

CHAPTER 10, LAW 6 - HOW TO FALL IN LOVE

by Rabbi Dovid Rosenfeld

It is a known, clear matter that the love of the Holy One, blessed be He, does not become bound to a person's heart until he constantly loses himself (lit. 'errs') in it as appropriate, and he forsakes everything in the world except for it. [This is] as [G-d] commanded and said, [You shall love the L-rd your G-d] with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your possessions' (Deut. 6:5). [It is thus] only [to the extent] of the knowledge that he knows Him. According to the knowledge is the love; if it's little, little and if much, much. Therefore a person much dedicate himself to know and understand those areas of wisdom which teach a person about his Creator, according to his ability to understand and to comprehend, as we explained in the Laws of the Fundamentals of the Torah.

This week's law is the final of the entire Laws of Repentance. After discussing the importance of serving G-d out of love and for no ulterior motives, the Rambam talks a bit about how one acquires love of G-d. Earlier he told us that love of G-d must be an all-consuming passion. One who truly loves G-d can think of practically nothing else his every waking moment. Likewise, explains the Rambam this time, to reach such a state of obsession, one must fully dedicate himself to understanding his Creator. As he put it, with knowledge comes love. The degree to which we comprehend our perfect G-d is the degree we will love Him.

Well now, how does one get to understand G-d? Isn't He infinite and utterly beyond man's comprehension? Is the Rambam asking us to all become philosophers or Kabbalists, spending our days meditating the unfathomable?

As the Rambam mentions here, he dealt with this question in an earlier section -- in his Laws of the Fundamentals of the Torah (2:2 & 4:12). How does one come to both fear and love G-d? It is not through contemplating G-d Himself. He is wholly unknowable. But we can study His creation -- His magnificent universe and all it contains. When we see the utter complexity and the breathtaking beauty of every aspect of G-d's world -- from the microscopic to the intergalactic -- we will be utterly overwhelmed with amazement. We will be filled with a love for and awe of the Creator of such beauty and perfection. We will both love and fear a Being capable of so much, and we will recognize our own insignificance before such might and grandeur.

The Rambam there was so enamored by this point that he proceeded -- for close to 3 chapters -- to present his own understanding of the natural world -- to demonstrate just how impressive G-d's creation is. In truth, for us today those chapters make curious reading. As great and advanced as the Rambam was, most of his science is quite archaic. He describes the heavens based on pre-

Copernican science, seeing the heavenly bodies as circling the earth, each one attached to one or more of a confusing array of mostly concentric spheres. And the biggest proof of G-d's existence is the fact that who else but an all-powerful Being could keep such a massive array in constant motion without getting tired. (Not of course that anyone could blame the ancients for their scientific notions. It takes a rare genius to see through what is "obvious" to all -- that we are staying still and the sun and stars are revolving around us -- and to theorize differently.)

Nevertheless, the Rambam's message should be far more meaningful to us than to past generations. Science today sees so much more complexity in virtually every aspect of the natural world than the ancients could have ever imagined.

Take any aspect of it -- say the human eye. Volumes have been written on its functionality -- how it receives billions of bits of data regarding color and intensity every instant -- while its lens focuses the image and adjusts the overall brightness. The image is then focused on the retina on an area the size of a pinhead. The nerves connected to the eye then filter and enhance mind-boggling amounts of information -- since the vast majority of the input our eyes receive is irrelevant to us -- processing and interpreting what is important, while leaving most of our brains free for other matters. The amount of cells which activate every instant we are reading a line across our computer screens -- while other parts of our brain concurrently interpret the letters, the words and their meanings, would easily overload the world's most powerful computers. Whereas the human brain does so instantly and effortlessly -- with hardly any appreciation on the part of the recipients of such wondrous mechanisms.

And of course we were blessed with **two** such eyes -- allowing our brains to instantly see three-dimensional depth and compute distances (applying relatively straightforward math many of us would be hard put to follow). All of this is not to mention our eyelids, tear ducts, blood vessels, etc. constantly (and subconsciously) performing their own functions to enable our eyes to work properly.

(Needless to say, studying G-d's universe does not only bring a person to fear and love of G-d. It brings him to belief in G-d as well. Intelligent people -- unless they are extremely biased -- could not see such a universe and not recognize conclusively that it has an infinite Designer. This is reminiscent of the well-known proof of G-d given by Rabbeinu Bachya, early 11th century Spanish scholar and philosopher. If we would find a piece of paper filled with neat lines of meaningful text, only a utter moron (or an intellectual) would entertain the theory that perhaps it came about by someone tossing a bottle of ink at the page and the letters "randomly" forming.)

Before any of you conclude that we should spend our entire day doing nothing but studying nature, I should add that by far the most effective method of seeing G-d's beauty is by studying His Torah. The Mishna in Pirkei Avos (3:9) states that if someone is studying Torah and interrupts his study to admire nature, he "bears the guilt for his own soul." As we explained there, this does not mean the Sages were against appreciating nature, that we should never take our noses out of our Talmuds.

