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Connecting To The Eternal

עולם - ובנה אותה בנין עולם - "And rebuild it (Jerusalem) as an eternal edifice."

We don't just ask that Yerushalayim be rebuilt - we ask that it be rebuilt to last forever.

If we reflect deeply, we discover that there is really nothing in this world that is forever. This world is temporary, and only Hashem is forever, for Hashem "was, is, and will be." Only Hashem is forever, while His Creations are limited. However, all creations can connect with Him, although we are limited and temporary; our soul has a yearning to connect itself with the eternal, and only the Creator is eternal.

But if the soul of a person is concealed from a person - and this is the situation of most people - one loses this yearning for eternity. He might yearn for things that are eternal, but he uses it for the wrong things. Without revealing the soul, a person misuses the yearning for the eternal, and it will manifest in other areas.

When People Feel Too Connected To This World

There are many, many things that people feel deeply connected to on this world, and people would never want to part from those things. It can be one's car, his house, or a certain items he owns which are very dear to him.

Reb Chatzkel would often quote the words of the Zohar that "A person dwells on this world and thinks it is his." Man has a nature to think that his life on this world is permanent. Any sensible person will admit that he is not eternal, because we all know that people die. Ever since the curse of Adam [when mankind was cursed with death] people who are on this world have been leaving this world.

Our brain can be aware very well that death is inevitable to all people (unless Moshiach comes during one's lifetime), but our heart often does not feel this reality. The heart can be blocked from the truth that our brain is aware of intellectually. Simply, this is a *ruach shtus*, a foolish spirit, that sways a person from realizing the truth.

But the deeper reason is because our soul really wants to feel eternal. It doesn't want a connection that is temporary - it wants some kind of connection that is eternal. This is a very deep need of our soul and when it isn't understood, it is misused by a person to seek an eternal connection with This World.

When the soul is concealed from man – in other words, when a person doesn't have a simple feeling of sensing Hashem in his life – his need for the eternal will be awakened, and it will seek eternal connections with This World. If a person can't find it in something truthful on This World, he will seek it in places that are not truthful. He might be aware in his mind of course that this is foolish, but he doesn't actually feel that way. He feels his possessions, his money, and that all worldly matters are forever.[\[1\]](#)

The Feeling of Connection To Our Children

Until now we were addressing someone who lives a very superficial kind of life. But there is a more subtle manifestation of this problem which exists by almost all people. Even if someone doesn't have that much of a materialistic life, and he doesn't feel that attached to his house and possessions, he will still feel that the most eternal connection he knows of on this world is: with his family.

Each person has relationships in his life, and people tend to feel that these relationships are absolutely eternal.

With parents, some people are very attached to them, and some have weaker relationships with the parents. When a person gets married, some people are very deeply connected with their spouse, and some are not. But when it comes to our children – we love them more powerfully than anyone else. The feeling of connection that a parent has for a child is very, very intense.

The Gemara[\[2\]](#) says that normally, if someone digs a tunnel into one's house to rob him, one is allowed to kill the intruder, because the intruder is deemed a *rodef*, a pursuer. But if the robber is one's father, the intruder is not considered a *rodef*, because the father would not kill the son, since he loves him.

The words of Reb Yisrael Salanter are well-known: That even if a father consciously loves another person more than his own son, such as a beloved student of his, if a time would come where he would have to choose between one of them to save, he would choose the son, because deep in his subconscious, he loves his child more, no matter how much grief the child has caused him.

When a person doesn't have children yet, he feels a certain void in his life, because the soul has a deep desire that its existence be continued. Thus, there is a very deep desire in man for children.

The soul of a person is very attached to one's children. There are even children who cut off contact from their parents, yet the parents continue to strongly love them.

Most people are willing to work very hard at jobs and even get into huge debts just so that their family will have income, and it's all so that the children will be able to live comfortably. We see that a person is willing to undergo a lot of stress at work just so that he can bring home money and support his children. He does it all for the children. So there is a very, very deep love that a parent has for a child.

There are also people who revolve their entire life around the children – they make their children into the center of their life.

Examining The Root of Why We Feel Deeply Connected With Our Children

We need to examine deeply into ourselves where this comes from. There are a few people who truly love their children with a totally pure kind of love. But most people who feel very attached to their children are actually being motivated by a need for some kind of "permanence" on this world.

Of course, Hashem implanted a love in every father for his child; whether the father is a *tzaddik* or a wicked person. But the level of love differs with each person.

Most people, in their subconscious, do not view children as people who “happen” to be in their life, and they feel that their bond with their children is a major part of their life, a part of their entire essence and being, and they are connected to their children with the depths of their soul.

Here we come to the root of the matter.

Those who are attached to materialistic aspects of this world use their power of deep connection for materialism, which is clearly the most negative way to misuse the soul’s need for deeply lasting connection. But even those who are not that attached to materialism of this world are also misplacing their soul’s need for deeply lasting connection: the bond that people feel towards their children can really be coming from a need for permanence of This World!

