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## Getting to Know Your Feelings - 007 Understanding The Power of Love

### ***Feeling On The Outside, Da'as On The Inside***

Although there are many emotions in the soul, they are all branches of one single root: love.

What is love? Our Sages say:<sup>[1]</sup> “The prayers of the righteous turn the *da'as* of Hashem from cruelty to mercy.” Hashem doesn't just transform His cruelty to mercy; He also transforms His “*da'as*, because the root of everything is *da'as*. Hashem sometimes uses *da'as* for “good,” such as when He exhibits mercy, or He can sometimes use His *da'as* for when He has to be “cruel.” *Da'as* is the root of everything, the essence of the soul, as we explained before.

We may think that cruelty and mercy are just emotions, but our Sages say that they are more than that: emotions are really *da'as*. The Rambam classifies emotions as “*hilchos da'as*,” because our emotions and our *da'as* are really one entity. The inner layer of emotions is *da'as*, and the outer layer is comprised of the feelings that emotions engender. Looking at emotions as only feelings and nothing else is a superficial approach, since the focus is only looking at the garment of the emotions, and not at the essence.

Once we have internalized this concept, it becomes clear that love has two layers to it as well. Love has *da'as* within it, as well as the feeling of love we are familiar with. The *da'as* of love is its essence, and the feeling of love we know of is only the outer layer of the love.

What, indeed, is the essence of love? What is the “*da'as*” of love?

### ***Conditional Love And Unconditional Love***

The words of the Sages<sup>[2]</sup> are well-known: “Any love that is dependent on a reason, the love goes away when the reason goes away; any love that is not dependent on a reason, the love never goes away, even when the reason goes away.”

What are these two kinds of love, and what is their root?

A love that is dependent on something is a superficial emotion of love, and doesn't involve *da'as*. A love that isn't dependent on anything is a love that stems from one's *da'as*.

When love is unconditional, the feeling of love that the person experiences is only the garment of the

love, while the essence of the love is his *da'as*.

The numerical value in Hebrew of the word *ahavah* (love) is the same as *echad* (one). True love, which is unconditional love, is reached when we want to become one with another. When we view another as being one with us and then we feel love for the person, we are utilizing the *da'as* of love. The accompanying feeling of love we experience is only its outer layer, but the love itself is the *da'as* – the **oneness**, which we have with another.

The source of conditional love is what we identify as the “emotion” of love. It is not the kind of love that connects people; it is just a feeling, and nothing more. These feelings of “love” toward another can come in numerous ways: either from “loving” him for his money, or for the honor the person gives us, or simply because of our personality tastes.

The love that one is feeling in these cases derive its strength from any of these superficial reasons, but as soon as any of these reasons go away, the feeling of love disappears with it.

Unconditional love is thus when one uses *da'as*, to foster a sense of unity with another. When a person is at one with another, he can love him. After this process is completed, the feeling of love he then experiences is a garment of the love, resulting from his *da'as* behind the love, but it is not the love itself. The actual love is the *da'as* behind it, which in this case is the desire to truly unify with the other.

Every feeling has its source. The root of conditional love comes from a superficial source, dependent on something external that causes the love; there is no sense of oneness with another here, and no *da'as*. Whatever it depends on is subject to change, so the love goes away when that factor changes. Unconditional love comes from tapping into the power of our *da'as* – to desire unity with another; it lasts forever, because oneness doesn't change.

Unconditional love is the true and deep kind of love, while conditional love depends on liking something about the other person's personality, which is subject to change, and thus can never be considered true love.

### ***Natural Love***

Now we can understand that there are two sources from which we draw forth our power to love.

Every person is born with a natural love for himself, and we can love ourselves in two ways. One of these ways is a superficial way to love others, while the other way is the true source of love that we have within ourselves.

The primary source of our natural self-love is the love that a person has for himself and his very existence. This is evident from the fact that every person wants to remain alive; a person loves himself for just existing. A second source of self-love we have in ourselves is the superficial kind of self-love, which is to love ourselves for our personality and good *middos* and qualities.

A person loves himself and his children unconditionally. Even if a person's child would be evil, and even if the child would be as evil as *Amalek*, Heaven forbid, the father would still love his child. Why?

It is because he sees the child as a part of himself. He loves his child just as much as he loves himself, and sees him as an extension of his own existence. This love doesn't come from admiring his child for any specific qualities; it comes from just loving one's very existence which is a deeper kind of love.

