

LOVE IN THREE PARTS

by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

You shall love your fellow as yourself. I am Hashem.

Meshech Chochmah: The simple reading of the *pasuk* implies a connection between the love of one's fellow and the very existence of G-d. Indeed, we can speak of multiple varieties of this connection.

We begin with the usual place that our forebears looked to find signs of Hashem's presence – the complexity of the natural world, and the synergy of all of its components. We stand in awe of the changing forms around us, all of them interdependent elements of a massive biosphere. Fine-tuning its design, and maintaining its stability are tasks that only a Divine engineer could oversee. The world testifies to Hashem's existence.

There is more. One part of this complex world yields different insight into the nature of G-d. The only creature vouchsafed the gift of free will is Man. Not even angels share this capacity. While all other things must slavishly read the lines scripted for them, Man writes his own story. Everything else obeys laws that are hard-wired; Man chooses between competing options. This ability is so unusual that it points to its source – the nature of G-d Himself. He is the singular element of existence that need not obey any rules, but acts solely according to His will. One who wishes to gain the slightest glint of recognition of Hashem's utter independence and transcendence of all limits and boundaries must turn to the example of Man. There he will find a bit of similarity in the ability of Man to choose, rather than to be driven mechanically by the laws of Nature. Man testifies to the limitlessness of Hashem.

We are not quite done. A subgroup of Man points in two ways to another quality of the Creator - His ongoing providence. The story of the Jewish people gives full-throated testimony to His oversight of their affairs. On the one hand, He provided for the Jews for forty years in an inhospitable wilderness. Every person of that generation subsisted through the *mahn* provided them each day by Hashem. In this we saw not an occasional insertion of His Will against the apparent constancy of the laws of Nature – what we call the open miracle. Rather, we witnessed the constancy of His supervision of the details of the lives of men, responding to their daily needs, and rewarding them for their choosing to be loyal to His mission.

Evidence of His providence continued well beyond the charmed lives of the generation of the Wilderness. No stronger evidence could exist than in the long-term history of that same people.

Living often apart from all other nations, they survived the relentless efforts of a march of enemies to destroy them. Moreover, whenever provided with a brief period of tranquility, their fortunes rose meteorically, as if some property within them propelled them to distinction wherever they resided. Of course, that property was nothing other than Hashem's presence amongst them, and its attachment to their very souls.

This attachment manifests itself in a pattern of Jewish settlement. No matter where they are exiled, it moves them to band together, to build communities, organizations of Torah and *avodas Hashem*, and charitable enterprises.

Klal Yisrael testifies to Hashem's *hashgachah*.

Moving, then, from the general world around us to the example of Man and on to the special case of the Jewish people, we are provided with glimpses of the meaning of Divinity. This is alluded to in our *pasuk*, "...your fellow as yourself – I am Hashem." In other words, you and your fellow together point to Who I am, to the Essence of my being.

A second approach to our *pasuk*. Typically, the heart desires what the eyes see. An important exception is love of the unseen G-d. When the power of a person's *sechel* overcomes its usual physical constraints *Klal Yisrael* testifies to Hashem's *hashgachah*.

the soul fills with a desire to know Hashem, and to become closer to Him. We are instructed to love our fellow because his *neshamah* is hewn from the same Rock. This quality remains invisible. So the Torah instructs us to love our fellow as ourselves. How? In the same way we love Him, which is to love that which cannot be seen. Similarly, we are told to love our fellow because of the special quality of his soul, despite the fact that we cannot see it.

A final approach. Much of what we call love stems from inequality. A recipient loves a giver for providing him with something he needs. But this kind of love is reflexive. The recipient really loves himself, and attaches himself to the other only because that other offers him something. When this is not the case, the opposite occurs. The difference between them becomes grounds for hatred, rather than love. As Chazal say,^[2] a craftsman hates another member of the same craft. When he doesn't receive from him, the difference between them becomes a perceived threat to his well-being.

Some relate to Hashem the same way. They love Him because He provides them with what they want. This is not really what Hashem asks of us; the love object here is the person himself, not G-d.

There is a different kind of love that flows from commonality, not difference. A person accomplished in some intellectual field may come to love a great luminary in the same field. The love comes from what the two of them share, not from their difference, nor from anything that one gets from the other. The loved one is loved for what he is, not for what he provides.

We can – and should – relate to Hashem in the same way. We ought to love Him not because He enhances our lives, but because of what we share with Him. We are told to emulate His characteristics/ *midos*. When we incorporate those *midos* within ourselves, what we share allows us to love Hashem for what He is.

Our *pasuk* hints at this as well. We optimally love Hashem for what He is, not for how He helps us. Similarly, we ought not love our fellow because that person will reciprocate the love, or because he will honor us for our help. We ought to love our fellow for what we appreciate about him – the admirable qualities that we share with him.

1. Based on Meshech Chochmah, Vayikra 19:18 .
2. Bereishis Rabbah 39:4 .