There are people who think that the ideal kind of life is when the children are everything. Let us examine the depth of this mentality that people have and see how to use it and what needs to be fixed with this mentality.

Man is made of soul and body. The Gemara states that a father gives five things to his child, and the mother gives five things to their child. These are physical mannerisms which a parent gives to the child. Even the *middos* which a child inherits from a parent are only the garments of the child’s soul, not the essence of the child’s soul. Thus, the entire bond that a parent can feel to his child can be entirely based on physicality, not the soul. Physically, relatives are always close; one may not marry close relatives and he may not testify for them in Beis Din, due to their physical closeness.

Thus, there is an intrinsic physical closeness with relatives and family members, which cannot be denied. What results from this, however, is that most of the time, the relationship that a father feels towards his child is purely based on the physical factor.

The more a person lives a bodily kind of existence, the more “bodily” his connections are. If he is totally materialistic, he is entirely connected to desires of this world. If he is a bit more refined – or if he feels both connected to this world as well as feeling connected to his children – it is still his body which connects him to things. His soul really wants eternal connection, but because it is hidden, and the body dominates the person, the soul’s need ends up getting twisted around by the body, and it manifests in a yearning to feel eternally attached with one’s children.

The Soul’s Perspective Towards Love

But if a person begins to leave his bodily existence and enters a soul kind of existence – not just intellectually, but to live life through the prism of the soul – the perspective of a person changes. He will want a different kind of connection. This doesn’t mean that he will forget about his body. We don’t live in Gan Eden; we are not ethereal. We live on this world, with a body, and we have 613 mitzvos to keep. But we can still get our perspective to change and view life through our soul; we can change how we view our concept of connection.

To bring out the intensity of this discussion, let’s say there is a father who loves his child very much. It’s very possible that in a previous lifetime (*gilgul*) that the souls of the father and child really hated each other! They might be more different from each other in their soul roots as the distance between the sky and the earth. (Of course, there is unity between all of the Jewish people, but that’s usually not the reason why a person loves his child. A father usually loves his child because it’s his child, and not because he feels a unity with the collective soul of the Jewish people!)

So the love that a father usually feels for his child, when experienced through the body - which dominates a person's existence unless he reveals his existence as being that of a soul - is based on the physical. If a person would reveal his soul, the love would come from his soul, and it would be stemming from the feeling of unity with the Jewish people. That is the real love. But when the body dominates in a person's life, a person feels connected to his child **not** because of this deep love of the soul for unity, but because his soul inside is demanding something eternal. The body takes that need and channels it towards loving one's child, which really translates into a wish for permanence on This World.

From the soul's perspective, although the *Halacha* states that one must support his children, the soul recognizes that the connection one feels to his child is purely physical. There is no denying that the child bears similarities to his father, but, it's all physical.

The soul's perspective can show a person that the connection he feels to his child needs to be defined and put in proper perspective, and that it should not be eternal.

Letting Go

When a person gains this perspective - not just intellectually, but to absorb it in his soul and to live this perspective - he will have the proper view towards his family. He will realize that although he feels connected with his children, it should have limits to it, and it should not be stemming from a need for eternal connection.

In order to slowly absorb this perspective, one can think about the following. One can realize that before this lifetime, there was no physical connection between father and child. Getting used to this perspective will weaken the physical nature of the relationship he feels towards his children [and make it more spiritual].

Of course, we know that children must honor their parents even after they die; that is the *Halacha*. But inevitable, the connection of children to their parents after death is a lot less, being that a large part of the connection was physical in its nature. After death, the body decomposes, and the physicality of the relationship withers away with this.

In fact, it's even possible that if the souls of parents and children meet in Heaven after they die, they won't even feel connection with each other any more than two strangers who meet each other in Heaven.

Deepening Your Ahavas Yisrael

On a side note, if a person absorbs this correctly, he will understand what it means to have *Ahavas Yisrael* (love for Jews). One of the deep reasons why people lack *Ahavas Yisrael* is actually because they are only connected with their own families, and not with others.

When a person feels like he only loves his family and he doesn't feel love for others, that essentially means that he is only connected in love with others through his physical orientations; therefore all that he loves on this world is his own family, and no one else. He views family members as his own physical 'flesh and blood' - his physical blood relatives, and he feels like they are a part of his own 'flesh'.

What happens when a person has this perspective? The physical body covers over the soul, and when the soul is covered over, it can't love other Jews.

When a person realizes that the love he feels for his children is coming from his physical connection

with them, that itself allows the soul's perspective to become revealed, and the soul will then naturally love all others Jews - once it has been allowed to be revealed.

(There are also souls that feel closer to each other, even after the love of the soul is revealed. But this is a concept which most people do not relate to).

The Nature To Feel Connected

Thus, a person has a nature to connect to the eternal, and the soul demands it. If a person merits to purify his level of existence (when he leaves the bodily kind of existence and lives life through the prism of the soul), he understands that the only absolute connection he can have is, with Hashem. (And this can extend to love for all Jews and for the Torah, for "Hashem, the Torah and Yisrael are one.")