Just like a person loves himself even if he wouldn't be able to find anything admirable about his

personality, so does a parent love his child unconditionally, and not because he admires anything in particular about his child.

These two kinds of natural love – unconditional love for ourselves, as well as conditional love for ourselves – exist within every person. A person can love himself simply because he exists – or for a variety of different reasons, most of which are superficial.

People who love themselves with the second kind of love only love themselves partially, depending on how positive they are toward themselves.

With this kind of love, a person born with a more positive kind of personality will be able to love himself, but a person born with a tendency toward negativity will love himself less.

But when a person loves himself unconditionally – simply because he exists – he loves himself totally no matter what.

Every person needs to recognize these two kinds of love within himself. Most people who need others to admire them for their qualities are usually unaware of how to truly love themselves. People don't know how to truly love themselves. They think that they should love themselves by finding their good *middos*. If one has a positive self-image, he may be able to generate feelings of self-love, but if he's negatively inclined toward himself, he will not feel loved, and he'll look for love from others, instead of being able to give it to himself. Either way, he has no inner source of love, whereas a person who loves himself unconditionally experiences a constant flow of love *for* himself, and *from* himself.

People who feel they don't really love themselves believe that this is because of their low spiritual level. They have no idea about the true love for themselves they could be having.

When a person loves himself conditionally, he will often feel down about himself and he will feel unloved, when his reasons to love himself fall away. But when a person loves himself unconditionally, such love is consistent, and it rarely fluctuates. This is an ability that exists within every person, whether it is has already been revealed, or whether it remains dormant in the person. His own unconditional love provides a constant inner flow of love from within himself that doesn't depend on anything external.

It is impossible to find unconditional love from an outside source. Unconditional love comes from one's inner world; it is not a feeling of love *towards* oneself, but it is rather a pure kind of love that comes from one's power of *da'as*.

This inner flow of love that a person has within himself comes from one's *very existence*.

It is the pure kind of love that comes from one's *da'as*, and it extends to become a pure feeling. A person can only love himself unconditionally if he loves his very existence; any other type of love can only be conditional.

### ***Revealing True Love Towards Others***

However, when it comes to loving others, there has to be both conditional and unconditional love present. For a person to really love others, he has to love them both because of their qualities and because of their very existence. We will explain why.

When a person feels a love toward another person, he must be able to recognize the source of that

love: Is it an extension of the unconditional love he has for himself, or does it depend on external factors? We will explain the difference.

If a person only loves himself conditionally, his love for others will be the same kind of love he has for himself. He will love Reuven...but not Shimon. This is why people have a hard time loving others. A husband and wife might only love each other based on certain factors, and thus the love between them is only conditional. A child who loves his father solely because he knows that his father gives him things only loves his father because he gives him things. This kind of love is shaky and impermanent.

When a person loves himself unconditionally, he will have no problem loving others the same way. His love for others won't depend on anything.

All of us are able to love unconditionally, but our conditional love can hold back the unconditional love if we don't access it within ourselves. But once the unconditional love pushes itself to the forefront, even if we find a reason to love another, the unconditional love will remain unchanged, and we will be able to experience both types of love simultaneously.

This was the great love that existed between David and Yehonasan.<sup>[3]</sup> Although they had reasons why they loved each other, they still loved each other unconditionally, because they had recognized unconditional love within themselves and allowed it to be revealed.

Let us review this again: We all have within us two abilities, the power to love conditionally and to love unconditionally. Unconditional love is to love yourself simply because you exist, while conditional love is to love yourself based on a reason. These are not two *separate* powers, but rather two *layers* of the same power. The inner layer of love is unconditional love, while its outer layer is conditional love.

One who only loves himself conditionally, however, will not be able to love others unconditionally, even if he tries to.

Let us ask: if a person has unconditional love toward himself, why doesn't he automatically love all others equally? The answer is because he also has conditional love for himself, which prevents him from loving everyone equally. He is incapable of loving others who don't appeal to him. His conditional love prevents his unconditional love from being truly revealed.

How, then, can we access our unconditional love for others? Won't the fact that we love others conditionally get in the way? Conditional love doesn't totally prevent<sup>[4]</sup> us from loving the other, because at least a little bit of love for the other has been revealed.

