

LOVING G-D

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Vaeschanan

Loving G-d

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Today's Learning:

Bikkurim 2:8-9

O.C. 397:18-398:2

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Shabbat 110

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Avodah Zarah 27

In this week's parashah, we find the mitzvah to love G-d. R' Yaakov Kaminetsky z"l (died 1986) observed in an address that this mitzvah has several components. When one reads the verse "Ve'ahavta / You shall love . . ." in Kriat Shema every day, one is called upon to be willing to sacrifice his life for Hashem. This is naturally very difficult. However, there is another aspect to loving G-d. The Gemara says that if a person learns Torah and engages in business with a pleasant demeanor such that people say, "Fortunate is the one who taught him Torah! Look at so-and-so who studied Torah; how pleasant his deeds are!" then one has shown his love of G-d.

R' Kaminetsky added: Students who learn this Gemara think it is mussar and not halachah. However, Rambam quotes this teaching in his Sefer Hamitzvot, his encyclopedia of the 613 commandments. Rambam adds: This mitzvah includes calling all of mankind to serve Him and believe in Him. Just as if you love a person, you speak his praises and you want other people to love him, so one who loves Hashem will speak His praises and want others to love Him.

Thus, concluded R' Kaminetsky, when one reads the verse "Ve'ahavta" in Kriat Shema, he must realize that it is a commandment in the Torah to act in a way that will cause others to love Hashem. This means more than having good manners. One must act in a way that calls attention to the fact that he is a servant of G-d, so that people will say, Look at so-and-so who studied Torah; how pleasant his deeds are!" (Reprinted in B'mechitzat Rabbeinu p. 251)

*"You shall love Hashem, your G-d, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your resources."
(6:5)*

R' Moshe Chaim Luzzato z"l (Ramchal; 18th century) writes: Ahavah / love for Hashem means that a person pines for and desires closeness to Hashem. One who has Ahavah for Hashem pursues holiness just as a person would pursue anything that attracts him strongly. Having Ahavah for Hashem means that mentioning His Name (may It be blessed) and His praises, and studying His Torah, is literally a pleasure. It means feeling the same type of love for Hashem that one feels for the wife of his youth or for his only child; one experiences joy merely from speaking about those relatives. [So, too, one who loves Hashem experiences joy from speaking about Him.]

There are three branches of Ahavah. They are: Deveikut / attachment, Simchah / joy, and Kinah / a combination of jealousy and zealotry. Deveikut means clinging to Him and being unable to separate from Him. One who is attached to another finds pleasure in being involved with the affairs of the subject of his love. [So, too, one who loves Hashem finds pleasure in being involved with His affairs, i.e., Torah study and mitzvah performance.]

Simchah (the second branch of Ahavah) is an important principle in serving Hashem. True simchah means that one's heart rejoices constantly because he merits to serve the Master (may He be blessed, there is no other like Him) and because he merits to occupy himself with His Torah and mitzvot, which are the ultimate perfection and the most valuable possession for all eternity.

Finally, the third branch is Kinah, i.e., that a person is jealous for the sake of His holy Name, hates His enemies, and subdues them in any way he can so that His work will be done and His honor increased. Moreover, a person who loves Hashem cannot bear to see His Name profaned or His mitzvot transgressed. This is what King Shlomo meant when he declared (Mishlei 28:4), "Those who abandon the Torah will praise the wicked, and those who guard the Torah will contend with them."

Of course, one who loves his Creator with real love will not set aside His work for any reason in the world, except for a truly unavoidable reason. Such a person will not need encouragement and incentives to serve Hashem; to the contrary, his heart will draw him to that activity.

(Mesilat Yesharim Ch.19)

"Only guard yourself and guard your soul well, lest you forget the things that your eyes have beheld [at Sinai] and lest you remove them from your heart all the days of your life, and make them known to your children and your children's children." (4:9)

Why the seeming repetition: "guard yourself and guard your soul well"? R' Yaakov Kranz z"l (1741-1804; the Dubno Maggid) explains: A person who sins brings about two results-he damages the

beautiful world Hashem created and he damages his own soul. And, the latter damage is more difficult to set right. Therefore, "guard yourself." Do not harm your body or your surroundings by sinning. But even more, "guard your soul well," for it is more difficult to repair your soul than to repair your body.