Quite the contrary. But there is no greater way of admiring G-d's handiwork than studying the greatest manifestation of His wisdom of all -- His Torah.

Nevertheless, admiring science and nature plays an important role in our religious development. Seeing and comprehending G-d's universe have a profound effect on our souls, filling us with awe and wonder at the Being who fashioned so much.

As R. Dr. Yehuda Levi observes in Torah and Science (Feldheim Publishers, 1983, preface & p. 101), to most people the phrase "science and religion" conjures up images of epic battles between two fundamentally opposing worldviews -- of a godless world wholly interpretable to man versus an irrational universe capriciously run by an incomprehensible G-d (no doubt with a flat earth being held up by pillars on the backs of giant elephants).

But, continues R. Levi, such an image is in reality false. The perceived contradictions between science and religion, if they exist at all, are actually relatively minor and are usually the result of one or the other overstepping its purview. Almost all the time Torah and science complement, science demonstrating the utter complexity of G-d's creation, with the Torah instructing us in the purpose of such magnificence. Rather than science obscuring G-d's reality, it loudly and clearly broadcasts to mankind that the world has a Creator.

On a somewhat different note, there is one issue I find a bothersome about this law. Say we follow the Rambam's advice and study G-d's wondrous universe, becoming filled with awe and wonder in the process. Would we say that as a result we **love** G-d? Is that really love? Do we feel a personal, intimate closeness to G-d because He is so incomprehensibly powerful -- because He fashioned protons, neutrons and electrons, because He defined laws of physics and electromagnetism, because He created photosynthesis, and because He provided Earth with the requisite amounts of atmosphere and water and placed its axis on a tilt? Such realizations may generate awe and amazement, but do they generate love?

Let's say we listen to a magnificent musical piece, say by Mozart. We might be amazed at his prodigious talents and wowed by his music, but can we say that we "love" Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart? I would think we would describe our emotional reaction as one of being impressed by his abilities, admiring his genius, and desiring to hear more of his works. But **love**? For the **person**? And if not, how does witnessing G-d's great genius -- whether in His universe or His Torah -- bring us to love of G-d?

On the other hand, the Rambam wrote earlier that our love for G-d should be virtually an infatuation. We should be able to think of virtually nothing else our every waking moment (Law 3). The Rambam there likewise equated the love we should have for G-d to a man's all-consuming love for a woman, whom he cannot (nor does he want to) get out of his mind for an instant. If so, love of G-d appears to be very personal and up close -- passionate love of the most heartfelt sort. How does one go from admiring the laws of thermodynamics to loving G-d?

Let us return to our illustration -- hearing beautiful music. Does admiring a symphony actually bring us to "love" its composer? But in fact, there is something to consider here. When we hear music we love, it is not just that our ears enjoy the pleasurable sounds. Beautiful music, in its cadence and harmony, touches our souls in a very deep way. It stirs our spirits within us -- in a manner almost not achievable through other means.

This gives us an inkling of the emotions we may feel when we begin to fathom G-d's reality. It is true that in one sense G-d is wholly unknowable to us. We cannot -- and must not -- think of Him as some lovable Zaidy in heaven -- whom we would just love to sit next to by the fireside for a long, heart-to-heart chat. (Yes, heart-to-heart conversations do occur when we pray, but we are taught at such times to stand before G-d in awe, fear and trepidation.) Although it is true that G-d loves and cares for us -- infinitely so, in fact -- we must never think of and love Him in a chummy, familiar fashion -- in a sense in any way resembling the love we might feel for another human being.

Yet our love for G-d, if cultivated properly, can run deep indeed. In Him we see all of the wisdom, qualities and understanding we admire. Everything we can understand about G-d and His ways -- whether through studying the Torah, comprehending the science governing the universe, viewing the harmony of the world, or simply by admiring a sunset -- touches our souls very deeply. We do not just admire G-d's qualities. We sense that beneath them is everything beautiful and all our hearts truly desire.

Whether through our intellect or emotion, everything we see and understand about G-d is just what our inner hearts love and want to draw closer to. For G-d is the source of our souls. Everything beautiful, everything dear and precious to us truly emanates from Him. G-d is perfection. He is the source of all that we love and admire, of everything in the world we would love to cleave to. Because more than anything else in existence, our souls want to return to their Source.

(Based in part on ideas found here: <https://torah.org/torah-portion/livinglaw-5766-vaeschanan/>.)

Mazel tov -- congratulations! We have just completed our study of the Rambam's Laws of Repentance! I completed the first version of this class on the tenth yahrtzeit of my father OBM (the tenth anniversary of his passing), and I dedicate this class to his memory. My father, Rav Azriel Yitzchak ben Rav Avraham Zvi, was in fact himself both a Torah scholar and a scientist, one who embodied many of the ideals we have studied in the Rambam over the years. He was also a personal friend of Prof. Levi whom we quoted above. May his memory be for a blessing.

Note that this class will restart G-d willing next week.

Text Copyright © 2014 by Rabbi Dovid Rosenfeld and **Torah.org**