After all, at least we have uncovered a conditional love toward the other, which is already a step. Once we reveal at least a conditional love for the other, we will then be able to reveal even an unconditional love for the other, reminiscent of the love between David and Yehonasan.<sup>[5]</sup>

### ***Eternal Love***

Let us return to the *Mishnah* in *Avos*:<sup>[6]</sup> "Any love that is dependent on a reason, the love goes away when the reason goes away; any love that is not dependent on a reason, the love never goes away, even when the reason goes away."

This is difficult to understand. It is clear that if the love was dependent on a reason, then the love stops as soon as the reason goes away. But unconditional love cannot go away because it doesn't depend on anything. Why does the *Mishnah* point this out?

Unconditional love can be hidden by the conditional love, so the *Mishnah* is teaching as follows: When a person loves another unconditionally, then even when his conditional love for the other falls away, he will still love the other, because unconditional love will always remain.

The lesson of the *Mishnah* is that even when the conditions for the love fall away, the person will still be left with unconditional love toward the other. Once there is unconditional love, there will always be love, even when the reasons for the love are no longer there.

### ***Hatred Is Only Possible When The Love Was Conditional***

Now that we have explained love, we can understand hatred, the opposite of love. Hatred is whatever love isn't, and love is whatever hatred isn't.

Only conditional love has an opposite emotion of hatred; unconditional love, though, has no opposite.

There is no such thing as unconditional hatred, because something that has no conditions to it cannot, by definition, have an opposite.

Hatred is only possible when a person only knows of conditional love.

Once a person reveals his unconditional love, he cannot hate.

### ***Unconditional Love Is Love Based On Da'as, Conditional Love is Love Based On A Feeling***

Now we can understand the opening words of this chapter, that the inner kind of love is love that comes from *da'as*.

What is the difference between a feeling coming from *da'as*, to a feeling that isn't coming from *da'as*?

*Da'as* is the awareness of reality as it is.

A feeling without *da'as*, though, is just a "feeling" to us and nothing more.

Unconditional love is an awareness of reality (even if one might also love himself for other reasons).

A person can love himself either due to his *da'as*, which translates into unconditional love towards himself; or from a mere feeling of love for himself, which translates into conditional love towards himself.

### ***Recognizing Another's Existence***

Before a person is able to love another, he has to first acknowledge their existence based on more than his physical senses.

Most people, though, evaluate others based on externalities, even by something as superficial as seeing or hearing them.

Reb Yeruchem Levovitz *zt"l* once stated that "A person cannot murder another person." If so, he asked, how was Kayin able to kill Hevel? It was because he wasn't aware that Hevel existed. He was cruel; he had no mercy. Only a merciful person is aware that another person exists. Anyone who is cruel enough to kill could only come to such behavior because he is not aware of others.

This can be applied similarly to the idea of loving others. We have a *mitzvah* to love other Jews on the same level that we love ourselves;<sup>[7]</sup> "And you shall love your friend like yourself."

We must love every Jew - absolutely! But there is something that comes **before** this! If we really want to love others, we need to first be truly aware of the other's existence, in the same way that we know that we see ourselves as existing. Just as one senses his own existence - in a very real way - so can he sense others' existence in a very real way.

But if a person never thought about his own existence and doesn't love himself unconditionally, then his awareness of himself is hidden, and he only experiences his awareness of others in a superficial manner.

Because his love for himself is dependent on a reason, he recognizes the existence of others in the same way.

True love is revealed when one utilizes *da'as*. Only by realizing the reality of your own existence will you be able to truly love yourself for who you are - and only then will you be able to love others, simply because they exist.

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<sup>[1]</sup> \_ Sukkah 14a

<sup>[2]</sup> \_ Avos 5:19

<sup>[3]</sup> \_ Avos 5:19

<sup>[4]</sup> \_ Editor's Note: The author previously stated that love will not last if it is based on conditional love. Here the author explains that conditional love is still essential in the process of reaching true love and to the contrary, we need to begin with conditional love which eventually will reveal unconditional love but only if that is the underlying motivation.

<sup>[5]</sup> \_ Avos 5:19

<sup>[6]</sup> \_ Pirkei Avos 5:19

<sup>[7]</sup> \_ Vayikra 19:18, Talmud Yerushalmi, Nedarim Perek 9