Whenever we feel connected to something, as long as it is not the connection with the Creator, it can never be a truly deep connection. It is only the branches of the root power of connection, which is to connect to the Creator.

This applies to all kinds of connection a person can feel: feeling connected to the materialism of this world, feeling a connection to one's children - either through love, giving, or compassion - it is not the depth of the power to connect. It is only the 'branches' of something deeper in us: an expression of our desire to feel attached to Hashem.

Mitigating The Pain of Mourning A Family Member

Of course, if a person takes care of his family, he is doing the right thing, and he lives and dies in the right way. But although this is true, we find that most people, when they lose a family member, find this to be terribly difficult, and they feel like part of their essence has been taken away from them; they find it unbearable to go on living. Nothing is the same anymore for such people. This really happens because the deepest connection a person usually feels is with his family members. When the connection is severed, through death, the pain is tremendous and unbearable.

But if a person makes sure that the deepest connection he knows of is with Hashem, then even when he suffers the death of a close family member (or any end to a relationship), he will certainly feel pain, but it will not destroy him. The pain he will feel will only be limited, because his deepest connection he feels is not with anything on This World, not even his family; the deepest connection he knows of is with Hashem.

The words here do not mean to imply that a person shouldn't feel pain when he loses a relationship just because he feels so close to Hashem. If someone doesn't feel pain at a loss of a family member, he is simply cruel; or he's deep in his imagination. What is meant here is that a person can gain a change in perspective. It is to understand what our need for deep connection is and to properly define the connections we have on this world.

Absorbing this perspective will not weaken your relationship with your children at all; it will not destroy your love for Jews, for Torah, and for Hashem. It will only serve to strengthen your love and reveal the true love, which comes from our soul, as opposed to the body's love for others, which is purely physical-based.

Woe to a person who doesn't love his family, and woe to the person who has no mercy on them - but a person who loves them too much is also incorrect. We have to be mainly directed towards the root of all roots, the Creator, whether we are in This World or even in the Next World. All other connections we have, even the connections are commanded to have, need to have their limits.

The Proper View Towards Loving Our Family

These words, when understood properly, can shake a person to the core, because it will show a person think that the connection he feels with his family are only temporary, and only our connection with Hashem is eternal.

So these words are very subtle. If they are not understood properly, it will simply shake a person up and he will think that perhaps it means he's really not connected to his family. But that is not the point of these words. The point is rather to understand the nature of our connection with our families, so that we can have the proper understanding.

When the words here are understood properly, they will actually strengthen your relationships. The words here are meant for anyone who searches for a true kind of life, for a life of the soul.

The true kind of life to have is a life which centers around a tri-fold connection: to seek connection with Hashem, with the Torah, and with the collective soul of the Jewish people; and not just to have a life which *revolves* around connecting with Hashem, Torah, and the Jewish people – but to *deeply connect* with these three areas. There is a fourth kind of connection we feel in our souls: the connection we feel towards our family. But this should not become before our connection with Hashem, with Torah, and with the Jewish people.

Thus, the point is that if a person always places his family “first” before anything else in his life, this is not a true priority; it distances one from the inner kind of life.

In Conclusion

When we ask in this blessing of Shemoneh Esrei that Yerushalayim be built to last forever, **ובנה אותה בנין עולם**, we are not just asking that it simply be forever, because nothing on This World is forever. We only ask for this in connection with the rest of the request, **ותשכון בתוכה** – that Hashem's Presence return to Jerusalem.

In other words - when the *Shechinah* will be revealed, only then will Yerushalayim be forever. As long as *Shechinah* isn't revealed – as long as the reality of Hashem isn't revealed, when people think that This World is forever – that is the greatest *hester* (concealment).

When a person realizes and feels the truth, that only Hashem is forever, he will in turn understand that all other connections he feels are only temporary, and it will be realized that all of our connections need to be limited; that we should not feel that any connection we have is “eternal”, except for the one connection we have which is eternal (our connection with Hashem).

The more spiritual of a life a person lives, the greater his quality of love for his children will be. Why? Because a person then realizes that all love he experiences on this world is but a branch of a greater love. And then even the ‘branches’ of love we experience will take on new meaning.

The words here are not meant to weaken a person's relationship with his family at all. Rather, the intention is the opposite: it can help us give greater meaning to our relationships. It is to be aware that our connection with our family is not eternal.

ובנה אותה בנין עולם- We ask for Yerushalayim to be built eternally – that this world, which is called “*olam*” from the word *he'elam*, concealment, be removed; and that the true *olam* “world” should be revealed, a world of *l'olam*, eternity – as we declare in *Amen Yehai Shemai Rabbah*, that the Name of Hashem should fill all the realms, forever, when His Great Name will be fully revealed.

[1] See **Bilvavi Part 4 Chapter 5 - *Calmly Giving Up This World.***

[2] *Talmud Bavli: Tractate Sanhedrin, Chapter Eight.*

Source: <https://mail.bilvavi.us/english/tefillah-123-only-lasting-connection>