(Kol Bochim Al Megillat Eichah 1:9; Voice of Weepers, p. 59)

"Then Moshe set aside three cities on the bank of the Jordan, toward the rising sun, for a murderer to flee there . . . then he shall flee to one of these cities and live." (4:41-42)

The Gemara (Gittin 12a) states (and Rambam rules) that if a slave commits manslaughter and is exiled to a city of refuge, his master need not support him. Furthermore, if the slave earns more than he needs to support himself in the city of refuge, the surplus belongs to his master. The Gemara asks: Why would I think that his master should support him while he (the slave) is in the city of refuge? Because the verse says, "he shall flee to one of these cities and live." Since I might think that the phrase "and live" imposes an obligation on the owner to ensure that the slave lives comfortably, the Gemara is teaching us that this is not the case.

On the other hand, Rambam rules (based on the Gemara in Makkot) that if a yeshiva student commits manslaughter and is exiled to a city of refuge, his teacher must go with him. After all, the Torah says, "he shall flee to one of these cities and live." Without one's teacher of Torah, one cannot live.

R' Baruch Ber Lebowitz z"l (rosh yeshiva in Kamenitz, Poland; died 1940) used to note the contrast between these two halachot. Regarding physical needs, the Torah expects a person to be satisfied with the basics. Thus, a master has no obligation if his slave can earn a minimal livelihood by his own toil. When it comes to Torah study, however, the exact opposite is true. Presumably there were yeshivot in the cities of refuge and an accidental killer who fled there could have gained admission to one of them. Nevertheless, such a person's rebbe is exiled with him so the exile can continue to study Torah the way he is used to.

(Quoted in Harav Ha'domeh L'malach p. 90)

Letters from Our Sages

[R' Yechezkel Levenstein z"l was one of the great mussar teachers of the 20th century, first in the Mir Yeshiva in Poland, then in Petach Tikvah, then back in the Mir in Poland and later in Shanghai, China, and finally at the Ponovezh Yeshiva in Bnei Brak. He died in 1974. The letter below (Ohr Yechezkel: Michtavim No. 9) was written in the winter of 1937-38 after R' Levenstein had returned to Poland

from Petach Tikvah. In the letter, he explains the importance of living in Eretz Yisrael but why he had left there. The recipient's name is not published, but he apparently was connected with the yeshiva in Petach Tikvah.]

I received your precious letter and I have delayed responding because I have no answer that will satisfy you. I know how much you desire to raise the level of the crown of Torah and fear of G-d in the yeshiva in Petach Tikvah. Indeed, that should be the desire of every person who has a share in the Torah of Moshe and Yisrael, for the holy land is in truth the central point in our hearts. One cannot separate the Land from the Torah, for they are included together in Birkat Hamazon / Grace after Meals: "We thank You, Hashem, our G-d, because You have given our forefathers as a heritage a desirable, good and spacious land; . . . for Your Torah which you have taught us . . ." There is no real Torah other than the Torah of Eretz Yisrael, for [Yishayah 2:3] "From Zion will go forth Torah." Attaining the Land really must precede attaining the Torah, for the Land is an inheritance from the Patriarchs, while the Torah was commanded to us by Moshe [who came after the Patriarchs]. What need is there for us to say more about the Land? It atones for sins. Anyone who walks four cubits in the Land has his sins forgiven. I think you, my friend, know how much I always loved to talk about our holy land. I spoke a number of times about the emunah / faith that can be obtained by living in the Land, and I myself benefitted in this way [presumably during his short stay in Petach Tikvah in the 1930s]. . .

Aside from this, I have personal family reasons for making my place in our holy land. But what can I do? The situation in the yeshiva here [Mir, Poland] absolutely precludes my returning to our holy land. You know how complicated things are here and that it is impossible to think about replacing me with someone else. Not only must I be here for the peace of the institution, but also for the good of the students I am needed here . .

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The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adira'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **Torah.org** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page. Text archives from 1990 through the present may be retrieved from <http://www.acoast.com/~sehc/hamaayan/>.

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