is not possible for us to know ourselves 100% but we need to try as much as we can to get to know our true self.

**Q: *Can the Rov give examples of how we can apply the concept said here.***

**A:** Is this question being asked regarding your child or regarding yourself? (**Regarding myself**). Regarding yourself, you can work on this as follows. Let's say you go to Daf Yomi, and your friends are there; you decide that you will learn for an hour a day. But next door there is a shiur going on which

you will find more suitable for you to do, but you don't know anyone there. What should you do? Naturally, you want to go to the shiur which you will enjoy more, where you won't have to deal with anyone and you will just be able to learn. (Many times a person knows convinces himself in his subconscious that he needs to do something which really isn't good for him...) What you should really do is go the Daf Yomi in which you will be able to have a lev tov toward others, even though it's not as enjoyable for you, because you'd rather to go the higher level shiur in the other beis midrash.

***Q: If let's say the child wants to go to shul wearing blue shirt, when everyone wears white shirts. Should we let the child be himself? Or should we oppose his behavior? Or should the father encourage the child by going himself to shul as well in a blue shirt...?***

**A:** It is impossible to give an answer to every possible issue that exists. But one rule that always applies is: Do you want the child to something because it's good for him to do, or because it's for your honor? Even if you get your child to wear a white shirt, he has to understand that he's doing it for his own good, and for his parents' honor.

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